JABBERWOCK 101

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

November 2020

SOCIETY OF FRIENDS
FLEET AIR ARM MUSEUM

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THE NATIONAL MUSEUM ROYAL NAVY

The Society of Friends of the Fleet Air Arm Museum

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FLEET AIR ARM
MUSEUM

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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!

ADMISSION
Members of SoFFAAM 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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Registered Charity No. 280725

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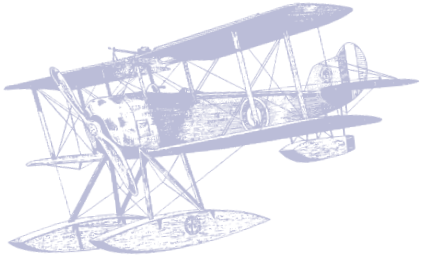

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COVER PHOTO

617 Squadron 'Dambusters ' F-35B Lightning II's operating from HMS *Queen Elizabeth* conduct air-to-air refuelling from ZZ336 Voyager "Vespina" over the North Sea. The RAF tanker/transport sports her new VVIP patriotic colours.

Inset photo is HMS *Queen Elizabeth* with embarked RAF and USMC F35B aircraft.

Editorial

In this issue we report the sad death of Derek Moxley, who was a founder member of the Society and contributed greatly to its early activities.

He served for years as our President before retiring in 2016. We will provide a full obituary in the next issue.

The Society held its Annual General Meeting, at which we re-elect all the Council members, in September; this was the first ever "virtual" AGM, held via Zoom. Regrettably, very few members took the opportunity to join the meeting on-line. On this occasion, we welcomed new Council member, Scott Freear-Price and re-confirmed Admiral Tom Cunningham as our President. The meeting voted to confirm various minor amendments to the Society's Constitution, including the formal introduction of virtual meetings at times when face-to-face gatherings are not possible. The minutes of the AGM may be found on our website.

The celebratory 100th issue of the magazine was well-received by our readers. We now revert to the familiar A5-sized document but hope that the variety of articles within will continue to provide interest. In this issue, you will find anecdotes from WWI vintage to the latest news of naval aviation in the 21st century. We include a tribute to Lt "Hammy" Gray RCN, who was awarded one of only two naval aviation VCs of WW2 for his gallant actions in the last days of the war in the Pacific.

We include the unwelcome news that subscriptions, which have been held at the same level for many years, will have to rise in the New Year. The Council believes that, even with these price increases, membership of the Society still provides good value for money. You will see elsewhere that, during the current health emergency, we are making efforts to return to bring back talks in a modified format.

Membership of the Society is holding up well, although it cannot be denied that the numbers are gently declining. This may be a Covid side-effect, but the Council is raising our profile with the public, by the introduction of a popular Facebook page and by various advertising initiatives. The recent aircraft modelling competition is another example of engagement with our members. You can help by encouraging others to join – we often comment that a one-year subscription would make a most acceptable Christmas present!

Malcolm

Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

Can I thank Graham Mottram for his informative article about the Fleet Air Arm Museum and the Society of Friends? Graham says he may have missed out some individuals who played a part in the history of both, and so may I mention my friend Den Wood, now blind and aged 96 yrs who certainly had a hand in the formation of the Friends.

Den dictated his life story to me about two years ago and I'm sure you will understand there may be some inaccuracies about dates, but he tells me he was the first Membership Secretary.

He told me the first meeting was in around 1963 when he had the idea of a society for ex-pilots to meet and talk about the aircraft they had flown in and which were now scattered around airfields in need of preservation, and of course he particularly meant Yeovilton.

He said 63 members attended the first meeting, and he wrote the names out in alphabetical order and gave membership numbers in that way. He became member 63, and he remains so to this day. Den was ex-RAF (sorry!) and was particularly friends with Ken Hermon and Peter Hoskin, who Den was very sorry to hear has recently died.

Jeff Turner

Hello Malcolm,

I believe the South African aircraft on page 5 of the latest magazine is an Avro Anson - minus port engine and nose.

The 100th magazine is excellent! Thoroughly enjoyable and an excellent read.

Kind regards,
Richard Parkhurst

Dear Malcolm,

Congratulations to you and the team for Jabberwock 100 ... just received an hour ago. It is an amazing publication which covers such an extensive array of RN history!

I certainly won't be the first (or the last) to identify the twin-engined aircraft on page 5 as an Avro Anson which was named, most appropriately, after 1st Baron George Anson PC FRS Admiral of the Fleet (1697 – 1762).

The particular variant shown has smooth engine cowlings which replaced the earlier (and in my opinion) more attractive helmeted cowlings to improve engine cooling, but with a corresponding loss of lateral vision from the cockpit.

Regards,
Gil Johnston.

Dear Editor.

Many thanks to the editorial team for a hugely informative and impressive J100.

Stumped by Aussie Gil's Quiz I visited FAAM to track down the answers. I found the quiz really educational and it made me appreciate the exhibits in a new way. I hadn't guessed two Buccaneers were profiled in the quiz or a Scimitar. After a three hour visit I'm still none the wiser on number 15 although I didn't investigate the U-boat in Hall 2!

The 'US Carriers in the UK' had me recall numerous sightseeing trips to Stokes Bay to view the ultimate warship type. Living in the Solent area my mother was the first to see a US carrier close up when the newly commissioned USS *Forrestal* made an official visit to Southampton in October 1957. Designated CVA-59 for cruiser aviation attack (the V standing for the French voler "to fly" presumably because France is the United States oldest ally), she was the first of a new class of four non-nuclear powered supercarriers.

The first USN carrier featuring an angled flight deck *Forrestal* weighed in at 60,000 tons (almost twice that of *Ark Royal*) and I presume Portsmouth wasn't utilised because of her draft. Back then her air power consisted of Skyraiders, subsonic F3 Demon fighters and A-3 Skywarrior jet bombers. The port call followed the Atlantic-based carrier's first participation in NATO exercise "Strikeback" held with 200 other warships in the North Sea. To my knowledge it was the first and last visit by a USN CVA to Southampton presumably because once the air-dropped B43 nuclear bomb became part of the USN arsenal in the 1960s it was deemed unacceptable to dock along side.

Whilst an air cadet one of our squadron's civilian instructors with a PPL flew me over the Kitty Hawk-class carrier USS *America* CV-66 anchored off Portsmouth. With no NOTAM saying we couldn't we lined up on the angled flightdeck and made an approach down to about 500ft. Happy Cold War days.

Chris Penney (3474)

Dear Editor.

I am writing to confirm that your kind gift of the copy of your 100th Journal has been received. Our Commandant and her staff read it with great interest and then passed it on to the College Library where it will be kept in our Journals archive. There are some fascinating articles which will be of great interest to students and members of our academic staff here as well.

2020 has indeed been a challenging year and we are still not back to a normal regime at the College. The experience our current cadets are having differs markedly from that of their predecessors over the past 100 years. Apart from during the hiatus of World War II when the College was closed, until now the cadets' routine has been fairly consistent down the years. At present our normal programme of visits to the College and to the Library has been suspended indefinitely. We very much miss the enjoyment of

showing our students, visitors and visiting scholars around. Everything is strangely quiet and subdued with nothing like the vibrant atmosphere that normally pervades the establishment. I hope your Museum is able to re-open for business sometime before the end of the year and that your gatherings, talks and meetings can also resume.

So thank you again for thinking of us in our (memorable for many wrong reasons) Centenary Year. Let's hope we return to something like normality before our 200th anniversary comes along.

With kind regards,
Tim Pierce,
Assistant Librarian, College Hall Library, RAF College Cranwell

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Dear Malcolm

A colleague of mine has been taking photographs of aircraft and steam trains for many, many years. He turned his hobby into a business, selling his prints at events and fairs.

A gentleman looking through the collection one day suddenly exclaimed "that's me". He was the pilot in the photo depicted below.

Does anyone know any more about this event?

Richard Macauley

McDonnell Douglas F-4K Phantom photo signed by the pilot.

The pilot wrote on the reverse; Pilot J.C. Scott. Obs P. Wright. Taken during 892s QRI at Yeovilton. Land on after Intercept. Brake chute streamed mid air. Failed jettison.

Peter Hoskins

An obituary by Graham Mottram

It was only when writing the article for Jabberwock 100 that I came to remember how much work Peter Hoskin had done for the Society in its earliest days.

After I joined the FAAM staff in 1983 we worked quite closely together in several way and became good friends. It is particularly sad that Peter passed away before J100 was published because I know that it would have given him great pleasure to see how his successors had built on his foundation work. Peter Terrence Hoskin was born and raised in Sherborne. He attended Fosters Grammar School for Boys where he attained several O levels. He had a keen interest in cricket whilst at Fosters and kept score for the senior boys teams. This led him to later play for Sherborne Cricket Club. He began his working life at a local petrol station, later swapping gallons of petrol for pints of beer in the Black Horse.

Peter on his sales stand.

Work with more of a career structure attached began at Sherborne Rural District Council and subsequently the water board, following which he made a move to Yeovil Rural District Council, later Yeovil District Council.

Like many other locals in the mid sixties, Peter spent some of his spare time at Yeovilton Air Station watching Phantoms, Buccaneers, Lightnings and other classic jets, and developed an interest in aviation. Whilst working at Yeovil District Council, the then chief executive, Ken Hermon, led him to become a Founder Member of SOFFAAM.

Being one of only a handful of members within the society and, eager to get involved, Peter became a key voluntary member for both the society and the museum as a whole. Variously Secretary, Jabberwock Editor and News Letter Editor, he put in many hours collecting and collating material

to try and ensure that the Society's publications were worth reading.

