Jabberwock

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

No. 98
February 2020

SOCIETY OF FRIENDS
FLEET AIR ARM
MUSEUM

In this issue

- Book Review - Battle of Midway
- News from Down Under
- HMS Activity and Gibraltar Convoys
- RNAS Tiree
- Seafire Mk 47 in 800 Squadron, 1950s
- St Davids and Brawdy Airfields

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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Simon Webster,
22 Kings Yard,
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Somerset TA4 3LE.

Tel: 01823 433448
Mob: 07527 707204

Email: soffaam.mem@gmail.com

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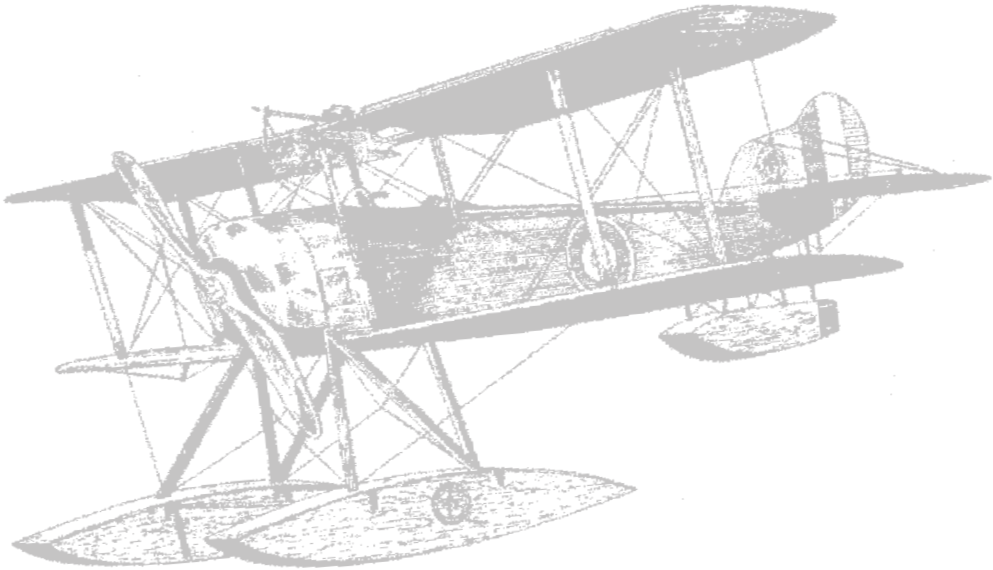

Patron: Rear Admiral A R Rawbone CB, AFC, RN
President: Rear Admiral Tom Cunningham CBE
FLEET AIR ARM MUSEUM
RNAS Yeovilton
Somerset BA22 8HT
Telephone: 01935 840565
SOFFAAM email: fleetairarm.sof@nmrn.org.uk
SOFFAAM website: fleetairarmfriends.org.uk
Facebook @SOFFAAM

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The Society of Friends of the Fleet Air Arm Museum

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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.*

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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!

Visit us on Facebook @SOFFAAM

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Seafire Mk 47, at an unidentified air station. The RR Griffon engine replaced the Merlin and needed two contra-rotating propellers to absorb the extra power. The mid-1930s designed fuselage was not up to the stresses of deck operations and the type was retired after a final operational period in the Korean War, p37

COVER PICTURE:

Main picture - Grumman TBF Avenger in USMC markings. The Avenger was the highly-successful replacement for the Douglas TBD Devastator.

Inset: The PBY Catalina. Based on Midway in 1942, these provided invaluable search and reconnaissance services

EDITORIAL

This issue contains the gratifying news that recruitment to the Society, which had been in the doldrums for some time, is now picking up. This may be as a result of wider advertising, e.g., in Facebook. We have also improved on methods of paying for membership.

Members continue to speculate about the identity of the car shown in the WW1 picture in Jabberwock 97. It seems almost certain that the photo was taken in the very first months of war, when civilian cars could still drive about to follow the fast-moving battle. Our Chairman seems fairly convinced that the car was a Peugeot, but others may have a different idea.

In "Snippets from Council Meetings", we read the announcement by Marc Farrance, the Museum's General Manager, of the opening in September last year of an important new display named "Pioneers to Professionals - Women in the Royal Navy". The opening was attended by two 90 year old veteran ladies who shared wartime experiences. Marc also mentioned the popular tours of Cobham Hall, which houses the Museum's extensive reserve collection of aircraft and artefacts.

In our summaries of monthly talks, you may read of the continuing progress being made by David Morris in the reconstruction of the Barracuda. This has been assisted by the discovery of the remains of another aircraft in the Solent and the recovery of significant parts of it.

The New Year luncheon is always a popular event in the Society's calendar. Held this year on 11 January, it was well-attended, as shown in the picture above.

We also carry a moving letter from member Brian Toomey on the World War 1 memorial at Arras, in northern France. We occasionally comment that this magazine not only brings news of Society activities, but also relies on the contributions of our members to maintain its general interest. We would particularly welcome articles, letters and general reminiscences for inclusion in our forthcoming special 100th edition, deadline for which is 10 July 2020.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Malcolm,

Many thanks for another interesting 'Jabberwock'.

I am afraid my car-spotting is useless but doubtless a motor-aficionado member will provide the answer. You also enquired as to the circumstances of the image. One strong possibility is that the car was one of those belonging to the sixty or so "Motor Owner-Drivers" who went over to France and Belgium in September 1915.

General Sir Hubert Blumberg in his "Britain's Sea Soldiers - A History of the Royal Marines 1914-1919" described them as follows:-

"...the Royal Naval Division Administrative Staff had also arranged with the Royal Automobile Club to obtain the services of 50 gentlemen [sic], who were to bring their own cars and place them at the disposal of the Admiralty; they were granted commissions as Honorary Second Lieutenants, Royal Marines, with pay £1 per day with free petrol and tyres ... [they] were dispatched to Dunkirk. ... These cars and their drivers proved very useful for transport of ammunition and wounded at Antwerp [where the Royal Naval Division fought in early October 1914], though the bill for compensation to the large limousine and other luxury cars involved was a heavy one. Many of the drivers attached themselves to the 7th Division and 3rd Cavalry Division at Ostend, and it was some time before they were all rounded up and returned to Engand by Sir John French's Staff after the return of the Royal Naval Division to England" [*on 12 October after withdrawing from the Defence of Antwerp].*

There is too little detail to identify the people in the image but the taller of the two naval officers bears a passing resemblance to Lieutenant W F Samson RNVR, one of Cdr Charles Samson's two brothers (Bill and Felix) in the RNAS armoured car formation. Samson's "Fights and Flights" has an image of Bill Samson at Douai and the merging of the non-armoured cars with the RNAS armoured vehicles is apparent from Samson's narrative A footnote to the above: one of the Motor Owner-Drivers, Lieutenant Anthony F Wilding RMLI, attached himself to Samson's RNAS unit as Transport Officer. A New Zealander, Wilding was a formidable tennis champion, taking the Wimbledon title in four successive years 1910-1913 and becoming Triple World Champion in 1913. He was killed in action with the Royal Naval Armoured Car Division at Aubers

Ridge on 9 May 1915.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthony_Wilding

Too much information? I hope some of it may be of use.

Yours aye
Roy Swales

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Dear Malcolm,
Reference your above article on P24 of the November Issue, I showed the picture to a Veteran Car friend on the London to Brighton Run the other weekend and he can't be sure, but the one shown while showing some Mercedes characteristics might actually be an Italian "Itala" who made rather splendid sports/racing cars at that time.
If you do get a definitive identification then do let me know if you can manage it!

Many thanks,
Bill Elwell-Sutton.

• • • • • • • • • • • • •

Dear Malcolm,
In "Fights and Flights" C. R. Samson describes how the Eastchurch Squadron set out for Ostend at the end of August 1914 with a "miscellaneous collection of vehicles" which included "ten touring cars". One of his officers was his brother, Lt. Bill Samson RNVR, who was always photographed wearing jodhpurs. I believe that the photograph shows Bill Samson during those first few weeks of WW1 when the RNAS and the RFC were working closely together, in the municipal square of some French or

Peugeot radiator badge of the early WW1 era

Belgian town. The resolution is not good enough to be sure if the RFC officer is wearing wings, and they were all khaki clones with moustaches who look identical to the modern eye. The man in the maternity jacket is almost certainly a senior NCO RFC.
My first research suggested the the car might be a Humber but Peter Wilcox and Anthony Saunders of the Humber Register deflated my early optimism and suggested alternatives. I now believe that the car is a Peugeot, possibly Type 145 tourer. It has a trapezoidal maker's badge atop the radiator and I attach a photo of the Peugeot badge of

Retsored Peugeot Type 145 Tourer

that era. The bodywork of touring cars was often hand made to the customer's requirements but there are several common aspects to the bodywork and that of the restored Type 145 photograph which I have attached. Whatever the make, it appears that the car had been rapidly requisitioned and a partially unsuccessful attempt made to erase its original civilian registration. The radiator grille bears a shadow of "423".

