

THE AUTHORITY OF AGREEMENT

A History of RTCA

by William G. Osmon

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To the engineers, technicians, pilots, and others who have spent endless hours around the conference table forging agreement out of conflicting desires—so that we might enjoy the benefits of technological progress in air transportation.

CONTENTS

Introduction

- 1 "Some Guiding Agency is Necessary"
Overcoming Precipitation Static
Guidance for Approach and Landing
Instrument Landing Demonstration
Selecting and Allocating Frequencies
- 2 The War Years
Organizing to Support War Effort
Return to Active Role
- 3 Meeting the Challenge of Explosive Growth
International Service Takes Off
Busy Times for Executive Committee
Air Traffic Control a Major Concern
Cautious Response to Congress
- 4 The Common System
Comprehensive Study Launched
Co-chairmen Choice Contested
An Unprecedented Achievement
Explaining Common System Concepts

Contents

5	Elusive Implementation	45
	Flow Control Dropped By Government	48
	Accident Triggers Major Review	51
6	A Single Government Agency	54
	Advisory Committee Rules Begin	55
	FAA-RTCA Relationship Turns Sour	57
	FAA Pulls Out of RTCA	61
7	Defining & Testing Equipment Performance	63
	RTCA to Help CAA With TSOs	64
	Performance Requirements Needed	66
	Applicability Disputed	69
8	International Cooperation Begins	73
	Europeans Organize to Set Standards	74
	FAA Restores Limited Relationship	76
	Search for ILS Replacement	78
9	The FAA Returns	80
	The Advisory Committee Dilemma	81
	TSOs for General Aviation?	84
	A New International Role	88
	Epilogue: The Philosophy of RTCA	93

APPENDICES

A	Standing Technical Committees	97
B	Special Committees	101
	Technical Areas	101
	Air Traffic Control	101
	Navigation	103
	Communication	104
	Approach and Landing	106
	Test Procedures and Equipment	107

Contents

Standards	108
Other Technical Areas	112
Date Established, Chairmen, Reports	114
C Executive Committee Membership	149
Government Organizations	149
Non-Government Organizations	150
Membership Groups	150
D Technical Advisers	151
E Officers of RTCA	155
Chairman	155
Vice Chairman	156
Secretary, Executive Secretary	157
Director, Technical Services	157
F International Associates	159
G Brief Chronology of RTCA	161
Notes	167
Abbreviations	169
References	173
Index	175

FOREWORD

William Osmun, a professional writer of note and a longtime observer of RTCA activity, researched and wrote this volume under contract with RTCA. He was given unfettered access to RTCA historical records; he was also given complete freedom to interpret events as he saw them. The views expressed in this narrative, therefore, are his and do not necessarily represent those of RTCA.

William C. Fuchs

William C. Fuchs
Acting Chairman

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This work is the product of many people, for whose help I am truly grateful. While the writing is mine, as is the responsibility for its imperfections, I have depended on many people for the help that has made this work possible.

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INTRODUCTION

The Radio Technical Commission for Aeronautics is a unique organization. Although its recommendations have achieved world-wide acceptance, their only authority is the process by which they are developed. This authority of agreement¹ was aptly described by RTCA Chairman J. H. Dellinger at Indianapolis in November, 1948. In a briefing for representatives of the aviation community invited to a demonstration of the transition elements of the RTCA-recommended Common System of Air Traffic Control, Dellinger said:

“The RTCA has no powers of enforcement; incidentally, I hope it never will. It recommends only, but its recommendations are backed by all interests as a result of their participation in the formulation of the recommendations. Its recommendations are, in consequence, accepted. I think this type of organization is the ideal one for the handling of complex technical problems in a democracy.”

Throughout the past 50 years, RTCA has enjoyed successes and suffered setbacks. It has had to change its organization and its way of doing business, to cope with the ever-changing needs, goals, authority and attitudes of the government agencies and industry it serves. While the RTCA of 1985 is vastly