

JABBERWOCK 109



SOCIETY OF FRIENDS
FLEET AIR ARM
MUSEUM

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

**November
2022**



IN THIS ISSUE

Three Albert Medals in one night • Temporary Sub Lieutenant (Air)
Frederick Dennis Websper • CHF marks Dartmoor National Park crash
sites • Visit to Historic Helicopters • Welcome to the Junglies • Carrier
exhibit re-opening • SoFFAAM Christmas Lunch • Book reviews

Plus all the usual features etc.

THE
NATIONAL
MUSEUM



The Society of Friends of the Fleet Air Arm Museum



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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 four guests (one guest only for junior members)

on any one visit, each at a reduced entrance fee, currently 30% off the standard price. Members are also allowed a 20% discount on goods purchased from the shop and cafe.

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

FLEET AIR ARM MUSEUM

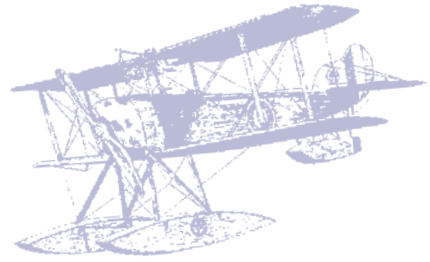
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Three Albert Medals in one night



Frederick Dennis Websper



Commando Helicopter Force



Carrier exhibit re-opening

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COVER ILLUSTRATION

Seafire XVII SX336 was built by Westland, Yeovil in April 1946. She entered service with the Royal Navy in 1946 at RNAS Bramcote in Warwickshire and is thought to have served with 833NAS, Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve. Navy Wings acquired the aircraft in November 2021.
© Roger Wilcox

Editorial

After various teething troubles, the provision of Society talks via Zoom is proving to be a popular service to our members.

We have had a good mix of quality speakers on interesting subjects and attendance by members to the talks in person is reaching reasonable numbers, although not approaching pre-pandemic levels. All are welcome to the talks, whether virtually or in person. Society membership is holding up well, helped by some vigorous campaigning by Council members at a local air show, but more members are always needed to maintain our Society in a healthy state.


Regarding Zoom, circumstances dictated that the recent Annual General Meeting was held via this service. Attendance was larger than in previous years and it is pleasing to report that there were more than enough volunteers to fill the fourteen available places on the Society's Council. We have commented before that Council members are Trustees of the Society, responsible for meeting its Purpose and planning for future developments. The minutes of the AGM will in due course be posted on the Society's website.

Council members attended the opening of the re-developed Carrier

Experience in July. This includes a new flight deck line-up and state-of-the-art audio-visual elements and includes a re-opened and revised Island. The sole remaining Westland Wyvern and Supermarine Attacker are prominent on the "flight deck".

In this issue, we carry a story from our Membership Secretary, Simon Websper, about his father's brief career as a temporary Sub Lieutenant (Air) in the early days of peace in 1945. We also review a book by David Hobbs, eminent historian and long-term Society member. This covers Fleet Air Arm operations in the north Atlantic and Norwegian theatres, operations that are perhaps not as well documented as those in the Mediterranean and western Atlantic areas. A pre-war catapult-launched aircraft is also featured. Although this is an unusual example of a maritime aircraft, we are sure that many of our readers will be able to identify it.

With the festive season once again approaching, it only remains for us to wish all our readers good health for the New Year.



Malcolm

Council snippets

From the September Council Meeting

The General Manager said that Museum has enjoyed a positive summer with the team managing new working and operational arrangements in Warnefords and the updated Carrier Experience to good effect.

The Museum has seen an expected increase in walk-up ticketing over the summer as visitors return to more traditional visiting behaviour. The online booking system remains in place and is working well, although SOFFAAM members can also benefit from on the day admittance if this is preferred. The Carrier Experience includes a new flight deck line-up and state-of-the-art audio-visual elements that see us re-open the Island as part of the updated experience. Our Collections Access Service has now opened for personal visitors to access documents in Cobham Hall. We also offer a digitisation service for those who cannot visit or who may want a particular photograph. These research appointments are being snapped up eagerly.

Tickets are on sale now for our Christmas Concert under Concorde (9 Dec, £15 per person).

To provide publicity for the Society,

the promotional stand was taken to Middlezoy Aerodrome for two days to attend their Vintage Aerofest fly-in. This participation resulted in the recruitment of 16 new members. The initial findings of the Membership Survey have been circulated. 155 members took the trouble to complete and return it. Included were replies from both USA and Canada.

Our talks programme is proceeding successfully and we continue to provide coverage by Zoom. Thank you to all that help make these evenings a success both in front and behind the scenes. The 2022 programme is full, with five speakers confirmed for 2023.

Society membership stands at 956, an improvement on earlier Quarters, while 24% of members receive their copy of Jabberwock electronically. This reduces the print run, although paper costs are increasing rapidly. The Council agreed to proceed with the Christmas Luncheon again - see the advertisement and Booking Form for this event on pages 33-34 in this edition of Jabberwock. The same Booking Form can be downloaded from the home page of the Society website.

Letters to the editor

Dear Malcolm

I was interested in Graham Mottram's article on RNAS *Killingholme* (page 8, Jaberwock 108). There was also HMS *Killingholme* which must have caused some confusion!

HMS *Killingholme* was one of the RN's humblest aviation ships. She and her sister ship, *Brocklesby*, were paddle steamers and built as specialist shallow draft ships to operate as ferries between Hull and New Holland on the wide lower estuary of the Humber.

German Zeppelins were nightly

crossing the English East coast on bombing raids and it was the Navy's job to stop them. HMS *Killingholme* was converted in 1916 to carry two small float planes to intercept them but had no success. It was a while before it was realised that seaplanes and floatplanes were no match for land-based aircraft. HMS *Killingholme* was returned to commercial service in 1917.

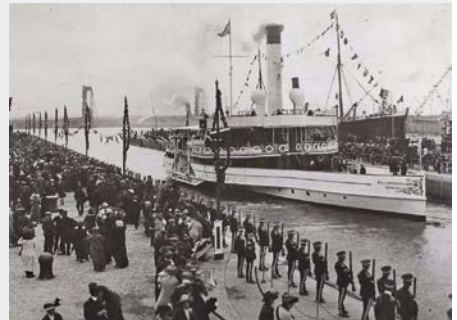
Regards

Chris Howat

The following was taken from an internet article as an interesting aside to Chris's response above about this particular ship.

In 1912, King George V and Queen Mary arrived on board the *Killingholme* to perform the opening ceremony at Immingham Dock, commissioned near the site of a submarine base six miles north-west of Grimsby itself. The intention was to extend the capacity of the existing port, whose earliest dock was developed in the 1790s and which has been for generations synonymous with fish. But it was the demand

for coal that fuelled the growth of Grimsby and the need to build and commission Immingham Dock.



The *Killingholme* entering Immingham Dock, Grimsby, England on 22 July 1912 with the King and Queen aboard, ready to perform the opening ceremony.

Dear Malcolm

The daughter of one of our Members, John Bowden sent me the following verses as a song he wrote while serving

on 753 Naval Air Squadron at Abroath in 1944. The photo below has John sitting in the front row, fourth from left.

753 Song (to the tune of Lili Marlene)

Going down to briefing, what a blooming farce
Listening to the met man, talking through his arse
And as he tells us with a grin: "the icing's thin, you won't spin in"
Oh, how we love the Barra, how we love that kite.

Lots and lots of tackle, climbing up the side
Loads of ***** bullshit, to give two goons a ride
And as we taxi carefully, we know that she will always be
The Fairey Barracuda, what an awful kite.

Trundling down the runway, nothing on the clock
Hangars getting nearer, waiting for the shock
And as we lift her carefully, we know that she will always be
The Fairey Barracuda, oh what an awful kite.

Miles and miles from Langcraig*, flying through a clamp
Engine coughs and splutters, trousers feeling damp
Next course to steer is 264, oh what a bore, where is that shore?
Oh what a lovely aircraft to bring us safely home.

*Navex departure point near Arbroath

Regards
Simon Websper



Dear Editor

I thought the readers of *Jabberwock* may be interested in viewing this photo I have taken of a goblet.

