

JABBERWOCK 113



SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

FLEET AIR ARM
MUSEUM

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

**November
2023**



IN THIS ISSUE

The Fairey Firefly • The FAA and the VC • RN Carriers off Korea -
part 2 • SoFFAAM Summer promotions • India's Aircraft Carriers
An Aegean Odyssey • His Majesty the King's cypher • Talks reviews
806 Naval Air Squadron Book Review • Christmas Lunch

Plus all the usual features etc..



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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, just state you are a SoFFAAM member and give your name to the admissions staff. 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.

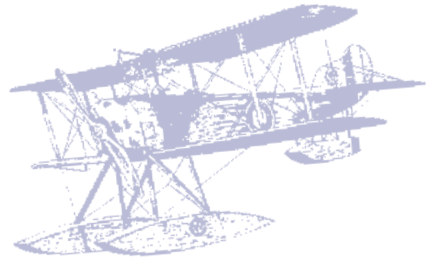
FLEET AIR ARM MUSEUM

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The Fairey Firefly



The Fleet Air Arm and the VC



RN Carriers off Korea



India's Aircraft Carriers

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COVER ILLUSTRATION

Hawker Fury Mk.II SR611 (G-CBEL) during the premier UK warbirds airshow Flying Legends at Leeds East airport (formerly RAF Church Fenton) on 15 July 2023. This annual airshow has relocated to Leeds East from Duxford and is reported to continue there for the next six years.

© Richard Macauley

Editorial

The recent Annual General Meeting, held via Zoom, attracted a sizeable attendance.

The minutes can be found on our website and show that your Society is in good form, also that the Museum is going from strength to strength. Details of the new Barracuda viewing gallery are particularly welcome. SoFFAAM has supported this project consistently and will continue to do so. There have been some changes to the Council membership and Ivan Childs and Martin Turner have stepped down after many years commitment. Graham Mottram has retired as Chairman but remains as a co-opted member of the Council for the time being. The decision to phase out membership cards and the resulting change to members' entry to the Museum, has proved to be successful.

In this issue, we carry the first part of a description of the Indian Navy's aircraft carriers, which historically were procured from Britain. The sequel to this article will show how this policy has radically changed as India's outlook on the world has evolved. We provide illustrated cover of the activities of Council members in attending air shows through the summer, which has resulted in a pleasing increase in membership

applications. Some time ago, we sought members' opinions on the Society in a questionnaire. One of the conclusions of this survey was that some would like to see the introduction of talks on Saturday mornings. We have now held several of these events, most recently with a talk by the noted broadcaster and author, Paul Beaver. On the whole, these have proved successful and we plan to continue them on an occasional basis subject to staffing levels.

Also in this issue, under the heading "The FAA and the VC", contributor Philip Beckinsale describes the valiant actions of the two Fleet Air Arm VCs, illustrated by painstakingly accurate models of their aircraft, the Swordfish and the Corsair. You may also read of the trip to Greece by two Council members, keen photographers both, to witness the operations of the Hellenic Air Force. This article includes some dramatic photographs of NATO and other nations aircraft types.

Finally, do not miss the application form for the SoFFAAM Christmas lunch, to be held next year on 13 January.



Malcolm

Council snippets

From the September Council Meeting

The General Manager commented that FAAM's general performance has continued to be very positive, with general visitation back to pre-COVID levels.

The Museum has recently launched a tender to improve Cobham Hall. This will include a new roof coating and the addition of solar panels. After 22 years, the Museum's curator, Barbara Gilbert, retires at the end of September. We wish her all the best. We have recently started to re-brand the Barracuda Project as 'Barracuda Live: The Big Rebuild' as work on Barracuda DP872 continues in our new Arthur Kimberley Viewing Gallery. The popular Christmas carol concert under the wings of Concorde returns this year at Yeovilton's Fleet Air Arm Museum on Friday 15th December 2023. Visitors can join the HMS *Heron* Royal Navy Volunteer Band under Concorde 002 in Hall Four of the Yeovilton museum.

Chris Penney reported that the publicity team have taken the promotional gazebo to Middlezoy, Taunton, Dunkeswell and Henstridge. Society members will attend the Yeovil Model Show, being held over the first October half term weekend.

Richard Macauley said we are holding an October Saturday Talk with Paul Beaver and enough volunteers to run the session. We have a speaker booked and available for Saturday 25 November and I intend to see if we have enough staff available to cover this date before I put it up on the website and other advertising means.

Rosanne reminded the Council that the New Year lunch will be held on Saturday 13 January 2024. The cost of a three-course meal, including orange juice and tea or coffee and mints will be £27 per person. We would require a non-refundable deposit of £5 per person to secure the booking, and payment in full to be received no later than three weeks before the booking.

The Membership Secretary, David Merrett, reported that six members died during the period. Of the 22 new applications received since the 15 June meeting, 15 were from events (1 from a previous event, 9 from Middlezoy, 3 from Dunkeswell and 2 from Henstridge). Members contactable by email has risen slightly as has the uptake of e-Jabberwock. BACS and Paypal subscription payments have almost doubled during the period.

Letters to the editor

Dear Editor

Trevor Robert Harris in his letter in Jabberwock 111 (page 6) refers to the article on The First VJ Day in Jabberwock 110.

Both mention the dreadful fate of those on board the *Khedive Ismail* when it was torpedoed by the Japanese submarine I27 at 14.35 on 12 Feb 1944. It appears from these articles that details of these events are somewhat scarce. However, I would refer those interested to the book "Fighting Destroyer" by G G Connel, who was the Gunnery Control Officer in HMS *Petard* at the time and had a Mk1 eyeball view as these events unfolded and their aftermath. The description is on pages 238 - 249, where there are also two photos, one of I27 on the surface, the other the explosion of the 7th torpedo that sank I27.

You could also access: Passage to Destiny for further details on "*Khedive Ismail*" (briancrabbmaritimebooks.co.uk in hardback and expensive to

buy). During the subsequent hunt for I27, HMS *Paladin* stopped to pick up survivors while HMS *Petard* was running in to make several depth charge attacks. Re-joining the hunt, *Paladin* was badly damaged by the 'can opener' of a hydroplane when ordered to abort an attempt to ram the now surfaced I27, which was finally sunk by *Petard's* torpedo at 17.55.

Even at this distance in time, the agonisingly necessary decision to depth charge the I27 with so many survivors in the vicinity is heart wrenchingly palpable.

God Bless Each and Everyone. I hope this brings some clarity.

Robin Bailey

PS: For those who are unaware, www.naval-history.net gives the service records of many RN ships and casualty lists for WW1 & WW2. Also www.uboat.net can be very useful.

Dear Malcolm

It was with interest that I read Jabberwock 112, as it contained two

articles referring to three aircraft types I flew during my 30 years as a fixed

wing Naval aviator, namely the Scimitar, Swift and Buccaneer. However, I would like to comment on discrepancies in both articles.

Firstly, the article on Supermarine aircraft states that between 1955-60 there were two Swift ground attack squadrons in Germany. The ground attack statement is incorrect; I was on exchange in Germany with 2 Squadron in 1957-58 and both squadrons were low level photo reconnaissance specialists assigned cold war photo recce targets. Enter the Swift Mk 5 with a reheated Avon 114 engine, sawtooth leading edge, VI tail, a 220-gallon ventral fuel tank, enlarged fin, 2 x 30mm Aden cannon and three F95 cameras in a new nose. Group Captain Nigel Walpole's book *Swift Justice* chapter 6 explains all. In the same article referring to the Buccaneer Mk1, it is misleading to say that the aircraft relied on Scimitar tanker top-up after launch. As Senior Pilot of 801 Squadron 1963-65, embarked in HMS *Victorious* in the Far East, we

never had fuel top-ups after launch. The word relied gives the impression that the top-up was necessary. However, for a specific task requiring a maximum weapon load, the fuel would be reduced for launch. I suggest that this was not entirely due to the lack of power of the Buccaneer Mk1, but just as likely that the ship was incapable of attaining the required windspeed over the deck and the catapult end speed.

Secondly, the article on the Buccaneer Mk1 by Jozef Newton states that by 1965 the Buccaneer Mk1 was unsafe to fly and withdrawn from Front Line service, this statement is incorrect on both counts. As Commanding Officer of 803 Squadron 1968-69 the squadron was equipped with Mk1 and Mk2 Buccaneers, tasked with evaluating methods of weapon delivery. The Mk1 remained with us until August 1968.

Kind regards
Graham Hoddinott

Dear Malcolm

I am hoping you can publish this in *Jabberwock* to gather comments from the SoFFAAM membership.

I am processing ideas for SoFFAAM visits in 2024. So far the following are on the 'possibles' list.