He did those jobs for about eight years before he turned his attention to publicity and fund raising, organising a travelling sales and publicity stall which toured UK air shows for several years. His happy band of pilgrims looked upwards to the skies in between their sales efforts and on one memorable occasion at RAF Mildenhall, looked downwards and zapped every toilet seat they could find with "Fly Navy" stickers.

On more than one occasion Peter, his wife Angie and then-baby son Russell would sleep with several thousand pounds under the bed until FAAM was open and able to take the cash in.

By some means, Peter made contact with one of HM Ships which was going in for refit and took over their sales stock. For several months he was the official purveyor of "Invincible" knickers. He eventually sold out and they must be very much a collectors' item by now.

His career and family started to require more of his time and his involvement with SOFFAAM declined as his work as an auditor took him to work for the Audit Commission. He took early retirement from the Audit Commission in the late nineties. Latterly he worked part time at first for Somerset County Council and then Devon County Council in Data Protection. On his final retirement Peter enjoyed playing host on Air Day at his house in Yeovilton Village which had an excellent view of the airfield and activities. His son Russell worked at FAAM for several years in Bob Turner's Attendants team. The late Bob had been a key member of the Travelling Sales Team 20 years before and had both he and Peter been spared longer retirements I am sure they would have become two old men in deckchairs, watching aeroplanes from Peter's back garden, and consuming much wine over tales of yore.

Peter had a long list of friends and cricket watching buddies and had it not been for Covid-19, there would have been many more than the 20 people permitted at his funeral in Yeovil Crematorium. My grateful thanks go to Angie and Russ for allowing me to be one of those 20 people and for providing the eulogy as the basis for this obituary. Without Peter's early efforts there may not have been a journal in which to record our thanks for his pioneering work 40 years ago.

A young woman with the word 'Invincible' embroidered on her knickers welcomes HMS *Invincible* back from the Falklands War, Portsmouth, UK, 17th September 1982.

A Story of SoFFAAM

The recollections of some Founder Members.

Graham wisely noted that 'memory will fail and that something important will be left out' and 'I am bound to leave someone out...'

Memories of other people fill gaps in the story, or provide a different view point. We hope that what follows will be taken in the same spirit as Graham's article, it is certainly meant that way. We encourage others who were involved to add their memories.

The first News Letter provides a few dates : The foundation of the Society was on 23 March 1979, yet the launching of the Warneford, VC book was on 7 November. Books do not appear overnight. There is a story behind the book that is also part of the Story of SoFFAAM. We would like to relate that story.

So, who are these We? Well the writer is Ian Burns (Founder 46), benefitting from the additional memories of Colin Huston (Founder 47) and his, now sadly passed, wife Barbara Huston (Founder 48). We were all present at the First General Meeting on 14 October 1979 – Colin and Barbara were elected to the Council at that meeting. My role throughout has been that of enabler, occasional assistant editor and ghost writer – of which more anon.

If the following seems a little lighthearted at times, well that is how I remember those days. Much would be achieved late into the night over Colin and Barbara's kitchen table (Barbara was a fine cook) and a couple of bottles of wine. Including the creation of that little book Warneford, VC.

Our story starts long before the founding of the Society. I had been involved in the aircraft preservation movement since my school days and had attended British Aircraft Preservation Council meetings from 1967 on. At the meetings I got to know both Les Cox and Dennis White. By the mid-70's I had one foot in the preservation movement and one in Cross and Cockade, The First World War Aviation Historical Society. The latter has proven to be on more solid ground.

Moving on to Birmingham in 1976 (or was it 1977?), where we were attending a BAPC conference. Amongst the Great and the Good wandering the halls we met Dennis White who, as Colin clearly recalls, was walking round with a large manuscript under his arm muttering about looking for a publisher. That's how Barbara and Colin came to meet the Museum's Director for the first time, to whom local author Mary Gibson, née Warneford, had recently presented her manuscript about the life of Reginald

'Rex' Warneford, for the Museum to publish. It was a meeting foretold...

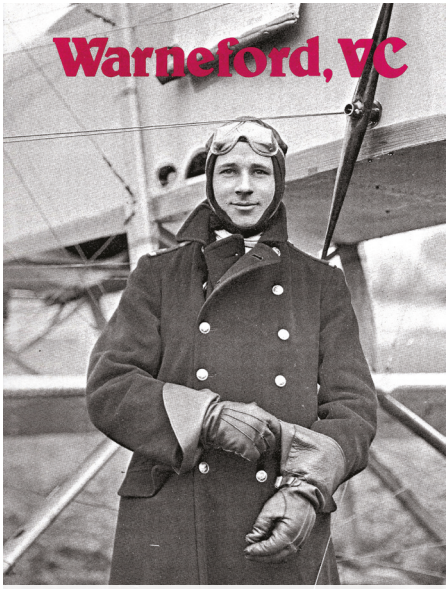
We three were all long time C&C members. Colin, as a designer publishing books with a company in Leicester, which included our quarterly C&C Journal, was immediately keen to help suggesting that we could create a special publication specifically for the Museum to sell, produced by friends of the Museum. So, long story short, to Dennis' relief and with his blessing we took over the manuscript and commenced to work on it. When I say We, I really mean Colin and Barbara, I was as mentioned earlier a minor cog in the production.

So began a lot of hard, mostly weekend work, and much serious research into Warneford's early history, along with Mary Gibson herself, helping to tidy up and remove quite an amount of the more fanciful parts of her story which we couldn't prove. During this period I remember many rewrites, including one complete chapter. Barbara's triumph when she found the Chilean newspaper with details of the salvage of Warneford's ship the Mina Brae in 1914, was one of the more enjoyable weekends. Fortunately Mary Gibson was charming and friendly throughout and accepted our rework of her manuscript.

I can't recall after all this time just how many weekends Colin and Barbara drove down to the Museum, or to visit Mary, there seemed so many. Colin suspects it was during that time, whilst getting the facts clarified, that the suggestion was mooted in Dennis's office about it being actually published under a 'Society of Friends' banner. Dennis had obviously been discussing details with others regarding getting such a body established.

I do remember a long discussion over the binding of the book. I thought it should reflect the VC claret ribbon, but was eventually persuaded that the white binding with VC claret end papers was the way to go. To our chagrin, when Dennis showed us Warneford's VC, it had a blue ribbon! When established the VC had a dark blue ribbon for naval awards and crimson (actually the claret colour) for army awards. I believe the dark blue ribbon was only abolished after the formation of the RAF.

It must have taken around two years until the book was finally completed and printed, as its launch ceremony is



Book cover.

recorded as being on 7 November 1979 in that first SOFFAAM News Sheet.

Versions of the Society's logo were offered up for members approval in the second April 1980 News Sheet. Looking at them now I can only be thankful that the Sopwith Baby 'Jabberwock' was chosen. However, there was an even earlier version.

If you look at the title page of the original edition of Warneford, VC, there is at the bottom right hand corner an RNAS eagle with supplicant hand (or a friend's helping hand?) upraised. This was suggested by Colin and accepted by Dennis as appropriate for the prospective Friends of the Fleet Air Arm Museum. The Society only existed on paper when the book went to press.

A similar process was followed with the second book published by the Museum and Society, Operation Skua by Major R T Partridge, DSO, RM. I see I get a nod as a designer. A little bit generous, as I still served in my role of assistant editor. This time Jabberwock appears on the title page. Sadly it was to be the last book produced and published by the Museum.

Ian Burns (Founder 46)
Colin Huston (Founder 47)

THE SOCIETY'S EMBLEM OR LOGO

Your Council has given much time and consideration to the design of an appropriate emblem or logo for our Letterheads, Lapel Badges, Ties and Scarfs etc.

The enclosed Xerox sheet shows:-

a. At the top a possible crown, anchor and wings logo with inset an alternative of the Sopwith Baby (the actual aircraft is now situated on a plinth in the new Museum entrance). In the case of a tie, the background would be dark blue and the logo would be between diagonal red and white strips, whether it was a crown, anchor or wings or the Sopwith Baby. "The crown, anchor and wings would be yellow and red, the aircraft would be mid-blue and silver with the letters FFAAM in deep carmine below the aircraft".

b. At the bottom of the sheet is shown a possible letterhead. Some members of the Council prefer to delete the word "Friends" and amend FAAM to FFAAM (Friends of the Fleet Air Arm Museum).

It is your Councils wish that all members make known to me their preference, lettered A and B. See Questionaire.

Jabberwock Magazine – Go Green!

Please consider switching to an electronic version, via email? You can retain every copy on your PC and read or print any section at any time.

The savings to the Society is two members switching to an electronic version is worth the cost of one new standard membership!

Please, have a think. It would be greener.

To switch, simply email soffaam.mem@gmail.com

Membership

By Simon Websper

Membership cards for November, December and January will be sent out separately, due to the current Covid-19 situation. (Please note that receipt of a membership card does not confirm receipt of payment).

For those very few members still renewing annually by cheque, please always enclose a stamped, addressed envelope. This saves us money. Thank you.

A big **WELCOME** to the new members who have joined us since the last journal issue:

3685	**Mr R Harding**	Somerset
3686	**Mr D Burrow**	Somerset
3687	**Mr A Day**	Somerset
3688	**Mr N Screen**	Somerset
3689	**Mr D Braccolino**	Italy
3690	**Mr W Doul**	N Somerset
3691	**Mr G Vinnels**	Bridgend
3692	**Mr T Datrio**	Italy
3693	**Mr S Carter**	Somerset
3694	**Ms J Halford**	Somerset

Increase in membership fees effective from 1 January 2021:

Membership prices have not increased in over 10 years so please note that from 1 January 2021, figures will increase as follows:

Individual	**£14.00**
Individual International	**£19.00**
Family	**£37.00**
Junior	**£9.00**
Lifetime UK	**£125.00**
Lifetime International	**£175.00**

VERY IMPORTANT

If you pay by standing order (our preferred method), ***please*** instruct your bank to change the amount payable, for all renewals due from 1st January 2021.

