Jabberwock

The Magazine of The Society of
Friends of the Fleet Air Arm Museum

No. 94
February 2019

SOCIETY OF FRIENDS
FLEET AIR ARM
MUSEUM

In this issue

Plus all the usual features: Readers' letters, Snippets from Council meetings, monthly talks programme, Talks Reviews, latest membership numbers etc.

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM ROYAL NAVY

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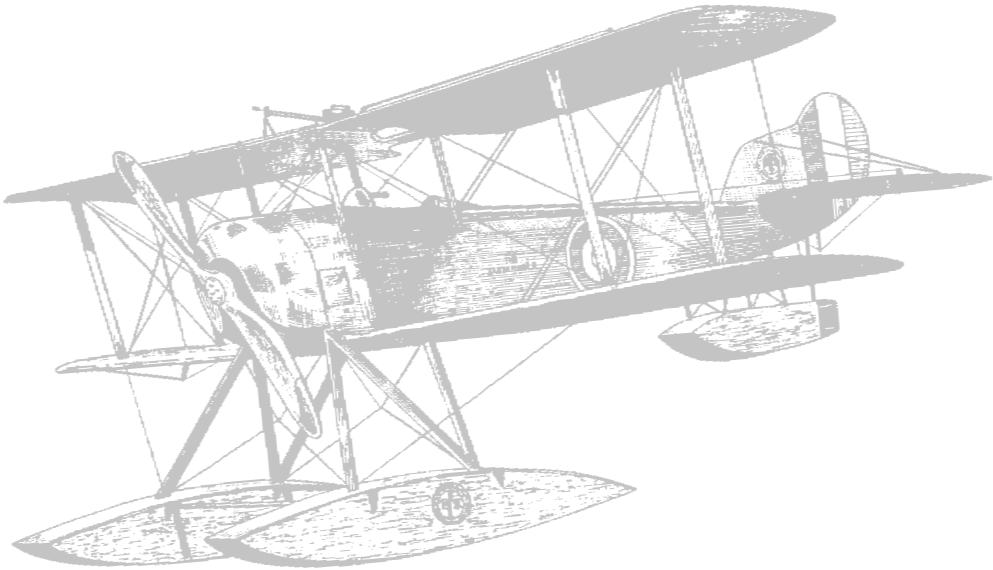

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Admission
Members are admitted to the Museum free of charge, on production of a valid membership card. Members may be accompanied by up to three guests (one guest only for junior members) on any one visit, each at a reduced entrance fee, currently 50% of the standard price. Members are also allowed a 10% discount on goods purchased from the shop.

Note: *These concessions are provided at the discretion of the General Manager of the Museum and could be removed at any time.*

Contributions
We are extremely grateful to all those who contribute articles and material to the magazine, even though it is not always possible to use every item!

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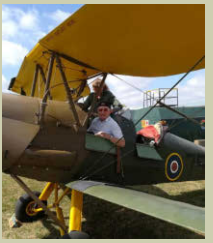

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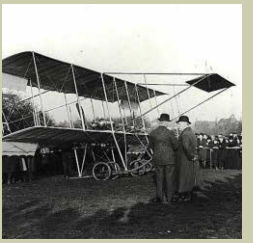

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COVER PICTURE

A Wildcat helicopter HMA Mk2 of 700(W) Naval Air Squadron conducting flying trials near HMS *Monmouth* off the South coast of the UKPhoto: PO (Phot) Si Ethell/MoD

EDITORIAL

We are sad to report the death of one of our regular contributors, Mr Keith Chadbourn. He joined the Royal Navy in 1954 and qualified as a pilot, spending his operational career in Gannets. He subsequently continued flying as a test pilot for Westland Helicopters. He was awarded a Queen's Commendation for Valuable Service in the Air in the 1989 New Year Honours. A full obituary by his friend and Flight Test Engineer, David Gibbings, is on our website

We provide a list of forthcoming talks on page 23, also details of the planned visit to Aerospace Bristol. This will give visitors the chance to step aboard a British icon, Concorde Alpha Foxtrot. Designed, built and tested in Bristol, she was the final Concorde to be built and the last to fly. This will be a popular visit, see the application form on page 24.

Our centre-page spread illustrates the well-attended Christmas Lunch, with thanks to our photographer, Ernest Lear.

In "Snippets from Council Meetings" on page 9, you will read that Council members discussed the Society's approach to publicity and marketing. There is some concern that our public profile is not attracting new members, so that our membership is steadily declining. We will welcome proposals from any of our readers that would halt this slow decline. You will also read that this year sees the 75th anniversary of Operation "Tungsten", the first of the FAA's attacks on the battleship Tirpitz in 1944. The next edition of Jabberwock will be largely devoted to this anniversary and will include a detailed description of the Barracuda, the "ugly duckling" aircraft that was used to carry out the bombing attacks.

In this issue, member Chris Howat provides a colourful glimpse of the Fleet Air Arm 61 years ago, when there were five fixed-wing aircraft carriers in commission. His career spanned the introduction of the Wasp helicopter to "small ships" - the designation of frigates and destroyers - and the initial steps towards powerful embarked aviation capabilities throughout the fleet, which today sees the Lynx Wildcat and the mighty Merlin widely deployed.

Finally, we once again print a selection of lively letters from readers. These are always welcome!

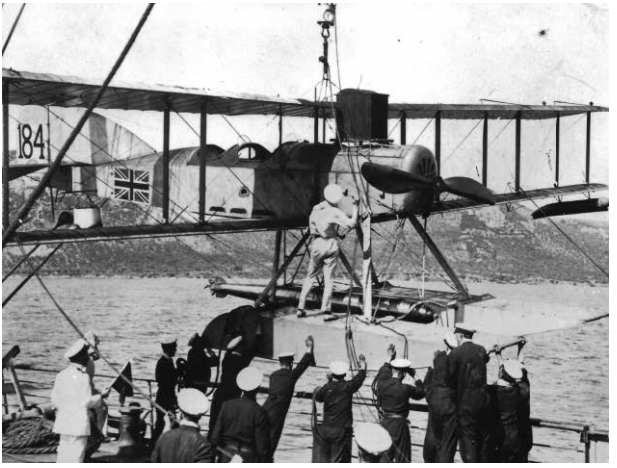
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Hi Malcolm,

Please excuse my penchant for pedantry … again. In your extract from Dacre's Diary in the latest Jabberwock you have a photo of a Short 184 labelled as being at Gallipoli. Not so.

Short 184, 8090, was used extensively by the East Indies and Egypt Seaplane Squadron (EIESS) from June 1916 from its Port Said base. 8090 was never at Gallipoli.

Moreover, the photo shows it late in its career in November 1916 after being modified by the EIESS in an attempt to improve the performance of the Short 184.



Short184, complete with torpedo and Dacre on the float, being weighed whilst at Gallipoli.

The lower wings were reduced in span, the wing tip floats removed and replaced by lighter angled plates (not yet fitted in the photo) and the fin slightly reduced in area. As such it became known as the "Cut Short".

8090 did not last long in this form. It crashed on 28 March 1917, whilst operating from HMS *Raven*, and was written off. There are some photos of the salvage operation in Samson's book Fights and Flights, opposite page 324.

The EIESS did a lot more messing about with the long suffering Short 184, but that is another story.

I am attaching a more appropriate photo that may be of interest. This was taken during an extended series of trials with torpedoes prior to the successful attacks. For more information see my *Ben-my-Chree* book, Chapter 8.

If my memory serves (I have had the photo for many years) it is part of the Jack Bruce/Stuart Leslie collection, so the

Museum should have a copy on file.

Cheers
Ian Burns

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Malcolm

Only two things to mention this month:

Firstly, on page 12 of Jabberwock 93 the photo of the Caribou is clearly in US Army colours and the USAAF became the USAF in 1947!

Secondly, on pages 16 and 17 Martin-Baker's Meteors are referred to as '50 year old' and '50+ year old'. In fact it will be 69 years on 21 November this year since WA638 was delivered to the RAF, and WL419 is not much younger being delivered on 20 August 1952.

It didn't mar my reading though, well done.

