

REPORT BY THE CHIEF OF THE AIR STAFF FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st MARCH, 1939

The Hon. the MINISTER OF DEFENCE,—

I have the honour to submit the following report on the Royal New Zealand Air Force for the year ended the 31st March, 1939.

The expansion programme which was embarked upon following the report presented to the Government by my predecessor, Group Captain the Honourable R. A. Cochrane, C.B.E., A.F.C., has proceeded satisfactorily, consistent with the provision of accommodation at Air Force stations.

PERSONNEL.

Arrangements have been made with the Air Ministry to release a number of ex-New Zealand officers from their service with the Royal Air Force to man the Wellington aircraft which are to be flown to New Zealand during 1939-40. Additional officers will also be released by the Air Ministry for service in other regular units in the Dominion. Under this scheme, some forty ex New Zealand officers with from two to five years' Service experience in the Royal Air Force will be transferred to the Royal New Zealand Air Force.

The output of pilots from the Flying Training School at Wigram is being increased from forty-eight to eighty per annum. The school continues to make good progress, and in spite of handicaps due to shortages of specialized equipment the standard of instruction compares favourably with that of similar schools in the Royal Air Force. The deficiencies in equipment are being met rapidly, and it is hoped will entirely disappear at an early date.

THE AIR FORCE RESERVE.

The importance of having a fully trained reserve of personnel available on the outbreak of war to meet expansion and to replace wastage in operational units was stressed in the report of the Air Department for 1937-38, and requires no further emphasis in this report. During the current year some progress has been made towards building up these essential reserves.

The system under which a reserve of pilots is being built up under an agreement with the Royal New Zealand Aero Club and its constituent clubs has been continued, and on the 31st March, 1939, the strength of the Civil Reserve of Pilots was one hundred and sixty. It is hoped to increase this reserve to three hundred pilots by the end of the current year.

With a view to providing a reserve of trained personnel for maintenance duties in the event of war, a scheme has been introduced with the co-operation of the Railways Department to provide the Royal New Zealand Air Force with an immediate reserve of trained mechanics. Under this scheme, apprentices in the last year of training will undergo a six months' course on airframe and aero-engine work. The provision of the necessary buildings and equipment for this scheme is well in hand, and the instructional staff is being strengthened by obtaining a number of Royal Air Force and ex Royal Air Force instructors from the United Kingdom. The first course under this scheme should commence training at the Hutt Workshops about the middle of July.

In addition to the above scheme, an appeal was made during the year to men between the ages of twenty-two and fifty-five to register for service in the Royal New Zealand Air Force in the event of a national emergency. There was a very gratifying response, and skilled tradesmen and others for whom the need will be most urgent in war are at present being interviewed and assessed with the object of rapidly augmenting the Regular Air Force should the need arise. At present no training is given to these personnel, but, as and when the initial requirements of regular units under the present expansion programme have been met, a scheme for the training of maintenance personnel on the Civil Reserve will be initiated.

TERRITORIAL AIR FORCE.

The Wellington Territorial Squadron was formed in October, 1937, and Territorial squadrons at Auckland and Christchurch have now been established. The strength of these squadrons is as follows:—

						Officers.	Airmen.
Wellington (T.) Squadron	..	..	..	..	..	18	96
Auckland (T.) Squadron	..	..	..	..	..	20	77
Christchurch (T.) Squadron	..	..	..	..	..	17	92

In addition, a further twenty-one Territorial officers are available, but as they are not living within a squadron area they are not attached to particular squadrons. These officers, however, carry out training in the normal way as and when they can find time.

It is hoped to form the Dunedin Territorial Squadron by the end of this year, by which time the building programme at Taieri should be completed.

Annual training-camps were held by the established Territorial squadrons during the year, and a very satisfactory standard was reached in the flying and low bombing practices. In addition to the annual camps, a three months' course of training was arranged for such personnel as could be spared from their civil employment. The response was very gratifying, and was possible only as the result of the very commendable co-operation of employers. Under this scheme twenty officers and ninety-seven airmen are now undergoing training at Wigram, Rongotai, and Hobsonville.