

ROYAL OBSERVER CORPS HAS PRIORITY DEFENCE ROLE
IN FUTURE YEARS

Fighter Command, Royal Air Force, holds its major air defence exercise from October 16 to 18, 1958. Closely associated with the rest of Britain's defence system will be the members of the Royal Observer Corps, on whom the threat of nuclear war has thrust a new, vital and up-to-date task.

By Frank Tinsley

THE ROYAL OBSERVER CORPS, unlike so many branches of defence that were made obsolete by nuclear development, has today a vital and up-to-date part to play in the protection of this country.

The vital job of reporting "fall-out" from a nuclear bomb falls now to the R.O.C. Since 1955 it has been responsible, in co-operation with Fighter Command and the Home Office, for tracking the deadly radio-active dust whose whereabouts and density must quickly be determined to ensure immediate action by Civil Defence and the armed forces if the civil population in the area are to survive. The organisation which for years operated proudly as "the eyes and ears of the R.A.F." has now become an indispensable nationwide scientific nerve centre. Visual "spotting" of aircraft still remains an important task, but much air activity has already passed beyond the limits of human hearing and vision, and often tracking is now only possible by radar. There still remains the possibility of low-level air attack, and here the Corps' tracking function would be of first importance.

MORE NEEDED

There is today room, indeed a great need, for thousands more volunteers to swell the R.O.C.'s present 15,000-odd members. The Corps wants men and women who are willing to devote a comparatively few hours of their time yearly to help keep Britain safe. Those who do will now learn to spot the many new types of aircraft; and how to measure and report the power and height at which a nuclear weapon has burst; and how to track the deadly "fall-out".

New underground Posts which are under construction will allow Observers to operate in safety until they may return to the surface after a nuclear attack. All the existing 1,500 Posts in Britain are gradually being provided with these underground "annexes" in which Observers could live for days, tracking the path of radioactive "fall-out" through instruments providing readings from above ground. They are equipped with sleeping facilities, and would be stocked with food to last a given period. Every five minutes, information would be passed through a communications network to R.A.F. and Civil Defence operations rooms, giving them a clear picture of both contaminated and "free" territories. Without such information defence and rescue operations would be impossible.

Except for a small basic number of regular officers, the R.O.C. is a voluntary organisation. Its doors are open to men and women who are British subjects (with some reservations governing R.A.F. personnel and reservists liable for call-up) aged 15 to 60 and normally fit (spectacles are no bar), willing to sign up for at least three years, put in 18 hours' training every six months, and, in a national emergency, to undertake to devote not less than 12 hours weekly to duty.

MUCH

MUCH TO OFFER

The Corps has much to offer its members. The uniform is free. Members learn their interesting work from experts. Travel expenses are paid for all duty trips. All members are eligible for Officer appointments, and those who eventually qualify as Master Observers are awarded the highly-prized "Spitfire" badge. At annual summer camps, attendance at which is voluntary, training is combined with social and recreational activities. This summer the Corps held its biggest camp with 3,000 men and women from all over Britain attending.

HOW OBSERVERS WORK

And what, having volunteered, will newcomers find at the Group of their choice? They will find themselves a link in the chain connecting various Posts within their Group with the Fighter Command Control and Reporting Organisation - the nerve centre of Britain's air defence. The central point in an R.O.C. Group is its Operations Room, containing a large plotting table surrounded on three sides by a balcony and on the fourth wall by a vertically-mounted table - the Long Range Plotting Board. "Plotters" and "tellers", men or women, or both, man the room, each plotter linked by telephone to a cluster of Posts. Aircraft movements are reported on the plotting table by special counters indicating the number, height, speed and direction of any formation, which the "tellers" on the surrounding balcony communicate to Fighter Command and adjacent R.O.C. Groups. Other counters plot the whereabouts and density of "fall-out", the information being passed to a Home Office scientific team working with Fighter Command. Other "plotters" record on the Long Range Board reports of aircraft movements in adjoining R.O.C. Groups, and their reports of radioactive danger zones. Thus, the Centre's Duty Controller knows at once all aircraft movements and radio-active danger zones in his own Group and within a radius of 100 miles.

32,000 IN LAST WAR

In the last war Fighter Command's ability to repel enemy aircraft attacking Britain was due in large measure to the 32,000 men and women of the R.O.C. who unceasingly manned hundreds of Posts and Centre Operations Rooms throughout England, Scotland and Wales, "spotting" for Fighter Command both friendly and enemy aircraft. In addition they provided information for air-raid warnings, saved millions of man-hours by making it possible for the Home Security authorities to give "imminent" warnings to factories so that they could continue working to the last minute, "nursed" home crippled British aircraft and so saved many aircrews from injury or death to fight again, and directed search parties to crash scenes. R.O.C. observers made history by reporting the first and last enemy air attacks on Britain, and, from Dymchurch, by first flashing the code word "diver" to the defence forces as they saw the first V.1 "buzz-bomb" cross the south coast to open Hitler's pilotless missile offensive. When the Allied liberation armada sailed for the invasion of Europe, R.O.C. observers with "seaborne" on their shoulders were aboard many of the vessels.

