

FLYING TO BATTLE.

Spanning the broad expanses of this planet, travelling on wings to the troubled corners of the globe, go the men and machines of the Royal Air Force. Journeys which will take them half way round the world start in the meteorological office.

It is the weather which finally decides when the machines can take off on their long travels. More reinforcements to get away in the early hours of the following morning.

The crews assemble in the briefing room to receive in detail essential information for the first leg of their journey.

The Station Commander comes in to say "goodbye", and offer a few words of practical advice. "What we want are whole aircraft the other end (he says). It's no use flying the first thousand miles and then bending it at the edges - So take it slowly".

It wouldn't do to miss the early morning crew bus, so call times are chalked up. The alarm clock is an extra precaution. And so to bed.

While the crews sleep, their thermos flasks are filled with hot coffee, and sandwiches packed for the long trip tomorrow. Preparations with the feminine touch.

Almost before it is light, the ground crews start the final check over. Meanwhile the air crews tumble out of bed and into their flying kit. Sausage and bacon; very important this last English breakfast. Tomorrow it may be prickley pears or birds nest soup - all the same....

The time to take off is at hand. Engines must be warmed and running smoothly. Breakfast is finished. The Mess Secretary is taking no chances. You can't run after these lads with an unsettled messbill.

One last hopeful look at the letter rack. Please see that your man is not disappointed when he gets to the other end.

The Fitter just has time to satisfy himself of every detail as the crew bus draws up.

The Pilot warms up the engines. The rear gunner makes sure that everything is working smoothly. You never know who you may meet.

Throttles are pushed forward and the motors respond with a roar.

The first away is a Beaufighter, the most viciously armed of them all. And then a Wellington. The long procession of bombers and fighters has started.

Another Beaufighter. A Hudson. Yet another Beau.

A Bœnheim. A Wellington. A Giant Liberator. Outward bound to
fight side by side with their comrades on the battlefronts of
Asia and Africa.

Plane after plane sweeps gracefully into the sky and down the long
airlanes of the world. Up they go, their noses turned seawards.

One last look at England, and then shall the right aiming thunderbolts
go abroad; and from the clouds, as from a well drawn dow, shall
they fly to the mark.