

CHAPTER 5

THE NEW COMMAND

IN the early days of 1940, with Air Commodore Anderson acting as Chief of the Air Staff, the whole air force was working and thinking in expectation of the substantial changes in organisation and command that the new chief might introduce.¹ But in that interval the Air Board had not been idle. Despite its earlier decision to refrain from adopting a new pattern of organisation because it foresaw just such an appointment as Air Chief Marshal Burnett's, it had before it a revised plan for the war effort of the R.A.A.F. Preparation of this plan was virtually the last task performed by Air Vice-Marshal Goble before he resigned his appointment as Chief of the Air Staff. So far as it concerned the European war theatre it was based on reports from two Australian overseas missions—the one which, at Ottawa, had negotiated the Empire air plan and the other which, with Group Captain Bostock as its air adviser, had shared in the London Defence Conference. For further guidance on this phase there was a detailed cablegram to the Prime Minister from Mr Casey who, as Minister for Supply and Development, had been negotiating for defence supplies in London and visiting the army and air force in the field in France. This cable contained a proposal for the establishment of an Australian overseas base depot in anticipation of the arrival in Britain of the first of many Australian E.A.T.S. men from Canada and Australia.

In his outline plan Goble placed heavy emphasis on the decentralisation of the home organisation. He proposed that the home defence program of 19 squadrons should proceed, subject to No. 10 Squadron continuing to serve abroad and the "immediate" dispatch overseas of No. 3 (Army Cooperation) Squadron for training with the 6th Division A.I.F. and subsequent active service with that division. If Japan should side with Britain or observe a "benevolent neutrality" and the seas could be cleared effectively of German raiders, other squadrons might be sent to relieve R.A.F. squadrons in such places as Singapore and Egypt. Ground maintenance and administrative staff should be sent to Britain as they could be afforded and, together with Australian E.A.T.S. aircrews, "filtered" into R.A.F. squadrons which should then be taken over as units of the R.A.A.F. When Australian squadrons predominated on R.A.F. stations, station and group staffs should be sent from Australia to command them. Goble considered that the aim should be the formation of eight squadrons in each of the next three financial years, timed to meet the first output of aircrew, which would mean an additional commitment of about 2,500 administrative and ground staff each year. All aircrew in excess of those needed for these squadrons should be placed at the disposal of the R.A.F. To meet the needs of this plan the R.A.A.F. should have three major func-

¹ Burnett arrived at Darwin from London on 11th February 1940. The date on which he officially took up his new appointment, and formally took up his duties as Chief of the Air Staff at RAAF HQ was 15th February.

tional commands in Australia—Home Defence, Training, and Maintenance; and a R.A.A.F. base should be established in Britain for administrative and record purposes.

For the home defence air force, which would be responsible for all air operations throughout Australia and for all stations and units so engaged, Goble calculated on the establishment of five new squadrons—one fighter, two army cooperation, one general reconnaissance (land-plane) and one general purpose—bringing the strength of the home defence force to 19 squadrons by June 1940.² Air Force Headquarters and the existing armament, signals, and engineering schools, equipment depots and No. 1 Flying Training School should all be expanded. For the proposed Training Command the Air Board favoured five self-contained groups formed on a geographical basis with a combination of units in each.

Thus Goble had planned. As for the immediate situation, by February some progress was being made with the training of civil pilots as instructors and Mr Fairbairn was able to announce that arrangements had been made for 236 experienced civil pilots to receive service training. On 28th February the War Cabinet reversed the decision of the full Cabinet in November 1939 and decided (as Goble seems to have assumed it would) that “for national and training reasons” an Australian squadron should accompany the 6th Division abroad.

As for the E.A.T.S. program itself, Mr Menzies, in a press statement issued next day, claimed that its adoption would mean that Australia’s air strength would be increased seven times in aircraft³ and eleven times in manpower. This buoyant statement referred to 591 Avro Ansons and 336 Fairey Battles to be provided by Britain as training aircraft but which were “considered capable of holding their own against any sea-borne aircraft likely to be brought against them in Australian waters”. The statement added: “The great increase in Australian air defensive strength, which is larger than that proposed by the Government’s advisers for defence against the probable scale of attack, should in conjunction with the Navy and the Army, render the Commonwealth secure against any serious attack.”

The new Air Board in its approach to the task of reorganisation to the pattern best fitted to the growing needs of the Service, agreed with Goble’s assertion that decentralisation was essential. It began by dividing the home Service into four areas.⁴ In this it followed the geographical method, the

² Additional establishments proposed included four recruit depots, six recruit centres, one engineering school, one central flying school (for instructors), six technical training schools, five aircraft depots (each with 1,000 officers and men), one equipment depot, two aircraft parks and two embarkation depots.

³ By 1,242 machines to 1,454, including 212 first-line aircraft proposed in the Home Force development program.

Total strength proposed in the pre-war program to be completed by June 1940 was 5,542 including 408 general duties officers; E.A.T.S. planning to March 1943 would provide 30,473 aircrew, and 27,000 ground staff.

⁴ Southern Area—all units in Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia and southern Riverina; Central Area—New South Wales except southern Riverina and northern New South Wales; Northern Area—northern New South Wales, Queensland, Northern Territory and Papua; Western Area—all units in Western Australia.

division being conditioned by the distribution of population and the use of existing stations and aerodromes as sites for flying schools, thus saving both time and money. The objective was to keep each area entirely self-contained in training, so that a trainee might remain in one area from the time he began his initial training until he embarked for service overseas. This allowed closer supervision of each trainee through the various schools, reduced travelling time, and simplified movement control. It was recognised that later, as the organisation expanded, subordinate groups would be needed; their form would be determined by experience. Nos. 1 and 2 Groups as they then existed provided the nucleus for the first two area headquarters, No. 1 Group in Melbourne becoming Southern Area headquarters and No. 2 Group in Sydney the headquarters of Central Area. The formation of Western Area and Northern Area was deferred, the tentative formation date being 1st October 1940.⁵

These areas had three basic defence tasks within their geographical boundaries: protection of naval, military and air force equipment and installations and all other vulnerable national centres against enemy air attack; protection of sea communications, including surface vessels, against submarine attack; reconnaissance of sea areas and enemy bases to provide Intelligence of enemy activity. If an attack was imminent, the air officer commanding in the area concerned was to assume operational control of all R.A.A.F. formations and units within that area.

The strain that was being placed on the technical services called for immediate consideration. After Ministerial conferences and discussions with the Air Board, Burnett first created the new post of Director-General of Supply and Production in place of the Air Member for Supply, a post until then held by Anderson. More and more the need for the local production of aircraft was impressing itself on the senior officers. It was clear too that much time was being spent on supply and production problems that lay outside the Service—problems that could be handled more properly by a separate staff—and that the obvious choice for the appointment of director-general would be a qualified civilian. The choice fell on Mr Robert Lawson,⁶ Chief Engineer of the Postmaster-General's Department, who consequently had wide experience of industrial production and contracting methods. His main task was to procure, so far as possible, the needs of the Service that were drawn from outside sources, and he was also to control the overhaul of airframes and engines.

The additional appointment of an Air Member for Organisation and Equipment was made to the Air Board. The duties attached to this appointment, which was in keeping with the British Air Ministry's pattern,

⁵ Formation of these areas was, in fact, deferred until early 1941; Western Area HQ formed in Perth on 9th January 1941 with Gp Capt De la Rue as AOC and Northern Area at Townsville, Queensland, on 8th May 1941 with Gp Capt Lukis as AOC. The first commander of Southern Area was Air Cmdre A. T. Cole and of Central Area Air Cmdre W. H. Anderson.

⁶ R. Lawson, OBE, Deputy Director Postal Services, Vic, 1933-36; Chief Engineer PMG's Dept 1936-40; Dir-Gen of Supply and Production, Air Board, 1940-42; Staff Business Mgr RAAF 1942-44; Technical Asst to Chief of Air Staff 1944-45. Of Canterbury, Vic; b. Liverpool, Eng, 29 Feb 1880. Died 5 Aug 1949.

were the control of organisation and works services, all equipment stores and supplies within the Service and all repair and maintenance undertaken in Service establishments. The new post, as mentioned, went to Williams, who had now achieved the distinction of being the R.A.A.F.'s first air marshal and who, so recently from London, was well acquainted with the comparable organisation at the Air Ministry.

The duties of the Chief of the Air Staff were unchanged except that he was relieved of the responsibility for organisation and works services and was thus free to concentrate on high policy and the general direction of the air force. The branch immediately under his control, known as the C.A.S. Branch, had four directorates as had the branches of the Air Member for Organisation and Equipment and the Air Member for Personnel. The branches of the Director-General of Supply and Production and the Finance Member had three directorates each, which made a total of 18 compared with 12 at the end of 1939.⁷ Anderson became Air Member for Personnel in place of Russell who returned to Britain. Langslow, Secretary of the Department of Air, continued for the time, to hold the additional appointment of Finance Member. Bostock, as Burnett's deputy, quickly established himself as the "right-hand man".

The R.A.A.F. Directorate of Operations and Intelligence joined with the navy and the army in planning the Central War Room—the operational fountain-head for the three fighting Services. In the War Room, situated at Victoria Barracks, Melbourne, the operational staff resources of the Services were to be pooled under the control of the three Chiefs of Staff, who met frequently so that there was coordination on the highest plane. An important adjunct was to be the Combined Operations and Intelligence Centre—abbreviated to C.O.I.C.—in which a staff of officers contributed by the three Services sifted all Intelligence material and provided the appreciations on strategical and other important problems on which the Chiefs of Staff based their war plans.⁸ For specifically trade defence operations the naval and air forces were coordinated in Area Combined Headquarters (A.C.H.) established in the four focal areas—South-Western (Fremantle), South-Eastern (Melbourne), North-Eastern (first Port Moresby and later Townsville) and North-Western (Darwin). Each of these headquarters with its own C.O.I.C. (including a mercantile movements section) controlled the naval and air forces allotted to the area and had authority to initiate trade defence operations against the enemy.

For specifically defended ports, to which naval, military and air forces had been assigned, Combined Defence Headquarters (C.D.H.) had been set up, their purpose, as their name implied, being to provide coordinated

⁷ CAS Branch: Deputy CAS, Operations and Intelligence, Staff Duties, Signals; AMOE: Organisation, Equipment, Technical Services, Works and Buildings; AMP: Personal Services, Training, Recruiting, Medical Services; D-GSP: Supply, Production, Aeronautical Inspection; Finance: Chief Finance Officer (civil directorate), Senior Audit Officer (civil directorate), Stores Accounts.

⁸ By direction of the War Cabinet both C.W.R. and C.O.I.C. were placed on a full-time basis on 27th February 1941.

operations to counter an enemy attack. In addition to the four centres at which the trade defence organisation of Area Combined Headquarters had been established, Combined Defence Headquarters were set up at Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide, Hobart, Port Moresby, Newcastle and Thursday Island.

The other part of the Directorate of Operations and Intelligence, the section concerned specifically with Intelligence, was still in the developmental stage throughout 1940 and the first half of 1941. Notable in the inter-Service Intelligence structure was the coastwatching organisation which had been initiated by the Royal Australian Navy as an outcome of a staff paper produced as long ago as 1919, followed by joint Service talks in 1922. The organisation was subsequently developed by the Naval Intelligence Division to a high state of efficiency. It demanded not only very competent direction at the centre, but great individual courage and resource in the field.⁹

Before Williams was appointed Air Member for Organisation and Equipment, organisation was controlled by the Directorate of Organisation and Staff Duties, in the C.A.S. Branch. Organisation was now made a separate directorate, under the control of Williams, and was responsible for the detailed plans on which executive action by other directorates was based.

