

Aerial Warriors of Two Nations Patrol Alaskan Skies

By FLYING OFFICER C. M. DEFIEUX, R.C.A.F.

A Point on the Alaska Highway, Nov. 20.—Unity, born of historic good-neighborliness is flying the foggy and storm-swept skies of Alaska and its Aleutian Islands and that unity is grim foreboding to the Japanese invaders of the United States' and Canada's continental home.

The first retaliatory blows have been struck. Their might will mount in strength and tempo.

Wing-tip to wing-tip the aerial warriors of the United States and the Royal Canadian Air Force will battle the last Jap for the Aleutians—and beyond.

Although they retain their identity and cherished traditions, the Royal Canadian Air Force units in Northwestern Alaska and the Aleutians operate under the United States Command directing that sphere of operations under the United Nations unified command.

And their services and fighting ability are valued highly. Their role in defense of Alaska's shores and the mountain offense is a vital one.

Daily they range the Alaskan skies flying through fog, rain, snow and ice. Daily they perform the hazardous reconnaissance operations far out to sea or over the tundra-like wastes. Daily they keep vigil above the lofty, snowsloped volcanoes of the Aleutian Peninsula and the rocky chain of islands stretching far to the west.

There have been weeks and months when the grim weather, such as the Aleutians, Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska can alone foment, has combined with tactical necessity to render offensive action impossible.

Those have been days of long and arduous patrols. Those have been days of dangerous flying not without their human cost. The job has been done and done well under terrific weather handicaps.

Canada's fliers have shared in the tribulations of those days with their American comrades.

But the offensive blows are increasing in tempo. The Royal Canadian Air Force is sharing in that too.

Bags First Zero.

Already Japanese fliers and ground troops have fallen before the deadly fire of Canadian pilots flying in complete operational co-operation with United States forces.

The first Japanese Zero encountered by a Canadian crashed into the seas off Kiska after its pilot challenged the ability of the veteran fighter, Squadron Leader K. A. Boomer, Ottawa.

The Nipponese have learned to respect the fighting prowess of such pilots as Squadron Leader Boomer, Flight Lieutenant H. T. Mitchell, D.F.C., of Ottawa; Flying Officer J. G. Gohl, Winnipeg; Pilot Officer D. F. English, Vancouver; Flight Sergeant F. R. F. Skelly, Kirkland Lake; Flight Sergeant G. R. Webber, Killarney, Manitoba; Sergeant Pilot N. Stusiak, Powell River, B.C.; Sergeant Pilot A. A. Katkins, Regina, and others who have given them battle.

While they are under the direction of the United States in their operational work, the R.C.A.F. units are headed by one of the service's most experienced and popular officers.

One of the heroes of the Battle of Britain, Group Captain G. R. McGregor, D.F.C., is carrying wide experience with him into the battle of the Aleutians and Northwestern Alaska.

Going overseas with No. 1 Fighter



Sqdn. Ldr. Boomer

Squadron of the R.C.A.F., Group Captain McGregor was second in command to Group Captain E. McNab, D.F.C. Later he commanded a large Royal Air Force station, after which he joined the staff of Air Vice-Marshal L. F. Stevenson when that officer directed R.C.A.F. headquarters overseas. He is again serving under Air Vice-Marshal Stevenson, who is now air officer commanding, Western Air Command.

Group Captain McGregor is married and makes his home in Kingston, where, before the war, he was associated with the Bell Telephone Co., and was prominent in civil aviation.

Morale is high among Canada's airmen in Northwestern Alaska. They speak glowingly of the co-operation and kindnesses of their American allies, the friendliness between all ranks and the quality of the fishing.

Whether they are stationed at the larger bases or are under canvas out on the tundras or down in the islands, Canada's airmen share all the comforts and recreational facilities provided by United States service organizations for their own troops.

Fliers Seek Gold.

"If the folks at home could see me now," they chortle as they wash their own clothes in the glacial streams that flow through the tundra. The lads in the outposts also find amusement in spearing fish and there's some who've even tried panning gold—although not with much success.

Alaskans, too, have taken them to their hearts. There's no distinction made between the Canadian and the American by the hardy settlers of that far northern country. Canadian boys who have spent short leaves on hiking trips through the country also report meeting many former Canadians.

Those are the times when the logs burn brightly in the fireplaces and the hosts loose a barrage of questions about their former homeland "outside."

Canada's airmen are agreed on the hospitality of Alaska and its people. But they are agreed with most unanimity when they talk about the weather. Pilots, mechanics, clerks and messmen agree vehemently on that point. And the United States fliers stand ready to add their word, too.

There are some sunny summer days, of course, but taking the whole Northwestern Alaska and the

Aleutians together—well—and the winter is still to come. Americas' best meteorologists stationed there do their best to forecast, but their job is a nightmare.

They even tell of the meteorologist who, in the seclusion of his inner office, one morning rejoiced in a "clean" weather map of his area and was ready to don a sun helmet. He stepped outside, to be almost drowned by the rain, looked up and screamed, "It's a lie!"

