

The outbreak of war with Japan faced the Government with unprecedented problems and involved the Air Force in a complete reorientation of plans and a heavy increase in overall commitments to meet the home-defence problem, whilst still maintaining the flow of trained personnel overseas. There was a serious shortage of combat aircraft in New Zealand. Emergency steps were taken to organize and to arm training types for local defence. The construction of modern airports to accommodate U.S. Air Forces was hastened. A Fighter Defence organization with an early-warning system (Radar stations) and an observer corps network was developed. In January, 1942, the small Air Force unit established in Fiji since November, 1940, was increased by the location of a R.N.Z.A.F. Bomber Squadron at Nandi equipped with Hudsons. The dire shortage of modern combat aircraft available to the R.N.Z.A.F. for use in New Zealand and the South Pacific was not relieved until United States equipment (Corsairs and Venturas) became available in 1944, although the United Kingdom supplied limited numbers of Kittyhawks and Hudsons from their own U.S. allocations. This enabled the R.N.Z.A.F. to provide during 1942-43 five Bomber Squadrons (Hudsons), which, from July, 1942, onwards, operated under U.S. command in the South Pacific area.

As the threat of Japanese invasion diminished, so the offensive capacity of the R.N.Z.A.F. was steadily developed. Towards the end of 1942 it was decided to place the R.N.Z.A.F. under United States authority for command and supply, and suitable allocations of U.S. combat types for progressive delivery by April, 1944, were made. The expansion of the R.N.Z.A.F. in the South Pacific Area to twenty squadrons was approved early in 1943. New Zealand fighter and bomber squadrons played an important part in the fight for air superiority and the defence of sea communications in the Solomons area in 1943 and 1944. As the Japanese air power was overcome, the role of the R.N.Z.A.F. changed to that of air support to the 2nd Australian Corps, and the aircraft (Corsairs) were equipped as fighter bombers. The operational statistics of R.N.Z.A.F. squadrons employed in the South Pacific area during the war are given in Appendix A.

On 2nd September, 1945, the Chief of the Air Staff (Air Vice-Marshal L. M. Isitt) represented New Zealand at the official surrender in Tokyo.

At the end of 1945, No. 14 (Fighter) Squadron commenced training for the British Commonwealth Occupation Force in Japan, and was embarked in H.M.A.C. "Glory" at the end of March, 1946.

OPERATIONS

With the reduction of the garrison commitment in the South Pacific Area, all our operational squadrons (with the exception of the two flying-boat squadrons, which still remained in the South Pacific Area) came under the command of General MacArthur in the South-west Pacific Area. By December, 1944, R.N.Z.A.F. squadrons were the only operational air Forces in the North Solomons and Bismarck area and were engaged in giving both tactical and close support to the Australian Army Forces. Their work in this sphere gained high praise from the Australian Field Commanders, which is a good augury for future co-operation.

With the intended move of our fighter squadrons still farther afield into the Borneo area, plans were put in hand for the expansion of air transport squadrons and the conversion of the existing bomber reconnaissance squadrons to this type. These plans were abandoned with the cessation of hostilities.

The squadrons in the South-west Pacific Area were retained there for the next two or three months to assist in the rounding-up of the enemy Forces within the area. They were then withdrawn from the area, aircraft and crews being ferried back to New Zealand for demobilization.