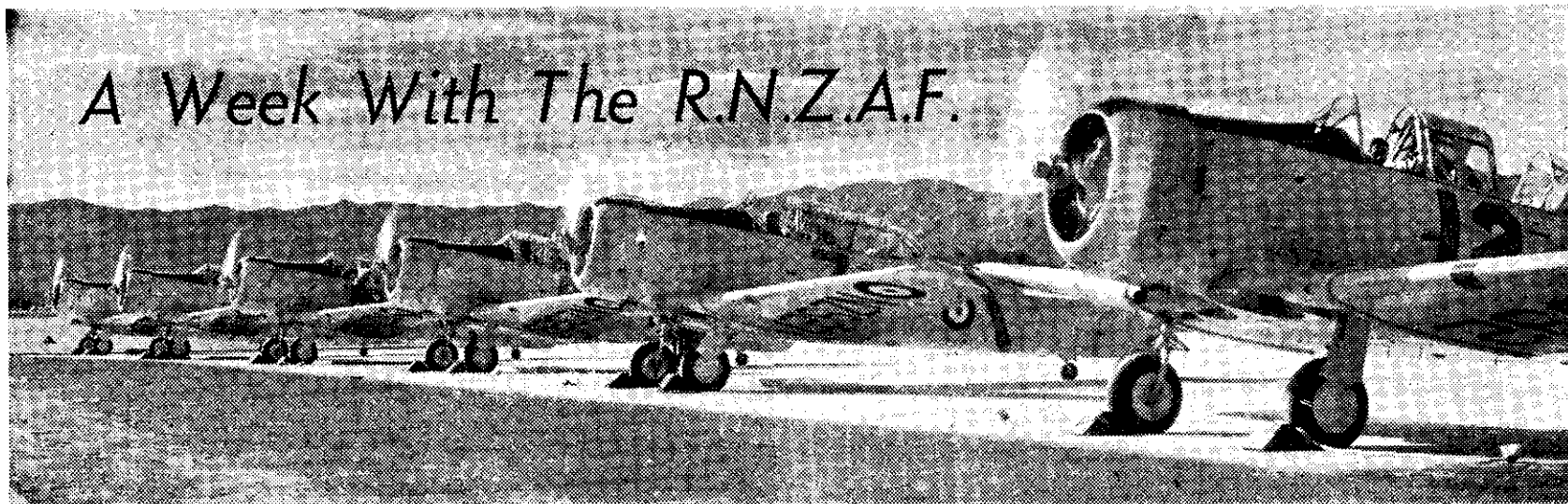


A Week With The R.N.Z.A.F.



ALTHOUGH it is not quite the silent service that the Navy is, the Air Force has never been an avid seeker of publicity. It is more, I think, a matter of modesty than reticence. The R.A.F. has gladly extended hospitality to the writers of books and the makers of documentary films, but one suspects that books like Noel Monks's *Squadrons Up* and films like *Target for To-night* must secretly be a little embarrassing to it. From the humblest aircraftsman to the men who direct the strategy of the air offensive against Germany, the R.A.F. is happy enough to do a job of work, to do it well and to do it without fanfares.

The R.N.Z.A.F. is cast in rather the same mould. I have just returned from a pretty comprehensive tour of training stations, and everywhere I found a completely matter-of-fact attitude to the business of flying. "For God's sake don't glamourise us," an instructor at an Elementary Flying School besought me. "Anyone can learn to fly."

I told the R.N.Z.A.F. people when I started off that I was hoping to get an objective picture of conditions in the Air Force. "That's O.K. by us," they replied in so many words. "There are certain things which are hush-hush, and naturally, we're not saying anything about them. But apart from that, you can go where you like and do pretty well what you like."

You Do Get Around

And so for nearly a week, I shuttled from Air Force station to Air Force station, living with officers and men, watching them at their work, flying with them, messing with them, talking with them and appraising their outlook on life in general and the Air Force in particular. I spent my days wandering up and down air fields and through workshops and hangars until I was ready to drop from sheer fatigue; at night I went to sleep to the drone of night-flying aircraft.

You can't see much of a big, wide-spread organisation like the Air Force in a matter of a week, you may counter. Agreed. But it's remarkable how you get around. "There's a Hudson going up to — in half an hour," someone will tell you at break-

fast, and by morning tea time you are 300 miles away. And so, during that week, I think I was able to secure a pretty fair picture of the job the R.N.Z.A.F. is doing.

I know what a raw pupil feels like when he is taken up the first time for "air experience," for I was inserted into a helmet, flying suit, and parachute, strapped in the rear cock-pit of a primary training machine and "given the works." And I know what an advanced pupil feels like when he is introduced to the technique of dive bombing for the first time, for, with a dry mouth and a stomach which quivered in anticipation, I clambered into an advanced trainer and went dive bombing.

Also, I think I know how the men of the R.N.Z.A.F. feel about the R.N.Z.A.F. Naturally, I hadn't thought to find one loud and universal paean of praise for the Air Force. It doesn't happen that way in war-time. I met one young man who complained that there was too much darned saluting for his liking, and another who said he wished he had joined the Navy, but I suspect that the man who disliked saluting was a natural rebel and may have needed straightening up anyway, and that the man who thought he had chosen the wrong service may genuinely have made a mistake.

But if morale wins wars, and it is generally agreed it does, the R.N.Z.A.F.

is well on the way. Back of the saluting and formality, which is admittedly a part of the Air Force, I could feel an essential democracy which made a man his own master when it came to his own particular task. The captain of an aircraft is the captain, no matter what his rank is and when the safety of his crew is at stake, he takes orders from no one.

DIVE BOMBING

THERE are a lot of misconceptions about dive bombing. Ask the man in the street and he'll generally credit Americans, Germans and Japanese with employing the technique, but the chances are he won't think of it in connection with the R.A.F., and he certainly doesn't know that the R.N.Z.A.F. gives a very thorough course in dive bombing at its advanced training stations.

They use Harvards for teaching dive bombing, and from what instructors told me, I gather it's an ideal machine. The target is a triangle of timber in the middle of an old lake bed, about a quarter of an hour's flight from the aerodrome. At a landing ground close to the range, the Harvard is loaded up with four practice bombs, one for an upwind dive, one for downwind, and two across wind. When the bombs strike, they give out a white smoke by which it is easy enough to judge how close to the target they've landed.

The Harvard loaded up and the pupil well strapped in, the instructor climbs up and above the target in steep climbing turns. At the required height, he circles to see that there are no other aircraft in the vicinity, steers a straight course for a second or two at right angles to the direction he will dive, and then flips his machine over in as neat a "wing-over" as Hollywood ever brought to the screen.

The nose goes down, the air speed indicator shows a terrific acceleration of speed, the altitude, another dial shows, is falling away at hundreds of feet a second. There is little noise from the motor it seems, only a dull noise in the pupil's ears, which may be the wind roaring past or may be only his own mounting blood pressure. The air speed

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YOUNG MAN WITH A HUDSON BOMBER. This Flying-officer is one of several R.N.Z.A.F. pilots who test twin-engined Hudson bombers after their assembly in New Zealand