RAF Museum at Cosford / Army Air Corp Museum, Middle Wallop / Portsmouth Naval Dockyard Museum / Solent Sky Museum, Southampton / RAF Brize Norton.

Any suggestions are welcome and if anyone wishes to advise a preference from the list or any new suggestions, please email or phone my colleague Richard Macauley at soffaam@btinternet.com or 07768 562976 who is collating the list on my behalf. We hope our members will respond.

Kind regards,
Rosanne Crowther

Hello Malcolm

I'm contacting you to let you know of the recent death of my father, Lt Cdr Jack Colbeck, at the ripe old age of 99 & 3/4! I'm not sure whether he was a life member or not, but thought you should be aware for the purposes of your membership records. I'm a life member ... please don't mix our records up!

He was a proud member of the Fleet Air Arm, joining on the eve of war in 1939 and entering RAF Halton as an FAA Halton Brat (40th entry) as an apprentice artificer. He had an interesting war, serving with 804 Sqn, providing the CAMship Hurricanes, he was aboard HMS *Furious* during Operation Bellows, part of Pedestal, when the RAF Spitfires were launched and *Eagle* was sunk within sight of them. He was aboard HMS *Dasher* with 804

during Operation Torch, and fortunately left the ship shortly before it exploded in the Firth of Clyde...went East with the Pacific Fleet aboard HMS *Glory* with the Corsairs of 1831 Sqn and witnessed the surrender ceremony of the Southern Japanese forces on the flight deck of *Glory*.

Commissioned in 1953 and continued as an AEO SD officer, through Attackers, Sea Hawks, 831 Sqn at Culdrose, and lastly 728 Sqn at Hal Far, where he presided over the White Ensign being hauled down for the very last time at the station.

Following retirement he worked for the BAC engineering support for the Royal Saudi Air Force Lightning Fleet.

Roger Colbeck



Dear Editor

This is to notify Members that any **new** joiners from 1 January 2024 onwards will have to pay an increased joining fee when opting for a paper Jabberwock. New Life Memberships will only be a PDF Jabberwock only option.

THIS ONLY APPLIES TO NEW MEMBERSHIPS FROM JANUARY 2024 ONWARDS.

If you joined before January 2024, then these increases do not apply to you, you will continue to be a member at the price you originally paid. We have made

these changes due to higher postage costs rising consistently over the years. These increased costs erode our ability to use as much of the membership fees as possible to support the museum.

So if you know someone who would like to join, have them do so before January 1st. You may even wish to gift membership as a Christmas present - see our advert on page 11.

David Merrett
Membership Secretary

Dear Malcolm

I have been a long time member since the 70's and have recently turned to writing. My background was 36 years in civil aviation.

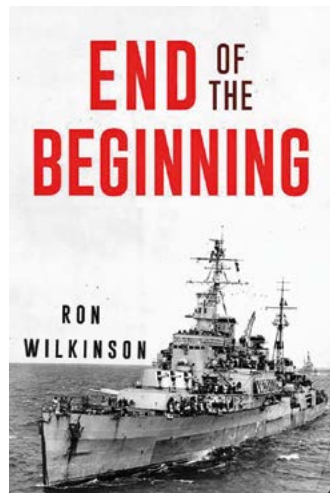
Please see the front cover of my latest book, 'The end of the Beginning'. As with my previous book, we follow the continuing career of Captain Alan Lee. RN.

This time, Captain Lee is given a small strike force, including an Aircraft Carrier HMS *Georgic*, and is sent to the Far East to create havoc amongst the Kings enemies. We follow the life and deaths of the ships companies and the FAA personnel, who battle the Japanese.

HMS *Georgic* is fictitious, but based on the carrier conversions of HMS *Pretoria Castle*, *Nairana*, *Campania* etc.

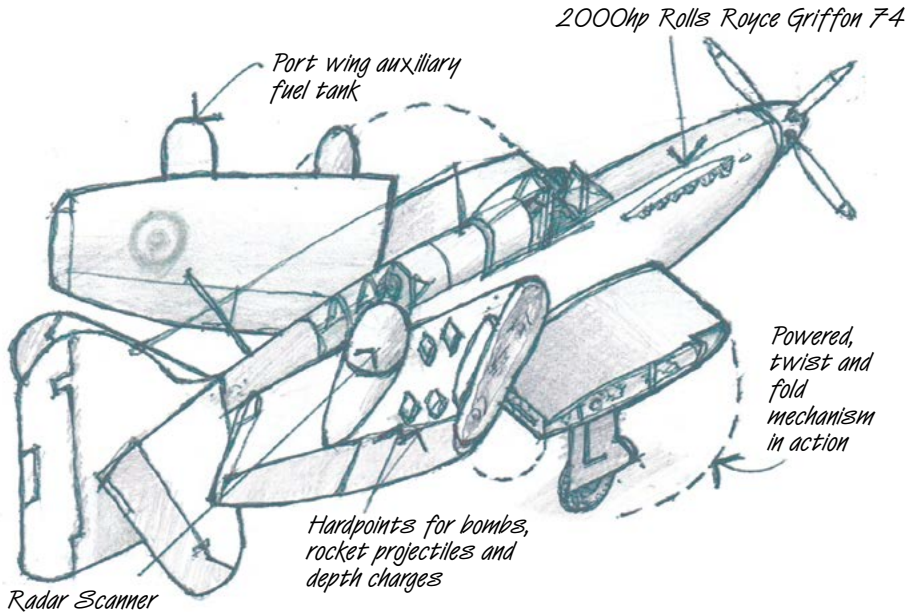
I would like to thank all members of the Society for purchasing book one, and if you love the FAA, like I do, Please purchase book two!

Many thanks
Ron Wilkinson.



The Fairey Firefly

By Jim Humberstone



Fairey Firefly AS6 with wings folded. © Jim Humberstone

Like its naval contemporary the Seafire, the Fairey Firefly remained in front line Royal Navy service for almost a decade, entering operational service in July 1944 and remaining in the front line until the mid-1950s.

This was a tribute to the quality of its design, some would say. FAA aircrew who flew it liked it a lot, not always the case with some of the aircraft types they had to handle, which included sadly, the aforementioned Supermarine fighter. It is often possible to trace the way British plane-makers have evolved the configuration of a type through

two or three preceding design stages, resulting in a family resemblance. Such is the case with Fairey's Firefly. The designers started the line in the 1930s with a single-engined two-seater RAF day bomber, the Battle. This design then evolved into the Fleet Air Arm's first eight-gun fighter, the Fairey Fulmar, finally culminating with the Firefly. All were identifiable by the way the pilot's cockpit canopy extended rearwards, to enclose a second crew member (observer), a naval stipulation to meet the need to navigate over great areas of sea.

The Fairey Firefly was a response to Naval Specification N5/40. Its wings conformed to the classic Spitfire semi-elliptic shape, giving the machine good aerodynamics. Although the aircraft was 4,000 lb heavier than the Fulmar (largely due to the adoption of the heavier Griffon engine and the armament of four 20 mm cannon) the Firefly was 40 mph faster due to improved aerodynamics. Perhaps its most distinctive and distinguishing feature was its large external and obtrusive Youngman flaps. These not only assisted with the exacting process of carrier deck-landing but also conferred benefits of enhanced cruising speed and manoeuvrability, when deployed. As was the case with some

marks of Spitfire, later Marks featured clipped wings, which also added extra manoeuvrability. The hangar height of RN carriers constrained the form in which aircraft could be stowed. At over 40 feet, the Firefly's span was such that wings had to be twisted and aligned along the fuselage rather than folded over the cockpit. Bill Gunston, the well-respected aviation writer who flew in a Firefly, commented on the extreme difficulty for handlers with these heavy wing sections. This was solved eventually when later Marks incorporated powered wing folding.

Tasked initially with fighter reconnaissance duties, the Firefly could carry 2,000 lbs of stores or 8 RPs under its wings. Delivered to



The Canadian Warplanes Heritage Museum's Firefly was built in 1951 and first served with the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, at RNAS Ford, UK. Later, it was transferred to the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) in 1953. It was retired from the RAN in 1960 and ended up in a museum in New South Wales, Australia. The Museum purchased it from them in 1979. Although a Mk.VI, it has been restored in the colours and markings of a RCN No. 825 Squadron Firefly Mk. V operating from HMCS *Magnificent* in 1949-50. This aircraft is flown regularly at Hamilton International Airport, Ontario © Eric Dumigan/Canadian Warplane Heritage Museum

its first FAA squadron in October 1943, the aircraft progressed through seven different Marks, including anti-submarine and night fighter versions. A twin-seat trainer version was built after the War. These had a modified, stepped fuselage profile to accommodate an instructor at higher level at the rear.

