

Royal New Zealand Air Force MCH, 2012h

Page 1 – Introduction

1934

On 1 April 1937 the Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF) became an independent service within the New Zealand defence forces. This marked the culmination of two decades of struggle for parity with its army and navy counterparts. In the subsequent 75 years the RNZAF has built up a proud tradition of service, demonstrating resourcefulness and professionalism in the face of changes and challenges.

Hundreds of New Zealanders flew in Allied air forces during the First World War. The small air force established in the 1920s remained under army control until 1937. Two years later, an independent RNZAF started training thousands of aircrew for the war in Europe and later undertook operations against Japanese forces in the Pacific.

The post-war period brought radical change in the RNZAF's size, structure, and equipment. Following deployments in South-East Asia during the 1960s, the air force began to focus on maritime surveillance and strengthened ties with the United States. Government policy during the 1980s and 1990s impacted heavily on the air force. The collapse of ANZUS ties with the United States, cuts in defence spending, and the decision to focus on peacekeeping culminated in the disbanding of RNZAF's combat force in 2001. Despite these challenges, the air force remained an integral part of New Zealand's humanitarian and peacekeeping efforts. Deployments in the Middle East and the Pacific highlighted the importance of modern air support, prompting a major upgrade of the RNZAF's fleet and the purchase of new aircraft.

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pg 129

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