I was fortunate to see this item and procure it from a local charity shop. They only wanted a small amount for this but I doubled the requested figure as I support this particular charity's activities. The goblet has no marks as to the manufacturer but the quality of this piece is obvious when you hear the lovely knell of this glassware when 'chinked' with another crystal glass.

The shop staff could not remember how they received this offering, but I am grateful this is now in my possession and hope the Wardroom at RNAS Yeovilton doesn't mind this being in private hands.

Cheers

Anonymous



Inscribed "Wardroom Mess HMS Heron" with the crest of HMS Heron on the other side .

Dear Malcolm

Having just received *Jabberwock* 108 (excellent as always), I would like to add a small PS to my letter to you regarding *Jabberwock* 107.

While I am by no means qualified to contradict your correspondent Chris Howat on the details of the Type 984 radar system, I can categorically state that use of side numbers including 8 and 9 continued on carrier-operating RN aircraft till mid 1965. (Examples: 801 NAS *Buccaneer* S1s on *Victorious* - codes 115 to 124; 899 NAS *Sea Vixen*

FAW2s on Eagle - codes 485 to 498; 803 NAS *Scimitars* on *Hermes* (to early 1964, thence *Ark Royal*) - codes 145 to 154, on *Ark Royal* 144 to 159).

As an aside, concerning Chris Penny's photo of *Scimitar* XD324/033, I saw it at Dowty-Rotol's facility at Gloucester/Staverton airport in July 1974, and have been told it was used for development of hydraulic systems.

Best regards

Mike Land

Can you name this aircraft

It is about to be launched from a ship at sea? Sorry, no prizes for the correct answer but you will get full marks if you can name the vessel as well.

A Blohm & Voss H139, launched from the MS *Schwabenland*, used by Germany to trial a trans-Atlantic mail service. Flying boats met the mail ships in mid-Atlantic, hoisted inboard, refuelled and catapulted off again. See further details here:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MS_Schwabenland_\(1925\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MS_Schwabenland_(1925))



Dear Editor

Tuesday 15 November 2022 will mark the 80th anniversary of the loss of the escort carrier HMS *Avenger* which took over 500 souls with her to the bottom of the sea off Gibraltar when she was torpedoed by a German U-Boat. Among those who perished were 127 Fleet Air Arm personnel which remains the second biggest loss of life at any one time in our aviation history to date.

An Act of Remembrance will be held at St Bartholomew's FAA Memorial Church at 10:30am on Tuesday 15 November 2022 to commemorate all

those killed on HMS *Avenger*, especially the Fleet Air Arm men that perished.

I would be most grateful if you could promulgate the service among the SoFFAAM Membership. If anyone is interested in attending could they please contact me so we can facilitate ample parking and seating at the church.

Email: Julie.Halford722@mod.gov.uk
Mobile: **07778 425041**

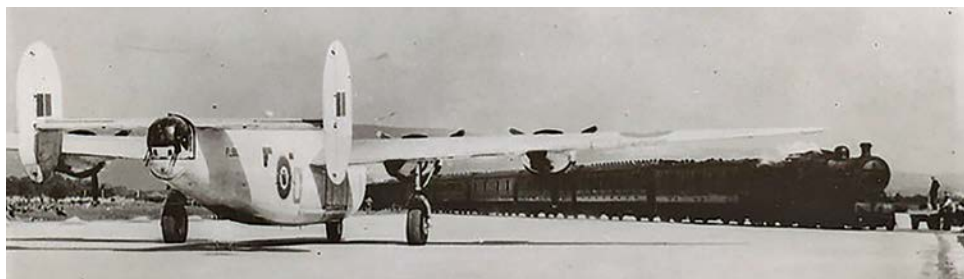
Many thanks
Julia Halford

Dear Editor

The photo on the next page is of RAF Ballykelly and can be found on the excellent website "Second World War in Northern Ireland" at ww2ni.webs.com. It shows an 86 Sqn Liberator GR Mk III of Coastal Command using the runway that was extended in 1943

across the main line to Londonderry.

The Vice Chairman's remarks in Jabberwock 107 on the operation of Ballykelly have in part solved a railway press mystery. This concerns the location of an unknown airfield sign instructing steam locomotive drivers to



“Stop and give way to aircraft”. Clearly such a railway notice was not from Ballykelly where Ivan states trains had priority over aircraft movements, so what other wartime airfields required aircraft having to cross railways? Only two come to mind, Bristol Aeroplane Company’s Filton aerodrome had a branch line to Avonmouth docks running across it. The other was A V Roe’s Hampshire airfield built at Hamble (Hamble-le-Rice) in 1916

where Australian and former RNAS pilot Herbert ‘Bert’ Hinkler, DSM, was Chief Test Pilot between 1921-26. The railway accessed No.1 (Southern) Marine Admiralty Acceptance Depot, although the war ended before this naval seaplane facility on Southampton Water, situated opposite RNAS Calshot had entered use.

Regards
Chris Penney

Dear Malcolm

There we were having a romantic Golden Anniversary cruise on the MS *Bolette*, when suddenly this voice says: “It’s Rosanne from SOFFAAM,” and blow me down, yes there he was - Ralph Sibley, one of our fellow members of SOFFAAM!

The Jabberwock in the picture was later presented to the captain of the ship in gratitude for allowing me to organise a Veterans’ lunch on board, which he and six fellow officers briefly attended.

Regards
Rosanne Crowther



Own a print of 'Humphrey'

All proceeds will go to SoFFAAM and help the Society to support the Fleet Air Arm Museum.



'Humphrey' on Fortuna Glacier rescuing a troop of SAS and crashed Wessex HU.5 crew. This has been painted by SoFFAAM Member Dan Hedger and signed prints are available © Dan Hedger

Working with the artist Dan Hedger, SoFFAAM is making prints available of this painting as a fund raiser, to commemorate the actions of 'Humphrey' on Fortuna Glacier.

They are A3+ (485mm x 330mm) limited edition prints of 25 and signed by Rear Admiral Chris Parry CBE and Dan Hedger. Available for £25.00. An A3 print of just the painting (unsigned) is also available for just £5. Postage and

Packing for either print is just £3.50.

You can order these from Richard Macauley by emailing him at soffaam@btinternet.com or **07768 562976**.

Dan is always looking for new military aviation subjects to paint, if you would like a particular aircraft rendered please get in touch with him on **07540 723854** or email him at danhedger@hotmail.com You can view his work on his website: www.aviatorartstudio.com

Three Albert Medals in one night

By Graham Mottram



A group of Polegate men who had received awards during the war. Eric Steere is seated 1st left, and Harold Robinson standing 4th left.

Most histories of WW1 relate that German U-boats nearly brought the British war effort to its knees in 1917.

After the defeat at Jutland the German Navy determined not to risk its major surface warships again, and instead turned to U-boats to strangle Britain's trade routes. The threat had not been entirely unforeseen and the RNAS had already created a chain of seaplane stations, mainly around the east coast, by the end of 1914. To provide more patrol capability and capacity the fixed wing patrols were later supplemented by lighter than air airships, with their ability to escort convoys for several hours at a time. One of the new stations

built to house patrol airships was RNAS Polegate, just to the north west of Eastbourne in East Sussex.

The site of the station was occupied from early 1915 but it was another year before airship sheds and accommodation blocks had been built and Polegate could become fully operational. The first airships housed there were Supermarine Scout (SS) Type, followed by the improved SSZ (Supermarine Scout Zero). Although simple in concept and a bit cheap and cheerful these were large craft; major improvements on the original SS type. Designed at RNAS Capel, they had a custom-designed boat shaped

underslung car, replacing earlier craft with modified aeroplane fuselages, and were powered by the purpose-built Rolls Royce Hawk engine of 75 hp. The envelope was 143 feet in length and 32 feet in diameter, and contained 70,000 cu.ft. of hydrogen.

SSZ6 was assembled at Polegate in early July 1917, the first of a batch of five airships (SSZ6-SSZ10) which arrived in the space of one month. The event in which it was involved was one of the few which resulted in the award of multiple Albert Medals on land. Most of the others occurred on the Western Front and usually involved ammunition trains or ordnance dumps. There were also two Albert Medal in Gold recipients which were not posthumous.

