

JABBERWOCK 117



SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

FLEET AIR ARM
MUSEUM

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

**November
2024**



IN THIS ISSUE

Jim Humberstone Obituary • The "cast-offs" - Naval Aircraft between the Wars • Peter Lovegrove reminisces • "Ham and Jam" • First Solo • *SS Steel Vendor* - October 1971 • WE 177 in Service • 845 steps in to get Czech veterans to 80th anniversary D-Day event • Visit to Bovington Tank Museum SoFFAAM Christmas Lunch • *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, just advise you are a SoFFAAM member to the reception staff. Members can bring 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

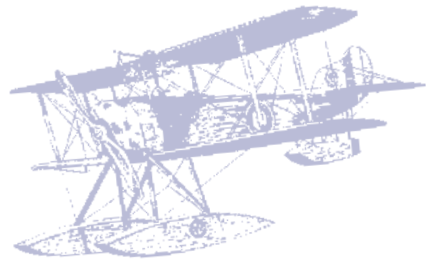
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Fairey Albacore



Peter Lovegrove



SS *Steel Vendor*



WE177

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COVER PHOTOGRAPH

Navy Wings Swordfish resplendent with the addition of D-Day stripes for this year's D-Day 80th anniversary. She was photographed on the afternoon of 06/06/2024 as she did several flypasts over St Bart's after a service in the church. This was the same day as the Operation Neptune commemoration in FAAM as described on the back cover of *Jabberwock 116*.
© Tim Smith.

Editorial

In this edition we hear from centenarian Peter Lovegrove, who piloted Corsair KD431 on its last deck landing.

Restored to its wartime paint finish, the aircraft is preserved in the FAAM. Peter used to be a regular attendee at the Society's AGM, when it was held in the Museum, some time ago. We also hear about the RN's air dropped nuclear weapon, WE177, thankfully now long retired. Regarding the AGM, the 45th event was held via Zoom on 15 October. We were pleased on this occasion to welcome our new Patron, Commodore Bill Covington. The role of the Patron is to act as the public face of the Society and Bill confirms that he is looking forward to this role. We also welcomed Nikolaos Diakidis from Greece and would encourage other members to join us via Zoom in these annual meetings. It is quite simple to log in! After the Council members had reported on the various activities of the Society, the Chairman remarked that this year has been one of consolidation and improvement. Membership is holding up well (helped by our enthusiastic outreach programme) and our finances are on a secure basis. The monthly talks have proved highly

successful and attendance at these events is returning to pre-Covid levels.

There was a small turnout for the visit to the Tank Museum in September. This is an outstanding venue, with a truly enormous variety of armoured vehicles and other warlike equipment. Those of us who attended enjoyed a splendid day out. Thanks, as always, are due to Rosanne for her efficient organisation of these visits. Look out for the notice of the next visit, to RAF Brize Norton next year.

We were honoured by being invited to attend the Museum for the visit by HRH the Princess Royal on 13 September. She was able to inspect the newly completed display cabinet, funded by SoFFAAM, containing the flying suit and equipment worn by her brother, the King, when he was the young Prince of Wales and undergoing flying training at Yeovilton. The Princess Royal is the Patron of the National Museums of the Royal Navy (NMRN).



Malcolm

Council snippets

From the September Council meeting

The General Manager reported that the Museum has had an indifferent summer, but visitor feedback has been generally very positive.

Visitor attractions in the region such as ours have seen similar indifferent visitor numbers and we remain in a strong position overall. We will be delighted to host Her Royal Highness the Princess Royal on 13 September in what is our 60th birthday year, as we reflect on the past 60 years and look towards the future. The visit will coincide with the launch of our new display case (interpretation of King Charles III Flying Suit) in the Welcome Gallery. The popular Christmas carol concert under the wings of Concorde returns this year, this time over two evenings. The concert sold out in very quick time last year and we wanted to trial a second evening once again.