Tony Jupp

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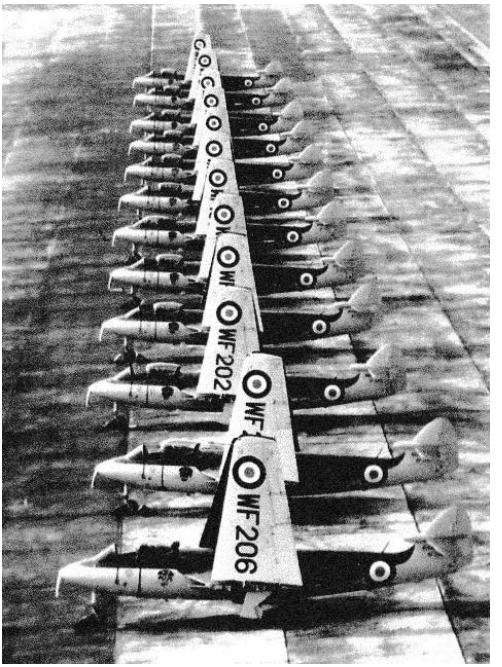
Dear Malcolm

Just finished reading an old edition (No.85) of Jabberwock and would like to make a couple of observations regarding one or two of the items. On page 29 there is a picture of the Attacker which was in service about 1952. I joined 702 squadron in 1950 which was a Jet Evaluation Squadron and we used to get aircraft that were being put through their paces prior to going front line and at that time we just had the Sea Vampire 20 and Meteor



Seahawks at RNAS Lossiemouth. Photo by the author. Les does not give a date, but probably 1955 or 56

7. The Attacker and Scimitar came later. It was rumoured that the Attacker was built as a test bed for the Nene engine! The aircraft in the picture was to my knowledge the Mk1 Fl and were based at Ford and were part of HMS *Eagle's* CAG but I cannot recall the squadron number. I have this photo amongst my collection which has this info on the back.

The letter from Mr Rowland on page 6 refers to the Flying Tigers of 814. In fact this bit of nostalgia reminded me of when I joined 804 squadron, our CO being the great Eric (Winkle) Brown. We changed from Sea Furies to Seahawks and were domiciled at Lossiemouth after a brief stop-off at Lee-on-Solent prior to the move north of the border and we became the Flying Tigers, and had the logo of a tiger's head. I have enclosed copies of some of our aircraft which shows the head with a large sword in its mouth! The 804 aerobatic team were formed by Cdr Brown and used to put on great displays long before the Red Arrows. Wonderful memories and we were proud of our input from the ground.

I like to read the magazine and enjoy the nostalgia and comments made. I had a spell on 848 Squadron in Malaya during the emergency there (the first Junglies) and still keep in touch with some of the old comrades, although there are not many of us left to "swing the lamp". Our CO was Bill Stanley, another great character.

We were the first frontline helicopter squadron to see active service. I have been down to Yeovilton several times for reforming and disbanding over the years. I hear it is now disbanded for the last time. I worked for Hawkers for a short while when I left the FAA assembling Hunters for India and Peru but left after about a year as I couldn't stand the strikes and disputes. I decided to leave, trained as a telegraphist with Cable and Wireless and retired in 1989 after 30 odd years with BT as it became after many name changes over the years!!

Keep up the good work- your efforts are appreciated to keep the journal going.

Regards,

Les Biggs (Membership No. 3436)

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Dear Malcolm

Den strikes again! Following his flight in a 2 seat Spitfire at Biggin Hill, SOFFAAM member Den Wood took to the air again. This time it was a trip in a Tiger Moth from Henstridge airfield (formerly HMS Dipper and a satellite field for Yeovilton), accompanied by fellow SOF members Peter Hoskin and Jack Sweet who also chanced their arm.

Den got happily into the front seat and enjoyed a 20 minute flight over the Dorset countryside, flown by Annabelle Burroughes, a fully qualified aerobatic pilot. Needless to say, not too many aerobatics on this particular day but Den did get his hands on the

Den Wood prepares for his Tiger Moth flight from the airfield at Henstridge

stick. He did very well for a 94 year old but then it transpired that he has got at least 100 hours on the type.

Please note the back to front baseball cap, Den might be 94 but he's still trendy! The folks at Tiger Moth Training were a joy to chat to – Annabelle, Kevin Crumplin (an ex-FAA observer on the Sea Vixen) and Clive Davidson, a qualified flying instructor who told me he had flown a Hurricane.

If you ever feel like a real open cockpit experience or want to buy that special friend or family member a present, have a look at the Tiger Moth Training website (www.tigermothtraining.co.uk). You won't be disappointed.

Peter Hoskin

Rosanne Crowther has asked us to include the following:

Dear Rosanne,

Good to hear of your experience in the WRAF – do you know about the RAF Stories project I'm currently leading for the museum? We are recording stories from anyone with any connection to the RAF and creating an online collection www.rafstories.org

You could share your stories via our new app, in which you use a phone or tablet. Or, next year I'd be keen to link up with air/military museums to come and do some recordings for the project, of any staff or visitors who'd like to share their experiences or any family stories. We did a pop up event a couple of weeks ago and gained 27 great additions to the collection. Let me know if this might be of interest at the Fleet Air Arm Museum.

Kind regards,

Jess Boydon
Community Engagement Officer : RAF Stories
Royal Air Force Museum
T: 01902 376 237www.rafmuseum.org

SNIPPETS FROM COUNCIL MEETINGS

From the September Meeting:

• *The Chairman opened the meeting.*

He welcomed the attendees and said that Bill Ellison had retired from the Council at the AGM. He had sent him an email to thank him for his valuable contribution to the Society, in particular in organising the Grand Draw.

• *The General Manager gave the following report:*

Capital Works. The Museum has successfully completed its bridge repairs. This has seen significant conservation work and refurbishment carried out over the last few weeks. It has been a very busy few months within facilities at FAAM, but we hope that all stakeholders will see progress being made around the site.

Events. Tours to Cobham Hall continue to be popular and continue to sell well. Tickets are £12 and available now from the Museum website and Ticket Desk. All tickets for the Cobham Hall tours on the 6th of December are now sold out. Tickets are also selling well for the 7th March 2019, despite being some three months away.

Flight Deck Upgrade. The Museum will begin work to upgrade elements of audio visual displays on the flight deck in December. The flight deck continues to be a significant driver for visits to the Museum and is often rated on visitor surveys and such sites as Tripadvisor as being a favourite or memorable part of the Museum visit. It is great to be able to communicate upgrades of this type.

Work also continues within the WRNS gallery as part of our planned refurbishment of this area.

Bomb Lift. The Museum has also recently tendered a project to either modernise or replace the Bomb Lift of the Flight Deck. We have not yet made a decision on how to take this project forward but are aiming to have the works complete ahead of main season in 2019.

• *The Chairman gave the following report:*

He had no report on this occasion and instead asked the FAAM Development Manager, Mr Chris Hill, to give the meeting his report on the progress of development activities, as follows:

The FAAM Development Programme, simply put, is exploring the best way to invest in the Museum to make it a world-class museum and attraction for the rest of the 21st century, while dealing with some major operational challenges. It will lead to major bids for funding.

Challenges include the following:

• The lease ends in 15 years

• The proposed closure of the B3165

• A new junction on the dualled A303

The development programme is currently in Stage 1. Two major pieces of foundation work are underway, led by Consultants. These are Hoskins Architects as project leaders (supported by Jura and Metaphor) and Fourth Street, responsible for Locations Appraisal.

The project timetable is as follows:

13 December 2018 – Project Board, seeing first draft of Locations Appraisal.

January 2019 – NMRN Board Location Appraisal complete.

June 2019 – Vision work completed.

16/17 July – NMRN Away Day at FAAM to consider all reports and Phase Two.

January 2019 – SOFFAAM Consultation.

Stage 2 will consist of the development of the major funding bid. He recognised the role of SOFFAAM as a stakeholder and would keep the society informed of progress. The proposals relate to a long term plan and it was essential that revenue kept flowing in the Museum as it exists today. Marc emphasised the high quality and experience of the Consultants, David Hill formally thanked the Society for its continuing support.

Chris Penney suggested that the Museum might recognise 2019 as "the Year of the Barracuda", since it would be the 75th anniversary of the several Fleet Air Arm attacks on the Tirpitz.

In discussions of the Barracuda re-build, the General Manager confirmed that this was going well. The Museum held a fragile copy of film of the Tirpitz attacks, which would need to be re-mastered before it could be made available for viewing.

The Chairman opened a brief discussion of the various proposals from Chris Penney regarding the Society's publicity and marketing strategy. Among the points raised were the following:

• In the eyes of the public, the Society lacks a defined identity.

• Most Societies today have a presence on social media. We should find a person with the relevant experience to institute such a presence.

• We should review our logo and consider whether the stylised Sopwith Baby is still a relevant image.

• Would there be any advantage in setting up Society branches in other geographical locations? This led to a brief discussion of the geographical distribution of our members.

Post meeting note: Robert subsequently reviewed locations and showed that the majority of Society members lived in Somerset and the adjoining counties.

The Chairman suggested that all Council members should review the Penney submission. Perhaps we should establish a sub-committee to

review the issues raised and make proposals for future policy changes.

• *The Talks and Visits Organiser gave the following report:*

The next Visit will be to Aerospace Bristol on 16 May, 2019.

The Council has approved the booking for Candida Atkins, who will talk about her late mother Jackie Moggridge, famous Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA) pilot. The talk will be in October 2019.

An action was taken by David Hill to ask David Morris if he would give a talk on the Barracuda in November 2019 and to endeavour to restore the Tirpitz film before the lecture.