Like their contemporary, the Seafire, FAA Fireflies continued to serve after VJ Day, having taken part in operations both in northern waters and the Pacific in the latter stages of WWII. They were finally retired after the Korean War, six squadrons having built an enviable reputation during their carrier operations in that conflict for the Royal Navy and its Australian counterpart. The most powerful Firefly versions, entering service after the end of the War, were the Mark 4, succeeded by the very similar Mark

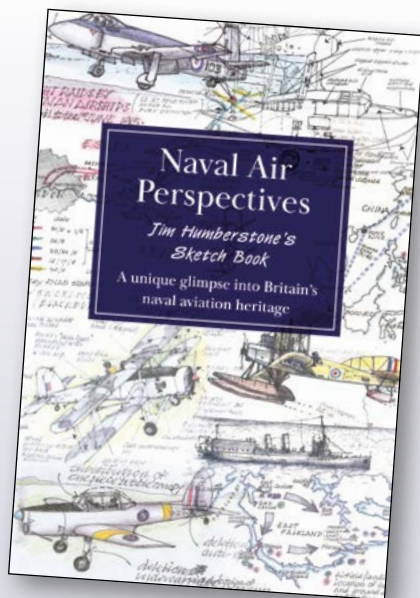
5, which had power-folding wings. Fitted with the Rolls Royce Griffon XII of 2,000 hp these gained an increase in maximum speed of at least 60 mph over the earlier Firefly versions. Installing the engine resulted in a redesign of the air intake provision, resulting in prominent radiators located next to leading edge wing roots with radar equipment housed in a leading-edge fairing in the starboard wing, balancing the long-range fuel tank, in a similar position to port.

Some 1700 Fireflies eventually left Fairey's factories in west London and the northwest. A popular machine to those who flew her, so successful was the design that the type was supplied for the carriers of the Commonwealth Navies of Australia and Canada, together with exports to the Netherlands, Sweden, Ethiopia, Denmark and Thailand.

The Fairey Firefly illustration is by Jim Humberstone. The Society has collected many of these charming pictures by Jim and published them under the title "Naval Air Perspectives".

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

This book is available on Amazon, just search for 'Naval Air Perspectives'. Alternatively, contact Richard Macauley on **07768 562976** or **soffaam@btinternet.com** to order a copy or request further information.



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The Fleet Air Arm and the VC

By Philip J Beckinsale



Fairey Swordfish Mk. II - W5984 from the Airfix 1/72 scale kit. © Richard Macauley

Since 2016, building models has been my life and my life saver.

Following a 29-year working life with the RAF as a Medic, and with the HM Prison Service, I eventually succumbed to the many years of physical and mental trauma that regrettably accompanies such occupations.

Building models is more than just following instructions to achieve the product, it focuses my mind on something other than the traumas I have experienced and allows me to relax and lose some of the anxieties and stress I have within me.

I research every aircraft I build to record why and how these amazing

machines were conceived and built. At the time of writing, my collection is 66 different types of aircraft and the human factor becomes just as important. This shows in my collection of military aircraft as they represent crew members who for their actions, have been awarded the Victoria Cross.

I currently have fifteen RAF aircraft, representing aircrew recipients of the Victoria Cross in my display plus another two from the Fleet Air Arm. To my surprise the FAA had only 2 aircrew VC awards. That said, the story of these two pilots is exceptional in telling of their bravery, courage, and self-sacrifice in the face of the enemy.

Lt. Cmdr. Eugene Esmonde VC DSO

825 Naval Air Squadron. Piloting Fairey Swordfish Mk. II - W5984

In the evening of 11 February 1942, the *Scharnhorst*-class battleships, *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* plus the heavy cruiser *Prinz Eugen*, six destroyers, fourteen torpedo boats and twenty-six E-boats left Brest in complete secrecy and entered the English Channel which came to be known as 'The Channel Dash'. The Luftwaffe were in support with thirty-two bombers and two hundred and fifty-two fighters providing air cover.

Hugging the French coast, it was not until the ships were entering the narrow waterway of the Dover Straits on the morning of 12 February, that Britain finally responded with salvos from shore batteries and aerial attacks from the RAF and Fleet Air Arm.

Lieutenant Commander Esmonde, DSO, of 825 Naval Air Squadron was at RAF Manston, Kent. He had six Fairey Swordfish Mk.II under his command, which had their usual camouflage hastily painted over in black.

On receiving his orders, he waited for as long as he could for his fighter escort to be arranged, but he decided to take-off without it. Whilst en route, ten Spitfires of 72 Squadron RAF, formed up with Esmonde's squadron and escorted them towards the German convoy. Enemy fighters of Jagdgeschwader 2 and 26 intercepted the British aircraft resulting in all of Esmonde's squadron receiving damage and also becoming separated from their Spitfire escort.

Despite the inflicted damage and

without fighter escort, the six Swordfish pressed on towards the German Naval Squadron. On sighting the enemy fleet, they started their attack run and were met with a wall of anti-aircraft fire from the escorting German Destroyers which stood between Esmonde's flight and the German capital ships. Esmonde's aircraft took severe damage, reportedly having most of one of his port wings destroyed, but pressed on through the destroyer screen towards the targets.

Just 2,700 meters from his target, a Focke-Wulf Fw 190 engaged Esmonde's Swordfish, causing the aircraft to burst into flames and crash into the sea killing all on board. The remaining aircraft continued the attack, but all were shot down by enemy fighters; only five of the 18 crew survived the action. The four surviving officers received the Distinguished Service Order, and the enlisted survivor was awarded the Conspicuous Gallantry Medal.

Lt. Cmdr. Esmonde's body was recovered some seven weeks later after washing ashore in the Thames Estuary near the River Medway. He is buried in the Woodlands Cemetery, Gillingham, Kent.

The courage of the Swordfish crews was noted by friend and foe alike. Admiral Bertram Ramsay RN later wrote, "In my opinion the gallant sortie of these six Swordfish aircraft constitutes one of the finest exhibitions of self-sacrifice and devotion to duty the war had ever witnessed", while Admiral

Otto Ciliax in the *Scharnhorst* described “The mothball attack of a handful of ancient planes, piloted by men whose bravery surpasses any other action by either side that day”, as he watched the smoking wrecks of the Swordfish falling into the sea. Captain Hoffmann of the *Scharnhorst* exclaimed, “Poor fellows, they are so very slow, it is nothing but suicide for them to fly against these big ships”. Wilhelm Wolf aboard the

Scharnhorst wrote, “What a heroic stage for them to meet their end! Behind them their homeland, which they had just left with their hearts steeled to their purpose, still in view”.

The Luftwaffe destroyed two Blenheims, four Whirlwinds, four Wellingtons, six Hurricanes, nine Hampdens and ten Spitfires. Kriegsmarine gunners shot down all six Swordfish and a Hampden bomber.

Sub. Lt. Robert Hampton-Gray VC DSC (RCNVR)

1841 Naval Air Squadron, HMS *Formidable*. Vought FG-1D Corsair Mk. IV KD658 (115)

With the war in Europe almost over, HMS *Formidable*, an *Illustrious* Class Aircraft Carrier, joined the British Pacific Fleet (BPF) from the Mediterranean Fleet in April 1945.

Formidable had to undergo extensive repairs at the Garden Island Dockyard, Sydney Australia after operations in support of the invasion of Okinawa. The repairs were due to a kamikaze

attack on 9 May 1945 and a subsequent fire on 18 May, when a Corsair’s guns were accidentally fired into an Avenger during ammunition loading, destroying and damaging twenty eight aircraft.

After repairs and her Squadrons back to full strength, she sailed with HMS *King George V* towards the BPF’s advanced base at Manus Island in the Admiralty Islands on 26 June 1945.



Vought FG-1D Corsair Mk. IV KD658 (115) from the Airfix 1/72 scale kit. © Richard Macauley

By July 1945, *Formidable* was involved in strikes on the Japanese mainland. On 16 July 1945, she joined with the American Third Fleet operating off the Japanese Home Islands and operations commenced the next day.

On 18 July, Lt. Gray, the senior pilot with 1841 Naval Air Squadron, led a strafing mission against airfields in the Tokyo area. Following suspension of air operations due to weather, Gray led another flight to the Inland Sea on 24 July which damaged a merchant ship, two seaplane bases and one airbase. Gray earned a Distinguished Service Cross for aiding the sinking of a Japanese destroyer near Tokyo on 28 July. This award was announced in the London Gazette but not until 21 August, twelve days after his death. The citation read, "For determination and address in air attacks on targets in Japan"

British Pacific Fleet aircraft continued attacking targets near Osaka and the Inland Sea, one of which was the escort carrier IJN *Kaiyo*, crippling her. Air operations resumed on 28 and 30 July following re-supply, attacking and sinking the IJN *Okinawa* near Maizuru. Weather again and resupply issues prevented further operations, as well as the atomic bombing of Hiroshima on 6 August 1945, which delayed air operations until 9 August 1945, also coinciding with the second atomic bomb being dropped on Nagasaki.