Graham

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Dear Malcolm

When touring the Somme battlefields in autumn 2019, Mary and I visited this WW1 Memorial, in Arras, Pas de Calais; it includes RNAS names. Our recently retired Army son, Richard plus his wife Liza drove us from Somerset, to stay for four nights in Arras, as a base for a battlefield tour of the Somme. We had a further excellent guide in our granddaughter Hermione, who was working as a Cultural Tour Leader in Normandy.

The Memorial to those with no known grave (see photos) is situated in a War Cemetery which contains 2650 Commonwealth burials; it names almost 1,000 airmen of the Royal Naval Air Service, the Royal Flying Corps, the Australian Flying Corps and the Royal Air Force, who were killed on the Western Front, and who have no known grave. The detailed photo (taken in heavy rain) shows some RNAS names.

Although at the start of WW1 in August 1914 the RNAS, with 80 aircraft and 8 airships had responsibility for "Air Defence of UK", this soon widened into anti-submarine warfare, bombing raids on German Zeppelin hangars, and involvement in Gallipoli. By August 1916 the RFC was suffering badly

The World War 1 Memorial at Arrras, Pas de Calais

from German fighter combat, so the RNAS were tasked with supporting them and the British Expeditionary Force in France and Belgium. The RNAS Squadrons had many great successes.

During the last year of the War, tanks and aircraft from the Allies played a key role in the defeat of Germany. By the end of March 1918 the RNAS had 2949 aircraft, 103 airships and 67,000 officers and men at 126 Naval Air Stations. On 1 April 1918, the RFC and RNAS ceased to exist; they became the Royal Air Force.

Our visit to the Somme was a deeply moving experience. The landscape is strewn with superbly maintained Memorials and Cemeteries, small and large, the latter often with excellent Visitor Centres. UK, Australian, Canadian and New Zealand Cemeteries show the extent to which these and many other Commonwealth and Empire Countries came to our aid in the titanic struggle in Europe, during WW1. The armies bore the brunt of the fighting and casualties, with the Allies suffering 2 million deaths in mainland Europe. A further 5 million were wounded, many of whom never recovered to live normal lives. Two thirds of these casualties were French, and the British made up most of the rest.

A sample of the Royal Naval Air Service names inscribed on the memorial

We should remember their gallantry, and their willingness to give up their lives, and in particular we should remember those of the RNAS who contributed so much to the victory.

Brian Toomey

SNIPPETS FROM COUNCIL MEETINGS

From the December Meeting:

• *The General Manager gave the following report:*

Capital Works. The Museum is pleased to report that the Hall Two Roof Replacement and new 'Bomb' Lift in Hall Three (Carrier) are now both fully complete.

Pioneers to Professionals: Women and the Royal Navy. Mary Owens and Eve Warton, both WRNS veterans of the Second World War, were guests of honour at the formal opening of "Pioneers to Professionals: Women and the Royal Navy", on the 24th of September 2019. Supported by SoFFAAM, this is a new permanent exhibition at the Fleet Air Arm Museum tracing the evolving role of women in the Royal Navy. The two ladies, both in their nineties and living in Somerset and Wiltshire respectively, were surprised to find while reminiscing about their wartime experiences that they had served together at RNAS Machrihanish in Scotland in the 1940s! The launch attracted much media attention with Forces TV and several local newspapers sending correspondents to cover the event. This helped to publicise the exhibition and the Museum has received several favourable write-ups in recent weeks as a result. We encourage all those within SoFFAAM to visit the Pioneers to Professionals exhibition in the coming months.

Vampire Re-Interpretation. The Heritage team has recently unveiled some small interpretation upgrades to the Vampire T22 Cockpit in Hall Two. These changes add depth and detail to the cockpit and albeit small, mark the first phase of potential future development to this experience.

Events. Tours to Cobham Hall continue to be popular and continue to sell well. Tickets are £15 and available now from the Museum website. The Museum has tours on the 5th of December 2019, but also is selling places already for the next year with the first access in 2020 confirmed for the 5th March 2020.

The Museum will also welcome back the HMS Heron Volunteer Band to the Museum on 12/13 December 2019. (tickets are £15, include glass of mulled wine and a mince pie).

The Museum sees the return of 'Top Gun' and our Cinema

Experience to the Flight Deck on the 28th December. Visit http://www.starlight-cinema.co.uk/ for more information.

Please visit the Museum website at www.fleetairarm.com for more information unless otherwise stated.

• *Publicity and Recruitment*

In a description of activity on Facebook, Chris Penney said that some Society members had received Facebook training; subsequently the reach of the Society had broadened. There had been 5000 followers after the Barracuda talk. He was concerned that our page only reached an elderly male-only audience and thought that there might be a need to pay Facebook to widen the demographic of the audience. He confirmed that the FAAM Facebook site is marketing Society talks.

• *The Talks Organiser gave the following report:*

Richard Macauley confirmed that speakers had been identified for all except the October slot for next year. He still hoped to find a female as a change from the almost universally male speakers. The Vice Chairman said he again planned to produce the A6 size talk programme, which could be included in the next Jabberwock.

Chris Penney brought up the proposal for a members' evening. The General Manager confirmed that he had no objection in principle to the conduct of such an event in the Auditorium. The format could consist of three or four people giving a brief talk on their life experiences. The idea was generally welcomed and a date of mid-August suggested.

Rosanne Crowther reported that she was planning a visit to Portsmouth Dockyard next year and had other visit possibilities in mind.

• *The Membership Secretary gave the following report:*

Membership numbers - Deep joy, the decline in membership numbers has stabilised since the last meeting in September. 7 lost and 6 gained. We are still below the "magic" 1000 and need to keep trying harder to recruit. Of the 6 new applications received since the September meeting, one has been downloaded from the web-site and five are from 'Join' leaflets picked up in the FAAM.

Sadly the Facebook 'Taranto' special offer of £5 off the normal £12 fee drew no takers. Nevertheless, Facebook is creating awareness of SOFFAAM. Currently the majority of new membership applications still come from the museum itself. It is a simple fact that the

more members we have, the more money we can donate directly to the FAAM. Double the membership, double the donations.

I asked Malcolm to incorporate an application form on the back cover of Jabberwock, which has appeared in the December 2019 issue and I ask myself why we did not spot this opportunity before?

• *The Publications Editor gave the following report:*

He reminded the meeting that, as he was now embarking on his ninth decade, he was beginning to consider the long term future of the editorship. Richard Macauley had agreed in principle to take over some of the design and formatting task. This would need discussion in the plans for the proposed A4-sized 100th issue. He asked whether the Council would formally agree that such a project should go ahead. The Council agreed unanimously that it should; although there were several implications, such as the increased cost and size of the print run, which would have to be clarified. There was also a brief discussion as to whether the issue should carry advertisements.

• *Any Other Business.*

Chris Adams suggested that another banner could be displayed at the Barracuda workshop to illustrate the Society's continuing support to the restoration project.

The Editor informed the Council that retired Council member Bill Ellison had recently suffered a major stroke. Rosanne offered to send his wife a card of condolence.

On the general subject of IT support to the Society, the Chairman reported that the Treasurer had been surprised at the cost of various sub-contracted work. The Facebook initiative also incurred some costs. He proposed that the Society will have to accept the cost of widening publicity and recruitment activities. The website needs to be improved, he said, and it probably needs specialist skills to re-design it. The Society will have to decide what it expects from the website. Richard Macauley asked if spending more money on it would be justified in increased membership. Tim Smith commented that the existing site fulfils the usual purpose of these communications, in that it informs the public of the Society's purpose and provides an opportunity for joining applications. It was important that it be kept up to date. The Chairman agreed to form a sub-Committee, whose Terms of Reference should include the establishment of a clear purpose for the website; how it might be re-designed and potential costs of re-design.

