

BRITAIN'S GROWING AIRCRAFT INDUSTRY

by the Minister of Aircraft Production

In a broadcast to the Empire today Col. J.J. Llewellyn, M.P., said:-

The Ministry of Aircraft Production was formed just about this time two years ago.

As everyone knows Lord Beaverbrook was its first chief. At the start of the Ministry I went as his Number 2 and was his spokesman in the House of Commons.

The main Belgian defences had been pierced on the same day that the Ministry was formed. In the same month the evacuation from Dunkirk began. The fall of France followed within a very short time. Except for those brave men of the conquered countries who fought on, we of the British Empire were left alone - barring the way between the victors of Europe and their victory over the whole world.

What had we with which to bar the way, with which to wage the fight?

We had an almost unarmed Army, we had the Royal Navy and we had the Royal Air Force. It is with the latter force and with the Fleet Air Arm with which I am in the main concerned.

What had we behind these two arms to keep them well supplied?

In the Dominions there were comparatively small aircraft industries. In our own country that industry was far too small for our needs. We finished the last war with the biggest Air Force in the world. In the succeeding years, in order not only to preach but also practise disarmament, we reduced it till it became of almost insignificant size. Our aircraft industry declined in corresponding degree.

In the few years before this war started that industry had been in part rebuilt. We had sufficient planes, but no more than sufficient planes, to cover the withdrawal of our troops from France. The Royal Air Force played its full part in making the evacuation of those beaches possible. The planes at the disposal of the Force were of better quality than those which the Germans had. Our pilots used them with a dash and daring unsurpassed in the history of mankind. All through that summer, and especially when the Battle of Britain began, our constant and compelling task was to see that the numbers produced kept pace with the numbers lost.

Despite the bombing of our factories: Despite the disorganisation of the transport facilities for the workers: Despite the destruction of the homes of many of them: Both they and the managements played their full part. They provided the planes in the Empire's hour of need.

So much so that over the last eight months we have been able to give substantial help to Russia in her hour of need. The numbers produced in recent months show an immense increase on the numbers produced during the early months of this Ministry.

So much for numbers.

But there is something equally if not more important than numbers, and that is quality. We must give our pilots the very best we can.

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These gallant men recruited as they are from every part of the British Empire; fitted so well for their task on training fields in all the great Dominions and lately in the United States as well; these men must go into battle knowing that they have machines good enough to take on those they will have to meet.

Some of you to whom I am speaking today, may think, when you continue to hear the names of Spitfire and Hurricane, that the machines which bear those names today are exactly the same planes we had two years ago.

They are not. They have been improved out of all recognition in the meanwhile.

The Spitfire of today can fly higher; it can fly faster, than its predecessor. Both it and the Hurricane carry more weight of gun-power and are better armed. And these are not the only fighter planes which we have. We have new aircraft with which to attack the enemy.

There is the Beaufighter, which in its night fighting capacity is already taking substantial toll of such enemy aircraft as now come and - in their wantonness - attack our more beautiful and most peaceful towns.

There are others - some already in production, some yet being developed, which will ensure that our aircraft remain superior to those they will be up against.

On the Bomber side, the big four-engine machines now form our main offensive attack on important ports, arsenals and factories, situate in the heart of Germany. These aircraft not only carry a heavier load of bombs at a greater height and speed, but are also themselves much more heavily defended with armour and guns. In many a combat they have indeed not only escaped from fighter attacks but have shot their attackers down.

They are the ones that drop the really big bombs which cause such great destruction to Nazi war efforts. They supplement the wonderful types such as the Wellingtons, Whitleys and Hampdens which still play their part in the great offensive we are waging on Germany. An offensive which has already made the Nazis squeal.

They are going to get their medicine in ever-increasing doses. In addition to fighters and bombers, we are, of course, producing many other types of aircraft - planes that are the eyes of our fleets and that increase by several hundred miles their power of attack, reconnaissance machines of all types, and by no means the least important, planes on which new pilots can be trained. We have sent thousands of these trainer aircraft, and are still sending them, overseas to be used in the great Empire Training schemes which are providing our Air Forces all over the world with the best pilots in the world.

When I spoke about the quality of our aircraft I was not only thinking of their good offensive quality, but of their capacity to stand up well to enemy action. I should like to give you one or two instances which illustrate this.

In the Augsburg attack a Lancaster was severely hit by flak when over the target. An incendiary shell cut the oil pipe. The oil poured into the bomb bay and caught fire. Three of the crew tore up the inspection hatches and fought the fire and put it out, but it had in the meanwhile done considerable damage to the airframe. Two of the engines were hit by shell fragments. One cut out over the target, the other continued to function. In spite of all this the plane got home.

A Spitfire pilot dived low over a rough sea - a large wave caught his propeller. Four inches were torn off one blade. Six inches were torn off each of the other two. The pilot got back home from near the Dutch coast and not even one bolt was cracked on the engine mounting.

A Beaufort pilot swooped down on an enemy supply ship in the dusk and set it on fire. He came so low that he hit a wire stay stretched from the mast top. The stay took off three feet of his port wing. The plane rocked and plunged and nearly went into the sea. But the pilot steadied it, climbed up again and made a perfect landing in darkness at his base.

Such is the stalwart nature of the goods we are turning out, and of one thing you can rest assured, and that is that throughout its career, whether under Lord Beaverbrook who in himself more typifies the speed and power of a modern aeroplane than anyone I know; under Lord Brabazon, himself the first holder of a pilot's licence in Great Britain; or under myself, all those working at this Ministry have but one aim. That is to provide these gallant young men with the best machines possible and in greater numbers as each week, each month, passes. The managements and workers in our many factories share this aim equally with us. There are hundreds of thousands now making aircraft who never made such things before. There are many <sup>many</sup> thousands - and they are mainly women - employed on this work, who, a few months ago, had never been inside a factory in their lives. They are doing wonderful work. They and all of us in the old country are determined to see this thing through. Compared with two years ago we of the British Commonwealth now have three powerful allies at our side to re-inforce those gallant men of the smaller nations who preferred honour to surrender and who fight and work with us on the seas, in the air and in armies in all parts of the world.

These three powerful allies are, of course, the United States with her huge man-power and rapidly increasing munition resources, Russia with her forces waiting without fear or flinching for the resumption of the full battle on the Eastern front, and lastly China, with the largest population in the world, who has stubbornly stood up to Japanese aggression for so long! We shall all no doubt have many more difficulties and many great dangers to face. Here at home, under the great leadership of Mr. Churchill, we face them with courage and with confidence. We know that, be the fight long or short, we are now quite certain to win. To win in the shortest possible time must be our constant endeavour - the constant urge that inspires each one of us in his or her daily task.

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MINISTRY OF AIRCRAFT PRODUCTION