The effect of the changes on the Directorate of Technical Services, which was as old as the R.A.A.F. itself, was to divide its staff to meet the needs of both the new branches. The directorate, as such, was placed in the charge of the Air Member for Organisation and Equipment and the Director-General of Supply and Production was given two new directorates—production and supply. The first of these had responsibility for the Service aspects of local production, particularly in aircraft. Squadron Leader Armstrong¹ became Director of Production and Wing Commander Mackinolty² Director of Supply, with responsibility for the provision of all air force equipment and stores and representation on the Contract Board, the Department of Supply, and the Commonwealth Oil Board.³

For partial relief from the acute shortage of aircraft and spares, the technical services turned to development of repair, maintenance and salvage, facilities for which were then very inadequate. The increasing demands made by flying training were first met by centralising maintenance in training units and eking out resources by allocating repair work to civil engineering shops. Aircraft erection parks and depots were established

⁹ Eventually more than 700 watchers were stationed at coastal vantage points on the Australian mainland and island territories. For detailed studies see G. Hermon Gill, *Royal Australian Navy, 1939-42* (1957), Ch. 3, in the naval series of this history; and E. Feldt, *The Coast Watchers* (1946).

¹ Air Cmdre W. S. Armstrong, CBE. Deputy Director of Technical Services 1932-34, 1937-40; Director of Production 1940-42; Director of Technical Services 1942-45. Regular air force offr; of Melbourne; b. Melbourne, 4 Jan 1904. Died 29 Oct 1956.

² AVM G. J. W. Mackinolty, OBE. (1st AIF: 1st Half Flight and 2 Sqn AFC.) Director of Supply RAAF 1940-42; Air Member for Supply and Equipment 1942-50. Regular air force offr; of Melbourne and Korumburra, Vic; b. Leongatha, Vic, 24 Mar 1895. Died 24 Feb 1951.

³ Representation on the Oil Board was transferred to the Directorate of Equipment at the end of 1940.

to deal with new aircraft. Central recovery depots were set up to reclaim urgently needed spares from crashed aircraft and other damaged equipment.

"Works and Buildings", or "Works and Bricks" as it was popularly termed in the Service, became one of the most important directorates at this stage because its own development was a controlling factor in the development of the whole Service. It began the war period within the branch of the Chief of the Air Staff with Squadron Leader Hancock⁴ as director. All suitably qualified Citizen Air Force officers were called up to serve in the Directorate and civil engineers, architects and surveyors were enlisted as rapidly as possible. In the March reorganisation it was transferred to the new branch under Williams and, at Burnett's direction, a number of experienced general duties and equipment officers were released for work for which they had been basically trained while, after a review by a special committee, it was agreed that the directorate should be staffed partly by officers of the Commonwealth Department of the Interior. It was decided on 4th April 1940 that the directorate should prepare all preliminary plans under instructions from the Air Board, but that its officers should remain in the control of the department. The Works Director, Air Services, in the department, Mr E. Knox,⁵ was appointed Director of Works and Buildings and later was given the honorary rank of group captain.

Aeronautical inspection was another phase of highly-skilled technical work that assumed a civilian aspect under war conditions, and was placed under Lawson's branch. Its Service practice dated back to 1928, but the 1940 reorganisation caused it to be placed on a civilian basis so that men with engineering qualifications and experience, who for various reasons were not eligible to join the R.A.A.F. might be employed. Approximately 28 members of the directorate were granted permanent civil appointments and 12 were seconded for duty with the re-formed directorate which remained in the control of its original director, Group Captain E. Harrison, whose experience of military aviation dated back to 1912. Inspection areas were established at Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth, each with an inspector-in-charge and associate staff. As the Beaufort production program began, and aircraft and spare parts were impressed from the civil aviation field, the inspection staff was substantially increased.

The background for this highly-specialised work was, of course, Australia's aircraft industry which, though beset by many supply and manpower problems, was at last making appreciable headway. The Aircraft Construction Branch of the Department of Supply and Development was

⁴ AVM V. E. Hancock, CB, CBE, DFC. Director of Works and Buildings 1938-40; comd 1 BAGS 1940-42; Director of Plans, Allied Air HQ 1942-43; SOA Western Area 1943-44; comd 100 Sqn and later 71 Wing 1945; AOC Malaya 1957-59. Regular air force offr; b. Perth, WA, 31 May 1907.

⁵ Air Cmdre E. Knox. (1st AIF: 22 Bn and 2 MG Bn.) Engineer for NSW and member of C'wealth Shipping Board 1937-40; Director of Works and Buildings RAAF 1940-45; RAAF Representative Allied Works Council 1942-45. Civil engineer; of Manly, NSW; b. Benalla, Vic, 27 Jan 1899.

reconstituted on 21st March 1940 as the Aircraft Production Commission, a statutory body with authority over all aircraft production establishments in Australia. For the first three months the commission remained with the Department of Supply and Development, but in June, with the formation of a Department of Munitions, it was transferred to that department. Mr Harold Clapp,⁶ who had resigned from the post of Chairman of Commissioners of the Victorian Railways to become general manager of the Aircraft Construction Branch, became the commission's chairman.⁷ He was given over-riding executive authority. The commission's responsibilities extended to the control of aircraft and aero-engine production in Australia, the maintenance and operation of factories established or purchased by the Commonwealth for aircraft production, the making of agreements or contracts for the acquisition, manufacture or assembly of aircraft and for the overhaul and repair of aircraft, the supply either locally or from overseas of materials, tools and equipment, the development of local sources for the supply of raw and fabricated materials, and the control and limiting of profits from the manufacture of aircraft.

Late in 1940 the Aircraft Production Commission undertook the organisation of the overhaul and servicing of all trainer aircraft and engines by civilian contractors, and the R.A.A.F. Directorate of Aeronautical Inspection therefore established "resident" stations at Mascot, Essendon, Parafield, Archerfield, Maylands and Newcastle. The beginning of the Gipsy Major engine-production program in 1940 also entailed the sub-contracting of parts' manufacture in engineering shops scattered throughout Australia. Inspection of this work and of the final assembly of the engines at the General Motors-Holden's works at Melbourne was done by the directorate, which also supervised the manufacture of parachutes and their components.

As the air force expanded, an increase in flying accidents, chiefly in training, was inevitable. These caused periodic outbursts of press and parliamentary criticism and in June 1940 an Inspectorate of Air Accidents was set up to make confidential reports to the Minister on all serious accidents.

It was noteworthy that the enlistment of men of non-European origin was regarded by the War Cabinet as undesirable in principle but justified to provide for special needs. In the R.A.N. and the A.I.F. aliens and non-Europeans generally were declared to be "neither necessary nor desirable", but in February 1940 the War Cabinet had specifically permitted their enlistment in the R.A.A.F. at the discretion of the Air Board.

⁶ Sir Harold Clapp, KBE, Chairman Vic Rlwys Commrs 1920-39; Chairman Aircraft Production Commn 1940-42; Dir-Gen of Land Transport 1942-44. B. Melbourne, 7 May 1875. Died 21 Oct 1952.

⁷ The other commissioners were: F. J. Shea and J. S. Storey (executive members), R. Lawson (Dir-Gen Supply and Production, Department of Air), A. S. V. Smith (chairman of the Contracts Board, Department of Supply and Development), E. R. Mitchell (representing the Treasury until Oct 1941), W. T. Harris succeeding Mr Mitchell as Treasury representative and V. F. Letcher (secretary).

By mid-April the strength of the R.A.A.F., which had numbered approximately 3,500 at the outbreak of war, was more than 9,000, but those on the waiting list were sufficient for the anticipated needs of the Service for the next six months. The immediate and the future needs in flying instructors were now assured and instructors in special subjects were being trained rapidly with the aid of a few R.A.F. officers who were provided to meet the R.A.A.F.'s deficiencies in this field. Trained pilots were now becoming available in sufficient numbers to meet the demands of the new Service and training units being formed or to be formed. Experience was showing that the "all-round" instructor no longer met the needs of the training program; instructors must specialise and consequently specialist courses were opened at Point Cook and instructors were graded for either elementary or service training. Link trainer courses were also begun.⁸

All was not well, however, with the use of facilities offered by the civil companies for flying training, and in April the civil school plan was abandoned because its financial basis presented difficulties and certain aspects of training were unsatisfactory. Some aircraft being used were, in the opinion of R.A.A.F. officers, of "questionable airworthiness". On 29th April the Instructors' Training Squadron at No. 1 Service Flying Training School, Point Cook, was separated and established with its own aircraft as the Central Flying School; in June it was moved to Camden, New South Wales. Its first commanding officer was Squadron Leader Bates,² R.A.F. Also on 29th April the first E.A.T.S. aircrew trainees were inducted at No. 1 Initial Training School at Somers, Victoria, where, in pre-war days, a boys' camp had been inaugurated by Lord Somers, a former Governor of Victoria. Its first commanding officer was Flight Lieutenant White, a member of the Commonwealth Parliament, whose parliamentary duties could not outweigh an enthusiasm for the air force born of his 1914-18 War experience and deep interest in civil flying between the wars. Under his command the first intake of E.A.T.S. trainees in Australia, 36 pilot pupils,³ started training. The first program provided for a course lasting one month, but it was extended to two months to coincide with the Empire program and the elementary and service flying training schedules.

The first of its kind, this school demonstrated some of the early E.A.T.S. problems in Australia. It began with the disadvantage of a complete lack of Link trainers which had become almost an essential to primary flying instruction. Early in the school's history there was discontent among trainees who were asked to sign a form designating them as "air gunners"

⁸ This trainer was a hooded facsimile of an aircraft cockpit in which flying conditions were simulated to test the trainee's reactions and capacity. At later stages of training it was used to raise the standard of instrument (blind) flying.

² Gp Capt E. C. Bates, CBE, AFC, 29122, RAF. Chief Flying Instructor 1 FTS (later 1 SFTS) Point Cook 1939-40; comd Central Flying School Camden, NSW, 1940- , 37 and 39 SFTS's Canada 1942-44, 31 Base Stradishall, Eng, 1944-45. Regular air force offr; b. East Fremantle, WA, 9 Jun 1906.

³ Twelve were from NSW, 10 from Victoria, 10 from Queensland and 4 from Tasmania.

and not "wireless air gunners". Parents wrote to the commanding officer complaining that their sons had been deceived as they thought they were to become pilots. Their complaints were sympathetically received and White proposed to R.A.A.F. Headquarters that, initially, all trainees should be described as "aircrew" and that they should be classified after entry into the school. Early records of this unit also noted the first appointment to the instructional staff of an air force school of a teacher from the Victorian Education Department, with the added comment that the department had been reluctant to release teachers for the E.A.T.S.