Victor Albert Watson was born in 1897 in the City of London. His father was the Clerk of Works at the Bank of England and he had two brothers William and Henry. The family were

relatively well off with a servant, and Victor was educated at Merchant Taylor's School.

On the outbreak of World War I, he enlisted with the Royal Naval Air Service, trained as an airship pilot and was posted to Polegate. As Christmas approached in 1917 the weather became decidedly wintry and on 20 December five airships were out on patrol when an afternoon fog closed in and resulted in a wireless call, "All ships to return to base".

"The weather... during the forenoon of December 20, 1917, inclined to be hazy with a small amount of sun showing through. The temperature was low, the snow which had fallen in the preceding days now lying around fairly thickly, covering everything with a frozen blanket." In these conditions five SS Zero class airships had taken off for a normal operational patrol over the approaches to the English Channel.



The burned out wreck of SSZ10 at Willingdon Hill Farm.

Obedying the order to return was not a simple exercise and as daylight faded hopes of making base vanished with the light. The captains aloft made a standard decision to find a suitable site to moor out for the night or to wait for the fog to disperse. SSZ 6 came down safely in a field north of Hailsham. SSZ 7 and SSZ 19 came in near Beachy Head Coastguard Station. SSZ 9 and SSZ 10 came down separately at Hill Farm, Willingdon.

Later in the evening the strengthening wind caused concern that the ships may not be able to hold their temporary moorings and were ordered to try to return to base. SSZ19 made it safely back and after a sensible gap in time, Flt. S/Lt. Richard Swallow set off in SSZ7.

As two airships fumbled their way through the fog to find a landing space SSZ7 crashed into the SSZ10 in mid-air. The sharp keel of SSZ7 ripped open the envelope and the skin of at least one of SSZ10's gas ballonets. The escaping

cloud of hydrogen blew into the sparks of one or both engines and exploded into flames. Both cars plunged to the ground surrounded by flaming gas and fabric. Watson, the senior officer on the spot, immediately rushed up to the car of SSZ10 "under the impression that one of the crew was still inside although he was well aware that there were bombs attached to the airship that could explode at any time. Having satisfied himself that there was no one in the car, he turned away to render assistance elsewhere. At that moment one of the bombs exploded, shattering his right arm, which had to be amputated almost immediately." Watson later received the Albert Medal.

He was not alone in his efforts to save lives. Two other men dashed into the inferno and extricated the pilot and two crew members from one of the cars, all of whom were seriously injured.

Harold Robinson and Eric Steere were awarded the Albert Medal in Gold: "Mechanic H. V. Robinson and Boy



Flt. S/Lt. Victor Watson.



Flt. S/Lt. Richard Swallow.

Mechanic E. E. Steere, then unclipped the bombs from the burning car and carried them out of reach of the fire. By the time they had saved the crew and gone back to the bombs, the weapons were so hot that they scorched the men's hands as they carried them. They must have expected the bombs to explode but fortunately they did not."

The only person to lose his life in this accident was 26 year old Richard Swallow, originally from Gateshead, who had joined the navy in 1909 and worked his way up to CPO in the RNAS before being commissioned in the summer of 1917 and qualifying as a (highly rated) airship pilot. Swallow left his wife Hetty the princely sum of £62 in his will.

Harold Victor Robinson was born in Glencorse, Midlothian and, listed as "Motor Engineer", enlisted in September 1915 as an Air Mechanic 1st Class in the RNAS, serving at Polegate during late 1917. He was barely 20 at the time. After the war Robinson emigrated to Australia, and he died at Kangaroo Point in October 1969.

Three years younger than Robinson and only in the RNAS for five months was Eric Edward Steere. He was only fifteen when his elder brother was killed in action when HMS *Lynx* was mined off the Moray Firth on 9 August 1915. Eric was determined to enlist and in January 1916, a month before his 16th birthday, he enlisted at Shoreham in the Royal West Kents by lying about this age. Found out, he was discharged and served in the Training Ship *Mercury* until he was old enough to join the

RNAS, where he specialised in being a wireless operator. After recovering from his burns and returning to duty, Steere stayed on in the peacetime RAF, and in the airship arm, but was sadly one of the 44 crewmen killed when the airship R38 broke up and crashed into the Humber in August 1921.

Victor Watson married into the jewellery trade and became a Freeman of the Goldsmiths Company in 1927. In 1971, he chose to retain his Albert Medal in Bronze rather than exchange it for a George Cross following the change to the Royal Warrant. Watson died in London on 2nd October 1974 and was cremated at Golders Green Crematorium, where there is a memorial plaque to him and his wife, who pre-deceased him in 1958.



The grave of the only fatality, Flt. S/Lt. Richard Swallow.

Temporary Sub Lieutenant (Air) Frederick Dennis Websper

An edited version of an account by Tony Jupp.



F D Websper (Lofty) on the right with his fellow crew members while at RNAS Piarco. © Simon Websper

Frederick Dennis Websper was born in Montevideo, Uruguay, on 27 March 1925. At the age of 19, he joined the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve and after basic training was commissioned as a Temporary Sub Lieutenant (Air).

In February 1945, He was appointed to the No.1 Observers School at RNAS Piarco (HMS *Goshawk*) in Trinidad. His first flight in Trinidad was on 12 February 1945 in a Stinson Reliant of 752 Squadron coded 'AO' for an air experience flight. (The AT19 Stinson Reliant had been supplied to Britain

under lend-Lease.) This was the start of his Part II Observers Course. Frederick's second flight was in a Grumman Goose Ia of 749 Sqn serial number FP476 coded 'W2B'. The Grumman Goose amphibious aircraft was another type supplied under Lend-Lease. Three further flights that week were for wind finding as the first practical exercises in navigation. Frederick then flew in Reliants and the Goose until 27 March 1945 when he had his first flight in a Fairey Albacore and shortly after in a Fairey Barracuda. On 14 July 1945



Stinson Reliant I serial number FK842 coded 'AG' of 752 Sqn, part of No.1 Observer School, seen here at RNAS Piarco in Trinidad. Frederick flew in this aircraft on 21 February 1945 for one hour 20 minutes whilst being piloted by Lieutenant Commander Lee. © S Websper

Frederick's course finished and he achieved a pass mark of 77%. He had amassed a total of 143 hours 10 minutes daytime flying and 10 hours night flying.

There are few details of the Barracudas allotted to 750 Sqn at RNAS Piarco. Three serial number allocations are known, these are DR255, MD799 and LS797 with only the code known was for LS797, that was 'B9'. Frederick was appointed to 735 Sqn at RNAS Burscough (HMS *Ringtail*) in Lancashire in September 1945. 735 was an Air to Surface Vessel (ASV) radar training unit equipped with Avro Anson Is and Barracuda IIs.

Frederick was trained to operate the AN/APS-4 radar equipment, which was designed to detect aircraft in flight but could additionally be used for radar navigation, radar beacon homing and radar bombing. The equipment was also known as ASH and ASV Mk IX. The equipment was usually pod mounted, its installation in the Barracuda was on a wing leading edge, both port and starboard wing leading edge installations are recorded. It was also installed in Grumman Avengers and Fairey Fireflies. Frederick first flew in an Anson that he records with a partial serial number '189' on 24 September



Grumman Goose. © IWM



Fairey Albacore. © IWM



Grumman Avenger. © IWM



Fairey Barracuda II. © IWM

1945 for a 55-minute familiarisation flight. His first flight in a Barracuda with this squadron was on 4 October 1945 for a coastline identification flight lasting for 2 hours and 55 minutes. Frederick's last flight on this course was on 9 October 1945 in Barracuda II serial number MX659. His total flying hours for the course were 14 hours 25 minutes with a course grading of 'C'. Frederick's next appointment was to 786 Sqn based at RNAS Crail (HMS *Jackdaw*) in Fife. 786 was a Torpedo Bomber Reconnaissance (TBR) training squadron first formed on 4 November 1940, the first Barracudas arriving during December 1942 and the squadron disbanding on 21 December 1945 when it was absorbed by 785 Sqn.

