The information for these presentations comes from a series of informational booklets published by His Majesty's Stationary Office in the 1940's. This is one of a number of books that were bought by my father during WW2. They were sold [usually for 6d or 1s] to keep people informed of various theatres of war and as a boost to morale.

These books have now been donated to the Imperial War Museum archives and other organisations, grateful thanks are due to Arthur for his sterling work in scanning them to digital format, which I appreciate, was no easy task.

PJS

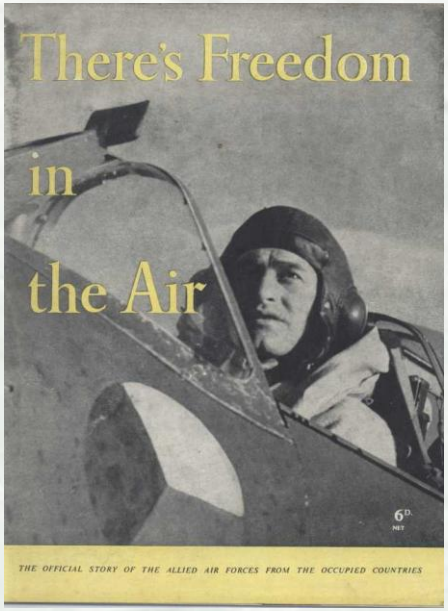
THERE'S FREEDOM IN THE AIR

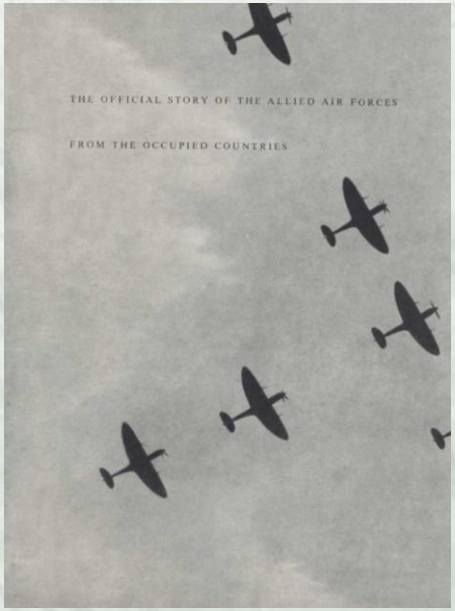
The Official Story of the Allied Air Forces From the Occupied Countries

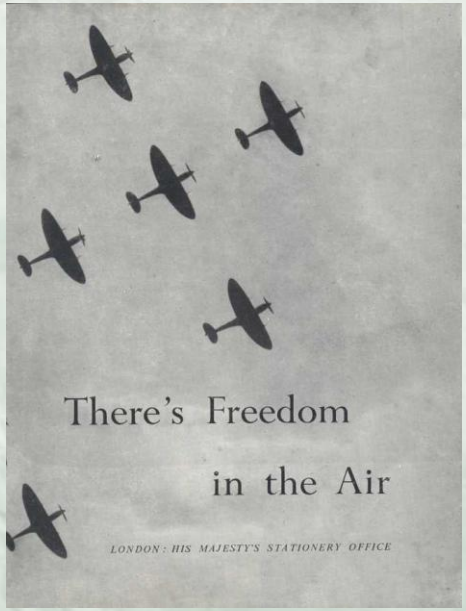
HIS MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE

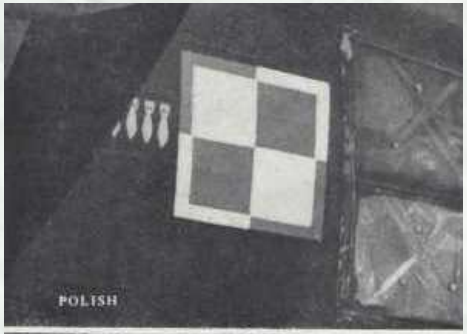
Published 1944

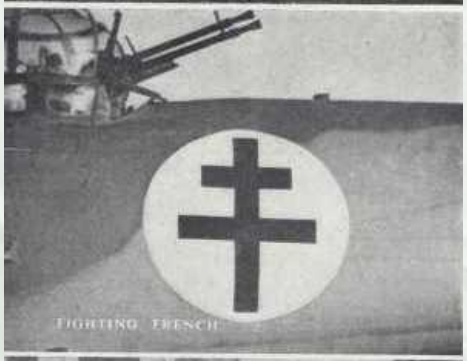
CONTENTS

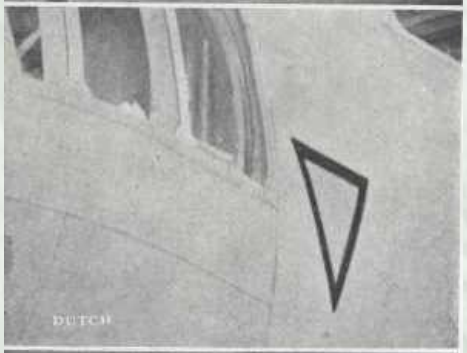

There's Freedom
in
the Air
6D.
NET
THE OFFICIAL STORY OF THE ALLIED AIR FORCES FROM THE OCCUPIED COUNTRIES


THE OFFICIAL STORY OF THE ALLIED AIR FORCES
FROM THE OCCUPIED COUNTRIES


There's Freedom
in the Air
LONDON: HIS MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE



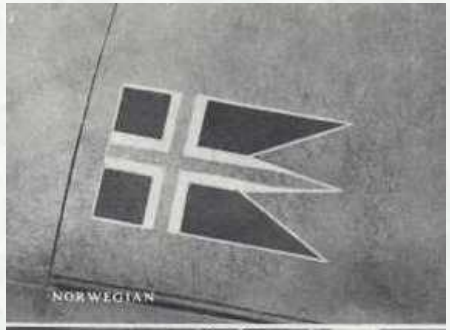




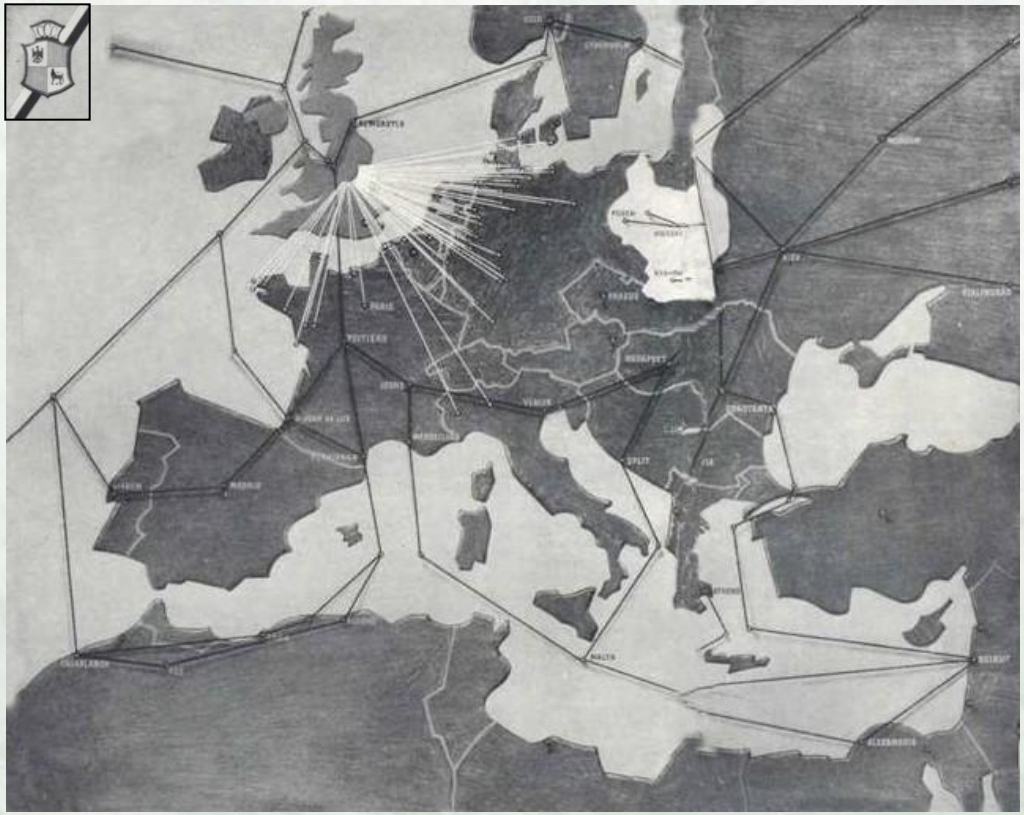
FOREWORD

This book tells the stirring and ennobling story of the achievements of our European Allies flying and fighting side by side with the Royal Air Force. One by one their countries have been seized their liberties destroyed, their governments driven into exile or suborned; but neither the blandishments not the oppression of the Nazis could break the spirit of the people. That spirit has inspired the brave men of those nations to give their all in the cause of liberty and freedom for which we fight. Poles, Czechoslovaks, Norwegians, Dutch, Belgians, Fighting French, Greeks and Yugoslavs have fought in the air with matchless gallantry against the might of the Luftwaffe. From bases in Great Britain, North Africa and elsewhere they have proved themselves fighting comrades of the Royal Air Force and worthy upholders of the proud traditions of their native lands.

Here is their story. No one could read it without being conscious of the heroism and devotion to duty of these gallant men. All will acclaim the superb courage which has led them, exiles from their homes and families, to take up the challenge of our common foe.



