

PRESS NOTES

ENGLAND - NEW ZEALAND AIR RACE

VISIT TO R.A.F. STATION, WYTON, TO SEE TRAINING OF R.A.F.  
CANBERRA TEAM, AUGUST 11, 1953

Programme

- 11.30 a.m. Introductory talk by the Station Commander, Group Captain L. J. Stickley, O.B.E., D.F.C.
- Followed by Briefing by Officer Commanding R.A.F. Canberra Race Flight, Wing Commander L.M. Hodges, D.S.O., D.F.C., on planning for the Air Race and the organisation involved.
- Talk on flying technique for the race by Squadron Leader L.G. Press, A.F.C.
- Talk on the navigation problem by Squadron Leader R. Currie, A.F.C.
- 13.00 Lunch
- 14.30 Inspect aircraft.

General

The air race to Christchurch, New Zealand, will start from London Airport at 4.30 p.m. on Thursday, October 8. The Royal Air Force has entered three English Electric Canberra photographic reconnaissance aircraft and one Vickers Valiant Bomber in the speed section of the race. The Valiant is not at Wyton, as preparation of this aircraft is being carried out by Messrs. Vickers-Armstrongs Ltd.

Formation of Air Race Flight

The Canberra Air Race Flight, under the Command of Wing Commander L.M. Hodges, D.S.O., D.F.C., was formed at R.A.F. Station, Wyton on June 4. Special Canberra P.R.3 aircraft have been prepared by the English Electric Co. These aircraft have certain military equipment removed and extra fuel tankage installed. Initial training has been carried out on standard Canberra B.2 aircraft.

Air Race Crews

Three crews, and a reserve crew are training for the race. Pilots and navigators have been selected from Bomber Command squadrons with recent Canberra experience. Some took part in Operation Round Trip - the 24,000-mile tour of South and Central America in October-December, 1952.

The crews are:-

<u>Pilot</u>	<u>Navigator</u>
1. Wg.Cdr. L.M. Hodges, D.S.O., D.F.C.	Sqn.Ldr. R. Currie, A.F.C.
2. Sqn.Ldr. L.G. Press, A.F.C.	Flt.Lt. J.W. Harper, D.F.C.
3. Flt.Lt. R.L.E. Burton, A.F.C.	Flt.Et. D.H. Gannon, D.F.C.
4. Flt.Lt. R. MacA. Furze	Flt.Lt. T.E. Dunne

Crew No. 4 is the reserve crew. Biographical details of the above officers are given at appendix "A".

Route

The route for the Canberras will be:-

London	-	Shaibah (Iraq)	2,875	statute miles	
Shaibah	-	Negombo or Ratmalana (Ceylon)	2,634	" "	5 3/4 h
Ceylon	-	Cocos Is.	1,771	" "	3 1/2 L
Cocos	-	Perth (Guildford)	1,840	" "	3 1/2 L
Perth	-	Christchurch	3,150	" "	6 h
		<u>Total</u>	<u>12,270</u>		(24-25h)

Organisation at Staging Posts

At each of the staging posts there will be a servicing team under the command of an Engineer Officer. Teams will be responsible for the rapid "turn-round" of the aircraft, i.e., refuelling, re-charging with oxygen, and dealing with any minor "snags" which may have arisen. Each team has spent one week at Wyton to practise refuelling drills. Provided there are no major troubles with the aircraft it is estimated that the "turn-round" should be completed in about 20 minutes.

Training of the staging post teams has been supervised by the Air Race Flight Engineer Officer, Flight Lieutenant S.R. Pattinson, M.B.E., who has had considerable experience of Canberra maintenance and accompanied Operation "Round Trip" to South America last year.

Servicing teams will travel by sea and air, the first parties leaving within the next few days.

Navigation

The navigation problem is a major one, since the Canberras will be flying at high altitudes - above 40,000 feet - in areas such as over the Indian Ocean where little high altitude meteorological information is available. The main aids to navigation will be radio fixing and astro. At each staging post there will be a navigation officer, who will work out flight plans for the next stage of the route, and thus cut to a minimum the time spent on the ground.

The Engineer and Navigation officers at the staging posts will be: Shaibah, Flight Lieutenant G.A. Graham (engineer) and Flying Officer D.A. Spackman (navigator); Negombo, Flying Officer J.S. Millman (engineer) and Flying Officer M.G. Jones (navigator); Cocos, Flight Lieutenant W.H. Collins (engineer) and Flight Lieutenant M.D. Middlemist (navigator), Perth, Flight Lieutenant C.H.J. Clampitt (engineer) and Flying Officer R.F. Plater (navigator).

Training

Before the race a number of training and proving flights are being made along the route to test the navigation aids and facilities available. Flights made to date include non-stop flights in one day to Malta and back and to Cyprus and back.

Information Division,  
Air Ministry,  
Whitehall Gardens, S.W.1.

10th August, 1953.