Frederick logged an Avenger Conversion flight before moving to 783 Sqn, part of the Naval Air Signal School at RNAS Arbroath (HMS *Condor*). 783 was an ASV training squadron that operated Ansons, Barracudas, Avengers and Fairey Fireflies. The Ansons were equipped as flying classrooms, presumably at least one equipped with Avenger ASV equipment. As soon as he completed his course Frederick was back with 786 Sqn at RNAS Crail. Frederick's first period with 786 was short, but this

final period was even shorter, lasting for only five days, however he achieved three flights in this time in Barracudas coded '3Y', '4D' and '3R'. His total flying time with 786 Sqn totalled 4 hours 10 minutes and his flight in '3R' was his last ever flight in a Barracuda. Frederick's next brief appointment was for six weeks to 711 Sqn, luckily still at RNAS Crail. 711 Sqn was a TBR training squadron, equipped with Barracudas that were supplemented in August 1945 with Avengers that operated as the Avenger Naval Operational Training Unit (NOTU). Frederick was with the squadron as part of the Avenger NOTU when it was absorbed into 785 Sqn along with his other old squadron, 786. 785 Sqn was part of No.1 NOTU but the squadron was only short-lived after this as it was disbanded on 1 March 1946. Frederick's Avenger training concluded on 2 January 1946 and he received a 'Pass' for his efforts.

A Royal Naval Aircraft Direction Centre (RNADC) was established at Kete on the Pembrokeshire coast in 1945 as an outstation of RNAS Dale (HMS *Goldcrest*) about half a mile distant. Its purpose was to train fighter direction controllers, to verbally direct fighters to intercept enemy aircraft that had been detected by radar. The



Miles Martinet I. The Queen Martinet was virtually identical but without the target tug winch seen below the cockpit. © S Websper



Avro Anson I. © S Websper

ADC moved to RNAS Culdrose (HMS *Seahawk*) on 13 December 1947. It is not known how long Frederick spent on his course at Kete but he 'Qualified' on 5 April 1946.

773 Sqn formed at RNAS Lee-on-Solent (HMS *Daedalus*) on 1 June 1945 as a service trials unit for the development of pilotless aircraft, hence its unofficial name as the Pilotless Aircraft Unit. The squadron moved to RNAS Brawdy during March 1946. Aircraft used were the Miles Queen Martinet drone aircraft that were flown with a pilot onboard, as well as de Havilland Mosquito B25s used as chase aircraft and drone controllers, and Avro Ansons. Frederick's first flight on the squadron was in an Anson I on 24 April 1946 for local flying. On 16 May he flew in an Anson I to Woodley near Reading, returning the same day with a different pilot. This was probably in connection with the Queen Martinets in use with the squadron, as the aerodrome at Woodley was the home of Miles Aircraft Limited, the aircraft's manufacturer. Frederick flew in two of the three aircraft allotted to 773 Sqn: serial number RH186 on 24 May and serial number RH185 on 31 May. The third Queen Martinet was serial number RH182. On 5 June

Frederick flew in a Mosquito B25 serial number KB670 for a 'Range test of Radio Controller'. This may have been connected with his attendance on a Ground Control Approach Course that he passed the following day, 6 June, at RNAS Dale. Frederick flew a further three times in the two Queen Martinets but he also flew in Anson XIs twice, once in serial number PH663 on 17 July and once in serial number PH655 on 21 August. Frederick's last flight with the squadron was on 27 August in Queen Martinet serial number RH185 for some final local flying. In his five months with the squadron, he had flown a total of 11 hours ten minutes.

Frederick had only one more flight left in his short naval aviation career. This occurred on 24 April 1947 in a Mosquito TR33 serial number TW251 of 811 Sqn that was based at RNAS Ford (HMS *Peregrine*). This 'Local' flying lasted for one hour five minutes.

In his short flying career of just over two years Frederick has flown for a total of 194 hours daytime flying and 13 hours 30 minutes night flying, a grand total of 207 hours 30 minutes.

Footnote

Tony Jupp compiled this article from reference supplied by Simon Websper, the son of F D Websper. Simon is SoFFAAM Membership Secretary.

Commando Helicopter Force marks Dartmoor National Park crash sites

By Chris Penney



As part of a training exercise 846 Squadron gave Dartmoor National Park a helping hand to airlift memorial stones. © Commando Helicopter Force - RNAS Yeovilton.

Yeovilton's Commando Helicopter Force (CHF) has helped Dartmoor National Park formally recognise US aircrew killed just days and yards apart in 1943.

Commando Merlin Mk4s delivered two cumbersome memorial stones to the remote air crash sites near Meldon Reservoir, Okehampton in Devon. The underslung load moves were performed by 846 Squadron and a CHF Mobile Air Operational Team.

Five USAAF airmen died when their Weather Flight B-17G 42-37869

crashed in low cloud on Corn Ridge, near Sourton Tor. The reconnaissance Flying Fortress was routing to its Cheddington, Buckinghamshire base on Christmas Day 1943 from RAF St Eval, Cornwall; three crew including a RAF meteorologist survived. St Eval hosted a RAF Coastal Command meteorological HQ and resident RAF 517 Meteorological Squadron were loaned several USAAF B-17Fs in late 1943 while awaiting Handley Page Halifax replacements.

Three days later US Navy PB4Y-

1/B-24D Liberator 'B-5' 63926 also impacted Corn Ridge while flying in dense cloud and icing may have caused the accident. All ten crew aboard the 110th Bombing Squadron (VB-110) Anti-submarine bomber returning to RAF Dunkeswell, Devon, on the Blackdown Hills were killed.

VB-110's December 1943 mission from Dunkeswell was initiated by the departure of the 2,729-ton German blockade runner *Alsterufer* from Batavia, Java, capital of Japanese-occupied Netherlands East Indies. She had sailed on 10 November carrying a mixed cargo of raw materials vital for Nazi Germany's war industry including rubber. Her destination was a Biscay port on France's Atlantic west coast believed to be Bordeaux.

Enemy cargo ships operating from Bordeaux to the Far East had been the target of a daring Royal Marines commando raid using kayaks and limpet mines the previous December; Operation Frankton portrayed in the 1955 film *The Cockleshell Heroes*. Then *Alsterufer* was at the U-boat base of Saint-Nazaire on the Loire refitting and escaped attack. Given the Bay of Biscay's notorious winter weather the *Alsterufer* hoped poor visibility would cloak the ship's return passage across the Bay from Allied air patrols. However, Ultra intelligence decrypt analysis by Bletchley Park derived from intercepted radio signals forewarned RAF Coastal Command. Such intelligence was often gleaned by minesweeping activity following RAF minelaying of coastal shipping channels off the U-boat bases



and Bordeaux's Gironde Estuary was a particular target. Enemy signals traffic was also picked up from surface craft dispatched to escort blockade runners or messages warning U-boats of their arrival.

Coastal Command's Biscay offensive against the U-boat had been ongoing since May 1943, when Allied countermeasures had forced them from their North Atlantic convoy hunting grounds. As a result twenty of the Command's UK-based long-range Anti-submarine warfare (ASW) squadrons patrolled the U-boat transit routes as they deployed from their Biscay bases. This included Dunkeswell's three US Navy Liberator squadrons, which following RAF familiarisation at

St Eval, deployed to Devon between 30 September and 22 October 1943. They assumed ASW duties from 479th Group US Army Air Force B-24D Liberators and reported to 19 Group Coastal Command.

RAF Dunkeswell was rebuilt by USN Seabees to handle up to four VB squadrons, each resident squadron usually being allocated 12 aircraft. Navalised B-24D, J, L and M production models of Consolidated's very long-range Liberator bomber were all designated PB4Y-1 in US Navy service. Early B-24D conversions were given a nose-mounted ventral ball turret armament for U-boat strafing. Replacing the standard bomber's ventral gun turret was a retractable antenna radome for the S Band SCR-717 Air-to-Surface Vessel search radar. Weaponry included the new ASW 92-pound Mark 24 mine - an acoustic homing torpedo first used operationally in May 1943.

Patrolling from Gibraltar were RAF Liberator ASW aircraft and with no German maritime activity in the Bay of Biscay exempt from Allied air attack the Luftwaffe responded. 1 Zerstörergeschwader Wing flew long-range Junkers 88C twin-engined fighters in free roaming packs of up to eight or more from Lorient and Bordeaux's Mérignac airfield. It forced RAF 10 Group intruder Mosquitos and 19 Group Beaufighters in Cornwall and at Talbenny, Pembrokeshire, to carry out 'Instep' anti-Ju88 sweeps over the Bay in support of Coastal Command's ASW patrols.