THEY WANTED TO GO ON FIGHTING



***DARK FOR ESCAPE, BRIGHT FOR VENGEANCE** are the strings on this map, which hangs in the Intelligence Room of a Polish bomber squadron. The dark strings indicate some of the routes which Polish airmen followed, leaving their homes in Eastern Europe [the area is coloured red on the original map], and journeying through many European countries, or via N. Africa, or round the Cape of Good Hope by S. America to the U.S.A., and so reaching Britain. The white strings show the raids in which they have exacted retribution.*

THE WAR between Poland and Germany began at dawn on September 1st 1939. Between that time and the virtual end of Polish armed resistance on Polish soil three weeks later, the world looked on at the first mass bombing of a great European city. It saw what an organised air force of 3,000 planes could do against a force of only 300 planes, at first organised, and then disorganised by loss and retreat. It saw the first series of triumphs of numbers over national faith.

Mere numbers are destructible; faith is not. When war began, the Polish Air Force had only 300 planes of action strength. Of these, half were P-11c Fighters, a type quite slow according to modern standards. Of the rest, 36 were medium bombers of the Los P.37 type, and 60 were light bombers of the Karas type. The rest were army co-operation aircraft. But behind this small number of planes were great numbers of men. Poland was a country under conscription; the number of recruits to the Air Force each year was therefore considerable. If its reserves of aircraft were poor and soon to be used up, its reserves of men were enormous. If it was not possible to save the planes from destruction by the Luftwaffe, it became evident, as early as September 14th, that it would be possible to save the men. Before active Polish resistance in Poland had ended, therefore, the escape of thousands of men of the Polish Air Force – and also of the Polish Army and the Polish Navy – had been planned. This escape, both because of its size and because of its triumphs over hardship and distances, was one of the most remarkable in history.

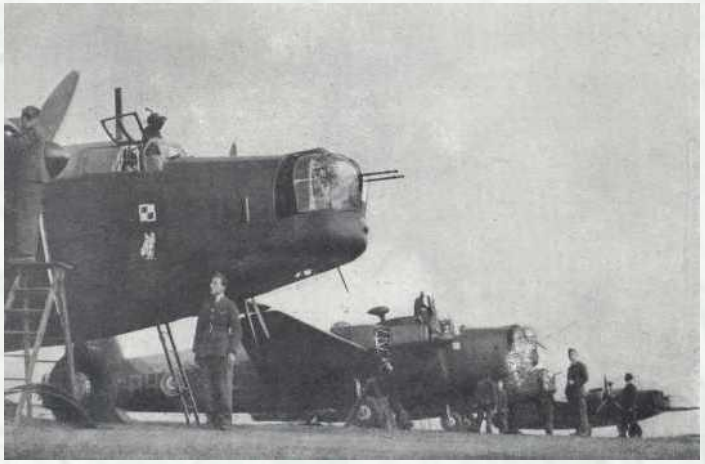
On the wall of the Intelligence Room of a Polish bomber squadron that now operates from an R.A.F. station in England is a map. It is a map of Europe, West Asia and North Africa, cut in wood. The continents and countries are painted in colours. Europe, Africa and Asia are painted brown, Poland is bright red, England is bright green. All over this map, in a wide circle covering every single country except Germany, are scores of chromium pins. They are joined together with strings of blue wool. All these strings begin in Poland and lead ultimately to England. They are journeys of escape. There is scarcely a country in Europe, Asia Minor or North Africa to which one of these strings does not go. They extend as far north as Sweden, as far east as Russia, as far south as Syria and Egypt. They go through Roumania, where thousands of Poles first gathered after their defeat, through Greece and Yugoslavia, Turkey, France and Spain; even through Italy. The strings come, too, across the Atlantic, across the north from the United States, across the south from South America. They are scattered everywhere.

But on the map there are other strings. They are coloured yellow. They are not scattered. They are concentrated. Compared with the strings of escape they are short. They radiate from a single point in England to a circle of 60 different points, from Brest to as far east as the Baltic ports. These strings and these points are the record of retaliation. They are the record of the bomber operations of the Polish Air Force that was disrupted, scattered, and reunited, at last, in England. They are the journeys of retribution.

These strings partly represent the stories and certainly represent the aim of many thousands of men, men at first scattered, walking, train-hopping, sledging and plotting their way across Europe towards the two countries. France and England, where the red and white Polish flag was still flying as a symbol of passionate resistance against the regime that had destroyed Warsaw. Some represent the stories of men who, unable to escape before Poland's final collapse, saw the New Order come in, read the military decrees nailed up in Polish cities and towns by von Brauchitsch, disobeyed them and still escaped; who saw brothers and fathers tortured and beaten, wives and sisters sent to Germany; who picked up leaflets in Polish streets: "If you don't surrender we shall use poison gas at 12 noon tomorrow"; who smelled death on the streets after the mass bombings of September; who were told to surrender or go to German prison camps and who replied by forging passports – of men, in short, who put freedom higher than pain.

On a day in the autumn of 1939 a young Polish airman stood by a wall in a Polish farmyard, waiting to be shot. The Nazi firing squad stood ready with their rifles, awaiting the order to fire. As the Pole stood facing them one of the rifles accidently went off. The noise startled the rest of the Nazi firing squad who immediately turned their heads. In that moment the Pole clambered over the wall and was gone.

The first of these men of the Polish Air Force began to reach England in early December 1939; only three months after the collapse of their country. In a sense they were fortunate. Europe had not crumbled; France was still a free country; the avenues of escape were still open. For these reasons they were to be followed by many thousands of their countrymen. Meanwhile many Polish airmen had reached France. They had skied across the Carpathians. They had been through the prisons of Hungary. They had stolen boats and rowed down the Drava River into Yugoslavia. They had come by steamer to Marseilles. They found themselves in France on the verge of defeat and disunity



BUT FAITH IS INDESTRUCTIBLE. The faith of her airmen, surviving Poland's defeat, enabled the Polish Air Force to be reborn in Britain. Wellingtons of a Polish Bomber Squadron on an English airfield

AIRCRAFT CAN BE DESTROYED. German soldiers examine the wreckage of one of the 300 Polish planes, which fought valiantly against the Luftwaffe's 3,000 during the invasion of Poland.

So in June 1940 their escape began again. There was now only one country left for them – England. "Thousands of us," says one of them, "came away from St Jean de Luz. Some were in uniform of the Palestine police. Some said they were French soldiers, some business men, some from Turkey. And so on. Really we were all just Poles wanting to fight the Germans." And so, disordered, scattered, deprived of that self-determination which had been Hitler's righteous and indignant cry in 1939, but not disunited and by no means defeated, the Poles began to come to England.

They were not alone. Nor were they the first disinherited people of the war, though their soil was the first on which war had been fought. For the Czechoslovaks the war began, not with the invasion of Poland in 1939, but with the Munich Agreement in 1938. From that moment every clear-sighted Czechoslovak saw the inevitable course of events. Immediately after Munich, Czechoslovak nationals, and particularly airmen began to escape secretly from their country under cover of darkness, singly or in groups, by all kinds of routes and means. They, too, like the Poles, had one object. They wanted to fight Germany. The word *wanted* is worth noting. It is the key word to these pages; it is the consistent emotion binding together in one purpose, these undefeated representatives of defeated peoples. *We want to fight Germany.* There is no other desire or aim.

Many Czechoslovaks, anticipating events correctly, escaped in 1938 and 1939 to Poland. Some remained there, some wandered on, through Eastern and Central Europe, on what was to be the long journey to England. When War began, many Czechoslovak airmen fought side by side with the Polish Air Force. When Poland fell, their way of escape was very difficult. Nevertheless, many of them reached France. There they joined the only Unit open to them – the French Foreign Legion – and it was not until France's entry into the war that they were embodied in the French Air Force. During that winter, there was little air fighting, and it was only in the spring of 1940, a few weeks before the collapse of France, that the Czechoslovak National Committee and the French Government came to an agreement whereby Czechoslovak airmen obtained their independence and were to be formed into national groups.

TO GO ON FIGHTING. Czechoslovak airmen after the fall of France embark for Britain – the only country where they could continue the fight for their own fatherland.

Like many other things in those days, it was almost too late. There was little time to organise. Over 100 Czechoslovak pilots were attached to various French squadrons, including the 5th Squadron of No. 1 Wing of the "Cigogne" Squadron, one of the most famous French fighter squadrons of the war. In these squadrons the Czechoslovaks fought themselves to a point of exhaustion in the Battle of France. They fought with an extreme fanatical zeal and to the limits of physical endurance. There were many stories of pilots losing consciousness in the air and recovering just in time to make a safe landing. Some idea of the success with which they fought may be got from *Chasseurs de Ciel*, a book published by Captain Accart in the autumn of 1941. On the list of fighter pilots in France, Captain Accart places a Czechoslovak pilot, Captain V., as third with 15 enemy aircraft destroyed, another Czechoslovak, Lieutenant P., as fourth and Lieutenant V. as 12th on the list.

On the collapse of France the Czechoslovaks found themselves in a desperate position. They were scattered over a country disrupted and disorganised by defeat. The Europe at which they looked was now a very different Europe from the excited but still unified continent of 1939. Poland, Norway, Denmark, Belgium, Holland, their own Czechoslovakia and now France had gone. For them, as for the Poles, there was now only one way of escape; to England. On the orders of the Commander-in-Chief, the Czechoslovaks assembled in the South of France and even in North Africa, to begin all over again the journey to a strange country in order to continue the struggle for their fatherland.

CZECHOSLOVAK FIGHTER PILOT. On July 12th, 1940, the Independent Czechoslovak Air Force was re-born on English soil. Its first fighter squadron was destined to play a notable part in the Battle of Britain.