• *The Membership Secretary gave the following report:*

Total members: 1030. Since the last meeting, membership numbers have fallen by 8 (18 lost and 10 gained). Of the 10 new applications received since the September meeting, 7 have been downloaded from the web-site and 3 are from 'Join' leaflets picked up in the FAAM

• *Any other business:*

Gordon Johnson informed the Committee that this would be his last year as President, as he would be standing down at the next AGM.

By the Editor: The Society would welcome comments from members on our recruiting activities and public profile.

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POST CHRISTMAS LUNCH

By Chris Penney

Peter Jinks was our post Christmas lunch speaker - a gentleman of 97 years who could still stand stock straight and recall his experiences in the rear seat of windswept Fairey Swordfish. He survived no less than seven crashes amongst hundreds of hours of wartime flying escorting convoys across the Atlantic. Peter was a Telegraphist Air Gunner (TAG) who began his training in late 1940. After training, he was posted to Jamaica to join newly formed 834 Squadron in HMS *Archer,* the first of the US-built escort carriers, a product of US-UK Lend Lease. In November 1942 *Archer* took part in the first operation by US troops in the European theatre - the Torch landings in French North Africa. Peter showed a photo he'd taken of Curtiss P-40 Warhawks on the flight deck waiting to be flown ashore. After some time disembarked in the UK including flying Swordfish on Channel patrols from Exeter, 834 embarked in HMS *Hunter* to cover the Salerno landings in September 1943. After Salerno, 834 embarked in HMS *Battler* and spent the rest of the war in the Indian Ocean. Heavy weather was a frequent problem and Peter recalled how on one occasion a Seafire broke loose in the hangar deck and destroyed the entire complement of Seafires. Thank you Peter for a truly remarkable and frank account of life aboard an escort carrier.

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MONTHLY TALKS REVIEW

Summarised by Robert Heath

OCTOBER 2018 TALK

"A Career in Army Aviation - From Sand to Sea" by Major Simon F.D. Pope, AAC

How times change. I have always associated the Army Air Corps with Middle Wallop, but now, Major Simon Pope is Commanding Officer of 659 Squadron AAC, based at Yeovilton. Consolidation of services makes sense, but sadly, it sounds as though Middle Wallop, as a base, might be just a memory before long. A politician would call that progress.

Simon Pope's experience as a helicopter pilot is based primarily around the Lynx/Wildcat. His career started in 2002 at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst and on completion of this training he was appointed as an Infantry Platoon Commander in Northern Ireland, to get his feet on the ground and put into practice what he had been taught so far. In 2003 Simon was accepted for a pilot's course and went off to RAF Cranwell for basic training on fixed wing aircraft. Having got his 'wings' he then moved on to the Defence Helicopter Flying School at RAF Shawbury, where pilots from all three armed services receive rotary wing training. On qualification, Simon was posted to Middle Wallop for Operational Training on the Lynx helicopter.

Following that, you could say that Simon's training in depth was undertaken at quite a frenetic rate. By 2005, he found himself in Bosnia, thankfully when the war had become quieter. What was not quieter was the weather, which Simon found to be quite challenging. Just a year later in 2006, he had moved on to Iraq, around the time when Lynx XZ614 was shot down in Basra, killing the Officer Commanding and crew (five in all). This was the first aircraft shot down in combat for many years and was deeply felt. Later in the same year Simon was posted yet again, to serve in conjunction with 847 Naval Air Squadron, on deployment in Sierra Leone, aboard HMS *Ocean*. That was a very new experience, to land a skid-mounted Lynx on board a carrier whose deck was heaving up to 30ft each way. As the saying goes 'timing was everything'. It was not helped by the fact that the Army Lynxes were positioned at the bow of the ship, where the extremes of motion are best experienced! Other than that it was a delight to work with the Royal Navy and to compare the different methods of operation for what was essentially

the same aircraft. One of the main activities was as a show of force against insurgents. This entailed flying into jungle holes, where the trees towered 200, sometimes 300 feet above you. It is a very sobering experience to drop down into these vertical tunnels. At this time, his Lynx squadron carried a .50 calibre gun in the doorway and confidence and faith in the gun-operator providing situational awareness, was paramount. The capital city of Sierra Leone, Freetown, was a truly dirty and smelly place to find yourself in, whereas once outside of the city and in countryside the villages were a much more picturesque and pleasant contrast.

Sierra Leone is hot, so where next? Norway and temperatures closer to -25 to -30C. In talking with servicemen, there can be few who have not at one time or another done their stint of 'Arctic' training. From a pilot's point of view it can be very difficult indeed, because of the blowing snow creating a white-out, giving the pilot no vision, nothing to focus on. What it did focus was the pilot's mind - the level of concentration was intense. On top of that came the Survival Courses. With just four hours of daylight, you dare not waste a minute. What fascinated Simon was that in spite of the low temperatures, you don't get cold because you are so busy digging snow-holes to snuggle into. Obviously everyone wore appropriate survival gear, but being busy generated heat. Illumination in the snow holes was typically provided by candles and they in turn provided a delightful display of art in nature, because as the candle wax melted, it was so cold that the wax froze again instantly creating a tall lattice column with a light inside it.

Having mastered hot flying in Sierra Leone, then cold flying in Norway, it seemed very appropriate that Simon should practise some high flying (of the practical sort rather than career-wise). For this he was sent to Gap, in the Haute Alpes in France to gain experience in mountain flying. Even this required special techniques, because the thinness of the air at altitudes around 10,000ft meant that it was far more difficult to hold station and not overshoot your objective. Similarly, judging the angle of mountain slopes was a lesson in itself.

Training, training. Every activity had a training element about it. The list went on and on, but in 2007/08 Simon found himself back in Iraq and within 30 minutes of landing they came under mortar attack, causing several casualties. A quick reaction force was set up, but each time they arrived on location no one was there. Very simple, the attackers were using egg timers to remotely fire the rockets. Simon was involved with several convoy escorts and in due course he trained as a Forward Air Controller. Both the US and RAF were good at responding

to attacks and on one particular occasion the group he was with on the ground came under heavy fire. On making the call for help, it was with great relief that in no time at all the friendly aircraft was on site. By doing this, Simon was able to see the troops' predicament from the opposite end and it made him a better aviator in response to their calls.

It was around this time that Simon had a lucky, but dramatic escape. He had just fired up the Lynx ready to go on an operation, when there was a loud bang and a ground crew member indicated that the tail rotor had stopped turning. Simon showed us photographs of the damage: the skin on the rotor fin had ruptured and two halves of the broken shaft protruded through. It was a very unusual event that had caused a lock-up in the tail rotor, leading to the shaft fracturing. If it had happened after take-off it would have been catastrophic. As if that was not enough, several weeks later Simon was asked if he could do an air test and lo and behold, it was the same aircraft ready to go back into service after being repaired.

As I mentioned earlier, training was a constant theme throughout the talk and appropriately we were shown film of typical commando operations involving Chinook, Lynx, Hercules, etc., all flying at very low level. One sequence particularly impressed me. It showed a helicopter with a RIB (powerful inflatable boat with a rigid hull) slung underneath it and all of a sudden several bodies appeared out the helicopter, and lowered themselves into the boat, while still in flight, ready for its launch in due course. That was a new one on me and it looked very businesslike.

We also watched film of a US hostage rescue event filmed from one of the participating helicopters. As usual the aircraft flew in low to avoid small arms fire (but still much higher than UK forces fly, remarked Simon) and then landed inside a confined walled yard behind a building. In this process, one of the helicopters actually struck the wall with its tail creating a large opening, through which ground troops dashed. Within 17 seconds of the touchdown, the helicopters were flying out again with the hostage on-board. No time wasted there. I was distracted making my notes and never did establish whether or not the hole knocked in the wall was intentional.

At this point Simon related how aircrew are trained to react if they were shot down inside a city. Having extricated yourself from the downed aircraft, you had to make your way to a roof top where other US troops would be put down with you to provide support, until ground troops came to the rescue. It was certainly encouraging to know that a process existed - perilous as it sounds.

In referring to his postings, Simon named his as just about

every conflict zone we see and hear about in the news. In between these postings he was of course training, in Belize, Denmark, France and goodness knows where. It is a busy life. In due course, the Lynx was retired and the Wildcat took its place and is unquestionably a great improvement in Simon's opinion. More powerful engines, glass cockpits with far more information available, significantly better systems, etc., altogether a much nicer place to work in. Now, with a full fuel load and crew, the Wildcat can still lift 700kg. Operational emphasis is on co-ordinated attacks in conjunction with Apache attack helicopters, UAVs (Unmanned Aerial Vehicles - aka drones) and other strike aircraft, in which the Wildcat finds targets and 'illuminates' them by means of a laser. The attack aircraft then send their Hellfire, or whatever, missiles down the laser beam. Laser illumination is held-off until the last second to prevent the enemy detecting it and taking avoiding action. Thus, six seconds elapse from illumination to missile hit. That is quick.

