

Vote 11, *Half-pay Pensions and other Non-effective Services*.—Rewards to officers, warrant officers, non-commissioned officers and aircraftmen, £350; half-pay of officers, £9,000; service and disability—retired pay and gratuities of officers and nurses, £147,000; wound pensions—officers, £550; service and disability pensions and gratuities—warrant officers, non-commissioned officers and aircraftmen, £55,000; pensions gratuities and allowances to widows, children, etc., £23,500; civil non-effective payments, recurrent charges, £9,300; civil non-effective payments—gratuities and other non-recurrent charges, £4,700; injury grants, £5,650; commutation of retired pay, wound pensions, etc., £18,400; relief fund, £500; compassionate grants, £50. Gross total, £274,000. Appropriations in aid, £20,000. Net total, £254,000. Net decrease, £12,000.

MEMORANDUM BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR AIR TO ACCOMPANY AIR ESTIMATES FOR 1931

Financial Summary

AIR Estimates for 1931 show a net total of £18,100,000, being an increase of £250,000 on the current year's figure of £17,850,000. The gross total is up by £273,400 at £21,197,200 as compared with £20,923,800 in 1930.

There is thus again a slightly larger rise in the gross than in the net figure, which is due to an increase of £23,400 in appropriations-in-aid. These latter, however, include provision of the necessary funds for the British entry in the forthcoming contest for the Schneider Trophy, without which they would show a decline. Subject to this special factor on the present occasion and the inclusion in these Estimates of the largely increased sum of £155,000 payable by the Dominion and Colonial Governments concerned as a contribution towards the cost of forthcoming African service, the gross figures are the truer index of comparative air expenditure from year to year. It is, therefore, highly satisfactory that, despite the increase in the strength of the Royal Air Force since 1925, the gross total for 1931 remains substantially lower than the corresponding figure for six years ago. The achievement of this result has, of course, been assisted by the smaller sum taken for airships, the further fall in prices during the past twelve months and the estimated reduction in rates of remuneration related to the cost of living, which factors, however, have been partially offset by the need for an extra day's provision owing to 1932 being a Leap Year. But in the main it has only been possible as a result of the exercise of the most rigid economy, the continuous review of establishments both at home and abroad, and the pruning of all services to the limit compatible with efficiency.

There is a "super-cut" of £100,000 (or twice last year's figure) on Vote 4 (Works, Buildings and Lands) but none on Vote 3 (Technical Equipment). Increases of £334,000 on Votes 1, 3, 4, 5 and 7 are partially set off by decreases totalling £84,000 on Votes 2, 6, 8, 10 and 11, making the net increase of £250,000 above-mentioned. The causes of the major variations on the several Votes are explained below and the following table summarises the comparative figures:—

	1931.	1930.	+ or —
	£	£	£
True gross (total of expenditure subheads) ..	21,297,200	21,073,800	+ 223,400
Deduct super-cuts ..	100,000	150,000	— 50,000
Gross estimate ..	21,197,200	20,923,800	+ 273,400
Deduct Fleet Air Arm grant ..	1,126,000	1,267,000	— 141,000
Deduct other Appropriations-in-Aid ..	1,971,200	1,806,800	+ 164,400
Net Estimate ..	18,100,000	17,850,000	+ 250,000

Policy

There has been no alteration during the current year in the main features of air policy. His Majesty's Government, having regard to the fact that Great Britain still ranks fifth of the world's air powers in terms of first-line strength and to the marked growth in recent years of air expenditure abroad, have approved a further modest instalment of the Home

* The "super-cut" is an overhead deduction to discount possible under-spending due (e.g.) to delays in the completion of works contracts or similar causes.

Defence Scheme, which will proceed in the coming year in accordance with programme. It is their earnest hope that the forthcoming Disarmament Conference will bring about a general reduction in air armaments (the rapid development of which the world over they view with profound disquiet) and remove the present serious disparity between the Royal Air Force and foreign air services.

Strength and Distribution of the Royal Air Force

During the year ending March 31, 1931, one squadron of flying boats and two new flights of the Fleet Air Arm will have been added to the strength of the regular Air Force, and in addition, one new cadre squadron is being formed. These developments are as forecast when Air Estimates for 1930 were presented, and on their completion the strength of the Air Force will amount to 72 regular squadrons, including the equivalent of 13 squadrons in the Fleet Air Arm. There will be, in addition, 13 non-regular squadrons, of which 8 belong to the Auxiliary Air Force and 5 are organised on a cadre basis.

In 1931, three new regular squadrons will be added to the Home Defence Force, which will bring the number of such squadrons up to 29 out of the total of 39 comprised in the programme formulated in 1923. The strength of the Fleet Air Arm will be increased by one flight.

Air Routes and Long-Distance Flights

The annual flight from Cairo to the Cape is, this year, being carried out by large twin-engine bombers also capable of use as troop-carriers. The Cape was reached on February 7, the aircraft concerned having up to that time covered a distance of some 5,600 miles. The return flight began on February 11. It is of interest and significance that, following the series of flights by Service aircraft over this route for some years past, a civil air service to the Cape is shortly to be inaugurated by Imperial Airways. The Royal Air Force has here, as in the case of the earlier service between Cairo and Baghdad, played a useful pioneering rôle for civil aviation.

The annual flight from Egypt to West Africa and back was successfully repeated in October and November last with, on this occasion, an extension to Bathurst in Gambia, the total distance covered being 7,200 miles. This, in its turn, may also prove ultimately to be the forerunner of a civil service crossing Africa from east to west. Among other noteworthy service flights during the year may be mentioned one by the Air Officer Commanding in India with three aircraft to Siam and Singapore and back, covering some 6,000 miles; and one by the aircraft of No. 36 Torpedo Bomber Squadron, recently transferred from England to Singapore. Eight machines of this squadron, having been transported as far as India by sea, flew in formation in two sections from Karachi, where they were erected, to Singapore, a distance of 3,400 miles. In the three flights last mentioned a total of 67,100 machine miles was flown with only two forced landings entailing temporary delays to the machines affected of 24 hours and 48 hours respectively.

A successful cruise of 3,830 miles was carried out by No. 201 Flying Boat Squadron in September, in the course of which visits were paid to Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, Polish, Finnish, Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian waters. Another long-distance flight of special interest was undertaken by a flying boat from Cattewater (Plymouth), which visited Iceland in connection with the millenary celebrations of that Kingdom. This flight covered some 2,724 miles. Further, a large flying boat successfully carried out non-stop flights from Plymouth to Lisbon and back in August and September, also visiting Gibraltar. The total distance covered was 2,541 miles.

These and other long-distance flights bring the machine miles flown on exercises of this character during the year by landplanes and seaplanes combined up to a total of approximately 115,000, without a single case of injury to personnel or serious damage to aircraft.

The two flying-boat squadrons based respectively on Singapore and Basrah have been actively employed in 1930. It is the policy of the Air Ministry to take every opportunity of testing and extending the potentialities of this most important type or aircraft, of which there are now six squadrons, and of developing new routes for their operation. Thus, three flying boats are at present *en route* by air from England to Basrah for the rearmament of No. 203 Squadron. Their journey of 3,940 miles includes long overland stretches and, with the various other flights above-mentioned, well illustrates the amphibious character of the Royal Air Force and its rapidly growing mobility.

In 1931, flying boats of No. 209 Squadron will for the first time co-operate with the Atlantic Fleet in Mediterranean waters during the Spring cruise.