A first group of 19 pilots arrived in England by transport aircraft on the day after the French Armistice was signed. More followed immediately. On June 21st, Dutch and Polish merchant vessels, loaded with Czechoslovak airmen arrived in English ports, and other vessels continued to arrive until the last transport reached Liverpool on July 9th. Only three days later, on July 12th, the Independent Czechoslovak Air Force was re-born. There was announced, with great national pride, the formation of the first Czechoslovak fighter squadron – No. 310. It practically coincided with the announcement of the first Polish Squadron, No. 300, to be formed in Britain.

Like the Poles, the Czechoslovaks were only just in time. They were in time for one of the great battles of History. It was a battle to decide as we in Britain knew too well, not only whether Great Britain should survive as a free nation, but whether ultimately all Europe should survive and it was right and opportune that the Czechoslovaks and Poles should take part in it.

ESCAPE TO ACTION

BUT WHILE the Czechoslovaks and Poles had been escaping through the long, tedious avenues of South Europe, Asia and Africa, much more had been happening in the north. The Norwegians, who had been flying an interesting mixture of aircraft in their short battle against Germany – using Gloster Gladiators, Curtiss Mohawks and Heinkel 115s – had also begun to arrive in England.

The story of the battle of Norway is the story with geographical differences, of Belgium, Holland and France. Both the Royal Norwegian Army Air Force and the Royal Norwegian Naval Air Force were very modest in size. Their aircraft were mostly obsolete types, built as early as 1925. They had few airfields, and these mostly in the coastal areas. In the summer and autumn of 1939 and the early spring of 1940, it was decided to alter this dangerous state of affairs. Both Forces were to be equipped with new types of aircraft: American Curtiss P. 36 Fighters and Douglas 8A5 Attack bombers for the Army Air Force, American Northrop N-3 P B and German Heinkel 115 seaplanes for the Naval Air Force. Plans were also ready and funds allocated for the construction of new airfields. These plans were excellent. Their only fault was that they were too late.

When by noon of April 9th, 1940, the Germans had succeeded in occupying existing airfields and seaplane bases south of Narvik, it was obvious that the situation in Norway was very desperate. Against the modern forces of the Luftwaffe, estimated to be something like 2,000 aircraft, the Norwegians had little to offer except Gloster Gladiators, which put up a gallant and hopeless fight in the defence of Oslo on the morning of April 9th, and such types as Heinkel 115 and MF11 seaplanes and Fokkers and Tiger Moths operating respectively with Naval and Army Forces. In spite of this the Norwegian Air Forces retained their ability to operate right up to the moment when the last Allied Forces, two months after the invasion, were forced to leave Norway.

Night and day, for example, the Norwegian seaplanes, operating from fjords and ice-covered lakes, bombed and harassed German transport and troop positions on the west coast. In co-operation with Army planes they made communication flights, linking up isolated units of Norwegian fighting forces in fjords and valleys. They operated until the situation in Southern Norway became impossible. Then the few naval planes capable of the long flight were flown to the north of Norway and there continued the work of reconnaissance, bombing and ground-strafing until finally, on June 17th, 1940, the whole situation in Northern Europe was revolutionised by the collapse of France.

And so the Norwegians, as the Poles and Czechoslovaks had done, came to England. The number of Poles was very large; the number of Norwegians quite small. The Poles had many means of escape, difficult and dangerous though they were; the Norwegians had very few. To navigate the North Sea to Great Britain was practically their only hope. A few were able to fly floatplanes to Scotland, but many others made the journey by sea, in small merchant vessels or in fishing smacks. Some even rowed their way across the 300 miles of water. Even then, many difficulties were still in front of them. They were too few, too disorganised and too lacking in equipment to fight immediately, so they collected together in Canada the scattered remnants of their Air Force, and with recruits from North America formed their training headquarters known as "Little Norway." And though too late for the Battle of Britain, they later fought with the same tenacity and courage as had brought them hundreds of miles across that dangerous water.

As time went on they became a powerful force second in numbers only to the Poles among the Allies in Britain. In May 1941 they formed their own Naval Squadron of Northrop Floatplanes in Iceland, from which they flew many dangerous and tedious hours of convoy escort. In July 1941, and January 1942, they formed two new squadrons of fighters, Nos. 331 and 332, fought with them in powerful sweeps over France, and in the bloody protection combats over Dieppe, with great distinction, and later made them among the highest-scoring squadrons of Fighter Command.

WINGS OF THE NORTH. In an Icelandic fjord, men of a Norwegian Naval Squadron get ready to set off on escort duty in a Northrop Floatplane. The Royal Norwegian Air Force is now the second largest among those of the Occupied Countries in Britain.

One of these combats is described in a Norwegian sergeant pilot's report during the Dieppe operations;–"When the Wing Commander ordered my section to attack, I dived down with my No. 1. heading for the Dornier to the left of a formation of four. I closed in to 400 yards and gave him a two-second burst with cannons and machine-guns as it dived to port. The bomber dived through the clouds, and I followed it down. Just below cloud the enemy aircraft pulled up and set course back towards the coast of Dieppe. As I approached, the top rear gunner opened with his machine-guns. His shooting was very accurate, and I was hit in wings by several bullets. Having closed to 300 yards, I opened fire. Altogether I made three attacks on the bomber – two from port beam and one from starboard beam, closing to 150 yards. As a result of these attacks the crew started bailing out. I saw three men jump and all three parachutes opened. The aircraft went down in a dive and finally crashed on the beach between rocks and the water line. It burst into flames, and I saw a man, probably the pilot standing knee height in the water beside it. Having exhausted my ammunition, I returned to base flying alone as there were no other Spitfires in the area."

No sooner had the sergeant given his report than he went straight over to his Flight Commander. "Am I flying on the next trip Sir? His face was one big smile when he received the answer. Soon after reaching the patrol area, numerous enemy aircraft were seen to approach flying in pairs and "fours" - a formation of six was also seen to be operating. Sgt. X. was flying as Red 2 when his section was attacked by three enemy aircraft coming out of the clouds. A number of dogfights developed and the Red section became split up. Sgt. X. was flying alone when he saw two F.W. 190s coming in from astern to attack another lone Spitfire below and to port of himself. Sgt. X. dived down on the right-hand enemy aircraft, opening up with cannons and machine-guns. The range was rather long, and he saw no results from his firing, but he achieved his aim in that the enemy aircraft broke off their attack on the Spitfire. As he was about to pull up from his dive, he found himself attacked by five F.W. 190s coming in from port quarter and above. He tried to turn his aircraft around so as to meet the enemy aircraft head on, but had only made a half turn when a hail of bullets hit his aircraft.

The F.W. 190s dived by and disappeared in the direction of the French coast. He was not hit himself, but his aircraft started burning and the engine cut out at 5,000 feet, leaving the pilot no other choice than to bale out. He released his hood and Sutton harness and then turned his aircraft upside down. By so doing he was thrown out of the aircraft, which spun down and soon crashed into the sea. He pulled the rip-cord as soon as he was thrown clear. The parachute opened satisfactorily, and descending slowly he finally landed unhurt in the sea, having released his parachute harness on touching the water. He inflated his dinghy and entered it thinking that to be shot down was not such a frightful experience after all. He did not get much time to use his experience as a sailor, as he was picked up by a motor gunboat of the Royal Navy some 15 minutes after entering the dinghy.

The Norwegians have also many pilots and navigators in Bomber Command and in British fighter squadrons as well as in Transport Command, which flies countless new aircraft from the factories of Canada and the United States across the Atlantic to the European battle-ground.

By the early summer of 1940, Holland, and Belgium too had fallen. Both had fought against the greatest odds. The story of their defeat was the story that had repeated itself, tragically, all across Europe. Faith and courage were in greater supply than weapons, and could not prevail without them. So again, in small boats, in fishing smacks and even in rowing boats, Dutch and Belgian airmen made their escape to England.

A young Belgian was captured by Germans in the fighting near Saint Germain-en-Laye in the summer of 1940. He was imprisoned and escaped; he was found and re-enlisted as a munitions worker; he performed acts of sabotage until things became too dangerous, and then escaped again. He reached the Pyrenees, walked across the mountains, and was arrested a few miles from Barcelona. From a concentration camp he made another escape, got back to Marseilles, found it too dangerous, and decided to go back to Belgium. He was then arrested by the French police, and had to escape again. As he was crossing the line into Occupied France he was picked up by a French patrol, and again imprisoned. He again escaped, went to Antwerp, and, after weeks of hiding, set of to Spain. He was once more arrested, handed over to the French police, and once more got back to Belgium. His last escape was to England. With friends he set out to row across the North Sea in a small boat. On the way they were machine-gunned by German airmen; all his friends except one were killed outright or were wounded and died in the boat. The boat itself was holed by bullets, the food soaked by blood and sea-water. The situation was so desperate that the two men, after unsuccessfully trying to catch sea-gulls in order to drink their blood, ate toothpaste and drank sea-water. But finally, in spite of everything, they reached England.

Two Dutch pilots arrived respectively in a Fokker seaplane and a Fokker fighter, both aircraft carrying German markings, a dangerous enterprise which happily ended well. But the Dutch and Belgians, like the Norwegians, were few in numbers. They were not always to be few, and their resolution, if not so demonstrative as that of the Poles, or so buoyant as that of the Czechs, was great and clear and invincible. Happily, too, the Belgians had, before the war, been trained very largely on Hurricanes. The Dutch were well trained on coastal craft, of which they had succeeded in bringing in a few Fokker T.8.W.s to England. The Dutch and the Belgians were thus in time, and ready, for the Battle of Britain. As fighters the Belgians became very successful, and nine months after its formation one Belgian squadron had already shot down or damaged 30 enemy planes.