All membership queries to:

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M: 07527 707204 **T**: 01823 433448

Talk nights

By Richard Macauley

We have good news as we are investigating online facilities, namely Zoom, to be able to hold virtual Talk nights with everyone safe in their own home.

With the Coronavirus-19 restrictions still in place and unable to have gatherings at FAAM for our talks programme, this method is the best way forward.

This will enable anyone around the world with an internet connection to enjoy our Talks programme - our speakers are lining up for 2021.

The success of this venture is very dependent on being able to email all our members. So please do as Lord Kitchener is demanding and send your email address to Simon our Membership Secretary, **soffaam.mem@gmail.com**

Floatplane to Damascus

By Ian Burns

Short 184, 8054, being hoisted out from HMS *Anne* into the harbour at Castellorizo in 1916

The Short 184 was ubiquitous in the RNAS. Entering service at the beginning of 1915, over 300 remained in active service at the end of the Great War.

It was a large two-seater biplane (spanning 63.5 feet, with folding wings, the fuselage was 40.5 feet long) it had, by the standards of the time, a powerful (225 to 240 hp) and reliable engine. It was capable of carrying a torpedo (see Jabberwock 97) or bombs. The 184 served everywhere the RNAS went from Arctic Russia to the Indian Ocean, and all points in between. It was used for anti-submarine patrols, convoy escort, observation, spotting - it was the Fairey Swordfish of its day. It was considerably slower than the Swordfish, one of its pilot's noting, 'It was a physical impossibility to fly a Short at much more than 75 miles an hour. If you tried to dive it steeply it would start taking the control away from you at, say, 65 mph, and would have flattened itself out before it picked up another ten miles an hour.' But its overwhelming disadvantage was that it only came with floats. So, what was a Short 184 doing over Damascus, many miles from the sea, one day in February 1917?

The Royal Navy's East Indies and Egypt Seaplane Squadron was based

at Port Said 1915-1918. It comprised seaplane carriers converted from merchant ships. There were two passenger ships HMS *Ben-my-Chree*, from the Isle of Man Steam Packet Company, and HMS *Empress* a cross-channel steamer operated by the South Eastern & Chatham Railway. These had been converted in British dockyards each with a hangar to house four or five floatplanes. Then there were three converted merchantmen. HMS *Anne* and *Raven* were ex-German ships captured in Port Said at the beginning of the war, and HMS *City of Oxford* which arrived in Port Said in August 1917 to replace HMS *Anne*. They had very simple conversions to carry two or three floatplanes in the open on their hatch covers. The rest of our story concerns HMS *Anne*.

Anne sailed from Port Said at 7 am on 26 February 1917, she had the French trawler *Nord Caper* as escort. Aboard were two Short 184 floatplanes, 8021 and 8022, pilots Flt Cdr A W Clemson, Flt Lt H V Leigh and Flt S/Lt G D Smith with observers S/Lt J L Kerry and 2/Lt G H Pakenham-Walsh, Cheshire Regiment. The majority of the Squadron's observers were army officers as most observations were on behalf of the army. The two ships made their slow way, *Anne* could barely maintain 10 knots, up the Palestine coast to be off Haifa at 5.30 am the following morning. Two flights were made over the "country in the vicinity of the Carmel Range and Haifa Valley." The ships then headed further north towards Beirut, arriving just off the coast the following morning, 28 February. Clemson and Kerry were briefed to fly to the railway junction at Rayak, take some observations and

RNAS fashions at the base in Port Said, ca. 1917. Left to right : Flt Cdr T H England, Flt Cdr A W Clemson, Flt Lt E J P Burling, Flt Lt E M King, Warrant Officer F H Whitmore (Senior Torpedo WO), 2/Lt G H Packenham-Walsh (Cheshire Regt, observer), 2/Lt A D Ferguson (Highland Light Infantry, observer), Lt W R Kempson (RFA, observer), Sub Lt J L Kerry (observer), Flt S/Lt H V Worrall, Warrant Officer A T E Witt (Carpenter).

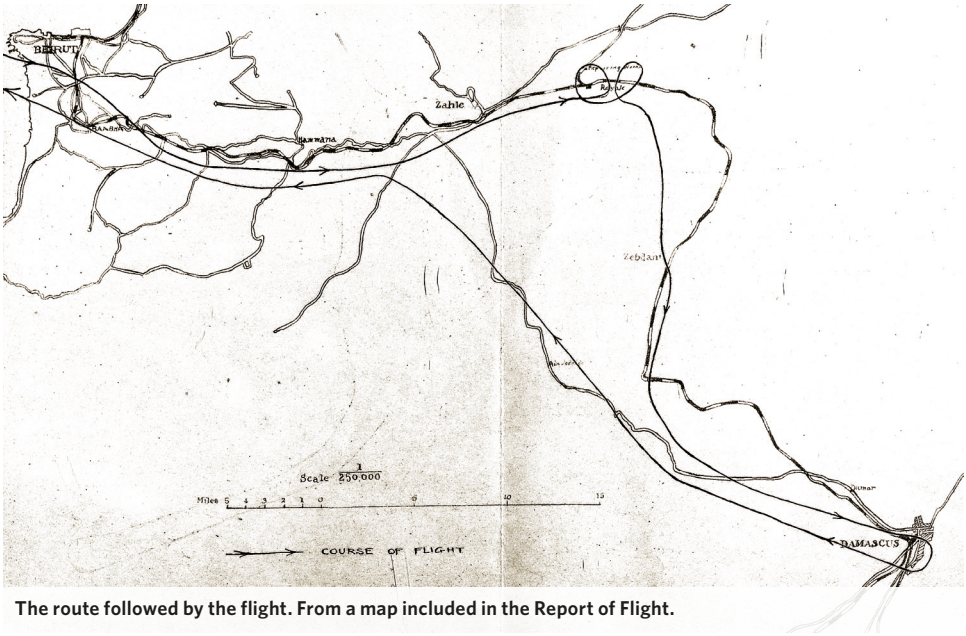
return. That is not quite what happened.

The two set off on Short 8022 with two Lewis guns and nine 'hoppers', W/T transmitting and receiving sets and a camera. Getting off the water at 7 am Clemson turned the Short towards the land, climbing slowly to 5000 feet before crossing the coast.

"The ship's company went unconcernedly to breakfast and to their various jobs, expecting to see it back somewhere about half-past eight. By nine they were beginning to get anxious, and when by nine-thirty there was still no sign of the seaplane, there was much speculation in that suppressed half-hesitating manner which people adopt when their feelings fight for expression in spite of themselves.

"It was ten minutes to ten when the machine was at length sighted high in the distance. Before the pilot and observer got on board, anxiety had given way to knowing explanations of the delay. Of course the old 'bus had let them down. The engine had conked out - everybody (excepting the Engineer Officer) knew it would. Or the water had boiled; or frozen - the suggestions were not all serious - getting over those mountains. Or this, or that, or the other. But they were all wrong."

The Short crossed the coast a little to the south of Beirut then followed the route of the railway (see the accompanying map from their report). To reach Rayak they had to cross the Lebanon Mountain range, which east of Beirut reaches 2695 metres (8842 ft) at Mount Sannine. The railway takes a slightly lower route, crossing the mountains at a maximum elevation



The route followed by the flight. From a map included in the Report of Flight.

of 1487 metres (4880 ft), before descending into the Bekaa Valley at Rayak, 929 metres (3050 ft) above sea level. The Short's engine was performing well, not always the case, as they reached 7600 feet crossing the mountains.

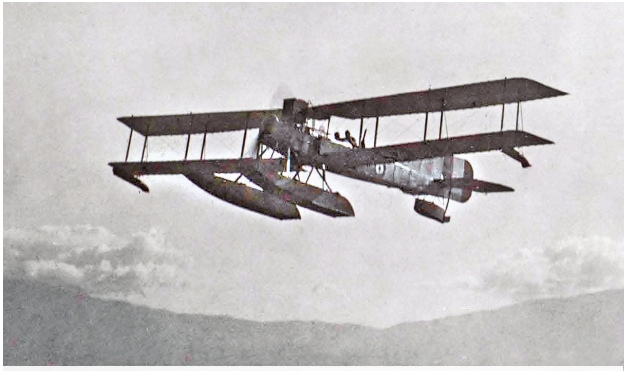
Rayak, approximately halfway between Beirut and Damascus, was an important exchange station. Coming down from the north was a standard gauge line which ultimately connected with Constantinople (modern Istanbul). Terminating at Rayak all goods had to be transferred to the 1.05m gauge lines that ran south into Palestine and Arabia, the Hejaz Railway of Lawrence fame. As all supplies for the Turkish army in Palestine had to travel by rail or road it was a busy place with exchange sidings, repair shops, engine shops and a foundry.

Clemson and Kerry arrived over Rayak just after 8 am. Crossing the mountains they had seen a single train travelling towards Beirut. Once over Rayak they commenced circling, taking notes and photographs. At the repair shops there were, "23 large sheds and a chimney from which smoke was issuing. The sidings contain much rolling stock and there were about 120 trucks and carriages. Two locomotives were seen. Close to the repair sheds is a camp of 25 tents. About 100 men were seen in the camp. In Rayak Station there was a locomotive and 6 coaches."

At this point the Short's engine was "running smoothly" so Clemson decided to continue to follow the line to Damascus. This "in spite of signals from his observer, who thought he had mistaken the direction of home. But he was not making any mistake. He had that instinct which some pilots have for the exact extent of the demands they can make on their engines. Theoretically it was a risky thing to do, and it would never have been ordered beforehand. But [Clemson] happened to be in command of the operation. He had a feeling that what he wanted to do could be done, and he did it."