The education services of the R.A.A.F. at this time were being expanded as rapidly as possible. These were within the Directorate of Training with Wing Commander Sheath⁴ as Principal Education Officer. In the beginning practically all the section's effort was directed towards some form of service training although general education was developed as circumstances permitted. The main problem was the common one of staff shortage. The Education Department's dilemma was great, for all the Services required teachers and in the R.A.A.F. the need was probably most urgent. A high educational standard was imperative in the building of an air force; it was vital if full use was to be made of trainees who possessed the aptitude but lacked the educational standard for graduation to the more highly qualified musterings. The pre-entry instruction of reservists on the waiting list also placed a big burden of work on the education officers. By the end of 1940 more than 7,000 reservists were receiving instruction and 1,500 honorary instructors were engaged at 400 centres in Australia. Towards the end of the year a Visual Training Section was formed. Using 16-mm sound films and 35-mm strip films in addition to printed pictorial material, this section developed an important phase of service training. While actual combat operations remained distant from Australia all operational training for the home squadrons was undertaken by the operational squadrons themselves, sufficient men for the various aircrew categories being drawn from E.A.T.S. service flying and other appropriate schools as needed.

Recruits for the ground staff came into two categories—those who needed service training only and those who needed trade training in addition. It was obvious that the demands of industry and the three fighting Services would soon exhaust the supply of skilled men and trade training was planned which aimed at turning unskilled recruits into competent tradesmen. Basic technical training was given by R.A.A.F. schools established in State technical schools and the trainees then went on to No. 1 Engineering School.

It was becoming evident to the Air Board that, with increasing commitments in aircrew and ground staff both for home defence and overseas service, it would not be long before there was a shortage of men. Establishment of a women's auxiliary for the R.A.A.F. had been under discussion

⁴ Gp Capt H. C. Sheath, 253756, Directorate of Training and Educational Services 1940-44; Director of Educational Services 1944-45. Civil Education Officer, RAAF; of Ivanhoe, Vic; b. Sydney, 17 May 1907.

by the Air Board and in Ministerial circles for some months. These discussions had originated in a proposal by Mrs Bell,⁵ then commanding officer of the Women's Air Training Corps, a voluntary organisation which had been in existence since April 1939, that the Air Board should consider the engagement of women for service in the air force. At that stage the Air Board took no action, but Mr Fairbairn, on his return from Canada, sought full particulars from the Air Ministry about the formation of the British Women's Auxiliary Air Force.

Mrs Bell, wife of Group Captain J. R. Bell, had since 1926 been a pilot and licensed ground engineer. She formed the W.A.T.C. in Brisbane to coordinate the efforts of a number of girls who were trying to train themselves at Archerfield to be ready to undertake aircraft work in the event of war. In September 1939 Mrs Bell went to Melbourne where her husband had been posted and was asked by an organisation named the Women's Voluntary National Register to form a division of the W.A.T.C. there. This division was soon about 1,000 strong and organised into ten squadrons each about 100 strong. Two of these trained on motor transport and one each in wireless telegraphy, stores, cooking, etc., photography and draughting, clerical work, as aircraft hands, on aero engines, on miscellaneous duties. Divisions of the W.A.T.C. were formed later in Tasmania, then New South Wales, South Australia and Western Australia. Mrs Bell became Australian Commandant, and each division had a commandant and staff. The members of the corps gave much voluntary service to the R.A.A.F. as drivers, clerks and so on. On 12th December 1940, the War Cabinet approved the formation of a women's auxiliary, subject to the approval of the Advisory War Council and to proof that the required number of male telegraphists were not available for the air force. Mr Fairbairn's successor as Minister for Air, Mr McEwen,⁶ made it very clear that he did not favour the enlistment of women in the air force unless it was unavoidable, but unavoidable it became, as he admitted in January when all efforts to obtain sufficient male telegraphists had failed. At this stage it was estimated that there were 650 positions on the establishment of the force suitable for women.

Burnett had to counter considerable opposition as when, at a meeting of the Advisory War Council, Mr Makin⁷ expressed the fear that the mixing of women with men on R.A.A.F. stations might create "difficulties". Burnett's answer was that in Britain the effect of W.A.A.F. and R.A.F. working together had been the reverse; it had benefited discipline.

⁵ Flt Offr M. T. L. Bell. Comd WATC 1939-41; Acting Director WAAAF 1941. Of Melbourne; b. Launceston, Tas, 3 Dec 1903. Mrs Bell resigned in 1941 and rejoined in October 1942, at the request of the Air Member for Personnel, but insisted that she should receive no promotion above the rank of flight officer. She served thereafter almost entirely in the medical directorate.

⁶ Rt Hon J. McEwen. MHR since 1934. Min for Interior 1937-39, for External Affairs 1940, for Air and Civil Aviation 1940-41, for Commerce and Agriculture 1949-56, for Trade since 1956; Deputy Prime Minister since 1958. Of Stanhope, Vic; b. Chiltern, Vic, 29 Mar 1900.

⁷ Hon N. J. O. Makin. MHR 1919-46 and since 1954. Speaker House of Reps 1929-31; Min for Navy and Munitions 1941-46, for Aircraft Production 1945-46; Ambassador to USA 1946-51. Of Woodville, SA; b. Petersham, NSW, 31 Mar 1889.

So it was that on 9th January 1941 the Advisory War Council agreed that women should be enlisted—but only “to the minimum number for a minimum period”.

On 24th February 1941 Mrs Bell was appointed acting director of the new service with the rank of flight officer, and on 10th March six more officers were appointed, all but one being former senior officers of the W.A.T.C.

I was given an office containing two tables, one chair, one form, one telephone and nothing else and told to get on with it (wrote Mrs Bell later). Luckily I had been associated with the R.A.A.F. since its formation when my husband was one of the original officers so knew most of the senior officers and my way about generally.

In the face of great difficulties and marked lack of enthusiasm on the part of some male officers the recruiting of airwomen began on 15th March.

On 25th March McEwen, in the House of Representatives, announced the formation of the Women's Australian Auxiliary Air Force. Initial plans, he said, were for the enlistment of about 250 women as wireless and teleprinter operators and about 70 for administrative, cypher and domestic duties. The age range was from 18 to 40 years with an extension to 50 years in special circumstances. Enrolment was for a period not exceeding 12 months, which might be extended, and pay would be at the rate of approximately two-thirds of the rates for the corresponding ranks of airmen. Conditions for enrolment of officers were comparable to those for nurses.

Mr Makin replied for the Opposition, raising a series of objections which included the opinion that young men from technical schools could fill the vacancies in the Service for which women were now to be enlisted; that the formation of the W.A.A.A.F. would create a precedent for the army; that the Opposition disapproved of this means of securing “cheap labour” (rates of pay should be equal to those for men); that establishment of the auxiliary would enable the Government to send men overseas (to which the Opposition objected), and that “the air force was a man's job, anyway”. But the increasing need overruled all objections.

Mrs Bell guided the new corps through its difficult early months and on 31st May resigned, having learnt that a new director was to be appointed from outside the service and that it was intended that Mrs Bell should be her deputy. The new director was Miss Clare Stevenson⁸ who was given the rank of wing officer. By mid-November there were 49 officers and 698 airwomen on the strength, and a further 321 had been accepted for enrolment.

While the question of forming a women's auxiliary was being debated the related issue of recruiting generally was still presenting specialised

⁸ Gp Offr C. G. Stevenson. Gen Sec YWCA, Rockhampton, Qld, 1929-31. Director of WAAAF 1941-46. B. Wangaratta, Vic, 18 Jul 1903.

problems. On 9th April 1941, the War Cabinet agreed in principle that a single recruiting organisation should be maintained for the army and the air force. Sir Donald Cameron,⁹ who was giving notable service as chairman of the R.A.A.F. Volunteer Recruiting Drive Committee in New South Wales, was appointed chairman of the new organisation with Mr Banfield¹ as his deputy. A month later the War Cabinet considered R.A.A.F. recruiting specifically. At a conference between army and air force representatives held in October 1940 it had been agreed that members of the militia accepted for R.A.A.F. service might be released from the army if not regarded as indispensable, the R.A.A.F. undertaking to endeavour to conduct its recruiting early in the financial year so that men accepted for the air force could be "earmarked" as not available for army service. Facilities were given to R.A.A.F. recruiting officers to address militiamen in camp and to seek as volunteers members of the A.I.F. who were not under orders for embarkation.

On 27th February 1941 McEwen had secured the War Cabinet's approval for the formation of an R.A.A.F. cadet corps on a voluntary basis from youths, aged from 16 to 18 years, who proposed to join the air force at the age of 18. On 28th April 1941, the corps was renamed the Air Training Corps and Mr Robertson,² deputy chairman of the Victorian State Rivers and Water Supply Commission, who had had considerable experience with the organisation and training of air force reservists in Victoria, was appointed director with the rank of group captain. A nucleus of full-time R.A.A.F. members was posted to each wing of the corps, but otherwise it was staffed entirely by civilians on a voluntary part-time basis. The commanding, administration and instructional officers of each unit were given honorary commissions in the R.A.A.F. reserve, without pay.³

In the Directorate of Personal Services there was increasing proof of the need for a revision of the system of maintaining service records which were mounting rapidly as the R.A.A.F. itself expanded. The Records Section which had been formed in October 1939 came under review when the March 1940 reorganisation was in progress, and the British Air Ministry was asked to lend the R.A.A.F. an officer with wide experience in this work. The request was met promptly; Squadron Leader Goodwin,⁴ R.A.F., was appointed officer-in-charge of records and within a month the section had an establishment for 6 officers and 164 other ranks.

⁹ Col. Sir Donald Cameron, KCMG, DSO, VD. (1st AIF: Comd 5 LH Regt 1917-19.) MHR 1919-31, 1934-37. Chairman NSW Recruiting Drive Committee for RAAF 1940-41, of Joint Army-RAAF Recruiting Drive Committee 1941-45. B. Brisbane, 19 Nov 1879.

¹ C. R. F. Banfield, MBE. C'wealth Loans Director since 1940; Deputy Chairman Joint Army-RAAF Recruiting Drive Committee 1941-45. Journalist; of North Balwyn, Vic; b. Subiaco, WA, 9 Oct 1899.

² Gp Capt W. A. Robertson. (1st AIF: 10 Fd Coy Engrs and 2 Sqn AFC.) Director of ATC 1941-43. Engineer; of Melbourne; b. Albert Park, Vic, 30 Mar 1896. Died 12 Oct 1943.

³ Commanders of the six wings formed, each of whom had a record of air service in 1914-1919 were: F-Os E. A. Cato (Vic), N. B. Love (NSW), W. W. Pike (Qld), Sir A. G. Barrett (SA), C. W. Snook (WA) and H. A. Wilkinson (Tas).

⁴ Gp Capt N. T. Goodwin, CBE, 19020, RAF. Directorate of Personal Services, RAF and RAAF; Dep Dir of Postings RAAF HQ 1942-44; SPSO, HQ ACSEA 1945-46. Regular air force offr; b. Shoreham, Sussex, Eng, 21 Dec 1900. Died 8 Jul 1952.

The reorganisation in March also freed the Directorate of Medical Services from the control of the Director-General of Medical Services (Army) and the R.A.A.F. shared in the representation on the Services Medical Directors' Committee. The introduction of the E.A.T.S. called for an immediate expansion of the directorate which was accomplished on the advice of Group Captain Daley who had gained first-hand knowledge of the R.A.F. medical services when on exchange duty from 1936 to 1938. Mr Hurley,⁵ a leading Australian surgeon, who in the 1914-18 War, after service on Gallipoli, had become Assistant Director of Medical Services, A.I.F., was officially appointed Director (subsequently altered to Director-General) of Medical Services in the R.A.A.F. with the rank of air commodore on 4th June 1940, with Daley as his deputy.