Finally, on June 26th, the first Fighting French pilots arrived in England. The position was, perhaps, the most tragic of all. France had suffered a catastrophe from which it seemed quite possible she would not recover for the rest of the century. The Poles, the Czechoslovaks, the Norwegians, the Dutch and the Belgians had reached England together with their Governments, their national unity unbroken, supported in some cases by rich resources capable of equipping them with new aircraft. They were one with each other; they had complete autonomy. The French enjoyed no such privileges. France had asked for an armistice and had found itself the victim of the most subtle of all political divisions – the Occupied and the Unoccupied. Every Frenchman who had escaped to England to continue the fight was therefore in the eyes of the Vichy Government a traitor. He was liable in his absence to be condemned as in fact many were, to death.

In spite of all this, many Frenchmen refused to accept defeat. They came to England. They came, like the Poles and Czechoslovaks, by way of Spain and Africa and the Mediterranean; like the Norwegians and Dutch and Belgians, in merchant vessels, fishing smacks, and even rowing boats across the sea.

They escaped to freedom by even stranger ways. On a day in 1940 many distinguished French officers, loyal to Vichy, were lined up on an airfield in North Africa; an airfield now in American hands. There was to be a presentation of decorations to French pilots who had distinguished themselves in the war. Among them was a French bomber pilot who had been captured by the Nazis in the French retreat, who had escaped, been hidden for weeks in a French port and had finally bicycled down through France, swimming rivers at night, until he reached Toulon. He, too, was apparently loyal to Vichy. Before the presentation of decorations there was to be a display of flying. At the assigned moment the pilot took off with the rest, circled the airfield and then quietly broke formation and flew off – to Gibraltar.

The Frenchmen who joined us came in full knowledge of what the consequences might be, not only for them, but for friends and families left behind. They came like the rest, *because they wanted to go on fighting.*

IN DEFENCE OF BRITAIN

IN THESE three stories of escape – three out of many thousands – it is possible to see the whole spirit of the unconquered peoples of Europe; the courage, the audacity, the sublime determination to be free, a pugnacious refusal to be dominated. Of these thousands of escape stories, wonderful and tragic, bitter and glorious, inspiring and humbling, the larger part can still not be told. Many of them are the greater epics of the war. All it is possible to say of such escapes, and of such a spirit of audacity, devotion and courage, is that thousands of Polish, Czechoslovak, Dutch, Norwegian, Belgium and French airmen reached Britain in the summer of 1940, and stood ready, as Great Britain also stood ready, for the new battle to begin.

But devotion, audacity and courage are not everything. Almost every schoolboy wants to fly a Spitfire; but desire without training remains a negative thing. So with the Allied airmen who arrived in this country. Their courage could never be questioned. But few of them could speak English; fewer still were trained to fly British aircraft. Nor are pilots of much use without ground staff, technicians, riggers and fitters – in which most of the escaped Allies faced a serious deficiency. Thus, when the Battle of Britain was about to begin, there were relatively few Allied squadrons ready to take part in it. Behind these few squadrons, in Scotland, in Wales, in Canada, units of the escaped airmen of Europe were learning English and were re-learning, according to R.A.F. methods, how to fight and fly.

Nevertheless, some were ready. The Poles and Czechoslovaks, having begun to arrive first were by far the largest force. By July 1940, the first two Polish bomber squadrons, Nos. 300 and 301, had been formed, though they were not to begin operating until September; and the first Polish fighter squadrons Nos. 302 and 303. The first Czechoslovak squadron, No. 310 had also being formed.

DEFENDERS OF BRITAIN. From the moment of their arrival in this country, Allied airmen prepared to take part in its defence. Pilots of the first Free French fighter squadron race to their aircraft.

Within three weeks of each other, on August 7th and August 26th respectively, the Poles and Czechoslovaks had their first success in battle. On the first date the Polish squadrons No. 302 and 303 shot down five enemy planes without loss to themselves. On the second date the Czech squadron No. 310, operating in four sections of three aircraft each, met the enemy for the first time and, in a dramatic encounter the Czechoslovaks were led by an English flight-commander - a combination of nationalities that has been one of the happiest features of the war.

But on September 7th, exactly a month after their first victory, the Poles did even better. That day, indeed, they did magnificently. At about half-past four in the afternoon a formation of 16 Hurricanes of No. 303 squadron took off to meet a large enemy bomber formation protected heavily by enemy fighters. An extremely fierce encounter took place over Essex, where the Poles had kept a rendezvous with one of the most famous of all R.A.F. squadrons, the thirty-year-old No. 1. In a short time the poles alone scored the following successes:-

10 Dornier 215s destroyed
3 Messerschmitt 109s destroyed
2 Dornier 215s probably destroyed
2 Messerschmitt 109s probably destroyed
2 Dornier 215s damaged

For this magnificent achievement the Poles paid with three Hurricanes, from which two pilots jumped safely; the third was wounded. The day was historic. The Poles had given to the world their first real demonstration of that fanatical courage, determination and skill for which they have since become famous.

A Pole gave this description of one operation: "At 6.40 we were already up in the air. We were directed by R.T. to the south coast of England, and warned of a strong enemy formation making for one of the towns on the coast. We were heading for this direction and were going all out. Suddenly I noticed a lot of aircraft slightly above us. I immediately warned the Squadron Commander.

"We changed course, went into the sun and then into attack. It turned out that they were all Me. 109s, without any bombers. Dogfights ensued immediately; we came up against odds of 1 to 6 and 1 to 7, but no one thought of that. I got hold of one Me. and started to twist and turn with him. I then noticed that another Jerry was coming in on my tail. I made a violent turn and fell into a spin. I pulled out and then I saw an Me. about 200 yards in front. I got on his tail and opened fire without using any deflection at all. Eight machine-guns did their work. Bits flew from the jerry, and soon he went down to the ground in smoke. I followed him down and saw how he exploded about six miles north of Dover. Soon after I saw several others falling down to earth. My squadron was at work! However, it did not last long. Jerry made back for home, and a few minutes later we received instructions to return. We came back singly, but w all got back.

"Sometime about 12.30 we were called up a second time. This time we saw a large bomber formation approaching with an escort of fighters. We met Jerry just over the coast, but on seeing us he made a sharp turn and dived down to attack some town beneath us. The C.O. led us in to head him off, and we almost succeeded. I got the tail of a Ju. 88 and pumped in round after round. Both his engines started to burn; he came down lower, turned out over the sea, and just as he crossed the coast, exploded. I circled over the burning remains, and just then I caught sight of a Defiant in a fight with an Me. 109. Quite unseen by the Me., I came in under his belly and pumped in the rest of the ammunition, but it was just a bit too late as the Defiant was already on fire and was dropping down to the water like a stone. A moment later my Me. burst into a black smoke and crashed close by his victim. A few minutes later and there was no trace on the water of either machine.

"I took a course for base and after 15 minutes landed, tired and perspiring, but happy that I had started to repay my debt to the Boche for September 1939. My C.O. and the whole squadron were overjoyed. Good lads – they shook my hands and congratulated me.

"We were not given long for a rest. At 2.30 we were in the air again. Our squadron was in the second line of defence. We met Jerry well over land, but we were lower down. The C.O. made a turn and we started to climb, parallel to the column of Jerries. They, meantime were throwing out their bombs on the towns lying on the road to London. Some 25 miles outside London we were above Jerry, and we went in to attack. Just as our first aircraft opened fire, about 30 Me. 109s attacked us. The last two Sections got to grips with the fighters, while the rest took on the bombers.

NEW WEAPONS, NEW WORDS. Allied personnel must learn to fly and service English aircraft, and to speak the English tongue. Polish aircraftmen are seen at a lecture.

"I was attacked by three Me. 109s. I took evading action, closed down the throttle, and when the first Jerry shot past me, gave him all I could. Instantaneously he broke into flames, lost both his wings, and like a rocket went down to the ground, but the other Me.s had already opened fire on me. I did a half roll, pulled back the stick, and at once lost sight of jerry, but this manoeuvre lost me some 4-5,000 feet. I started to climb on full throttle so as to reach the nearest group of bombers, which were flying calmly along without any protection, and so far had not being attacked at all. After two or three minutes I was in a good position. At a convenient moments I opened fire and directed it on the nearest Ju. 88. The rest of the Jerries fired at me with tracer bullets. This made a fine sight as the smoke remained in the air and formed a fan-shaped pattern. My ammunition gave out after a few seconds, so I did a left climbing turn and dived down, as two machines had appeared quite near me. After losing several thousand feet I looked at my Ju. 88. There he was, in flames, spinning down to the ground."

The Czechoslovaks, too, had been doing great work. In the first month of its operations, No. 310 Squadron had shot down 28 enemy planes, and had damaged many others. But by this time, No. 310 Squadron was not alone. A second Czechoslovak squadron, No. 312, had been formed on August 29th, and many Czechoslovak pilots had been drafted to squadrons of the R.A.F. The two Czechoslovak squadrons were not only maintained by Czechoslovak ground personnel. Too many of these men, excellent engineers though the Czechoslovaks are, the British aircraft were unfamiliar. They were not only maintained in first-rate condition, but the numbers of them increased, and the Czechoslovaks flew them with characteristic distinction.

And so, all through the Battle of Britain, the symbols of these two peoples were carried into combat on the fuselage of British aircraft. The scarlet and white chess-board painted on the planes of Polish squadrons, and the red, white and blue circles, with the white lion on a red background, which form the emblem of the Czechoslovaks. These circles are the national colours of the Czechoslovaks. The lion is the emblem of the Czechoslovak State.

The red and white chess-board of the Polish Air Force, its official emblem according to international aeronautical law, has its origin in the last war. When the Poles took possession of aircraft left behind by retreating Germans in 1918, they replaced the German iron crosses painted on the aircraft by coats of arms belonging to such districts of Poland as Warsaw, Lwow, Poznan, Kracow and so on.