A Wildcat helicopter HMA Mk2 of 700(W) Naval Air Squadron conducting flying trials near HMS* Monmouth *off the South coast of the UK
Photo: PO (Phot) Si Ethell/MoD

Wildcat upgrades and refits of new radars and other systems are in development along with weapon systems to match. All in all it is an impressive package and Simon repeatedly said that a career in the Army (Air Corps in particular) is a very good choice for anyone to make right now.

Thank you Major Simon Pope for a very detailed, fast moving picture of life in the modern Army Air Corps. Exciting stuff!

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NOVEMBER 2018 TALK

"Navy Wings" by Commodore Jock Alexander, OBE, MA, FRAeS (Rtd), Chief Executive Navy Wings

It was almost a wordless introduction to this talk. Having introduced himself, Commodore

Jock Alexander immediately projected a fast moving, colourful 'Navy Wings' promotional film telling us in just a few minutes what the organisation does, why it does it and how it achieves it. The Fleet Air Arm of today is a relatively small organization. At its height in World War 2 there were 40 RNAS squadrons, with an engaging variety of aircraft that still fascinate and hold people's attention today. The film took us through glimpses of many of these aircraft, from the inevitable Swordfish, right up to date to the latest F35 Lightning. Many of the older aircraft are classics and to still see them flying and, of course, to hear them is a joy in itself, let alone a privilege. The Royal Navy Historic Flight (RNHF) has enabled this thankfully. The Flight was established in 1972 as a living memorial, when a Swordfish was handed over to the unit.

Today, RNHF has grown to include: two Swordfish, a Mk I, s/n.W5856 (often referred to as a Blackfish, because it was built by Blackburn Aircraft); and a Mk II, s/n. LS326 (also a Blackfish): a Hawker Sea Fury FB.11, s/n. VR930; a Hawker Sea Hawk FGA.6, s/n WV908; and finally a de Havilland Chipmunk T.10, s/n WK608. Operating these aircraft is an expensive business and with the financial constraints imposed just about everywhere the MoD decided its priorities must look to the future and not the past. RNHF suddenly felt a financial draught and has had to become very resourceful in keeping money coming in from wherever possible. Figures of £800,000 to £900,000 per year are quoted as being the budget needed. At present, RNHF enjoys free access to the Yeovilton airbase, hangars and maintenance staff. However, only a blindly optimistic Rip van Winkle could believe this will continue unchanged. These considerations also lead to the question of 'ownership'. The aircraft were all registered and operated as military aircraft. Was this the best way forward? Would transfer to civilian registration offer benefits?

Operators of other historic aircraft with Royal Naval service background were already happy to discuss co-operation with RNHF by offering and making their aircraft available to the Flight for training (such as the North American Harvard), plus the appeal of linked appearances at air displays. Gradually, they all joined the conversation about their particular ambitions and constraints and it became obvious that by working together, rather than in isolation, much more could be achieved. From this emerged what is now very appropriately called 'Navy Wings'. It is all in the name. The simple objective of Navy Wings is to: 'Inspire future generations by bringing together aircraft, people and the story of flying from ships'.

Central to all this is the fact that Navy Wings comprises only aircraft that can fly. Once they stop flying they become static museum pieces and no longer of direct interest to Navy Wings. In simplistic terms, Navy Wings comprises the RNHF; the Fly Navy Heritage Trust (FNHT), which is the charity behind Navy Wings and in turn Naval Aviation Ltd. which is the operating company actually owning the Sea Fury T20 and the Sea Vixen XP924, generously donated by Julian Jones, plus of course the Navy Wings Associates collection of privately owned aircraft. The intention is to demonstrate samples from the entire period of naval aviation. To date the Associates add a further impressive range of aircraft, including: WW1 era - three Avro 504K bi-planes; a 1915 Bristol Scout bi-plane rebuilt around an original control column and rudder pedals; WW2 era - North American T6 Harvard/Texan; three Supermarine Seafires; a de Havilland Tiger Moth; Stinson Reliant; Post-WW2 – three Westland Wasp helicopters; Westland Gazelle; Westland Wessex V; two Westland Whirlwind; Sea King Mk V; and two Sea Harriers in the offing. Altogether, this is a very impressive collection of naval warbirds for the display circuit, a photographer's dream.

Making all this happen is not for the financially faint-hearted, as shown earlier. For example, last year, the Sea Vixen suffered a total hydraulic failure, resulting in a belly landing on the runway. The drop tanks took much of the impact, but nevertheless the tail assembly was badly stressed. The estimated rebuild is in the order of £500,000 and a "white knight" is being sought to step in and fund it - here is your chance. That is on top of the day-to-day running of the organisation. Consequently many high profile events have taken place and are planned for the future to raise awareness and more importantly, money. Names of several legendary rock band members and other celebrities with enthusiasm for aviation appear regularly, not only as donors, but also as a draw for other people and Corporations to attend and make their contribution. As an example, Boeing have now twice used Navy Wings facilities to hold their AGM. There are several activities on the go including 'Swordfish' beer, for which 5p is donated to Navy Wings for every pint sold - this is my chance to make a notable contribution.

But, what of our speaker, Jock Alexander, the Chief Executive of Navy Wings? Jock started his career in the Royal Navy as a university cadet at Dartmouth. By 1981 he was a Sub Lieutenant Diving Officer, then in 1983 he moved on to flying training and subsequently joined 820 (Anti-Submarine Warfare) Squadron on front-line service in 1985. After this, in 1987, he completed an Helicopter

Warfare Instructor (HWI) course, followed by two years as HWI with 819 Sqn. In the 10 years between 1989 and 1999 Jock took command of a ship, an essential career move; took further courses at Greenwich; went on to the staff at Northwood; was Commanding Officer of 819 Sqn; and was promoted from Lieutenant to Lieutenant Commander. After that, Jock's career continued upwards with promotion to Commander, resulting in yet more numerous, more responsible roles including 'Commander Air' in HMS Illustrious. This involved working closely with the US forces and also involved taking Chinook helicopters on-board, which was an experience in itself. By this time, the number of staff roles were increasing and included manpower studies and encouraging other nations to contribute to the fighting in Afghanistan, which I can imagine required imagination, a sharp mind, and incisive, articulate 'arguments'.

By 2007, Jock was elevated to the rank of Captain and was responsible for the training of the RN and US Marine Corps in Basra, Iraq, followed by working with the CinC Fleet (Commander-in-Chief Fleet), by running the aircraft carrier programme. Later he was transferred to the MoD as Naval Staff Air Advisor to the First Sea Lord. Finally, once promoted to the rank of Commodore, Jock was in command of the RNAS Yeovilton Air Base between 2012 - 2015. Retirement from the Royal Navy came on 26 February 2016.

The Question and Answer session raised some further, interesting issues, such as what was behind the slashing of the British armed services resulting in the Harriers being sold to the USA for a trivial sum? In his answer, Jock alluded to inter-service rivalry. He was pleased to say that after a difficult period, funding for two new aircraft carriers was approved. In Jock's view aircraft carriers represent good value as UK territory floating to wherever it is needed world-wide. Likewise, Jock opines that the US and Russia spend significantly more on defence than UK, but they do not gain significantly more relative value.

Another question was: why are our new carriers not nuclear-powered? The short answer is cost, but also many countries will not allow nuclear-powered vessels in their territorial waters.

Finally, said Jock, both the US Navy and the French Navy are setting up organisations very similar to Navy Wings, to preserve and present in the air, their historic aircraft. Thank you Commodore Jock Alexander for a very interesting and informative evening.

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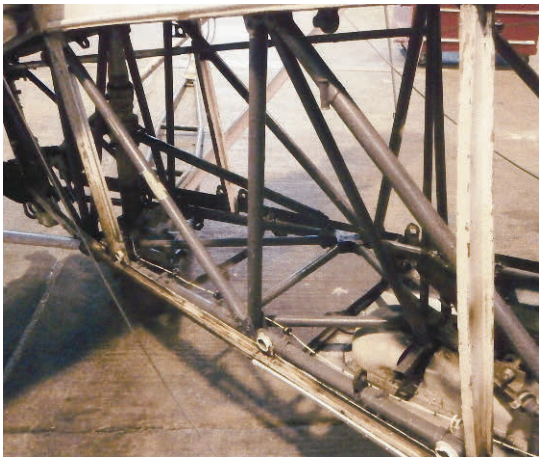
NEWS FROM THE HISTORIC FLIGHT



As we heard in the recent talk from the Chief Executive of Navy Wings, changes are afoot this year in the Royal Navy Historic Flight. From April, ownership and all responsibility for the Flight's aircraft, including the three priceless Fairey Swordfish,will pass to Navy Wings. This is a registered charity, established to preserve and promote the nation's naval aviation heritage. As a result of this change, the Historic Flight's aircraft, which up until now have been subject to the Royal Navy's regulatory regime, will all be transferred to the Civil Aviation register.