On the morning of 9 August, a dozen Corsairs flew a fighter sweep, followed an hour later by Avengers that attacked Matsushima Airfield. A second fighter sweep of eight Corsairs,

led by Lt. Gray, were diverted to attack warships located at Onagawa Wan, Miyagi Prefecture. They spotted two escort ships and despite fierce anti-aircraft fire from shore batteries and a heavy concentration of flak from some five other warships pressed home their attack.

Flying through this intense anti-aircraft fire, Lt. Gray's engine was damaged, setting it on fire, but Gray, flying extremely low to ensure success, skipped bombed a 500-pound (230 kg) bomb into the *Etorofu*-class escort, IJN *Amakusa* which sank within five minutes with the loss of 157 lives. Gray's aircraft rolled inverted shortly after releasing the bomb and crashed into the sea, with his body never being recovered.

Six days later the war ended and *Formidable's* Captain, Philip Ruck-Keene paid tribute to Gray, stating that he was "the best & bravest fighter pilot on the ship and everybody loved him. The tragedy is all the worse coming so close to the end of the war." Lt. Gray had consistently shown a brilliant fighting spirit and most inspiring leadership.

Lt. Gray's VC was the last to be awarded for action during WW2 and was gazetted in The London Gazette of 9 November 1945. A memorial for Gray was erected at Onagawa Bay in 1989 in Sakiyama Park. This is the only memorial dedicated to a foreign soldier on Japanese soil. Following an earthquake in March 2011 which knocked over the granite monument, it was re-positioned into a park (with new plaque) near the Onagawacho Community Medicine Centre in Onagawa Town.

RN Carriers off Korea - part 2

By Jim Humberstone



HMS *Theseus* at Malta en-route to the Korean theatre. © Royal Navy

We continue with Jim's account from Jabberwock 112.

With *Glory* at sea and in action, the Royal Navy continued its carrier presence off Korea's west coast until the autumn of 1951. September then saw the arrival of the Australian Navy with HMAS *Sydney*, her CAG comprised Fireflies and Sea Furies, very similar to a British one. Unfortunately for both ships and particularly their crews, they faced severe weather that winter, conditions so bad that even the sea froze. By now aircraft were emblazoned with the black and white stripes on wings and fuselage so familiar from the period of D-Day in 1944. HMS *Ocean* arrived in May 1952. In her case the aircrew

of 17 CAG were arriving with some experience of action, having already undertaken scores of sorties helping British ground forces in Malaysia during its Emergency. *Ocean's* sojourn saw a change of equipment, with her Sea Otter replaced by a Sikorsky helicopter, a foretaste of things to come. *Ocean* was then relieved by *Glory* in November 1952, only to return in May 1953. By this time an Armistice was in the offing, so when she returned to the UK in November having been relieved by HMAS *Sydney*, peace had as they say, 'broken out'.

The RN Carrier Rota System

During the campaign, a convenient routine had been established with the

RN carrier changeovers. The replaced ship would sail onwards to Britain, calling at Singapore and leaving any repairable aircraft there. Not untypical of the length of overseas RN deployments at the time, HMS *Ocean* returned to its home port of Portsmouth in late 1953 having spent two and a half years away.

The Fleet Air Arm's contribution to the Korean Campaign would not have been possible without the presence of HMS *Unicorn*. The inspired decision to provide the Navy with this dedicated repair carrier paid off a hundredfold. Having ferried, replenished or replaced materiel, including aircraft from the yards of the Naval Air Base at Singapore, 2,500 miles away to the south, *Unicorn* would await the on-station carriers at the ports of Sasebo or Kure on the Japanese mainland to provide support.

The Air War

The war in Korea in its initial phases was fought principally with equipment inherited from the Second World War, which was well tried and tested. However, while the Firefly, in its earliest form, had seen action late on in WWII, the Sea Fury was a post war design. Fortunately, such was the sturdiness of the FB 11 version of this aircraft, that its ordnance capability was doubled during the conflict, from two 500lb to two 1,000 lb bombs, albeit requiring RATOG i.e. Rocket Assisted Take Off to leave the flight deck.

Fleet Air Arm aircraft were in action at a significant time in the evolution of warplane design from WWII piston engined fighters to the earliest jet powered aircraft. USAF Mustangs gave way to P80 Shooting Stars and eventually the F86 Sabre, the latter reflecting a change from straight to



A Division of four 808 Squadron RAN Sea Furies overfly HMAS Sydney, at anchor in Jervis Bay. The ship and squadrons are working up before sailing for Korean waters. © RAN

swept wing configuration. While no RAF Fighter Squadrons participated, the sole Royal Australian Air Force unit eventually replaced its Mustangs with the twin jet Gloster Meteor 8, a sturdy machine, albeit straight winged and thus limited in its performance when faced by the latest generation of jet fighters put up by its potential opponents.

FAA Aircraft in Action

With the appearance of the Chinese swept wing Mig 15, powered by a reverse-engineered version of the Nene, the Klimov VK-1, a new dimension in air warfare was created. It was only by introducing the US F86 Sabre that the UN was able to restore the balance of power in the skies over Korea.

The Russian designed fighter did not have it all its own way. As all those familiar with FAA history know, Sea Furies from *Ocean* scored a famous victory over these intruders when in August 1952, during dogfights which paralleled in some ways confrontations between Spitfires and jet powered

Luftwaffe Messerschmitt 262s in 1945, one of their number shot down a Mig 15.

While RN Fireflies and Sea Furies contributed Combat Air Patrols, they also conducted anti submarine missions, spotted for allied warships bombarding the coast but of most significance served in the fighter bomber role for which they were so well equipped. Again this particular contribution parallels similar activities of RAF and USAAF aircraft in WWII, particularly in the period leading up to D-Day 1944.

Lines of communication were the principal targets for the marauding RN and RAN fighter bombers. So-called 'bridge busting' figured strongly in their list for activities. While, as would be learnt by the Americans in Vietnam, insurgent supply routes were something of an elusive quarry, UN ground forces undoubtedly welcomed this assistance from the air. Pilots learned to time their approaches during attacks on defended targets so as to catch if possible anti-aircraft gunners off guard but flak was certainly a major threat for aircrews.



HMS *Theseus* with Hawker Sea Fury and Fairey Firefly aircraft lined up on its snow covered flight deck which demonstrates the harsh winters encountered in this theatre. © IWM

While there are several accounts of bale outs and ditching due to this kind of damage, aircrew had the reassurance that their colleagues of the USN were often nearby and could help guide the guardian angel S-51, the early model Sikorsky helicopter to the rescue.

Such was the esprit de corps of the small band of Fleet Air Arm flyers that highly complimentary statistics about their achievements abound. As just one example, a two month period in the winter of 1950/51 saw over 1200 deck landings take place on HMS *Theseus* without mishap. A busy schedule in 1952 saw HMS *Ocean* Squadrons clock up a record 123 sorties in a single day.

The Light Fleet carriers developed an On-duty/Off-duty routine. Typically pilots would fly three or four sorties in a day for four days, with a break when Fleet Train replenishment would take place. Back then to another four days shift for aircrew before two or three days spent when the carrier returned to the ship's base in Japan.

Conclusions

In retrospect, perhaps the best that can be said about the British input to the Korean campaign was we gave what help we could. No doubt there was still that old lingering suspicion in US minds, inherited from WWII, that the modest nature of our naval contributions was being prompted by a distraction, the perceived need to devote our dwindling resources to holding on to Empire. This view sadly, ignoring of course the salient responsibility in perpetuity, that our Navy has to protect our absolutely

critical mercantile dimension with its world wide sea routes and their associated hazards. Wealth, Safety and Strength in fact.

Looking at the nature and extent of our contribution, Britain with its Commonwealth cousins stepped up with a relatively small naval task force. The inclusion of carriers in its mix however meant that a highly effective asset was always on hand. An asset too, that possessed considerable versatility. No greater evidence of this can be seen than by noting what was on offer from the presence of HMS *Unicorn*, since this all purpose ship not only acted as troopship and succoured and supplied all the needs of the Light Fleet Carriers but on one occasion actually joined in a coastal bombardment. Finally and above all the performance record of the FAA, its carriers and crews during those two and a half years, alongside the other ships, was testimony to a very British naval and military tradition, that of making the very best use in war of what you've got. Not least the undoubted skills and commitment of your personnel, far from home though they might be.