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MONTHLY TALKS REVIEW

Summarised by Robert Heath

October 2019 TALK. "Jackie Moggridge - ATA Pilot" by Candida Adkins

Our speaker, Cadida Adkins, who brought her mother's memory vivdly to life in this talk

A girl with a mission - that just about sums up Jackie Moggridge, but what a girl. Jackie (Dolores Theresa, in fact) was born in 1922 in Pretoria, South Africa to English parents. She had a pretty conventional childhood, attending a convent school where she enjoyed English and many other subjects, but maths was certainly not one of them. She had two brothers and as always there was sibling banter and baiting, which one day set her on her future career, little did she realise at the time. Her brothers, bless their little socks, teased and teased her calling her a sissy and in reply, as an aeroplane flew overhead, she announced that one day she would be up there as a pilot of an aeroplane. The mould wasn't quite cast yet however. On her 15th Birthday, her mother bought her a flight in a DH Rapide and for Jackie it was truly memorable; she was sick all over the place - a feeling that never left her as a passenger in aircraft. Nevertheless, a week later mother indulged Jackie with another flight and this time the flying bug sunk its teeth into her, never to let go.

That was how it started. By the time she retired she was credited with being: the youngest licensed woman pilot in South Africa; the first woman to make a parachute jump in South Africa; active throughout WW2 with the Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA); was one of the first women to be granted her 'Wings' by the RAF; accumulated 3,500 flying hours in 1,500 aircraft of 83 different types; was the first woman to become an airline captain; and so it went on. She also wanted to be the first woman to break the sound barrier,

but unending fumbling and bumbling by the authorities allowed America's Jackie Cochran to claim that first.

All this was in an age when women were expected to stay at home, quietly in the background, to bring up the children and to be home-makers, while the men went out to work and were recognised, unambiguously, as the bread-winners. On top of that Jackie was only 5ft 2in tall. She was a girl with a mission and a bee-in-her-bonnet! Fortunately, she was a keen diarist also and that is how our speaker, Candida Adkins, came to really know her mother, Jackie. As a child Candida knew her mother was an aviator, but of course the extent is never revealed in day to day life. Gradually Candida assembled all the memorabilia, diaries and letters and now fully understands what her mother achieved.

After her second flight in the Rapide, Jackie was determined to learn to fly herself and started lessons and while still aged only 15, gained her pilot's licence (an accompanying photograph showed her climbing in DH Gypsy Moth, ZS-ABM). Following that achievement, aged 17, she decided to try a parachute jump, which in those days meant climbing out of the cockpit, standing on the wing and launching yourself, which she did bundled up in a borrowed flying suit much bigger than she was.

For Jackie, a pilot's licence was good, but not enough. She now wanted to gain a commercial pilot's licence so that she could fly passenger aircraft, but for that she would have to move to England. Even then most air training schools were unwilling to take on a woman pupil, until at last the Aeronautical College at Witney, Oxford admitted her for pilot training and at the same time another girl for aeronautical engineering. Now Jackie would have to get to grips with maths. Just a year into the course WW2 broke out, so Jackie promptly offered her services to the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) knowing that pilots would be in demand. Without hesitation the WAAF enrolled her, looked at her qualifications and made her a - cook. Nothing new there then. However, being Jackie, she quickly got transferred to be trained on the then very hush-hush radar system which enabled her to watch the progress of the Battle of Britain first hand, via a radar set.

While this was happening, a lady named Pauline Gower had been established as the ATA Women's Commandant to recruit the many women pilots available, to ease the intensifying workload of the male pilots, many of whom were fine aviators, but unfit for front-line service. Thus, in July 1940, Jackie was invited to report to Hatfield to take up duties as an ATA pilot. She found herself appointed as pilot No.15 in the No 15 Ferry Pool, an all women Pool based at Hamble, near Southampton. Jackie was

delighted to be flying again, this time as a First Officer in uniform. Candida informed us that in all the ATA employed 1,600 men and 168 women pilots, of whom the latter often met with prejudice. All ATA aircrew endured difficult and dangerous wartine flying conditions and around 10% of the men were killed in service. Similarly around 10% of the women pilots also died in service. This was a good safety record, as the aircraft had no radios, pilots were not allowed to fly into or above cloud level, not allowed to fly at night and they had no specific training for any of the enormous range of aircraft types they flew. They were each presented with a small pocket-size flip pad which contained a page for every different type of aircraft. As you can imagine the details were sparse, but sufficient to take off, transit and land safely with care and concentration.

Jackie Moggridge at the controls of a Spitfire. (From an undated wartime picture.)

ATA pilots did have to be qualified for categories of aircraft, e.g., single engine, twin engine or four engine; so a Tiger Moth biplane trainer and a 24 cylinder Tempest fighter bomber were all in a day's work, being single-engined, likewise a sedate Anson was in the same category as an all-powerful Mosquito - it is like a dream come true to us arm-chair 'wallahs' isn't it?

Jackie also kept an aircraft recognition book in which she made personal comments on each aircraft type, good features and bad. Needless to say, the Spitfire was a clear winner in Jackie's eyes. In all she flew 372 of them, the last when she was well and truly retired and was invited by Carolyn Grace to fly in her two seat Spitfire. In tracing the history of her Spitfire, ML407, Carolyn Grace had become aware that Jackie had delivered it new from the factory to 485 New Zealand Squadron, where it became the mount of Flying Officer Johnnie

Houlton DFC. He then went on to be credited with shooting down the first enemy aircraft on D-Day over the Normandy beachhead, in ML407.

The love of flying was not all-consuming, because Jackie did also make time to meet army engineer Lt Col Reginald Moggridge. Unfortunately he was shortly afterwards sent off to India for two years before they could marry in 1945 when he brought her home to Taunton. In due course, the war ended and Jackie was presented with the 'King's Commendation for Valuable Services in the Air' by Clement Attlee, the then Prime Minister, on behalf of the King. With the war over, Jackie still wanted to continue flying and once again joined the WRAF (VR), where she did actually formally gain her RAF 'wings' in 1953, just one of five women to do so at that time. During her service she managed to notch up several different types of aircraft, including the then novel jet powered Meteors. Women were still very much swimming against a very strong tide of prejudice in those days and recognition was hard won. Things have started to change since then and in 1991 the RAF erroneously boasted that they had trained and awarded 'wings' to the first female RAF pilot - wrong by 38 years.

In June 1953, Jackie was awarded the Queen's Coronation Medal. In 1954 an unusual opportunity occurred when Jackie joined a select group of pilots who were tasked with delivering 30 Spitfires from Turkey all the way to Burma. It entailed 9 stops en-route plus the inevitable disbelief that a woman should be capable of, let alone involved and entrusted with, such an important role.

After this episode Jackie tried time and time again to find a position as a commercial pilot. Eventually after a few interim flying jobs, she was taken on to the books of Channel Airways, where she became the first woman airline captain to fly passengers on scheduled flights, flying a variety of aircraft including Rapides, Doves and Vikings. One important aspect of commercial flying for Jackie was that she had to be inconspicuous and keep quiet on the intercom. Passengers must not know that the pilot was a female - they might not fly with Channel Airways again. She was the first to be awarded the Jean Lennox Bird Trophy for furthering the cause of women in aviation.

Candida has carefully collected everything to do with her mother's life, but one unexpected item was a French comic called "Lisette" which told in very graphic and exciting terms the life story of an adventuress who overcame all obstacles to become a famous and heroic aviatrix. It was all based, step by step, unmistakably on Jackie Moggridge.

If you want to know more or were unable to attend this splendid

evening talk, in 1957 during a lull in flying opportunities, Jackie sat down and wrote her biography “Spitfire Girl: My Life in the Sky”. Dash off now and for £6.47, Amazon will send you a paperback copy.

Thank you Candida Adkins for all the energy and effort put into this lively and entertaining narrative of a pioneering career in aviation.

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November 2019 TALK. “The Barracuda Restoration Update and Solent Wreck Recovery” by David Morris AMA, Curator of Aircraft.

Unmistakably, it was a buoyant and conservatively optimistic David Morris who stood before us this evening and we would soon know why. Project DP872, the Fairey Barracuda restoration, really started in the 1970s with the excavation of the crashed Barracuda wreckage from Enagh Lough in Maydown, Northern Ireland. This unfortunate aircraft crashed and sank in 1944 in typically Irish, very soft bog, sadly killing all three crew members. Due to the hazardous ground conditions and the fact that it was war time, the wreckage and crew remained untouched in-situ. The grieving family members of the crew asked if recovery could be made so that formal burial services could be held. It was only in the 1970s that the Ministry reviewed the situation and agreed that recovery should be attempted, despite the difficulties. It was a success. The crew members were recovered and at long last received a respectful service of burial. To accomplish this, most of Barracuda DP872 was recovered and the family agreed that it should be donated to the Fleet Air Arm Museum (FAAM), where it was corrosion treated and ‘put into storage’.