(Above) Mk I Swordfish W5856 with rear fabric covering removed. This reveals the robust but heavy tubular frame structure, common to biplanes of this and earlier eras.

(Right) Mk II Swordfish LS326, veteran of Atlantic convoys and the tiny MAC aircraft carriers, undergoing winter TLC. The nine-cylinder Bristol Pegasus engine has been removed for servicing, a useful facility enjoyed by Swordfish maintainers.

SOFFAAM CHRISTMAS LU

Photographs b

LUNCH 15 DECEMBER 2018

s by Ernest Lear

MEMBERSHIP

f *Standing Order Membership cards enclosed for February, March and April.*
(Please note that receipt of a card does not confirm receipt of payment.)
Welcome to the new Members who have joined us since the last magazine issue:

3630 Miss S. Stainer	Dorset
3631 Mr S. Drury	Hampshire
3632 Mr J. Richmond	Dorset
3633 Mr D. Weatherley	Devon
3634 Mr R. Sargent	Dorset

Total members: 1026
Members who have made a Gift Aid declaration: 721

Annual membership £12
Family membership (Up to two adults and three children) £32
Life membership £180 (£90 for those over 60)

All funds are donated to FAA Museum projects – none is wasted on salaries. Help SOFFAAM to grow by encouraging others to join. It makes an excellent, low cost, but highly appreciated Gift. You will deserve the thanks.
Let us know if you would prefer to receive Jabberwock via your e-mail.

Members who pay by cheque are reminded to post their renewal fee to the Membership Secretary (see page 2 for his contact details) when it is due. To save on postage, we do not routinely send out reminders. To save this annual task, members are encouraged to pay by standing order.

MONTHLY TALKS PROGRAMME

Talks are usually held in the FAAM Auditorium on the last Thursday of each month (except August and December) at 19.30. Entry price is £7. You can pay at the door, but note that these events are well-supported and total numbers are limited. To be sure of a place book your tickets on-line in advance at www.fleetairarmfriends.org.uk/monthlytalks, or buy from the Museum shop. Non members are welcome. The price includes light refreshments, including a glass of wine.

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28th February 2019
Mr Chris Shores
"The Bombing of Sherborne - 30 September 1940"

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28th March 2019
Wg Cdr Rtd Tony Davies
"From Kittyhawk to Cape Canaveral"

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25th April 2019
Mr Rory Smith
Trinity Lighthouse

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16th May 2019
VISIT TO
BRISTOL AEROSPACE MUSEUM (See page 24)

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30th May 2019
Mr Peter Jinks
TAGging along in a Stringbag

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27th June 2019
Mr Paul Beaver
Naval Pilots in the Battle of Britain

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Note that talks start promptly at 19.30. Entry is via the lower (wheelchair) access. Latecomers should ring the bell at the left of the gate to gain admission

VISIT TO BRISTOL AEROSPACE MUSEUM

Thursday 16 May 2019

SOFFAAM Member and one guest allowed

Please arrive at the Fleet Air Arm Museum Car Park by 08.45. You will be allowed to leave your car at the museum for the duration of our visit. Depart the museum at 09.00 prompt for the tour which commences at 11.00.

PROGRAMME FOR THE DAY

10:30am to 11:00am – Arrival and free time to purchase your own tea or coffee.
11:15am to 12:15pm - Guided Tour Group 1
12:30 to 13:30pm - Free time to purchase your own lunch
13:45pm to 14:45pm - Guided Tour Group 2
14:45pm onwards - free time to explore the rest of the attractions

After the guided tour you will have approximately 1hr 15 mins to yourself. The coach will depart from Bristol Aerospace Museum at 16.00 with the anticipated arrival time at Yeovilton of 17.30.
For further information on the museum please view the website www.aero-spacebristol.org
Please complete and return the application form, together with cheque for £25.50p each made payable to SOFFAAM, ideally to reach me by **30 March.** Tickets will be allocated on a first come first served basis. I will notify you immediately if for any reason the visit is postponed OR if you have not been allocated a seat.
Please note that NO REFUNDS for non-attendance can be given.

Mrs Rosanne Crowther, St David's, 5 Church Close, Martock, Somerset, TA12 6DS.
Tel No: - 01935 822143

Name:……

Address.....
.
.....Post Code.....

Membership number……. Name of guest .....

Please inform me of any special dietary requirements ***in advance of*** the trip.

HMS UNICORN - VERY SPECIAL CARRIER

By Jim Humberstone

Arguably only one Royal Navy aircraft carrier can lay claim to have seen extensive action in both WWII and the Korean War, as well as other lesser emergencies that confronted Britain in the years following VJ Day. HMS *Unicorn* was very much a one-off and could be regarded as a very special vessel.

Unicorn was laid down in June 1939 at Harland and Wolff's yard in Belfast and launched in 1943, designed primarily as an aircraft repair ship. She was the brainchild of Admiral Sir Charles Henderson, who as Admiralty Controller responsible for the ordering of new ships in the 1930s saw the need for this specialised class of warship, designed in his view as the Fleet Air Arm's equivalent of the depot ships that were attendant on destroyers and submarines. Additionally, and of great importance, as it turned out, Henderson designed *Unicorn* to enable her to act as an operational back up to the armoured fleet carriers that were entering service at the time.

Her specification was very similar to that of the highly successful Light Fleet carriers that followed her into service by war's end. At 14,750 tons displacement, *Unicorn* was some 1500 tons or so heavier than the Light Fleets but of similar deck area and with the same Light Cruiser type twin shaft propulsion machinery with 40.000 shp geared turbines. Again, like the Light Fleets, her two hangars could accommodate 48 aircraft. An important feature was the pronounced overhang aft. This increased the effective length of the flight deck while providing a gantry for transferring floatplanes and other aircaft to and from lighters

The final stages of the ship's building saw an acceleration of the work, which resulted in the fitting out of some of her workshop facilities being postponed for a later refit. Thus completed in a slightly depleted form in March 1943, and after working up in the Firth of Clyde, *Unicorn* very quickly assumed operational carrier duties. Initially this debut involved embarking a Seafire Air Group to escort a Gibraltar convoy, whilst ferrying a flight of RAF Beaufighters to the Rock. Summer 1943 saw her participate with Home Fleet units including HMS *Illustrious* in a diversionary incursion into Norwegian waters, intended to draw attention away from the Allied invasion of Sicily.

The next phase of the ship's career was to prove much busier. Aerial protection was needed for the Allied landings at Salerno, codenarned Operation Avalanche,

on the south-western coast of Italy in early September 1943. On this occasion the carrier joined four Escort Carriers (CVE) to provide close support by flying Combat Air Patrols (CAP) over the task force. Seafires were embarked as the sole equipment of the five ships, in an attempt to achieve the benefits of a one-type operation. *Unicorn* embarked 36 aircraft. The Seafire proved to be a most unfortunate choice for the escort carriers. The incidence of light winds, the very limited speeds of the CVEs (maximum 17 knots) and the by then notorious deck handling difficulties of the Seafire, combined to produce a wholly disproportionate spate of accidents and write-offs. With her much higher speed and more spacious flight deck, HMS Unicorn was less afflicted, but the Salerno experience underlined the Fleet's urgent need for afloat aircraft repair facilities, especially for the more accident-prone types then in service. These types would continue to make up a major component of the Fleet Air Arm's complement when the focus of hostilities shifted to the Far East.

Returning to Belfast at the end of 1943, *Unicorn* underwent a refit that finally incorporated her full complement of repair workshops and stores. January 1944 saw the carrier in company with HMS *Renown, Queen Elizabeth* and *Valiant.* together with the fleet carrier HMS *Illustrious,* acting as a convoy escort for this squadron as it sailed to form the Eastern Fleet in the Indian Ocean. During this passage she flew off anti-submarine patrols with her small resident flight of Swordfish and also fulfilled the important role (for which she was suited) of providing an alternative carrier deck for

HMS* Unicorn *astern of HMS* Illustrious *in Ceylon, June 1944. The higher freeboard of the aircraft repair ship is clearly visible.

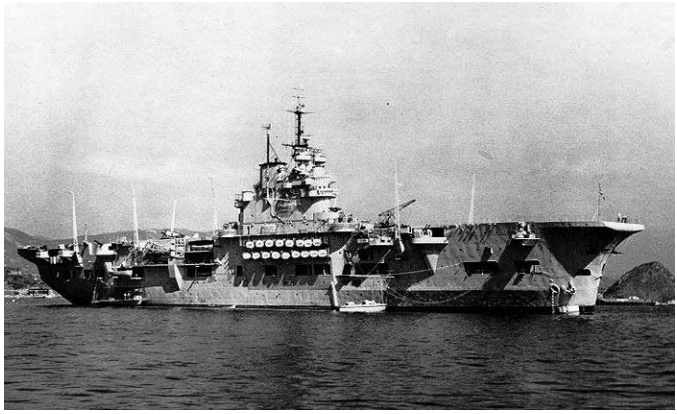
deck landing practice for the other carriers on station. From February until November 1944 *Unicorn* kept to a busy schedule ferrying and repairing aircraft whilst based at Trincomalee, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka).

