

Since I last reported to the house in May of last year the situation with respect to western hemisphere air operations have undergone considerable change. The enemy has been driven, or has been forced to withdraw his forces, to a more comfortable distance from our shores. The Japanese have been chased out of the Aleutian islands on our western flank, and a greater concentration of naval and air strength, together with new and improved weapons have forced the withdrawal of German submarine raiders to a considerable distance from our Atlantic coast line and from the gulf of St. Lawrence.

I have already explained on various occasions that the Royal Canadian Air Force engaged actively in operations against the enemy in the western hemisphere theatre is a complete and separate entity distinct from the Royal Canadian Air Force overseas and the British commonwealth air training plan.

It is history now that Royal Canadian Air Force squadrons composed of British commonwealth air training plan graduates and commanded by air veterans of the battle of Britain and the battle of Europe, operated under American command in the Aleutians coastal shipping and watching for Japanese foothold on our Pacific approaches. Blinded by the eternal fog and buffeted by the fierce and whimsical gales of that bleak corner of the continent, Royal Canadian Air Force fighter bomber pilots, with their American air comrades, developed new technique in blasting the Japanese on Attu and Kiska so that United States and Canadian naval and ground forces could move in and take over those barren bits of rock away out in the Pacific.

The successful air operation in the Aleutians was pressed to a conclusion in the face of great difficulties, not only of weather but of supply and communication. Living conditions were, of necessity rather primitive and our boys suffered at times, considerable physical discomfort. A point which is not generally realized is that the personnel of our Aleutians squadrons, were more than 2,000 miles from their home bases, in other words as far from home as if they had been serving in the European or Mediterranean theatre, and the facilities of communication and supply were nothing like those connecting the home front with the latter theatre of war.

The units in the Aleutians were the only ones in the western air command who were fortunate enough to get in their own personal punch at the Japanese but there were thousands backing them up in less glamorous activities. There were squadrons patrolling the sea lanes of the Pacific coast protecting coastal shipping and watching for Japanese

raiders. There were fighter squadrons poised to repel air attacks. There was a vast construction organization, very often composed exclusively of service personnel, engaged in building new air bases in British Columbia and in the Yukon. Behind this again was a vastly improved communication and administration organization. Land line and radio communications were installed on a large scale. The Royal Canadian Air Force took over the control of all flying, civil as well as military, in the entire western region as well as throughout the busy northwest staging route north and west from Edmonton to Canol and on to Whitehorse and Alaska.

Probably hon. members and the public are more familiar with our Atlantic operations, particularly those concerned with the protection of troops and supplies moving to European theatres of war and with the unrelenting hunt for enemy submarines.

From the first Royal Canadian Air Force attack on a U-boat in October of 1941 up to the end of the calendar year, 1943, Royal Canadian Air Force operational aircraft have made a total of sixty-three attacks on enemy submarines in the Atlantic including one machine gun attack by a fighter aircraft. Of the sixty-three attacks, one half were made in 1943.

Through the acquisition of 4-engine Liberator long-range bombers, we have been able to extend the radius of air-cover from Canadian bases by something more than 200 miles. Of course, it will be understood that the primary purpose of our long-range squadrons in eastern air command is to protect the valuable convoys traversing the Atlantic.

The monotony of flying protection for convoys and hunting for submarines is indicated by some figures compiled by our research office. They tell us that late in 1942 the average flying time productive of a U-boat sighting was 840 hours and that our aircrew sighted a submarine on an average of once in 140 sorties. In the first half of 1943 the average remained about the same but in the last six months of the year it took an average of 1,700 hours of flying time for a U-boat sighted or an average of 230 sorties per sighting. Of course, the U-boats may still be there, but at least they keep submerged and thereby reducing their effectiveness.

Our increasing success on the anti-U-boat campaign is due in part to improved weapons, more modern aircraft and the greater experience of our aircrews. We are constantly improving our aircraft. For instance we have now the 4-engine Liberator and we have quite a number of Vega Ventura reconnaissance