



AIRSHIPS

RETURN OF R 100

GREAT and general was the satisfaction when R 100 appeared over Bedford at 10.30 a.m. on Saturday, August 16. On the night before the messages from the airship had been reaching the Air Ministry very late, and it was impossible to form any clear idea of the hour at which she might be expected. However, at 10.30 she appeared with the sun shining on her fabric and a bright blue sky to make an effective background for her. At 11.33 her main cable was connected with the tower, and exactly half an hour later her "dewdrop" was locked home to the mooring cone at the head of the tower. Half an hour is not a long time in which to bring an Atlantic liner up to her quayside. The manœuvre was very skilfully executed by the captain, who kept his five available engines running until the main cables had been connected, and continued to equalise his forward air speed with that of the head wind until the nose was made fast. The starboard forward engine was out of action with damaged reduction gear.

Lord Thomson of Cardington, Secretary of State for Air, welcomed the officers and men of the airship, and his presence and his cheering words compensated for the absence of great crowds to welcome R 100 home from her great flight. Addressing Wing Commander Colmore, Lord Thomson said:—

"I welcome you home from Canada and congratulate you on having accomplished this first stage in the development of British airships, whose contribution to our Imperial air communications must be of incalculable significance. You may look forward with quiet confidence to the successful completion of the great experiment with which you have been charged by His Majesty's Government. I wish to convey through you my heartiest congratulations to Sqdn.-Ldr. Booth for his excellent handling of the airship and to all the officers and crew for the magnificent work they have done in circumstances which have provided a searching test not only of their efficiency, but also of the sound construction of R 100. You have lived up to your great reputation and can look back on this day with satisfaction for the remainder of your lives. I wish also to express my high appreciation of the work of all who have been responsible for the design and construction of R 100 and to pay a special tribute to the officers and staff in charge of the ground organisation, which has worked perfectly throughout the flight."

As the crew left the tower, the first crying need was for a smoke. R 100 has petrol engines, and so smoking cannot be allowed on board. R 101, with her heavy-oil engines and regular smoking room, will be a more popular ship with passengers. But all looked forward also to a hot meal. The last one they had enjoyed had been dinner on the previous Thursday evening. After that, water had got in through the fabric, possibly near the outlet trunks of gas valves, and had put the electric cooker out of action. Since then only cold food, such as bully beef, had been available. No tea or coffee was forthcoming. The supply of beer had run short, and there was a choice of whisky and lemon squash to drink. Major Scott also confessed that he was looking forward to a bath. Still, the absence of a bath on an airship is not the hardship which it is on a long journey in a Continental train, for the air up above is clean.

For the moment, however, a smoke was the only solace allowed to Wing Commander Colmore, Major Scott and Squadron Leader Booth. First of all, the Director of Airship Development had to broadcast. In the course of his remarks, he said:—

"This was the first British Empire flight carried out by an airship. The flight to St. Hubert took 79 hours, and was completely without incident until within 50 miles of Quebec, when we experienced rather bad conditions. The trip up the St. Lawrence and view of Montreal at night was really wonderful. Twelve Canadian officials accompanied us on the flight to Toronto and Ottawa. The course was set first for Ottawa and then direct to Toronto, which was reached at 3 a.m., but as we were not due until 9.30 a.m., we went across to Hamilton and viewed the Niagara Falls. We then flew over Lake Ontario and back to Montreal—about 1,000 miles. We remained at St. Hubert tower nearly a fortnight, and had fairly good weather, but one bad storm over the airport while we were moored there, but we had no difficulty in handling the ship."

"We left Montreal at 9.30 p.m. local time last Wednesday. Made quick passage down the river and were out in Atlantic 14 hours later. The trip home occupied just over 57 hours, and was again quite uneventful. We passed through bad weather last Thursday night, which delayed us somewhat. We obtained reliable weather information throughout the flights, but for regular services organisation will have to be developed. It is absolutely essential, if fast voyages are to be made over the Atlantic, to be fully and constantly informed of the weather ahead. We have made progress during the last few years. With extensive meteorological and W.T. organisation I think airships will compare favourably with ship ocean passages. I am sure that for comfort you will not beat the airship—the passengers will vouch for this. We shall require larger airships to operate this route regularly. R 100 and R 101 are quite strong enough, and I do not think we shall want very much higher speed. It is necessary, however, to maintain a higher cruising speed throughout the journey, and it is for this reason that in my opinion larger airships are necessary for this route. I would like to leave the impression in your minds that flying the Atlantic in an airship is the most comfortable way of crossing that ocean. Life may be boring, but the smoothness of the airship will more than compensate for the lack of amusement. Also, I am sure that time will prove that this method of transport is just as safe as any other form of transport."

Then the three gave an interview to the press. They were agreed that better meteorological information was necessary when navigating the Atlantic. Squadron-Leader Booth, denying the rumour that they had ever been out of wireless touch with land, said that they were in too much touch. For future flights he held that there should be a separate wireless outfit for press correspondents. They must not use the navigating wireless. Wing-Commander Colmore admitted that the whole question of fabric on airships would have to be gone into. He denied a report to the effect that he had stated in Canada that the system used on R 100 of supporting the fabric on the hull by drawing it in with tapes and wires had proved unsatisfactory. But, two months ago, before R 100 started, they had come to the conclusion that the new system of doping the fabric before it was put in place had not been a success. It had been an experiment which they had hoped would be an improvement, and they had been disappointed. They would revert to the old system of fixing the fabric on the hull first, and then doping it, though not necessarily using the spray doping method. There had been damage to the fabric on three of the fins, only the lower vertical one having escaped. The patches which we could see on both the horizontal fins had had to be left undoped on the outside, but they were doped internally.

Major Scott gave a vivid account of the storm over the St. Lawrence on the outward journey, which was the most important incident of the whole trip. He said that the reports which had been published in some papers had been much exaggerated. In particular the report that the airship had pitched to 45 degrees was quite incorrect. He said that they were flying at 1,200 ft. when they went into a thunder-storm with strong vertical currents. They rose rapidly to 3,000 ft. The nose was put down to try to prevent the

