

AERO CLUBS.

Very valuable service has again been rendered by the aero clubs throughout the year. With their ground organization at the larger aerodromes, and the public interest they foster in all aviation matters, they play a very important part in the air defence of New Zealand.

One hundred selected candidates of the physical standard prescribed for the Air Force were trained by selected clubs throughout the Dominion for the Civil Reserve of Pilots. In addition, the clubs at Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, Dunedin, and Wanganui undertook the elementary training of candidates selected for training at Wigram for short-service commissions in the Royal Air Force and Royal New Zealand Air Force. These clubs are undertaking an important duty in training pilots for the Royal Air Force and the Royal New Zealand Air Force, and are doing the work in New Zealand which in England is done by civil flying training schools specially organized for that purpose.

AIR FORCE STRENGTH.

The strength of the Royal New Zealand Air Force on the 31st March, 1938, and the 31st March, 1939, was as follows :—

Regular Air Force—							1938.	1939.
Officers	..	..	..	..	..	..	37	57
Airmen	...	..	..	..	..	..	302	622
Reserve—								
R.N.Z.A.F. Reserve of Officers	..	..	..	..	..	..	13	16
Civil Reserve of Pilots	..	..	..	..	..	..	106	160
Territorial Air Force—								
Officers	..	..	..	..	..	..	73	79
Airmen	..	..	..	..	..	..	75	265
							606	1,199

CO-OPERATION WITH ROYAL AIR FORCE.

At the present early stage in the development of the Royal New Zealand Air Force, the Service is obviously dependent to a large extent on the Royal Air Force for specialist officers and flying training and technical personnel, as well as for equipment, and it is appropriate to acknowledge the very generous manner in which these requirements have been met by His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom. Without this assistance the difficulties inevitable in an expansion programme of the magnitude now being carried out would have been formidable. The New Zealand Air Liaison Officer at the Air Ministry has been most valuable in dealing with all questions of supply and personnel and in providing up-to-date and authoritative information on equipment, training methods, and other matters of interest to the Service. His appointment has been more than justified by results.

In the past year the system of interchanges between officers of the Royal Air Force and of the Royal New Zealand Air Force has been continued and extended, and a number of officers and men have proceeded overseas for refresher courses or specialist training in navigation, engineering, signals, and armament. The courses serve to bring the training of New Zealand officers up to date and to train selected officers for instructional duties in the Royal New Zealand Air Force.

During the year 144 New-Zealanders were selected and proceeded direct to the United Kingdom to take up short-service commissions in the Royal Air Force. Under arrangements made with His Majesty's Government, these men will return to New Zealand on completion of their service with the Royal Air Force. Some may be absorbed into the Regular Air Force in the Dominion, and the remainder will considerably strengthen the Reserve.

BUILDING PROGRAMME.

The extent of the building programme involved in the Air Force expansion can be most readily appreciated from a brief survey of the work carried out in the past two years. The year 1937 was chiefly devoted to engineering surveys of possible sites for the two operational stations, to the preparation of plans and specifications of the major buildings required at the various stations, and to surveys for ancillary services such as roads, water, and lighting involved in a scheme of this magnitude. By the end of March, 1938, tenders had been accepted for the majority of the buildings, and in some cases new construction, especially at the Flying Training School, Wigram, and the Air Base, Hobsonville, was well under way.

At Ohakea, the Medium Bomber Squadron Station near Palmerston North, building has been in progress since the end of February, 1938. The major buildings, including one of the two concrete hangars, station headquarters, officers' mess and quarters, and airmen's barracks, are nearing completion, and will be ready for occupation in time to receive the first flight of Wellington aircraft about October. The total cost of the contracts in hand at this station is £384,000.

Satisfactory progress is now being made in the construction of the second station at Whenuapai, near Auckland. Work on this station did not commence until approximately nine months after Ohakea, owing to the difficulties experienced in obtaining a suitable site in this district and, subsequently, to the additional design work involved in the heavier foundations required for buildings. Contracts were let at the end of January, 1939, for the two concrete hangars, which should be completed by April, 1940. A contract was also let early in March, 1939, for the airmen's barracks, which should be ready for occupation by the same date. Satisfactory progress has been made with the levelling and drainage of the flying-field, a portion of which has already been grassed.