Chris Penney announced that there are now 843 members on the Society's social media pages (Facebook and Instagram), also that two Saturday morning talks are now booked. Richard Macauley said that he had procured a reprint of 1000 membership leaflets

due to the large number given away around FAAM and at events. The new gazebo is working well for the Society in that it has much greater presence at events, it is much more durable and a lot quicker and easier to erect and dismantle.

The Society's Treasurer, Laurence Whitlock, said that we finished the financial year in a strong financial position, predominantly because of the level of donations and monies generated through the Soffaam talks programme. We have approved a request for £16,000 to fund a new display to illustrate King Charles' service in the Royal Navy. David Merrett's report showed that membership numbers were slowly increasing. A high proportion of new members came from the Society presence at outside events.

Richard Macauley said he now had a complete set of talks recordings from the Zoom broadcasts, as taken on the night and unedited. We have started to discuss the opportunity of how to make these available to interested parties, also how we could charge a fee for them.

Have you viewed our website lately? www.fleetairarmfriends.org.uk

Letters to the editor

Dear Editor

Many thanks to those members who responded to my plea in the last edition for back copies of Jabberwock to be surrendered.

This was very generous as no one asked for the postage to be reimbursed

so a huge benefit to SoFFAAM. Thank you sincerely to David A, David P, Ian G, Peter L and Rob H.

**Regards,
Richard Macauley**

Dear Malcolm

J115's Royal Navy King's Colour 100 feature omitted detailing the 1924 Royal Fleet Review at Spithead, which was truly historic.

Partaking was the newly commissioned HMS *Hermes* - as the Navy's first purposely designed aircraft carrier - and HMS *Argus* that had joined the fleet in 1918.

To clarify, while the RN King's Colour

has the Sovereign's cypher usually only the Sovereign's crown adorns regimental King's Colours as on this Parachute Regiment Colour.



I was pleased to see the RAF consulted you about their Typhoon's D-Day 257 (Burma) Squadron camouflage for 2024's air display season: on 6 June 1944 257Sqn was resident at Needs Oar Point as profiled in spring's Jabberwock.

IWM Archive film of the Solent 2 TAF Typhoon ALG taken in May 1944 can be viewed here: www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1060054954h

**Regards,
Chris Penney**



Southern Rhodesia Prime Minister, Sir Godfrey Huggins, visits 266 Squadron at RAF Needs Oar Point. © IWM



Spitfire SM520 parked at Dunkeswell. © John Heath

Dear Editor

I was fortunate to attend a fantastic talk by Matt Jones of Spitfires.com, The Spitfire Academy on Tuesday 21st May at Dunkeswell airfield.

The session was put on by Devon & Somerset Flight Training. Matt was one of 3 pilots who flew Spitfire Mk IX G-IRTY, MJ271, the "Silver Spitfire" around the world in 2019. This added up to 43,000Km, 16 weeks, and 30 countries. Matt stated he was going to talk for about an hour and a half, about 2 hours later he took questions as the sun was setting behind the company's 2 seat Spitfire behind us, as witnessed in the reflection in the window behind Matt.

Matt is an incredibly engaging speaker, and like a lot of slightly "crazy" ideas with a few friends, the idea of a long distant Spitfire flight was born in the pub, the flight morphed into an epic journey. He gathered a skilled team

around him, a second aircraft, Pilatus PC-12 on loan as the support/transport. They took off from Goodwood, and headed to Iceland, Canada, America, Russia, Japan, India, Kuwait, Greece, Italy, Germany, Holland (I've missed a few out) and back to Goodwood. They overcame many hurdles along the way, challenging fuel deliveries, obtaining permission to land at some locations, a burst tyre on landing, long flights over water. Every challenge was overcome, including the birth of Matt's first child.

You would need to have been present to hear this inspiring young man, who with an exceptional team, flew a 1940's combat veteran around the world, with a fuel tank designed to keep the aircraft in the air for 350 miles, adapted for the aircraft to cover 1000 miles, so long flights could now be achieved. My two other friends Kev and John along with 50 or 60 others

were treated to a thrilling journey. If you wish to know more, there is a DVD and excellent book, 'Silver Spitfire, The Longest Flight' available from Spitfires.com. Matt hinted at another challenge,

but would not be drawn, watch this space.