Finally, in the spring of 1918, it was noticed that aircraft operating from Lwow airfield bore the red and white chess-board. Soon afterwards it became officially accepted, and has remained ever since the emblem of the Polish Air Force.

While the Poles and Czechoslovaks were fighting with such positive distinction in the air, battle of 1940, the Belgians, Dutch and French inevitably in less numerical strength, were operating too. The Belgians, perhaps, were the most fortunate of the Allied pilots who came to England. For in the Belgian Air Force, before the war, they had been trained on British Hurricanes. Their transition to R.A.F. methods was therefore rather easier than that of Poles and Czechoslovaks who had been trained on aircraft of Polish, Czechoslovak, American and Russian manufacture, and of the Norwegians, who had mostly flown types that could only be described as obsolescent. The Belgians were like the French, handicapped by lack of numbers; but although it was not until after the Battle of Britain that the first separate Belgian squadron was formed, many Belgian pilots, like many French ones, were able to fight in the battle squadrons of the R.A.F. Indeed, a number of R.A.F. squadrons and sections were, and still are commanded by men of the Allied Forces.

But before that first Belgian squadron was formed something happened that typified, perhaps better even than a total of victories, the Belgian national spirit. For the Belgians, too, had a symbol. It was a flag. It was the original flag of the Belgians Air Force, and during the retreat of the Belgians in 1940, it had been left in occupied territory in the secret keeping of faithful friends

SYMBOL OF FREEDOM. A Belgian pilot flew back to his country, at immense risk, to rescue the flag of the Belgian Air Force. The flag is being presented here to the first Belgian squadron to be formed on British soil.

A Belgian airman who knew of the hiding place volunteered to fly to Belgium, find the flag, and bring it to England. He knew quite well of the immense risks of that undertaking. But he flew to Belgium, found the flag as he had promised, and brought it to England. And there, before members of the Belgian Government, H.R.H. Prince Bernhard of Holland, the Secretary of State for Air, Allied representatives and diplomats, a few privileged civilians and not least, many Belgian pilots, the flag was presented to the first Belgian squadron formed on British soil.

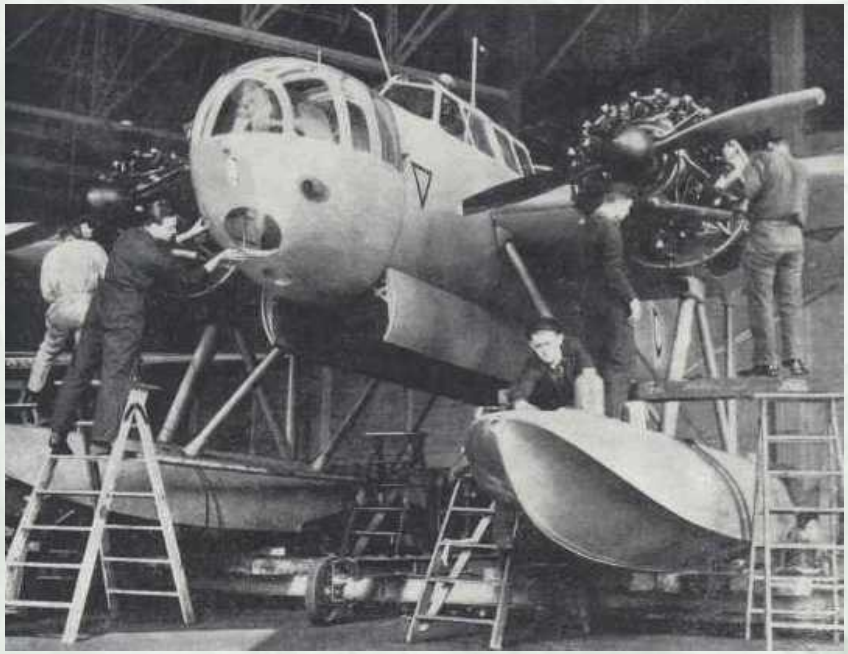
Meanwhile the Dutch had not being idle. As early as June 1940, a unit of the Royal Dutch Naval Air Service was formed at Pembroke Dock armed with Fokker seaplanes and manned by such trained Dutch naval air personnel as were ready. This unit was called No. 320 [Dutch], Squadron, R.A.F., and it was put under the operational control of R.A.F. Coastal Command. Very soon afterwards a second Dutch squadron, No. 321 [Dutch] was formed and equipped with Anson aircraft. The personnel consisted of the remaining trained Dutch air crews, and some semi-trained pilots, observers and air gunners.

Holland's record in the Battle of Britain may not have been spectacular. The public which saw day after day the great air battles of south and south-eastern England were perhaps too enthralled and excited to remember that Great Britain was surrounded by sea, and that one of the most vital, most arduous and least spectacular jobs of the war was the job of coastal air patrol. It could not know that in one year Coastal Command would fly almost 150,000 hours and about 17,000,000 miles over the seas from Iceland to Gibraltar, from Norway to the Outer Hebrides , bombing enemy shipping, depth-charging U-boats, protecting convoys on the sea-routes of supply; or that the Dutch, a nation rich in sea-faring history, who sailors had been among the great navigators of all time, were taking daily part in that vital monotonous but often dangerous task.
It is one of the paradoxes of the war, indeed that the small figure of 50 aircraft destroyed means more than the colossal figure of 17,000,000 operational miles. The perspective, here quite wrong, does an injustice to Coastal Command in general, and to the Dutch not only patrolled the seas, bombed shipping, and depth-charged U-boats. They did much work in air-sea rescue, saving by their accurate navigation and skilful plotting the lives of many fighter and bomber pilots shot down at sea. That their work was not always front-page news did not mean at all that it was not great. The work of Coastal Command pays its dividends slowly. A pilot saved from the sea may mean, perhaps, in time, long after the public has forgotten the incident, that ten more enemy aircraft have been destroyed. A convoy safely protected means more life to more people than a fallen Messerschmitt. And finally, the Dutch observer who flew back a Hudson from Norway after his pilot had been killed, may stand higher in heroism, because he had never been taught to fly, than many a pilot of a romantic Spitfire.

That observer wrote:- "one day my crew and I were detailed to do a daylight anti-shipping patrol off the Norwegian coast. My job on this trip was navigating, and I had never flown a Hudson myself and never thought I could.

"We took off about noon and set course towards the Norwegian coast. Most of the trip was done under bad weather conditions, cloudbase was about 800 feet, and it was raining steadily. But as we reached a point 30 miles off the enemy coast, the weather cleared and the rain stopped.

"THE LIGHT-WEIGHT CAN HIT HARD." This Dutch ground crew is bombing up a Fokker T.8.W., one of the aircraft they succeeded in bringing over to England.



TO KEEP THE SEA-WAYS CLEAR. Dutch mechanics overhaul one of the Fokker seaplanes which, manned by Dutch naval air personnel, shared in the vital, unspectacular, but often dangerous work of Coastal Command.

We flew on a course parallel to the coast in search of enemy convoys. After about 15 minutes' flying, we sighted one – two medium-sized supply ships and two escort vessels or flakships. We dived into the clouds and kept nipping in and out to make out the lie of the land. We finally decided to attack the biggest supply ship from the rear. We got into position, shut our throttles, and glided out of the clouds to make our bombing run. At first they didn't seem to realise what was happening, but as we got within 300 yards' distance they opened up with light and heavy machine-guns and cannons. The fire was heavy and became more and more accurate. We swooped over the ship, released our bombs and then tried to make our getaway. Then things began to happen.

"There was a hell of a bang – one of their cannon shells had hit us right by the cockpit; just afterwards another hit us a little behind, almost severing the control wires, as we learnt later. At the same moment the pilot – a chap weighing 13 stone – collapsed. The shell had exploded by his left leg; after a few seconds he was unconscious, and within a few minutes bled to death. I was standing close to him and reached over his body to seize the controls.

"I pulled hard on the stick to get the aircraft out of the dive – that was difficult enough – and then tried to engage the automatic pilot, but the damned thing wouldn't work. Well, that looked nice, leaning over a dead pilot, precariously holding the Hudson in the air, having to go back over 300 miles and land the aircraft! It seemed quite impossible. The rest of the crew came to my help, dragged the dead pilot out of his seat and helped me to get into his place. And then for home. It wasn't easy, but finally we made it, and when we saw an airfield near the coast we were very glad.

"but now the worst part, landing 10 tons of aircraft at a speed of 100 miles per hour. So sweating heavily, we tried to make our first landing run, undershot and tried once again. Twice, it was unsuccessful – the Flying Control people must have had kittens by then – and then the third time we were lucky, and managed to make a fairly decent landing. I felt like kneeling down and kissing mother earth. Can you imagine how I enjoyed the first pint of beer?" In this way, solidly, conscientiously, with heroic determination, the Dutch took their part.

In December 1940, No. 320 Squadron gave up its Fokker floatplanes for Hudsons, and was merged with Squadron No. 321. The Battle of Britain was over. An island had been saved from invasion, not only by the efforts of its own people, but by efforts of so-called defeated peoples from the continent of Europe; it had been saved not only by Polish fighters, one squadron of whom had claimed 150 victories and another of whom had destroyed 28 enemy aircraft in three days, or the equally successful Czechoslovaks, but also by the Belgians and Dutch, who had proved, as in boxing, that the light-weight can hit very hard. They, too, were part of the victory.

To-day the Dutch are fighting from the northern shores of France to the Indian Ocean. Their fighters were over Dieppe, adding glory to their records. In the Pacific Ocean, after the cataclysm of Pearl Harbour, Dutch pilots fought gallantly in the defence of Singapore and Java. When they fell, some of these pilots escaped to Australia; where they formed the nucleus of a Netherlands East Indies Squadron, while yet others made an epic flight of 3,000 miles from Western Australia to Ceylon, where they reformed as a Flying Boat Squadron and were operational once more. Increasing numbers are now finishing their training, and will soon be assembled with other Dutch squadrons ready to take part in the fight for the liberation of their country.

