

THE PERMANENT ROYAL AIR FORCE

THE following outline of the scheme for the permanent organisation of the Royal Air Force, prepared by Air-Marshal Sir H. Trenchard, was issued as a White Paper on December 13, with the following prefatory note by the Secretary of State for Air:—

The scheme outlined in the following memorandum on the permanent organisation of the Royal Air Force has been prepared during the course of the present year under my directions by the Chief of the Air Staff, and has in principle received the approval of the Cabinet.

The many complications of the Air Service and its intricate technical organisation are not perhaps fully appreciated, even by those who take a general interest in the subject. It therefore appears desirable to lay this memorandum in both Houses of Parliament, in order that they may understand the character of the problem and the complications that are being faced.

It should be added that the financial provision which the Cabinet have approved as governing the scale of the Royal Air Force during the next few years is approximately £15,000,000 per annum. It is upon this basis that this scheme has been prepared, and it is upon this basis that it is hoped the Estimates of next year will, apart from any extraordinary expenditure which the military situation may render necessary, be framed.

WINSTON S. CHURCHILL.

December 11, 1919.

Memorandum by the Chief of the Air Staff.

1. *The problem confronting us.*—The problem of forming the Royal Air Force on a peace basis differs in many essentials from that which confronts the older services. The Royal Air Force was formed by the amalgamation of the Royal Flying Corps and the Royal Naval Air Service, and one may say, broadly speaking, that the whole Service was practically a war creation on a temporary basis, without any possibility of taking into account that it was going to remain on a permanent basis. The personnel with few exceptions was enlisted for the duration of the War, and put through an intensive but necessarily hurried course of training. Material was created in vast quantities, but rapid development often rendered it obsolete almost before it had reached the stage of bulk production. The accommodation provided had perforce to be of an entirely temporary character. The force may in fact be compared to the prophet Jonah's gourd. The necessities of war created it in a night, but the economies of peace have to a large extent caused it to wither in a day, and we are now faced with the necessity of replacing it with a plant of deeper root. As in nature, however, decay fosters growth, and the new plant has a fruitful soil from which to spring.

The principle to be kept in mind in forming the framework of the Air Service is that in the future the main portion of it will consist of an Independent Force, together with Service personnel required in carrying out aeronautical research.

In addition there will be a small part of it specially trained for work with the Navy, and a small part specially trained for work with the Army, these two small portions probably becoming, in the future, an arm of the older services.

It may be that the main portion, the Independent Air Force, will grow larger and larger, and become more and more the predominating factor in all types of warfare.

2. *Governing principles.*—In planning the formation of the peace Royal Air Force it has been assumed that no need will arise for some years at least for anything in the nature of general mobilization. It has been possible therefore to concentrate attention on providing for the needs of the moment as far as they can be foreseen and on laying the foundations of a highly-trained and efficient force which, though not capable of expansion in its present form, can be made so without any drastic alteration should necessity arise in years to come. Broadly speaking, the principle has been to reduce service squadrons to the minimum considered essential for our garrisons overseas with a very small number in the United Kingdom as a reserve, and to concentrate the whole of the remainder of our resources on perfecting the training of officers and men.

It is intended to preserve the numbers of some of the great squadrons who have made names for themselves during the War, in permanent service units with definite identity, which will be the homes of the officers belonging to them, and will have the traditions of the War to look back upon.

There will be found in the Appendix a statement showing detailed particulars of squadrons, stations, schools, depôts, etc., which it is hoped to provide in the next three years at

home and abroad. It will be understood that this programme is to be regarded as provisional only.

3. *Service units.*—It is proposed to provide eight squadrons for India and three for Mesopotamia, with the necessary facilities for repair. As regards India this is in accordance with a proposal put forward from India and now under consideration by the Government of India. The cost of the units in India will fall on the Government of India on exactly the same basis as in the case of the military garrison. Recent events have shown the value of aircraft in dealing with frontier troubles, and it is not perhaps too much to hope that before long it may prove possible to regard the Royal Air Force units not as an addition to the military garrison but as a substitute for part of it. One great advantage of aircraft in the class of warfare approximating to police work is their power of acting at once. Aircraft can visit the scene of incipient unrest within a comparatively few hours of the receipt of news. To organise a military expedition even on a small scale takes time, and delay may result in the trouble spreading. The cost is also much greater, and very many more lives are involved.

In Egypt it is proposed to station seven service squadrons. Under existing conditions in that country aircraft are a most valuable means of communication. Distances are long and ground communication confined to a few main routes. On the other hand the country and the climate are both ideal for flying. From a wider aspect Egypt is the Clapham Junction of the air between east and west, and is situated within comparatively easy reach of the most probable centres of unrest, and this, added to its natural advantages for aviation, makes it the obvious locality for a small Royal Air Force reserve.

As regards our Naval bases and important coaling stations overseas, future developments will almost certainly lead to the necessity of providing aircraft as part of their garrisons, but in the majority of cases the need of this is not urgent under existing conditions, and for the present it is only proposed to station a small seaplane unit at Malta, and a similar unit in the Eastern Mediterranean, probably at Alexandria.

The Service squadrons quartered in the United Kingdom apart from those for co-operation with the Army and Navy will eventually number four, but not more than two of these squadrons will be formed in the next financial year. These squadrons will be employed on communication and similar duties in peace and will form a small reserve in case of need. For co-operation with the Army it is proposed to provide eventually squadrons on the basis of a flight per division for work with the troops at all stages of their training, and in addition one or more squadrons for co-operation with the artillery both during their winter training and their annual gun practice. During the next financial year it is proposed to form two squadrons in all, one at Farnborough for co-operation with the troops at Aldershot and Salisbury, and the second at Stonehenge for work with the artillery. Small units will, if necessary, be provided in addition for co-operation with the Garrison Artillery School at Golden Hill, and the Anti-aircraft School when formed.

There remain the Service squadrons for co-operation with the Fleet. It is proposed eventually to provide at home three aeroplane squadrons and two seaplane squadrons. To secure economy and to give the units a corporate existence and ample facilities for practice it has been decided that aeroplanes will no longer be carried normally in capital ships as was done during the War, but will only be embarked when required to take part in Fleet exercises. The aeroplane squadrons will consist of one reconnaissance and spotting squadron, one squadron of fighter machines and one of torpedo-carrying machines. The two former will be based on the Firth of Forth where ample facilities exist for practice and for the embarkation and disembarkation of machines, a most important point. The torpedo-carrying squadron will be located at Gosport, the most suitable station for torpedo work, and it is proposed to provide a small experimental unit at the same station in order to develop fully this form of co-operation with the Navy, which is of primary importance. Of these three squadrons it is only proposed to provide one, the reconnaissance squadron, at full strength in the ensuing financial year. This is necessary in order to study and perfect the system of observation of artillery fire which from various causes was not so highly developed on the naval side as on the land side during the War. The torpedo squadron will be maintained at sufficient strength