Kriegsmarine destroyers at Brest and Bordeaux necessitated a RN light cruiser to cover the Biscay-assigned Escort Group hunting U-boats en route from their French bases. For her run across the Bay *Alsterufer* was promised Luftwaffe protection against the Royal Navy; Heinkel 177 bombers armed with HS293, a new 500-pound anti-ship glide bomb. The revolutionary radio-controlled weapon had achieved its first ship 'kill' in the Bay that August, when an HS293 from a Dornier 217 bomber sank Londonderry-based sloop and 1st Escort Group flagship HMS *Egret*.

Around 09.45 on 27 December 1943 *Alsterufer* was located by 201 Squadron Sunderland flying boat 'T Toc' airborne from RAF Castle Archdale on the shores of Lough Erne, Northern Ireland. 201 Squadron was one of the RAF's oldest squadrons having formed at Gosport, Hampshire, in October 1914 as 1 Squadron Royal Naval Air Service, being renumbered in 1918. She was joined by Sunderland 'U' of 201, and 422 & 423 RCAF Squadron Sunderlands also from Lough Erne. Intense flak from the vessel prevented low-level attacks using 500-pound bombs and attempts at bombing through cloud failed. It took a bomb and 60-pound semi-armour piercing RP-3 rocket salvo from Liberator GR MkV 'H' of 311 Czechoslovak Squadron, out of RAF Beaulieu, Hampshire, to leave *Alsterufer* burning. She was sunk by a Ballykelly-based 86 Squadron Liberator.

Under cover of the bad weather six German destroyers sortied from Bordeaux to escort *Alsterufer* and they



An Airfix model depicts Dunkeswell resident PB4Y-1 Liberator 'B-6' without the ball-style nose turret, circa 1944.

were spotted by a USN VP-63 squadron PBY-5A Catalina that had departed RAF Pembroke Dock. Another destroyer flotilla had left Brest and neither group were aware the *Alsterufer* had already sunk. Following the Catalina sighting 15 PB4Y-1s launched from Dunkeswell on 28 December to hunt the enemy, including VB-110's Liberator 'B-5'. The destroyers were bombed and strafed, one being straddled by near misses. An aircraft took flak damage with the crew later bailing out over Spanish territory. Two RN cruisers vectored to intercept the enemy sank three of the destroyers in a gunnery duel named Battle of the Bay of Biscay.

The USN bombers encountered 12 Junkers 88 fighters and four Heinkel 177s over the Bay. One PB4Y-1 shot down a He177. Returning Liberator 'B-5' reporting it had been attacked by two Luftwaffe fighters during the mission; a propeller blade recovered from the high ground wreck on Dartmoor is displayed at Dunkeswell Airfield's Heritage Centre.

Between 1943-45 the Devon-based US Army and Navy ASW force sank ten U-boats and lost 28 Liberators, and



US Marine Attaché to the UK Lt Colonel Adam Lefringhouse, USMC, at Dunkeswell airfield's memorial on 12 June 2022. © Chris Penney.

every June the Parish Council holds a church service in remembrance. The crash site memorials airlifted into place on Dartmoor by 846 Squadron were crafted by the Duchy of Cornwall royal estate with funding from the National Park and UK MoD. Formal dedication services are planned before 2023's anniversaries.

Footnote

517 Meteorological Squadron Halifax MET MkIII RG380/N crashed in low cloud on the Quantock Hills, Somerset, on 10 September 1945 killing all nine crew, including Louis Groves; his uncle was Commander Robert Groves RN, DSO, Officer Commanding 1 Squadron, RNAS in 1916. RAF 201 Squadron 'inherited' 1 Squadron RNAS battle honours "Western Front 1915-18", "Arras" and "Ypres 1917" and today operates the ASW Poseidon MRA1 maritime patrol jet, known in US Navy VP squadron service as the P-8.

SoFFAAM Membership and the advantages

By Richard Macauley



Sopwith Baby (N2078) 'Jabbercock' at the Fleet Air Arm Museum. © Richard Macauley

I thought it a worthwhile exercise to reiterate the advantages of SoFFAAM Membership.

It is hoped that all our readers realise the excellent value of Membership and suggest that friends and family can be persuaded to join. An excellent Christmas gift perhaps.

Museum Entrance and discounts

Members continue to have access to the Museum for free for the whole of their Membership year. They can bring up to four guests for a 30% reduced entry price. The Museum tells us that they are now accepting 'walk-up' entry

but it is still best to book an online ticket to gain a price advantage for your guests beyond the 30% reduction.

As well as the re-vamped Carrier exhibit (see pages 26-29) the museum has restarted its volunteer talks programme, free for visitors with a valid museum ticket, where the volunteers talk about a particular aircraft or artefacts. They also have other events planned within the Museum so check out their website www.fleetairarm.com

You can enjoy a coffee and snack in the revitalised Warneford Café at a 20% reduction on listed prices. The 20% reduction also applies to

the Museum shop, so with Christmas coming...

SoFFAAM is most grateful to the Museum for these valuable concessions*.

The museum is open Wednesday to Sunday, 10am to 4.30pm. It is also open Mondays and Tuesdays during School Holidays.

Jabberwock Magazine

Possibly one of the most time consuming but rewarding offering is compiling Jabberwock the society magazine. Therefore it is important that those who read it enjoy the contents. We are happy to receive letters and comments about the articles along with receiving submissions from Members or their friends and acquaintances. So please tell the editorial team what you think using the contact details on page 1 under the contents listing.

Talks Programme

You can see details of our upcoming speakers on page 30. But we would like to hear from members if they would like to share their story or know anyone who would.

You do not need to be a Member to attend our Talks so persuade your friends to join in as well, either at the Museum or on Zoom.

Website

A good source of information for Society Members and don't forget the Members area where you can review and download the whole back catalogue of Jabberwock. The password for the Members area is in both Jabberwock 107 and 108.

*Concessions footnote

Museum entry concessions to SoFFAAM members and their guests is given by the Museum but could be withdrawn at any time.

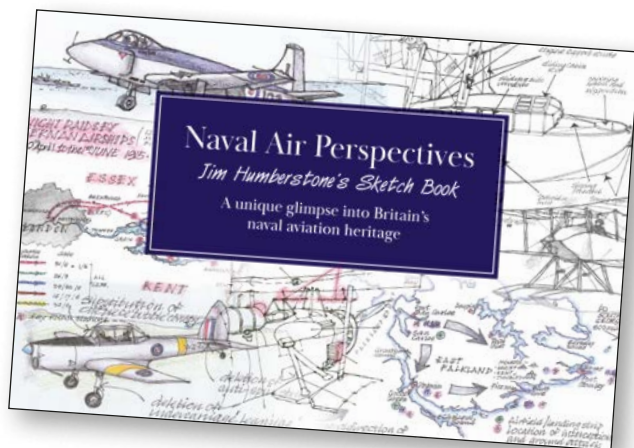
A new book with the drawings by Jim Humberstone will be available very soon.

Jim's illustrations have graced the pages of Jabberwock for many years and this book features old and new drawings along with stories and the exploits of the subjects depicted.

This book will be available from Amazon in the near future.

We will send out detail of how to obtain a copy as soon as it is available.

Contact Richard Macauley on 07768 562976 or soffaam@btinternet.com for information.



SoFFAAM visit to Historic Helicopters at Chard

By Richard Macauley



A happy SoFFAAM group pose alongside a Sea King HC4. © Richard Macauley.

The Society's first foray post Covid pandemic saw a small group travel to Historic Helicopters Chard.

Rosanne, our visits organiser did us proud with this opening visit as although this is a small organisation, the huge enthusiasm of our members was matched by our wonderful guide Peter and his young assistant.

Peter gave us a detailed briefing in the HHC Boardroom which was bedecked with all sorts of helicopter memorabilia and had individuals recalling connections with said exhibits.

We then went into their two

hangars where 'no cat could be swung' and carefully manoeuvred our way around, peering into open doors and hatches of the Sea Kings, Wessex, Lynx, Whirlwind, Widgeon and the owner's Sikorsky S-76A, all the while hearing the informative Peter and his detailed commentary on each aircraft's history and statistics.