THE BRIGHT STRINGS OF VENGEANCE

BY THE TIME the Battle of Britain was over, two other victories had been won.; and a new phase was to begin. At the school-desk, Poles, Czechoslovaks, Norwegians, Dutch, Belgians and French had won victory over language; in the little published world of training and equipment they had won, and were still winning, the victory of weapons. Not only in this country, but in the flying schools of the Dominions, they were trained side by side with British airmen to fighting fitness. To speak English in order to train; to train in order to fight – without these steps their unfailing courage and resolution would have lacked practical expression.

The new phase had even then begun; the Battle of Britain had simply overshadowed it. It was the offensive by Bomber Command; the offensive in which the Allied Air Forces had begun to take part in September, when the first Polish air crews, flying the Battles of which we now never hear, had bombed enemy shipping in the harbour of Boulogne. Two squadrons had taken part in this operation, Nos. 300 and 301, and both had been formed in July of that year.

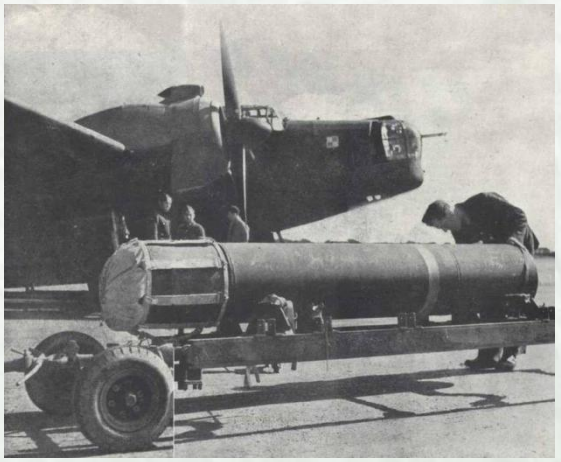
Back in England, at the beginning of August, the first Czechoslovak Bomber Squadron No. 311, facing difficulties that had not confronted Czechoslovak fighters, many of whom were now veterans in war, had been formed and equipped with Wellington aircraft. By August 18th its first air crews were ready for operational training, and barely two months later, on October 10th, it carried out its first operational flight.

Armed with eight 250 lb. bombs each, the Wellintons had instructions to attack the marshalling yards at Brussels from a height of 1,000 feet. The weather for the operation was very bad, but low cloud obscured the city, in consequence the Czechoslovaks were forced to go down to less than 300 feet before releasing their bombs.

The Daily Mail wrote:-
"Planes dived from clouds in the face of heavy anti-aircraft fire and calmly crossed and recrossed the target as many as four times whilst taking a precise bombing aim. This squadron had particular reason for making a perfect success of its job – it was the Royal Air Force of Czechoslovak Squadron having its first chance to strike at the Nazis."

On that first bombing operation by the Czechoslovaks, probably about 20,000 lb. of bombs were dropped. It was the beginning. As time went on, this Czechoslovak bomber squadron began to go not only to Belgium, but to Germany, whose rulers had once talked very glibly across the Czechoslovak border about self-determination, and to Italy, whose now deflated Duce had invented the word Fascism itself. The Czechoslovaks also visited other German-occupied territories. These journeys, gradually mounting up, gave them the opportunity to drop, in about eighteen months, just under 3,000,000 lb. of bombs. On Brest alone, which, during its occupation by the warships *Scharnhorst, Gneisenau* and *Prinz Eugen* – known to bomber crews as "Salmon and Gluckstein" and "the Tadpole" – was then perhaps the most heavily defended port in the world, the Czechoslovak squadron dropped 342,000 lb. of bombs.

TAKING THE FIGHT TO THE ENEMY. This massive mine is about to be loaded on to a Wellington' of a Polish bomber squadron. Allied squadrons have played their part in the ever-increasing offensive of Bomber Command against German industry and shipping.



Other ports notably Kiel and the submarine base at Lorient, were also attacked by the Czechoslovaks. These ports were highly important. By 1941, indeed, the war had become and was becoming even more a battle of ports. By the dislocation of port facilities, ship-building yards, idle capital ships, submarine bases, naval dockyards, each side sought to injure, at its source, the sea-power and merchant-power of the other. Similarly, the destruction of port bases could amount, in terms of shipping and potential shipping destroyed to a naval defeat on a fair scale. Ports therefore became more and more points of concentrated anti-aircraft defence, and the visits to them by attacking aircraft more and more difficult and dangerous.

The Czechoslovaks, therefore, like the Poles and their British comrades, did not attack without considerable losses. In spite of this they have maintained a number of squadrons out of all proportion to their total manpower – simply because the percentage of flying men among the escaping Czechoslovaks was itself so large – and they have continued to maintain all these squadrons, with one exception, with their own Czechoslovak ground crews. They have fought with tenacious skill wherever they have attacked; by day and night, against raiding enemy bombers, fighters or submarines. As their bomber strength and experience mounted they were proud to take part in the 1,000-bomber raids on the great cities of the Rhineland and the Ruhr. In the huge unprecedented raids on Cologne, Rostock, Bremen and Hamburg, the Czechoslovaks had a most distinguished part.

All this time the strength of the Poles was growing. The coloured map of Europe with its bright strings of retribution was becoming more and more interesting. From the Atlantic coast of France to the Baltic ports of Germany, the strings were growing closer and closer together into a solid fan. This fan represented, in 1941, the dropping of a total load of 1,2000,000 lb. of bombs. The Polish power to hit back had been doubled and doubled again.

These repeated operations gave the Polish bomber pilots, in time, an interesting idea. They decided that it would be fitting that, whenever a Polish airman had made three trips to a German city, he should receive the freedom of that city. Thus a Pole, making his third trip to Bremen, would be given the title, Obywatel Honorowy Miasta Bremen. The appropriate rites would be conducted at breakfast on the morning after operations – most probably in marmalade.

During 1942, more and more Poles received these honorary freedoms of German cities. More and more crews made their third trips, and then others, to the great cities of Bremen, Essen, Hamburg, Cologne. More and more strings were added to the coloured fan. Now, at last, they felt that they had a positive task. The defence of Great Britain, in which many of their compatriots had played a splendid part, was only part of the immense plan of the war. To carry the war into Germany, to demonstrate to the citizens of Europe of Cologne and Bremen some of the experiences of the citizens of Warsaw, to make war a horrifying positive and striking evil whose evidence could be smelt in the house, the factory and the street – all this seemed to the Polish bomber crews a clear course towards its end. Poles have been at war with Germans for something like a thousand years. It is consequently natural that they should feel they know them well.

The Poles, therefore, were not only proud, but extremely satisfied, at their part in these enormous raids of the summer of 1942, for by it they were carrying the answer common to all the disinherited nationals of Europe – that the subjection of one nation by another is ultimately an impossible thing. A nation cannot fight with abstract qualities like faith and honour and resolution; but its people can endure by reason of them. And if they can endure long enough and can somehow support that resolution and honour and faith with tanks and guns and aircraft and bombs, they can accomplish a miracle. To the Poles the great bomber raids were the first part of that miracle. It must also have seemed an uneasy miracle for the people of Germany. For who in Germany could have guessed that, three years after the crushing defeat of Poland, a resurrected Polish Air Force would raid the cities of Germany in greater strength than it possessed in 1939?

All these great raids and many others, were not made without loss. Though not comparatively greater than British and other Allied losses, they were nevertheless considerable. And since it is the story of the returning aircraft, and not the aircraft lost, that the public almost invariably hears, the story of the Polish courage in the nights over Germany will never be fully written or known..

But the stories of those who do return are also great. Behind the big victories, which are world news, lie the little victories, which time turns into something like local legend. So the public probably read, after one Bremen raid, the story of five Polish Sergeants and a Polish Flying Officer in a Wellington.

That night this bomber crew had just dropped their bombs over Bremen when they were attacked by enemy night fighters. From astern and then starboard below, came a Ju. 88 from port and Me. 110. The Wellington, though returning fire, was badly damaged. Four of the crew were wounded. At 3,000 feet the situation was extremely grave. The wireless operator and the second pilot lay seriously wounded on he floor. The observer was shot through the chest. There was no inter-communication with the front or rear gunners. The situation in the aircraft was incredibly bad; the flaps and undercarriage were down, the rudder shot away, one engine damaged, petrol tanks shot through, the radio out of order.

There was fire on board, and of all the more essential flying instruments the altimeter and the compasses alone appeared to be working. The aircraft crossed the Dutch coast at 300 feet. Out at sea it had a narrow escape from an enemy convoy. Then it sighted one of our own convoys with its barrage balloons flying. Seeing the aircraft in distress, the foremost ships increased speed; the rest slowed down. And so the aircraft, rocking and heaving above the sea, passed through. When it finally reached base two of its crew died, two were taken seriously wounded to hospital.

Behind all such exploits lies a single inspiration. It is perfectly expressed in an inscription that hangs above an altar in the hanger of a Polish bomber squadron. Almost all Polish men in this country are Catholics. Their altar of devotion is rightly very close to the scene of their action and sacrifice. In the huge dark hangar, among the black bombers, it shines with its inscription that in its profound and touching simplicity is the voice not only of the Poles, but of all the disinherited peoples of Europe everywhere: *"Lord, please bring back our country's freedom."*

ON THIS ALTAR, shining in a Polish hangar, is inscribed the prayer of all the disinherited peoples of Europe – the prayer that their freedom may be restored.