To reach Damascus another

Sub Lt J L Kerry, RN – the well dressed observer.



A Short 184 with the Turkish coast in the background.

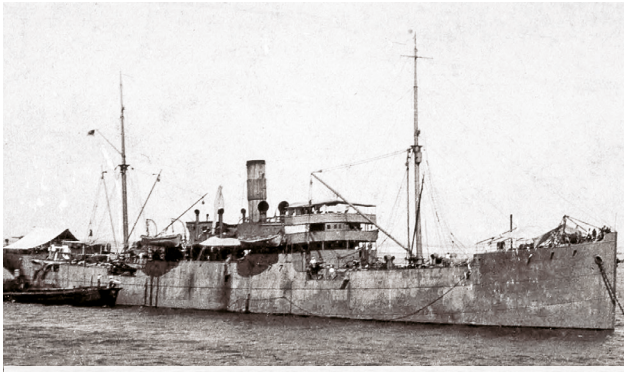
mountain range had to be crossed, the Anti-Lebanon range. In its southern reaches this inland range includes Mount Hermon at 2814 metres (9235 ft), often snow covered year round. Fortunately the railway crosses the mountains at a maximum of 1372 metres (4500 ft), which the Short crossed easily at 7000 feet. They reached Damascus at 8.45 am.

Hughes' waxes almost poetically over the city. "Damascus has been called by the Arabs 'The Pearl set in Emeralds', and to see it from the air with its pale mass of houses lying in the midst of its luxury of trees and fields, so I learned from the lucky observer, is to realise something of the truth and beauty of this description." British troops, when they marched in a year and a half later, were not so impressed. Kerry's actual report is also much more to the point.

On the road at Dumar, about 2 miles NW of Damascus, "was a battalion of troops on the march towards the town. Fire was opened on the seaplane from 5 or 6 guns which were brought into action with remarkable speed." The shells burst wide of the target and no damage was done. The Short crews, however, had learnt the hard way to respect the accuracy of Turkish rifle fire. The wings and fuselage often being holed by ground fire, fortunately without serious harm to man or machine.

"On the SW edge of the town were 3 lines of trenches and 9 gun pits all unoccupied. No hangars or camps were observed. No hostile aircraft were sighted." British intelligence had warned that an airfield had been established at Damascus; they were correct. A maintenance and repair station had been based there from mid-1916. However, there were no operational machines stationed at Damascus. Which was just as well, as the Rumpler C.I two-seater, in use at the time, was far superior to the Short 184.

The Short's fuel supply was now becoming a concern and they spent little time over the city. Once through the Anti-Lebanon, they followed a road directly to the pass in the Lebanon mountains, a



HMS *Anne* probably at Port Said.

The repair sheds at Rayak, 28 February 1917, taken from 7000 feet.

more direct route. About halfway across the valley, they met another battalion of troops marching toward Damascus. According to Hughes, "Their faces could be seen as they gazed upwards in wonder and bewilderment, but few of them were ready with their weapons, and no damage was sustained from the very spasmodic fire which they put up."

Crossing the Lebanon mountains again, this time at under 7000 feet, they passed out to sea and landed alongside *Anne* at 9.48 am. Clemson, Kerry and Short 8022 were hoisted in a few minutes later.

Whilst the flight should be considered more of a stunt than a practical operation, it was an impressive achievement. The straight line distance to Damascus and back was 110 miles (180 km). The route actually flown was nearer to 125 miles (200 km). The Short spent two hours overland, averaging just 60 mph (96 kph). They returned with photographs and up to minute information about supplies and troop movements. Information that may have affected the conduct of the First Battle of Gaza on 26 March 1917.

Both Clemson and Kerry were awarded the DSC, "In recognition of their conspicuous gallantry on the 28th February, 1917, when they carried out a reconnaissance of Rayak and Damascus in a seaplane. During this flight they crossed two mountain ranges whose lowest ridges are 4,000 feet high, and brought back valuable information."

Notes

- Flt Cdr A W Clemson crashed near Adana in Turkey on 11 October 1917, flying Short 8021 from HMS *Empress*. The Short was hit by AA fire in the fuel tank, fortunately not catching fire. Clemson was shot in the chest by Turkish soldier after he had burnt the aircraft. Both Clemson and his observer, 2/Lt E A Newton, remained guests of the Turkish government until repatriated in December 1918.

  S/Lt J L Kerry remained an observer with the Squadron until later in 1917 then returning to the UK for training. He later served at Eastchurch, Naval Air Station, transferring to the RAF in April 1918.

- Short 184, 8022, remained active with the Squadron into 1918. The last operational record I have is on HMS *City of Oxford* returning from the Red Sea at the end of March 1918; 8022 - In commission but [has] done fair hourage, and not fit for inland flying until overhauled. The venerable Short was scrapped in October.

- HMS *Anne* was decommissioned on 8 August 1918, serving for the remainder of the war as a collier. *Anne* passed through several owners and names (*Ithaki*, *Moldova*, *Jagrahat*), survived WW2 to be scrapped in November 1958.

- With the creation of the RAF the East Indies and Egypt Squadron ceased to exist, becoming part of 64 (Egypt) Wing, RAF, without any seaplane carriers. In July the seaplanes at Port Said became 431 Flight and a smaller unit at Alexandria 432 Flight. These amalgamated to become 269 Squadron, RAF, on 6 October 1918. The squadron was disbanded on 15 November 1919.

HMS Argus – The first proper aircraft carrier

By Chris Howat

HMS *Argus* showing the temporary island

In 1908, it was firmly stated "Their Lordships are of the opinion that aeroplanes would not be of any practical use to the Naval Service".

How wrong they were and how slow to see the future use of aircraft at sea. It was a battle of the traditionalists versus the free and forward thinkers of the day and eventually the admirals at sea and the Admiralty Board came round to the concept of aircraft working as a part of the surface and submarine fleet. The history of HMS *Argus* reflects this in many ways.

The first time an aircraft landed onboard a ship was in 1911 when a Eugene Ely landed on USS *Pennsylvania*. In Britain, ideas on launching and recovering aircraft from ships at sea were being voiced as early as 1912 when the ship builder William Beardmore proposed to the Admiralty an aircraft carrier design with a continuous, full-length flight deck, but it was not accepted. In the same year, the idea of a flush decked aircraft carrier was proposed by Admiral Mark Kerr. In 1915 H A Williamson, *Ark Royal's* Flying Officer at Gallipoli, submitted detailed proposals for a carrier with the island on

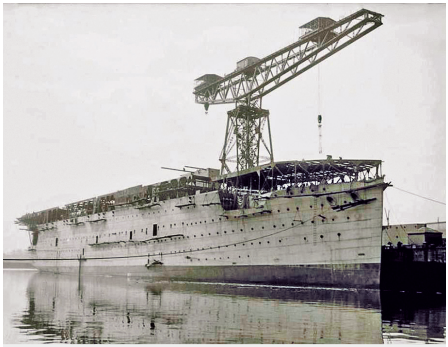
the starboard side and a form of arrester gear. The aircraft of the day with their single engine torque tended to turn to port when taking off and landing. Therefore, it was logical to choose the starboard side for the island. But Williamson's proposals were rejected by the Director of Naval Construction as impracticable!

As the first World War at sea progressed it became clear that the surface fleet needed an air arm to carry out the roles of reconnaissance, attack and defence. But the commanders at sea still had little concept of the use of aircraft. This was evident at the battle of Jutland where aerial reconnaissance would have been of inestimable value. As it was, Lieutenant Rutland's brief aerial reports never reached the fleet commanders.

As the limitations of existing ships carrying aircraft with their ability to launch but not recover became more apparent, the flush deck carrier design was dusted off and the Admiralty located two large, fast hulls suitable for conversion into an aircraft carrier. Construction of the Italian ocean liner *Conte Rosso* had been suspended by William Beardmore and Company at the outbreak of the war, and it met the Admiralty's criteria. *Conte Rosso* was purchased on 20 September 1916 and the company began work on converting the ship.

Much effort had been expended on fitting suitable ships with light fighter aircraft for fleet duties using catapults, but the ships were unable to recover the aircraft dry and intact ready to fly again. Often the pilot drowned after being knocked out on landing on the water. Float planes were also operated but their use was limited by the sea conditions and the aircraft being unsuitable for aerial warfare. Therefore, there was no effective answer to the menace of German Zeppelins reconnoitring the North Sea and reporting on the activities of the Royal Navy ships. So, thoughts turned to the problem of launch and recovery of wheeled aircraft onboard ship.

The plans by James Graham, Sixth Marquess of Montrose, a director of the Beardmore company, were dusted down. The initial design had two islands with the flight deck running between them. Each island contained one funnel; a large net could be strung between them to stop out-of-control aircraft. The islands were connected by braces and the bridge was mounted on top of the bracing, which left a clear height of 20 feet (6.1 m) for the aircraft on the flight deck. Fairly early in the design process, the decision was made to delete the



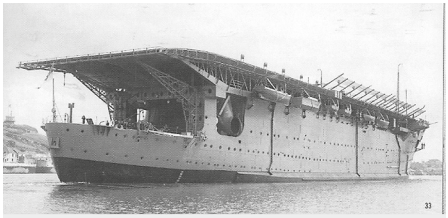
HMS *Argus* under conversion. Starboard island has been fitted and port island on the dockside.

funnels to reduce turbulence over the flight deck. The exhaust gases were, instead, ducted aft in the space between the roof of the hangar deck and the flight deck and were enclosed by a casing through which cooler air was driven by electric fans.

