

The Air Force Gives Us "The Works"

(Continued from previous page.)

indicator is quivering near a red line which marks the limit at which the machine may be dived; the target is rushing up to meet them. Just then, the pilot gets the target squarely lined up, presses a button which releases the bomb and pulls out of the dive. This sensation, to the pupil who has never dive-bombed before, is more acute than the dive itself. He is compressed into his seat as though he weighed half a ton as, indeed, he does for the moment, and the blood seems to drain from every blood vessel in his head. Then the aircraft is away up and over the target again.

The point about dive bombing is that it isn't an exciting business at all, and at this station it is just part of the day's work. And the accuracy attained is little short of amazing. Direct hits on the small target are too frequent to attract attention, and in the practice in which I played the part of pupil, the instructor averaged 26 feet from the target for his four bombs. With modern high explosive bombs that's so near to a direct hit it doesn't matter.

As we cruised back to our aerodrome, I could not help thinking it was worth a headline—New Zealand Pilots Can Dive Bomb With the Best of Them.

TEST PILOT

I INQUIRED who was the solidly built, quiet young Flying-Officer reading a magazine in the corner. "Oh, that's So-and-so," came the reply, He's a test pilot."

I pricked up my ears, thinking immediately of Clark Gable power-diving a new machine until the wings folded back, and then calmly picking up the instrument board and walking home. No, not that sort of test pilot, I was told. He takes over Hudsons when they are assembled and puts them through their paces. Just a routine check-up.

Later, I met and flew with this young Flying-Officer, and I had to admit that the job of test pilot is not what Hollywood makes it out to be. The big, twin-engined Hudsons arrive in New Zealand in several parts. The fuselage is taped and sealed, and has the engines in place. Wings, tail assembly and other odds and ends are packed away in huge crates. At the assembly depot in New Zealand, the machine is put together, gone over

on the ground with a fine tooth comb to see that everything is present and correct and then taken up.

I was lucky enough to be in on a test flight, and apparently I was the only person who attached any special significance to it. The other passengers were the rigger, the mechanic and the instrument checker, who always like to go up on the first flight to show how confident they are in their work. The young Flying Officer chewed gum, sang happily to himself and in every way behaved like a small boy taking a scooter out for its first run.

The test flight was completely uneventful, and the Hudson behaved as everyone knew she would behave, like an even-tempered, well-mannered racehorse.

WE'LL FLY THEM!

I FLEW back to Wellington late one night in the same machine as the Chief of the Air Staff. It was the first night flight I had ever made, but it did not take me long to master my reactions and arrive at the conclusion that it's no more interesting flying by night than it is by day. We discussed my tour of Air Force stations, and, I mentioned one or two things which had particularly impressed me. I also passed on a remark I had overheard in Wellington one morning just after a formation of fighters had swept overhead, wing-tip to wing-tip, fast and deadly, just about the last word in flying efficiency.

"New Zealand boys were flying those machines," said the Chief of Air Staff. "They assemble them here, test them and fly them. And they'd fight them as well as they fly them, if they got the chance. New Zealand should be told that."

And that's just one more home truth about the R.N.Z.A.F. I would like to drive home. Once they have been swung out of the ship and on to our wharves, it is the lads of the R.N.Z.A.F. who get the machines into the air, and it will be fully trained, hard-fighting young New Zealanders who will be flying most of them if Zero fighters ever dare put their noses over our horizon.

THE W.A.A.F.'S

IN any story about the R.N.Z.A.F., the W.A.A.F.'s deserve a chapter all to themselves. The civilian sees them in



W.A.A.F.'S are taking over more and more jobs which were previously done by men. Two girls who instruct on a Bombing Teacher at a R.N.Z.A.F. station

parades, driving Air Force cars and trucks, or maybe blowing a shrill tune in a drum and fife band. The work they do behind the scenes at the various stations is often less spectacular, and very often less interesting.

The real heroines are the girls who sweep out hangars and clean 'planes and cook and wash dishes and wait on the men in the messes. Theirs isn't a romantic calling at all, and many a W.A.A.F. must sometimes think to herself that she could just as easily wash dishes at home. But ask any airman if he'd care to go back to the days of mess and cookhouse fatigues!