WINGS FOR FREEDOM

TWO OTHER COUNTRIES in Europe had now joined the dispossessed. Greece, which had waged against Italy a campaign of such heroic that the thrill of it touched the world, and Yugoslavia, peopled by hardy romantic peasants in a territory of black mountains where a magnificently organised war against Germany and Italy still goes on, had at last been occupied by a Germany still seeking strategic Lebensraum. To the Grecian war it had unfortunately not been possible to send more than a few squadrons of British aircraft, so that the Greek story became, like the Yugoslavian story with it and the stories of Czechoslovakia, Belgium, France, Holland, Norway and Poland before it, the old story of faith without arms.

Greece and Yugoslavia were terrorised, as countries north of them had been terrorised, by an exhibition of robot armed force. Belgrade was treated to the savagery that had struck Warsaw and Rotterdam, London and Coventry. The way of the Greeks and Yugoslavs was as clear as the light of morning; to go on resisting, in secrecy or in exile, long after it had seemed impossible. So, inspired by these ideals, two more small countries, passionate in national idealism, joined the Poles, the Czechoslovaks, the Dutch, the Norwegians, the Belgians and the French in the fight for the right to be left alone, in freedom, to live their national lives. For the Yugoslavs, chances of escape were certainly not great; but from their seaplane base at the beautiful little town of Kotor, in the great fjord-like harbour on the Dalmatian coast, a few crews managed to get away. From there they reached Egypt, where they were able to carry on the fight alongside the R.A.F., using their Dornier 22 seaplanes to help in submarine patrols over the Mediterranean. Even to-day a few Yugoslav patriots are still escaping to join their countrymen and help expand the Yugoslav Air Force. These men are training on British aircraft and will be formed before long into operational units.

The Greeks who escaped to British territory proceeded to do in the Middle East what six exiled nations had already done in Great Britain. They re-formed, re-equipped, re-trained themselves; they began to learn English – which thanks to a Scots teacher, many of them spoke with a strong Scottish accent; they were becoming a new striking force, part of an infinitely stronger organisation than the little Greek Air Force that had vainly resisted the Luftwaffe with such notable courage. Greeks who had been evacuated from Greece and Greeks who had made their own escapes, Greeks from Egypt and all over the Middle East, now joined themselves together with the ardent spirit that had for so long defied the Italians. Among them was a young Greek soldier who had been wounded three times in the Albanian campaign, whose brother had been killed, and whose ship had been sunk by bombs soon after leaving its Greek port. As soon as he reached Egypt he demanded transfer to the new Greek Air Force. His spirit was typical.

As those new Greek units became trained, new Greek squadrons were formed. A Greek squadron of Hurricanes soon began to protect Mediterranean shipping and to raid convoys. A second squadron, equipped with Blenheims, made submarine patrols, long-range reconnaissance. Many of the Greeks, now flying British aircraft, had already flown, like many Poles and Czechoslovaks, 2,000 or 3,000 hours. They held Greek decorations. Now they began to earn British Decorations. A Wing Commander dive-bombed enemy airfields in the Iraq campaign; the exploit carried him the D.F.C. While these things were happening, more and more Greeks came to join the new Greek Air Force. Soon there were enough of them to make it possible for a complete Greek depot to be formed. Greek technical officers, administration officers, medical officers, Greek N.C.O.s and ground staff – they began to prove, once again, that national ardour cannot be squeezed to death between the fingers of aggressors. They too, had only one object – a living Greece.

So two more exiled Air Forces were joined, still fighting, with the R.A.F. And while they were escaping by sea and air to Malta, Crete and North African mainland, things of importance were still happening in Britain

GREECE LIVES in the spirit and deeds of such pilots as this – men who, after valiantly defending their country against the Luftwaffe, escaped to form Greek squadrons of the R.A.F. and take part in the victorious Middle East campaigns.

YUGOSLAV AIRMEN, after the fall of their country, flew their Dornier seaplanes to Egypt and operated with the R.A.F. in anti-submarine patrols over the Mediterranean. They are being trained in Britain.

***THE COLOUR AND SPIRIT OF FRANCE** were carried to Britain by French patriots. men of the French Fleet Air Arm work as ground staff on the airfield from which a French fighter squadron operates.*

***UNDER THE CROIX DE LORRAINE,** the emblem carried once by Jeanne d'Arc, these young French pilots fight with the daring and gaiety for which their country is famous.*

On November 7th, 1941, the first Free French Squadron, No. 340 Fighter Squadron, was formed. It had been nearly 18 months since the first Free French pilots had reached England. The Poles had been able to form their first exiled squadrons in about nine months, from the outbreak of the war. The Dutch in spite of defeat in the spring of 1940, had been able to re-form and fight by the summer.

The position of the French was not easy. Metropolitan France was a big country, slit in half. The French Empire without colossal, occupying, as a glance at the African map in particular will show, rich and strategically important areas of the world. A divided France, with a divided and bewildered Empire, without certainty of leadership, was a political tool of dangerous importance. The defeat of France had led to a disruption; it was the vortex of the war. Into this vortex, in the summer of 1940, Great Britain might have been dragged down.

It was therefore immensely to the credit of the de Gaullists that they should chose to fight from England, where the cause was by no means certain of success, rather than remain under domination at home. It was significant also that they gathered together in England under the emblem of the Croix de Lorraine, first adopted as the badge of the *Forces Francaises Libres* in 1940. That dual cross, in no sense a national emblem or part of the national flag, once expressed by Jeanne d'Arc, who, too, carried the Cross of Lorraine. It had a history, in France alone, of 700 years. Brought from the East in 1241 by Jean d'Alluye, it was kept at the Hospital for Incurables at Bauge. The first Duke of Anjou, Louis, had a great devotion for the relic, and introduced it into the Coat of Arms of the House of Anjou. At Anjou it is part of the splendid tapestries of the Apocalypse and several decorative themes in the cathedral. When Rene, Duke of Anjou, became Duke of Lorraine in 1431, after his marriage, he incorporated the double cross into the coat of arms of the new Duchy. From that time onward the cross, known as formerly as the Cross of Anjou became the Cross of Lorraine.

So on a spring day of 1942, exactly 700 years after Jean d'Alluye had brought the cross from the East, you might have seen a burly Frenchman, pipe in mouth, in the dark blue uniform of the French Air Force, doing his best to make a rough design of the cross in stones on a ground of sand, outside the disposal hut of the first Free French Squadron in England, With typical French provincial love of a piece of property, this Frenchman had neatly lined out the path with stones on either side had painted them white. The cross too, was painted white the sand was raked smooth. Plump, dark pipe-smoking, this Frenchman might have been any French provincial artisan painting up his garden anywhere from Dieppe to Bordeaux, from Toulon to Morlaix, on a warm spring day. All about him, on the perimeter track where Spitfires were lined in readiness for sweeps over France, Frenchmen from all corners of the earth were also in process of making a little piece of England as much like France as they could.

These French patriots had come not only from all parts of Metropolitan France, but from the most distant parts of the French Empire. Most of those from France itself were flying men; they had fought in the air in France. Perhaps they were part of that contingent of flying Frenchmen who had escaped with a young priest in a fishing boat – the young priest feeling it his duty his duty to embark with them almost solely because he felt the boat must go down. Perhaps they were part of another little contingent who had also come by boat, nailed down under its planks until they were far out to sea. Among them were suave-faced city men from Paris, English-looking Bretons from the Atlantic coast, dark Provencals from the South.

But most of the men there, the ground staff, were not from France. They were men of the French Navy. They had come from Africa; from as far south as Tahiti and as far east as Indo-China. In sailors' dark blue tam-o'-shanters, with scarlet bobs, they played vociferous and exited games with pennies in the warm spring dust. As they played, a lorry drove up and braked on the perimeter, raising dust, and there developed instantly one of those voluble and pantomimic arguments between driver and bystander that are as much a part of French national life as *vin rouge,* coffee and the smell of onions.

This argument caused intense and serious interest until finally it was seen to be less real than funny. After which the lorry drove off, the driver shouting sulkily back through the open window, and the tam-o'-shanters continued tossing pennies in the sunshine.

Here, without doubt, among the Spitfires painted brightly with the Croix de Lorraine, among the smell of French cigarettes, and the games that should have been played on the dusty quays of St. Malo or Brest or Marseilles or Casablanca or Toulon, France was alive. These Frenchmen, refusing to be Anglicised even in England, were demonstrating simply and forcibly that you cannot squeeze nationalism to death as you squeeze a maggot between your fingers. The essential odour, colour and spirit of French life have been carried to and kept alive in the most unlikely parts of the world. They even continue to permeate parts of it, most notably Canada, which has long ceased to be a French possession. There was no better evidence that this spirit was still alive than in the Frenchman making his Croix de Lorraine in stones and the sailors gambling with pennies by the waiting Spitfires.

But that spring, almost every day, this group of Frenchmen provided other evidence. They flew their Spitfires – one painted not only with the Croix de Lorraine, but with a saucy Donald Duck, designed for it by Disney himself – in a large number of offensive sweeps, in one of which no less than 600 aircraft took part, over their native country. In this way, helping to pin down a large Nazi fighter force on the airfields of Northern France, many of them saw their native land for the first time in nearly two years. One, it is reported, even shot down an enemy aircraft within sight of the roof of his own French home.