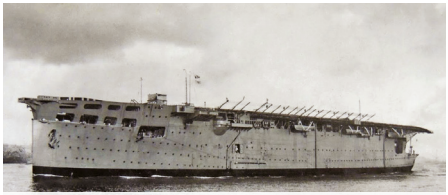
In November 1916, the ship's design was tested in a wind tunnel by the National Physical Laboratory to evaluate the turbulence caused by the twin islands and the bridge over them. They were found to cause problems, but no changes were made until the ship was nearly complete. As late as April 1918, Argus was ordered to be modified to a flush-decked configuration after the sea trials of the carrier *Furious* had revealed severe turbulence problems caused by her superstructure. The ship was given a bridge underneath her flight deck, extending from side to side.

In 1917 with the growing crisis at sea, the Admiralty had eventually to take notice. HMS *Furious* was converted in three stages but she was never successful until she had a flush deck fitted in the early twenties, far too late for use in WW1. So priority was given to the flush deck carrier building at Beardmore's yard.

Work had commenced on the hull of the *Conte Rosso* now renamed HMS *Argus* in 1916. Many innovative features were included in her design. The hangar was to be 330 ft long, 48 feet wide and 20 feet high, enough for one aircraft to be hoisted by gantry and moved over the top of any other aircraft in the hangar. Entry to the otherwise sealed hangar was to be via four air locks and sub divided into four sections by four fire resistant roller curtains. A steel roller door aft would allow seaplanes to embark over the quarterdeck by two cranes. Good ventilation was installed to disperse petrol fumes and the hangar deck given steel non-skid strips rather than planking which might become soaked in oil and petrol. Firefighting equipment was to be fitted at deck and gallery level. Care, too, was taken over the safe stowage of petrol, not in one large tank but in two-gallon cans. The storage areas were to be separated from the rest of the ship by void spaces and cans of fuel supplied to the flight deck on a two-stage lift with a fire barrier half-way up. Boiler smoke was to be carried away through two large ducts between hangar and deck, but this design proved not to be successful. Oil fired boilers



Stern view showing the two float plane cranes.



HMS *Argus* from which the Hurricanes took off for Vayenga near Murmansk 7th Sep 1941.

were fitted to give 20.5 knots.

Without an island, control positions were provided in galleries on either side of the flight deck but when flying was not taking place a retractable chart house could be raised on a hydraulic ram at the fore end of the flight deck.

Two lifts were fitted but the after one proved of little use. The size of the forward lift was large and subsequently proved sufficient to take fixed wing Hurricanes and Spitfires into the hangar in WW2, the only carrier to be able to do so. Many other innovative features were incorporated, becoming standard in British carriers of the future. Safety in storage and handling petrol was taken very seriously.

Argus was commissioned on 14th September 1918 and the first landings commenced on 24th. Within two days, 21 successful landings had been made with different aircraft but the pilots suggested that some sort of superstructure on deck would help them to judge their height. A wood and canvas mock-up was fitted on the starboard side and tried in October. With the wind on the port bow turbulence over the landing area would be minimal. These trials led to the decision to complete *Eagle* and *Hermes* and all subsequent carriers with permanent islands.

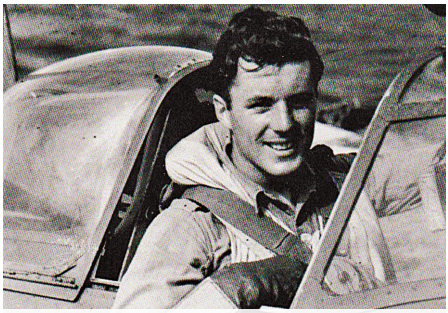
Argus embarked her squadron of Sopwith Cuckoo torpedo bombers on 10th October and began her work up for an attack on the German fleet, but the war ended before she was ready. By 19th December, 36 successful landings had been made by Sopwith 1½ Strutters and Pups. She remained an operational aircraft carrier until 1930 when she went into reserve. She spent much of her first decade on the vital work of developing carrier techniques and training aviators in the demanding work of operating aircraft at sea. Her merchant ship hull, relatively small size and modest speed limited her utility as a combat ship, and she was superseded in fleet service as newer carriers were completed during the later years. She emerged after a refit in 1938 to operate remote controlled Tiger Moths for anti-aircraft gunnery practice.

During WW2 *Argus* served mainly as an aircraft transport but was pressed into Active service when necessary. She was in reserve at the start and was recommissioned on 7 October 1939. She also served in a training role during much of World War II, but the desperate circumstances of the first years of that conflict sometimes required that she saw front-line service, notably in 1942, when she served with Force H and later supported the landings in North Africa. After further training duty, she was reduced to reserve in late 1943 and was hulked as an accommodation ship in August 1944. She was sold and finally scrapped at Inverkeithing in 1947.

As the forerunner of all aircraft carriers ever since, the *Argus* story goes from the first ideas in 1912 to operational service in 1918 and to being paid off in 1944. A remarkable career! I am indebted to David Brown and his excellent book "The Grand Fleet – Warship Design and Development 1906 to 1922" for much of the information above.

Seafire at War

By Lieutenant (later Rear Admiral) Ray Rawbone CB AFC



The author in the cockpit. The Seafire pilot's headroom was not exactly generous.

I joined 809 Squadron based at Andover in October 1943. We were to remain with the squadron until it was decommissioned at the end of the war.

Our base was a large grass field on the edge of a major road which is now the A303. We were equipped with 24 Seafires, initially a mixture of Mark IIC (Merlin 46) and L Mark IIC (Merlin 32) commanded by Major Al Wright RM, a smart, rather strict disciplinarian – which is probably just as well as we had a fair mixture of high-spirited, Commonwealth officers!

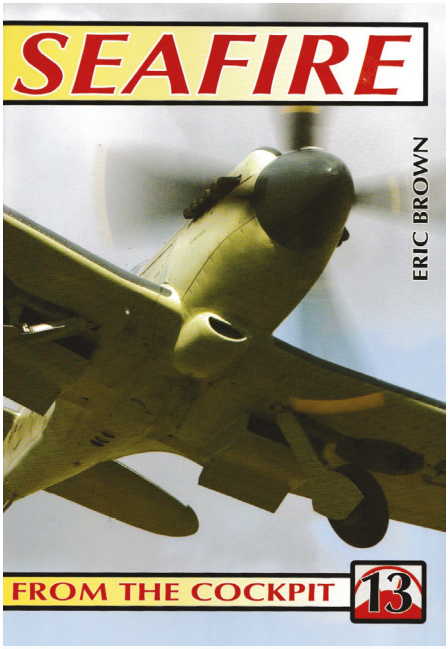
Our parent carrier, HMS *Stalker*, was a typical American-built ship supplied on lend lease to the Royal Navy and one of 23 carriers which normally operated in company, the other two being HMS *Attacker* (879 Squadron) and HMS *Hunter* (807 Squadron). Each carrier could accommodate 24 Seafires with an additional three or four aircraft in reserve. On joining the squadron we learnt that the three carriers had just returned from Salerno, where very low wind speeds over the decks had resulted in very many deck-landing accidents, which with battle damage taken into account, had led to an exceptionally high attrition rate overall.

Operation Dragoon

On 12 August 1944 we all sailed to support the invasion of the South of France, centred on the area of St Raphael and St Tropez with Toulon and Marseilles the main objectives. As we approached our operating area about 60 to 70 miles south of the French coast, we found ourselves part of a task force of nine aircraft carriers, HMS *Hunter, Stalker, Attacker, Pursuer, Khedive, Emperor and Searcher*, together with USS *Tulagi* and *Kasaan Bay*; all adequately supported by escorts and replenishment ships

D-Day, 15 August.

Overnight, Allied commandos and paratroops had captured the Ile de Levant and landed in mainland France. Ships went to Action Stations at about



Seafire cover image of the From the Cockpit series of books by Aeroflight.

05.30. The sea was flat calm and the wind over the deck was never more than 20 knots and in hazy conditions visibility was poor. At 06.55 our flight took off to provide CAP for the fleet. The sky was full of allied heavy bombers- an estimated 400 to 500 during our patrol, but no enemy aircraft were seen or reported.

My next mission was in support of bombarding ships, but I was unable to get a target from the air controller. Together with my wingman, I made a recce inland over two German occupied towns. There was a complete lack of enemy movement and ack ack, and the towns seemed deserted. There were hundreds of landing barges and ships along the coast as we set course for *Stalker*. Visibility was bad. As our YG direction beacons were not working and our fuel state was low, we were worried in case we missed the force. However, we landed on safely and shortly after airborne again on CAP.

Overall, it had been a successful day for the invasion force but a surprisingly quiet one for the squadron. We did have two pilots who went into the barriers on landing, and Sub Lt George Morris had to ditch when he ran out of fuel having lost the force. George landed about a mile from an air sea rescue launch, which unfortunately did not see him. Eventually realising that he was not going to be picked up, George, a very strong swimmer, took off his Mae West and swam to the launch! He was returned to us the next day.

D +9. 24 August

A date firmly etched in my memory! Back in the operating area, Lt Jefferson's flight of three aircraft was airborne at 06.40 to carry out a tactical recce of the Nîmes-Rhône area. I was temporarily detached to check the roads west of Nîmes and saw a German staff car proceeding north towards Arles. I attacked, and a heavy group of cannon shells brought the car to a standstill. I saw no further movement and 0730 turned south towards Nîmes to rendezvous with Lt Jefferson. A few moments later I noticed that the engine was running very roughly. The boost pressure dropped off and 12-inch flames appeared from the exhausts. The maximum revs attainable were 2,200. I

decided to stay with the aircraft and get as far south as possible, hoping to reach the sea or Allied troops. I was then at 4,000 feet. I gave my tac-recce report to my flight commander and reported my condition.

