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Air Ministry News Service

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POLISH APPRENTICES ARE HERE

Polish youths, ranging in age from fifteen to seventeen and a half years (most of them are sixteen), have now arrived in this country to begin their training as aircraft apprentices in Technical Training Command of the R.A.F.

All the boys - very junior school boys when the war began - have recently come from a Polish military camp in the Middle East. They were specially selected on the basis of intelligence and keenness to undergo the finest technical instruction the R.A.F. can give them.

All the boys have had varying periods of instruction at Polish primary schools, and the eldest of them, at the time of the German attack on Poland, were preparing to proceed to a senior school or "gymnasium" as it is called in Poland, in preparation for a later university or polytechnic career.

At the Polish universities, studies are classified as "humanistic" - dealing, that is, with the arts, law and languages, while at the polytechnics, they are classified as "realistic", dealing with technical subjects for such careers as engineers, architects and so on.

At the moment the Polish boys are doing physical drill and gymnastics, learning English and undergoing a disciplinary course.

Within a few weeks they will start training as fitters, armourers, electricians, and instrument repairers. They will, in fact, have exactly the same technical training as their British counterparts.

Even the end of the war will not necessarily mean the interruption of their training. They will continue just as British aircraft apprentices did in peace time, but, if possible, it is hoped they will get leave to visit their own country. They will, however, return to England to complete their course, should the end of the war break into it.

Along with this training will go the work of perfecting their English, so that by the end of their long course, they will be not only fully-pledged technicians, but fully equipped to speak both technical and colloquial English. Then they will join the Polish Air Force, where the wide knowledge they have gained in this country will be of benefit to the new Polish Air Force which will be born at the end of the war.

The boys are "good types" - young, healthy and eager, and desperately anxious to become "English". They have their own choir, and when they arrived in battledress at a North West port recently, they sang Polish songs as their ship tied up.

They use the centuries-old form of greetings "Czolem" when addressed on parade by their superior officers. This consists of saluting with the back of the hand to the forehead. This is derived from the gesture made of old by knights in armour, who, as a proof that they did not propose to engage in combat, raised the vizors of their helmets to show their friendly intentions.

Some of the Polish boys are so slight in build that it was found impossible to obtain R.A.F. shirts small enough to fit them. The stores at their new station, however, came to the rescue and they paraded in W.A.A.F. shirts instead. Their uniform is identical with the R.A.F. uniform in every detail, the only distinguishing mark being "Poland" on the shoulder.

The commanding officer of the school formerly commanded the Polish School of Technical Training at Bydgoszcz, South of Gdynia; the officer in charge of the boys was formerly in charge of the Pilot's Training School at Warsaw.