The Corps, which became "Royal" in 1941 by order of the late King, was further honoured in 1950 when he became its first Air Commodore-in-Chief. The Queen followed the example of her father and became Air Commodore-in-Chief in 1953.

The Royal Observer Corps badge has for its motto the words "Forewarned is Forearmed". The badge bears on its reverse a replica of an Elizabethan coast watcher, with torch, standing beside a signal fire.

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October, 1958.

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Tel.: TRAlgalgar 8811
Extn. 7446

AIR MINISTRY,

INFORMATION DIVISION,

LONDON, S.W.1.

Ref.: Inf.1(b)

19 June, 1960

Dear Sir,

The first of a number of specially constructed underground Group Headquarters, designed to allow the Royal Observer Corps to operate for long periods, completely self-contained in the event of nuclear war has been constructed at No. 57 London Road, Maidstone, Kent.

The Headquarters, which is air-conditioned and includes an operations room, offices, dormitories for men and women, training rooms and a canteen, will be opened by General Sir Sydney Kirkman, Director-General of Civil Defence at the Home Office, at 3.0 p.m. on Saturday, June 25.

An exercise, demonstrating the Royal Observer Corps' nuclear-age functions, will be in progress on the opening day.

Will you please let me know (Telephone TRA 8811, extns. 7446 and 6909) if you wish to be represented?

Yours faithfully,

C. L. Fisher

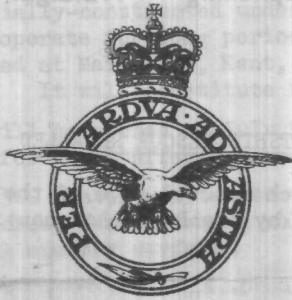
(C. L. FISHER)
for Chief Information Officer

The Editor,

2/17.

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AIR MINISTRY

News Letter

INFORMATION DIVISION • WHITEHALL • LONDON • S-W-1

*Plotting first reports of
fallout.*

*Monitoring information
by hand with pointers*

Large size plotting board.

In order to provide for simultaneous publication at Home and Overseas, Editors are asked not to publish items from this News Letter No. 699 before the morning of 10 June 1960

Further information may be obtained by telephoning **Trafalgar 8811, Ext. 7448 or 7449.**

NORTH CARR LIGHTSHIP RESCUE RECALLED

The pilot of the R.A.F. helicopter which rescued five of the crew of the North Carr Lightship last December has been awarded a medal by the Royal Aeronautical Society for his "brilliantly skilful performance".

To Flight Sergeant Basil Breach (29) of No. 228 Squadron, Coastal Command, based at R.A.F. Leuchars, Fife, goes this award - the Alan Marsh prize presented to British pilots by the Society's Rotorcraft Section in recognition of outstanding pilotage.

Battered by gales, the North Carr lightship was in imminent danger of foundering when on December 9 the Broughty Ferry lifeboat set out in high seas to go to her aid. The lifeboat was lost with all hands. The R.A.F. was then called in and Flight Sergeant Breach, at the controls of a Sycamore helicopter, flew to the scene. Hovering over the ship, bludgeoned by high winds, the helicopter winched up two of the crew and flew them to the shore. Returning, it took off three more, including the captain. The entire operation from the moment the helicopter took off until the last man was landed lasted 1 hr. 33 mins.

A second helicopter of No. 228 Squadron, piloted by Flight Lieutenant J. E. McCrea, D.F.C., stood by during the operation and then rescued the two remaining members of the crew.

Flight Sergeant Breach will be presented with his prize at the Rotorcraft Section's annual dinner at the Dorchester Hotel on September 8.

Flt. Sgt. Breach's home address: SHALDEN Drive, MORDEN, Surrey.

W.R.A.F. N.C.O. BEGINS NEW SERVICE CAREER

A 20-year ambition fulfilled is the satisfying achievement of Phyllis Bounden who, qualifying as a state registered nurse, has become the first woman ever to be commissioned into the Princess Mary's R.A.F. Nursing Service from the Women's Royal Air Force.

Flying Officer Bounden, as she now is, joined the W.A.A.F. in 1941 as an equipment assistant, and looked after medical stores in R.A.F. hospitals in Britain, Algeria, Egypt and Singapore.

In 1954 she finally resolved to become a nursing attendant and following basic training at R.A.F. Warton, Lancs., was posted to R.A.F. Hospital, Wegberg, in Germany, and later to Ely, to train as a state registered nurse. She became a sergeant.

Now embarked on a new career in the P.M.R.A.F.N.S. she is serving at Halton, where, during a recent visit by the Princess Royal, Flying Officer Bounden was chosen to present Her Royal Highness with a bouquet of flowers.

