



A KORERO Report

STRANGE AS it seems, one of the busiest members of the Royal New Zealand Air Force in the forward Pacific is a sign-writer. He works in red and white, painting Jap flags on a scoreboard at the island headquarters of the New Zealand Fighter Wing. Each new flag shows that another Japanese warplane has crashed to its doom after exchanging aerial unpleasanties with an R.N.Z.A.F. fighter. And the sign-writer is busy—extremely busy.

There is more in this tropical sign-writing than occurs at a cursory glance. To those who know the R.N.Z.A.F.'s short but eventful Pacific history, the scoreboard points in two directions. Its empty spaces offer dismal cheer to the flying men of Hirohito's hordes, and its gay chequers of red and white recall the equally chequered history of R.N.Z.A.F. pioneers in the Pacific. The latter is a short story that goes back to a tropical hurricane . . .

The wind blew strong in Fiji halfway through February, 1941, so strong that

it wrecked half of the R.N.Z.A.F.'s aircraft strength in the Pacific—two de Havilland 89's, tethered down on a Fijian aerodrome. The R.N.Z.A.F. had then been "up in the Pacific" for four months. Its first unit, assigned to carry out reconnaissance, shipping escort, and operational training, consisted of four aircraft taken over from civil owners and converted for service flying. This flight, plus a headquarters unit, arrived in Fiji in November, 1940. It had the "will" even if it had but little with which to make the "way."

Even earlier than this Fijian commencement, however, R.N.Z.A.F. aircraft were operating in the Pacific. Traditions were founded in the earliest days of the war, when a handful of pilots flew cheerfully hundreds of miles out over the Pacific on reconnaissance from New Zealand air bases. They flew obsolescent, single-engined aircraft, with only their life-jackets as small salvation in the event of a water "landing." Nevertheless, the pilots of this little band join