

AIRCRAFTMEN GET 'DIPLOMAS' AT ST. THOMAS

First Class Will Be
Succeeded by Groups
of 100 Graduates Week

PASS IN REVIEW

(By ROYD BEAMISH.)

(Staff Writer, The Globe and Mail.)

St. Thomas, April 14.—Canada's biggest colony of air force personnel produced its first graduates here Saturday as the class No. 1 of the R.C.A.F. Technical Training School prepared to leave for scattered stations after a ceremony unique in the annals of the R.C.A.F.

In the presence of high officials and before 1,800 of their fellow-trainees, 306 technical specialists and 165 equipment assistants completed the first phase of their technical training under the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan and made ready to take over important ground duties at other Canadian centres.

Every branch of technical training was represented in their ranks, for there were 129 aero engine mechanics, 119 airframe mechanics, 30 metal workers and 28 fabric workers, in addition to the equipment assistants who had attended the equipment and accounting school since December.

The ceremony that marked their transition from students to qualified aircraftmen was characterized by military brevity and simplicity. The graduating class was drawn up on the walk in front of the administration building, with the main body of student airmen lined along one side.

Deputy Minister Attends.

Graduates were inspected by Air Commodore G. O. Johnson, M.C., member of the Air Council for organization and training, who represented the Chief of the Air Staff at the ceremony; James S. Duncan, Acting Deputy Minister of National Defense for Air; Group Captain L. F. Stevenson, Air Officer Commanding No. 1 Training Command at Toronto; Group Captain D. C. M. Hume, director of technical training, R.C.A.F. Headquarters; Wing Commander A. E. Case, senior technical officer, R.C.A.F. and Wing Commander R. Collis, officer commanding No. 1 Technical Training School.

Following the inspection Air Commodore Johnson and other members of the party took their position on the saluting base in front of the administration building to take the salute from the entire school in a march past. The R.C.A.F. band played the unit over the parade ground during this part of the ceremony.

The parade represented the largest turnout of air force personnel ever assembled in one place in Canada and the squadrons of student airmen was greater in strength than the entire R.C.A.F. permanent force establishment before the war began. In their ranks were students from every Province and almost every principal city in Canada.

Most of them in their late 'teens or early twenties, the boys who swung smartly past the reviewing stand were a few months ago bank clerks, farmhands and salesmen. At Saturday's parade they represented the first batch of qualified technicians to be sent out from the ambitious air-training project, a part of the huge ground crew that will be needed to keep the Royal Canadian Air Force in the air. Their importance to the Empire's war effort was stressed by Air Commodore Johnson in his address.

Urges Continued Study.

"You must realize that your training has just begun," he said. "Your usefulness will end when you cease to learn. You must never forget that the lives of our flying personnel will depend upon your skill."

He reminded them that they were going into the service to take their places in the "largest air-training plan ever attempted in so short a time" and urged them to keep on the alert at all times and to attempt to learn new things.

Parade was dismissed after the Air Commodore's brief address, and members of the graduating class swarmed in on the school's orderly officer to collect the week-end passes that were issued to each graduating student. In the infirmary six of their classmates who would have graduated Saturday but for illness, lay in their cots and counted the days until they, too, would be able to leave for duty at other stations.

New classes will be opened to replace those who have graduated and officers of the school estimated that, when the instructional program is in full swing, the school's present enrolment of 1,800 will be practically doubled.

The school will turn out 100 trained groundmen a week when courses get fully under way in August, Wing Commander Collis said in an interview.

By mid-summer training will be stepped up to a maximum. About 100 new students will be brought in each week for instruction in aviation trades when all the facilities of the school are utilized and the same number will leave weekly after com-

pleting courses lasting from four to six months, according to Wing Commander Collis.

"I am satisfied with the way the school is operating," he said. "It is being run according to schedule and the spirit and deportment of the men is excellent. Every one is keen and enthusiastic."