



In the gathering dusk at Laarbruch, Germany, No. 31 Sqn. ground-crews service their Canberra P.R.7s by the light of hangar-roof lamps. "Flight" photograph

ACHTUNG CANBERRA!

P.R.7s, B(I).8s and RB-57s on Duty in Germany

By C. M. LAMBERT

THE Canberra is now launched on what might be considered the second phase of its operational life-cycle. When it started out, as a light bomber, it had capabilities which put it comfortably out of reach of fighter interception. It represented the swing of the performance pendulum in favour of the bomber. Canberra crews were able to laugh off attempted interceptions by anything then in general service; if it came to close quarters they could turn inside the interceptor, but more often they could merely sail by, comfortably above him.

A very considerable number of Canberra B.2s were built for the R.A.F. and altogether six other variants have gone into service or are expected shortly, and some of them still maintain a very useful edge in performance over their potential adversaries. But the absolute superiority of the type could not be expected to last. A closer appraisal of the Canberra's stronger points has now led to its adoption for rôles in which they can still be used to best advantage. Thus emphasis is being placed more and more on tactical use at night. While the P.R.9 will, one hopes, continue to excel at very high altitude, the B(I).8 is fitted out for the highly specialized night low-level intruder task; and, as an interim type, the B(I).6 is also following this road. The P.R.3 and P.R.7 are already established in the high-level recce field. The B.6s continue in their original rôle as light bombers, and T.4s are distributed both in O.C.U.s and squadrons for conversion and instrument-flying training. Many T.4s are conversions from B.2s, and this practice may be expected to continue and widen in scope, eventually resulting in an entirely-late-mark Canberra force.

During this time the Americans have produced large numbers of their own Canberra, the Martin B-57. The U.S.A.F. have followed rather the same pattern of operational development, with the difference that they began very soon to use the machine for photographic reconnaissance and night attack. And they also adapted it for the peculiar form of attack known as loft bombing or toss bombing, details of which appeared in *Flight* of October 19. This system is now reported to be under development for the R.A.F. as well, and the Canberra B(I).8 appears to be an obvious vehicle for it.

So the Canberra is set for its second phase—its tactical maturity. It could now prove a far more potent weapon than ever it was as a light day or night bomber. Upon it may rest the hopes and fears of many a military commander on both sides of any future conflict. As the Canberra was the despair of the interceptor of four years ago, so it might become the terror of the aggressor of the future—NATO's aiming eye and the straight left of its deterrent striking force.

Such were the conclusions we reached after a recent tour of Canberra units in Germany. We visited No. 31 Sqn. with P.R.7s, based at Laarbruch, No. 88 Sqn. with B(I).8s at Wildenrath and the RB-57 squadron of the 10th Tactical Reconnaissance Group, U.S.A.F., at Spangdahlem in 4th A.T.A.F. Each unit was carry-

ing out its tasks in its own way, yet in each place we found the Canberra doing much the same job, looking much the same under a variety of paint schemes, and respected in much the same way by its various crews.

Few rôles can be more rewarding and instructive in peace time than photographic reconnaissance. The normal run of continuation training missions entails flights to all parts of a continent, the photographic records of which are something a crew or a squadron can take a pride in. No. 31 Sqn. has carefully developed this appreciation of its work by framing and exhibiting many of the incidental pictures taken during sorties. Since the P.R.7 carries only vertical or near-vertical high-altitude cameras, several pilots have developed the technique of banking their aircraft to take oblique shots at comparatively low levels. The perspective which results is curious; but the pictures thus obtained of towns, buildings and landscapes form an excellent decoration for squadron offices. The most recent pictures of general interest are displayed on a large board in the servicing hangar under the title *Out and About with 31 Squadron*. Some crews went out and photographed the royal yacht in the North Sea on its way to Stockholm. Rome, Cologne, Nijmegen, Dover, London, York, Brixham and Tyneside all appear in the great collection of current-interest pictures.

No. 31 Sqn. was re-formed at Laarbruch on March 1 last year and has been commanded since that time by S/L. J. C. Stead. It was the first unit in 2nd T.A.F. to receive Canberra P.R.7s. Under the control of No. 83 Group, it forms part of No. 34 Wing, a formation which was well known at the end of World War 2, when it flew Spitfires and Mosquitoes. The other two squadrons in the wing are Nos. 69 and 80, both with Canberra P.R.3s. Also at Laarbruch is the 306th Sqn. of the Dutch Air Force, with Republic RF-84Fs and Gs. This is a lodger unit and comes under the operational control of No. 2 Group. Each Canberra squadron has attached to it a Mobile Field Processing Unit, Nos. 3, 6 and 8 M.F.P.S. working for Nos. 31, 69 and 80 Sqn.s. respectively. Other R.A.F. reconnaissance units in No. 83 Group include No. 79 Sqn. (Swifts) and No. 541 (Meteor F.R.9s) both based at Gutersloh. No. 17 has recently been re-formed with Canberra P.R.3s at Wahn.

Unfortunately, little can be said about the capabilities, equipment and work of the P.R. squadrons. In common with all other Canberra units they are at present having a little tailplane-trim motor trouble, although modifications are steadily coming through and being incorporated, so that speed restrictions can be lifted. The crews are not particularly worried, since the trouble is well enough known to be relatively easily avoided.

During Exercise Stronghold, No. 31 Sqn. ranged over England, mostly at high level, and found that they were not entirely immune from well-flown Hunters. They feel that they would be safer flying right down close to the deck, where ground cover would give them much greater protection than would performance. But