In the 70 years that have passed since the unresolved Peace Talks at Panmunjon, North Korea is ever more belligerent in its global stance, flaunting its ICBM and nuclear potential. This, in a Region rapidly evolving as a possible geo-political flash point for other reasons. Meanwhile and virtually in complete contrast, South Korea displays a highly successful, wealthy economy with increasing political and military support from Eastern Pacific friends.

SoFFAAM Summer promotions

By Richard Macauley and Chris Penney
All photos by the authors.



Henstridge Wings and Wheels event. Formally RNAS Henstridge (HMS Dipper) when operating as a satellite airfield to RNAS Yeovilton. There happened to be more classic cars than aircraft at this particular show but it was still a very enjoyable day.

2023 was our busiest year in promoting SoFFAAM at Summer events.

The picture above shows our gazebo that we erect at these various outdoor activities and talk to the public, the organisers and other attendees, describing who SoFFAAM is and what we do.

Plenty have visited FAAM, some have heard of us, many have not. Fortunately, a few of the public are impressed with the Society's *raison d'être* and sign up to become Members.

Once we show them copies of *Jabberwock*, discuss the Talks programme and the benefits of being a member, this is enough to convince them to join SoFFAAM.

We hear many fascinating stories, usually aviation related about relatives and friends who have served in the military since the dawn of the RNAS, FAA and RAF. Some are tragic, many are humorous but all are welcome.

Do come and say hello if you see us out and about.

Middlezoy Wings & Wheels where Navy Wings heavily supported this event. The Saturday was fine though rain intervened on the Sunday but they still displayed the Reliant, Harvard, Seafire, Swordfish and the Wasp which demonstrates the 'rural' environment of part airfield, part farm.

Steve Winter from the local modellers club displayed his trio of Navy Wings aircraft.



Dunkeswell 80, where Historic Helicopters Chard supported this event as well as many private aircraft owners. The notorious British summer weather cancelled the Saturday but Sunday went ahead as planned.



Yeovil Modellers Show, One of the South West's biggest modelling shows.



Henstridge Wings & Wheels another good showing by Navy Wings displaying their aircraft.

Occasional heavy bursts of rain brought visitors under the gazebo to take shelter where we promptly turned some of them into members.

The Red Arrows used the SoFFAAM stand as a marker for their overflight, just as they did at the **Somerset Armed Forces Day** back in July



Somerset Armed Forces Day, Local MP Rebecca Pow visits the SoFFAAM stand.



India's Aircraft Carriers - Part 1

By Chris Penney



India's first indigenous aircraft carrier INS *Vikrant* on sea trials. She commissioned in September 2022.
© Cochin Shipyard Limited

Taunton's Museum of Somerset holds an ornate silver model of India's historic Gateway of India arch-monument at Mumbai (Bombay). Presented by the Indian Government to the Somerset Light Infantry, it was a gift for being the last British military unit to leave the country on 28 February 1948.

The event marked the end of the British Raj era as it was known and followed India's independence from the UK in 1947. The Royal Indian Navy continued use of the Royal Navy White Ensign until 26 January 1950, when

India formally became a republic. Thereafter its navy was re-christened the Indian Navy and while the ensign's St. George's Cross over a white field was retained, the Union Flag changed to the Flag of India. In 2022 the Indian Navy unveiled a new Ensign. The fourth redesign since 1950, the ensign features the national flag and a navy blue-gold octagon encompassing the naval crest. It was flown for the first time in September 2022 from the new carrier INS *Vikrant*. The ship's name translates as "courageous" and is a tribute to the

Indian Navy's first aircraft carrier, also named *Vikrant*.

India's 1961 acquisition of an aircraft carrier was the most significant event in that country's naval history. It ushered in not only a completely new era of jet naval aviation in the Indian Ocean region, but also achieved the Indian Navy's stated aim of establishing a modern balanced naval force (a submarine service already existed). None of India's near neighbours possessed such a capability. The ship chosen to fulfil this requirement was the surplus Royal Navy *Majestic*-class HMS *Hercules*. Then still incomplete and mothballed near the Firth of Clyde, the 19,500-ton carrier built at Vickers-Armstrongs' Tyne shipyard was purchased by India in 1957. Design improvements incorporated over the preceding *Colossus*-class ships included improved anti-aircraft armament, larger aircraft lifts and greater aircraft handling capacity. For

Indian Navy service she was refitted with an angled flight deck and steam catapults. The four other stored British-built *Majestic*-class carriers also saw service with Commonwealth nations – Australia (two) and Canada (two). Her acceptance trials complete by mid-February 1961, the finished carrier was handed to the Admiralty from outfitter Harland & Wolff in Belfast on 4 March 1961. India's High Commissioner to the UK formally accepted the 700ft-long ship on behalf of the Government of India, renaming her INS *Vikrant*. A formation of Sea Hawk fighter aircraft flew overhead in salute.

The Indian Navy also acquired a naval aviation strike force to operate from the planned carrier, first establishing a Naval Jet Flight to initiate naval aviation training, comprising three single seat Hindustan Aeronautics-built Vampire FB52s (de Havilland's export FB6) and one Vampire T55 trainer, in September



British-built INS *Vikrant* began operating from Bombay's naval base in late 1961. © Indian Navy

1957. The selected operational aircraft was the Armstrong Whitworth Sea Hawk FGA Mk6 and the first combat squadron, Indian Naval Air Squadron (INAS) 300, officially formed at RNAS Brawdy, Pembrokeshire, on 7 July 1959. Air and ground crews began training with the Fleet Air Arm on the single-engined type. That September the Indian Navy ordered 24 Sea Hawks to serve in the dual fighter-bomber role. However, the Coventry manufacturer had already ceased Sea Hawk production and to fulfil the order the FGA Mk6 line was reopened. Records differ as to the number of new Sea Hawks built for India, but it is known that 14 were completed in 1960. The subsonic jet had largely been replaced in Royal Navy frontline service by the Supermarine Scimitar and Sea Hawks had been handed to 1832 RNVR squadron. With ex-Fleet Air

Arm aircraft readily available, further examples were purchased by the Indian Navy after rework.

On 5 March 1961 *Vikrant* departed Northern Ireland for sea trials off Portland, Dorset and on 18 May 1961 the first Indian Navy Sea Hawk landed onboard. The flight deck could handle aircraft up to 20,000-pounds (9,100kg) maximum landing weight. Finally on 31 July 1961 INAS 300 embarked off the Isle of Wight. On 6 October 1961, *Vikrant* sailed from HMNB Portsmouth for India and proceeded through the Suez Canal. Passing Bombay seafront's Gateway of India, she entered the main naval base there to national acclaim on 3 November 1961. The Indian Navy eventually operated a force of 74 naval Sea Hawks. Their armament comprised four nose-mounted 20mm cannons with 200 rounds per gun and four 500-pound



Sea Hawk Mk100 and licence-built Vampire T55 trainer at Goa's Naval Aviation Museum.

bombs or mines and 60-pound RP-3 unguided rockets on underwing pylons. This fighter-bomber force included 28 Mk100s and Mk101s acquired from the Federal German Navy's Marineflieger; the type having been replaced in West German Navy service by the F-104G Starfighter. The Mark 101 was an all-weather interceptor carrying an external underwing radar pod.

Vikrant initially provided fleet air defence with its Sea Hawks, anti-submarine warfare (ASW) Bréguet Alizé aircraft and Westland Sea King helicopters. That December she participated in operations to liberate the Portuguese enclave of Goa, providing a distant deterrent. During the 1971 Indo-Pakistan war the carrier implemented a naval blockade of East Pakistan (modern Bangladesh) in the Bay of Bengal. Her Sea Hawks successfully struck enemy

shipping in the main Port of Chittagong and at Cox's Bazaar harbour. Later strikes targeted Khulna and the port of Mongla, as well as Chittagong's military infrastructure. The ship underwent a major refit in 1987, when she acquired a 9.75-degree ski-jump to prepare for Sea Harrier operation. The steam catapult was removed at the same time. In 1983 Sea Harriers replaced INAS 300's Sea Hawks and the ASW role was performed solely by Sea King helicopters. In January 1995 *Vikrant* was removed from active service. She became a floating museum upon decommissioning in 1997 before being scrapped in 2014. India's national Naval Aviation Museum at Goa was officially opened on 12 October 1998 by the first Sea Hawk pilot to land on *Vikrant*, former Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral RH Tahiliani.



The RN CSG21 deployment saw UK F-35 Lightnings joined by pairs of navy Fulcrum-D fighters and maritime strike Flanker-H and Jaguar jets. © Indian Navy

An Aegean Odyssey

By Tim Smith



The venerable and still operational F4E Phantom II of Hellenic Air Force 338 Sqn. © Richard Macauley

I have long since realised that Richard Macauley's ideas cannot be taken with a pinch of salt.