**Regards,
John Heath**

Dear Malcolm

I am a trifle miffed at your comment in the Editorial in Jabberwock 116 about my article Operation Swiftmove 1973 where you suggested I was telling a fib. My story is absolutely true! Doubt may be expressed as the event did not receive any publicity. Very few people knew about what happened to the inebriated Norwegian Rear Admiral thanks to the tact of the Senior Service. He fell into the lift shaft, probably halfway judging by his torn and greasy trousers. He was spotted by the chief steward and helped into the sickbay where he was tended by the staff. The chief steward, anxious to inform someone in authority, found me and was most discreet in informing me of what had happened

I went to the sick bay to ascertain the facts and ensure the Admiral was being looked after properly. I then

felt it my duty to inform Commander Rose, the ship's Executive Officer and accompanied him to the sick bay. Nobody else saw what happened except the chief steward as the Royal Marine band was the centre of attention. I expect the Commander informed the Surgeon Commander and the Captain and probably FOCAS, Admiral Eberle. To avoid embarrassment the story was not mentioned. I expect the unfortunate Admiral was treated for any injuries and possibly new trousers and seen home via his chauffeur.

**Yours sincerely,
Chris Howat**

By the Editor, I am happy to put the record right and have apologised to my old friend Chris for doubting his word!

Dear Editor

After previous conversations at the Yeovil Model Show regarding my diorama depicting a Sea King in Ukrainian colours (See Jabberwock 114), I promised to send you some photos of a scale model of the HeliOps operation at Portland.

Unfortunately, the builder of the model, Roger Dent, was hospitalized for a spell and has only just finished the model, which he researched and built in 1:72 scale.

I hope the photo of the completed model taken at a recent show will be

of interest to SoFFAAM members, especially given the popularity this airframe enjoys

**Regards,
Tony Clayton,
Aviation Diorama Special Interest
Group Leader. International
Plastic Modellers Society**

Editor's Note: Given the mix of 'Sea King', 'HeliOps' and 'Ukraine', all these factors have played a part in Jabberwock over the last few editions. So it is appropriate to continue the theme and publish Roger's photo here for our readership to enjoy. A copy of this photo has been sent to the Chief Operating Officer of HeliOperations.



A fine model of the pan at Portland, formally HMS Osprey and now the busy hub of HeliOperations flying activities. © Roger Dent

Dear Editor

Having only recently taken advantage of the Visits agenda offered by SoFFAAM can I give my thanks and appreciation on behalf of all those who attend these days out to Rosanne Crowther for taking the trouble to organise them. I was surprised at the small number who joined us at The Tank Museum at Bovington in September and have to say that it was a missed opportunity to visit

one of the finest Museums of its type anywhere. I encourage all members to consider getting involved as these events are a great opportunity to meet up with each other and learn about both aviation and others who value our heritage.

**Regards,
Peter Gray**

Dear Editor

I'm pleased to be able to send you some back copies of Jabberwock as requested as I am having a clear out, so grateful to see them go to a good home and not the bin.

You asked about my background so here goes; I had completed QM and QS on the Wessex HU5 on 707 Naval Air Squadron in September 1974 and drafted to ERS (Engine Repair Shop). Whilst there I spent a day cleaning up the Perseus engine from a Skua raised from a Norwegian Fiord that summer.

That winter both 845 and 846 Naval Air Squadrons were onboard HMS *Hermes* and *Bulwark* for several months, leaving an empty hangar so many of the museum's airframes on display outside in the elements were finally put under cover. I volunteered to help work on some of them, mostly the

Sea Venom on our weekends, rubbing down paint.

The Petty Officer from the museum, I think his name was Reg, thought that the radome under the Skyraider had collected some rainwater? Too big to remove, he drilled or cleaned out a drain hole and placed a bucket under it. When we returned the next day we found a half flooded hangar. On one occasion I left my overalls in the Vampire T22 nose, never to see them again.

