

LIBERATOR "Y" MAKES HISTORY

A new stage in the air escort for Atlantic convoys was reached a few days ago when a very long range Liberator of the R.C.A.F., on patrol from its base in Newfoundland, was diverted in mid-ocean and ordered to land at a Coastal Command station in Northern Ireland.

To mark this development in the air offensive against the U-boats a special message was sent by Air Marshal Sir John Slessor, Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Coastal Command, to Air Vice-Marshal G.O. Johnson, R.C.A.F., Air Officer Commanding the Eastern Command in Canada. It read:-

"History has been made by Liberator "Y", the first R.C.A.F. aircraft to take-off from the continent of America on an operational sortie and land in the U.K. The commanding officer of this squadron attended our weekly anti-submarine staff meeting. Hope there will be many similar instances".

The significance of the Liberator's achievement is that the North-Atlantic "gap" which shore-based aircraft were formerly unable to cover has become still more effectively closed. Since as well as aircraft from escort carriers V.L.R. shore-based aircraft can now operate with increasing freedom in an area once so productive for U-boats in search of allied merchantment.

Previously, a Coastal Command aircraft on patrol in the North Atlantic nearly 1,000 miles from its British base, was ordered to land in Newfoundland, and since then several aircraft from Iceland have been diverted to Newfoundland or Canadian airfields when adverse weather made a return to their own base unduly hazardous.

The R.C.A.F. Liberator, captained by Flying Officer W.M. Howes, of Toronto, took off from Newfoundland to provide close escort for a convoy more than 900 miles from base.

The aircraft remained with the convoy until dark and then set course for Iceland, according to his original orders. The weather became so bad, however, that F/O Howes decided to fly to England but was later instructed by radio from a Coastal Command group headquarters to land at a station in Northern Ireland, where he arrived 15 hours 26 minutes after leaving Newfoundland. His flight was officially described as "uneventful", except for sightings of two large patches of oil on the sea.

It had been the longest sortie which any aircraft from his squadron had made, although on several former occasions convoys had been left 900 miles from base.

For Flying Officer Howes, who was born in Cork, it was the first time that he had returned to Ireland since leaving the country at the age of six.

With the possibilities created by this system of diversion, alternative landing grounds in two continents and in Iceland have become available to British and Canadian squadrons engaged in the Battle of the Atlantic. In poor weather, when fog or cloud appeared in a few hours and shrouded a home base, aircraft on Atlantic patrols were often recalled urgently before their missions had been fulfilled, although conditions may have been good in mid-ocean. How many more patrols are likely to be completed, since an airfield will probably be open to aircraft on one side or other of the Atlantic, even though the weather has closed down at their own stations.

Meanwhile, Liberator "Y" has returned to its base, by way of Iceland. When in Northern Ireland it carried out two operational sorties.

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