Over 2,500 Barracudas were built, variously by Fairey, Blackburn or Boulton-Paul, but not a single complete example exists anywhere. You may have spotted that the name Barracuda continued the Fairey theme of naming aircraft after tunny fish, viz: Swordfish and Albacore. As an aircraft, it was in fact very good, tough, versatile and advanced for its time, although early marks were all underpowered. Unfortunately due to exigencies of war, it was put into service without a proper manufacturer’s ‘shake-down’, leading to several quirks having to be accommodated, which along with its unusual appearance left it with a tarnished reputation.

What of the restoration project? DP872 in itself was insufficiently complete to even consider making a start, let alone fitting it into the schedule of work, or making space to do so. As time went by further Barracuda artefacts were discovered and gradually the project started to look as though it could be worthwhile. By 2012, David Morris

had six wreck sites to work from, so it was decided to chalk out the aircraft silhouette on the ground and lay recovered parts in place to establish what was really available and what was missing.

The outcome was encouraging and in 2015 the renovation project started in earnest. This meant cleaning and stripping everything back to basics before it could be re-built, leading to numerous queries, such as: was that section bent in the crash or is that how it came out of the factory, and so on. Interestingly, several pencil doodles and graffiti on metalwork have been revealed and will be carefully retained. SOFFAAM has played a part in this important role, by donating the funds for the FAAM to buy a grit blaster, which enables all the debris accumulated over the past 75 years to be carefully removed back to the original material, without doing any harm to it. As an example, David explained how an item originally weighing just a few grams (ounces) had accumulated encrustation weighing around a kilogram (2.2 pounds). Putting a whole aircraft the size of a Fairey Gannet through this process, piece by piece, does not happen quickly, but it is thorough and lasting.

Assembly of the fuselage framework is definitely progressing, but for every two steps forward there is one step back - such as installing components, then having to remove one because the next item has to go in beforehand! William Gibbs is the leading light and now hands-on expert on the engineering of the Barracuda, and with his team of engineers they are making the aircraft like new again, yet almost entirely doing so with the original materials. It is very impressive to behold.

Earlier this year (2019) David Morris was laying all the bureaucratic groundwork for a visit and probable subsequent recovery of a Barracuda from high on a mountain by a fjord in Norway; no simple task and a very costly prospect. The aircraft was one of those involved with the attack on the Tirpitz, to prevent it leaving the fjord, so that Lancaster bombers could follow up and administer the killer-blow. Plans were quite well advanced when David received a call from Wessex Archaeology, who were working in the Solent on a project to lay a new subsea electricity cable between England and France. The cable is 8 inches in diameter and can transmit power of several thousand megawatts, which will generate terrific heat. It consequently has to be laid in a straight line to ensure that joints remain secure. Wessex Archaeology had been commissioned to survey the route and identify any potential unexploded ordnance, of which around 400 were found and destroyed, plus any boulders or other obstructions. They said

they had found an almost intact aircraft wreck. Might the FAAM be interested? The aircraft was buried in the silt, but by studying the dive footage it was soon evident that it had Youngman Flaps, a distinctive feature of the Barracuda. It lay just half a mile offshore from the site of RNAS Lee-on-Solent (HMS Daedalus), in 15ft of water, just where the cable would be laid. It was an obstruction, it could not be moved to one side and cause an obstruction elsewhere; it had to be lifted out of the water and disposed of. Removal or recovery of obstructions on the route of the cable was all costed into the construction project, which was working to a tight schedule, so the FAAM was being offered a complete aircraft and better still, the means of recovering it at no cost. What more could anyone ask? From that moment, discussion was of recovery of an aircraft and not removal of an obstruction, so David quickly joined the survey team operating from the Dive Ship “Stour”. This looked very Heath-Robinson and low-budget, but in fact was a practical, high-tech maritime survey and recovery facility.

Being in shallow water and close offshore (800yards) sounds ideal, but in reality has many drawbacks. The Solent has two tides each day resulting in the seabed being constantly stirred up and the surface water also constantly on the move.. A 200 ton crane barge was brought in and all planning had to take into account dive times and limits, tides, weather, swell and wave surges and the beastly silt. All of this could be very dangerous in just 15ft of water. Access to the “Stour” had to be by transfer boat every time and conditions made even that impossible at times. Before each recovery session, the barge was positioned absolutely precisely by GPS. The high-tech control room on the “Stour” had six monitor screens to control everything that took place, not only for safety, but because visibility could be so bad underwater that the divers (who also had a GPS tag on their helmet) could be carefully guided on to the half buried aircraft. A 3D image was built of the wreck, which looked quite complete, but was more like a spider’s web, where if you touch one part, it easily tumbled further apart. All the surrounding silt was pumped up to the barge through a screening basket to clear access to the aircraft, but also to collect any artefacts that had fallen away. This in itself proved to be an absolute gold-mine, revealing very desirable pieces. A classic, unplanned moment occurred when, as the first large piece, a Youngman Flap, was lifted out of the water, a Spitfire flew overhead! How remarkable.

The final harvest of material

was truly far beyond expectation and no artefact has knowingly been left on the seabed. After 75 years underwater, everything required desalination treatment to neutralise the pH. Having done that and identified most components, the layers of concretion were removed and cleaned up beautifully, ready for immediate installation on the DP872. Among them were two critical, complex, specially tapered tubes, in excellent condition. A specialist workshop was close to receiving an order to replicate these tubes from drawings, at great expense. Instead original parts were installed. Another star find was the observer's canopy in brilliant condition, having obviously fallen to one side of the wreck. Likewise the rear gunner's seat and leather cushion have restored beautifully, as did the aerial spool. Even more incredible were the two 12volt batteries, which looked no worse for wear than if they had sat at the back of a garage for a few years, instead of being submerged for 75 years. They looked so good that David tested them and was astonished to see them register 0.2 volts charge. As yet the manufacturer remains a mystery.

What is the identity of the Solent Barracuda, I hear you ask? Unfortunately, historic crash records are not sufficiently complete to pin-point which Barracuda this is. It is believed to be one of two, but which, is still unresolved. It could be BV739, which lost power shortly after takeoff, from which the pilot S/Lt Williams, swam away, or it could be LS473 from which S/Lt Sands also safely removed himself. Archaeology will remove the uncertainty and reveal the identity in due course. David's Norway visit is still on the cards and it is expected to reveal more valuable parts, but it will be a complex and expensive exercise. Please have you cheque-books at the ready.

The FAAM now holds the archive for Fairey aircraft, mostly donated by the family itself. A great many manuals and drawings for the Barracuda are available, although the RAF Museum at Hendon also holds important reference material, which they have no hesitation in allowing access to, but not to the extent of handing it over to the care of the FAAM. One missing element is the parts lists for the Barracuda, which would be so useful in identifying components by their serial numbers. Overall, David is hopeful that on completion, the Barracuda will comprise at least 70% original Barracuda parts, if not more. What a target, what a legacy. Well done David Morris and his dedicated team of engineers. It will be an outstanding achievement. Thank you for an absorbing evening.

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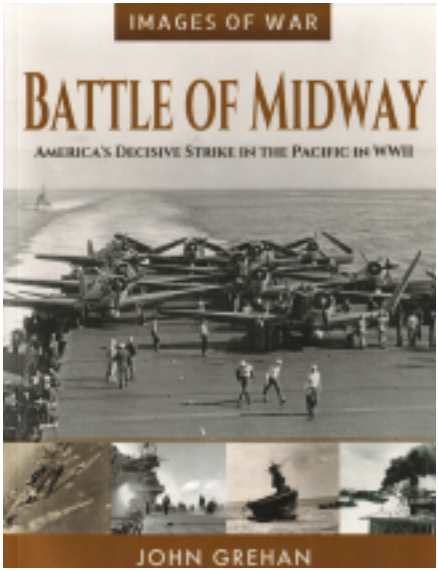

The cover picture shows the flight deck of USS Enterprise at 07.00 on 4 June 1942. The aircraft about to launch are Douglas TBD-1 Devastators. All the TBD-1 squadrons suffered serious losses in attacking the IJN carriers and the Devastator was withdrawn from front line service immediately after the Battle.