Now that may be an exaggeration, but there's plenty of fliers up there who will nod understandingly at the story.

"Pretty tricky," is the way Flying Officer J. B. Morgan, Montreal, describes the weather. "It's hard to forecast. The weather is made north of us. One the East Coast you could tell reasonably well. The mountains make conditions even worse. They're covered 80 per cent of the time. Believe me, a clear day at sea is a rarity."

He gets firm support in his weather exposition from Squadron Leader C. A. (Chuck) Willis, Sherbrooke, Que., also a flier of wide experience on the East Coast.

"The toughest weather I've ever seen," Pilot Officer Jack Attle, Sudbury, Ont., described it. "You can always count on a thrill."

Tricky Landing.

Then there's 21-year-old Flying Officer Harry Bray, Blyth, Ont., who had the thrill of spending more than two hours looking for a place to "sit down" at the end of a patrol. He finally got in on an emergency field at 12:30 midnight with the aid of the headlights of two caterpillar tractors to mark the end of the short gravel runways.

Pilot Officer James B. (Joe) Doak, Cowansville, Que., simply said "the weather can be improved upon."

He was immediately voted all existing awards for understatement by fellow-members of the mess, including Pilot Officer John H. Brown, observer, from Orillia; Pilot Officer Beverly W. Bristol, Douglastown, N.Y.; Pilot Officer Harold C. Paynter, Toronto, and Flying Officer Donald E. Arnold, Salina, Kansas.

Flight Sergeant Robert Skelding, Montreal, whose wife is residing in Vancouver while her husband is in Alaska, offered a comparison with flying conditions in Britain, where he also served as an airframe mechanic.

"This weather is grim. It's much safer flying over there, believe me. Everything seems against you here. It closes in on you so fast, and leaves you stranded."

While they decry the weather, Canada's airmen are equally vociferous in praise of the co-operation afforded by the Americans.

"We can get anything we want from them," declared Flying Officer W. M. Lord, Ottawa, engineer officer, who entered the Royal Canadian Air Force in 1930.

Even more emphatic were Flight Lieutenant Douglas G. Hair, Montreal, equipment officer; Flying Officer W. Burgess, Vancouver, accountant officer, and Flight Lieutenant Ian Webb, M.M., Gulfport, Miss., former British Army officer of the



Group Captain McGregor

last war, and now an administrative officer with the R.C.A.F.

"While we are supplied through our own forces, there are, naturally, some things that are needed in a great hurry," declared Flight Lieutenant Webb. "The United States forces bend over backward to help us. And they do much, too, to keep our boys happy. They are as fine a bunch of fellows you would meet anywhere."

As for the fellowship of American soldiers with the airmen of the Royal Canadian Air Force, there is a wealth of tribute.

"They're swell," declared Leading Aircraftman James Albrecht, Lacombe, Alta., and Leading Aircraftman Clifford Blow, St. Andrews, Man., nodded his assent. "They certainly show us a good time," declared Leading Aircraftman Phillip J. C. Beerman, Deepdale, Man.

That they had made a host of lasting friendships was reported by Leading Aircraftman Jack Fordham, Fort Saskatchewan, Alta.; Corporal Neil B. Saunders, New Westminster, B.C.; Leading Aircraftman George Manchester, River Glade, N.B.; Leading Aircraftman Earl W. McIntyre, Kemptville, Ont.

"They're really awfully good to us," declared Flight Lieutenant R. A. Murray, Rosthern, Sask. "They have not a privilege that is not extended to our men."

Report Health Good.

The health and morale of Canada's forces in the far reaches of Alaska are probably best summed up by Flight Lieutenant Herbert B. McGregor, Penticton, B.C., one of the medical officers.

"Generally speaking, the health is good," declared Flight Lieutenant McGregor. "There were lots of colds when we arrived some months ago, but they're better now."

"The health of the men is remarkably good considering the climate and the flying conditions some have got to work under. There are no contagious diseases.

"The food is good too. From a Royal Canadian Air Force dietary standpoint it is a bit starchy, but that is the trend in the United

States. The boys don't seem to mind. Sanitation is good even at the outpost detachments. Medical attention is available at all times to all personnel no matter where they are serving.

"The boys' morale is quite good too, I think, though they are badly in need of mail, pictures and clippings from their home-town papers.

"Snapshots are a godsend. I don't think they need parcels.

"There's a question about mail, though, I think should be brought up. People at home write about a lot of problems which, if they were smart, they'd leave out. The lad gives his advice, and then it takes nearly a month to get an answer and he worries.

"If the folks at home would only wait a few days and let these problems iron themselves out, or if they phrased their letters differently, everything would be all right.

"Tell the folks outside not to dwell on the fact that they miss the boys too badly. Of course they miss them. And we miss them too. But don't overemphasize it.

"If they'd just stop and think when they write, the boys would be even more happy," concluded the doctor.

Canada's airmen are doing a big job well in Northwestern Alaska.

"Let's start swinging," seems to be their chorus.

They've got the punch. The Japs are beginning to feel it. They won't like it any more than their Axis partners over in Europe.