

**\*1221.—Fleet Air Arm—Air Gunners, Observer's Mates and Rating Pilots.—Re-organisation and Institution of New Branch.**

(N. 3371/39.—11.5.1939.)

Their Lordships have had under review the present regulations concerning the non-substantive rates of Air Gunner, Observer's Mate and Rating Pilot, and the manner in which the personnel holding those rates is provided.

2. The review had become necessary because, owing to the expansion of the Fleet and the number of ratings to be provided by the Navy for the Fleet Air Arm, the continued provision of men for Fleet Air Arm non-substantive rates by other branches has placed a strain on the resources of those branches, and this cannot be continued in the same degree. Moreover, under the present procedure, ratings while remaining members of other branches have experienced difficulties in obtaining the necessary qualifications for advancement in their substantive rate owing to their continuous employment on Fleet Air Arm duties.

3. In order to meet those difficulties, Their Lordships have approved the formation of a separate branch of naval personnel, to comprise ratings holding the non-substantive rates of Air Gunner, Rating Observer (previous title Observer's Mate) and Rating Pilot. Men holding those rates will therefore, when the new organisation is in force, no longer belong to the Seaman, Signal or Telegraphist branches as at present, and will have full opportunity to develop a naval career whilst employed on their duties in the Fleet Air Arm.

4. The new branch will be administered by the Rear Admiral, Naval Air Stations, at the headquarters of the newly formed Fleet Air Arm Division. All training, drafting and advancement of the personnel will be centralised, and ratings of the new branch will belong to the Fleet Air Arm Division instead of being attached to one of the three Home Ports as at present.

5. As a result of the consolidation of the various ratings into one branch, it has been necessary to assign one general scale of pay which shall replace the several scales at present in operation.



7. The present titles, and the rules for granting a step in rating with certain qualifications, will be revised as follows :—

(a) **Air Gunners** will, in future, consist of three rates, Air Gunner 3rd Class, Air Gunner 2nd class and Air Gunner 1st class. The 3rd class rate will be equivalent to the present rate of Air Gunner. Details concerning the qualifications and duties assigned to each of the three grades and the manner of advancement in non-substantive rates are promulgated separately.

(b) The present non-substantive rate of **Observer's Mate** will be re-named Rating Observer, with separate acting and confirmed rates as at present. Men holding an Air Gunner rate who volunteer and are recommended as suitable for training as Rating Observer, will be given a course of training. On commencement of the course men will be advanced to the Acting rating of Leading Airman, and on qualifying as Acting Rating Observer will be rated Acting Petty Officer Airman, with confirmation in substantive and non-substantive rate in the normal course. (See para. 9 (ii).)

(c) In future the non-substantive rate of **Rating Pilot** will be granted on successful completion of the course in the Flying Training School, when men will be rated Acting Petty Officer Airman, with full non-substantive pay, specialised naval flying courses being taken later.

Rating Pilots will serve under a continuous service engagement. The normal period of full flying duties will be 10 years from commencement of training.

Thereafter, ratings will pass into one of three categories, as follows :—

(A) A limited number of Rating Pilots who volunteer to do so and are recommended will continue on full flying duties for further periods of two years, a re-assessment of fitness for flying being made at the end of each period.

(B) Those who remain fit for flying but are not selected for category (A) will constitute a Reserve of Rating Pilots within the Service and will be required to carry out the periodical flying practices and periods of training laid down for other classes of Reserve Pilots of the Fleet Air Arm.

(C) Those who, on account of physical unfitness or any other reason, are not permitted to continue flying.

Rating Pilots who do not re-engage to complete time for pension but who remain fit for flying duties may volunteer for enrolment in the Royal Fleet Reserve as Rating Pilot under the same conditions in regard to flying practice as are laid down for category (B) above.

8. As one of the objects of the re-organisation is to allow other branches full scope to develop their personnel to carry out their own specialised duties efficiently, the Flying Branch will, in the future, to a large extent recruit its personnel direct from shore, and transfers from other branches will be regulated to requirements in those branches. Men who have already been accepted for training in Fleet Air Arm non-substantive rates will, however, be taken for the new branch.

Ratings of other branches who, when manning conditions admit, are accepted for training as Air Gunner, Rating Observer or Rating Pilot will revert to their former duties at any stage of their training if found to be unsuitable for Fleet Air Arm duties.