Another phase of air force development was emphasised in August 1941 when the Directorate of Operations and Intelligence was divided into two directorates as its name implied it might. With the formation of a separate Directorate of Intelligence Wing Commander Packer⁶ became the first director. His task was to plan an organisation that could cope with the collection and distribution of air Intelligence which would help in the assessment of the enemy's order of battle. Added to these and other direct Intelligence responsibilities was security, not only as it applied to air establishments and administration, but to communications and information, including the use of adequate codes and ciphers, and general precautions in procedure and in selection of staff.

Control of the release of information to the public was in itself a subject of great diversity. British rules and procedure formed the basis for the Australian censorship system⁷ though, in the initial days of the war, the Director of Military Operations and Intelligence exercised a general control over communications and publicity censorship with the Intelligence sections of the other two Services cooperating. This lasted until 7th September 1939, when the Prime Minister announced the establishment of a Department of Information with Sir Henry Gullett as Minister and Major Treloar⁸ as director. Thereafter the censorship of press, broadcasting and films passed to the new department in which Mr. Jenkin⁹ was chief

⁵ AVM Sir Victor Hurley, KBE, CB, CMG, VD. (1st AIF: 2 Fd Amb and ADMS AIF.) DGMS RAAF 1940-45. B. Melbourne, 3 Jan 1888. Died 17 Jul 1958.

⁶ Gp Capt G. Packer, 251800. Director of Intelligence 1941-42; comd Fwd Echelon RAAF SWPA 1942-43; SOA 1st TAF 1944-45. Asst Inspector Admin 1945. Accountant; of Brighton, Vic; b. Melbourne 14 Apr 1900. (Packer was a graduate of the Royal Military College, Duntroon, and had served first in the British Army and then in the RAAF from 1924 to 1932.)

⁷ Between the wars there had been discussions on a British Commonwealth-wide basis of the problems of censorship which was divided into two main divisions—communications and publicity. The Standing Inter-departmental Committee of Imperial Defence acted as the clearing house on questions of policy and there was a general coordination of regulations for the restriction of information to an enemy and the collection of Intelligence material from sources over which censorship was exercised. The British Ministry of Information, formed at the outbreak of war, though conceived in advance of that event, existed at once to inform the British people and exercise security control over news.

⁸ Lt-Col J. L. Treloar, OBE. (1st AIF: 1 Div HQ and O i/c War Records Sec.) Director Aust War Memorial 1920-52, of Dept of Information 1939-41; Offr i/c Military History Section 1942-47. Of Canberra; b. Port Melbourne, 16 Dec 1894. Died 28 Jan 1952.

⁹ P. B. Jenkin. Editor *News* (Adelaide) 1938-39; Chief C'wealth Publicity Censor 1939-41; Director Dept of Information 1941. Journalist; of Balwyn, Vic; b. Melbourne, 5 Aug 1895. Died 7 Sep 1941.

publicity censor. Representatives of the three fighting Services were appointed to the department which, in practice, deferred to each Service on all censorship specifically relating to it. A photographic committee was formed to control release of all pictorial material.¹

Information and censorship, though opposed in principle, were thus linked in wartime practice. While the fighting Services needed publicity they also needed security protection and, though there were times when sharp clashes occurred between those who felt that information was dispensed with dangerous liberality and those who complained that the censorship, unnecessarily restrictive, was exercised on the axiom "if in doubt, cut out", this very opposition was a salutary check on each. So far as information—or public relations as the Services chose to term it—was concerned, within the R.A.A.F. there was, in the beginning, considerable conflict behind the scenes between zealous public relations officers and conservative permanent general duties officers.

Australia had been at war for nine months before action was taken to meet the need for a specific public relations organisation for the air force. With an intense recruiting campaign in progress and the strength of the Service growing daily, publicity was recognised as essential. Despite this the air force and the metropolitan daily press were in unhappy relationship—a relationship created by misunderstandings and lack of vision on both sides in the years immediately preceding the war. Senior officers of the Service, highly sensitive to public criticism and resenting newspaper stories which gave large headlines to air accidents, had adopted a rather autocratic stand and sought to prevent newspaper representatives from obtaining news, pictures and information generally. The newspapers accepted this as a challenge to what they declared were fundamental rights and to their capacity in news gathering, holding that their readers, the taxpayers, were entitled to know the worst as well as the best about a fighting Service for which they were paying. On the outbreak of war a truce was made and, Ministerial sanction having been given, a R.A.A.F. Public Relations Directorate was formed on 1st July 1940.² In that month Mr Leonard,³ a senior member of the staff of the Melbourne *Herald*, was appointed director. He was responsible directly to the Minister through the Secretary of the Department of Air. Leonard introduced a Service newspaper *Air Force News*⁴ which was self-supporting and which, together

¹ An example of the exercise of censorship of pictorial material for purposes of morale was provided by the War Cabinet when, in February 1941, it prohibited the publication of photographs of aircraft crashes in Australia.

² On 21 May 1940 Sir Keith Murdoch, managing director of *The Herald and Weekly Times Ltd*, Melbourne, was appointed Director-General of Information, responsible to the Prime Minister and with access to War Cabinet. He proposed that special men of the "news editor" type should be allotted to the three fighting Services and to the Munitions and Supply departments to "free" news and trace causes of complaints and so counter criticism. The policy he proposed was approved by War Cabinet on 19th June 1940.

³ Maj R. B. Leonard, Director Public Relations RAAF 1940-41 (Hon W Cdr). Editor *Guinea Gold* 1942-44. Journalist; of Elwood, Vic; b. Melbourne, 13 Mar 1907.

⁴ For security reasons *Air Force News* ceased publication after the entry of Japan into the war, Burnett and his Intelligence staff holding that it contained information which might help the enemy to determine the RAAF's order of battle. In April 1943 the directorate undertook publication of a fortnightly illustrated magazine *Wings* which was continued until the end of the war.

with his development of publicity through broadcasting services, did much to stimulate public interest.

In May, Leonard was succeeded by Mr McDonnell,⁵ an experienced Queensland journalist who, like his predecessor, was appointed with the honorary rank of wing commander and who, responsible to the Minister alone for the publicity policy of the Service, approached it with enthusiasm and energy. However, perhaps because of the method of his appointment, his efforts were regarded coldly by some members of the air staff, a situation that was not altogether surprising when the Chief of the Air Staff himself was openly opposed to publicity and went so far as to deny McDonnell the right to attend a daily conference at which he met all other directors of the Service.⁶

The expansion of R.A.A.F. Headquarters was designed to cope with the expansion of the Service generally. A pointer to this was provided on 26th June 1940 when Fairbairn re-submitted the 32-squadron plan to the War Cabinet. The plan provided that the force should be increased by thirteen squadrons with ancillary units. Carrying the recommendation of both the Minister and the Air Board, it was left with the Prime Minister, the three Service Ministers and the Treasurer, for examination.

At this stage achievement of the current 19-squadron program was in sight except that Nos. 4 and 7 Squadrons each comprised only a nucleus, and formation of No. 5 Squadron had been deferred until there were more aircraft. The works construction program was satisfactory except that undertakings at three of the most important bases—Townsville, Darwin and Port Moresby—were still incomplete.

The War Cabinet's next step towards deciding whether to adopt the 32-squadron plan was to inform the Australian Minister to Washington, Mr Casey, that Britain had been obliged to suspend the export of Anson and Fairey Battle aircraft (the embargo still applied at this time) and ask him to examine the prospects of obtaining aircraft from America, but it was insisted that any Australian request must not prejudice Britain's requirements; the course of world events had, in four months, changed Menzies' optimistic picture of a seven-fold increase in aircraft rendering Australia secure from serious attack into one revealing a serious shortage.

To resolve doubts about the War Cabinet's intentions the Minister for Air, in a memorandum to the Secretary to the Air Board, explained that his recommendation that the force should be increased by 13 squadrons had been approved so far as its desirability was concerned, but that no consequential commitments such as the building of stations were to be accepted until it was known whether adequate aircraft were available. Despite this qualification planning was to proceed "forthwith".

⁵ W Cdr L. F. McDonnell, Director of Public Relations RAAF 1941-45. Journalist; of Canberra; b. Sydney, 3 Aug 1908.

⁶ This situation led McDonnell to write subsequently that "in the early days of the war the difficulties encountered by PRO's in the discharge of their duties, which had been approved by the Minister, the department and the Air Board were almost insuperable. . . . The extraordinary change in the attitude of the Air Staff towards publicity before the end of the war, however, was adequate evidence of the value of good public relations."

The final step in achieving a nominal strength of 19 squadrons was taken on 9th January 1941 when, delivery from overseas of aircraft in limited numbers having been resumed, No. 5 (Army Cooperation) Squadron was formed at Laverton. Even then little more than a bare beginning—a headquarters and one flight—was made with this unit.

By the second quarter of 1941 the 32-squadron plan was being advanced again. Better and therefore more expensive aircraft were now being sought and the plan seemed likely to prove very costly. An authorised expenditure of £11,951,405 had risen to £15,798,065, a fact which caused Mr Fadden⁷ (as Federal Treasurer) at a meeting of the War Cabinet in May to express concern at the “high standard and cost adopted by the Department of Air” in the layout and construction of R.A.A.F. stations. He had noted, he said, that the Board of Business Administration was constantly urging economy and that, though certain of the Air Board’s recommendations had been adopted, there still were grounds for “considerable economy”. In giving approval for the increased expenditure on the plan the War Cabinet directed that all departments must exclude non-essential provisions from their projects and that reasons should be given to the War Cabinet for any lag in the granting of authority for works approved. A report from the Air Board detailed the aircraft required for the program: 238 general reconnaissance bombers (Hudson or a substitute), 243 general purpose aircraft as replacements for Wirraways, 27 fleet cooperation aircraft to replace Seagull amphibians still in service but obsolete, 11 Catalina flying-boats, and 50 long-range, two-seater fighters. The War Cabinet cabled to the British Government asking whether it could meet any of these requirements. If early deliveries could not be promised the War Cabinet wished to know whether Australia might retain the 90 Beauforts being built by the Commonwealth for the R.A.F.

A matter of considerable interest to the air force was raised on 9th May 1941 when the War Cabinet discussed a recommendation by the Army Minister, Mr Spender,⁸ that Lieut-General Sturdee⁹ should be appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Australian Military Forces and Major-General Northcott¹ Chief of the General Staff, and that the Military Board should be abolished. Mr Fadden, then acting as Prime Minister during Mr Menzies’ absence abroad, suggested that the application of similar principles to the air force would be raised. The then Air Minister (Mr McEwen) was strongly opposed to any such proposal, and said that with the existence of three separate commands—the A.I.F. in the Middle

⁷ Rt Hon Sir Arthur Fadden, GCMG. MHR 1936-58. Min for Air 1940; Treasurer 1940-41, 1949-58; Prime Minister Aug-Oct 1941. Of Townsville, Qld, and Brisbane; b. Ingham, Qld, 13 Apr 1895.

⁸ Hon Sir Percy Spender, KCVO, KBE. MHR 1937-51. Treas 1940; Min for Army 1940-41, for External Affrs 1949-51; Aust Ambassador to USA 1951-58. Judge of the Court of International Justice 1958-. B. Sydney, 1 Oct 1897.

