Canadian Contingent Says Atlantic Crossing Seemed Just Like Holiday Cruise

Hundreds of Soldiers and Airmen Join Overseas Army of Nation

A British Port, March 24.—(CP Cable)—A contingent of several hundred Canadian troops and airmen and another hospital unit have arrived in Britain after an Atlantic crossing from Canada that was "just like a cruise."

The troops, which will join the swelling ranks of Canada's overseas forces, included reinforcements for artillery units and members of Army Service Corps reinforcements units.

Personnel of the 8th Canadian General Hospital included more than 50 nurses.

Mostly Air Crews

The men in air force blue were mostly air crews—pilots, gunners, wireless operators and navigators.

These men will reach squadrons after a spell at personnel reception depots in the south of England and operational training with units in other parts of the country.

Besides the flyers the transports carried some ground crew men.

The nursing sisters, neatly dressed in their trim uniforms of navy blue, were anxious to meet friends from Western Canada, whence most of them come. They found the crossing unexciting, but said they had an enjoyable time aboard the big ships which carried them safely through dangerous areas of the Atlantic.

"The crossing was very quiet," one of them said. "It wasn't as rough as we had expected it to be. In fact it was just like a cruise."

Like the soldiers and airmen, they were looking forward to landing leave. London was the general choice of the new arrivals, most of whom wanted to see for themselves the air raid damage the Empire capital suffered.

The convoy also brought a number of Polish and Netherlands troops.

Sail on Gloomy Night

An East Coast Canadian Port, March 24.—(CP)—Determined to do their bit in the struggle, tough Canadian soldiers and flyers whose safe arrival in Britain was announced to-day sailed from this port on a night as gloomy as their mood was jubilant.

Crowded on the transports with these grim but happy fighters, headed for unknown battlefields were army nurses, about 50 in number, and a few civilians making the trip in connection with wartime duties.

Only complete unit in the miscellaneous movement of reinforcements was the No. 8 General Field Hospital, headed by Col. H. Gordon Young, D.S.O., M.C., a former well-known surgeon in Moose Jaw, Sask.

Under him was a group of highly trained medical officers, seasoned not only through years of civilian practice but during two years of working under actual war conditions. The unit's record proved this as they had, before sailing, conducted military hospitals at Regina, Nanaimo, B.C.; Winnipeg, Fort Osborne and Camp Debert, N.S.

Formerly, in July, 1940, the unit recruited under its banner many of the best-known doctors of the west. Typical of these are Lieut.-Col. C. F. Bennett, a member of the Royal Air Force in the first Great War and later head of the Anti-Tuberculosis league in Saskatchewan.

Many Veterans Aboard

Non-commissioned officers going over in the same unit were mainly men who might be classed near the middle-age mark by their youthful shipmates.

Air force personnel made up the bigger part of the movement. Young men whose wings still looked newish on their tunics were crowded into nearly every cabin and passageway in the transport. Their one fear was that they would get seasick.

From Ontario had come Tom Lewis, of Orona, an English lad who first came to this country 14 years ago. "In fact," he said, "I am celebrating the 14th anniversary of my arrival in Canada by sailing for my home in England."

Most of the boys had packed in their knapsacks sugar and silk stockings as "get acquainted" aids with the English girls. But Pte. E. W. Sturley, of Toronto, a handsome soldier complete with tricky moustache, went them all one better.

Wrapped in a piece of fine cloth he had as his bait one onion, a giant of its species. "I will give this to the girl after I meet her, not before, though," he said, wrinkling his nose.

Toronto Man Aboard

Like old warhorses with the smoke of battle sharp in their nostrils, tough veterans of the First Great War looked forward eagerly to "getting into another scrap."

Among the old-timers were Cpl. Edgar Taylor, of Toronto, and Pte. C. Lovett, of Montreal. Both bore breastfuls of ribbons won in the earlier conflict, and were the envy of the youngsters in the movement.

Second Trip Overseas

Announcement of the safe arrival meant that Sgt. A. Davies, of Hill Springs, Alta., had just completed his second trip overseas.

Davies first went to England in 1939 as an infantryman in the Canadian army, only to transfer to the Royal Air Force and return here last November for training under the Commonwealth air training plan.

Now a sergeant pilot, he is back "home"—at least that is what he calls England, as he married an English girl while there before.

Travelling with him was another former soldier, Sgt. W. S. Bond, of Montreal, who fell under the spell of the air force. He transferred to the R.C.A.F. after serving with the Royal Rifles of Canada. "Those are the boys who went to Hong Kong," said Bond, "and boy, am I glad I got in the air force."

Former Jockey Sails

Pte. Frank J. McTague, a one-time jockey, who traded in his racing silks for the army khaki, was among the reinforcements. Buried in a greatcoat that cascaded over his 128 pounds like a blanket, McTague said he was glad to be going over, but could not refrain from reminiscing on his five years of jockeying. High point of his career, he said, was piloting Bud Path to second position in the Winnipeg handicap last year.

Third Generation

Fighting with the Canadians had become a "tradition" with the family of Sgt. Grey Stafford, of Hollywood, which is one reason why he was among the Royal Canadian Air Force reinforcements.

"I'm the third generation of Staffords to go over with the Canucks," the 21-year-old aerial gunner told newsmen before he left.

Carry Luck Charms

Lucky trinkets will fly into battle with the youthful Canadian pilots.

To a man the pilots denied they were superstitious, but most of them admitted they carried some charm or good luck piece and averred they would have them when they finally clashed with "Jerry" somewhere in the clouds.

A pink teddy bear was the ludicrous bit of fluffy magic that protected D. C. Plaunt, of Sudbury, Ont., from all evil.

S. J. Fowler, of Moose Jaw, Sask., had a small sailboat pinned over his wings, the history of which he refused to tell.

A quarter of a penny picked—of all places—from the wreckage of a plane crash was the rather dubious guardian of the luck of F. B. Dashper, of Winnipeg. H. R. Cran, of Saskatoon, stuck to a surer, but less original, symbol of good luck, the four-leaf clover.

Other sergeant pilots who carried with them charm trinkets included A. F. Hildebrand, of Haque, Sask.; P. B. MacPherson, Kenora, Ont.; G. A. Pothecary, of Vernon, B.C., and E. Morris, of Kitchener, Ont.

Not Superstitious

Superstitions don't bother these young air force members from Canada's west, as they proved by flouting a succession of "unlucky" things during their training and [illegible] safely in Britain with the latest contingent of Canadian troops.

Aboard the big grey transport here before they started the Atlantic voyage whose completion was announced to-day the boys, all sergeant wireless air gunners in the R.C.A.F., told of their experiences.

There were 13 in their group which started training at a western flying field, and they stayed in hut No. 13 at camp. They graduated on Friday the 13th, traditional breeder of ill-luck, and got ready to set out for overseas on another Friday 13th.

"All that doesn't worry us a bit," the spokesman for the group said. "Right now our trigger fingers are itching, and we hope we can shoot down 13 Jerries apiece the next time Friday the 13th rolls around."

149
WAR
EUROPEAN
1939
CANADA
ARMY
041-053-007
BRITISH