G. 373722/IB/8/53/200

Biographical Notes on Canberra crews for England-Christchurch  
Air Race

PILOTS

Wing Commander Lewis MacDonald HODGES, D.S.O., D.F.C., (b. March 1, 1918) entered the R.A.F. College, Cranwell in 1937. During the early part of the war he was flying Hampden bombers and was shot down over France in 1940. He evaded capture by the Germans, and returned to England in 1941, re-joining his old squadron (No. 49). He was awarded the D.F.C. in 1942. The following year he was appointed to command No. 161 (Special Duties) Squadron, which was responsible for parachuting agents into occupied territories, and was awarded the D.S.O. and a bar to his D.F.C. for his work with this unit. He graduated at the Staff College in 1944, and in November of that year went to the Far East as Officer Commanding No. 357 (Special Duties) Squadron, which operated Liberators over Burma, Siam and French Indo-China and also carried out long-range sorties of more than 20 hours' duration to Malaya. Wing Commander Hodges was awarded a bar to the D.S.O. in 1945. Since the war he has served at the Air Ministry, as Staff Officer to the Deputy Chief of the Air Staff, and at the Ministry of Defence. He has recently completed the course at the R.A.F. Flying College. His home is at Abingdon Court, London, W.8.

Squadron Leader Leslie George PRESS, A.F.C., (b. March 1, 1919) joined the R.A.F. Volunteer Reserve in 1938, and after the outbreak of war, became an instructor at maritime reconnaissance schools in the United Kingdom and in Canada. He was awarded the A.F.C. in 1943. From that time until 1945 he was with Coastal Command squadrons in Britain and the Azores. After the war he spent three years with the Handling Squadron which prepares pilots' notes on all new aircraft entering R.A.F. service, and was one of the first R.A.F. pilots to gain extensive experience of flying the Canberra. In 1951 Squadron Leader Press took command of No. 12 Squadron and flew one of the four Canberras which made the 24,000-mile tour of South and Central America in October-December 1952. He was awarded a bar to the A.F.C. last January. He lives at Maidstone, Kent.

Flight Lieutenant Roland Louis Ernest BURTON, A.F.C. (b. May 18, 1918) joined the R.A.F. in 1937 as an engineer tradesman and trained as a pilot in 1941. From 1942 until 1945 he was a flying instructor, after which he was attached to the R.A.F. Airfield Construction Branch, serving in the Far East and Germany, where he was in charge of the plant undertaking the various airfield extensions made during the Berlin Airlift. For the past two-and-a-half years he has been a flight commander in a photographic reconnaissance squadron, and recently carried out R.A.F. trials on the Canberra P.R.3. In February he made the first of the R.A.F. photographic flights over the flooded areas of eastern England. Flight Lieutenant Burton lives at "Tyrhos", New Quay, Cardiganshire.

Flight Lieutenant Robert MacAlister FURZE (b. November 9, 1928) entered the R.A.F. College, Cranwell, in 1947 and on completing his flying training, was posted to No. 617 Squadron. In 1951 he transferred to No. 101 Squadron, the first unit in Bomber Command to be equipped with Canberras. Flight Lieutenant Furze lives at Manuden, near Bishops Stortford, Herts.

NAVIGATORS

Squadron Leader Robert CURRIE, A.F.C. (b. November 4, 1920) joined the R.A.F. in 1939 and completed three operational tours during the war. He flew in Blenheim bombers operating from England and later served in the Middle East, in Blenheim, Maryland, Baltimore and Boston squadrons. In 1944 he went to the Far East, where he was a navigator with a transport support squadron. Since the war he has undertaken navigation training duties, and has recently been senior navigation officer at several bomber stations. Squadron Leader Currie lives at 32, Amherst Road, Withington, Manchester.

/Flight Lieutenant

Sq Seal Gene.  
F.P.M. B. Bannburne.

Flight Lieutenant John Wilson HARPER, D.F.C. (b. May 25, 1920) joined the R.A.F. in 1940 and served in Malta, the Middle East and India during the war. He completed two operational tours as a navigator on long-range fighters and was awarded the D.F.C. in May, 1945. Before being selected for the New Zealand race he was No. 12 Squadron Navigation Officer, and was Squadron Leader Press' navigator during the Canberra tour of South America last year. Flight Lieutenant Harper lives at 13, Chatsworth Street, Sunderland.

Flight Lieutenant Donald H. GANNON, D.F.C. (b. August 5, 1923) joined the R.A.F. in 1942. After training in Canada he returned to England and completed 56 bombing operations with No. 139 (Pathfinder) Squadron. He was awarded the D.F.C. in 1945. Flight Lieutenant Gannon lives at 4, Brook Street, Benson, Oxon.

Flight Lieutenant Thomas Edward Michael DUNNE (b. June 21, 1925) joined the R.A.F. in 1943 and trained in South Africa. After the war he was employed as a G.C.A. (ground controlled approach) controller. Before coming to Wyton he was with No. 12 Squadron. Flight Lieutenant Dunne lives at 24, Baber Drive, Feltham, Middlesex.

8 Oct Start  
Week before London Airport

Rebecca