

## The British Commonwealth Air Training Plan

One of a series of articles written specially for Weekly Newspapers by Hugh Tompkins, Editor of the Fergus News-Record

### AIR OBSERVER IMPORTANT MEMBER OF BOMBER'S CREW

Previous stories in this series have described the training of a Pilot in the Royal Canadian Air Force from the day he enlists, rather nervously perhaps, to that other proud day, six or seven months later, when he "gets his wings" and completes his training in this country. After that, he is ready to proceed to Great Britain, where he gets some more experience under the somewhat different conditions in a land where enemies may lurk. Then he is ready to take over a 300-mile-an-hour fighter, or to pilot big bombers over Germany.

In these stories, I have completed the task I undertook, thanks to the hearty cooperation of the officials of the Royal Canadian Air Force, but before the task was finished, I know many things I hadn't realized at the start. One of these is that while all the recruits want to become Pilots if they can, the Pilot is not the only important member of the air crew; possibly he isn't even the most important member. For that reason, I am writing something about the training of the Air Observers.

Pilots, Observers and Navigators.

I sat one day in the office of Mr. W. Woollett, civilian manager of the Air Observer school at the great Malton Airport. "There's a tendency on the part of the public," observed Mr. Woollett, "to think of the Observer as the man who just sits in the plane and looks out occasionally, while the Pilot does all the work and takes all the risks. Perhaps the word 'Observer' is at fault. A more accurate term would be 'Navigator.' The time is coming when the Navigator will be the captain of the large planes and the pilot will be only the wheelsman."

Mr. Woollett should know what he is talking about. He was a pilot himself in the last war, and has had much to do with flying ever since. In 1929, he returned from England, and with another Pilot of the Great War, operated a company in the North Country, Dominion Skyways Limited, they called it, and their planes flew over much of Northern Quebec and Ontario. Name any place north of the Transcontinental and he is sure to have been there.

When war broke out in September, 1939, Mr. Woollett and his partner, C. R. Troup, were asked to form the first Air Observer School. They had it going by the end of May, 1940, and it has been in operation ever since. In all that time, there has not been one accident to students, pilots or planes—not so much as a flat tire on a landing gear. Canada may not have been prepared to go to war, but in our experienced "bush fliers," we had a great asset.

The Air Observer School at Malton is operated by a civilian company, Dominion Skyways Training Ltd., under an arrangement somewhat similar to those whereby Flying Clubs operate the Elementary Flying Training Schools for Pilots. That enabled the R.C.A.F. to take advantage of the experience of older Canadian pilots, and it speeded up the early stages of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan.

The company looks after maintenance of flying aircraft, buildings and flying in general. It supplies the experienced pilots and the repair men. The R.C.A.F. takes over the ground instruction and the discipline. Squadron Leader G. W. Jacob is the Commanding Officer.

**A Specialized Job**  
The course lasts twelve weeks. A new class comes in every month and another graduates, but there are always three distinct classes at the school at one time. The educational requirements for an Observer are higher than for a Pilot. The course is stiffer and entails more hard work, though it undoubtedly has its share of thrills, even in Canada. The future Observer has a specialized job, and he must make no mistakes.

Sometimes, those who start the course as Pilots and fail to make the grade are shifted to the Observers' course. At first, they are disappointed, but Mr. Woollett says that invariably they are all glad they changed before they have half-finished their course.

The Air Observer must learn several things, and all of them must be done well. Rather, they must be done perfectly. He must learn to lay out an exact course, in spite of wind and weather, that will take him where he is ordered to go. More important, he must return again and know when he gets home. He must learn to operate a tricky bombight, so that his bombs find their target. And he must learn to use a machine gun if need be.

At the Malton School, he learns to navigate. Everything else is subordinate to that. He does not have to worry about piloting the plane; that is done by an experienced pilot who knows Ontario as you know your own home. The Observer charts the course for his pilot and the Pilot carries out those instructions to the letter, unless they may result in possible danger to the aircraft and the crew. Apart from that, he follows the course the student gives him even if he knows it is at right angles to the direction in which he ought to be going. At the end of each trip, he hands in a detailed report. It omits nothing, even noting whether the student became sick, and whether he carried out his exercises in spite of his sickness.