But now the Fleet Air Arm's inventory was changing. In addition to newly arrived Barracudas, American Lease lend Corsairs were being taken on charge. These represented a new repair challenge with their different specifications, affecting everything from instruments to screw threads and tools.

With the prospect of the Royal Navy joining forces with the US Fleet in the Pacific, the focus of naval war shifted eastwards and by February 1944 the carrier was at Sydney. The final link up with the Americans was at Leyte Gulf by which time *Unicorn* and the four Fleet Carriers were now constituted as part of The British Pacific Fleet (BPF). She formed part of the Fleet Train, repairing and supplying replacement aircraft for the Fleet Carriers.

After completion of BPF's operations in support of US forces in the Okinawa campaign, the ship returned with the Fleet Carriers to their base at Sydney, at which their crews celebrated.VJ Day in August 1945.

At the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950, HMS *Unicorn* was at Singapore as part of the RN's Far East Fleet. The Light Fleet Carrier HMS *Triumph* was already off Japan with a US Navy fleet and *Unicorn* was ordered to support *Triumph* in the replenishment role. In the event whilst *Unicorn* was carrying out ferry operations from Hong Kong to Japan, she was diverted to act as a makeshift troopship, ferrying a battalion of the Middlesex Regiment with their transport and equipment, from the colony direct to the Korean port of Pusan.



HMS Unicorn in 1950 at the beginning of the Korean war, anchored in a Japanese port, probably Sasebo. *Photo US Navy*

Further ferry duties followed with the carrier supporting HMS

Theseus, *Triumph's* successor on station. She then assisted Australia's contribution to the conflict by ferrying a squadron of Meteors from Singapore to Iwakuni in March 1951. (Iwakuni was the principal British and Australian air base in Japan and a focus of the Commonwealth contribution.)

Ferry runs on the Singapore - Hong Kong - Japan route continued throughout the spring of 1951. During this time *Unicorn* extended the proliferation of types she had carried since her first commission. RAF Vampires and AOP Austers were to be added to that extensive list. By now the RN had established their Aircraft Holding Unit (AHU) at the Japanese base and this facility complemented the work of *Unicorn* in assembling and supplying replacements for the RN carriers stationed off Korea.

Unicorn continued in her supporting role off Korea. As if to emphasise her flexibility, during time in company with HMS *Ocean*, she had the distinction of being the only RN Carrier to engage in shore bombardment. This occurred when she attempted with her main armament to take out a group of North Korean shore watchers' positions on the coast.

After an eventful October 1951 when she encountered 100 mph winds and mountainous waves as well as colliding with power lines in the narrow strait near Iwakuni, *Unicorn* went on in the following months to see further action off the Korean peninsula. She accompanied *Ocean* during July 1952 on strike missions and subsequently assisted that carrier with CAPs in a September engagement.

Ferrying duties continued into 1953, although not without incident it appears. On one occasion in July 1953, en route to Japan, *Unicorn* received a distress signal and as a result steered to the rescue of a merchant ship beset by pirates. Once arrived, the threat of the ship's guns at close range was enough to discourage the pirates who promptly fled the scene.

HMS *Unicorn* finally returned to the UK in November 1953 after four years service in foreign waters. There then followed the familiar process of passing into reserve after final disposal for scrap, which took place at Dalmuir in Jen 1959.

HMS *Unicorn* was a workhorse by any standards and her achievements were highly impressive, even by comparison with other hard working Royal Navy ships stationed in far-flung climes. Few of her contemporaries matched her record for sheer versatility. The way in which she measured up to the needs of the moment in whatever form they took, however taxing they proved to be to her men and officers, must have set a fine example, with few equals in war or peacetime.

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THE FLEET AIR ARM 61 YEARS AGO

By Chris Howat

My first ship after initial training at Dartmouth was HMS *Bulwark.* She was still a fixed wing carrier and about to set off on a world cruise; first to the West Indies with the Home Fleet on their spring cruise. Trinidad, Bequia in the Grenadines and Jamaica were our list of ports of call. Our captain, Percy Gick, of *Bismarck* fame, wanted a sub lieutenant to look after his 24-foot dinghy, Fairy Fox, and said so when I happened to be bridge watch keeping. I volunteered, and we had a lot of fun sailing her in all the different parts of the world.

HMS Bulwark on passage in the Indian Ocean, 1958

Not long after joining I was attached to an observer, Cyril Meek, assisting him in talking down aircraft on to the deck at night using a Venom nose radar mounted on the after part of the Island. Action stations for me was in the director of the six barrelled Bofors gun on the flight deck below the bridge. For obvious reasons we had a very limited arc of fire, out to starboard only, and it was during a practice shoot that a round of brown smoke puffs jammed in one barrel and the mounting caught fire. The gun crew leapt off, I evacuated the director and the flight deck party put the fire out before the ready use rounds cooked off! The gun was never repaired but off loaded in Singapore. That would not happen these days!

So, I was assigned as FDO 4, assistant to that delightful

gentleman, then Lieutenant, Robin Doe, as FDO 2, to work watch and watch about with FDOs 1 and 3 on the flight deck. This was all very new to untrained and inexperienced me and exciting. We would set up the mirror landing aid before flying stations and sit there during recovery stations on the sponson over the sea, with a wire mesh net beneath us if we had to jump for our lives in the event of a dodgy landing. My job was to fire a Very light if the aircraft coming in was not best placed for landing. When operating with the Americans, Robin would go aft to bat them in.

I ended my six months general time onboard working in 801 squadron, helping carry out Maincheck 4s and 5s on their Seahawks; my first introduction to air engineering. Daddy Nicholls was the AEO.

After the West Indies, we sailed to Bermuda and on to a very cold Halifax, Nova Scotia, before sailing to Gibraltar to dry dock for a fortnight. My job for those two weeks was to attend the Dockyard apprentices' school to carry out practical chemistry experiments prior to taking an O level in that subject. I took the exam in the middle of a South East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) exercise (and passed!) before the fleet repaired to Trincomalee for rest and recuperation.

On the way out to the Far East, *Bulwark* was rammed by an Egyptian pilgrim ship at 02.00 on a dark night in the Red Sea. Her captain and mate were both drunk, so after ascertaining the ship was not about to sink, we continued at high speed down the Sea, dented and holed on the starboard quarter above the waterline.on arrival at Singapore, *Bulwark* anchored offshore. Another job I had was assistant Confidential Books (CB) officer,

"Last one on". A Skyraider Airborne Early Warning (AEW) aircraft is prepared to mave forward from its landing position. The ship has just started turning away from the recovery course.

Two piston-engined Whirlwind helicopters of 845 Naval Air Squadron

while *Bulwark* was in Mombasa, with the crew enjoying trips to Nairobi and the Game Parks. The 2nd Battalion of the Cameronians were embarked with all their stores and vehicles and taken up to the head of the Gulf of Aqaba to be landed in Jordan. All this was whilst in expectation of being attacked with two Seahawks ready

spending hours checking and burning out of date CBs with a rather florid RM Captain. He sent me ashore to collect two large bags of CBs from the dockyard which meant a boat ride to the pier then a taxi to the dockyard. I felt very vulnerable on my return standing with two large bags of secret books on a crowded pier waiting for a boat back to the ship, wondering what to do if I was attacked! Jump into the sea and hope the bags sank!

And so to Hong Kong and alongside in the dockyard there. What a feast of new experiences, rattling trams and Wanchi Burberrys and so much to see and explore. After two weeks it was time to return home via the Cape. That plan went wrong because nationalists decided to assassinate King Faisal of Iraq

Crossing the Line ceremony. The Captain is welcomed by Neptune's court

on the catapults with orders to land ashore as the flight deck was out of use, covered in army lorries!

That job done, we sailed to Aden in support of army operations. We were there in the harbour for a total of 56 days in that stinking heat! On one trip out, our aircraft bombed rebel forces in the Omani hills, but the most exciting thing was when two tankers, the SS *Melika* and *Fernand Gilabert*, collided not far away from us, With the scent of salvage money in the air we went to the rescue to find the *Melika* on fire and abandoned. We managed to save some of her crew while other ships tended to the other vessel. We then set about landing a fire party onboard and getting the stricken tanker in tow. Her steering gear was out of action and towing was difficult, eventually it became necessary to use the frigate *Puma* astern, but we made it finally to Muscat where the Admiralty had all the fuel removed. For the whole operation the RN ships companies involved were awarded £100,000. My share was £75, probably worth ten times that much in today's money.

