

THE TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT OF R.N.V.R. AIRCRAFT MAINTENANCE RATINGS BY 1832 R.N.V.R. (AIR) SQUADRON

BY

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There are at present four R.N.V.R. (Air) Squadrons, these are as follows :—

- No. 1830 Squadron, based at R.N.A.S. Donibristle, near Edinburgh.
- No. 1831 Squadron, based at R.N.A.S. Stretton, near Warrington.
- No. 1832 Squadron, based at R.N.A.S. Culham, near Oxford.
- No. 1833 Squadron, based at R.N.A.S. Bramcote, near Nuneaton.

A fifth Squadron is to be formed shortly and it is proposed that this should be based at R.N.A.S. Ford in Sussex.

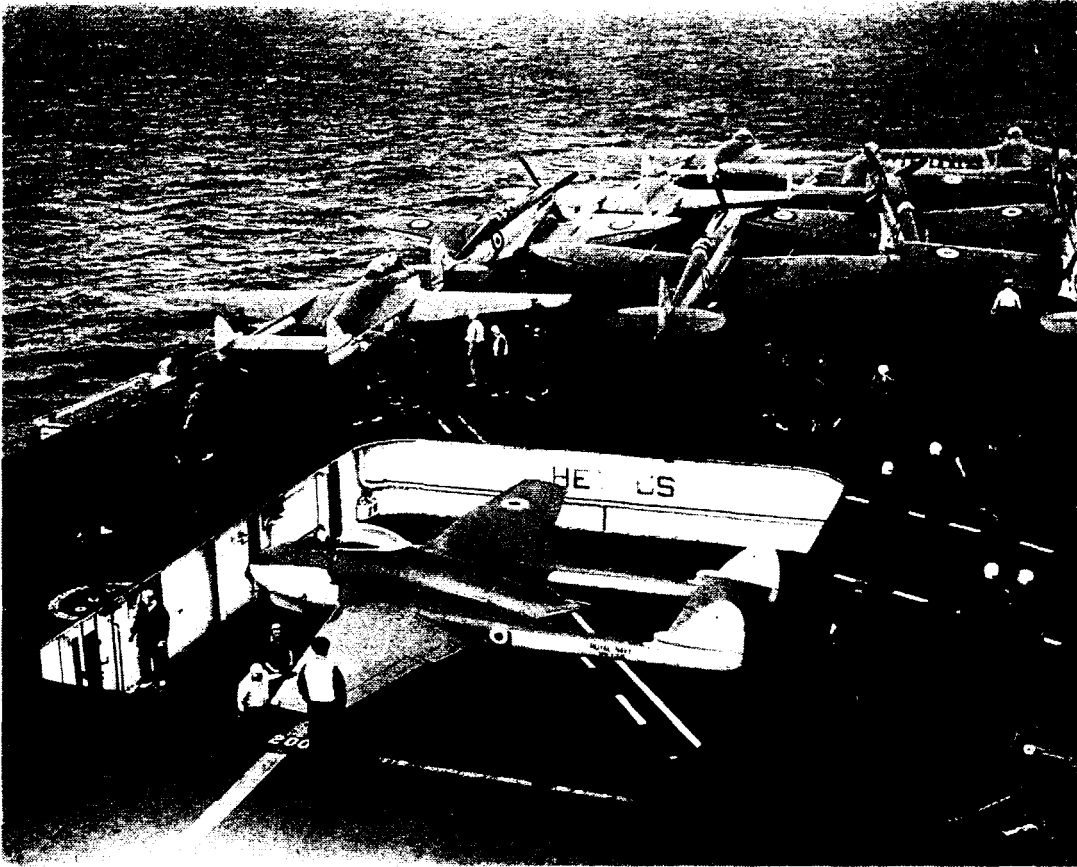
The organization of an R.N.V.R. (Air) Squadron is necessarily specialized, and it is therefore desirable to give a general description of the organization of one of these Squadrons before going on to describe the training and employment of R.N.V.R. technical ratings. The details which follow apply principally to 1832 Squadron, but the objects of each of the four Squadrons are similar, and much of this information applies to the other three Squadrons also.

The objects of an R.N.V.R. (Air) Squadron are :—

- (i) To provide the training and operational facilities of a first line Naval Air Squadron for R.N.V.R. aircrew who reside in that part of the country in which the Squadron is based.
- (ii) To provide refresher training and employment for R.N.V.R. aircraft maintenance ratings. (Ex-service entries.)
- (iii) To provide pre-entry training for young men about to do their National Service.