BOOK RE

By Malcol

Subtitled "America's decisive strike in the Pacific in WW2", and published by Pen & Sword, this is a profusely-illustrated volume in softback format. John Grehan is the author of more than 20 books covering every period of military history: his accessible style and skilful use of material make this an excellent overview of the whole Midway campaign. He opens with a brief Introduction, which describes how, from the Japanese viewpoint, the First Phase of their operations had relied upon rapid and overwhelming assaults on weakly-defended targets throughout East Asia. In April 1942, Admiral Yamamoto of the Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN) told the assembled officers in his flagship *Yamato* that the Second Phase of operations was about to begin. This was to be fast, brutal and hard-hitting, with the aim of extending the defensive perimeter of their possessions while at the same time decisively defeating the US Navy (a task that they had failed to achieve at Pearl Harbor). The opening battle in this phase – the attempt by the Japanese to capture the important harbour of Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea, led to the Battle of the Coral Sea. Grehan comments that this was conducted entirely by ship-borne aircraft and the first in which none of the surface vessels sighted or fired on each other. Although the attempt to capture the port failed, the battle ended with the loss of the US carrier *Lexington* and considerable damage to the *Yorktown.* The IJN assumed that the latter vessel would be out of action for months and Yamamoto calculated that, if he could lure the US Navy out by attacking their Naval Air Base at Midway Atoll, the westernmost of the scattered Hawaiian Islands, he would be able to pounce on their remaining aircraft carriers with his powerful battleships

REVIEW

colm Smith

and annihilate them. He had a formidable force of warships and aircraft carriers, although this had been somewhat weakened by the insistence of the Japanese Army on carrying out a simultaneous strike on the remote Aleutian Islands.

Grehan describes the opening phase of the battle, in which the Japanese Occupation Force of troopships approached the islands on 3 June 1942, supported by the separate Carrier Striking Force under Admiral Nagumo. Yamamoto also commanded (in person) the Fleet Main Force, which he intended to use to finally crush the US Pacific Fleet. However, the rapid tempo of Japanese operations before this operation had led to a reduction in the efficiency of the aircrew of the carrier force, with many inexperienced flyers having recently joined to replace battle losses. "Japan had only planned for a short war", comments Grehan.

Admiral Nagumo, Commander of the Carrier Striking Force

The IJN had hoped to achieve complete surprise in their attack on Midway, but skilful use of intelligence had enabled the USN to identify the target and to enhance their defensive forces on the islands, including B17 bombers and recently-arrived Avenger fighter-bombers. Under the overall command of Admiral Nimitz, the USN could field three aircraft carriers and supporting warships. Unknown to the Japanese, *Yorktown* had been hastily repaired in a heroic effort by the Pearl Harbor Navy Yard. USS *Hornet* and *Enterprise* formed Task Force 16 under Admiral Spruance and *Yorktown* with its escorts formed Task Force 17 under Admiral Fletcher. Advance warning of enemy plans enabled Nimitz to position his fleet to the north of Midway, in a prime position to surprise the would-be invaders.

Vice Admiral Frank Fletcher, commanding the Yorktown Task Force

As the Japanese force approached the islands and waves of attacking aircraft took off to bomb the runways and facilities, they were themselves attacked by Midway's land-based fighters and bombers. The fighters caught the oncoming waves of aircraft by surprise and claimed many shot

down. SBD Dauntless bombers attacked the carriers and claimed some hits on the *Akagi*, but they were badly shot up by the Japanese fighters and defensive fire from the ships. B17 bombers were next to attack with 600lb bombs and claimed two hits on the *Soryu*.

While Nagumo's fighters were successfully fending off these attacks, the Japanese admiral had to consider his next move. "He was blissfully unaware of the presence of the US carriers", comments Grehan. The returning attackers reported that they had failed to put the airbase out of action and a second strike would be necessary before the invasion force could go in. Nagumo ordered the aircraft of the second wave, which had been loaded with torpedoes to attack the USN fleet, to be re-loaded with bombs for a second attack on the islands. Nagumo was confident that, as the only attacks on him had come from Midway, there was no enemy carrier force in the vicinity.

However, he had been spotted by PBY (Catalina) reconnaissance aircraft and his position radioed to Admirals Fletcher and Spruance. At just after 07.00, *Enterprise* and *Hornet* both started launching aircraft in formations of fighters, dive-bombers and torpedo aircraft. Yorktown followed suit at 08.40, launching torpedo bombers and fighters. Almost simultaneously, Japanese reconnaissance aircraft spotted the US fleet and sent Nagumo the electrifying news that it included an aircraft carrier (*Yorktown*).

The first wave of US attacking aircraft were TBD Devastator torpedo bombers. They met overwhelming opposition from fighters and anti-aircraft fire from the ships. Of 15 aircraft from Hornet, none survived. Subsequent Devastator squadrons attacked bravely, but none scored a direct hit on the Japanese carriers and almost all were lost.

At about 09.45, Dauntless bombers

Lieutenant Douglas Bottomley at the controls of his Dauntless dive-bomber, in which he scored a direct hit on the Akagi, which subsequently sank

from *Enterprise* and *Yorktown* next attacked, catching the Japanese carriers with their decks crowded with fully fuelled and armed aircraft. The Devastator attacks had left the Japanese defending fighters low on fuel and ammunition, so the Dauntless bombers were rewarded with stunning success. Three Japanese carriers, the *Akagi, Soryu* and *Kaga* were left with uncontrollable fires and structural damage, so that all were abandoned and subsequently sank.

At 10.50, Admiral Nagumo ordered the aircraft of the only carrier that had not been hit, *Hiryu,* to counterattack.

The undamaged *Hiryu* was able to launch 18 Aichi Type 99 bombers to attack *Yorktown*. The US carrier detected the incoming force and launched its remaining F4F Wildcat fighters. They were so effective that, of the 18 attacking bombers, only 7 or 8 broke through, to be met by the concentrated anti-aircraft fire of *Yorktown's* escorts. Shortly after noon, the US carrier was hit by a bomb just aft of the midships elevator (lift). This damaged the flight deck and started fires in the hangar below. Two more

USS* Yorktown *after the first Japanese attack. The crew make "almost superhuman" efforts to patch the flight deck

bombs struck the vessel, but all the attacking bombers are believed to have been shot down. Yorktown's crew made an almost superhuman effort to rescue their ship, patching up the flight deck so that aircraft could be re-positioned and fighting the many fires. However, at about 14.30, another wave of attackers, this time by torpedo bombers, was detected. *Yorktown* was able to launch several Wildcat fighters, but the torpedo bombers broke through and the vessel was struck by at least two torpedoes. At the same time, aircraft from *Enterprise* had located and attacked the *Hiryu*, leaving the enemy ship burning fiercely, so that she later sank. By late in the afternoon, *Yorktown* was listing badly and had to be abandoned. She remained afloat over the night, but early the next morning, capsized and sank. Early the next day, 5 June, after minor clashes between aircraft and units of the Japanese fleet and the loss of a heavy cruiser as well as all four of his carriers, Admiral Yamamoto ordered the abandonment of the operation.

All these epic events are illustrated with hundreds of dramatic photographs, mostly from USN archives. The last hours of the stricken *Yorktown* are particularly well illustrated. Grehan sketches in the strategic background to the battle, but the emphasis of this splendid book is on the people who fought in it. Many of the aircrew are illustrated and their stories told; giving a valuable insight into the human side of the battle. The book is an informative (and inexpensive) contribution to our knowledge of the Pacific war.

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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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Thursday 27 February 2020
Gp Capt (Retd) Jock Heron
Flying the Lightning plus the Thunderchief and Mirage, on USAF and French AF exchange programmes.

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Thursday 26 March 2020
The RAF Presentation Team
An exciting and informative talk about the modern Royal Air Force by serving RAF personnel

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Thursday 30 April 2020
Col (Retd) Rich Graham
Flying the SR-71 Blackbird including its development and history.

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28 May 2020
Mark Service (RAF Retd)
An entertaining speaker with anecdotes on his life in the RAF

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Thursday 25 June 2020
Sqn Ldr (Retd) Rod Dean
The wooden wonder - development of the de Havilland Mosquito.

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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. *Whilst the Society makes every attempt to adhere to the published programme of lectures, there are occasionally factors such as weather or short notice unavailability of speakers which could force a change of programme. We recommend that members check our website and the booking section of the FAAM site*

MEMBERSHIP

Standing Order Membership cards enclosed for – February, March and April 2020.
(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:

3653 Mr P. Gray	Dorset
3654 Mr D. Collyer	Somerset
3655 Mr I. Offord	Dorset
3656 Mr T Alexander	Devon
3657 Mr J Hart	Rhondda Cynon Taf
3658 Mr A Wright	Somerset
3659 Mr M Boddington	Dorset
3660 Mr C Harris	Somerset
3661 Mr D Chettle-Wakeling	London
3662 Ms C Chettle	London
3663 Mr T Davies	Dorset
3664 Mr O Webb	Dorset
3665 Mr K Fairburn	Devon
3666 Mr S Freear-Price	Manchester
3667 Mr N Ladd	Somerset

Total members: 988
Members who have made a Gift Aid declaration: 691

PAYMENT can be made by: PayPal, standing order; cheque or BACS.
Cheques to be made payable to SOFFAAM and sent to:
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Annual membership £12
Family membership (Up to two adults and three children) £32
(Children reaching the age of 16 are liable to pay adult membership fees.) 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.