Thank you very much HHC (and Rosanne) for giving us such an excellent visit. Have a look at the HHC website to see more details about what they do in keeping these historic aircraft flying.

www.historichelicopters.com

Welcome to the Junglies

By kind permission of Navy News



Waiting to receive their wings in the hangar at RNAS Yeovilton. © PO(Phot) Des Wade, CHF.

Five pilots and two aircrewmen with the Commando Helicopter Force (CHF) are awarded their wings.

The seven trainees received the coveted insignia from Commodore Nick Walker, deputy head of the Fleet Air Arm, at RNAS Yeovilton.

For the student pilots, the road to wings passed through Dartmouth, a short assessment at Yeovilton on Grob Tutors to determine if they possessed the qualities expected of all aviators and complete Elementary Flying Training.

Next came pilot training in the Juno HT1 helicopters at RAF Shawbury from general handling, through the hover (described as “easy once you’ve got the hang of it”), then advanced manoeuvres: instrument flying, low-level navigation, landing/taking off from confined spaces, night flying including low level with Night Vision Devices,

mountain flying and moving under-slung loads.

The trainee aircrewmen, either came directly from HMS *Raleigh* or from other branches of the RN who wanted a career change. They learn the art of voice marshalling, navigation and operating the helicopter to make it the useful machine that it is. They are also exposed to student pilots from all three Services and began the evolving world of Crew Resource Management to become a refined and efficient team, culminating in a major exercise/assessment at Shawbury.

Then to 846 Naval Air Squadron and the Merlin Mk4/Mk4a, a significantly more complex and larger helicopter than the Juno. Mountain flying around RAF Anglesey and Snowdonia, a short deployment to Denmark, plus two weeks at sea aboard HMS *Queen Elizabeth* all ramping up to the final MILEX assessment (MILitary EXercise).

Lt Edward Riley earned the Bill Murton Trophy for displaying the best Junglie spirit/ethos during training. The Westland Trophy was presented to Lt Patrick Richardson for the best all-round results in operational flying training and the ‘Doc’ Love Trophy to Sgt Simon Whitby RM for epitomising the Junglie spirit and ethos in training.

Carrier exhibit re-opening

By Malcolm Smith



Carrier exhibit main deck looking towards the island. © Richard Macauley.

The Fleet Air Arm Museum re-opened its Carrier Experience exhibition on 27 July 2022.

The £1m refurbished experience invites visitors to immerse themselves in the complex combination of skill, technology and teamwork that powers

the modern aircraft carrier. The new flight deck arrangement sees several rare and unique aircraft types, including the sole surviving examples of a Westland Wyvern and Supermarine Attacker aircraft, also a Sopwith Pup, the first aircraft type to land on board a moving ship in 1917. A Buccaneer S Mk 1 is included in the display – one of only four surviving S Mk 1s and in its original Cold War condition even down to the paintwork.

The Carrier Experience is dedicated to the memory of generous benefactor Vice Admiral Sir Donald Gosling KCV0, Admiral of The United Kingdom. It blends the best of digital technology with the scale of a carrier flight deck



Adam Gosling opening the exhibit, the son of Sir Donald Gosling. © Richard Macauley.

to transport visitors from the pioneer years of the First World War, all the way to the aircraft carriers of today. With AV projections some 100 feet long, visitors are immersed in the sights and sounds of a carrier at sea and watching, in cinematic detail, Squadron Commander Dunning's pioneering landing on a moving ship over 100 years ago.

The Exhibition provides an opportunity to see the technology used in *Queen Elizabeth* class carriers as well as learning all about the highly skilled people behind the aircraft. Visitors can visit the 'island', the command centre of the carrier, meeting a virtual cast of characters to get a taste - and feel - of what those serving on board experienced. At the centre of the UK's Carrier Strike Group is its air superiority fighter-bomber, the F-35 Lightning II. Thanks to support from Lockheed Martin, the exhibition creates a dramatic audio-visual experience of this technologically advanced fifth generation aircraft. The experience features projection mapping technology, overlaid on an impressive revolving F-35B model, creating a stunning display detailing the role of the F-35B and its capabilities.

At the opening, Donald Gosling's son Adam said: "... the original Carrier Experience opened in 1994 and has welcomed over four million visitors. To see the Experience reinvigorated and made meaningful and relevant for today's audience is the perfect way to celebrate my late father's enduring support of the Fleet Air Arm Museum. His generous legacy gift has enabled

the illustrious tale of Britain's aircraft carriers to be told, and enjoyed, for many more generations to come."

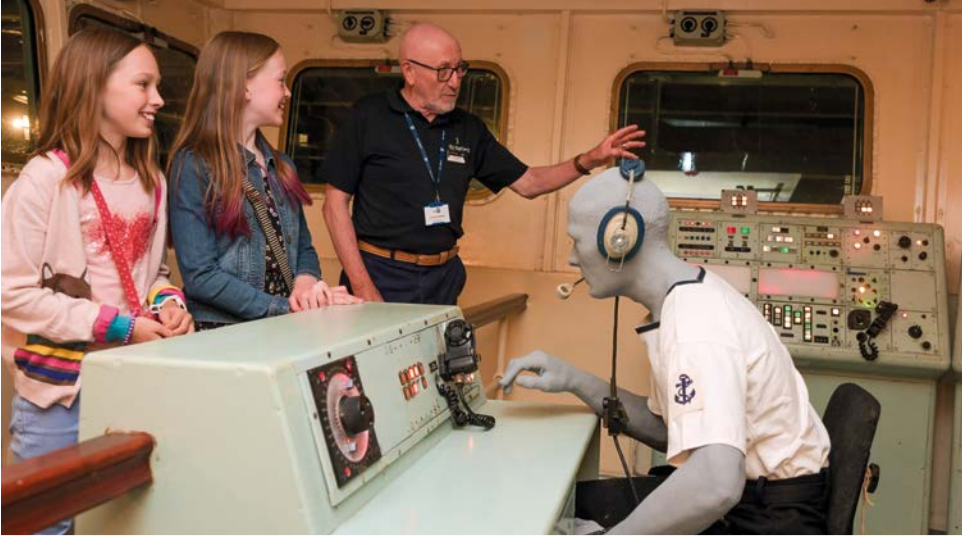
Professor Dominic Tweddle, Director General of The National Museum of the Royal Navy commented, "The re-imagining of the Carrier Experience to include the *Queen Elizabeth* Class ... demonstrates our ongoing commitment to the history of naval aviation and telling the story of the contemporary navy. This mix of heritage and modernity mirrors the projects that Sir Donald Gosling so generously supported over the years. I am certain that the work of the staff team, contractors and corporate partner Lockheed Martin has brought to life the Carrier story in the way that Sir Donald had in mind when he made his legacy gift. It is both an honour and a pleasure to recognise his lifelong support with this exhibition, which is housed in The Gosling Hall."

Melanie Coles, Communications Manager at Lockheed Martin, added "Lockheed Martin are pleased that we have enabled a display to showcase F-35 technology, bringing the story of the aircraft to life."



CSG exhibit and F35 audio visual presentation.
© Richard Macauley.

Carrier exhibit photos



Don Andrews, a FAAM Volunteer describing the bridge functions to some young visitors. © NMRN.



The engaging displays at the Carrier Experience demonstrate the family friendly nature of the new features. © NMRN.

Do not let these photos of the re-opened Carrier Experience be your only insight to this excellent new exhibit.

Use your SoFFAAM Membership to visit the Museum for free and you can

bring up to 4 guests at a 30% reduction on the normal ticket price.

You can also get a 20% reduction on any purchases in the Museum shop and Warneford Cafe.



Aircraft Direction Room exhibit and audio visual presentation. © Richard Macauley.



Main Carrier Deck showing the huge audio visual screen some 100 feet long. This traces the beginnings of the aircraft carrier through to the present day. © Richard Macauley.

Future Talks

By Richard Macauley



McDonnell Douglas F4K Phantom at the Navy Wings night shoot 2017. © Richard Macauley

It is fair to say that the Blackburn Buccaneer was very well represented this year with an excellent Talk by Air Commodore (Rtd) Graham Pitchfork MBE - see review opposite.