HMS* Bulwark *towing SS* Melika *off the Omani coast, 1958

After this excitement and boredom of sitting in Aden for so long, *Bulwark* finally returned home. We went, not via South Africa as planned, but through the canal again to Cyprus and Malta, then back to Portsmouth and pay off for conversion to a Commando Carrier. I joined HMS *Starling* to complete my engineering experience and get my engine room watch keeping certificate.

After engineering training lasting four years I returned to the FAA and served in 705, 707 and 819 squadrons, *Ark Royal* and on the staff of Flag Officer Carriers and Amphibious Ships (FOCAS) in which appointment I briefly served with your Editor.

All photographs are by the author.

FROM THE ARCHIVE

By Flight Lieutenant E L Ford, RNAS

Few of us who learnt to fly during the early days of the 1914/1918 War fully appreciated that we were indulging in a dangerous bout with the elements. Although at that time it really wasn't natural to fly at all, we budding airmen thought otherwise and blithely undertook risks which, even today when I think of them, send shivers rippling down my spine to tickle up my third lumbar vertebra which fractured during my last crash. As a Sub-Lieutenant, probationary, Royal Naval Air Service, I was taught the preliminaries of flight at the Grahame White Flying School, Hendon. Here our civilian instructors, Mr Marcus Manton and Mr Winter, took us aloft in Bristol Boxkites. Flying these machines of wood, wire and canvas was allowed only in practically still air conditions which usually ushered in the dawn, hence the necessity for waking up our instructors before the air got weaving, said awakenings being nobly borne by our tutors. They realised that we were an irresponsible but keen bunch of Quirks (Service nickname) and there was a war on.

Atmospheric conditions at the aerodrome were ascertained by holding aloft a silk handkerchief; if it remained limp or fairly so, we flew - if it flew, we didn't! Piloting a Boxkite was a novel and exhilarating experience because one was neither on, nor in, the machine but sort of in front of most of it except the elevator. One sat on a tiny wickerwork affair attached to a framework built out from the leading edge of the lower main plane - it seemed to be a long way out too - and from this airy perch, with legs outstretched, feet on an open-air rudder bar out front, firmly grasping the joystick to starboard and engine switch to port, we made our early attempts at flight, and actually flew!

When airborne there was absolutely nothing but lots of space and air, between one's seat and the ground below; the view looking down between one's outstretched legs was definitely bird's-eye and the completely unrestricted `look around' quite fascinating, as was also the discovery to most of us that the horizon was terribly important and always at one's eye level. The instructor sat on a few wooden laths behind the pupil, slightly higher so that he could lean over and grasp the joystick - he could also reach the engine switch, but had no physical control whatever over the rudder bar moved by the pupil to instructions shouted into his ear above the din of an unsilenced engine's exhaust.

Boxkites were equipped with one "instrument", a drip-feed oil pulsator

which one watched as closely as circumstances permitted - say - when flying level or straight ahead. If the oil was seen to be dripping regularly and at the correct rate of flow then one knew the engine was getting its quota of oil and should be OK, but if there were pauses in the visible oil supply then one nosed to earth immediately with engine switched off and landed as best one could.

The Gnome rotary engine ran at full pelt and one's speed through the air as well as the niceties of landing were governed by a switch one flicked on or off, thereby blipping the engine for more or less momentum as required. If one paused too long between blips one ran the risk of losing the engine, so care had to be taken during this vital operation.

Stalling a Boxkite was dangerously easy and at the low heights we flew of 100 to 200 feet, a distinct hazard, as the space required in which to recover from a stall simply wasn't there. The margin of error between stalling and flying speeds was so narrow that one could not truthfully term that margin a safety factor! Of this we Quirks were blissfully unaware as we meandered around on the fringe of both safety limit and aerodrome feeling, as we were, on top of the world at that particular spot, even during those so early hours at dawn and in the softness of a tranquil evening the sheer delight of those ambling early flights was indescribable.

Bristol Boxkite at Durdham Down in November 1910. Sir George White, who founded the Bristol Aircraft Company with his brother Samuel, is standing in front of the aircraft

So calm was the air as we practised that when executing our "figures of eight" and flying dead level we'd pass through our own backwash of disturbed air when crossing over at the centre of the eight from one loop to the other; we'd get mightily bumped whilst doing this and the old Boxkite would wobble and heave uncomfortably, but that was good flying.

To qualify for one's Brevet or Ticket one had to carry out quite

a programme, consisting of take-offs, landings, left and right hand level circuits, a climb to a minimum height (or higher) with a barograph in a sealed box slung around one's neck, execute good figure eights, and finally volplane or glide in with engine dead and hand held well away from the switch, then make a smooth landing and come to a standstill within thirty yards of official Royal Aero Club observers who were on the ground watching one's flight. All this required pretty good judgement, yet the surprising thing was the large number who passed the tests with flying colours.

We were taught to fly and judge our speed by capital F Feel and capital S Sound - a sense of balance and the noise made by the air whistling through wires and around struts. Never, we were told, NEVER rely on instruments; a sensitive seat and delicately tuned ear were much more reliable! A total flying time of six hours and 24 minutes, of which one hour and six minutes were flown solo, accounted for my Brevet and during my tests I, being light and small, attained the terrific height of seven hundred and eighty feet - a Hendon Boxkite record which stood for some considerable time!

After Hendon came Eastbourne where there were more advanced types of aircraft to be flown before being posted to an active service station as a fully qualified operational pilot, with between 20 and 30 hours total flying to one's credit. The advanced types consisted of Bleriot monoplanes and Curtiss biplanes, but there was also a sprinkling of Boxkites, Maurice Farmans and Caudrons. It was here that I went through what I believe still is a truly unique experience. I am pretty certain that no pilot has ever purposely spun a Bleriot and got safely away with it, nor have I heard of any unintentional spins followed by one-piece landings. In fact I am convinced of the impossibility of spinning a Bleriot and coming out whole because the machine was so slow in responding to the controls. The reason for this was its reliance on warping the wings when manoeuvring - it lacked the more sensitive ailerons. Wing-warping was a cumbersome strong-arm job. I know it called for considerable effort from myself, a mere five feet one inch of pilot, but even taller and heftier men with longer arms and in consequence greater powers of leverage have told me that flying Bleriots was hard work. As for anyone being able to control a spinning nose dive, I am sure that no wing-warping aircraft of any make could be expected to obey instructions in such a circumstance!

I had flown the Bleriot for a total of around 80 minutes or so in brief practice flights of 10 to 15 minutes duration and on this memorable occasion had been up higher and longer than I'd

ever flown solo before, enjoying myself thoroughly. In the near distance, high over the aerodrome perimeter to the west, I spotted a lovely large solid-looking cloud - a real beauty - and as I'd always wanted to see what the inside of such a cloud was like I headed for it and plunged smack in near the top. "Smack" is the operative word, because as I shot into the thick grey mass I received a smart kick in the pants followed immediately by a sickening falling sensation, and then everything happened with startling rapidity; the old Bleriot went berserk, completely out of my control, the engine revved up and vibrated so violently that I switched off in a hurry and there was I hanging on like grim death to a joystick which had become rigid, pressing on a rudder bar gone solid, and being tossed about within a dense mass of something which was nothing and yet everything, if you get me! I had not the remotest idea of what was happening - that I was in a spinning nose dive - but only knew that I was flying "blind" and hurtling down through a frightening cloud in a quivering machine which howled its protest by shrill-pitched wires from whose note I realised that we were travelling at an excessive rate of knots, too fast for that machine.

Tensely gripping the joystick and literally standing on the rudder bar I was unable to do anything but feel very frightened and bewildered, bracing myself for whatever was coming and vaguely expecting to hit something somewhere hard and fast, when suddenly I shot out from the cloud base to find myself spinning around on an almost vertical axis, the twirling gasworks below approaching at a horrifying speed. To this day I do not know what I did or whether I did anything at all except to switch off the engine, but I do know I felt a cracking bump, then a sideways tearing tummy wrench, the earth stopped spinning and I found myself steeply banked and turning, able to regain control of sorts as both joystick and rudder unfroze, and lucky enough to be in such a position that I could nip in between the tall chimney stack and gasholder which were adjacent to the aerodrome, straighten up, flatten out and make quite a presentable forced landing on the aerodrome.

Looking back, I think the famous "bump" over the gasworks threw the old Bleriot out of its spin into a tight turn from which I recovered and regained control. I cannot imagine any other solution except that of an act of divine Providence. Feeling distinctly limp and shaken, I climbed out of the machine and tottered towards the CO, whom I'd spotted striding hurriedly towards me, the late Flight Lieutenant Commander

Sheppard, RN (his rank at that time) - one of England's pioneer airmen. He greeted me with "What the blazes have you been up to, Mr Ford?" I replied that I was sorry, Sir, but I really didn't know as I'd just fallen out of a cloud and felt a bit sick, Sir; he gave me a penetrating look and said, "I saw you - AND heard you - frightened the life out of me - thank God you made a good landing - report to me later. Meantime, you'd better take up that Curtiss, you'll be alright and feel better." So I did - and was! I flew clear of cloud ever after if it was possible to do so and never enjoyed flying in them for quite a long time after that experience and was never really comfortable in them.