NEWS FROM DOWN UNDER

Contributed by Martin Turner

Geoff Turner (left) and Wally Gee get to work on their latest project

Above: The replica of Richard Pearse's flying machine when it was hanging in MOTAT.

Classic Flyers boss Andrew Gormlie is right. A few cane struts here, a bit of metal tubing there, a tangle of light rope and a bit of piano wire. But it's actually a significant piece of New Zealand aviation history.

For many years, this 'dusty nothing' was a showpiece at MOTAT - the Auckland Museum of Transport and Technology - a true-to-life model of Richard Pearse's monoplane, arguably the first in the world to go aloft. For many years it was suspended in perpetual flight from the roof of one of MOTAT's galleries, gazed on in wonder by hundreds of thousands of museum patrons. And now it has been scored by the local flying enthusiasts at Classic Flyers.

"What it does is make everyone focus on the fact that it was Richard Pearse who was the first person in the world to fly," says Andrew. Richard William Pearse was a Kiwi farmer and inventor who tinkered with pioneering aviation experiments. Witnesses interviewed

many years later claimed Pearse successfully flew and landed a powered, heavier-than-air machine on March 31, 1903. “And as far as

Richard Pearse 1877-1953

Classic Flyers are concerned, he was the first person in the world to fly”, says an adamant Andrew Gormlie. This is because March 1903 was a full nine months before the exploit of Wilbur and Orville Wright - the two American aviation pioneers generally credited with building and flying the world’s first successful aeroplane - the Wright Flyer.

Classic Flyers plans to make a strong statement on New Zealand’s role in aviation history and the replica of the Richard Pearse model monoplane will be hanging right at the main entry door to the hangar. At present the model sits stacked in a sad heap on a pallet in the middle of Classic Flyers’ hangar. Rebuilding it is the sort of project the behind-the-scenes boffins at Classic Flyers feed on. “We do what we call recovery missions“, explains Andrew, “... the replica is reasonably close to the original. Pearse had a huge skill set, exceptionally clever and driven ... to turn his hand to something that had never been done before.”

The model that will shortly hover over the Classic Flyers hangar will take us back to the moment 116 years ago. “It’s our aviation roots, and of course, being a small country, we’re quite proud of it, aren’t we?”

With acknowlegements to the Tauranga NZ “Weekend Sun” of 19 July 2019. The city is in the Western Bay of Plenty (North Island).

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By the Editor:

Pearse himself never claimed to have made the first ever powered flight and the evidence that he did so is poorly documented. He was certainly a prolific inventor and later in life attempted to develop a vertical takeoff and landing rotorcraft. This had a tilting propeller/rotor and monoplane wings. He intended the vehicle for driving on the road (like a car) as well for flying.

Thanks to the Society’s Treasurer for bringing this story to our attention.

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HMS ACTIVITY AND GIBRALTAR CONVOYS

By Jim Humberstone

The Allies' response to the inherent dangers of unrestricted German submarine warfare in World War Two was bedevilled by equivocation. The arguments for and against convoys had been gone over exhaustively and in almost identical circumstances in the First World War. The same objections surfaced in WWII, especially so in the US, with the US Navy's Admiral King initially resisting their introduction. Once implemented by 1941 however, after the disastrous "Happy Time" enjoyed by U-Boats off the Eastern Coast of America, when American vessels sailed independently, it became very clear that the addition of aerial support would be required for the system to be effective, not only when assisting escort vessels track and engage underwater attacks, but also to ward off the attentions of German aircraft. This second threat strengthened as U-Boats refined and developed their tactics. Specialist anti shipping units had been trained by the Luftwaffe not only to locate convoys but

also to make attacks on merchant ships in their own right.

The summer of 1940 had seen the establishment at Bordeaux Marignac in SW France of a specialised Luftwaffe anti-shipping unit equipped with the fearsome long range four-engined Focke Wulf 200 Kurier, otherwise known as the Condor. These heavily armed aircraft, with a range of nearly 2,000 nautical miles (3,700 km – 2,300 miles) had by late summer 1941 established a worrying tally of successful ship attacks and also provided a valuable long-range reconnaissance function for U-boat command. Faced with the threat from the air, and unable to call on Very Long Range (VLR) support from land based aircraft, the British devised a stop-gap measure, namely the catapult fighter. This was a one shot response to the appearance of the Condor. Launched from converted merchantmen known as CAM-ships, Hawker Hurricanes tackled aerial intruders on their own terms. Installed in selected merchantmen and manned by RAF and Fleet Air Arm aircrew, these catapulted fighters met with varying degrees of success. In total, there were nine combat launches. Nine German aircraft were destroyed (four Condors, four Heinkels and a Junkers 88), one damaged and three chased away. Eight Hurricanes ditched and only one pilot was lost.

In the longer term, it was realised that the answer lay in enabling a small component of fighters to accompany convoys throughout their voyage, carried on small auxiliary carriers. The US Navy, exploiting their country's vast ship-building capacity, set in train programmes of building new escort carriers. Britain with its more limited shipyard capacity, already stretched to produce other warships, turned to the potential that lay in existing merchant hulls. Surely, the thinking went, superstructure could be removed or modified and the ships could be furnished with a short flying deck, as small as 450 feet, from which a handful of fighters could be flown off and retrieved. Such was the urgency of need that these measures were put in hand with alacrity, leading to fruition in the late summer of 1941.

The sailing of Gibraltar convoy OG74 on 13 September of that year heralded a new dawn in Fleet Air Arm history. The day of the auxiliary carrier had arrived and for the first time a convoy was to be accompanied all the way by ship borne fighters. HMS *Activity* was joining as part of an escort group that would accompany the convoy to Gibraltar, its aircraft able to locate and suppress the U-Boat opponent. The introduction of the Escort Carrier, together with a detailed description of its operations during the passage of the four Gibraltar

convoys, is expertly recounted by a distinguished participant: the legendary Captain Eric “Winkle” Brown CBE DSC AFC RN, doyen of all test pilots. As a young Fleet Air Arm pilot, appointed to 802 Naval Air Squadron in *Audacity*, Brown and his companions fought off successive attacks by U Boats and the Luftwaffe during all four trips. His experiences are graphically described in his excellent memoirs: “Wings on My Sleeve”, published in 2006.

HMS *Audacity* had begun life as the 15 knot German Norddeutscher Line’s passenger cargo ship Hannover. Built by Bremer Vulcan and launched just a few months before the outbreak of war, she was seized by the RN cruiser HMS *Dunedin* in the Caribbean in February 1940. The 5,500 ton vessel was brought back from Jamaica and converted for her new role at Blyth Shipbuilding yard. The relatively simple expedient of the removal of some ship’s superstructure, coupled with the relocation of her funnels, enabled a short (460 feet) flight deck to be provided, fitted with 4 arrester wires. This, together with other changes such as the provision of light, principally AA armament, gave the Royal Navy a whole new dimension in convoy escorts.

The men of OG 74 knew they were in for a rough passage in September 1941, not just from the expected sea states of the Bay of Biscay. By then, the Gibraltar run was high on the convoy danger list, with ships exposed to risks from aerial and underwater interception. The German intelligence network would invariably signal allied sailings along the Iberian Atlantic coast, and despite taking a sweep away from the coast of Western France, Gibraltar convoys ran the gauntlet of threats from U-Boats based on and around the Brittany peninsula. Anxiety in the convoys was heightened through the knowledge that ammunition intended for Malta comprised a significant proportion of the merchantmen’s cargoes with OG74.

The convoy was defended on the surface by a group of escort vessels, principally corvettes, and in the air by four Grumman Martlet IIs flying from HMS *Aadacity*. When not airborne, these aircraft were permanently parked on Activity’s flight deck since no lift and hangar had been incorporated in the vessel’s conversion. Maintenance and servicing was thus entirely in the open.