It was his idea to visit the Axalp exercise in the Bernese-Oberland a few years ago. He was right - the Swiss Air Force do invite the public to attend their target ranges and watch them shooting live 20mm cannon shells at targets from their F18's and F5 aircraft and you do start the mountainous ascent at some unearthly hour in the pitch black. The village sits at 1500m then the climb starts as the ranges are another 750m higher, although a bit can be lopped off with a ski lift to give you a bit of help. In

the end though, it is surreal sitting at the top of a mountain watching live firing.

I therefore realised that his idea to visit Greece to watch F4s (yes, the Hellenic Air Force do still operate them) at Exercise Iniochos had to be taken seriously, so the logistic exercise started. Richard applied for Base passes and booked hotels, car hire etc. Having done these events before it was easier for him. I reviewed flights options, though the obvious easyJet proved a false economy once the costs of cabin bags (cameras) as well as hold luggage were taken into account. Aegean had recently opened a direct route from Bristol to Athens so this

option was chosen by Richard. This then became more complex because Exercise Anatolian Eagle in Konya, Turkey was to take place immediately after Iniochos. With no direct flights to Konya, which was a mixed blessing, the flight logistics had a plus side in incorporating a stopover in Istanbul. That was another one off my 'bucket list' the Blue Mosque was absolutely jaw dropping.

Our flight into Athens arrived late in the evening and our car pick up was 'off site'. We had the usual car hire hassle with insurance excess waiver fees but as they were not exorbitant, we were tired and still had a fair distance to travel we took a pragmatic view and paid up!

Thankfully we had opted to break the journey and stayed in a comfortable hotel at about half way. Unfortunately, we couldn't linger over breakfast the next morning to enjoy the spectacular setting overlooking the Gulf of Corinth as we still had a considerable distance to drive and we wanted to settle in at the next hotel at Kyllini in the Western

Peloponnese to be ready for our early start on base the next day. The journey on the motorway was broken numerous times due to the multitude of tolls. Thankfully they all took credit cards.

The Air Force personnel at Andravida air base were well organised and our security passes were duly waiting. It is very easy to forget this is a military exercise, not a public airshow. Transport was laid on to move us around the base.

Ominously, someone mentioned that the weather forecast had altered as the previous week the forecast had been superb, but in the interim a deep depression had developed off the Italian coast in the Southern Adriatic affecting the whole of the Mediterranean. Initially the light was perfect on the aircraft with dark skies behind them as the storm approached, but when the front arrived it produced rain of 'Biblical proportions'. My waterproof shoes kept the water in not out so the rest of the day was spent walking in my own puddles! The weather stopped the morning aircraft launches



Indian Air Force Sukhoi Su-30MKI taxis to dispersal after an afternoon sortie. © Tim Smith



Panavia Tornado IDS of 6 Gruppo, Aeronautica Militare (Italian Air Force) carrying two AGM-88E AARGM missiles on the under fuselage weapon stations. © Richard Macauley

but we were bussed back to a base cafeteria with coffee and barbecued food available. Luckily the rain passed over quite quickly and perfect drying conditions ensued. The sunshine and wind dried everything pretty quickly (apart from my shoes which took the rest of the trip to dry out).

We were positioned quite close to the takeoff runway and immediately adjacent to the taxi way for returning aircraft. A 400mm lenses gave good framing for takeoff and the short end of a 70 - 200mm lens was adequate for recovery. We were so much closer to the aircraft than we would have been in the UK, so we could use much shorter focal lengths. The afternoon started with the Italian Tornados (so nice to see this type again) followed by Hellenic F16s. The contrast in size really emphasised how much smaller the F16s are. Next up were the Saudi Arabian F15's. Then came the stars as the Hellenic F4s and

the Indian Su-30s departed, the latter huge in comparison and even made the F4s seem small. Finally, the recently acquired Hellenic Rafales commenced their sorties as the earlier launches started to return.

As the exercise had been abandoned in the morning, the afternoon seemed all too short, but the sorties extended into the early evening with the late returnees bathed in the golden Greek sunlight. But all too soon we were leaving the base and back to the comfortable Hotel Glarentza Richard had found. This was also being used by one of the Aviation Enthusiast tour operators and it was a comforting feeling knowing that our trip had cost about half of the cost that these tour operators charge for the same experience.

The next day we had to return to Athens but, with no rush to get back, we took the mountain route allowing us to enjoy the spectacular scenery



Royal Saudi Air Force 92 Squadron F15SA. Note the pilot waving to the assembled crowd. © Tim Smith

with some late spring flowers as we headed to a section of the Greek low fly system. Directions were kindly supplied by an Austrian 'spotter' we had met at Axalp with whom we keep in touch. An added bonus was missing some of the motorway tolls. Photography outside Greek bases is not advisable, so discretion being the better part of valour we passed on the opportunity. Some Dutch photographers we met at the low fly zone assured us they had not encountered any problems nor had the number of photographers with them though they kept a 'respectable' distance

from the base fence.

Although we had no passes by the exercise aircraft in the low fly area, we heard stories of the Italian Tornados, French Rafales and the Indian Su-30's that did so the preceding week. The whole trip was an unforgettable experience.

The next stage of our Aegean Odyssey was transferring to Turkey for Exercise Anatolian Eagle. Not quite as complex as Odysseus's travels in Homer's poem but it was still bit of a trek. This 'Turkish Delight' delicacy will follow in a future edition of Jabberwock.



Hellenic Air Force Rafale EG. © Tim Smith

Photographic kit list as used by Tim and Richard

Tim Smith Cameras: Canon R5 x 2
Lenses: Canon EF 400mm f/4 DO IS II USM and Canon RF 70-200mm F4L IS USM zoom,

Richard Macauley Cameras: Nikon D810 and D610
Lenses: AF-S Nikkor 500mm f/4E FL ED VR, AF-S Nikkor 80-400mm f/4.5-5.6 G ED VR zoom and AF-S Teleconverter TC-14E III.

Search 'Richard James Macauley' on flickr to see more photographs of this exercise.

His Majesty the King's cypher

By Richard Macauley.



The King's cyphers of Royal Navy commissioned and non-commissioned Officers. © MoD

Sailors and Royal Marines wore His Majesty The King's cypher on their uniforms for the first time at the coronation parade in May 2023.

Petty Officers, Chief Petty Officers, Warrant Officers and Officers on parade during the historic event bore the Tudor Crown on the King's cypher.

Royal Marines wore a newly-designed Brunswick Star on their helmets incorporating the Tudor Crown.

"This will already be a proud moment for our sailors and Royal Marines Commandos, and it is made even more memorable with the addition of the cypher," said Warrant Officer First Class Eddie Wearing, the Royal Navy's State Ceremonial Training Officer.

The Royal cypher is a monogram-

style design used by the reigning monarch. The King's cypher features the letter 'C' intertwined with the letter 'R' for Rex (Latin for King), with 'III' within the 'R' and the Tudor Crown sitting above. Our late Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II used the Edward Crown on her cypher.

The King's cypher also appears on cap badges, buttons and other adornments to Royal Navy and Royal Marines uniforms, as well as on those of the Army and Royal Air Force.

The College of Arms designed the cyphers and is responsible for creating and maintaining official registers of coats of arms and pedigrees. The heralds who make up the College are members of the Royal Household, and act under Crown authority.

Future Talks

By Richard Macauley

Saturday Morning Talks

Our new initiative in 2023 has been successful, with Cdre Neil Thomas starting us off last March with his anecdotes of flying the Phantom in 892 Naval Air Squadron service.

The noted historian Paul Beaver spoke about his new book, the biography of Winkle Brown in October and we are looking forward to Cdre Bill Covington and his stories of flying the Sea Harrier, including the Falklands conflict this November.

However, we are at a crossroads with the Saturday Talk Series as the current Talks team is unable to continue with this Saturday Series next year.

If there are any willing volunteers out there who would like to arrange and continue this excellent opportunity of just four Saturday talks per year in 2024, please contact me in the first instance at soffaam@btinternet.com or 07768 562976/01278 683300 and I can outline the requirement for you.

Thursday Evening Talks in 2024

We have a very diverse range of speakers lined up for our Thursday evening programme for next year, so please enter the dates in your diary if you intend to come along, we are sure you will not be disappointed in any of

our arranged speakers.

Due to very busy lives, operational commitments and a host of other diversions, a speaker may cancel at the last minute, therefore we may have to employ a substitute. We have managed this successfully in the past and we hope that our audiences will bear with us if and when we have to substitute a notified speaker. We will try and give as much notice as possible when this happens - keep an eye on our website.

www.fleetairarmfriends.org.uk/talks/

Thursday 25 January 2024

Mike Morison with the introduction of the Apache AH64D to service.