At 800 feet about 7 miles west of Nîmes, my engine cut out and I prepared to land into small fields; it was not easy to bail out of a Seafire, and I was clearly too low. My instruments began to malfunction, and the airspeed indicator stopped working. However, the aircraft still handled well enough to judge the final approach by feel. I landed just short of the fields, finishing up among bushes and trees in a small clearing. My R/T was still working and was able to contact Lt Jefferson, giving my position and telling him that I was unhurt. I had landed about five miles west of Nimes.

As a pocket of my gloves contained coded information, I placed the gloves in the cockpit together with my helmet and set fire to the aircraft with a small incendiary bomb provided. There was a small explosion; I saw smoke from the resulting blaze while still in the area an hour later. At this stage I saw several men, whom I took to be Germans, about 800 yards away and heading towards the aircraft from the west. I took my emergency rations and knife from my Mae West before hiding it in thick scrub and running off swiftly in the opposite direction! About a mile from the aircraft I thought it prudent to hide from several French people who were making for the crash.

After hiding for an hour, I moved north around Nîmes before heading eastwards towards more rugged territory, where I felt sure I would find help from French farmers or from the Maquis. I walked about six miles before risking contact with a lone Frenchman working in a field. I had some trouble persuading him that I was English and not German, but once satisfied, he quickly took me to his home in the village of Dions. One of his family was a member of the Maquis, and after a meal I was introduced to a young lady who spoke English.

Dions lies in a secondary road much used by the Germans to transport their troops for Montpellier to Uzes. I was advised to stay put for a few days, until the Allies had reached across the road. Early warning of German transit movements was provided by the Maquis so that I could hide elsewhere as necessary. The adrenaline flowed for the next two days as two columns of German MT passed through the village and I hid in a small copse nearby. The first column of eight next trucks was ambushed half a mile from the village by the Maquis. Four Hellcats joined the fray with heavy strafing, and the damage was devastating. The second column of 60 vehicles, which included some tanks, were sighted by Allied aircraft as it approached Uzes and the sound of explosions and cannon fire indicated that it had been immediately engaged. The following day the village was quiet, but the Maquis appeared to be everywhere. They liberated Nîmes on

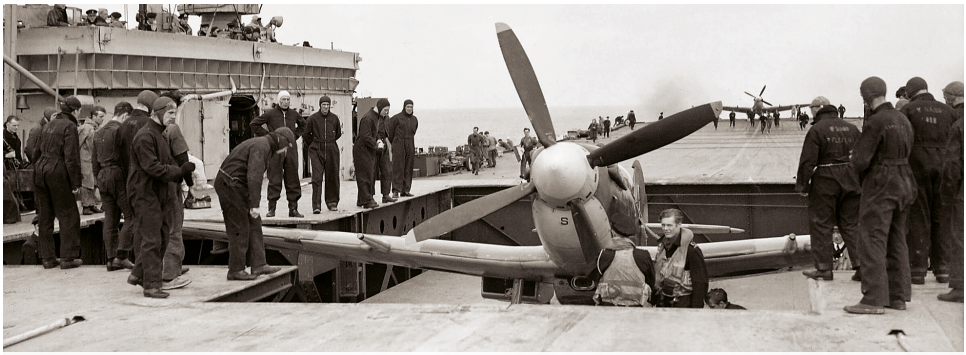
The Maquis were rural guerrilla bands of French Resistance fighters, called maquisards, during the Nazi occupation of France.

27 August and on the 28th I left Dions with three French friends and cycled into Nimes - an exciting journey as we did not know what to expect. I was quickly passed to Major Sharpe of the Special Forces working with the Maquis, who arranged motorcycle passage to Arles, where I crossed the Rhône by rowing-boat and on 30 August I made contact with Lieutenant-Colonel White, an English liaison officer with the French division. The following morning, 31st August, I was flown by Piper Cub to the airbase at Salon. During my time on the move I had seen many examples of the carnage caused by cannon and machine gun strafing. This had been militarily effective and essential, but it also clearly brought to mind the horrific tragedies that had been faced by many helpless civilian families as they struggled to escape along the main transport routes during the early Blitzkrieg days of the war. War is not glamorous if one is on the receiving end.

From Salon I was flown to Naples and I learned that the carriers had been withdrawn from the south of France and that HMS *Stalker* was en route to Alexandria. I was very anxious to get back to the ship as soon as possible as I knew that my drama was being shared by the family at home and I had no idea their state of mind nor the details of any information passed to them.

My wife was expecting our first child, and it must have a great shock for her to open the telegram reporting that I was missing. Fortunately, a second communication arrived the same day, Lt Jefferson having received my message that I was unhurt, and seen me leave the aircraft at some speed! I quickly made contact with the family from Naples. We were all conscious that our families also served, as they patiently remained at home and dutifully waited for news. I took passage to Malta by air and the next day flew to Cairo. From Cairo I had a lift by car to Alexandria and arrived on board *Stalker* at 20.00 on 7 September.

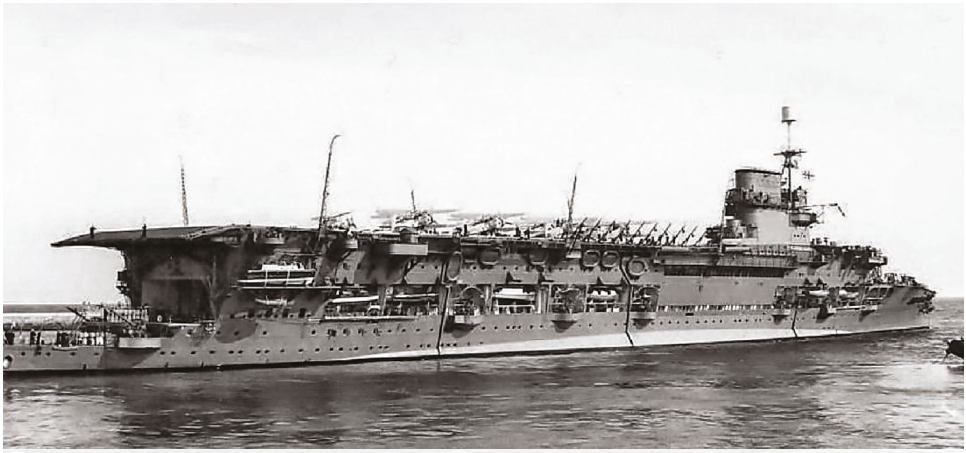
This is an edited extract from an article in the "From the Cockpit" series, No 13, "Seafire", published by Ad Hoc publications in 2010.



A Seafire being 'brought up'.

RN aircraft carrier losses 1939-1942 - Part 1

By Jim Humberstone



HMS *Courageous*

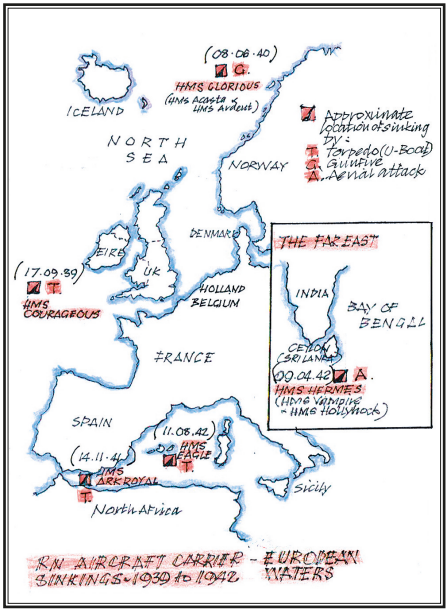
I was prompted to write this article by a caustic comment made by a retired Naval friend, a former submariner Commander, when I recently visited him in Alverstoke.

Having seen from the Gosport shore the spectacular outline of HMS *Queen Elizabeth* recently arrived at the Portsmouth Naval Base, I remarked how impressed I was by this new addition to the Royal Navy, to which he responded with a slight smile "Nice target". Such a response reminds us of the extent to which, 75 years on from the end of WWII, notwithstanding technological advances, the vulnerability of the aircraft carrier and the nature of the threats by which it is confronted have changed little. Examination of the circumstances in which five RN fleet carriers were sunk during the first half of the Second World War may, therefore, still offer lessons.

From the early days of powered flight, Britain placed great emphasis on the development of naval aviation, a commitment that was only effectively rivalled by the US and Japan. This development depended at first on the conversion of available hulls to carry wheeled aircraft. Following on from HMS *Argus* (based on a commercial liner) the RN converted the fast battlecruiser,

HMS *Furious* by several stages into a recognisable aircraft carrier; although, like *Argus*, she had no permanent island superstructure. *Furious* served as a test bed for the development of carrier aircraft operating techniques and was later followed into service by its converted sister ships, HMS *Glorious* and *Courageous*.

By the outbreak of WWII, through conversion and new build, the Royal Navy possessed seven large fleet carriers. Calling them "fleet" carriers reflected their design concept. They were intended to act as integrated elements of a striking fleet, using their aircraft to carry out reconnaissance beyond the line of sight of the battleships and cruisers and to spot for the fall of shot for the big guns when battle was opened. A secondary role, apparently formulated just before the outbreak of war, was to carry out independent anti-submarine sweeps in the western approaches. The effectiveness of this role depended on the ability of escorting destroyers to identify submerged submarines with their ASDIC, whilst surfaced submarines would be detected by patrolling aircraft.



The loss of HMS *Courageous*

HMS *Courageous* was launched in 1916 as a fast light battlecruiser, with a normal displacement of 22,500 tons. She was converted to an aircraft carrier in 1925 and was able to accommodate 48 aircraft. When the War started, she embarked two squadrons of Swordfish aircraft and was tasked to form a hunter-killer group with four destroyers to find and destroy German submarines. She sailed on the first of such missions on 3 September 1939 under the command of Captain W T Makeig-Jones RN, and on the 14th was in her operating area off south west Ireland.