The RN’s introduction of the portly Grumman Wildcat (briefly called the Martlet in RN service) had met with the approval of Fleet Air Arm aircrew. This was because although of roughly equal specification to converted Hurricanes and Seafires, unlike them the American aircraft had been designed from the outset by Grumman to operate from aircraft carriers. It reflected

the American Navy's design philosophy, which placed its faith in air cooled radial engines rather than their liquid cooled in-line equivalents. Having a sturdy shock resistant undercarriage and reasonable visibility from the cockpit resulting from its shallow radial engine, it also possessed good manoeuvrability in combat. This was combined with a short take off and a high rate of climb. A further example of its fitness for purpose lay in the positioning of its arrester hook. Fitted at the bottom end of the aircraft's tail, the so-called "sting" location, it was generally more effective in catching the wire than the v-frame version of the British fighters, the Sea Hurricane and the Seafire. The Martlet's qualities enhanced its

suitability for service on what would come to be called Escort Carriers, with their short decks and far from ideal landing platforms.

Convoy OG74 sailed on 13 September 1941. It comprised 26 ships with seven escorts, including HMS *Activity*. The enemy was not long in making its presence felt. Within a couple of days, and despite making a wide detour into the Atlantic, the convoy was informed of U-Boat sightings. Torpedo attacks began on the 20th. The following day the convoy encountered the attentions of two Condors, with the Martlets scoring their first 'kill'. Later on Junkers 88s replaced the Condors and attacked the convoy before being driven off. By the time it arrived at Gibraltar on the 27th, OG74 had lost 5 ships to U-Boats with a further merchantman sunk by a Condor. In return however, the Martlets had shot down a Condor and driven off several U-Boat attacks. It later emerged that the U-Boats' attention had been diverted to a richer prize, in the form of the parallel convoy HG73. Of a similar number of merchant ships but guarded by nine escorts, this sailed without benefit of an escort carrier and the German submarines' score of nine sinkings can be attributed, at least in part, to the lack of aerial support.

Homeward bound HG74, leaving Gibraltar on 2 October, comprised 70 ships from the Mediterranean and West Africa. While beset by Condor incursions, this convoy actually reached home waters with a clean sheet, having survived with no sinkings. OG76 set out from Britain on 29 October 1941. This time the convoy comprised 20 ships. Repelling Condor attacks was once again the order of the day for *Audacity's* Martlets. Two had been shot down by the time the convoy reached the Rock. Sadly in one of the encounters the aircraft being flown by the squadron's CO was hit by a Condor's gunner and he was killed. As some compensation, no ships were lost from the convoy.

The next homeward bound convoy from Gibraltar namely HG76, was a larger affair than HG 74, and was destined to see much action. It comprised 32 ships in all. These were entrusted to a bigger escort group, In this case however the merchantmen were in luck for they were to be blessed with the presence of the RN's dedicated and very efficient 36th Escort Group. Made up eventually of 16 ships, this was led by the redoubtable Commander F G (Johnnie) Walker, arguably the most successful and expert anti-submarine commander of the war. For this voyage *Audacity's* Martlet complement had dropped from 6 to 4 aircraft.

Sailing on 14 December 1941, the convoy was initially protected by Swordfish from Gibraltar. These were instrumental in driving off three U-Boat attacks in the first 24 hours. Intelligence however revealed the

gathering of 5 U-Boats in a Wolf Pack formation in the path of the convoy. During the early hours of the 17th further U-Boat sightings brought the Martlets into action, assisting in the destruction of a U-Boat but with one shot down and the pilot killed by its anti aircraft fire. By the end of the second day, another U Boat had been sunk by the escorts. A third U-Boat was then sunk on the 18th but during this engagement HMS *Stanley* was hit and blew up. Condor attacks continued with two FW200s falling to the guns of *Audacity's* aircraft the next day. All this time the U-Boat pack was closing in. Fearful of drawing fire on the merchantmen by its presence, *Audacity's* Captain took the carrier away from the convoy. This proved to be a fatal decision. One of the U-Boats closed the vessel. U571 fired three torpedoes at the ship which went down within minutes, together with the loss of several crew including the ship's captain. Then while rendering assistance to *Activity*, two of the escorts collided, their damage reducing the escort capability thus further. The final stages of the voyage before making port in Liverpool did gain some relief, in the form of cover from RAF Liberators flying from their British bases.
The tally, three U-Boats sunk with two Condors shot down and one severely damaged, had been bought at the cost of two merchant ships and a destroyer. This result was to be a severe disappointment to the U-Boat High Command. Although offset to an extent by the sinking of *Audacity* and HMS *Stanley*, the outcome of convoy HG 76 worried Admiral Karl Donitz, in charge of the campaign. He regarded this imbalance as too high a price to pay. It was clear he believed the first presence of an aircraft carrier with a convoy represented an emerging threat to the future operation of his boats.

Unfortunately, despite the proven benefits shown by HMS *Audacity's* participation in convoys, it would be June of the following year before another RN Escort Carrier set sail. This time the ship was HMS *Avenger*, one of the first conversions of US origin, on this occasion providing escort for an Arctic convoy carrying supplies to Russia.

In conclusion, there is little doubt the contribution made by HMS *Audacity* and its crew during its brief existence in late 1941, can be regarded as a turning point in the Battle of the Atlantic. Above all it represented a cheering change in the prognosis for the convoy system, as seen at the end of that year. As their contribution, the Martlets and their young pilots can be said to have punched well above their weight during the four Gibraltar convoys and set a fine example in their encounters with U-Boats and the fearsome Fw 200 Condors.

ROYAL NAVAL AIR STATION TIREE

By Chris Howat

The Isle of Tiree

Have you ever heard of RNAS Tiree? It did or does not exist! So, what is the connection between the Fleet Air Arm and this beautiful island set out in the Atlantic as one of the Inner Hebrides? Tiree is one of the sunniest places in Britain, with the moderating influence of the warm Gulf Stream, so that winter temperatures are generally higher than on the mainland, while summer evenings are warm and balmy. Tiree is also known as a windy place, with the strongest winter gales normally occurring in December and January. It is fertile and flat with virtually no trees. These features made it an ideal forward base for the Sea King Mk 1 helicopters of 819 Squadron, based at HMS *Gannet*, which had been established at Prestwick Airport in 1971. There was a small airport with limited facilities and some old redundant buildings belonging to the MoD. It had been a Coastal Command station in WW2.

In 1972, long before the island became popular for surfers and tourists, a survey was carried out to

establish its suitability as a base for intensive two-day flying operations by the squadron. The old barn, still with bits and pieces of old wartime aircraft, could be used to house a fuel bowser and other ground equipment plus the necessary 45-gallon drums of fuel. The only missing facility was a mini ops room and aircrew rest room.

With the closure of RNAS Lossiemouth (prior to its handover to the RAF) Flag Officer Naval Air Command (FONAC) decided to move the Lossiemouth Crash and Salvage hut from there to the airport on Tiree. This wooden building was 70 feet long and 20 feet wide and the plan was to split it down the middle and transport the two parts by road to the old seaplane base at Rhu. From there it would be shipped out to Tiree courtesy of the Royal Corps of Transport (RCT). They surveyed the beach and approaches and found them suitable, although the only beach the RCT would use was Gott bay on the south east side of the island, connected by the B8069 to the airport.. Once the halves of the hut had been landed on the sand, the RCT departed, anxious to get away before the tide went out. It was left (rather irresponsibly) to the squadron to do the rest. Unfortunately, there was a narrow bridge on the road to the airport; there was no lorry on the Island which could carry the hut and no crane to lift it anyway. A local farmer agreed to drag the halves up above the high tide mark which meant up a steep sand bank. The first half was deposited safely by the road but subsequently the second half collapsed. Strangely, all the bits of this half disappeared overnight and in a following gale the other half blew apart; all the remains being “salvaged” by the grateful locals.

Sea King Mk 1 of 819 Squadron

On request, the airport manager kindly offered to let the squadron use a room in the airport lounge which solved the accommodation problem. A fuel bowser and personal transport were brought

out to Tiree by ferry. All that was needed now was fuel and a team to service the aircraft. A contract was placed with Shell to supply the fuel in 45-gallon drums and, prior to operations, a fuel and servicing party would take the ferry out to the island "to open up", top up the bowser and do the necessary water checks. This was a very popular job and the men soon found excellent hospitality amongst the locals. Empty drums would be returned to Shell via the jetty at the small port of Scarinish. These would prove to be very useful later in 1973. In that year, one sunny calm Sunday morning, the Caledonian MacBrayne ferry ran onto a rock on approaching the island of Coll. Mayday calls went out and 819 squadron scrambled two Sea Kings to help in the rescue. When they arrived, the passengers were in the lifeboats and on their way to safety. The ferry captain took his limping ferry to Scarinish, where it promptly sank alongside the jetty preventing any other ships from getting alongside. Desperate telephone calls were received by the squadron to fly out various stores (including whisky) where the islanders had run out. Resupply was resumed when a Dutch salvage company refloated the ferry using the empty fuel drums sitting on the jetty and kindly "donated" by the MoD. Actually, the powers that be probably never realised!