In one of these operations, "A Squadron, 12 Spitfires lX, flew to mid-Channel where it climbed reaching the mouth of the Somme at 11,000 ft. B Squadron were on the right of A Squadron, which flew down the Somme at 15,000 ft., skirting the forest of Crecy. Some accurate heavy flak was directed from Drucat at B Squadron and Blue Section A. The wing turned right, orbiting the airfield where two aircraft were seen taxi-ing out to take off. They turned right again, and after reaching Le Crotoy, heard a warning that six enemy aircraft were behind. Nothing was seen by A and, as B could not engage, the wing turned to come out. A were now in front and on the left, and turned to take their position behind B, being at 15,000 ft. At this moment, two aircraft were seen at 3,000 ft. below by Comm. Duperier [Red 1], who, with Red Section, dived and found three F.W. 190s flying N.W. towards Le Touquet. Combats followed, as a result of which one enemy aircraft was destroyed by Comm. Duperier, the pilot baling out. Comm. Duperier also attacked another F.W. 190 flying in the same direction, and shot it down near Le Touquet, the aircraft crashing near the airfield. Six enemy aircraft were then seen diving on the squadron from 3,000 ft. above. Several attacks were made by these, two of which attempted to attack Red 1 from the rear. They were, however, prevented from carrying out their attacks by Adjt. Gouby and Adjt. Buiron, each damaged and F.W. 190. The aircraft damaged by Adjt. Goudy had the engine cowling shot away and may have been destroyed.

"About the same time when Red Section first attacked, Blue Section saw an F.W.190 1,000 ft. below and four F.W. 190s 3,000 ft. above, flying in a wide orbit from Berck to Cayeux. Blue leader decided to attack the aircraft below, which was probably destroyed by him and Blue [S/Lt. Moynet], who saw that the tail unit had been blown away by their fire. When half-way back to Beacy, four aircraft were seen following at a great distance, but they soon gave up the chase. All aircraft landed at base by 15.55 hours, when it was found that Adjt. Goudy's aircraft had been hit in the wing by an m.g. bullet, and S/Lt. Kennard's aircraft had been slightly damaged by A.A. fire."

In this way, by July of that year, nine months after the formation of their first squadron. Free French pilots of Fighter Command had succeeded in shooting down 34 enemy aircraft in combats over Europe. Meanwhile, French pilots were at work in Syria and the Middle East, where the "Lorraine" and "Alsace" squadrons fought with great success. They were also doing co-operation work in French Equatorial Africa.

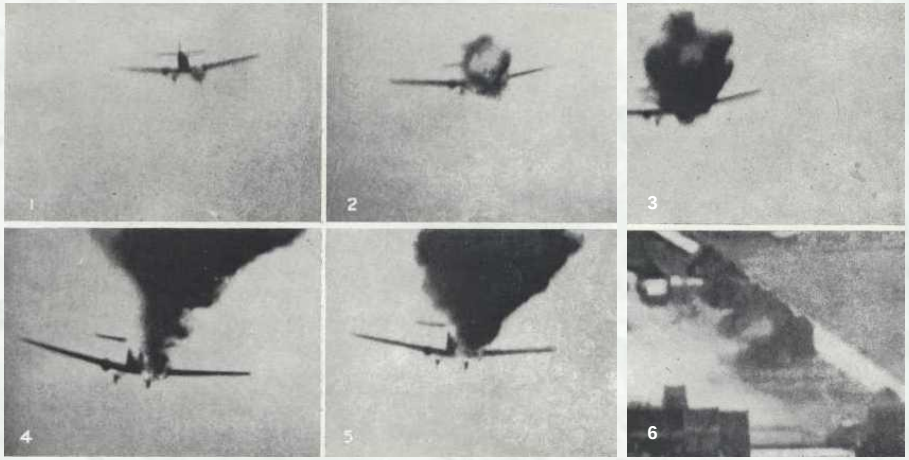
CIRCLE OF FAITH,

CIRCLE OF ARMS

IF YOU put the point of an imaginary pair of giant compasses in Berlin and place the other point in Iceland you can draw, going southward, an interesting circle. It will pass the British Isles, cut through French Morocco, Algiers, Libya, Egypt, Syria, Iran, the Caspian Sea, the Great Central Russian plain, Stalingrad, Moscow and Leningrad, and will ultimately emerge at Murmansk. Inside this circle lie Germany, Italy, Austria, Rumania and half a dozen subjected nations; all along the edge of it, closer and closer, more and more powerful, lie the forces of opposition. In that circle lies the strategy of the European war.

When the war began there was no circle. Confused and bloody spots of savagery broke out at disconnected points on the map of Europe; Poland, Norway, France, Belgium, Holland, finally Greece and Yugoslavia. There was a bloody spot over Britain. As the war progressed an inner circle was formed, acquired and dominated by Germany. Out of this inner circle, with its horrors of persecution, the Gestapo, the hostages, the bloody curfews, the savage reprisals, there escaped in ones and twos, hundreds, sometimes in thousands, the men who are the subject of these pages. They escaped to help form, in time, the outer circle as it stands to-day. This circle is no longer symbolic, but real. It is not simply a circle of faith, but of arms. Its power consists not in hope, but in ships, in Spitfires, in Wellingtons, Halifaxes, Lancasters and Stirlings, in Mosquitoes and Bostons, in Hudsons and Flying Fortresses, in men and guns. The encirclement of inner Europe is no longer and indignant myth of Nazi propaganda; it is no longer the retaliatory encirclement of Great Britain. It becomes a fact of geography, men and arms.

DESIGN FOR ATTACK. The Allied Air Forces are an integral part of the great weapon which has now been forged to strike at the enemy's heart. A Spitfire V, of a Czechoslovak squadron, about to take off on a sweep against hostile fields.



ATTACK IN PROGRESS. A Belgian pilot, flying a Typhoon on an offensive patrol, down a Ju. 52 near his own home town. [1] "I climbed and let him have it..." [2] "Only my port guns fired, but it was enough..." [3] [4] [5] "The starboard engine of the Hun caught fire, and pieces flew out of the cloud of smoke..." [6] "He went down and broke in two behind a small building."

The men of the Allied Air force are relatively in numbers, a small part of that completed circle, now powerfully reinforced by the United States. Their greatness and their achievement are not, however, in the accomplished thing, but in their part in its accomplishment. Their greatness lies in the fact that, when the war was confused, desperate and even on the verge of being lost, they decided to make the immense personal sacrifice needed for them to remain actively fighting. Their greatness lies in the fact that they rejected personal safety and commitments for a voluntary and dangerous exile; in the fact that they left families, parents and friends under enemy occupation and persecution, knowing that they might suffer because of them, simply for the uncertain change of being able to avenge, in the air, the defeat of their native countries.

The exploits of flying men and of aircraft tend, as time goes on, to repeat themselves. The exploits of Spitfires run to a pattern; the long journeys of Catalinas over the Atlantic become as alike as the voyages of ocean liners. It becomes harder and harder to extract, from thousands of combat reports, a new exploit more illuminating and heroic than one which has already happened. It becomes easier to take the great event of yesterday for granted. For this reason the exploits of the men of the Allied squadrons may seem to be of the same pattern as those of other men. But theirs, in fact was always a different achievement. It demanded always an extra personal sacrifice; it asked more of the imagination; it was full of potential distress, not only for the man himself, but for those he loved most at home. It demanded an endurance that could not be alleviated by family meetings, the family fireside and all the comforts of home. It demanded all, and always, the patience of the exile.

What of the future? The result of this great sacrifice cannot be temporary. The infiltration into the insular life of Great Britain by thousands of young Poles, Czechoslovaks, Norwegians, Dutch, Belgians and Frenchmen must do something to affect that life. In Peace we talk of war; in the middle of war we begin to talk of peace. The plans for peace are often grandiose, vague and illusory. But in the presence of thousands of young foreign airmen in Great Britain we have a fact from which a new international understanding, idealistic yet free from antipathetic ideologies might grow to benefit the world.

These men have lived in Britain and, while fighting for their own countries, have fought for Britain and the ideals which will live while Britain lives.

We on our side must never forget this. But these men could never have fought here without British aircraft, flown from British airfields, built by British hands and brains and made by British coal and steel. They too, on their side, will never forget.

Living in Britain, these men have seen our life. They have been into British homes, have become familiar with British customs. They have married British girls. Already some of them have families. The roots of Scandinavia and Central Europe reach out and take new life in the English midlands, in Edinburgh and London, in the mountains of Scotland and Wales, in the blitzed cities. From America come more men, to find in English valleys the very place-names, sometimes the very idioms, of their own country. These men are taken into British Homes, given British hospitality. Men from Texas and Colorado, born to immense distance, fly over a little country where the landmarks are like a tangle of loose stitches. Men from the Middle West help to gather the harvest of the English corn.

If there is to be a better international understanding in the future, its roots are here. They are the roots of living men. Wars are won on the battlefield, on the sea and in the air; they are lost at the conference table. In this war, more than any war in history, nations have endured a common experience. The bomb falls on the home, from Oslo to London, Warsaw to Plymouth, Belgrade to Liverpool, Rotterdam to Coventry, Stalingrad to Canterbury. The cathedral, the house, the flat, the cafe, the hospital, the school – none of them is inviolate any longer. There have never been so few non-belligerents, so few neutrals, as now. We all make the common sacrifice.

In 1940, Mr. Winston Churchill made to France the offer of a Franco-British union by which the citizens of each country would become citizens of the other. To-day, as the Allied Squadrons help to account for the 170 enemy aircraft shot down over Dieppe, as Poles become "honorary citizens" of the German cities they bomb in their Wellingtons, as the Norwegians rise from their small beginnings to second place in numerical strength, as Czechoslovaks, Belgians, Greeks, Dutch, French and Yugoslavs carry the air war from the shores of the Mediterranean to the fjords of Norway, there is being made in the air, if we care to see it, the possibility of a new union on earth. It could be a union of men, not words; it could be the new inheritance of the disinherited.

'THEY ARE COME AMONGST US WITH PURPOSE IN THEIR EYES, WITH A SMILE ON THE MOUTH'

Aircraft of the Royal Norwegian Air Force on patrol

WORLD WAR II

1939 - 1945

Presentation by
the2xislesteam