*Uniforms.*—Ratings of the Flying Branch will be dressed as Seamen with changes of uniform as for Petty Officers and Chief Petty Officers of the Seaman branch.

9. *Transfer of existing personnel.*—Ratings already holding the non-substantive rates of Air Gunner (Acting and Confirmed), Observer's Mate (Acting and Confirmed) and Rating Pilot, will be assimilated to the new branch in the substantive rating equivalent to the rating at present held by them, with full seniority due under present rules. Non-substantive rates will be dealt with as follows :—

(i) *Air Gunners.*—All men holding the present rate of Air Gunner (Acting or Confirmed) will be transferred to Air Gunner, 3rd class (Acting or Confirmed as appropriate). Particulars concerning immediate selection for higher Air Gunner rates are promulgated separately.

Men under training for Air Gunners will be rated Acting Air Gunner, 3rd class, on successful completion of their present course.

(ii) *Observers.*—All men holding the present rate of Acting Observer's Mate will be transferred to Acting Rating Observer with the substantive rating and pay of Acting Petty Officer Airman if they do not already hold a Petty Officer rate.

Men holding the confirmed rate of Observer's Mate will be transferred to Rating Observer with the substantive rate of Petty Officer or Chief Petty Officer Airman as appropriate to their present substantive rate.

Men undergoing training for Observer's Mate will where necessary be granted the Acting Leading rating. If already holding a confirmed substantive Leading or Petty Officer rating this will be altered to the nomenclature of the new branch. Advancement to Acting Rating Observer and to Acting Petty Officer Airman will be made on successful completion of the course, with confirmation as Rating Observer after six months' satisfactory service in the acting rating, and confirmation as Petty Officer Airman in the normal course.

(iii) *Rating Pilots.*—Men undergoing training for Rating Pilot will, where necessary, be given an Acting Leading rating, and on successful completion of the course at a Royal Air Force Flying Training School, will be rated "Rating Pilot" (confirmed) with the substantive rate of Acting Petty Officer Airman and confirmation as such in the normal course. (See also para. 12.)

(iv) *Men under training.*—Men who belong to other branches at the time of their selection for training will not be permanently transferred to the new branch until they have successfully completed their non-substantive course.

Candidates for Rating Observer will retain their Air Gunner rate and will thus already belong to the new branch ; the procedure under sub-para. (ii) above will apply.

10. *Selection for non-substantive rates.*—Candidates should generally have passed standard or provisional swimming test before being accepted for non-substantive courses in the Flying Branch, although candidates who are unable to swim may, in special circumstances, be accepted. The existing arrangements for men under training will be retained except that ratings will be transferred to the new branch for training, substantive rate being granted in accordance with paragraph 9 (ii) and (iii) above.

It is expected that direct entries to the Flying Branch will become available for Air Gunner in the autumn of the present year, when further transfers to the new branch from other branches will be regulated in accordance with paragraph 8.

*Rating Observer.*—The present system of recommending and selecting men qualified as Air Gunner for training in Observer duties will be continued.

*Rating Pilot.*—Present arrangements will be continued.

11. *Advancement.*—Advancement to the Leading, Petty Officer and Chief Petty Officer Airman rate will be regulated by rosters in vacancies on similar principles to those at present applied to Seaman ratings.

Ratings on permanent transfer under this order, will be allocated Official Numbers in the F. and F.X. series, and care should therefore be taken to ensure that all such transfers are reported on Forms S 52 and 52 A.

The existing instructions for rendering Forms S 161 will apply to the changes made under this Order.

12. *Date of effect of new procedure.*—The necessary changes in substantive rating, non-substantive rate and rates of pay of personnel already holding any of the non-substantive rates of Rating Pilot, Observer's Mate or Air Gunner, are to be effected to date 1st June, 1939, except that Rating Pilots who have already passed out of the Royal Air Force Flying Training Schools are to have their substantive rating and non-substantive rate adjusted with pay to the date on which they passed out of the School. The substantive rating in those instances will be in the Seaman Branch for any period prior to the 1st June, 1939.

(A.F.Os. 459/38, 846/38, 1220/38, 2548/38 and 95/39 will be cancelled.)

(K.R. & A.I. will be amended.)

(This Order will be reprinted for posting on Notice Boards.)