⁹ Lt-Gen Sir Vernon Sturdee, KBE, CB, DSO. (1st AIF: CRE 5 Div 1917-18; GSO2 GHQ BEF 1918.) CGS AMF 1940-42, 1946-50; GOC First Army 1944-45. Regular soldier; of Melbourne; b. Frankston, Vic, 16 Apr 1890.

¹ Lt-Gen Sir John Northcott, KCMG, KCVO, CB. (1st AIF: 12 Bn.) GOC 1 Armd Div 1941-42; CGS AMF 1942-45; C-in-C BCOF Japan 1945-46. Governor of NSW 1946-57. Regular soldier; of Melbourne; b. Creswick, Vic, 24 Mar 1890.

East, the A.I.F. in the Far East and the A.M.F. in Australia—maintenance of the Military Board system appeared essential for effective administration and coordination. Mr Spender replied that he was convinced that the appointment of at least a General Officer Commanding army field forces in Australia was desirable. The War Cabinet approved of this in principle.

Despite its intricacies, the timing of the E.A.T.S. program as a whole was good. The date of the induction of R.A.A.F. pilot trainees at Somers in Australia—29th April 1940—coincided precisely with the induction of trainees, mainly Canadian and none of them Australian, at Canada's first initial training school at Toronto, Ontario, where the intake was 169 cadets.²

The first meeting of the Supervisory Board set up to administer the plan in Canada was held in Ottawa on 24th January 1940. Its first chairman was Mr Norman Rogers,³ Canada's first wartime Minister for National Defence, who had played a vital part in inaugurating the plan. But Rogers was not to live to see the fulfilment of his great task. Five months later, on 10th June 1940, an aeroplane in which he was flying from Ottawa to Toronto crashed and he was killed. For Australians this loss was much more than doubled when, only two months later, Mr Fairbairn, who had led the Australian delegation to the Empire Conference in Ottawa in 1939 and who as Minister for Air exercised considerable authority over the Commonwealth's contribution to the plan, died in similar circumstances. This accident, which occurred on 13th August near Canberra and in which all the occupants of the aircraft were killed, also cost Australia the lives of the Minister for the Army (Brigadier Street), the Vice-President of the Executive Council (Sir Henry Gullett), the Chief of the General Staff (General Sir Brudenell White) and Mr Fairbairn's private secretary, Mr Elford, who had been secretary to the Australian E.A.T.S. mission.⁴

When Sir William Glasgow arrived to take up his appointment as Australian High Commissioner in Canada he almost immediately began duty as a member of the board; his first attendance was on 8th April 1940. Early in the year the United Kingdom Liaison Officer in Chief, Air

² At 30th December 1940 12,576 aircrew had been selected under the EATS and 7,861 more were awaiting final examination. Of those selected, 3,219 were training in Australia, 697 in Canada, and 120 in Rhodesia (total 4,036). Since 3rd September 1939 23,490 airmen had been enlisted, and 1,786 more were now on the waiting list; of these 7,906 were training in Australia for overseas service. The total strength of the RAAF (excluding men selected but not yet in training) was 1,896 officers and 30,187 airmen.

³ Hon N. McL. Rogers. (1914-19: Canadian Mounted Rifles.) Professor of Political Science, Queen's University 1929-35, Min of Labour, Canada, 1935-39, of National Defence 1939-40. B. Amherst, Nova Scotia, 25 Jul 1894. Killed in aircraft accident 10 Jun 1940.

⁴ As though those who had wrought so well in planning a vast Empire Air Force had not already paid too dearly in air casualties, still another of the original planners lost his life in an air accident before the war ended. Mr H. A. Jones, who had been a member of the British air mission to Ottawa in 1939 and who, as a British Civil Liaison Officer in Canada, had attended the first meeting of the Supervisory Board, was killed when a RAF Transport Command aircraft was lost near the Azores on 27th March 1945. Mr Jones, an honorary air commodore in the RCAF, was the author of the British official history of the RFC and RAF in the 1914-18 War. He had held a number of senior appointments at the British Air Ministry.

Chief Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham,⁵ attended two meetings of the board; on leaving Canada to become Commander-in-Chief in the Far East he was succeeded by Air Vice-Marshal McKean⁶ who remained a member of the board until the E.A.T.S. ended. Shortly before the death of Mr Rogers the Canadian Government appointed as its first Minister for Air Mr Power⁷ who had attended meetings of the board to assist Mr Rogers and who was to succeed him as its chairman. Air Vice-Marshal Goble reached Ottawa in August 1940 and from that time Glasgow had the benefit of his technical and Service experience.

Australia's first monthly commitment for Canadian training was 40 pilots, 42 observers and 72 air gunners. Having passed their initial and elementary flying courses in Australia, the pilot trainees in this quota made up the first draft. They left Australia in the *Awatea* on 5th September and disembarked at Vancouver on 27th September, nine months after the Ottawa Conference had created the Empire plan. There was keen interest in their arrival and their welcome by the Canadian Government and people was extremely cordial. After a formal welcome in which the Lieutenant-Governor of British Columbia took part, the airmen in their distinctive blue uniform marched through crowd-lined streets to entrain for No. 2 Service Flying Training School at Uplands, near Ottawa, which they reached on 30th September. Two days later they began flying training in Harvard aircraft. Earlier it had been decided that, training requirements permitting, Australian trainees would be allocated to units in quotas of not fewer than 15.

The 12-weeks course at Uplands was completed by the first draft just before the full effects of the Canadian winter had been experienced and at their passing-out parade on 22nd November, 37 of the draft were awarded their wings by the Australian High Commissioner before a gathering of Australian and Canadian friends.

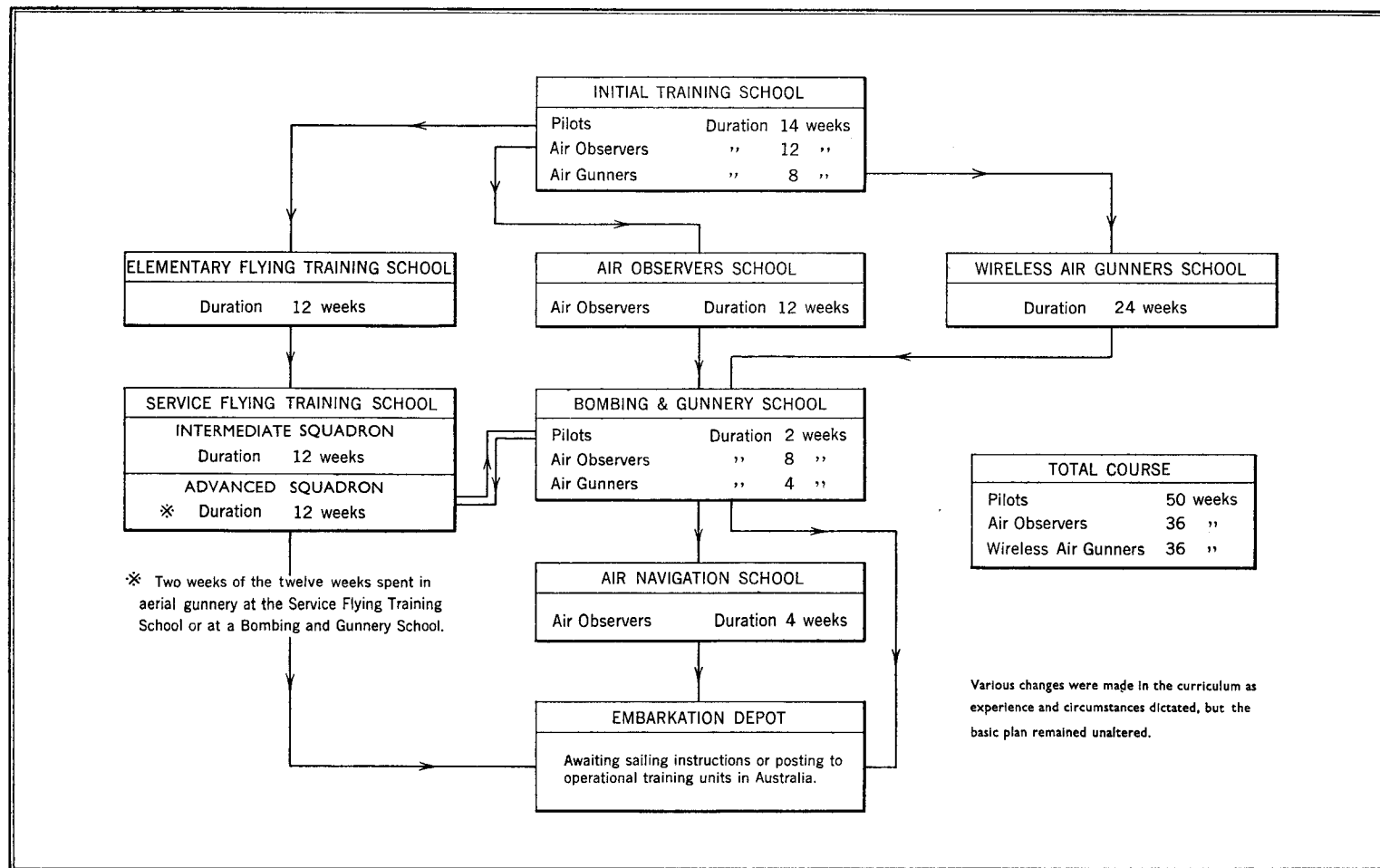
With the second draft of 40 Australian pilot trainees who arrived in Canada on 25th October, and who formed the first intake into No. 3 S.F.T.S. at Calgary, came the first Australian wireless air gunners—71 in number. It was in October, too, that the first aircrew graduates from the Empire plan—12 Canadian air observers—were commissioned and sent overseas for active service.

After the first two drafts of Australian pilot trainees the Australian contribution was increased to 80 for November and December. At the end of 1940 the total number of Australian trainees in Canada was 537, the total intake for the Canadian section of the plan being 10,147, compared with the planned intake for the period of 5,623. Of the 575 graduates to this date, all except 37 Australians from the first R.A.A.F.

⁵ Air Chief Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, GCVO, KCB, CMG, DSO, AFC. (1914-18: Maj RFC.) Inspector General RAF 1935-36; Governor of Kenya 1937-39; C-in-C Far East 1940-41. B. Wetheringsett, Suffolk, 18 Sep 1878. Died 20 Oct 1953.

⁶ AVM Sir Lionel McKean, KBE, CB. (1914-18: RNAS and RAF.) Head of RAF Mission, Canada, 1940-45. B. 1886.

⁷ Hon C. G. Power, MC. (1915-18: served overseas, A/Major.) Min of National Defence for Air, Canada, 1940-44. B. Sillery, Quebec, Canada, 18 Jan 1888.



The Empire Air Training Scheme—Australian curriculum

draft who had graduated at Uplands and had gone overseas were Canadians. Of the Australian graduates 13 had been awarded commissions. Twelve of these and 23 sergeants, all pilots, reached England on Christmas Day 1940.⁸

In Australia progress with the Empire plan throughout 1940 was satisfactory except that there was some lack of technical ground staff and that provision of equipment for instruction was lagging seriously.