The ship was lost on 19 September, less than a fortnight after war was declared. She was sunk by torpedoes fired from U29, commanded by Captain-Lieutenant Otto Schuhart. The sinking occurred during the early evening, when the ship was accompanied by only two of her destroyer escort, HMS *Ivanhoe* and *Impulsive*. The two other escorts had gone to the aid of the liner *Kaliristan*, which was being attacked by another submarine, U53. The carrier was turning into wind to recover four Swordfish previously sent to assist in the search for U53, and it is likely the ship received two torpedo hits on her

port side. *Courageous* sank after 20 minutes with the loss of her captain and over 500 ship's company. The destroyers counterattacked U-29 for four hours, but the submarine escaped. *Courageous* was the first British warship to be sunk by German forces in WW2.

The loss of HMS *Glorious*

Glorious was a sister ship of HMS *Courageous*, of similar design, displacement, and aircraft capacity. Her sinking became one of the most controversial of the disasters that overtook the Royal Navy in WWII. Coming at the end of the equally disastrous Franco-British Norway campaign, the incident occurred during a period when the British armed forces were experiencing their first blooding. Six months of phoney war had possibly created a degree of complacency and over-confidence and all three services were to learn critical lessons during their deployment in northern latitudes. The fate of *Glorious*, however, reflected poorly on the attitude and judgement of her commanding officer, Captain D'Oyly-Hughes DSO DSC RN.

Glorious had been operating in Norwegian waters when the decision was made to evacuate British forces. D'Oyly-Hughes had been authorised to proceed independently to Scapa Flow, even though a returning convoy was preparing to make the same journey. Although this decision is surrounded by controversy, it is generally believed that the captain was determined to return to Scapa as quickly as possible to pursue a court-martial against his Commander (Air) whom he had left behind under charges of cowardice. On 8 June, *Glorious* was proceeding at cruising speed out of Norwegian waters. No additional lookouts had been posted and no reconnaissance aircraft were airborne. She was accompanied by two destroyer escorts, HMS *Ardent* and *Acasta*.

Her sinking was the result of the unexpected encounter with the powerful 11 inch German battlecruisers *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*. It is believed that, but for the keen eye of a young Kreigsmarine officer who detected smoke from the carrier on the horizon, the tragedy might not

HMS *Acasta*.

HMS *Ardent*.

have occurred. Once apprehended however, the small British squadron was powerless, and the outcome was certain. *Scharnhorst* stood off from its victim, opening with its main armament fire beyond the range of the 4.7 inch guns of the aircraft carrier, which was quickly despatched. *Ardent* was also sunk by gunfire after helping its sister ship to lay a smokescreen. The captain of *Acasta* sought compensation for the losses, exploiting the smoke screen to approach the German ship closely enough to score a hit with one of his torpedoes before being sunk by the battlecruisers' gunfire. The destroyer's action caused serious damage. Two officers and 46 seamen of *Scharnhorst's* crew were killed, and the ship was left with one turret out of action and an engine room flooded. The action prevented a further tragedy, since having assessed the damage, the German Admiral called off any further search for targets and returned both his ships to Trondheim. Had the battlecruiser not been damaged, the two ships would most likely have continued their hunt for allied shipping and would have come across the convoys, which were carrying 15,000 allied troops.

HMS *Glorious* had previously achieved the unusual feat of successfully flying-on the Hurricanes of 46 Squadron RAF, which had been operating in Norway in support of the allied forces. Their presence may have inhibited the normal precaution of launching aircraft to scout ahead. This would usually be an essential precaution, although it is fair to say that the Admiralty had given no warning of the possibility of major German warships in the area. Much evidence emerged at the subsequent enquiry. This confirmed that the passage of the carrier and destroyers under the dangerous circumstances that obtained at the time was prompted by other factors than just that of the evacuation of the RAF contingent from Norway.

We will continue Jim's fascinating account of the fate of other Royal Navy wartime carriers, namely *Ark Royal*, *Hermes* and *Eagle*, in Jabberwock 102.

HMS *Glorious* in Grand Harbour, Malta.

No more accidents!

By Malcolm Smith

The author on detachment at RAF Akrotiri in Cyprus 1972. Canberra T17s in the background.

In 1971, after a year with 801 Buccaneer squadron in HMS *Hermes*, I was fortunate to be appointed as the RN Air Engineer Officer to 360 (RN/RAF) Squadron, based at RAF Cottesmore in Rutland.

The squadron was equipped with the Canberra T Mk 17 aircraft, converted from the venerable B Mk 2; its role was to provide Electronic Countermeasures (ECM) training for NATO forces. As the squadron's title implies, the squadron was jointly manned, with 25% RN people and the remainder RAF. For a while, I was the only engineer officer, although the squadron was supposed to have two, so by default I became the senior engineer officer (S Eng O in RAF jargon). I had about 90 maintainers, who worked together harmoniously despite their different service backgrounds. RAF Cottesmore had previously been a V-bomber station and the dispersal (where the line offices were situated) was a good quarter mile from the hangar. We had two enormous Vulcan-sized pans, each of which could accommodate two Canberras with ease and these in turn were a good five-minute walk from the Line offices. This all led to a somewhat languid pace of ground operations, which for me took some getting used to after the closer confines of RNAS Lossiemouth, not

to mention the more hectic tempo of embarked life.

Around that time, the RAF had experienced an unexpected upsurge in aircraft accidents, some of them fatal. These did not seem to stem from any specific cause but led to great and understandable concern in the Air Force hierarchy. The order came down the layers of management: "There are to be no more accidents!" Officers Commanding Air Stations were left in no doubt that if an accident occurred to any of their aircraft, its effect would be severely and personally career-limiting unless it could be shown to be purely "accidental". (Those with experience of accident investigation will know that this is a slippery definition.) The Officer Commanding (OC) Cottesmore duly made it clear to his staff that there were to be no more accidents at his Air Station, or else ...

A few days later I was sitting in my office next door to the line office when I heard some excited conversations through the hatch in the wall and one of my Senior NCOs burst in to say there had been an accident on the runway. The message came from Air Traffic Control: a T17 had been about to start its take-off run when the port engine had failed. From the sound of it, the failure had been catastrophic, although happily the three aircrew were unharmed.

Very soon afterwards, I was told that the Group Captain was on his way to see me in person. I learned later that he had just left in his staff car to visit Group HQ when the message came through on the car's radio telephone. He had told his driver to do a U-turn on the A1 and return to base post haste. The staff car soon arrived at the dispersal, where I was waiting.

"Get in," commanded the Group Captain and we travelled at some speed around the perimeter track and on to the runway, arriving alongside the Canberra and various rescue vehicles, fire tenders and so on.

We approached the aircraft. There was a ragged smoking hole in the port engine nacelle, directly in front of the jet pipe; and various bits of blackened debris beneath it

"Well!" demanded the Group Captain, "What caused this accident?" I considered embarking on an explanation of the need for careful consideration of all the factors surrounding an accident before coming to a preliminary decision on a likely cause (or causes) but one look at the Group Captain dissuaded me. I examined the debris and quickly spotted a segment of turbine disc, complete with blades.

"Well, sir" I said, "it's a bit of a snap judgement, but it looks to me as if the turbine disc has disintegrated. There was nothing the pilot could have done to prevent it."

"Very good", said the Group Captain and without another word returned to his car and drove away.

I got a lift back to the dispersal with OC 'A' Flight in his RAF Mini. He was a sardonic Squadron Leader pilot of many years' experience. He said nothing on the short journey, but before driving off, he raised one eyebrow and gave me a wink. That seemed to sum it all up.

Lieutenant Robert Hampton Gray VC

From the Royal Canadian Navy website

The future HMCS *Robert Hampton Gray* will be the Royal Canadian Navy's sixth Arctic and Offshore Patrol Ship. The *Robert Hampton Gray* will be a sister-ship to first-in-class *Harry DeWolf*, pictured here during its delivery to the Government of Canada on July 31, 2020, in Halifax. © *Royal Canadian Navy*

The Royal Canadian Navy's (RCN) sixth Arctic and Offshore Patrol Ship (AOPS) will be named in honour of Lieutenant Robert Hampton Gray, a Canadian naval hero of the Second World War.

Lt Gray joined the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve in 1940 and served as a pilot in the Royal Navy Fleet Air Arm. He embarked in His Majesty's Ship HMS *Formidable* with 1841 Squadron, joining the war in the Pacific as part of Operation ICEBERG, the invasion of Okinawa, Japan, in April 1945.

Lt Gray was awarded the Victoria Cross posthumously, for courage and determination in carrying out daring air strikes on the Japanese destroyer His Imperial Japanese Majesty's Ship HIJMS *Amakusa*.

On August 9, 1945, he led two flights of Corsair aircraft to attack naval vessels in Onagawa Bay, Japan. He opened the attack run flying straight into concentrated anti-aircraft fire and was hit almost immediately.

With his aircraft on fire and one bomb lost, he continued the attack and released his remaining bomb on the escort vessel HIJMS *Amakusa*, causing the ship to capsize and sink. His aircraft then crashed into the sea and his body was never recovered.

"Lt Gray was known to his fellow military members as a courageous leader with a brilliant flying spirit, who continued to inspire and motivate his crew after his unfortunate passing," said Vice-Admiral Art McDonald, Commander RCN. "By naming the sixth Arctic and Offshore Patrol Ship after Lt Gray, we honour him as a Canadian naval hero, and celebrate his outstanding leadership and heroism."

Lt Gray was the only member of the RCN to be awarded the Victoria Cross during the Second World War.

