

squadrons at Fiji had borne a heavier burden of reconnaissance in Fijian and Tongan waters. More was required, however, for the bamboo halted in its southward flight had now to be sent whistling back to its mother grove in the East.

It was a cool, grey October morning, just after dawn, when the next chapter began. From the runways of a northern New Zealand air station a squadron of Lockheed Hudson bombers took off at one minute intervals to fly to the forward Pacific area. This departure is history now, but at the time it was an epic, being the first mass aircraft departure from New Zealand soil for a landing in the combat zone. As the sign-writer "up forward" will tell you, such mass migrations are commonplace nowadays—even fighter aircraft now migrate *en masse*.

Operating from Guadalcanal, aircraft of this pioneer squadron were immediately on the job, co-operating with the U.S. Forces. The squadron was early to find need for a scoreboard—in attacks on submarines, one was accounted definitely destroyed, and another counted as a probable, while later at least one enemy float-plane was definitely destroyed. This, judged by European standards, was a modest beginning, but not so modest when it is remembered that the squadron's assignment was reconnaissance and search.

Many jobs of flying came the pioneer squadron's way, including the bombing of supply dumps and other targets, the illumination of targets for U.S. night bombing attacks, and weather-reporting flights prior to U.S. bombing operations. On many occasions the Hudsons were intercepted and attacked by enemy aircraft, and, as recorded earlier, at least one Jap will never intercept again. This squadron laid a foundation.

Other squadrons went to the Solomons and by as early as May of last year R.N.Z.A.F. reconnaissance craft in the forward area, operating from Guadalcanal alone, had flown missions aggregating 700,000 miles; had carried out 1,240 searches and other operations, and had clocked 5,000 hours of operational flying.

On over twenty occasions they had clashed with the enemy.

Sign-writing became almost a full-time job for the R.N.Z.A.F. painter in June last, when the first New Zealand fighter squadron arrived in the Solomons. Ten emblems went up on the board after the first two major battles in which our fighters met Japanese Zeros. Six of the ten victims were despatched by pilots who had arrived at Guadalcanal only the day before the engagement.

Since that June beginning the fighters of the R.N.Z.A.F. have gone on to bring the score to the century mark, the shooting-down of the hundredth Japanese plane being announced a short time ago. Fresh fighter squadrons have been flown up from New Zealand, and to-day their bases are much farther forward than the original landing-strips on Guadalcanal.

Word has recently been received that New Zealand fighter squadrons are to



(R.N.Z.A.F. Official Photograph.)

PIONEER

Wing Commander G. Fisher, R.N.Z.A.F., who commanded the first squadron of Lockheed Hudson bombers to fly direct from New Zealand to the Pacific operational area.