I really enjoyed my seven years at Yeovilton and then the following twenty seven years with Dan-Air, FLS and Monarch at Gatwick. All the best to all ex Yeovilton staff and to the guys at the museum.

**Yours Sincerely,
David Allwright**

Dear Malcolm

Some background info on HMS *Glory* following on from the special photo feature in Jabberwock 115.

On 17 March 1952, *Glory* launched 105 operational sorties, retaking the record for a single day's flying from HMAS *Sydney*'s 89 sorties of 9 Sept 1951; 65 sorties were flown by 804 NAS Sea Fury FB11 and 40 by 812 NAS Firefly AS6.

During *Glory*'s three tours in Korean waters between April 1951 and May 1953, 7388 offensive and 1676 defensive sorties were flown.

The photo is the HMS *Glory* Roll of

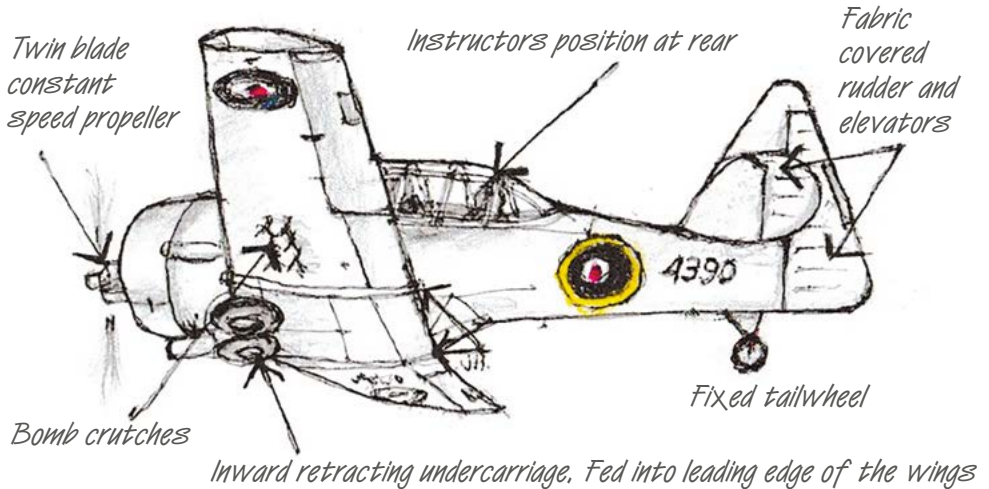
Honour board which now hangs in the Fleet Air Arm Museum at Yeovilton.

**Regards,
Chris Penney**



In Memoriam – Jim Humberstone

By Malcolm Smith



Harvard II. 550hp Pratt & Whitney Wasp radial engine. © Jim Humberstone



We are sad to report the death of Society member and regular contributor, Jim Humberstone.

He sent his delightful drawings of military aircraft to us on a regular basis and we include here his picture of the North American Harvard trainer aircraft. He served on the Society's governing body, the Council, for a while before he moved away from the area, where he was a wise and jovial presence. We still have a few more of his drawings in reserve but are sad to think that there will be no more new ones. Rest in peace Jim.

The "cast-offs" - Naval Aircraft between the Wars - Part two

or "The benefits of hindsight"

By Malcolm Smith



The transfer of Grumman Wildcat fighters diverted from a French order to the FAA.
Illustration by Steev



Grumman Martlet Mk.I

We continue this article from Jabberwock 116. It first appeared in Jabberwock 66, published in the Autumn of 2011.

Naval aircraft at the outbreak of War

Notwithstanding the comments above about lack of funding and the shortcomings of the UK's aircraft industry, the RN pursued a consistent procurement policy between the Wars. Torpedo-carrying aircraft were steadily developed from the original Sopwith

Cuckoo, while other robust and effective inter-war aircraft included the Fairey Flycatcher and IIF. The RN entered the War with the Fairey Swordfish in the TSR role and the Blackburn Skua in the FB role. The Swordfish replacement, the Fairey Albacore, entered service in March 1940, while the Fleet Fighter role was filled by the Fairey Fulmar, which entered service in July 1940. In the Reconnaissance role, the Fairey Seafox and the Supermarine Walrus equipped cruisers and battleships. The

RN also had a windfall in the transfer of Grumman Wildcat fighters from a French order, which was switched to Britain at the fall of France in 1940.