Australian arrivals in Canada in 1941 began with a draft of 193 in January—79 pilot, 42 observer, and 72 wireless air gunner trainees. The February draft of 216 reflected the second increase in pilot quotas agreed to by the Australian Government—23 per cent. By March there were more than 1,163 Australian trainees in Canada—520 pilots trained or in training, 210 observers and 433 wireless air gunners. The acceleration in the plan as a whole was achieved by reducing the length of the courses.⁹

A new problem in E.A.T.S. development was revealed when the Air Board, in June 1940, had found that the intake of trainees was greater than either the Canadian or Australian sections of the program could absorb. The Australian Government therefore offered the British Government additional men for training either in Canada or Britain. The reply received by the Air Board on 6th July was that neither the Canadian nor British programs could accept higher quotas of Australian trainees for some time. As an alternative the British Air Ministry suggested that elementary flying training courses for Australian aircrews might be provided by the Government of Southern Rhodesia through the now well-established Southern Rhodesian Air Unit.¹

In December 1939 the South African Air Force had offered to train British subjects and on 27th July 1940, at the request of the British Government, General Smuts, who had succeeded to the Union's Prime Ministership on the day before South Africa declared war on Germany, agreed to the transfer of R.A.F. training schools to the Union under arrangements comparable with those accepted by Canada. But Australia's

⁸ The operational training and active service of Australian aircrew in Britain, Europe and the Middle East are described in Volumes III and IV of this series.

⁹ The original plan provided: manning depot 2 weeks; ITS 4 weeks (subsequently extended to 7 then 8 and eventually 10); EFTS 8 weeks (50 hours' flying); SFTS 16 weeks (divided into sub-sections for intermediate and advanced training); bombing and gunnery 2 weeks (abandoned before any pilots had graduated). Reductions in training time were made as from July 1940 so that the total pilot course was reduced from the original plan of 30 weeks to 25. In October the SFTS period was reduced from 14 weeks to 10 (75 hours' flying) and 3 courses of 56 trainees replaced 4 of 40 giving an SFTS peak of 168 trainees every 24 days. Increase in output was 40 per cent. In September 1941 ITS courses were lengthened to 7 weeks and in October to 8 to include time for navigation and other special subjects in these instead of subsequent courses. EFTS courses were extended to 8 weeks, later to 10 (60 hours' flying) and SFTS to 12 weeks (100 hours' flying), the SFTS intakes being increased from 56 to 58 to maintain output. (Intakes at Anson schools remained as previously owing to shortage of aircraft.) At the request of Air Ministry SFTS courses were again extended to 16 weeks as from 8th December 1941 and, as need for aircrew decreased, progressively to 20 weeks late in 1942. In March 1944 SFTS courses were divided into two—flying training in advanced trainer and advanced work with composite exercises. In June the course was extended to 28 weeks to provide post-graduate work, the course including 60 hours' flying and 145 of lectures.

¹ After a visit to South Africa by a RAF advisory mission in 1936 RAF officers were sent to reorganise the Southern Rhodesian Air Unit which, in its new form, began flying operations in July 1938.

interest was almost entirely associated with the Southern Rhodesian Air Unit.

On 24th May 1940 the first of four elementary flying training schools opened in Rhodesia and the organisation was developed to include four service flying training schools and a combined observer and air gunner school. The proposal that Australian trainees should be accepted by the Rhodesian training organisation was confirmed by the Rhodesian Government on 28th August and the Commonwealth Government agreed to send 40 trainees every four weeks to undergo all stages of training between the initial and the operational courses. The first draft left Sydney in the liner *Nestor* on 4th November and the second in the *Largs Bay* on 10th December, the date on which the first draft, which had disembarked at Durban, began training.²

The transit of these trainees to Rhodesia uncovered, incidentally, the poverty of R.A.A.F. administration overseas that had caused Williams much concern. Trainees arriving at Suez on their way to Rhodesia found poor administrative facilities for pay or the arrangement of their onward journey. An appeal by the R.A.F. for R.A.A.F. staff to cope with this need, though acknowledged and approved by the Air Board, was not attended to for some months. Meanwhile R.A.F. Headquarters, Middle East, not unreasonably, took what Burnett subsequently referred to somewhat tersely as "unilateral action", and appointed Wing Commander McLachlan³ of No. 3 Squadron R.A.A.F. as liaison officer.⁴

Flying training conditions in Rhodesia were excellent. The chief drawback was dust in the summer months and, as the sealing of runways was regarded as too great a problem, air filtering was relied on to check the abrasive action of sand on engine cylinder walls; as in Australian experience this was one of the main contributing factors to aircraft unserviceability.

Of 674 Australians who entered Rhodesian elementary flying schools 564 graduated, 58 were re-selected as observers, and six as air gunners.⁵ Of the 564 elementary school graduates, 514 passed out as pilots, 11 were re-selected as air observers, and one as an air gunner. There were 17 fatal training casualties from the service schools at which the average pilot wastage from all causes was 8.87 per cent. Over the whole of the training period the pilot wastage among Australians was 23.74 per cent and of that wastage, which totalled 260, 139 went to observer, navigator or air gunner courses. The over-all loss in aircrew was 13.50 per cent. Australians throughout were reported to have maintained a very much

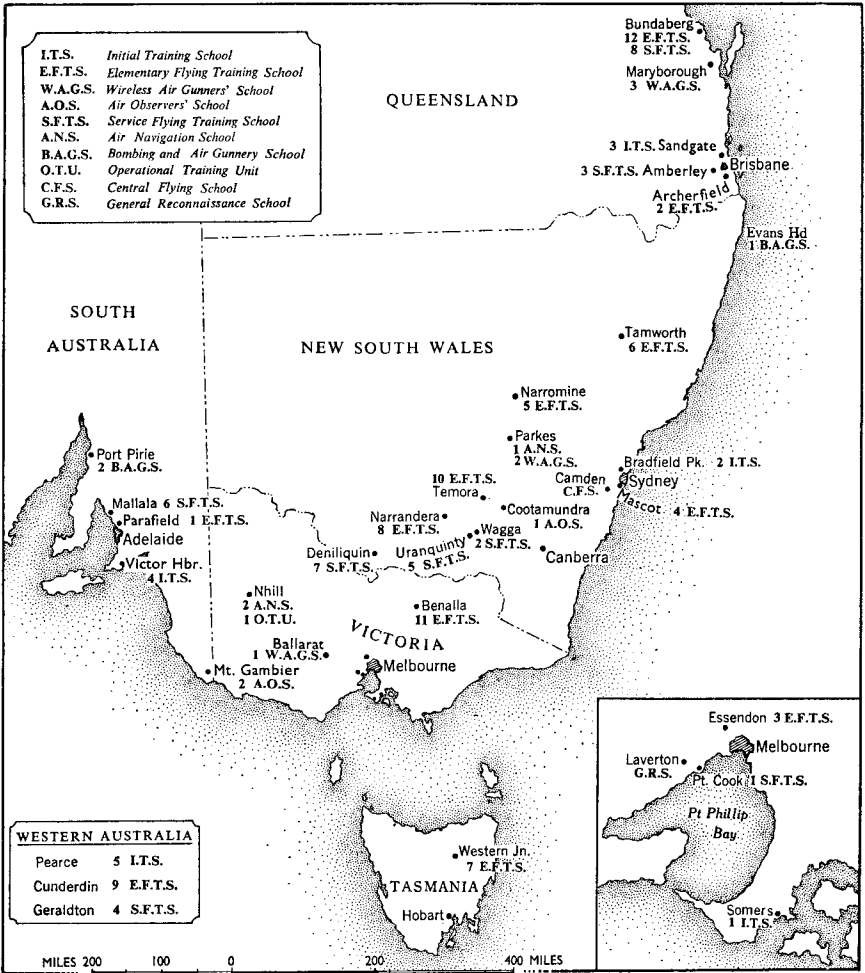
² In all, 12 drafts were sent to Rhodesia up to 7th January 1942.

³ AVM I. D. McLachlan, CBE, DFC. Comd 3 Sqn 1940-41, RAF Stn Benina 1941, RAAF Stns Canberra and Laverton 1942, RAAF Wing New Guinea 1943, 81 Wing 1945. Regular air force offr; of Melbourne; b. South Yarra, Vic, 23 Jul 1911.

⁴ For a detailed account see J. Herington, *Air War Against Germany and Italy, 1939-43*, in this series.

⁵ The few Australians associated with the SAAF training program were mainly trainees re-selected from pilot to air observer category and transferred to South African air observer schools before the Rhodesian Air Unit had arranged for such training.

higher standard than the average for the whole Rhodesian program. The R.A.A.F. liaison officer in Southern Rhodesia reported that station commanders repeatedly asked for more Australian cadets. Of 583 Aus-



E.A.T.S. schools for aircrew, December 1941

tralians who graduated in the various aircrew categories 156 were granted commissions (26.76 per cent of the total) on a basis comparable with that of the E.A.T.S. elsewhere—33 1/3 per cent on graduation for pilots and observers and 20 per cent for air gunners. Recommendations far in excess of the allotted percentage were received for Australian trainees, indicating anomalies in the commissioning system. The air liaison officer

reported to the Air Board: "Officers commanding state that they find great difficulty in omitting some Australians on the course who must be omitted if they keep to the 33 1/3 per cent rate. They say these trainees are far ahead in type and leadership of trainees from other sources."

Training in Australia had now expanded to such an extent that it became necessary to make its control independent of the areas into which the whole Service organisation had been divided in March 1940. On 2nd August 1941 two training groups—No. 1, with headquarters in Melbourne, and No. 2, with headquarters in Sydney—were formed on a part-regional, part-functional basis. Central Area was disbanded and its units divided as convenient between Northern Area, Southern Area and No. 2 Training Group.

A frequently-recurring problem for the War Cabinet in this period was the retention of the identity of Australians serving with the R.A.F. under the Empire plan. Mr Menzies had written to Mr Bruce on 26th March 1940 to guide him on this subject when taking part in a conference between representatives of Britain, Australia and New Zealand in London. First, the Australian Government sought that R.A.A.F. men should have the right to continue wearing their own distinctive uniform; Australia would meet any expense above that of the R.A.F. uniform. Further, R.A.A.F. aircrew should be grouped into squadrons, though it was realised that, particularly at first, composite squadrons would be unavoidable. When Australians provided 75 per cent or more of a R.A.F. squadron that squadron should then become known as an Australian squadron of the R.A.F. Officers from the Australian home defence force, either on exchange with R.A.F. officers or on direct loan, should command these squadrons and their flights. This was desirable not only to establish the Australian identity of the squadrons but to give officers of the home defence force experience in a war theatre. Menzies informed Bruce that if this system could not be arranged the effect on the morale of the R.A.A.F. would be "disastrous". Australia also desired that more senior officers should serve with the R.A.F. and that such officers should go overseas in advance of the R.A.A.F. trainees they might command. If, later, without endangering the capacity of the R.A.A.F. to meet its commitments for the E.A.T.S., it was possible to send ground staff overseas as well as aircrew, that would be done, these airmen being made available to the R.A.F. on the same conditions as those applied to the aircrews and for posting to the same squadrons. Since Britain would bear the financial cost of such squadrons it was not suggested that they be called R.A.A.F. squadrons. But, if Canada established the right to designate squadrons as being of the Royal Canadian Air Force, there seemed no reason why Australia should not have the same right, Menzies added. Each Australian R.A.F. squadron should be affiliated with an appropriate squadron of the R.A.A.F.; its record would then be added to the traditions of its R.A.A.F. counterpart.

