

WINGS OVER GERMANY:

WHAT are a bomber pilot's thoughts as he sets off in the twilight, wheels up and his aircraft almost staggering under its load of bombs for industrial Germany? How does he feel, and what are his reactions when he is caught in the white beams of searchlights and feels the machine lift and shudder from bursts of anti-aircraft fire? What does he think about and how does he keep himself occupied during long daylight reconnaissances over the North Sea, with seldom the sight of a ship to break the drumming monotony?

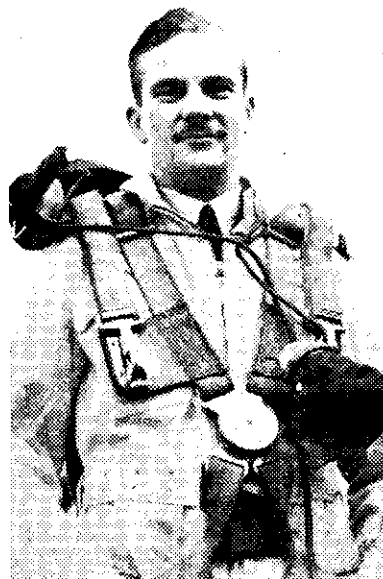
Squadron-Leader Aubrey Breckon, the young New Zealand D.F.C. who returned to the Dominion for instructional duties a couple of months ago, could probably write a book full of experiences of flying under war conditions, and when the war is over and an end has been made of the dropping of bombs, there is no reason why he shouldn't be persuaded to write it. In the meantime, with typical reserve, he will not discuss his experiences except in general terms and in this interview which he gave to *The Listener* one must do a good deal of reading between the lines of the matter-of-fact story he tells.

"It Might Be Yesterday"

Since returning to New Zealand, Squadron-Leader Breckon has not been given much leisure. He has found that

New Zealand Squadron-Leader Tells What it Feels Like

SQUADRON-LEADER A. A. N. BRECKON, D.F.C. (right), returned to New Zealand from England at the end of June of this year. Elder son of a well known Auckland photographer, he lived in Northcote and went to the Mount Albert Grammar School. A younger brother is also in the Royal Air Force. Squadron-Leader Breckon was one of the first New Zealanders to win the Distinguished Flying Cross, this being awarded shortly after his record long-distance flight to Narvik. He was the first R.A.F. flyer to transfer to the R.N.Z.A.F. just prior to the outbreak of war to fly Wellington aircraft out to New Zealand, and among his later activities were leaflet and bombing raids over Germany. He was married in England to Miss Dana E. Waugh, of Cumberland.



the training programme undertaken in the Dominion calls for unstinted effort on the part of all the flying and non-flying personnel, and the weeks he has already spent here have passed quickly. So it was, too, with his first years of training in England. Those years, re-

member, were momentous ones, with some stirring events as a background to the job he was doing, and it is not to be wondered that events have telescoped a little in his memory. And so, he recalls, it might be yesterday, and not six years ago, that he left Auckland for England and a short service commission, and he remembers the apprehensions of his first solo at Mangere Aerodrome as keenly as his last operational flight.

He left New Zealand, he says, with a B licence, some useful experience in photography, a certain amount of cautious optimism, and very little else. His worries over examinations and his ups and downs as a young officer he dismisses as not being of special interest, and typical of the experiences of quite a number of other New Zealanders who joined the R.A.F. in the same manner as he did.

Bigger And Bigger Bombers

The years up to the outbreak of war he spent in hard training in several different types of aircraft. The R.A.F. soon discovered that he was suited (temperamentally, he supposes) to bombers, and the 'planes he flew got bigger and bigger until, of course, he was on nothing but Wellingtons.

Much of Squadron-Leader Breckon's training was done in Virginias, Heyfords, and Whitleys, and included some long flights, some by day and some by night, under conditions as closely resembling operational conditions as possible. Some of them were up to ten hours, mostly over England and Scotland, and he remembers one flight on which, just to prove it could be done, he took a series of photographs, developed them, and made contact prints—all while cruising along some thousands of feet up.

New Zealanders in the R.A.F. were naturally very much intrigued when they got word of the proposal to fly out

several flights of Wellington bombers to New Zealand. Squadron-Leader Breckon was actually the first to transfer to the R.N.Z.A.F. for this purpose, and had the luck to be one of those chosen to train for No. 1 Flight. It was to be the longest formation flight ever attempted, though the object was not to break records but to get the 'planes safely out to New Zealand. The trip was scheduled to take six weeks, with stops here and there along the way for inspections and checks, and a good overhaul before hopping across the Tasman.

The flight was due for October of 1939. In September came the war, and the New Zealanders "stayed put" under Group-Captain M. W. Buckley and became the pioneers of No. 75 (New Zealand) Bomber Squadron. Perhaps it is not correct to say that they "stayed put." They were into the real thing now, and before long Squadron-Leader Breckon was making lengthy and often not very exciting trips out across the North Sea, looking for submarines and generally keeping a look-out.

Pamphlet Raids

Shortly he was posted to make pamphlet raids over Germany, a job which gave him a foretaste of flying over enemy country under service conditions. There is no doubt, he says, that the experience so many R.A.F. flyers got on pamphlet raids stood them in good stead later.

Pamphlet raids entailed a surprising amount of hard work. Squadron-Leader Breckon forgets the actual weight of paper carried, but it amounted to a good many hundred thousand pamphlets each trip. Once over Germany, it required some nice calculation to estimate the distance the leaflets might float. As later, when they were dropping bombs, their first consideration was to get them down where they would do the most work. Once they were on the job, however, they didn't waste time. As often as not, anti-aircraft batteries for miles around would be throwing up everything they had. The pamphlets were in bundles of two or three thousand, and fastened with elastic bands, so that after dropping some distance, they would fall apart and scatter paper like confetti. Pitching them down through the floor usually took half an hour's solid work.

Narvik And Back

After that came months of routine operational flying, much of it done from Scottish stations out over the North Sea, working in co-operation with the Navy. It was during this period that a Wellington of which he was captain made a flight to Norway that got rather more publicity than he had expected. It took fourteen and a-half hours to Narvik and back, and as far as Squadron-Leader Breckon knows, it still ranks as the longest flight of its kind yet done.

What he remembers particularly is the shocking weather over the North Sea. A southerly buster in Cook Strait has nothing on the North Sea at times, he says. Sometimes, if he were close enough to the water, he would look down and see a British destroyer ploughing along with green water all over her, and

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"THEIR KEENNESS IS PHENOMENAL": Men of the New Zealand bomber squadron, which has made many raids over Germany and occupied territory. Their 'plane is christened the "Wellington Devil"