

Information, propaganda or advertising?

(Robert G Pelley, 26 June 2019)
bobsganderhistory.com

The first trans-Atlantic delivery of bombers was made successfully on 11 November 1940, with the departure from Gander of seven small Lockheed Hudsons, manned by very brave pioneer crews.

These deliveries of Hudsons marked the imagination of anxious people, worried about another Great War like that of 1914-18 and perhaps even worse. Hudsons were often used therefore in magazine ads, such as the one below from early 1941.

Transatlantic Ferry -

There's a life line to England in the air. Above the submarines and surface raiders...from somewhere in Canada to somewhere in Britain...drone these flights of Hudsons from the arsenal of democracy to the first line of its defense.

Delivered in ever-increasing quantities, Hudsons and other Lockheeds continue to contribute their might to the Battle of Britain. From unbiased reports, probably no plane is more frequently praised by pilots of the R.A.F.

American bombers get to Britain, blockade or no blockade, on their own sure power. And their work aids in the conveying of heavier war necessities... food and guns and shells and steel and gasoline...

**... for Protection today
and Progress tomorrow**



LOOK TO *Lockheed* FOR LEADERSHIP



Lockheed Aircraft Corporation • Burbank, California

The three Hudsons, flying in tight formation, are up in the upper right-hand corner of the painting, hard to see, just as they would have been out over the North Atlantic. They seem to be flying at a fairly low altitude, perhaps because of possible icing. Below is the text and a zoom on the aircraft on the ramp:

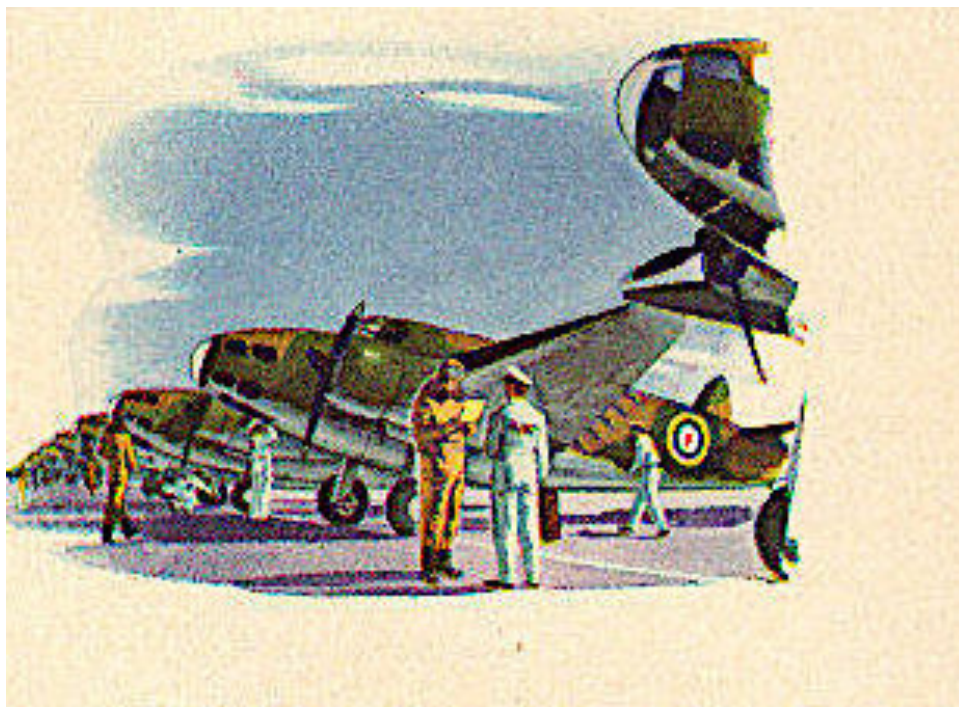
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Very dramatic, but is it exact? The answer is “no”.

The first point is that these Hudsons are shown in tight formation. However, after a first attempt at formation flying in November 1940, pilots flew on their own. They checked their aircraft and the weather and then decided if conditions over the Atlantic were good enough for a safe flight. During the first flight out of Gander, Capt DCT Bennett, himself an excellent navigator, initially lead the group in formation. However as weather conditions went bad, there was a greater chance that aircraft would run into each other than them getting lost. Knowing that each plane had its own navigator, he had them disperse and find their own way to the UK.

A second aspect of interest is the close-up photo where crew members can be seen in beige flight suits and ground crew in white uniforms. This not the garb of ferry pilots in early 1941, nor that of maintenance personnel. In fact the early crews were strictly civilians who wore whatever clothes they owned. But this ad was in an American magazine, so it could very well mean to show US flyers in general or those who ferried Hudsons up close to the border so they could be “stolen” by Canadians for next stage on the way to Britain.

It is interesting to note as well that until war was declared in December 1941, American was supposed to be neutral. This ad, however, in early 1941 did hide where American sympathies lay.

The last point concerns the point of departure. The text says, “from somewhere in Canada to somewhere in Britain”. In early 1941, the only airport available for ferry operations was Gander. However, at that time Newfoundland was an independent entity and not part of Canada. So much for geography!

It can be seen that while this ad contained some information, it had several distinct audiences. Firstly, it meant to slowly convince reluctant Americans that they were on the right side in the war. It was also meant to reassure the population, by underlining the ability of America industry to build weapons of war of the best quality. It also motivated Lockheed workers to maintain high standards. It also spoke to possible buyers of Lockheed products when it said that no plane was more frequently praised by the pilots of the RAF.

It also created hope for the future when it said, “for Protection today and Progress tomorrow”.

It was therefore light on information, medium on advertising and heavy on propaganda.