

AN AIRY CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

YOU have heard politicians recently assail this country's national defense effort for being a "trickle when it should be a flood." Many of their statements are aimed at the aviation industry, which is as unfair as it is infuriating. Five years ago those same politicians looked upon our aviation industry as the silly whim of a bunch of eccentric lunatics; today they want an air force a day or a reasonable facsimile thereof.

The demands being made upon our aviation industry today are fantastic. Yet it has accepted the job with hardly a whimper and is doing the impossible so well it leaves the most blase of us a bit breathless. Two thousand complete military aircraft per month! Why, it was only a short time ago we thought 2,000 big planes per year comprised a lusty industry. And the modern warplane—far more intricate and complicated than the run-of-the-mine commercial ship—still is being put together by hand.

Many people still are unable to understand why aircraft cannot be put together on high-speed assembly lines in exactly the same manner as are automobiles. There is just the one answer: they are hand made. With some refinements, they still are building aircraft on the comparatively slow scale required by fine, precision craftsmanship. You have seen the rate of speed at which an automobile assembly line moves; there is nothing like that yet in aviation.

There are other delays, too—delays that could be eliminated by the very critics who lay the blame on the aviation industry: strikes, shortages of materials, numerous bottlenecks. Yet, despite all this, our factories are turning out airplanes faster than pilots can fly them away. So think of all this the next time you read one of those statments-to-the-press. Take our word for it, there are dozens of men in the aviation industry who are working themselves into early graves to give us the aeronautical superiority we have today.

* * *

THERE'S another one of those mad dashes around the countryside in our diary this month. Spent two days trying to get a seat on an airline to New York. Then one Saturday night, just as we were thinking of going to bed, a phone call advised that there was just one seat available on the plane leaving in two hours. So we went to bed in New York City instead. Then down to Washington for a day, followed by a quick ride up to Baltimore. Out at the Martin factory we climbed 24 steps to get to the level of

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