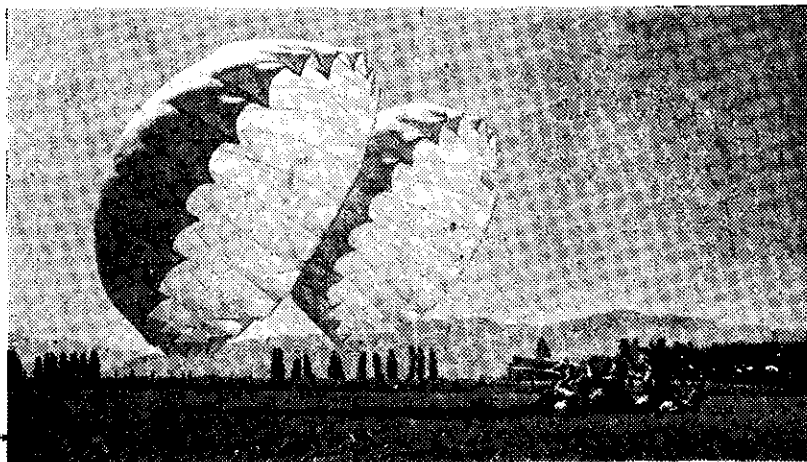
Of course, they learn specialised trades as well. In my tour I met W.A.A.F.'s who were expert parachute packers, instrument repairers, photographic dark room assistants. At one station I talked to two girls who instruct pupils on what is known officially as an A.M.L. Bombing Teacher. This is an elaborate machine which enables a pupil to learn the whole technique of bombing on the ground, before he ever drops a practice bomb. The girls are proving first rate instructors, and they've even applied their knowledge in flights over a full scale bombing range.

INSTRUCTORS

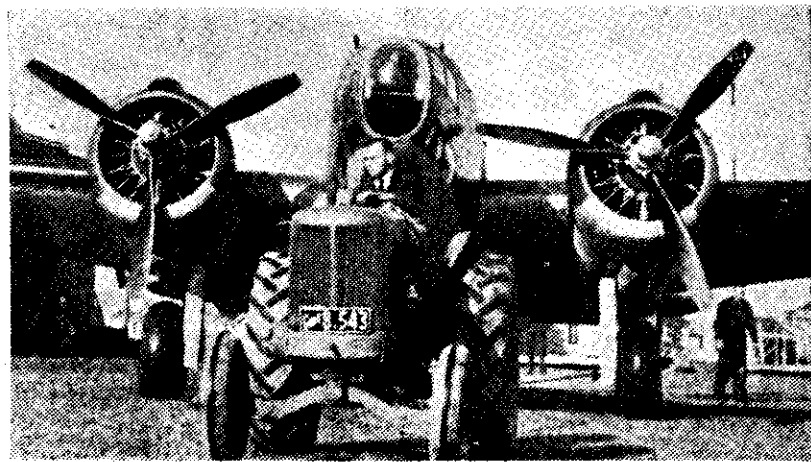
THE other unsung heroes of the R.N.Z.A.F. are the instructors. None of them is ever an instructor by choice. They happen to be steady pupils who have put up a good showing right from the day they first entered the Air Force. Their progress is watched with especial care, and sooner or later, instead of being sent overseas for final operational training and then a shot at the real thing, some of them are told to stay behind and report to a school for instructors. They may protest like the very devil, but there's nothing they can do about it, and usually they realise that it is just as important to have good instructors as it is to have good operational flyers.

It is among the instructors that you'll pick up the richest examples of Air Force jargon. A pupil who is slow to get the hang of flying is a "dim bulb." A variation is the pupil who simply can't pick up "the gen" of it. Practice at landings and take-offs is "circuits and bumps." The verbal instructions fired back at the pupil through the voice tube is "the patter." An instructor who is jaded from a heavy spell of flying is "browned off," and the final stage of being "browned off" is to be completely "cheesed."

—J.G.M.



TESTING TWO "BROLLIES." Parachutes blown open by the slip stream of an aircraft make an effective picture against the sky



MOTIVE POWER—ONE TRACTOR: A Hudson bomber is pulled out on to the tarmac in readiness for a test flight