Home address: 19, Treveneague Gardens, Plymouth, Devon.

R.A.F. LECTURER FOR PAKISTAN

To give the latest in a series of lectures by R.A.F. officers to the Pakistan Air Force Staff College since its opening early last year, Air Commodore W. E. Coles, Senior Air Staff Officer, No. 3 (Bomber) Group, flies to Karachi on June 17, to present to students a picture of how R.A.F. Bomber Command trains and operates.

The curriculum at the Staff College is modelled on that of the R.A.F. Staff College at Bracknell, just as the organisation of the Pakistan Air Force is based on the R.A.F.'s.

Air Commodore Coles served during the war in European, Middle East and Far East theatres, largely on transport and night-bomber operations, including paratroop and supply-dropping in Burma and over the Continent. At Arnhem he commanded No. 233 (Dakota) Squadron.

FIRST UNDERGROUND OBSERVER GROUP H.Q. TO OPEN

The first of a number of specially-constructed underground Group Headquarters designed to allow the Royal Observer Corps to operate for long periods, completely self-contained, in the event of nuclear war, will be opened at Maidstone, Kent, on June 25, by General Sir Sidney Kirkman, Director-General of Civil Defence. It will constitute the Headquarters of No. 1 Group, R.O.C.

A similar subterranean H.Q. will be opened on July 9 for No. 17 Group at Wrexham, North Wales, by Lord Brecon, Minister of State for Welsh Affairs.

Over 700 out of a total of 1,500 heavily-protected underground R.O.C. posts have also been built around Britain in the past three years in which volunteer Observers, linked to the Groups controlling them, would work during nuclear warfare.

The R.O.C., for many years the 'eyes' of Fighter Command in an aircraft spotting role, now has responsibility for reporting nuclear fall-out.

The new air-conditioned Headquarters consist of an operations room, offices, dormitories for men and women, contamination-cleansing rooms, a kitchen and canteen, training and storage rooms. Their walls are finished in a coating of anti-condensation material.

The functions of the nuclear-age H.Qs would be to receive and co-ordinate information on fall-out from the posts they control and from other Groups, and pass it on to the Civil Defence authorities, the Services and other interested organisations.

A WINDOW ON THE R.A.F. IN CYPRUS

An illustrated guide book to the Royal Air Force in Cyprus is now being distributed to officers, airmen and airwomen posted to the island.

Edited and compiled by Mr. Michael Perceval, a former education officer stationed at R.A.F. Nicosia, the book incorporates thumb-nail sketches of all R.A.F. units, laying particular emphasis on the amenities each offers.

Comprehensive advice is given on accommodation problems for married airmen, shopping and health, education, religious matters, domestic budgeting, pets, clothing and transportation.

On the recreational side, the newcomer is briefed on how to make the most of his tour with the Middle East Air Force by taking part in yachting, water skiing, mountaineering, underwater swimming and a multiplicity of other sports.

Service motor clubs, music circles, pony clubs and amateur dramatic societies also have a place in the guide book which is illustrated both by photographs and lighthearted cartoons.

NORFOLK GETS NEW R.A.F. RECRUITING CENTRE

A new R.A.F. recruiting centre decorated in Tudor style is to be opened in Norwich by the Lord Mayor on June 15.

For the past twenty years the city's R.A.F. recruiting premises have been in the Ministry of Labour building which the Army has also shared.

Prelude to the noon opening ceremony will be a parade in front of the City Hall by a ceremonial flight from No. 16 (Field) Squadron, R.A.F. Regiment, Felixstowe, supported by No. 1 Regional Band, at which the Lord Mayor will take the salute.

After the march-past the Lord Mayor and guests will go to the new recruiting centre for the opening. A reception will follow.

Commander of the Centre - at 6, Bridewell - will be Flight Lieutenant R. J. H. Wilders, who has been on the R.A.F. recruiting staff in Norwich for fifteen months.

AIR GUNNERY TROPHY FOR R.A.F. SQUADRON IN GERMANY

The Duncan Trophy - a two-handled silver cup presented by General Gervasio Duncan to commemorate his visit to the R.A.F. in 1947 when Chief of Staff of the Brazilian Air Force - has been won for 1959 by No. 26 (Hunter) Squadron, based at Gutersloh in Germany.

The trophy was handed over to the squadron by the Duke of Gloucester during his recent visit to the R.A.F. in Germany.

It is awarded annually to the fighter squadron of the 2nd Tactical Air Force achieving the best results in air-to-air gunnery training.

The trophy was competed for within the 2nd Tactical Air Force for the first time in 1954. It was originally accepted by the Air Council for annual competition between day fighter squadrons in Fighter Command and the British Air Forces of Occupation, Germany, going to the squadron adjudged to have made the greatest contribution towards flying with safety in all weather conditions.