Thursday 29 February 2024

Joe Marsden – Flying the Vulcan in the Maritime Reconnaissance role.

Thursday 28 March 2024

SBS Veterans and Robert Brooke – SBS Operations in the Falklands Conflict.

Thursday 25 April 2024

Sue Adcock – The RAF Institute of Aviation Medicine, Farnborough

Thursday 30 May 2024

99th Expeditionary Reconnaissance Squadron and U2 ops at RAF Fairford

Thursday 27 June 2024

David Hassard – “Bat boat to Red Arrows”, the story of Hawker Aviation at Kingston

Thursday 25 July 2024

Iain Ballantyne – ‘Undersea’ in the Cold War

See the website for other speakers and dates

“The Queen’s Platinum Jubilee Flypast 2022”

By Lt Cdr David Lilly, RN.

July Talk summarised by Robert Heath



The Queen’s Platinum Jubilee Flypast at Buckingham Palace took place on 2 June 2022 and of the 70 - plus aircraft that took part, the lead aircraft was a Wildcat helicopter flown by our speaker tonight.

David Lilly had just come off duty and addressed us in flying overalls. He joined the RN in 1977 and four years later gained his Wings and joined 702 Squadron. To date he has flown around 4,400 hours, including 1,500 hours as an instructor. He has flown every type of aircraft in RN service and has served in the Baltic, the Gulf, spent four years as a Lynx Trials Instructor,

three years with the Oman Air Force, was involved with the introduction of the Wildcat into service, plus Wildcat Conversion Instruction. He spent six months training in the Ukraine - which included all aspects of training, such as ‘escape and evasion’, which he knows has been put into practice since. David is currently Senior Pilot, 825 Squadron.

In March 2022, the Squadron was told that a flypast of Buckingham Palace for the Platinum Jubilee was being planned. The RAF had devised and wanted to implement the flypast plan with participation by the other services. However, it was soon apparent that they were not the only ones with a plan. The RN, the Army and the Joint Helicopter Command (JHC) also had plans. The RAF was the lead organisation, but because it was a ceremonial occasion, the RN, as Senior Service, would lead the fly past, followed by the Army Air Corps and finally the RAF. Bearing in mind the speed difference between a helicopter of say 150kts and that of jet aircraft at 400+kts it would be a nightmare if it went wrong.

David was told by his CO that, he, David, would lead the flypast while the boss took the squadron’s Wings

Parade. An Air Marshal gave the flypast briefing at RAF High Wycombe. Rehearsals would be an essential element, Restricted Airspace was allocated and all flights at Heathrow and Gatwick would be stopped during the flypast. All aircraft had to arrive over the palace, on track and on time. Preparations were detailed and intense, including: rendezvous at RAF Benson; routing across London; for accuracy, mark plots on the chart at one minute intervals for 15 minutes; tolerance no more than 5kts/5 seconds, otherwise the 70 aircraft following behind would back-up and bunch, or stretch out, plan to fly constantly at 90kts ground speed, so that the other faster flying elements could realistically calculate their speed to arrive precisely on schedule.

A full rehearsal took place using RAF Cranwell as its palace substitute. Additionally, the RN team used its flight simulators to practise and refine the plans. As lead pilot, David had to brief all the rotary-wing crews from RNAS Yeovilton, RAF Benson and RAF Odiham. This involved briefing an audience with many senior attendees and over 150,000 flying hours experience. Not a problem, said David, with all that instructing under his belt.

On the day, the weather was excellent and all the aircraft were serviceable. All eight Wildcats flew to RAF Benson, refuelled and joined up with 10 additional helicopters. They arrived at the first waypoint and maintained schedule throughout the onward flight. David stressed the critical role played by his observer in

maintaining the schedule.

Arrival time over the Palace was 13.00 and the BBC added some excitement for David by airing at 12.53 its previously recorded interview with him. David's mobile phone went berserk as everyone he knew called him to say they had seen the interview. Some timing!

On the run in, David's observer switched on the Wildcat's camera to gain some excellent close-up images of the Royal party standing on the Palace balcony looking up. Similarly, the crowds in the Mall took video shots of the fly past from every conceivable angle. David mingled many of these views with the ones taken from his cockpit of the London Eye. Once past the Palace, it was all over and the Wildcats returned to Yeovilton. David reflected while driving out the gate, "that was a job well done".

Several lessons were noted. People easily overcomplicate things; there is always more than one way to achieve the aim; experience does matter; individuals deal with stress very differently; it would be beneficial if the different services' flight simulators were connected.

David was justifiably pleased with the outcome of the exercise and took great delight in any opportunity to exchange banter with the many ex-RAF members of the audience. Thank you, Lt Cdr David Lilly for a lively, animated and humorous evening. If you cannot join us in the auditorium for future talks, make sure you join us on Zoom, it is so easy to do.

The Development of the Hunter

By Sqn Ldr (Rtd) Rod Dean

September talk summarized by Robert Heath



Rod Dean has 2,810 flying hours on the Hawker Hunter, but as ever, there was not one line-shoot in his entertaining talk.

1,972 Hunters were built and a great many of these were rebuilt and re-sold. In November 1964, Rod completed his first Hunter flight and roughly 40 years later, in March 2003, he made his last. He explained that aviation experience in WW2 gave first notice of compressibility problems arising from increased aircraft speeds. One solution was to make wings thinner. In 1947, the USA adopted very thin straight wings for the supersonic Bell X-1. This delayed the drag rise, but it meant that almost nothing could be contained within the wing. The swept wing, as introduced on the German Me 262 jet fighter, reduced the thickness/chord ratio of the wing, making it 100 mph faster than

the P51 Mustang. In October 1947, the swept wing North American F86 Sabre appeared, followed two months later in December 1947 by the MiG 15 and the B47 Stratojet with a 35° swept wing.

In Britain, we were behind the creative design curve, with the straight winged Meteor, Vampire, Venom and Attacker. In the Korean war in 1950, straight-wing RAAF Meteors were truly outclassed by MiGs. This led the introduction of swept wing aircraft with the experimental Supermarine 510, followed by the Swift, which entered service in 1952. Hawker produced the swept winged P1052, based on the delightful Sea Hawk, followed by the P1081 with all swept surfaces throughout. The culmination of these development aircraft was the Hawker Hunter prototype, which first flew in July 1951. The aircraft, serial WT555, looked promising, but it revealed troublesome features, including the unsuccessful design of combined flap and airbrake and trouble with the ammunition link and cartridge case ejectors. The RR 100-series Avon engine tended to surge when the guns were fired and spanwise airflow across the wing caused the wingtips to stall before the rest of the wing, making the aircraft pitch upwards.

The first aircraft flew with a 103

series engine, giving around 6,500lb of thrust. The second prototype had an uprated Avon 107 engine giving 7,550lb thrust, while the third prototype was modified to take the 8,000lb Armstrong Siddeley Sapphire engine. Uprated versions of both engines continued throughout the Hunter's service life.

Development snags were gradually overcome. The original robust flaps were retained, but an airbrake was added to the underside of the fuselage. Bulbous 'Sabrina-collector' blisters were installed to catch the cartridge cases (Sabrina being a notably well-developed actress at the time) and the gun ports were modified to deflect firing gases. Swept wing stalling problems were not unique to the Hunter. MiG fighters all used large wing fences to reduce spanwise flow, while the F86 Sabre tried automatic slats before reverting to fences. Hawker adopted a more innovative approach with a dog-tooth leading edge that formed a vortex in the airflow to delay the stall. Rod enthused about the effectiveness of this solution.

As in most British designs of the time, fuel capacity was inadequate, giving the Hunter F1 a range of around 400 miles. By the time the Hunter Mk 6 emerged this was increased to around 1,450 miles at 40,000ft altitude with the introduction of drop tanks, typically two 230 gallon, plus two 100 gallon tanks. The standard armament fit was four 30mm Aden cannon in a pack beneath the cockpit. The pack contained 150 rounds of ammunition per gun and could be changed in seven minutes. Underwing pylons enabled

additional weapons to be carried including the original WW2, 3" 60lb unguided rockets. Hunters could also deploy French SNEB anti-tank rockets.

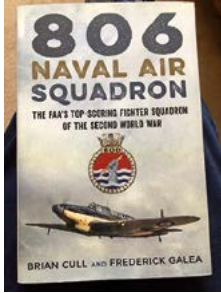
Flying controls were hydraulic throughout, except for the rudder. Manual reversion was available, although the controls were very heavy. The instrument panel remained largely the same throughout. Several Hunter Marks from FR 1 to Mk12 emerged to fill different roles and to meet the needs of foreign operators. In 1953, a prototype F3 piloted by Hawker Chief Test Pilot Neville Duke achieved the world speed record of 727.63mph. Subsequently, a standard operational Hunter F6 could achieve 620 knots (about 713mph) at sea level. Later Marks were fitted with the "bullet-proof" Avon 203 engine of 10,000lb thrust.