Finally, mention must be made of the Sea Gladiator, converted from the RAF's last biplane fighter for naval use, but already obsolete at the start of the war.

How good were they?

The performance of naval aircraft in 1940 has been widely criticised, but the RN's operational concepts were dependent on Government policy, which did not forecast the rapid collapse of France and the German invasion of Norway, the Balkans and Greece. These unwelcome events meant that the RN was exposed to ferocious attack by the Luftwaffe from the Arctic Ocean, the French Atlantic coast and the Mediterranean, so that the shortcomings of its aircraft were cruelly exposed.

Nonetheless, Fulmars destroyed 112 enemy aircraft, which made it the leading fighter type, by aircraft shot down, in the Fleet Air Arm during the Second World War. Swordfish sank more tonnage of enemy ships than any other aircraft acting in the same role during World War II and served in a variety of roles until 1945. Skuas carried out numerous air and surface attacks, notably sinking the German cruiser *Königsberg* in Bergen harbour during the German invasion of Norway. Although very slow, the Albacore proved effective in many roles that did not expose it to fighter opposition. Finally, before surface vessels were

widely fitted with radar, the Walrus and Seafox filled invaluable reconnaissance and spotting roles.

What about the RAF?

Many criticisms of RN aircraft revolve around the supposed superiority of their RAF equivalents. Certainly, in the defensive role, the RAF was fortunate to possess the superlative Spitfire and the robust Hurricane. If it was not for these aircraft and their pilots, effectively supported by the UK's early-warning radar system, Britain would have fared badly in 1940. However, the role of the RAF was not just defensive; indeed its leaders, from Hugh (later Lord) Trenchard onwards, saw its principal role as to defeat the enemy by offensive action. Bombers would be used to attack his armies, destroy his armament factories and demoralise his population. Enormous funds were devoted to RAF expansion from 1935, but its offensive capability at the outbreak of war can best be described as inadequate. The lack of investment in commercial air travel meant that there had been no investment in the associated all-weather navigation aids already common in the USA. The rapid expansion of the RAF prejudiced realistic training and at the outbreak of war the RAF lacked the means to mount effective attacks at night or in poor weather. Experience of the blitzkrieg in France in 1940 showed that, even in daylight, there was no possibility of attacking targets on the Continent with virtually defenceless Wellingtons and Blenheims without suffering prohibitive losses.

In its principal offensive role (and in spite of grievous losses of brave aircrew) the RAF in 1940 was thus incapable of living up to its offensive promise. It would be two more years before sufficient four-engined bombers, with improvements in navigation and bomb-aiming, became available to carry the war to the German heartland. But that's another story ...

To summarise:

Our modern perceptions are coloured by knowing that the performance of FAA aircraft in 1940 was in some respects inadequate. The RN also had too few purpose built aircraft carriers to support its roles, a legacy of the Government's earlier policy of adherence to Treaty limitations. Political decisions to devote most of the capacity of our aircraft industry to support Fighter and Bomber Command meant that more effective replacement aircraft, such as the Barracuda and Firefly, were slow in coming.

Nonetheless, with the exception of the Wildcat and the Sea Gladiator, all the aircraft in FAA operational service at the beginning of the war were unique to the RN and designed specifically to meet Admiralty requirements for ship-borne aircraft. These requirements reflected the war the RN expected to fight. The aircraft were accepted into service by procurement committees on which the Admiralty was represented. Thus none of them could be considered "cast-offs", nor were any of them poor derivatives of RAF designs. If they were not very good, they were the best that



Albacore being prepared for flight

industry could provide to meet the specifications within the budget. With the benefit of hindsight, perhaps our predecessors in the 1930s should have better predicted how warfare would develop, but if they failed, they were in good company.