The Bleriot I'd spun in was in a pretty bad state and the riggers had to just about rebuild it before it was fit for further service - all wires were slack, wings soggy, engine loose in its housing, in fact the machine was on the verge of collapse and doubtless would have done so in the air had I been unable to land immediately; a lucky escape if ever there was one. We had no wheel brakes or air brakes in those days, and the number of crashes I've seen due solely to "inability to stop within a desired distance on landing", especially when a Quirk committed the cardinal sin of landing downwind instead of into it, are legion. Mostly, however, crashes occurred during take-offs and were nearly always due to engine failure at these critical moments. Drummed into us was the instruction that the first thing to do as soon as we left the ground was to look for a place to land on. By assiduously obeying that instruction throughout my flying career as well as continuously practising forced landings (with engine switched off) from varying heights - good for judging distance, angle of glide in, number of circles down, etc. - I was able to bring off a great many landings without engine, and without damage, all of them somewhat trying as with a pukka forced landing one has only one chance of bringing it off safely - just one! I was always lucky in finding the right spot large enough to get into; sometimes, as I became experienced, by side-slipping into it and then kicking the machine round into the wind on touch-down, thereby shortening the landing run, a trick possible with the small light machines of those days.

This is an edited version of material originally published in "Jabberwock". The full version, together with a wide range of anecdotes about the RNAS, can be read in "Voices in Flight - the Royal Navl Air Service during the Great War", published by Pen and Sword, ISBN 978 1 78346 383 1

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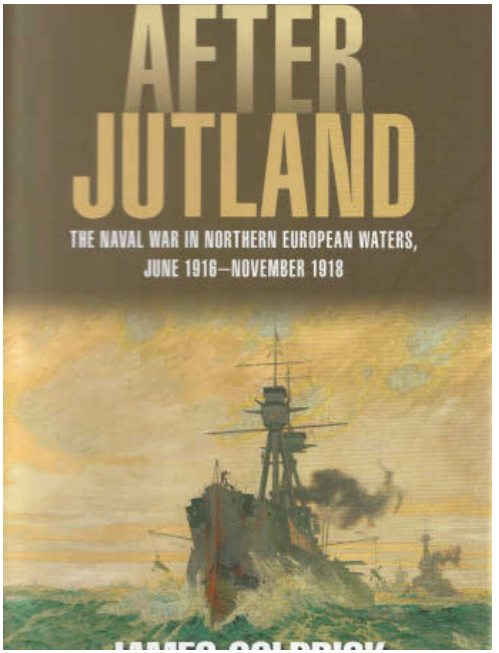
BOOK REVIEW

By Malcolm Smith



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The Battle of Jutland was a climactic event in the life of the Royal Navy - a battle that had been eagerly anticipated by both sides and expected to settle the command of the seas once and for all. The results were inconclusive and gave the Service a great deal to consider: some of its ships had proved to be unexpectedly vulnerable and the Fleet's freedom of manoeuvre had been significantly affected by the potential threat from torpedoes and mines. Worst of all, the Grand Fleet's almost complete lack of ability in night-fighting had allowed the German High Sea Fleet, some of whose ships were almost near sinking from battle damage, to avoid further battle overnight and escape to its home ports. Even though the RN had invested in aircraft-carrying ships, which might have improved the reconnaissance information available to the Command, a muddle over signalling meant that the most capable vessel (HMS *Campania*) was left behind when the Grand Fleet deployed. One seaplane reconaissance sortie was flown from HMS *Engadine*, but the enemy sighting report from the pilot (Rutland of Jutland) did not reach the ears of his Flag Officer, Admiral Beatty.

It is against this disappointing background that James Goldrick, a retired Rear Admiral in the Royal Australian Navy, tells the post-Jutland story of the naval war in northern European waters. He describes a sortie by the High Sea Fleet in August 1916, aimed ostensibly at bombarding Sunderland,`but really intended to draw out the Grand Fleet. The German Admiral Scheer had designed a complex plan, involving

the support of submarines and Zeppelins. In the event,the two fleets did not meet in strength, but the outcome was that two British fast destroyers were torpedoed and sunk, while a British submarine torpedoed and severely damaged a German battleship, the *Westfalen*, Even though none of the capital ships fired a shot, the encounter proved to be a turning point in naval strategy. The apparent invincibility of the Zeppelins led to urgent development of large British airships, such as the Coastal class, which were deployed in bases along the eastern coast of the UK. They began to work co-operatively with the British fleet; while seaplanes, now fitted with wireless, began to play a more active role from shore bases.

Scheer's own plans for increasing co-operation of all three arms were frustrated by a lack of central direction of the German naval war effort. The Zeppelin force was commanded by Korvettenkapitän Peter Strasser, who believed his force would be better employed in strategic bombing than in routine patrols over the fleet. The German submarine force was also partly directed away from North Sea patrols by the decision of the German high Command to re-start unrestricted attacks on merchant shipping in January 1917. This fateful decision caused the United States to declare war on Germany in April 1917.

The author focuses on the battles in the Dover Strait in 1917, involving combined attacks by German torpedo boats and submarines on the defensive barrage in this important waterway. The presence of the powerful new torpedo boats of the German Sixth Flotilla in Flanders led to sustained air attacks by the RNAS on Bruges and other locations. Spasmodic attempts by Admiral Bacon to attack the Bruges lock gates with surface forces revealed a lack of cohesion in the Admiralty's strategic planning. The need for re-organisation was partly resolved by the efforts of the Convoy Committee, which led to the general introduction of convoys later in the year, supported by an effective submarine tracking room in the Admiralty.

!918 saw the continuing difficulties experienced by the RN in countering German light forces and submarines. This led to the plans to attack the German bases at Zeebrugge and Ostend. After several false starts, the Zeebrugge attack, intended to completely block the exit channel from the port, went ahead on 22 April. This was an audacious plan and great bravery was shown by the forces involved. Although it was only partly successful, it ensured a huge increase in morale, both in the RN and generally in the country and allied nations.

In a chapter entitled "End Game in the North Sea" Admiral Goldrick describes the deterioration in the High Sea fleet, faced with increasingly effective joint operations by the RN and USN; weakened also by fuel

shortages and worsening material condition of its ships. Both of the allied navies were improving their anti-submarine effectiveness and the RN was making ambitious efforts to employ aircraft offensively.

The Harwich Force acquired a new capability in the form of lighters, each carrying a single flying boat, which could be towed at high speed by destroyers. The intention was to launch them in mid-channel to provide a deterrent to zeppelin patrols. However, once floated off from their lighters, the seaplanes often failed to get into the air because of wind and sea conditions. In June, a Sopwith Camel was launched from the cruiser *Sydney* and intercepted a German seaplane, "the first engagement by a ship-launched aircaft of another heavier-than-air machine".

HMS *Furious*, in her latest embodiment of the aircraft carrier concept, was capable of deploying a sizeable force of fighter-bomber aircraft, while having the speed and endurance to keep up with the fleet. Additionally, many more ships, including light cruisers, carried a fighter aircraft. On 19 July, *Furious* launched a strike of seven Sopwith Camels, each armed with two 50-lb bombs, against the airship hangars at Tondern. The raid was successful; leaving two Zeppelins destroyed and another hangar damaged. The raid showed the way ahead for British carrier capability, concurrently with the conversion of a liner into the first true aircraft carrier, HMS *Argus*. Regrettably this revolutionary design appeared just too late to take part in the War.

A final wartime aviation innovation was the conversion of lighters to carry wheeled fighters, leading to the successful interception on 10 August of the Zepellin L53 by Lieutenant Stuart Culley, who had been launched from a lighter towed by the destroyer HMS *Redoubt*.

Admiral Goldrick concludes this well-researched book by asking how effectively the Germans employed the navy it had created. He answers his own question: *not well*. The High Sea Fleet was always limited in fuel and material, but it was not employed as aggresively as it might have been. He levels many criticisms of the RN's leadership and slowness to bring together an experienced staff to manage strategic planning. He recognises the difficulties faced by those developing ship-borne aviation, but states that the widespread embarked deployment of fighters and reconnaissance aircraft by the end of the war "represented a formidable capability". He disproves the popular misconception that the Battle of Jutland signalled the end of offensive operations by the High Sea Fleet, whilst demonstrating that it did initiate widespread improvements in the operational capability of the Royal Navy

This is a scholarly book, with copious notes, extensive bibliography and a full index.

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