The desire that Australians should gain senior command experience in the theatres of war was entirely commendable, but in fact, as will be seen, very few R.A.A.F. officers in the senior and middle ranks were to obtain active service experience in the war against Germany and Italy in 1940 and 1941.

The question of establishing overseas a R.A.A.F. base depot, which Casey had raised in a message to Bruce in 1939, was also becoming urgent. Air Chief Marshal Burnett, on 20th November 1940, after conferences with the Air Board decided that a nucleus staff headed by Group Captain De La Rue⁶ should be sent to Britain. But he had reckoned without Mr Langslow who, though no longer Finance Member or, at the time, a member of the Air Board, was responsible to the Minister for the higher financial direction of the Department of Air of which he was the permanent head. Langslow promptly objected to the overseas base proposal, for the formation of which, he claimed, the R.A.A.F. had no obligation since the British Government had accepted liability for all disembarkation, pay and maintenance facilities. The Air Ministry was again consulted and this time the Air Board was informed that an Australian base depot was considered unnecessary. Mr Bruce and Air Commodore McNamara,⁸ both of whom had originally favoured the proposal, now also reversed their opinions and supported the Air Ministry's latest suggestion that, instead, six comparatively junior officers and some airmen should be posted from Australia to serve in the R.A.F. Central Records Office and reception camp. About nine weeks later the base plan was abandoned and a number of junior officers were sent to serve with the R.A.F. staff at the main reception camp in England.

In December 1940 Mr Bruce took part in discussions in London between representatives of the British, Australian and New Zealand Governments, arranged in keeping with *Article XV* of the four-party E.A.T.S. agreement. The British Government's views as put to the conference by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Air, Captain Balfour, were that the air effort of each Dominion should be recognised by squadrons of its own air force in the field. Dominion squadrons might be formed with aircrews as they became available, allowing for wastage in aircrew strength under war conditions. Alternatively an assessment of the manpower effort contributed by each Dominion might be used as a basis for calculating the strength in squadrons which that manpower would maintain in the field in war conditions. The first method, Balfour said, would give a preponderance of Dominion squadrons with Dominion aircrews but with R.A.F. ground staff. The second method appeared to be the more satisfactory for account had to be taken of the rear organisation needed to maintain squadrons in the field. On this basis Australia would be entitled

⁶ Air Cmdre H. F. De La Rue, CBE, DFC. (1915-18: RNAS and comd 223 Sqn RAF.) Comd RAAF Stn Richmond 1937-40; AOC Western Area 1940-42; Insp RAAF Admin 1942-46. Regular air force off; of Kew, Vic; b. Auburn, NSW, 13 Mar 1891.

⁸ AVM F. H. McNamara, VC, CB, CBE. (1st AIF: 1 Sqn AFC 1916-18.) RAAF Liaison Offr, London, 1938-41; DAOC Overseas HQ RAAF 1941-42; AOC RAF Aden 1942-45. Regular air force off; b. Rushworth, Vic, 4 Apr 1894.

to "some 18" squadrons and New Zealand to 6, beyond those complete Dominion squadrons already serving in the theatres of war. Questioned by Bruce, Balfour said that Canada would have 25 squadrons. Surplus Dominion graduates beyond the needs of Dominion squadrons would be posted to R.A.F. squadrons.

Bruce told the conference that the British Government's proposals appeared generous and that he felt they would be acceptable to Australia. The progressive formation of R.A.A.F. squadrons under this plan was to be: by March 1941—2; July 1941—6; September 1941—9; December 1941—12; March 1942—15; May 1942—18. When practicable senior R.A.F. officers and R.A.F. ground staff in these squadrons should be replaced by Australians and, should the Australian Government desire, the R.A.A.F. might send to Britain a high-ranking officer who would be given access to the Chief of the Air Staff R.A.F. and to all group and command headquarters, with power to review all matters affecting the employment of Australian airmen except those matters already under the authority of the Australian High Commissioner. The War Cabinet on 16th January 1941 cabled its approval of the plan to the British Government. Despite this promptness the argument had not ended; the new memorandum of agreement was not formally signed until three months later.

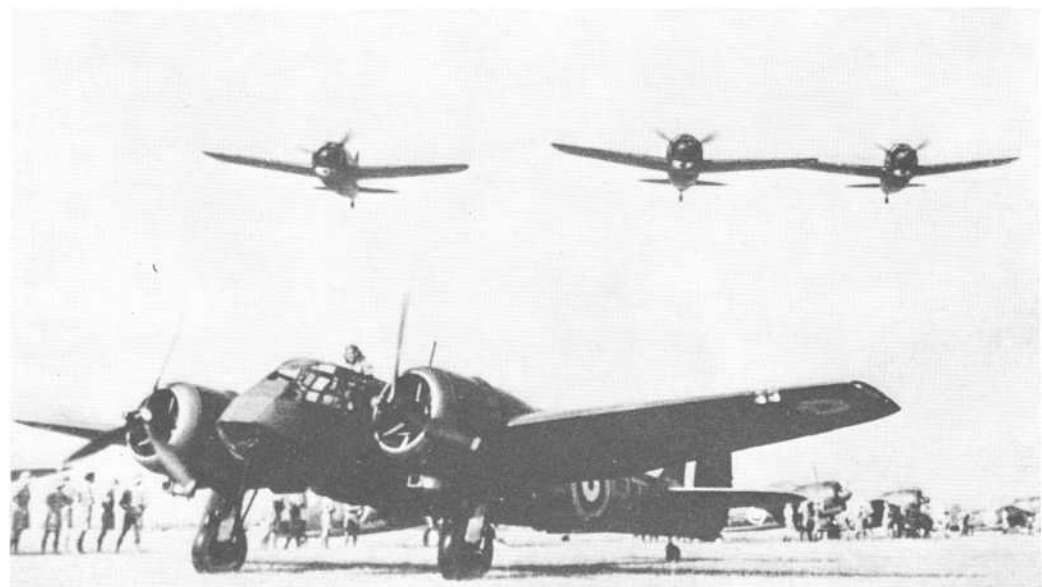
When the Air Board reviewed this agreement and considered its implications, Air Marshal Williams, in his capacity as Air Member for Organisation and Equipment, emphasised the prospect of Australia having approximately 28,000 members of its air force serving overseas by mid-1943. He urged that the Air Board should consider closely the form of organisation the R.A.A.F. required for this responsibility. He held that with the building up of E.A.T.S. squadrons and of the administrative control of the R.A.A.F. the time should soon come when, through its own administrative organisation overseas, it could arrange exchanges between R.A.A.F. officers serving overseas (up to and including those commanding squadrons) more satisfactorily and economically on its own authority than through R.A.F. channels. One mistake of the 1914-18 War should be avoided—officers and airmen should not be sent overseas without any indication or hope of returning to their own country until the war was over. Exchange with a R.A.F. officer had the effect of sending a R.A.A.F. officer overseas and leaving him there, thus preventing R.A.A.F. officers with war experience from returning to instruct their "younger brothers". Proper organisation and a sound system of exchange within the R.A.A.F. would do away with this depressing condition and its unsatisfactory human results. At the same time it would enable members of the permanent force at home and those carrying the burden of training, to gain overseas experience.

Williams therefore strongly advocated establishment of a R.A.A.F. administrative organisation overseas. Free movement between permanent and E.A.T.S. squadrons of the R.A.A.F. serving overseas and squadrons



(R.A.A.F.)

The Air Board, July 1940. Left to right: Mr C. V. Kellway (Finance Member); Mr R. Lawson (Director-General of Supply and Production); Air Vice-Marshal H. N. Wrigley (Air Member for Personnel); Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles Burnett (Chief of the Air Staff); Mr F. J. Mulrooney (Secretary); Air Marshal R. Williams (Air Member for Organisation and Equipment); Mr W. Sydney Jones (Business Member); Mr M. C. Langslow (Secretary, Department of Air).



(R.A.A.F.)

Aircraft of Far East Command in December 1941. The Beauforts shown in the top photograph had just arrived in Malaya from Australia. Much was expected of them but they were found to be unarmed and all but one were returned to Australia. Below are shown Buffalo fighters and Blenheim bombers. Both were outclassed by their Japanese counterparts, the Zero fighters and the Mitsubishi-type bombers.

in Australia was most desirable. Existing differences in rates of pay and difficulties in accounting had prompted the suggestion that Australian permanent and E.A.T.S. squadrons should be kept apart and that officers in the permanent squadrons must be exchanged only with R.A.F. officers if they were to command E.A.T.S. squadrons. The R.A.A.F. should pay all Australian officers and airmen on its own pay-book system and so eliminate the existing difficulties of pay rates and accounting methods.

The policy of the Government on this issue was again reviewed by the War Cabinet on 9th May 1941 when considering the draft of a cablegram to Bruce. In this, contrary to the opinion expressed by Menzies to Bruce in March 1940, it was held that Australian squadrons should be known as R.A.A.F. squadrons. Further, the R.A.F. had undertaken that the 18 Australian E.A.T.S. squadrons would be manned by Australians when they were available. It was assumed therefore, that, in addition to Australians within the R.A.F., such permanent R.A.A.F. officers of senior rank as might be offered would also be accepted for these squadrons on attachment, exchange or loan.

The question of establishing an Australian headquarters overseas was also revived at this meeting. The War Cabinet considered that, since surrender of R.A.A.F. members to the R.A.F. for general operations and control did not relieve the R.A.A.F. of responsibility for the individual and general welfare of its members overseas, it was necessary to create an Australian organisation in proximity to the Air Ministry. The War Cabinet proposed therefore to establish a small R.A.A.F. headquarters in Britain under the command of a senior Australian officer. But Bruce, meanwhile, had expressed his own emphatic opinion on the subject in a cablegram which was received by the War Cabinet while their own cablegram to him was still in draft form. Bruce had returned to the same conclusion. He now held that all duties, whether relating to the E.A.T.S. or to air liaison, should be unified under the control of a senior Australian air officer in Britain. Broadly, he said, the need was to ensure the best possible advice to the High Commissioner, the closest and most intimate contact with the Air Ministry and the R.A.F. Air Staff, and the most efficient organisation to look after the interests of Australian units in Britain and of Australians whether R.A.A.F. or E.A.T.S. One organisation to do this could carry a more senior officer, which was of high importance in making contact with the Air Ministry, the Air Staff and the Ministry of Aircraft Production, and would avoid overlapping and difficulties in the definition of functions. It was essential that this officer should be under his (Bruce's) jurisdiction. He praised McNamara and expressed a desire to retain him if this would not prejudice his career. With these views the War Cabinet agreed in principle. Thus, in six months, the opponents of a R.A.A.F. overseas headquarters, who thought first in terms of economy, had lost heavily to the champions of Australian Service independence overseas, as represented by Williams.

At this same meeting in May the War Cabinet also decided that 1,000 airmen surplus to R.A.A.F. requirements in Australia should be sent overseas to join the R.A.F. as soon as possible to provide the ground staff needed for R.A.A.F. squadrons listed for formation by April-May 1942. Discussion of this question prompted a suggestion that these airmen should be retained in Australia to meet the need for skilled tradesmen for munitions production until their services were actually required for new R.A.A.F. squadrons overseas. This proposal had stemmed from discussion about a week earlier on the practicability of using tradesmen from the R.A.A.F. for munitions work when they were not fully employed in their trade classifications within the Service.⁹ The Minister for Air, Mr McEwen, told the War Cabinet that, as between the Air Board and the Air Ministry, it had been arranged that 1,000 ground staff should be provided by Australia for the R.A.F. The Minister was then informed that, since Australia had been so committed, the War Cabinet would give its approval for the dispatch of these ground staff to Britain, but that before any more skilled tradesmen were committed for overseas service the Minister must first obtain the War Cabinet's approval.