Postscript

"As dusk started to set in, five North African based Albacores of 826 Squadron arrived on the scene. They did not wait for darkness before launching into the attack, despite the intense flak and the Ju 88s that peeled down to attack them. Two of the Albacores scored direct hits on the vital troop ship, and causing it to sink ... "

" ... 820 Squadron was eventually able to patch up three Swordfish to mount a strike, during which they sank a freighter, although one of these Swordfish was shot down in return ... "

"On 1 June 1942, two Swordfish and three Albacores left a freighter on fire and listing heavily ... One of the Swordfish was lucky to evade a Ju 88 ... an Albacore was wrecked on landing when it hit a lorry that had been left on the duty runway ... "

From "Stringbags and Albacores, the War against Rommel's Convoys" by Tony O'Toole (Jabberwock 61).

Reminiscences of Peter Lovegrove

By Richard Macauley



Peter in front of KD431 at the roll-out ceremony at FAAM on 9 August 2005. © Peter Lovegrove collection

Peter commented on Corsair KD431 (Jabberwocks 115 and 116), as he is credited with the last deck landing of this airframe.

I rang Peter, who kindly invited me to his house in Ferndown (twice) so he could tell me about his wartime naval career and his relationship with KD431. This airframe is now on display at FAAM after a magnificent restoration led by Dave Morris along with his team. But back to 1943, when Peter received his call to arms on reaching the age of 18. As he was an engineering apprentice with Vickers Armstrong and had gliding experience with the ATC, the RAF seemed the likely choice. Introduction to the RAF was by way of the Initial

Training Wing at Newquay followed by Flying grading at Sywell on the ever-faithful Tiger Moth and soloing after 6 hours, meant his flying training would continue in Canada. Initial Flight Training was with 33EFTS at Caron Saskatchewan on the Fairchild Cornell, then to a rather chilly -35 degrees out on the prairie at Medicine Hat and 34 Wing with Intermediate Flying Training on Harvards.

On gaining his wings and embarking from Halifax, Nova Scotia, Peter returned to the UK with the rank of Sergeant and was 'in the pool' at Harrogate where he was given the options of joining the Glider Pilot Regiment or the Navy. He and his friend Jim put in for the Navy, so

guess where they were sent...?

Arriving at Fargo Plantation on Salisbury Plain for glider training, Peter thought his flying career was mapped out for him. However, after returning from Booker airfield and a Tiger Moth sortie, Peter says he will never forget this. It was a Tuesday morning, and the parade commander put his hand out and said; "All those to the left will be enough glider pilots to fulfil the Rhine crossing requirement, so all you chaps to the right are going to the Navy!" Peter was happy that he was now heading for the service of his original choice, but this was tempered by later events where many of the men he trained with became casualties in the heavy losses that befell the Glider Pilot Regiment. Many of his former friends and colleagues are buried in the Lübeck Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery.

He donned his dark blue uniform and reported to RN Hostel Wellbank, HMS *Macaw* where he attended an Admiralty Interview Board to decide his suitability to become an officer in RNVR (Air Branch). He met the requisite standard and was duly sent to RN

College Greenwich for officer training. While there, he recalled an incident regarding the railway line which passed nearby his window at HMS *Macaw*. A munitions train from Royal Ordnance Factory Hycemoor caught fire and the engine driver shunted the wagons away from Bootle Station but unfortunately in line with Peter's accommodation at the base. Here the cargo of depth charges blew up. Being away at Greenwich, he was safe, but his model aircraft and his personal effects disappeared in the big bang.

Now to the real business of getting to grips with a front-line aircraft. He was first introduced to the Corsair at Zeals Airfield and continued his training to tame this popular but feisty aircraft. With the fundamentals of the Corsair mastered, it was then to RNAS Yeovilton, HMS *Heron*, to assimilate the warfighting skills he would need when operational. Gunnery started here and then continued at RNAS Eglinton, HMS *Gannet*, Northern Ireland. Sorties were flown from the nearby satellite airfield of RNAS Maydown, HMS *Shrike*, with the Corsair IV 'attacking' the local ranges.



