

Goose Bomber Group Takes Off From Britain On Homeward Flight

By FRED BACKHOUSE

Middleton St. George, May 31 (CP).—In a typically terse unemotional ceremony the RCAF's famed heavy bomber group said goodbye to England today as the first wave of battle-trying Lancasters left this airfield for home.

The big four-engined planes were flown by the same veterans who wrote the name "Canada" along every bomber trail over Europe.

With them, the Canadians took a tribute from the RAF Bomber Command's head, Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur (Bomber) Harris. Standing on a runway from which 1,000 and more Canadian raids on Germany began, he told the departing fliers they had won a reputation "equal to any and surpassed by none."

At 10 a.m. (4 a.m. E.D.T.) today, the assembled fliers were bade farewell by the station commander, Group Capt. J. K. MacDonald of Antigonish, N.S., who said merely: "Okay chaps. Get in your aircraft and be ready to take off."

Dip Guns in Salute

Ten minutes later the first of these Canadian-built Lancasters flashed down the runway, its engine drowning the strains of "Auld Lang Syne" played by the group's band. "Fearless Fox," a veteran of 30 missions, was followed by "Fightin' Pappy" and "Georgie's Blues" until 15 aircraft, each painted with an insignia denoting the number of missions—one had 65—was airborne.

As each huge bomber roared smoothly away, hundreds of airmen and airwomen edging the runway waved wildly and the aircrews responded with the "thumbs up" sign, while airgunners dipped their guns in salute.

It was the last take-off. The big adventure was over and this time the bomb-bays were empty and the bombers were heading for Canada and home. As the flight flew over the green fields of Yorkshire for the last time, Wing Cmdr. J. G. Edwards, DFC., St. Lambert, Que., who helped arrange the flight plan, commented "Best damn take-off I ever saw."

Today's flight will be followed at intervals by others until in a few weeks 160 bombers, representing eight squadrons of the group, are home. Some squadrons are remaining in England for reassignment.

The fliers are returning by easy stages—Cornwall, the Azores, Newfoundland and finally setting down in Nova Scotia.

Today's squadron, the Goose, is expected to arrive at Dartmouth, N.S., Saturday or Sunday. The flight leader is Wing Cmdr. Wilson Gall of Lachute, Que., officer commanding the Goose Squadron. In addition to a crew of seven, each aircraft carried two ground crew men who will set up servicing stations at four fields in Nova Scotia for aircraft which will follow.

Air Chief Marshal Harris, who flew from headquarters for the take-off, told the assembled fliers: "You leave here after all you've done with a reputation which is equal to any and surpassed by none. We in Bomber Command always regarded the Canadian group and Canadian crews as among the very best of the personnel and our appreciation of your achievements is surpassed only by what the Germans think of you."

Referring to the controversy whether bombers alone could win

the war, the bomber chief said: "My reply has always been that we never said we would win the war alone, but that the war couldn't have been won without us."

Grinning, he told the Canadians that when their grandchildren asked "What did you do in the Great War, Grandpappy?" you can say without blushing "I won it"—and you won't be far from the truth.

Bombers, he said, set out to defeat the enemy as far as they could and smooth a path for armies.

"We did that beyond all expectations both in regard to quantity, quality and time. It may surprise you to know, as it certainly surprised me, that the total cost in killed in the whole Canadian and British armies was less than it was in the first day of the Somme battle. It was equally less than the total killed in the whole of bomber command.

"If it had not been for bombing, you wouldn't be going home this

day, this day next year, or the year after, and possibly never at all."

Air Marshal G. O. Johnson, air officer commanding the RCAF overseas, Air Vice-Marshal O. M. (Black Mike) McEwen, bomber group commander, were among high-ranking officers here to see the men depart.

Air Marshal Johnson declared the Canadian squadrons had brought credit to their country and to themselves by their war record.

"Now you are making history again as the first British squadrons to fly across the Atlantic as squadrons," he added. "This is an indication that in future wars, if wars come, the Canadian Air Force will fly to war as squadrons. Happy landing."

Plan Warm Welcome

Halifax, May 31 (CP).—The first 15 Lancaster bombers from the RCAF 6th Overseas Bomber Group now on their way across the Atlantic are expected to arrive at Dartmouth Airport about noon Saturday if weather conditions are favorable.

Plans are under way for a reception for these planes and their crews of the Goose Squadron, first of the 160 Canadian-built Lankies from eight veteran squadrons of the group which will make the westward crossing during the next few weeks in the first operation of movement of its kind to Canada.

Air Vice-Marshal A. L. Morfee, air officer commanding in chief, Eastern Air Command, will welcome the fliers, and it is hoped to have Lieutenant-Governor H. E. Kendall of Nova Scotia extend the formal welcome of the Province.

Eventual destination of the big bombers has not been revealed, but it is presumed they will fly to Pacific bases after regrouping in Canada.

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