Over the years, Lt Gray's courage, service and sacrifice continue to be recognized in many ways. In 1946, the Geographic Board of Canada named Gray's Peak, a mountain in British Columbia's Kokanee Glacier Provincial Park, in honour of Lt Gray and his brother John, also killed during the war. In 1989, a memorial was erected to him at Onagawa Bay, the only memorial dedicated to a foreign service member on Japanese soil.

For the first time in its 110-year history, the RCN has named the six Harry DeWolf-class AOPS ships after prominent Canadian naval figures who served Canada with the highest distinction. This proudly honours their leadership, achievements and heroism while serving Canadian interests at sea. The other five AOPS are named *Harry DeWolf, Margaret Brooke, Max Bernays, William Hall* and *Frédérick Rolette*.

AOPS will provide armed, sea-borne surveillance of Canadian waters, including the Arctic. These ships will enforce sovereignty, cooperation with partners, at home and abroad, and will provide the Government of Canada with awareness of activities in Canada's waters. The multi-purpose nature and versatility of the fleet, both when deployed independently or as part of an allied or coalition task force, allows Canada to rapidly deploy credible naval forces worldwide on short notice.

Lieutenant Robert Hampton Gray was the only member of the Royal Canadian Navy to be awarded the Victoria Cross during the Second World War. © *Nelson Museum*

Lt Robert Hampton Gray Memorial Plaque, Nelson, British Columbia. © *Nelson Museum*

Dambusters get webbed feet

By Chris Penney

617 Squadron F35B lands aboard HMS *Queen Elizabeth*. © *Crown Copyright*

The Royal Air Force's legendary 617 Dambusters finally got their feet wet this summer as the East Anglia-based squadron embarked in HMS *Queen Elizabeth* in the North Sea.

This was the first occasion that UK-based F-35s have gone to sea and marked the latest stage in the Royal Navy's operational work-up of the new carrier, which had previously hosted trials of US-based test and evolution F-35 Lightning stealth fighters.

617 is the first UK F-35B squadron, based at RAF Marham, with both RAF and RN personnel. Its current boss is Commander Mark Sparrow RN. The famous squadron's motto is "Après moi, le déluge" (After me, the flood) and a quick look at its battle honours shows that they include attacks on the Biscay U-boat pens and a half share in sinking the Nazi battleship *Tirpitz*. Doubtless they got some ribbing about it once finally aboard!

The air exercises with the UK F-35s followed a rigorous four-week Covid lockdown sea training cruise for the carrier's crew in the southwest approaches. The aim was to demonstrate that the new strike jets could successfully defend the carrier by delivering combat air patrols (CAP), also to conduct attack missions, and being kept at short notice readiness

for launching. After initial qualification in carrier landings and take-offs, 617's Lightnings had to get used to operating with the carrier's Merlin helicopters of RNAS Culdrose based 820 Squadron, whose specialist role is Anti-Submarine Warfare. F-35 pilots conducted day and night flying training, intense operations including the launch of a four aircraft strike package. They also practised interoperability with other naval and aviation assets including the carrier's supporting frigate. Supporting the F-35s was the RAF Voyager "Vespina." This military Airbus A330 VVIP/transport/tanker is now resplendent in the UK Government's new red, white and blue Union Flag livery, designed to better promote Global Britain when on tour overseas with the Royal Family or Prime Minister.

The carrier's final hurdle before being declared fully operational is exercise Joint Warrior 20-2 with other

Capt. James Blackmore (left), Air Group commander on HMS *Queen Elizabeth* and Cdr. Mark Sparrow (right), CO of 617 Squadron. © *Crown Copyright*

NATO navies. Embarked will be ten US Marine Corps VMFA-211 squadron F-35B jets as part of a UK-US carrier air group for future joint operations. HMS *Queen Elizabeth's* first deployment as task group flagship will take place next year and is expected to include port visits to Australia and Japan.

617 Squadron F-35B Lightnings conducting air-to-air refuelling over the North Sea. © *Crown Copyright*

Navy pilots landed dream roles

From Navy News

DHC-6 Twin Otter of the British Antarctic Survey

TWO trainee Royal Navy pilots swapped the UK for Antarctica.

While Sub Lieutenants Emma Reynolds and Connor Kirkpatrick waited for a date for their rotary training, they were sent to work as radio operators with the British Antarctic Survey (BAS). SLt Reynolds takes up the story.

Since 2005, the Royal Navy has sent two holdies south to Rothera Research Station every year to assist with BAS's aviation operations in the Tower, albeit with a brief break between 2013-2016.

Whilst we had both heard of the Antarctic hold, we never thought we would be in the right place, at the right time – but luckily, circumstances lined up and somehow, we ended up in Antarctica, on what can only be described as the dream hold and an amazing opportunity.

As Radio Operators, they have two main roles: Firstly, communicating with aircraft and science projects in the deep field and secondly, controlling movements at and around Rothera, including aircraft operations, polar boating, local travel, and most importantly, coordinating the runway operations.

Working in a small team of five, we started at 0645 and finished whenever the planes landed – sometimes, if there was an emergency, as late as 0400 the next day.

Our primary job role was talking with aircraft; mostly looking after flights in the north and west of Antarctica, with

pilots of all nationalities – an area the size of Europe. The farthest journeys covered a distance equivalent of the UK to Africa – this was when aircraft were flying over the South Pole. This is an immense area, and could get very busy.

Aviation in Antarctica is undertaken mainly by DHC-6 Twin Otter aircraft on skis/wheels – a twin-engined, high-wing turbine aircraft, perfect for Antarctic operations with the exception of range. Another aircraft used is the DC3 Basler, but whilst this has greater range and more cargo capacity, it lacks the versatility in landing. BAS also operates a DHC-7 Dash 7, which flies the inter-continental run between the Antarctic and South America – and the main route in and out for BAS personnel.

One of the most rewarding parts of the deployment was the flying. The Twin Otters fly single pilot, which means there is space for a non-qualified co-pilot – a great opportunity extended to everyone on station, with the aim to get everyone at least one flight. This was an opportunity to leave the peninsula and see more of Antarctica.

Actually living on the continent is a challenge in itself, but amazing. Every day you wake up to a different view, with a different set of extreme weather conditions – the ice had normally shifted overnight, leaving different conditions in the morning. It could have snowed two feet in a couple of hours, or you could wake up to 50 knot winds and not be able to go outside without snow goggles, mountain boots and multiple buffs. Or, you could step out of one buildings and be surrounded by penguins and seals, who have no fear of humans.

Once arriving in Rothera, training in snowmobile driving was essential, further first aid, field training, boat crew, avalanche training, mountaineering and crevasse practical courses. Also instruction in using skis and crampons for day-to-day tasks.

Every tasking in the Antarctic takes longer than it would normally – not just due to the extreme conditions, but also the remoteness.

How does two aircrew spending their time as radio operators in the Antarctic help the Royal Navy? Well, we have gained a broad perspective in how aviation operations work. This will really help us to see the bigger picture when back on the squadron.

This article first appeared in Navy News, March 2020 and is reproduced here by kind permission of the editor.

SLts Connor Kirkpatrick and Emma Reynolds marked New Year's Eve in style in the Antarctic.

SLt Emma Reynolds in the radio room.

SoFFAAM modelling competition

By Richard Macauley

Joint first - Thiago Datria from Brazil with "Humphrey" Westland Wessex HAS.3.

Joint first - Guy Vinnels with DH Sea Venom FAW.21.

Simon, our Membership Secretary, had a great idea.

"Why not run a Plastic Modelling Competition which can also act as a publicity tool for the Society."

Simon is a modeller himself so he already had some contacts on Social Media. They too said they would help publicise the competition.

So we set to, thinking up a simple rule to capture a broad audience. The only rule was '*Your model must be a naval aircraft from any era and any Naval Air Arm but it must be 1:72 scale and there is just one category which is open to all ages*'.

We created publicity material to advertise using one of Simon's own models (he wasn't allowed to enter) and photos of the builders entries started to come in. These were placed on a specially created Flickr page for the judges to view, who came from within the Society as volunteers.

While we didn't get the biggest response, those entered were very fine examples of the modeller's art to scoop the first prize of a year's membership to SoFFAAM.

We had to award a joint first, so two memberships were given out including certificates which were also given to 2nd and 3rd places.

Membership Application

I hereby apply for membership of SoFFAAM (the Society) and will pay via:

☐ Bank Standing Order

☐ BACS transfer, bank details on standing order form, payment ref. "(your surname) MEMBS"

☐ PayPal using soffaam.joinup@gmail.com

☐ Cheque, made payable to SoFFAAM

Individual Adult Membership (age 16+) **at £12.00** ..... ☐

Junior Membership (age 5-15) **at £8.00** ..... ☐
(must be accompanied by an adult)

Family Membership at £32.00 ..... ☐

Life Membership (single payment) **at £180.00** ..... ☐

Life Membership (over 60, single payment) **at £90.00** ..... ☐

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We have a robust data protection policy. GDPR compliance can be viewed on the Society's Website.

Please complete and return this form to the Membership Secretary:

Simon Websper,
22 Kings Yard,
Bishops Lydeard,
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Somerset TA4 3LE.

Tel: 01823 433448
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Email: soffaam.mem@gmail.com

Front cover inset photo shows the packed fore deck of R08 *HMS Queen Elizabeth* with both RAF and USMC F35B Lightning II aircraft.

Back cover photos depict the same F35B Lightning II aircraft from 617 Squadron 'The Dambusters', RAF and United States Marine Corps VMFA-211 Squadron 'Wake Island Avengers', aboard R08 during exercise Joint Warrior 20-2 (September/October 2020). This is the largest number of fixed wing aircraft to operate from a British carrier since 1983.