

§ 3. Air Defence.

1. **General.**—Having regard to the development in aircraft, the Australian military authorities, as early as 1911, were considering the question of providing for local air defence. In 1912 approval was given for the establishment, as part of the army organization, of a Central Flying School for the training of aeroplane pilots. An area of land was acquired at Point Cook, Victoria; hangars and workshops were erected, and two flying instructors, four mechanics, and five aeroplanes were obtained from England. In June, 1914, the work at Point Cook was sufficiently advanced to permit the commencement of training, and the first course was arranged to begin on the 14th August, 1914. The training of pilots at the School continued actively throughout the War, but after the cessation of hostilities the staff was reduced to a small nucleus.

No steps were taken towards the establishment of a Naval Air Service beyond the appointment, in 1918, of an Air Adviser to the Navy Department.

In 1920 it was resolved to establish an Australian Air Force. Pending the passing of an Air Defence Bill, the Australian Air Force was constituted by proclamation issued under the powers contained in the Defence Act 1903–1918, as part of the Australian Military Forces. This was effected as from 31st March, 1921, and from 13th August, 1921, the Force was designated the Royal Australian Air Force. The Air Defence Bill was passed by the Senate in May of that year, but lapsed on the prorogation of Parliament. The Air Defence Bill was presented to Parliament again in 1923 and after debate was withdrawn and a short Bill drafted—entitled the Air Force Act 1923. This Bill passed through all stages and was assented to on 1st September, 1923. It is a temporary measure constituting the Royal Australian Air Force an autonomous arm of the Defence Forces, and will probably be superseded by a more comprehensive measure.

Under the new Air Board Regulations issued in October, 1922, the Royal Australian Air Force is administered by a Board consisting of two Air Force members and a Finance member. To this Force is entrusted the air defence of Australia, the training of personnel for co-operation with the naval and military forces, and the refresher training of pilots engaging in civil aviation. The present establishment of the Force includes the following units:—

- (a) Head-Quarters, Royal Australian Air Force, with representation at the Air Ministry in London;
- (b) One Station containing a Flying Training School, a Stores Depot, and one composite squadron.
- (c) One Station containing one composite squadron and one flight.
- (d) An Experimental Section.

In deciding all matters of policy the Minister is assisted by a representative Air Council, which includes officers of the Navy, Army, and Air Force, and the Controller of Civil Aviation.

2. **Establishment.**—The present approved establishment of the Permanent Air Force is 71 officers and 453 airmen.

The policy of the Air Force is to form in peace an efficient nucleus which in time of war will be capable of rapid expansion to meet war requirements.

3. **Aerial Routes.**—Aerodromes and Alighting Sites have been prepared between the capital cities and on certain parts of the coast for service and civil purposes. The total number prepared to date is 120.

4. **Civil Aviation.**—Details regarding the formation and activities of the Civil Aviation Department will be found in Chapter VII., Section D. Aircraft.