

JUN 15 1943

IND MAIL

Sea Umbrella

Johnson Determined To Lick Subs

By KEN W. MacTAGGART

Halifax, June 14. — "We can be satisfied with nothing short of total accomplishment," said the quiet-spoken former school teacher. "And you may say we have opened the umbrella over the entire North Atlantic."

Air Vice-Marshal G. O. Johnson, M.C., Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Eastern Air Command, whose job is the aviation end of the combined Canadian, British and United States anti-submarine operations in the Northwest Atlantic, is a chunky, square-built permanent force officer who has spent 25 years learning the best way to do the job he is handling now.

It was in 1917 that he quit teaching school at the age of 21 to become a fighter pilot. After the war ended he filled a succession of increasingly important posts, with intermissions at such schools as the Royal Air Force Staff College and the Imperial Defense College, until last January, when he came to the east coast as Air Officer Commanding, to which words "in Chief" have been added.

Is Fitted for His Job.

Those two words mean that all United States military and naval aircraft in the Northwest Atlantic, including Newfoundland, are now added to his operational direction.

Like Rear-Admiral L. W. Murray, Commander-in-Chief of the Northwest Atlantic, Air Vice-Marshal Johnson is 47 years old. Like Murray, his whole history as a permanent force officer has fitted him for the command which he now holds. That job is to see that aircraft provide the patrol and convoying service which, combined with naval surface forces, will rob Hitler's U-boats of the merchant ship prey they seek.

"It is a specialized type of flying," said Air Vice-Marshal Johnson in his moderate-sized, plainly furnished office at the heart of Eastern Air Command headquarters. The desk in front of him was bare except for a single file of correspondence and memoranda. Behind him hung a small framed citation from the Polish Air Force, awarding him the gift of the wings of that force.

Work Is Specialized.

"The men who fly in the service of this command are doing a special job," he continued. "After having received all the training available for general flying, they go to one of two schools which we operate for the specialized training they require for this work."

"Why is their task different?" asked The Globe and Mail.

"Many ways," replied the A.O.C.-in-C. "They seek objectives which can only be found by highly technical and skilful navigation. They may operate entirely, and usually do, far out at sea, out of sight of any guiding landfall. They must be experts in dead reckoning and celestial navigation."

"And have you enough aircraft and men?"

"Because nothing short of total accomplishment is our objective," he replied, "we could always use more. We have received more and are getting more. But we also must not detract from the flow of men and machines who are handing it more directly to Hitler than we are."

"Is this your favorite command to date?"

War Started Wrong Place.

"Yes. When war broke out I had the Western Air Command (Pacific), and I was not very happy about Hitler starting the war in the wrong place," he smiled. "And, as you asked at first about whether I would like to be back again in a fighter, I can only say that some of us get a little older and a little more knowledge and we're useful in jobs like this."

"It's an interesting command, very interesting. And we feel it is important. Men and ships must get across that ocean, and it's our job to help them get there. It requires great planning, both in men and equipment use. We must not tax the efficiency of either. We must seek utmost efficiency, for instance, by keeping crews together so they function as one. We must also adjust their schedules so that men are not fatigued by too many long patrols. Every combat unit must be at peak efficiency at all times."

"Is a rough picture of your task as follows: Because the major objective is to see that convoys travel the ocean in safety, you are interested in providing protection rather than in staging submarine hunts?"

"Yes. If we keep their heads down, we will have accomplished

much of the purpose. Our task is to deliver ships safely. Whether this is done by destroying submarines or by forcing them to resort to evasive action is of secondary importance. A submarine forced to remain under the surface of the sea a proportion of time out of keeping with its efficiency period is a submarine greatly defeated in its objective."

Umbrella Covers Ocean.

"There is much talk about the so-called umbrella over the ocean, the canopy of aircraft, and it has been said that it doesn't extend across the entire Atlantic. Is that so?"

Air Vice-Marshal Johnson smiled slowly. Then he grinned. "You may say that the umbrella has been opened over the Atlantic, the entire Northwest Atlantic. And it extends right across the sea."

"There is also much talk about the small aircraft carriers which can accompany convoys. Do you consider them valuable?"

"We consider anything that provides a further means of fighting submarines effectively as being valuable. Please recognize this position: Obviously, nothing short of the total accomplishment is our objective. That total accomplishment is the delivery of all ships safely at their destinations. We must consider everything that offers further aid in the attack on, not the defense against submarines. That also means we are constantly striving for greater effectiveness from the methods we are using. There is no resting point; we must always be trying to do better."

105-081-043