

The strength of the Air Force at 31st March, 1948, was 434 officers, 2,283 airmen, and 130 Women's Auxiliary Air Force, which is two-thirds of the strength twelve months ago. All "interim" service engagements expire at the end of March, 1948, which will cause a considerable drop in effective strength. For various reasons, it has not been possible to develop technical training courses to the degree necessary for the reconstitution of the Air Force until early in 1948. The product from such courses will not in general become effective until late in 1949, so that on present indications there will be little relief from the present shortages in trades for at least a further twelve months.

The major commitments during the year under review continued to be the segregation, custody, and disposal of surplus equipment in conjunction with the War Assets Realization Board, the operation of a weekly air transport schedule (No. 41 Transport Squadron) between New Zealand and Japan in support of the New Zealand Contingent of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force, and the maintenance of No. 14 Fighter Squadron in Japan. During the year a total of 63 Mosquitos were flown out to New Zealand. The first squadron to be equipped with Mosquitos is No. 75 (Bomber) Squadron at Ohakea which is being expanded as personnel become available. No. 5 Flying-boat Squadron, equipped with Catalinas, is maintained on a skeleton basis in Fiji.

A satisfactory degree of co-ordination between the three Services is being steadily developed through the activities of the Chiefs of Staff Committee and the Principal Administrative Officers Committee. In addition, a defence science organization has been established, embracing civilian and Service scientific research which will enable New Zealand in due course to play its part in this vital aspect of Commonwealth defence.

Close liaison with the Royal Air Force has been maintained during the year by visits of Service aircraft and specialized teams from the Empire schools, by the interchange of officers, and the establishment of two R.N.Z.A.F. crews in No. 24 Commonwealth Squadron. As the R.N.Z.A.F. obtains the greater benefit from these forms of liaison, which represent a most economical means of maintaining operational efficiency, they should be developed to the maximum extent.

During the year the Air Force has been engaged on a number of miscellaneous flying activities of economic value to New Zealand.

In May, 1947, the Chief of the Air Staff visited the United Kingdom to participate in Commonwealth inter-Service exercises and Conferences.

OPERATIONS

Squadron Activities.—In Japan No. 14 Squadron, manned to a reduced level from December, 1947, continued as the Air Force component of the New Zealand Contingent of the British Commonwealth Occupation Forces. The squadron moved from Iwakuni to Bofu in February, 1948, and continued to take its full part in all occupation air activities. As well as security and anti-smuggling patrols over the B.C.O.F. area, the squadron participated in mass international fly-pasts at Tokio on several occasions, including the day of the Royal wedding. Based at Lauthala Bay, Fiji, No. 5 Squadron, equipped with Catalina flying-boats, continued to provide search and rescue facilities in Fiji and Hobsonville (New Zealand), to which a flight of two aircraft is detached. Since N.Z.N.A.C. took over the South Pacific Regional Services, No. 5 Squadron has carried supplies and R.N.Z.A.F. personnel between New Zealand and Fiji, in addition to carrying out "mercy" flights to outlying islands of the Fiji Group and to the Chatham Islands. Flights to Gilbert and Ellice Islands and the Solomons have also been undertaken for the Western Pacific Administration. No. 75 Squadron, which is based at Ohakea, was mainly employed in flying Mosquito aircraft from England to New Zealand, and is only now in the process of re-forming as an operational entity. During the period under review 57 Mosquito aircraft were flight delivered to New Zealand, bringing the total now in New Zealand to 63. Royal New Zealand Air Force crews flew out 27 aircraft, R.A.F. crews 6, and the remaining 24 were flown by R.A.F. pilots with R.N.Z.A.F. navigators. No. 75