

R.C.A.F. Airwomen Eager For Operational Duties

Ottawa, Oct. 5 (CP).—The young woman joining the Women's Division of the Royal Canadian Air Force is just as keen to be an operations' room clerk as the average young man is keen to be a pilot, nine officers of the division agreed today at a press conference.

The staff officers are in Ottawa for their first meeting since the division went on active service. Under their command, from coast to coast, are about 7,000 women.

Their force will be one year old Oct. 21, and they were agreed that R.C.A.F. women have shown they can do many essential jobs just as well as men. But they didn't say they could do these tasks better than men.

"We don't believe in saying the airwomen are better, and we just say that they do these jobs as well," one smiling officer said.

Ten members of the division now are in the United Kingdom receiving instruction as operations' room clerks, said Squadron Officer Kathleen Walker of Ottawa, senior officer of the division. When they return they will be available as instructors.

Appeals to Women.

Operations' room clerks keep in touch with aircraft in flight and mark their positions for operational officers. Such women will be used extensively in Canada after training is available for more members of the women's division.

All nine officers said this type of work appears to appeal to women now in the service because it gives women an actual part in operational activities.

"We have in the Division at least eight women with their private pilots' licenses, and there are many others who would like to have instruction in flying so they could undertake the ferrying of machines, as is being done by women pilots in the United Kingdom," said Squadron Officer Walker.

She consulted with other officers and most of them reported would-be pilots had made application for enlistment.

The round-table consultation also brought out that the Division has:

A qualified woman welder now employed in aircraft work;

An experienced parachute jumper—Assistant Section Officer E. G. Flint of Flin Flon, Man., now in Ottawa;

Several meteorologists who have been taking special courses;

A number attending wireless courses at Montreal who, after grad-

uation, will take over ground duties now handled by men.

Officers said that those taking the wireless courses have done "extraordinarily well." Some had completed examinations with 100 per cent marks and the majority ran about 96 per cent.

Women appeared to have an aptitude for this type of work which perhaps made it easier for them to learn than it was for men.

As for teletype operators, a group of women "completed in three weeks a course that usually takes six weeks."

Instruction will be given in aircraft helper classes through which women are to be trained in some of the lighter work of aircraft maintenance. Already women are engaged in mending torn fabric, placing dope on wings and fuselage, and other work for which they are fitted.

But, the officers said, one of the most important contributions of the Women's Division was in the kitchens. Airmen had indicated satisfaction with having women take part in the preparation and service of meals. In the officers and sergeants' messes, women are actually serving the food.

The officers entered the R.C.A.F. division with the rank of airwomen last year and went through the ordinary basic courses.

Original Officer.

Squadron Officer Walker was the first Canadian woman to hold the King's commission in the R.C.A.F. She was active in the Red Cross transport service before the war, but said: "I was mainly a housewife."

Flight Officer Willa Walker of Montreal is officer commanding No. 7 Manning Depot at Rockcliffe, near Ottawa. She is the wife of Captain David Walker, who was taken prisoner during the German drive on the Channel ports in June, 1940.

Flight Officer Winifred Taylor of Toronto commands the training wing at No. 6 Manning Depot, Toronto.

Flight Officer Marion Peiler of Montreal is women's division staff officer at the eastern air command at Halifax. She is the wife of Lieutenant-Colonel M. F. Peiler, now overseas.

Section Officer Moira Drummond of Montreal, staff officer at No. 3 Training Command at Montreal, was a painter of some distinction before enlisting.

Flight Officer Jean Cumming of Montreal, staff officer at No. 1 Training Command, Toronto, was with a travel agency and had worked on a Vancouver newspaper.

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Flight Officer E. J. C. Henderson of Toronto, staff officer at No. 2 Training Command, Winnipeg, was secretary to the head of a Toronto publishing house.

Section Officer Sylvia Evans of Edmonton, staff officer at No. 4 Training Command, Calgary, was with a "welcome wagon" service at Edmonton, and Section Officer Jean T. Cameron of Woodstock, Ont., staff officer at the western air command at Victoria, was on the staff of Woodstock High School.