

FLIGHT

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The Outlook

Developing the Fleet Air Arm

LEE-ON-THE-SOLENT, Ford, Donibristle, and Worthy Down are the four R.A.F. stations which are to be handed over to the Admiralty by the Air Ministry, and Lee is to be the shore home of the fleet air mechanics, just as Chatham, Portsmouth and Devonport are the headquarters for the seamen, and Deal for the Royal Marines. A repair depot will probably be established at or near Lee. Ford, of course, is already the home of the School of Naval Co-operation, and for some time past only the Oxford University Air Squadron has ventured to introduce a non-naval element into that station. Donibristle, on the Fife shore of the Firth of Forth, has recently been evacuated by our only two torpedo-bomber squadrons, and will be very suitable for F.A.A. use, especially if Rosyth becomes an active naval base once more. Worthy Down seems haunted by the ghosts of Vickers Virginias, and there is no nautical tang in the air; but the Navy could not get on without shore aerodromes, and this one was selected for transfer. The F.A.A. cannot do all its flying from carriers or catapults, for that would be too expensive, and even in these riotous days the interests of the taxpayer must be considered occasionally. As the Fleet Air Arm is to be expanded from its present strength of about three thousand to about ten thousand officers and men in the next few years, the Admiralty plans to establish still more shore aerodromes. It will also want some overseas, and Malta and Singapore immediately come to mind.

Admiralty Policy

DURING the war, although the liberty men used to "go ashore" from H.M.S. *Daedalus* at Cranwell and used to salute the "quarter deck" when they came on board again, the R.N.A.S. drifted rather far away from the Navy which floats. As in those days there was no type of aircraft really suitable for work with the Fleet, this gradual divorce was unavoidable. It is

quite certain that the Admiralty does not intend the same thing to happen again. The Fleet Air Arm is very definitely to be part and parcel of the Royal Navy, perhaps in closer touch with the seaman branch than are the Royal Marines. The existence of short-service officers as pilots and observers is perhaps the greatest distinction between the Navy which floats and the Navy which flies. It may come about that when a flying reserve has been built up this system of giving short-service commissions will be terminated. At least it seems probable that most of the first lot of S.S. officers will be able to serve full time for pension.

In this connection it may be noted that no more short-service or medium-service officers of the R.A.F. are to be allowed to apply for transfer to the "A" branch of the Navy. The explanation of this step is that a certain rough figure was agreed on between the Admiralty and the Air Ministry as the maximum which the R.A.F. could spare, and the applications for transfer have already reached this figure. It is obvious that the prospect of a life's career in the air appealed to quite a number of R.A.F. officers who might otherwise have been relegated to the R.A.F. Reserve in a few years.

The Thorniest Problem

THE Fleet Air Arm, therefore, seems in a fair way to get its pilots. It had to replace only thirty per cent. of the existing pilots, who were R.A.F. officers, and this it is doing by giving short-service commissions, by transfers from the R.A.F., and by training ratings as pilots. Of course, the Navy and the F.A.A. are expanding like all other Services, and the F.A.A. will be no better and no worse off than the others in dealing with that problem. Naval observers have been naval officers ever since the days of the Balfour Committee, so that no new problem arises in that respect.

The thorniest problem for the Fifth Sea Lord (Vice-Admiral the Hon. Sir Alexander Ramsay), who is Chief of Naval Air Services, is to replace the R.A.F. airmen