The Mk12 series was the two-seat version with side-by-side seating. The design was significantly aided by the modular construction of the Hunter, with the single-seat nose section replaced by the wider, two seat cockpit. Getting the airflow correct around the new canopy proved to be a design challenge, but ultimately it was successful and added a laminar flow effect that could make it faster than a single-seat Hunter. Several Hunters are still flying now in civilian identities and Rod indicated that to his knowledge a fatigue life for them has not been defined.

Thank you, Rod Dean for a very professional, well-illustrated presentation. Thank you also to those who made it all happen in the auditorium and on Zoom.

806 Naval Air Squadron

By Brian Cull and Frederick Galea. Reviewed by Malcolm Smith



Sub-titled “The Fleet Air Arm’s top-scoring fighter squadron of WW2”, 806 squadron was formed in February 1940, equipped with eight Skuas and six Rocs.

The squadron was commanded by Lt Cdr Charles “Crash” Evans, one of the great characters of the FAA, and intended to be the fighter element of the new HMS *Illustrious*. The squadron was first deployed to HMS *Sparrowhawk*, (RNAS Hatston) in the Orkneys, from where they mounted attacks on ships and harbour installations in Bergen, Norway, in support of allied forces there.

In May 1940, the squadron was redeployed at short notice to Kent, tasked to fly patrols over the Channel to protect the vessels evacuating troops from Dunkirk. Observer Lieutenant Vincent-Jones recorded: “... one memory, off Dover, was looking down over Kent and seeing figures playing cricket on village greens... and by turning one’s head 180 degrees ... see the bombs exploding on the beaches...” After Dunkirk, the squadron was re-

equipped with Fulmars and embarked in *Illustrious*. The ship carried out a short work-up voyage to Bermuda (where the disembarking aircraft were mistaken for German fighters) before re-crossing the Atlantic and entering the Mediterranean to join Admiral Cunningham’s Mediterranean Fleet.

Here they were initially engaged in defending the fleet from Italian reconnaissance aircraft, including SM79 and floatplane Z501, which attempted to locate the fleet to enable attacks by enemy bombers. The eight-gun Fulmars regularly defeated the shadowing aircraft, enabling the battle fleet to protect convoys transiting the Mediterranean. In November 1940, *Illustrious* was detached to enable her Swordfish to attack the Italian fleet in Taranto and the next day 806 aircraft were fully engaged in fighting off numerous attacks by Italian Air Force. The operational picture changed abruptly in January 1941 when the Luftwaffe transferred a powerful bomber contingent to Sicily. On 10 January, Fulmars supporting raids on Italian ports were recalled to defend *Illustrious* from waves of Ju87 Stuka dive-bombers. Although some of the Fulmars were able to engage the Stukas as they flew away, they were helpless to

protect the carrier from the bombing. Six 1000 lb bombs hit the ship and one penetrated the after lift well, causing tremendous damage. The surviving 806 aircraft were diverted to Malta and *Illustrious* made harbour that evening with 126 dead on board. In the following days, the Luftwaffe mounted heavy bombing raids on the island and the remaining Fulmars joined in its defence.

Illustrious was sent to the USA for repairs and her Fulmars were re-deployed to the venerable HMS *Eagle*, from which they took part in operations to protect convoys. HMS *Formidable*, sister ship to *Illustrious*, arrived in Alexandria on 10 March and a reinforced 806 squadron embarked in their new home. A hectic period of naval operations ensued, in which the squadron was heavily involved, as German convoys and airborne transports attempted to reinforce their troops in north Africa, German airborne troops captured Crete in May 1941 and *Formidable* was tasked to provide support to Malta convoys. On 13 May, the carrier was supporting operations off Crete when she was heavily attacked by waves of German bombers. Seriously damaged, the ship returned to Alexandria and the Fulmars had lost their second home in six months.

The Mediterranean fleet was now without an effective carrier and in July 1941, various naval aircraft, including crews and aircraft from 806, now equipped with Hurricanes, were formed into the Royal Naval Fighter Squadron (RNFS) based at Dekheila, near Alexandria. The RNFS carried out land

operations in support of the army in the confused fighting in late 1941.

In early 1942, there were fears for the security of Ceylon, threatened by Admiral Nagumo's Japanese striking fleet, which included six aircraft carriers. The island was weakly defended on land by a mixture of aircraft. 806 Squadron, now re-equipped with Fulmar IIs, was deployed to the island. Other units arrived to strengthen the defence, but they were entirely inadequate to counter the attack by Nagumo's aircraft on 5 April. Several of the defending Fulmars were shot down, while the RAF lost 21 Hurricanes. In subsequent attacks by the Japanese, the carrier HMS *Hermes* was sunk. "Fulmar pilots acquitted themselves well" says the author, "even though out-performed by the A6M Zero fighter". In late March, 806 re-embarked in the newly repaired *Illustrious* as part of the Eastern Fleet, to take part in the assault on French-held Madagascar.

The final wartime activities of 806 Squadron, now re-equipped with Martlets and embarked in HMS *Indomitable* to form part of the Pedestal convoy. Brian Cull describes the complex air operations in this major effort, which included the sinking of HMS *Eagle*. There has been no room in this review to mention the contribution of co-author Frederick Galea on the sufferings of Malta. What does come across is the hectic tempo of naval aviation in the first years of the war, supported by copious first-hand testimonies from the young aircrew.

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SoFFAAM Christmas Lunch attendance form

At Long Sutton Golf Club, Long Load, Langport, Somerset TA10 9JU on Saturday 13 January, 2024 - 12:00 noon for a 12:30 start.

Please Note - this form can be downloaded from the home page of the SoFFAAM website if you prefer not to cut this out from your Jabberwock magazine

Name _____

Name of Guest(s) _____

Address _____

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Tel Number(s) _____

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

Roast Turkey Quantity

Roast Beef Quantity

Moroccan Nut Roast Quantity

Christmas Pudding and custard Quantity

Spiced Apple and berry crumble Quantity

Chocolate Yule log and cream Quantity

Please return your cheque **payable to SoFFAAM** for **£24.00** per person no later than **Friday 15 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.



Long Sutton Golf Club Christmas Menu

Main

Roast turkey, pig in blanket, pork & cranberry stuffing,
crispy roast potatoes & seasonal vegetables (GF)

Roast beef, homemade yorkshire pudding, roast potatoes &
seasonal vegetables (GF)

Moroccan nut roast, new potatoes and roasted seasonal
vegetables (VG/ VE)

Dessert

Traditional Christmas pudding with custard (GF/VG)

Spiced apple & berry crumble with custard (GF)

Chocolate yule log with cream

Followed by coffee and mince pies (GF)

*VE - Vegetarian

*VG - Vegan

*GF - Gluten free on request

Membership

By David Merrett

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

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Total members as of 8 October 2023: **930**
Members who have made a Gift Aid declaration: **702***

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“Going green” and receiving a PDF Jabberwock via your e-mail saves us around £9 per member, per annum. Thank you to those who switched recently! This is very much appreciated.

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

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Hawker Fury Mk.II SR611, construction number 37539 was produced by Hawker's as a Fury ISS - Iraqi Single Seat for the Iraqi Air Force, as part of contract number 53/1/012 for 60 aircraft and was numbered 315 within this production batch.

The aircraft was brought to Orlando, Florida, USA from Iraq in 1979 by Ed Jurist and David C Tallichet. In 1989 the aircraft passed to Laws/ Coleman Warbird Museum, Coleman, Texas where it was rebuilt to airworthy condition, before flying again in April 1991, registered as N36SF.

The Fury was then shipped to the UK in September 1991, passing into the ownership of John Bradshaw at Wroughton until 2009. During this time the aircraft flew in the markings of a Dutch Navy and latterly Royal Australian Navy aircraft marked as 361 and on the UK Civil Register as G-CBEL. She was then exported to Australia where she was registered as VH-SFW.

She was imported back into the UK by her new owners, Anglia Aircraft Restorations Ltd. She was re-registered again as G-CBEL. The aircraft has been refurbished and repainted, by Air Leasing Ltd, in the colours of one of Hawker's Sea Fury prototypes coded SR661, which was a modified Fury Mk.II with a tail hook fitted, but without the folding wings included on subsequent production Sea Fury's.

Photo by Richard Macauley

I am grateful to Nick Walch and his website www.warbirdaviation.co.uk for allowing me to use the description above.