While the Buccaneer is a firm favourite of mine, I am hoping someone out there has a connection with the F4 Phantom, especially in Fleet Air Arm service.

700P (IFTU), 767 and 892 Squadrons all had a hand in bringing the Phantom into FAA service and operational use. I would dearly like to hear someone give a talk about this iconic aircraft to the Society to 'balance out' Graham Pitchfork's very detailed and erudite presentation. So, if anyone knows of air or groundcrew who could talk about my equally favourite aircraft,

please get them to contact me on the details at the bottom of this column. I will be happy to engage them to talk to the Society in 2023.

We try to keep an eclectic mix of speakers, and I hope this list of future presentations will be of interest to our Members and their guests.

**Michael Napier - RAF Tornado
pilot and noted author**
24 November 2022

**Christmas Zoom - subjects
to be confirmed but will
include a Falklands quiz**
29 December

2023
26 January - TBC

AEW Sea Kings
23 February

**Tim Prince - RIAT 'Desert
Island Discs' anecdotes**
30 March

**Nicci Pugh - White Ship, Red Crosses.
SS Uganda Hospital Ship at War**
27 April

If anyone has a special request for a particular person of subject to present to the Society, please contact me on **01278 683300** or **07768 562976** or they can email me at **soffaam@btinternet.com**

The Blackburn Buccaneer in service

By Air Commodore (Rtd) Graham Pitchfork MBE.
July 2022 Talk Summarised by Robert Heath



Graham spent 36 years as a navigator in the RAF, much of it in Buccaneers.

During the Cold War, he said, Russia built the powerful 16,500 tonne *Sverdlov* class cruisers. The UK's response was to define a specialized carrier-borne strike aircraft - the NA39, which became the Buccaneer. This was for a two-seat aircraft with folding wings, capable of Mach 0.85 at 200ft, a 400 nm range and the ability to deliver conventional or nuclear weapons

Blackburn's built the prototype at its Brough factory in Yorkshire. The design featured a relatively small wing, ideal for high-speed low-level flight, with a boundary layer control system that enabled lower landing speeds. Other novel features included the rotating bomb bay door and massive rear air brakes. The aircraft made its

first flight on 30 April 1958 and the first carrier landing was in HMS *Victorious* in August 1960. The Mk1 was underpowered and the Mk 2, with more powerful Rolls Royce Spey engines, entered service in 1965.

Buccaneers played a prominent role in the Beira Patrol in 1966 and when the tanker *Torrey Canyon* ran aground off Cornwall in 1967, Buccaneers were tasked to break open the hull and ignite the spilt oil with 1,000lb bombs. After the decision to retire the RN's aircraft carriers, RN Buccaneers were transferred to the RAF and an additional 46 new-build Buccaneers were ordered for the RAF. These were delivered with RAF communications and avionics and a fuel tank with a 2,500lb capacity bulging from the rotating bomb bay.

RAF Buccaneers participated in a 'Red Flag' combat training exercise at Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada and the aircraft also took part in the Gulf War. Graham commented that the Tornado could not fly as far, nor could it carry as many weapons as the Buccaneer.

Thank you Graham Pitchfork for a thumping good talk. For those members unable to attend in person, do join us via Zoom.

Development of the P51 Mustang

By Sqn Ldr (Rtd) Rod Dean.

September 2022 Talk Summarised by Robert Heath



Rod thought the Mustang was probably a better aircraft than the Spitfire, because it would escort bombers all the way to distant targets. It had the same engine as the Spitfire, but was faster, carried more ammunition and had a better range. Rod put this down to good design and exacting production techniques. All were built to very high tolerances and all parts were interchangeable

The Mustang design originated in a proposal from the British Purchasing Commission to North American to build Curtiss P40 Tomahawks for Britain. Instead, North American suggested that it could design a better aircraft. The Ministry of Aircraft Production placed an order for 320 aircraft in March 1940 and 102 days later in September 1940, the finished aircraft was rolled out of the factory. Early Mustangs were fitted with Allison V-1710 engines, which

suffered poor performance above 15,000ft. The very first RAF Mustang 1, AG346, entered service on 23 April 1941 and lasted until 24 August 1944.

Lend-Lease Mustangs were designated Mustang IA, fitted with four 20mm canon instead of machine guns. An updated Allison-engined version equipped with drop tanks was called the Mustang II by the RAF and P51A by the US. To overcome the shortcomings of the Allison engine, Rolls Royce suggested installing a Merlin 61 engine with a two-speed, two-stage supercharger. This variant was flight tested in October 1942 and became the RAF Mustang III (US P51B and P51C). It adopted the British-designed sliding 'Malcolm' hood, which improved visibility. The US car company Packard was selected to build the Merlin under licence for all Mustangs.

The RAF Mustang IV (US P51D) introduced a full bubble canopy and an additional 85-gallon fuel tank behind the pilot. More P51D models, recognisable for having a three-blade propeller, were made than any other mark. A tandem two-seat version of the P51D was developed and many two seat versions are still operating today.



SoFFAAM Christmas Lunch

At Long Sutton Golf Club, Long Load, Langport, Somerset TA10 9JU on Saturday 14 January 2023.

The menu appears below for SOFFAAM Members and guests. Kindly complete the application form on the next page or download from the SoFFAAM website and send your cheque for **£24.00** per person (This does not include wine. All drinks can be purchased directly from the bar).

Cheques to be made payable to **SoFFAAM**, and to be received by the organiser by **Saturday 17th December**. Please post to: Mrs Rosanne Crowther, St David's, 5, Church Close, Martock, Somerset, TA12 6DS.

Please arrive at Long Sutton Golf Club by **12:00**; lunch will be served at **12:30**. Acknowledgements will not be sent, however, should the demand exceed the maximum seating at Long Sutton Golf Club, you will be advised accordingly.

Complimentary glass of Mulled Wine or Orange Juice on arrival



A choice of one of the following for main course

Roast Turkey, pig in blanket, pork and cranberry stuffing, crispy roast potatoes and seasonal vegetables



Roast Beef, homemade Yorkshire pudding, roast potatoes and seasonal vegetables



Mediterranean vegetable Wellington, roast potatoes, spinach and rich red wine sauce



A choice of one of the following for dessert

Traditional Christmas Pudding with custard
Triple chocolate cheesecake
Apple and berry crumble



Followed by Coffee and Mince Pies



SoFFAAM Christmas Lunch attendance form

at Long Sutton Golf Club, Long Load, Langport, Somerset TA10 9JU on Saturday 14 January, 2023.

Please Note - this form can be downloaded from the home page of the SoFFAAM website

Name _____

Name of Guest(s) _____

Address _____

_____ Postcode _____

Tel Number(s) _____

Please tick your choice of menu and add quantities if including guests

Roast Turkey Quantity

Roast Beef Quantity

Vegetable Wellington Quantity

Xmas Pudding and custard Quantity

Triple chocolate cheesecake Quantity

Apple and berry crumble Quantity

Please return your cheque for **£24.00** per person no later than **Saturday 17th December**, to Mrs Rosanne Crowther, St David's, 5, Church Close, Martock, Somerset, TA12 6DS.

Kindly note no refunds will be offered unless agreed by the Chairman.



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The Fleet Air Arm and the War in Europe 1939-45

Reviewed by Malcolm Smith



This is the sixth in a sequence of volumes by retired naval air engineer and test pilot David Hobbs on the development and history of aviation in the Royal Navy.

This book concentrates on naval aircraft operations from both carriers and shore stations during the war in the European theatre. It opens with a description of the equipment and personnel of the Fleet Air Arm (FAA) at the outbreak of war, touching on the complexities experienced by the Admiralty in taking on the training of its own aircrew and maintainers. The primary anti-surface vessel weapon

was the Mark XII torpedo carried by the Fairey Swordfish, while the bombs and machine guns inherited from the RAF were ineffectual and unsuited to naval warfare. Naval aircraft such as the Skua and Sea Hurricane quickly demonstrated their inadequate performance. In the first chapter we read of the loss of HMS *Courageous* and the consequent shortage of carriers in home waters, leading to the need to form naval units at Hatston in the Orkneys to attack the enemy in Norwegian waters.