**A Baby Day at Malton**  
It was raining when I arrived at Malton, but a few planes were up. The big silver biplane of the Trans-Canada line was arriving at Malton, and the nearby commercial air-

port, and the little yellow elementary trainers from another R.C.A.F. School were in the air, but the Avro Ansons of the Observer School were being called home from the wireless room. Perhaps that wasn't entirely a disadvantage. Mr. Woollett was able to spare hours to the visiting newspaper man, and when he had to keep another appointment, Duty Pilot Smeek acted as guide.

All down one side of the control room were wireless sending and receiving sets. Two way conversation can be carried on from anywhere in Southern Ontario. Later, I saw the wireless equipment inside the Avro Anson plane and marvelled at its compactness and efficiency. But that is not all. Recently a direction finding station has been installed. A lost aviator can send in a call for help, and when the answer goes back, it will tell him exactly where he is, and how to get back home in any kind of weather.

Laid out on a large table in the centre of the room was a map of Ontario. On it was marked the exercise for the day. Colored pins were stuck in the map at half-a-dozen places and a black thread wound from one to another. This marked the course the planes would be taking that day. It was not a straight trip out and back, but had several turns and angles. The student must learn to navigate such a course accurately, and he should be able to tell to the minute when he will be back at Malton again. He may have travelled 300 miles or more. Similar exercises are conducted at night.

Out on the edge of the runway, a long line of Avro Ansons was drawn up, mostly yellow, but some silvery and a few camouflaged. Some of them had seen active service. They are altered for use in the school. The gun turret is removed and some of the windows taken out. Guns are not needed for protection here, and the planes gain speed and saves fuel as a result of the changes.

Everywhere around the Observer School at Malton were evidences of similar economies. The oil is all filtered and reclaimed, and when tested, 87% is as good as new. One serious problem at all schools using British or American planes is the obtaining of repair parts. At Malton, most of them are manufactured in a little workshop. A mechanical genius, and a small staff, using machines of their own designing, which look, as the Director put it, "like something out of a Heath Robinson cartoon," make many of the repair parts out of easily obtained materials, saving more money and keeping the planes flying.

Planes are overhauled in two huge hangars. After so many hours flying, the Armstrong-Siddley motors are overhauled. Each Avro Anson has two of these big engines, giving a top speed to the altered planes of 200 miles an hour. At longer intervals, the whole plane is torn down and rebuilt.

That day, there was a visiting plane in one of the hangars, a huge Douglas bomber, belonging to the American Army. A committee from the Air Corps was visiting Canadian schools and gathering information. The visiting bomber dwarfed the Avro Ansons, but it was somewhat older and lacked something of their sleekness.

The buildings at all Air Force camps are much alike, but two things impressed me at Malton. Though officers, civilian personnel and men all have separate mess halls, their food comes from the same central kitchen. And there is a hospital with space for 25 beds, yet it has never had a crash to handle at this school in 20 months, though an ambulance always stands ready, and two crash beds are always kept warm with hot water bottles.

In the men's mess hall a full-size propeller hangs on the wall, backed by a square of blue carpet used in Westminster Abbey when the King and Queen were crowned. On the hub is a silver Avro Anson, and on the blades are replicas in silver of the Observer's badge, each one bearing the name of the highest ranking graduate in a class. In the office are pictures of the graduates, and scrap books with clippings and more pictures of students—Winston Churchill's nephew, the brother of a famous opera star, and so on. Many of them are in Britain now; a few are dead in the battle for freedom.

**Next Week—Bombing and Gunnery School at Jarvis.**

Mary had a little limp  
And furrows in her brow,  
She couldn't wear a number two  
But tried it anyhow.