R.N.V.R. Officers

Most of the R.N.V.R. personnel attached to 1832 Squadron live in the London and Oxford areas. The Squadron is commanded by a Lieutenant-Commander (A) R.N.V.R. and there are 35 Lieutenants (A) all of whom are pilots. Each pilot is required to fly a minimum of 75 hours as first pilot of a Naval aircraft. Pilots are required to attend at least 12 weekends per year and to carry out 14 days' annual continuous training; this period of training is usually carried out in an aircraft carrier. Each pilot receives payment according to his rank and seniority and, in addition, if he fulfils the conditions required of him and is recommended, he receives an annual bounty. The period of service is five years, with an option to continue for a further five years if the pilot wishes to do so and is recommended. The maximum age for pilots is normally 35. Most of the flying by R.N.V.R. personnel is carried out during



THE FLIGHT DECK OF H.M.S. "THESEUS" SHOWING SEAFIRES OF THE R.N.V.R. SQUADRON AND VAMPIRES OF THE CARRIER AIR GROUP

their annual continuous training and at weekends, but they may fly at any other time if they wish. In addition to aircrew, other categories of R.N.V.R. officers are borne. In 1832 Squadron there are three Air Engineer Officers, 1 Electrical Officer, 2 Air Traffic Control Officers, 1 Supply Officer, and 2 Medical Officers. These also attend for weekend and continuous training, but they are not eligible for an annual bounty. All R.N.V.R. personnel are allowed travelling expenses.

R.N.V.R. Ratings

There are about 120 R.N.V.R. ratings attached to the Squadron. These are of two distinct kinds :

Ex-service ratings.—These are enrolled in the R.N.V.R. in the same rates as they held at the time of their release from the service. They sign on for a period of five years during which time they are required to perform a minimum of 56 days' continuous training (most ratings do 14 days' continuous training during each of their five years). In addition to this, each rating is required to perform 80 hours' non-continuous training per year. One day is considered to be four hours' duty and thus attendance required works out at about one weekend per month. Each rating is paid according to his rate, and can qualify for an annual bounty. Uniform is provided free of charge and is the same as that worn by the equivalent R.N. rating, with the addition of the letters " R.N.V.R." on the cuff of the left sleeve.

Pre-National Service ratings.—These are enrolled between the ages of 17 and 17½ years. They enter as Junior Naval Airmen and are guaranteed their

National Service in the Royal Navy if they are efficient and medically fit. Young men over 17½ can be accepted provided their National Service has been deferred long enough to enable them to undergo at least one year's training before call-up.

Pre-National Service ratings are given one year's training before their call up. During this year they are given some of the training which they would normally get during their first few months in a training establishment. Their conditions of service are similar to those for other R.N.V.R. ratings. Those who are at boarding school or whose employment makes it impossible for them to attend weekend training may attend for periods of continuous training instead of attending at weekends. There is also a scheme whereby young men who possess certain trade qualifications may enrol as probationary aircraft artificers.

The Establishment

The establishment of aircraft in 1832 Squadron is at present 14 Seafires, Mk. 17 ; four Harvards, Mk. 2B ; one Auster, Mk. 5 ; and one Seafury, Mk. 20. During the summer months the establishment of Seafires is usually increased to about 30 to ensure that there are sufficient aircraft to meet the flying commitments. The aircraft are housed in two adjacent hangars at R.N.A.S. Culham. An office block is situated nearby and the electrical, radio and ordnance workshops are also situated within a few yards of the hangars. There is a photographic section, and a stop butts where the aircraft cannons can be tested. An issue centre is provided for the issue of spares and stores and there is a crew room for the use of the R.N.V.R. aircrew. One end of this building is fitted out as a rest room for use between flights and the other end is equipped as a briefing room. This can also be used as a lecture room and there are facilities for showing films. The building also contains a Safety Equipment store where parachutes, dinghies, etc., can be kept when not in use. Two instructional classrooms are maintained for the instruction of technical ratings.

Several R.N. officers are attached to the Squadron. One Lieutenant is borne as Chief Flying Instructor, he is a fully qualified flying instructor and in addition to his instructional duties he acts as Squadron Commanding Officer in the absence of the latter. Another Lieutenant is borne as Staff Officer. He may also be a flying instructor, but his main job is connected with the administrative and recruiting work of the Squadron. He also acts as Divisional Officer to the R.N.V.R. ratings. One Lieutenant (E) is borne as Squadron Air Engineer Officer. He is responsible for the serviceability and airworthiness of the aircraft, for the technical organization of the Squadron and for its working routine. He is responsible for the employment of all R.N. and R.N.V.R. ratings.