The book follows a chronological pattern and Hobbs provides lively descriptions of major actions, such as the contribution made by FAA aircraft to the sinking of the *Bismarck*. He includes the crucial reconnaissance flight in appalling weather of a Martin Maryland aircraft, navigated by observer "Hank" Rotherham, which confirmed that *Bismarck* had sailed from its anchorage in Bergen. He describes the attacks by Swordfish from *Victorious* and the later attacks by those from *Ark Royal* and mentions post-war analysis of the wreck of the German vessel, which concluded that it was indeed a torpedo from an *Ark Royal* Swordfish that had

hit the warship's starboard quarter and fatally damaged the rudder.

The author devotes considerable attention to Operation "EF" in July 1941, an attempt to attack enemy-held harbours and disrupt shipping off the Norwegian coast to assist the Russian war effort. HMS *Victorious* and *Furious* mounted the attack with Albacores in the strike role, protected by Fulmar fighters. Neither the ships nor their air groups were fully worked up and losses to enemy fighters and ground fire were severe. Nonetheless, Hobbs remarks that, unlike so many of Britain's wartime leaders, Germany appreciated that carrier-borne RN aircraft were the only strike assets with sufficient range to attack them in this remote but strategically important area. "EF" was the first major effort in what became a continuing assault by the FAA on enemy forces in Norway. In this, as in all the operations described, the author scrupulously lists the aircrew involved (including the Telegraphist Air Gunners).

A little-known feature of FAA operations in 1942 was the temporary attachment of Swordfish and Albacore squadrons to shore stations of Coastal Command. These aircraft were used in night attacks on enemy shipping, also on minelaying and armed search and patrol. Equipped with ASV radar and VHF communications, they had capabilities not available to RAF aircraft. The author devotes the remainder of the chapter on 1942 to Operation "EV", the deployment of the new US-built escort carrier, HMS *Avenger*, with an air group

of Sea Hurricanes and Swordfish, in support of convoy PQ18, a determined attempt by the Admiralty to avoid the severe losses suffered by PQ17. The convoy was repeatedly attacked by enemy torpedo aircraft and *Avenger* quickly developed tactics assisted by its radar to counter these attacks. Admiral Burnett later reported that "It was a fine sight to see *Avenger* peeling off Sea Hurricanes while streaking across the front of the convoy ... altogether a most gratifying action". By early 1944, increasing availability of escort carriers enabled the Admiralty to provide two for every convoy.

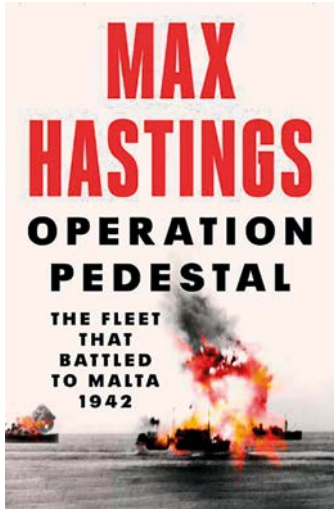
The author describes in detail the planning and execution of Operation "Tungsten" - the attack in April 1944 on the battleship *Tirpitz* in its northern Norwegian fjord, in which for the first time the newly delivered Barracuda would be used in large numbers in the dive-bombing role. By this time, fighter protection was provided by US-provided Corsairs and Hellcats. Although this attack did not sink the warship, it was put out of action for several months.

David Hobbs has delivered a most comprehensive and well-researched account of FAA activities in northern European waters, illuminated throughout with a huge selection of photographs, many of them from his own collection. Produced to a high standard by Seaforth, this volume provides a fitting conclusion to his six-volume history of British naval aviation.

The Fleet Air Arm and the War in Europe by David Hobbs, Seaforth, ISBN 978 1 5267 9971 1

Operation Pedestal

By Max Hastings. A book review by Chris Penney



In August 1942 our vital Mediterranean outpost of Malta was under constant aerial bombardment from Axis forces, based minutes away in Sicily.

Less than half the supplies convoyed to Malta that year had reached the island and remaining food stocks for her 300,000 citizens would be exhausted within a month. Hastings observes that British aspirations in the Mediterranean theatre that summer were at their lowest ebb after Tobruk's surrender to Rommel in June. With the title of Operation Pedestal, the War Cabinet planned a large fast convoy to relieve the besieged island. For the Royal Navy, tasked with fighting the convoy through

a thousand miles of hostile sea, the stakes could not have been higher, as the previous month Convoy PQ17 had been all but destroyed in the Arctic. Upon initiating the Operation, Churchill told their Lordships that British prestige demanded this convoy "must get through" or Malta surrendered.

The ordeal of the convoy that was Malta's salvation is arguably the most famous of WW2 and this title is a thoroughly researched account from a renowned historian. Pedestal participants faced risks greater than in the Arctic or Atlantic, for Malta was surrounded by all the Axis' weapons of war - submarines, torpedo and dive bombers, torpedo-boats, the powerful Italian battle fleet (although depleted since the FAA's 1940 Taranto strike) and, on the approaches to Malta itself, various scattered minefields. 13 fast cargo liners capable of 15 knots were detailed for the hazardous journey, along with a US-built oil tanker *Ohio* loaded with desperately needed aviation fuel, without which the Island's RAF defenders could not operate. Assembling the convoy's escort was a crucial dilemma for the Admiralty. Escorting cruisers lacked adequate anti-aircraft armament for protection and the allocated three fleet carriers, HMS

Eagle, *Victorious* and *Indomitable*, could not be risked near the island because of overwhelming enemy air superiority. Thus, as the merchantmen with their precious cargoes neared their destination, the convoy's defences against aerial attack would be weakest.

On 2 August, Rear Admiral Burrough briefed the 14 merchant vessel captains under his protection. Reassuringly, he stated that the most dangerous part of the passage would commence during the dark of the moon, on 12 August, adding wryly: "You know what the Twelfth is...we should find plenty of birds in the Mediterranean." In the days that followed ships' crews found themselves tested to their limits. The enemy took full advantage of the escort's deficiencies. As foretold, on 12 August the convoy endured coordinated attacks from over 200 Regia Aeronautica and Luftwaffe aircraft, losing four freighters to the aerial onslaught. Of Burrough's 14 cargo ships just six survived the voyage; they were played into Valletta's Grand Harbour by a military band with emotional Maltese cheering from the bastions. Lastly, on 15 August the heroic *Ohio* - barely afloat from repeated bomb damage - was towed in.

Hastings offers forthright opinions on this naval operation's numerous shortcomings. He states with good reason "each successive disaster fed the next" and the narrative is littered with anecdotes of the life and death struggle to get the convoy to Malta regardless of cost. He describes the tactical and strategic situations faced by British and



The famous photo of the SS Ohio entering Grand Harbour by Lt H E Cook, War Office official photographer.

Axis commanders that impacted the battle's outcome. For instance, the lack of VHF fighter-direction communication throughout the escort hampered RAF defensive cover after the two RN cruisers so equipped were lost. This left Malta's airmen unable to pinpoint Axis aircraft targeting what remained of the savaged convoy.

Latter-day historians can be grateful that war correspondents documented Pedestal's agony and the quality and quantity of illustrations used is impressive. The book includes over 50 archive photographs, including a fateful image of the convoy's dramatic first loss: the carrier *Eagle* sinking. Such striking images paint a very real picture of what took place. This dramatic day-to-day diary of the convoy's survival against overwhelming odds is made more readable by the inclusion of the views of those who fought on either side in one of the Royal Navy's bloodiest encounters of the Second World War. Included are reminiscences of FAA and RAF pilots. Not a cheap buy, it's war at sea in all its glory and gory detail.

Operation Pedestal by Max Hastings. Published by William Collins. ISBN 978-0-00-836498-4

Membership

By Simon Websper

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VR930 in original 802 Squadron code of '110/Q' as allocated at the shore base of RNAS Eglinton, Northern Ireland, and embarked on HMS Vengeance in 1948. © Roger Wilcox

Navy Wings night shoot

Held in October 2022, this popular event for aircraft photographers raises funds for Navy Wings and is organised on their behalf by Threshold Aero.

Navy Wings acquired Seafire XVII SX336 in November 2021. She flies in the markings of 767 Naval Air Squadron. © Roger Wilcox



Stinson Reliant, owned and operated by Paul Kehoe but 'used' by Navy Wings. © Roger Wilcox