In July the High Commissioner in London was given further advice on the question of R.A.A.F. administration overseas. He was told that he would continue to control all inter-governmental matters, matters of policy affecting the R.A.A.F. overseas, financial adjustments, and supply and shipping. Bruce described the plan as "admirable". On 30th August Williams received a memorandum from McEwen informing him that he had been appointed as Air Officer Commanding at the new headquarters. "It is the definite desire of the Government," his instructions read (in part) "that you will always bear in mind that the agreement (E.A.T.S.) provides not only for the manning of certain squadrons completely with R.A.A.F. personnel, but also that, in other cases, R.A.A.F. personnel should be grouped together so far as possible. It is also the desire of the Government that R.A.A.F. personnel shall be under the command of R.A.A.F. officers, warrant and non-commissioned officers, to the fullest possible extent."

The new headquarters were established in London on 1st December—a signpost to the national identity of the R.A.A.F. had been erected overseas. But the signpost so erected was misleading and, as might be expected of any signpost bearing the wrong directions, it pointed out a road to confusion. McEwen's instruction to Williams that he should "always bear in mind" that the agreement provided not only for the manning of certain squadrons completely with R.A.A.F. personnel, but also that "in other cases R.A.A.F. personnel should be grouped together so far as possible", was undoubtedly an expression of Australian desires, but it most certainly was not a part of the signed agreement. The agreement of April 1941

⁹ It had been reported to the War Cabinet that men had been enlisted in the RAAF in anticipation of the arrival of aircraft from overseas; the aircraft had still not arrived and might not arrive for some time. Three months later the War Cabinet noted that 135 airmen had been released for munitions work and that a list of a further 116 men who wished to be released for this purpose had been given to the Manpower Committee.

did provide for a review in September of that year and one subject specifically mentioned for this review was consideration of "the position and organisation of Australian aircrews whom, under these agreements, it may not be practicable to absorb into R.A.A.F. squadrons".¹ This review was never made—neither the Australian nor the British Government sought it—but the blame, surely, lay on the Australian side for failure to press for the achievement of their "definite desire". But, having formally stated the demand for recognition to which Australia was fully entitled, the Cabinet, particularly since Fairbairn's death, had shown little inclination to exert any such pressure. This left the Government open to the charge, soon to be laid with some vigour both in the Australian Press and Parliament, that they were willing to submit to the dominance of R.A.F. officers who were said to be "jealous of the Dominions taking a greater share in air force administration".² Certainly neither Burnett, nor the senior R.A.F. officers who would lead the expanded Empire air force, had any such "definite desire". Burnett shared the R.A.F. leaders' vision of a big unified air force to which the Dominions would eventually contribute a large proportion of the aircrew, but in which, unless the Dominion air forces looked sharp, virtually all the senior commands would be held by officers of the R.A.F. and there might be no unit larger than a squadron claiming Dominion identity.

Thus to Williams and most other senior R.A.A.F. officers the Government's acceptance of Burnett's determined policy that the Australian air force should be a reservoir for the R.A.F. was completely inimical. Williams and some of his subordinate officers in the regular force had served proudly in the Australian Flying Corps of 1916-18 whose squadrons were all-Australian and between the wars they had helped to build the R.A.A.F.; that force was their lives' achievement. Now that the war had come the R.A.A.F. was commanded by an officer of the R.A.F., and it seemed likely that its main task would be to train recruits for an English-led force in which there would be only token recognition of Australian national sentiment.³ How different was the situation of the Australian Army! By

¹ The same Memorandum of Agreement also contained a specific provision that would help to ensure RAAF identity overseas; it ruled that all Australian aircrews, whether serving in RAF or RAAF formations, would wear RAAF uniform.

² *Herald* (Melbourne), 5 and 7 Jul 1941.

³ The problem had been debated early in the 1914-18 War when the viewpoint so consistently expressed in later years by Williams was warmly advocated by Colonel Brancker, RFC, who later, as Air Vice-Marshal Sir Sefton Brancker, was to become a member of the British Air Council, then Director of Civil Aviation, and to lose his life in the *R-101* airship disaster in 1930. "Early in the war," Brancker wrote, "we were faced with the problem as to how we could best train and organise the personnel available from our overseas Dominions. I think all of them actually wished to raise squadrons of their own but, of course, they were all almost entirely dependent on England for expert instructors and equipment. Personally I was in favour of meeting their wishes which were quite understandable, but David Henderson [Brig-Gen, later Lieut-General Sir David Henderson, former Director of Military Aeronautics and at that time commanding the RFC in the field] thought otherwise; he was afraid of the complications which he anticipated might arise if we attempted to place two or three squadrons from different Dominions under one command, with their probably wide variations of pay, promotion, discipline and administration. So the policy was laid down that the overseas Dominions should not have their own squadrons, and that all their volunteers for the air should be either commissioned or enlisted in the Royal Flying Corps on exactly the same terms as those from home. This led to confusion; Canada agreed to this system and adhered to it to the end of the war. Australia revolted at once and by some means or other obtained the concurrence of the Cabinet to raise a corps of their own with its own promotion list and

April 1940 it had organised an army corps for overseas service under a commander who had been given wide powers. By August 1941 (when Williams was appointed to the new post in London) the corps had fought as such in two hard campaigns and its first commander had been promoted to a higher post. But no officer of the R.A.A.F., in a war then two years old, had commanded in action, except briefly, anything larger than a squadron.

It was natural that Williams should go to London filled with zeal to achieve the objectives that the Minister had given him and in particular to realise "the desire of the Government that R.A.A.F. personnel shall be under the command of R.A.A.F. officers . . . to the fullest possible extent". It was unlikely, however, that he would achieve much success at that late stage.

Indeed, as the year was closing, only 9 of the 18 proposed Australian E.A.T.S. squadrons had been formed—3 below the agreed number—and of these 4 were not yet ready for operations. And there was, in this period, strong protest both in the Australian Federal Parliament and in the newspapers that the national identity of R.A.A.F. squadrons overseas was not being preserved. Meanwhile Mr Beasley⁴ was telling the Advisory War Council that he would press for the abandonment of the system under which it was "impossible for an Australian officer to gain the highest rank", adding that Australians should have the right to fill all the high places in the R.A.A.F. Mr McEwen, who might well have had the ardent plea of Williams in mind, replied that Beasley's immediate objective was identical with the Government's deferred objective. "It is my definite intention," he said, "to arrange that senior R.A.A.F. officers shall have command and operational experience in theatres of war as soon as this can be managed. I cannot, however, agree to leave our vast Home Defence program and even vaster Empire Air Training program in Australia without an adequate number of senior officers."

These words would have had a hollow ring for the 32 officers of the General Duties Branch of the R.A.A.F. who in August held the rank of group captain or above. After nearly two years nobody in their branch above the rank of wing commander was in fact on exchange to the R.A.F.⁵

The delay in the formation of Australian E.A.T.S. squadrons in Britain certainly did not arise from lack of Australian aircrew. Indeed the rate

special rates of pay. South Africa adopted a middle course and although they had a squadron manned as far as possible by South Africans, the personnel were on our main list for promotion and some officers and men from the R.F.C. were posted to it for duty. As a matter of fact the Australian squadrons proved a great success and did magnificently. So far as my experience went we had no appreciable trouble as a result of their difference in administration, and whatever inconvenience may have been caused to the staffs under whom they worked was amply recompensed by the tremendous *esprit de corps* and efficiency of the squadrons themselves. I always felt a little sorry for the Canadians in not being allowed to organise their own units, but the R.F.C. would have been very much the poorer if it had not been able to absorb the many magnificent men we obtained from across the Atlantic."—Norman Macmillan, *Sefton Branker* (1935), pp. 99-100.

⁴ Rt Hon J. A. Beasley. MHR 1928-46. Asst Min for Industry and External Affairs 1929-31; Min for Supply and Shipping 1941-45, for Defence 1945; Aust High Commissioner in UK 1946-49. B. Werribee, Vic, 9 Nov 1895. Died 2 Sep 1949.

⁵ The only officers on exchange were 3 wing commanders, one squadron leader and 3 flight lieutenants.

of enlistment was such that, in contrast with the situation in May 1940 when the War Cabinet feared that no more trained airmen could be sent overseas, the R.A.F. was now asked whether it could undertake the formation of more than the prescribed 18 Australian squadrons. The Air Ministry made the studied answer that after June 1942 an increase of 25 per cent "might be possible", but at the same time indicated Britain's own need by advising a continuation of ground staff training. The chief trouble in forming the Australian squadrons lay in the tremendous strain that was being placed on the R.A.F.'s capacity for training and arming such units.⁶

On 29th August 1941 Mr Menzies returned his commission as Prime Minister to the Governor-General and was succeeded by Mr Fadden who had been serving as Treasurer. Then, about six weeks later, Mr Fadden himself resigned and Mr Curtin, as the new Prime Minister, led a Labour Ministry to the Treasury benches. So far as the air force was concerned there was special interest in this dramatic wartime transfer of control to the party which, for so long, had pledged itself to a defence policy in which the R.A.A.F. was the declared keystone.

The new Minister for Air and Civil Aviation, Mr Drakeford, could scarcely have taken over his portfolios at a more difficult time. For the British Commonwealth as a whole the war situation was extremely grave, and for Australia in particular the rapid fading of hopes that Japan might be restrained from becoming an aggressor in the Pacific was causing acute tension.

Mr Drakeford had graduated into politics with a lively industrial background. Long experience as a railwayman in Victoria, culminating in promotion to the locomotive footplate as a driver—a calling which he had in common with the new Federal Treasurer, Mr Chifley—led to his election first as Federal Secretary and later as Federal President of the Australian Federated Union of Locomotive Enginemen. This last office he retained after he became a Minister. Friendly and earnest, he immediately displayed intense keenness to understand the problems with which his Ministerial duties confronted him. From the outset, too, he showed a keen sympathy with the men of the air force. Inevitably, and particularly in the early days of office, he had to lean heavily for guidance on the senior departmental and Service officers. In Mr Langslow, the department's permanent head, he had an adviser who, although often extremely unpopular with serving officers intolerant of departmental ways and means, had an intimate knowledge not only of the detail of R.A.A.F. administration but of the Australian political scene, and therefore of the new Minister's part in it. With Air Chief Marshal Burnett the relationship was different in the extreme. Here the former locomotive driver, ardent industrial advocate and alert Australian Labour politician was placed side by side with the regular Imperial service officer, a man trained to be con-

⁶ The EATS Memorandum of Agreement dated 17th April 1941 declared: "The rate of formation cannot be guaranteed since it is dependent on the rate at which the projected air force expansion can be achieved. . . ."

servative in thought and action, at least so far as political administration concerned him. But this was war, the cause was common and tremendously urgent, and so the new Minister, the astute departmental secretary and the autocratic Chief of the Air Staff went to work together while many observers wondered about the outcome of the strangely assorted partnership.