The Bombing School at Jarvis. —R.C.A.F. Photograph

## "As We See It"

By J. A. Strang

The word bacteria has taken on a sort of bogey-man meaning during these last few years that it doesn't deserve at all. We seem to regard bacteria as a sort of enemy, something that, if possible, we should have nothing to do with and yet we couldn't exist for very long without it. We forget that bacteria has just as important work to do in this world as we have and that it does that work faithfully.

The study of bacteria takes one into another world almost and that, a thickly populated one. We reckon the humans by the millions but bacteria would be reckoned by its billions. We eat bacteria, we drink it and at times we breathe it. We recall one day during bacteriology lectures the professor asking us to tell him where the skin of our face and the lining of our mouth met. You just think that over and see if you could answer that question. Of course you didn't want an answer. The point that he was trying to put over was that there is very little difference in our skin and the lining of our digestive organs. We all know that if our skin is in healthy, unbroken condition that it is not apt to become infected and the same applies to the lining of our digestive organs. If they are in a healthy state the bacteria that we eat and drink may not do us any harm. Because of publicity and also because of a government ruling we think of pasteurized milk as being pure, however, there are bacteria in milk that the pasteurizing temperature has no effect on. There is one particular bacteria that is found in all flour that will withstand a temperature of 700 degrees and still live. Bread is baked at 425 degrees so that the baking of bread has no effect on this particular bacteria at all. While we wouldn't want anyone to expose themselves unnecessarily to bacteria yet it is just as necessary in the doings of this universe as is anything else that we can think of.

V V V

The recent ruling from Ottawa prohibiting the slicing of bread by our Canadian bakeries will no doubt mean a little extra labor in the kitchen. However, we never did think that it was necessary at all, and we used to wonder what certain bakeries would introduce next after the novelty of being able to buy bread all ready sliced were off. One point in regard to this ruling that we haven't noticed discussed is the large investment that nearly all bakeries have in slicers that will be of no use at all to them now. No doubt there will be plenty of bargains in used slicers that might interest camps, restaurants and other large users of bread. One thing sure the bakers will never go back to slicing bread no matter how soon the war may be over and these restrictions removed. We imagine that they have learnt that lesson.

V V V

This time of the year is often described as "The Dog Days." We aren't sure where the title was obtained however it is the time of year that certain foods spoil and they may be said to "have gone to the dogs." Perhaps that is where the title originated. Moulds seem to flourish at this time of the year and the study of moulds is just as interesting as is the study of bacteria. There are several different kinds of moulds, one kind puts out runners not unlike strawberries, and this particular kind when ripe, scatters its seeds in a manner similar to that of the dandelion. The worst feature of moulds is the odor which does not develop until the mould is ripe. The only real mould preventative is cleanliness and bright sunlight is its worst enemy.

V V V

The stand that is being made by the Russians recently is the surprise of the last war. They didn't do so well in the last war and we didn't think much of their stand against Finland either. No doubt they have learned a few lessons since then. Previous to the last war we were living up in Northern Ontario and at that time quite a number of foreigners were engaged cutting wood in that locality. We dealt with them in supplies for their camps and became well acquainted with them. They were all honest and we liked doing business with them. Each nationality would have a camp of their own and there were Russians, Finns, Danes, Austrians, Italians and Poles. Judging by their camps we would class the Poles as having the lowest standard of living of these groups. We recall looking into their sleeping tent one evening. It was strewn with dry hay and the men merely took off their shoes and slept on the hay. It wouldn't get first prize for sanitation. Perhaps the Russians would get the prize of these groups for being the better informed of them.

all. They were fine looking fellows, tall and kept themselves shaven. They seemed to belong to the educated class. They would settle their accounts once a month and after concluding this business they would want us to drink whiskey with them. They never seemed to understand why we wouldn't do this and yet they knew enough to not be offended at us. Of course they referred to whiskey as Vodka. We liked these chaps.

### ANOTHER RED CROSS SHIPMENT

The following shipment of knitted goods is going forward to the warehouse in Toronto this week:

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2 pullovers  
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Welland city council on Tuesday night granted all city employees a five per cent cost of living bonus effective as of July 1.

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