AVIATION MEDICINE IN 2nd T.A.F.

Nearly 900 decompression tests of various kinds have been carried out by the 2nd T.A.F. Aviation Medicine Centre—0.R.A.F. Wildenrath—since it began operating in April last year. It is the only aviation medicine centre in any Command of the Royal Air Force. Operated primarily for the instruction of aircrew in flight safety procedures, the Centre was designed by R.A.F. medical staff who were able to utilize the experience of staff of the Institute of Aviation Medicine at Farnborough.

The main work at the Centre takes place in a static two-compartment decompression chamber, built by the Frankfurt company of Olaf and Joachim Zeuzem and sited in a large, airy hall with cream-coloured walls and generous window space. The main compartment, which holds up to ten, is used for normal instruction of aircrews in flight safety procedures. The Centre is also equipped with an ejection training rig and a number of mobile units. The mobile decompression chamber similar in size and capacity to the static one, mounted on a 37ft expanding trailer, is completely self-contained, with diesel engines and pumps. This mobile unit, which tours the squadrons within the Command, is used primarily for assessment of aircrew susceptibility to “bends” and for fitting oxygen equipment.

Four to 12 pilots can be taken on each four-day course at the Centre. A typical one begins with an introduction by the commanding officer (S/L. R. W. Wright) and this is generally followed by a talk on the physiology of respiration by his second in command (F/L. E. R. J. Emery), who directs the work in the decompression chamber. The remainder of the first day is taken up with a film illustrating “Oxygen in Flight” and a talk on cabin pressurization, otitic and sinus barotrauma.

The hard work of the course begins on the second day. In the aircrew lecture room crews have a practical explanation of oxygen control procedure (oxygen supplies are connected to each desk) and discussions on acceleration and centrifugal force. Then come practical demonstrations and tests—pressure breathing, decompression runs and demonstrations on the ejection seat rig.

The third day is taken up with more lectures on a diversity of subjects such as escape from aircraft, ejection seats, decompression sickness, vision problems, crush helmets and more films. First aid and the testing of flying clothing—oxygen masks and helmet fittings are tested—are the main items on the last day.

In addition to the modern aircrew lecture room the Centre is also equipped with its own projection room, a demonstration room (where there is a mock-up Mark 111 Martin-Baker test rig and the testing of flying clothing—oxygen masks and helmet fittings are tested)—the main items on the last day.

Since the Centre was opened no fewer than 370 aircrew and 16 medical officers have taken courses there.