A number of R.N. ratings are borne for duty with each R.N.V.R. Squadron. These consist of fitters, riggers, electricians, radio and radar mechanics, ordnancemen, photographers, aircraft handlers, stores assistants and writers. The Squadron Air Engineer Officer acts as Divisional Officer for all R.N. ratings. The aim of the maintenance staff is to produce the maximum aircraft availability at weekends so that pilots can gain the maximum profit and advantage from their visits. During the week a smaller number of aircraft are kept available for flying and the main task of the maintenance staff is to carry out the necessary repairs, inspections, modifications, etc. The Squadron is responsible for the complete first and second line servicing of its own aircraft up to (but not including) major inspections.



RATINGS OF THE R.N.V.R. SQUADRON WORKING ON AN AIRCRAFT IN ONE OF THE HANGARS

Entry and Training

The procedure for enrolling and training R.N.V.R. ratings will now be described in greater detail. The Squadron is authorized to spend a sum of money each year on publicity. With this money posters and leaflets are printed and distributed, advertisements are inserted in local newspapers, slides are exhibited at local cinemas and shop window exhibitions are arranged from time to time. Squadron officers give lectures at local schools, and members of the Squadron are asked to encourage their friends to join. Prospective recruits are invited to write to the Squadron to ask for further details. Each applicant is then invited to visit the Squadron one weekend, bringing his Service Certificate and History Sheet with him. He is told that he is under no obligation to join and that his travelling expenses will be refunded. On arrival he is interviewed by the recruiting officer. His service history is investigated and the conditions of service are explained to him. If he is acceptable and is willing to join he is sent to the Sick Bay for a medical examination, and if this is satisfactory he is formally enrolled into the R.N.V.R. The training programme which he then follows is laid down in the syllabus of instruction for ex-service ratings.

Pre-National Service applicants are required to bring with them a testimonial from their headmasters or employers when they attend for interview. In addition to the normal interview they undergo a series of psychological tests to ascertain their intelligence, mechanical aptitude, etc. Subject to suitability and medical fitness the candidate is enrolled and his subsequent training

programme is laid down in the syllabus of instruction for pre-National Service entries. It will be noted that these entries are under training during the whole of the time that they are with the Squadron and their syllabus of instruction has to be concentrated in order to fulfil the requirements of the course.

In the case of ex-Service technical ratings the refresher training laid down in the syllabus is intended only as a necessary prelude to their employment on "live" aircraft. Several lectures and demonstrations are given to these ratings, but the main part of their training is of a practical nature in order that each rating may regain his efficiency in his former trade as quickly as possible. When a rating is considered to be proficient in his trade he is given an oral and practical examination. If he passes this successfully he is re-awarded the "Qualified to sign Form 700" qualification, and is then eligible to work on aircraft under the same conditions as R.N. ratings.

A number of difficulties have to be overcome in connection with the employment of R.N.V.R. ratings on aircraft. For example, these ratings attend for only one and a half days at a time and it is therefore impracticable to start them on a lengthy job which they might be unable to finish before their departure. Secondly, if the R.N. maintenance personnel have done their job well, most of the aircraft are serviceable to fly, and therefore there can be little repair work for the R.N.V.R. skilled ratings to do. Thirdly, the utmost vigilance is needed in order to keep the R.N.V.R. ratings up to date with the latest maintenance regulations and safety precautions. This is essential if accidents are to be avoided.

Various means are used to overcome these difficulties. Certain jobs can be purposely saved for the weekend without any adverse effect upon the serviceability of the aircraft (*e.g.*, Inhibiting and preparation of power plants for despatch, component servicing, etc.). An instructional aircraft is maintained which can be run up, and inspected, and thus provide employment for several tradesmen if no work on a live aircraft is available. A proportion of the R.N. ratings are given leave each weekend and the deficiency in numbers is made up by the R.N.V.R. ratings. This makes the R.N. watchbill easier to work and ensures that there is always some work for the R.N.V.R. ratings to do when they come. A comprehensive set of Technical Orders is maintained and each rating is required to sign a certificate to the effect that he has read and understood these orders. New orders are brought to the attention of the ratings by means of Notice Boards and special lectures. The employment of non-technical R.N.V.R. ratings is an easier matter; Stores Assistants, Sick Berth Attendants, Air Traffic Control ratings, Safety Equipment ratings, are sent to work in the appropriate section, and it is found that they very soon regain their proficiency in their former trades.

It is essential that all R.N.V.R. ratings should be given every encouragement to keep themselves proficient in their trades so that no time need be wasted on further training in the event of mobilization. They are encouraged to take part in all of the social and recreational activities of the Station in so far as their civilian commitments permit. Everything possible is done to ensure that they feel themselves to be valued members of the Squadron and of the Service.