Balevullin beach, Isle of Tiree

Another problem arose when one Sea King had a main gearbox magnetic chip warning. This could mean an internal gearbox failure and so the aircraft landed at once. Where? Back on Tiree! So, how to get it home to Prestwick for a gearbox change? Easy, hitch a lift on a passing RFA tanker with a telephoned authorization for a one-off flight to embark and a similar flight when the RFA arrived off Prestwick. All went well. Phew!

I do not know how long the Forward Operating Base on Tiree lasted as I left the job of Air Engineer Officer of 819 and HMS Gannet in 1973. Maybe it still exists? Anyway, it was a lot of fun!

All photographs by the author.

SEAFIRE MK 47 IN 800 SQUADRON, 1950

By Commander T D Handley

This is an edited extract from a much longer article in "Voices in Flight - the Fleet Air Arm". Before this extract opens, Cdr Handley narrates that he flew out to Singapore to join 800 Squadron in the last days of 1949 in a Super Constellation of the British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC).

Sembawang was a small grass airfield which had been built by British prisoners of war under the direction of the Japanese occupying forces. Not quite finished when the war ended it was completed by the British and handed over to the RN. We put down Sommerfeld tracking, which were long strips of metal plating secured together to form a semblance of a runway. Our accommodation was in Japanese 'Basha' huts, which were made of wood with a wooden floor, and when my Chinese steward by the name of Chan Fukoi (pronounced as spelled) and wearing wooden flip-flops came to call me in the morning I could hear his footsteps miles away. I did not care for my first few trips from Sembawang in a Seafire 47. It was a very hot and humid climate and one never stopped perspiring, and it just got worse getting into a very hot metal aircraft that had been standing in sun for a while. The noise of the aircraft wheels on the metal Sommerfeld tracking had to be experienced to be believed. Also when airborne it took a while to become acquainted to flying over thick jungle instead of the lovely English fields, villages and countryside.

An unusual view of a Seafire 47, at an unidentified naval air station. *Photo: Simon Websper*

After a few weeks the squadron embarked in HMS *Triumph*, together with a Firefly squadron, and we made our way up to Hong Kong. In late March we heard we were to go to Japan for three months to be temporarily part of the Allied occupation forces. This was all exciting stuff, but we were a little apprehensive; after all we had been at war with the Japanese less than five years before. Our last port of call was to Ominato, on the northernmost island of the three that go to make up Japan. It was the Japanese Scapa Flow, from whence their fleet set out to make the infamous attack on

Pearl Harbor. Back onboard there was a great atmosphere, our foreign meanderings were over and we were starting on our way back home to the UK and family – or so we thought. We were off the most southerly of the Japanese islands when we heard on the BBC World Service that war had broken out between North and South Korea, just a couple of hundred miles way. As we had a drink in the wardroom that night we all agreed this was the one war that we, the British

Seafire Mk 47 in Korean War markings taking off from an un-named carrier (probably* Triumph*) in 1950.

Empire, the Royal Navy and certainly HMS *Triumph* would not be involved in. So we had a second gin, a good supper, and a good night's rest. Everything looked rosy. At breakfast next morning we all heard that we were no longer bound for Hong Kong and during the night the ship's course had been altered to head for Okinawa. It appeared we were going to be involved after all. Shall we say a little despondency set in. Okinawa is some 400 miles south of the bottom end of Japan, the island that had been the scene of some bitter fighting between the Americans and the Japanese immediately before the atom bombs were dropped. We were to join up with the USN aircraft carrier *Valley Forge* and await instructions. Just before arriving we separated, having been given our respective targets, and we prepared for our attack on Kaishu airfield.

Kaishu airfield was on the coast on the western side of the front line between the opposing forces. The targets were to be aircraft on the ground, the hangars and control tower. Twenty-four aircraft took part in the raid, twelve Fireflies and twelve Seafires. The Seafires were to be the covering force and to defend the Fireflies in case of enemy fighter attack, but we were carrying six 60lb rocket projectiles each, so we could have a go at the airfield should no enemy air opposition be encountered. None was forthcoming and as we neared the airfield there were no aircraft on the ground either, so we all carried out attacks on the hangars, workshops and control tower. An air of mystery prevailed: where was the enemy? In the reconnaissance photos taken by the Americans a few days earlier there had been plenty of aircraft on the airfield. They had probably all been flown elsewhere along the front line.

For the next week or so my flying logbook shows I was employed on combat air patrol whilst the Fireflies carried out sea patrols. The Americans employed us in a defensive role for the fleet, as at this stage it was

uncertain as to whether the Chinese, or even the Russians, were going to join forces with the North Koreans. As no enemy appeared on the sea or in the air it was decided that *Triumph*'s aircraft would attack any waterborne targets that could be found plus a few special missions. During the next ten weeks I flew some thirty-five sorties. One of the targets we found was a water-pumping station, and we left it in a pretty parlous state. Quite amazing, during this sortie we never saw an enemy aircraft or ship, and yet we had ventured some 200 miles into North Korean territory and not so very far from Communist China.

During our time in Korea we used Sasebo in southern Japan for rest and recreation and here we had the first class facilities of the US Navy including their officers' club. It was in the American sector and the Yanks, God bless 'em, had their feet well and truly 'under the table'. A lot of them had taken up with the local populace and I once saw an enlisted soldier with a young Japanese lady on each arm. Such virility!

When we entered the Korean War the front line was about the middle of the country. In the early weeks the Allies were pushed down to the south-eastern edge, and then General MacArthur, once his reinforcements arrived, took the initiative and it ended up with the Allies in North Korea not far from the Chinese border. We thought it was all over and *Triumph* was released from the conflict. Our successor, HMS *Theseus,* waited for us in Hong Kong to conduct a turnover. Our spirits were on the crest of the wave and we told them that they had 'missed the boat' and we had had all the glory. Little did we realize at the time that things were to go wrong for us, the Chinese gave their backing to the North, MacArthur asked permission to use nuclear weapons and was refused, and there was a retreat to the original front line. *Theseus* was called to the action and endured a real conflict.

The Korean War was the Seafire/Spitfire swansong. We had flown the last operational missions in this very famous aircraft. However, although the Spitfire was a fine aircraft in the air, it was sadly lacking in deck-landing capability. It had been built to have a high top speed and performance and for operation from shore airfields. It was not robust enough to withstand the stresses and strains of deck operation. The aircraft skin between the cockpit and the tail plane used to wrinkle if a deck landing was heavy or off the carrier centre line. During the war the ship's air engineer officer in the interests of keeping them flying had turned a blind eye to the laid down regulations and acceptable limits for safety. As soon as the last operational sortie was flown he grounded every Seafire onboard. Thus we had no aircraft to fly during the passage home even if we had wanted to. So I read The Forsyte Saga and thoroughly enjoyed it.

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ST DAVIDS AND BRAWDY AIRFIELDS

Contributed by Rosanne Crowther

St Davids and Brawdy were the last and largest airfields to be built in Pembrokeshire

With their long runways, these two airfields became the bases for four-engined aircraft of Coastal Command. St Davids was opened in September 1943. The first squadrons operated the American-built B17 Flying Fortresses, but these were soon replaced by Halifaxes of 58 and 502 Squadrons. Their main operating area was over the Bay of Biscay against enemy surface ships and U-boats operating from Brest and Lorient. During the Normandy invasion in June 1944, they helped protect the landing ships and also attacked the naval base at St Nazaire.

After the War, the two airfields were transferred to the Royal Navy. In the 1950s, St Davids was operated by Airwork Ltd, who trained Fleet Air Arm pilots using Mosquitos and Sea Venoms. RNAS Brawdy (HMS *Goldcrest*) became the base for the first Sea Hawks to enter service with 806 Squadron in 1953 and, from 1963, the Airborne Early Warning (AEW) Mk3 Fairey Gannet. The Royal Navy left in 1971 and the base was allocated to the Department of the Environment, before the RAF returned in 1974. RAF Brawdy operated Whirlwind helicopters and (subsequenty) Hawk T1 in the Tactical Weapons Training role. The RAF left in 1994 and the Army took it over, re-naming it Cawdor Baracks.

With acknowledgements to the St Davids Peninsula Tourist asociation.