At 1700 hr the first phase of the exercise was completed. Air Chief Marshal Sir Basil Embry, A.O.C-in-C. Fighter Command, said that he was delighted with the number of interceptions.

**Binbrook Canberras**

This famous station was of particular importance during the first phase of Ardent, for it was here that the Canberra bombers were based. Each of the Binbrook squadrons contributed to the effort, a number of crews from each unit being detailed for each operation.

For the first time in such an exercise, operational secrecy was applied to the bombers’ activities. Such a policy is clearly essential if real lessons are to be learnt, and Binbrook did all it could to deny the fighters any advance knowledge of the Canberras’ intentions. The only weakness lay in the fact that each sortie could be followed by radar as it left Binbrook: as a consequence, the attacking forces were routed far out to sea, beyond radar range, and brought in again over a completely different part of the coast. In fact, many hundreds of miles were usually covered before the aircraft could once more be detected from the British Isles.

The first sortie, by a medium force, was airborne before 6 a.m. on the Saturday, bound for an industrial target in Birmingham. One pilot saw a fighter after sun-up, but no other defence activity was reported. The day dawned windy and cloudy and three aircraft were diverted—two to Waddington and one to Valley—to return after breakfast.

The next, and major operation, was a night attack on a Liverpool target. By about 5.30 p.m. the various briefings had been completed and about 40 minutes later two Devons arrived, one bringing Lord De I. Isle and Dudley, D.F.C., Secretary of State for Air. The pilot of this aircraft—Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh P. Lloyd, A.O.C-in-C. Bomber Command—appeared well pleased with his command in general and Binbrook in particular; but he could not stay, and was airborne again within a few minutes. The Secretary of State, however, had come to see things working at first hand, and had arranged to fly on the imminent sorties.

One of the flight commanders was airborne by 7.35 p.m.—by which time it was pitch dark—to act as a form of pathfinder; the main force followed some ten minutes later. One aircraft had to return after a few minutes, but the remainder enjoyed a beautiful, clear night; and to add to the splendour, a particularly brilliant display of the Northern Lights appeared when the aircraft reached high latitudes. Again no opposition was seen—which does not necessarily imply a lack of interceptions—and the force was back at the appointed hour, landing at commendably frequent intervals.

And a stirring scene it was as we saw it from the downwind end of the runway in the yellow glare of the sodiums—the sinister shapes squelching on to the tarmac, leaving behind a warm wind heavy with paraffin.

Discussing the sortie later it was evident that the Secretary of State had enjoyed himself greatly, notwithstanding his choice of “the most occasional of the Canberra's seats” up alongside the pilot, S/L. A. W. Southall, D.S.O., D.F.C., A.F.C., one of the squadron commanders. At one time, he said, nearly the whole of Scotland could be seen clearly; and he found the Canberras surprisingly quiet and smooth.

The final Binbrook effort was a photographic reconnaissance carried out by a small force, the leading aircraft being flown by G/C. N. C. Hyde, the station commander. Each Canberra flew the same series of legs up to a specified point, and then selected an individual course, to cross the coast alone and make for its own selected target. A luxury—as W/C. “Per” Connolly, D.F.C., A.F.M., put it—was the “airborne reserve” procedure adopted on this sortie. A reserve, briefed for the occasion, followed the P.R. aircraft to 20,000 ft; if by this time no one had turned back, the “airborne reserve” cruised gently back to Binbrook. Such a procedure is essential if a reserve is to be used at all, for if one Canberra takes off and its reserve is left on the ground the reserve cannot fit into the operation at all.

Although, understandably, no attempt at an analysis of the work done can yet be attempted, we may express the view—unanimous at Binbrook—that, when the Canberra is efficiently operated, very very few fighters can make an effective attack on it, or even get near it. And it was rather galling to the crews involved when one strike was briefed to fly some ten to fifteen thousand feet below the optimum—just to give the fighters a chance, as one spokesman put it.

W. T. G.

**Waterbeach Meteors**

“Well,” announced F/S. Jack Crowther, as he swung our Meteor 7 on to the runway last Saturday afternoon and hailed after a preceding stream of Mk 5s, “there we go.”

Our machine displayed the yellow and black chequer-boards of one of the day interceptor squadrons based on Waterbeach, which sprawling Cambridgeshire base is commanded by G/C. A. H. Donaldson, D.S.O., D.F.C., A.F.C., and has as its wing commander flying P. P. C. Barthropp, D.F.C., whom we remembered from his Boscombe days.

We had found the wing commander early that morning in the dilapidated, fuggy dispersal hut with his pilots—all totting their 38s in rakishly slung holsters, smoking and raggling, and occasionally glancing through the grimy windows at the heavy Fenland mists. There we waited until the sun began to fight through, and stable conditions; but then we passed an hour in the sun till the Meteors came streaming in again and we joined their tousel pilots at debriefing.

From 34,000 ft it emerged they had spotted the raiders—ten Vampire "bombers"—10,000 ft below them on the port quarter; whereupon the wing commander had told them to get in and pitch. And though his views on certain aspects of the proceedings were not altogether complimentary, he did allow that some “pretty reasonable” attacks had been made.

While we had waited a suppressed roar from behind the hut had set us scanning the horizon for rats; but we had traced its source to the pressure stove, where we now fell in line before a steaming and succulent steak and kidney pie of transcendent size and succulence. The tablespoon which the wing commander managed to win for us is an ideal tool to negotiate the boulders of kidney, and having dispatched our helping we felt ready for anything—even Canberras.

For the sortie, which, we were assured, could hardly fail to materialize that afternoon, we had a parachute already stowed in the Meteor 7; so when standby was eventually called we were quickly out of a Land Rover, into the cockpit, strapped in, plugged in, and shut in. Our Mk. 7 charged out from dispersal, fell into line, stood there poised for a minute or so—and taxied back. The squadron’s state had been reduced to readiness. But this Grand Old-Duke-of-York business is just part of the game and is reckoned to be much easier on the anatomy than prolonged sitting on a parachute pack.

“We just had time to light a cigarette when someone yelled ‘38 Plane’ and, the Land Rover having already careened away, we had to leg it back to the Meteor. We were still panting as we taxied round the perimeter track, and almost immediately we heard F/S Crowther’s assurance that we were, at least, away.

Our Meteor was one of 16 drawn from two squadrons, commanded by S/L. F. W. Doherty and S/L. R. J. F. Spooner. As (This first report on Ardent is concluded on page 492.)

The Secretary of State for Air arrived at Binbrook on the evening of Saturday, October 4th; he is seen (left) being welcomed by the station commander, G/C. N. C. Hyde. The Binbrook ground crews were kept busy over the week-end; Canberra fuelling (right) was a major task.