Peter's intake at RN College Greenwich. © Peter Lovegrove collection

On one sortie he recalls that the guns would not fire and on inspection it was found that the barrels were very rusty. On another occasion he had no airspeed indication, necessitating a quick return to the airfield. He kept the airspeed up as he did not want to induce the vicious stall of the Corsair, making it safely back to *terra firma*. Inspection of the pitot head revealed that the pipes behind were found to be bent, halting the pressure and airspeed measurement.

His next posting was to RNAS East Haven, HMS *Peewit*, to work with HMS *Ravager* for intensive Deck Landing Practice (DLP). Once completed, the plan was that he be posted to 1834 Naval Air Squadron, which was fighting hard in the Far East from HMS *Victorious*, but the dropping of the atomic bombs meant he would stay in the UK. I asked Peter what it was like to join *Ravager*, as effectively his naval career so far was as a landlubber. "Very different" was his not unexpected reply though he only stayed onboard for a few nights. "Very noisy in my top bunk just below the deckhead, the 'tie-down' chains made for a lot of clanking disturbing my sleep. But the kindness, the personalities and relationships of the ship's company made a very big impression on me".

With the changing requirements

at war's end, *Ravager* ceased flying operations and de-commissioned. Peter was sent to RNAS Lee-on-Solent, HMS *Daedalus* and given SAR and mine disposal duties flying Sea Otters, which was a very different experience to the Corsair. He continued this task when posted to RNAS Lossiemouth, HMS *Fulmar*. While at Lossiemouth he considered his future and as the war had interrupted his engineer training, he put in for release from the Royal Navy and went to work at Supermarine. After a couple of years, he went full circle and re-joined the RAF in 600 (City of London) Squadron Royal Auxiliary Air Force as a reservist and based at RAF Biggin Hill. Further flying ended with the best part of 8000 hours on 87 types of aircraft but that as they say is another story...

Coming back to Corsair KD431, David Morris, the Museum's chief curator, arranged a roll-out ceremony to mark the completion and display of this airframe. In attendance was Chris Clark who was the Goodyear Test Pilot during WW2, first to fly KD431. With the last deck landing in KD431 attributed to Peter, these three came together on 9 August 2005, along with other former FAA Corsair pilots as a very fitting tribute to this excellent restoration.



Corsair IVs at RNAS Eglinton of 794 Naval Air Squadron. © Peter Lovegrove collection

“Ham and Jam”

By Chris Penney



Squadron Leader Chris 'Tim' Clayton from RAF Brize Norton together with the author at Exeter Canal Bridge's newly unveiled D-Day 80 interpretation panel. © Chris Penney

“Major Howard, I cannot overestimate the importance of your task - the Orne river bridge must be captured intact before the enemy has a chance to destroy it. Your gliders will land at night, without the benefit of ground support. You will assault the garrison, overwhelm it and hold until relieved, [I repeat] hold until relieved.”

Crossing the English Channel by moonlight aboard an Airspeed Horsa on 5 June 1944 Howard recalls the operation's briefing and after securing his objective then asks himself: “[But] how long can we hold?”

This iconic scene from the 1962 movie *The Longest Day* in which Major John Howard is played by famous British actor Richard Todd captivated me as a child. I was therefore delighted to accept

an invitation to a D-Day 80 ceremony in Devon recalling dress rehearsals for Operation Coup de Main's (as it was known) glider-borne assault by an antecedent regiment of The Rifles.

D-Day planners for Operation Overlord's seaborne landings on Normandy identified two strategic road bridges south of the coastal port of Ouistreham on the far eastern left flank of the British Sword Beach landing area. In enemy hands a counter attack launched across them threatened the Sword landings. These bridges over the Orne river and Caen canal near Bénouville were some 500 yards apart and needed a lightning assault if they were to be captured intact. That task fell to 6th Airlanding Brigade.

After widespread RAF photographic aerial reconnaissance coverage of the target area sites with twin bridges closely matching the Norman countryside were sought out in the UK. One such location was the Exeter Canal and River Exe road bridges outside Exeter, Devon. It was here that members of 2nd (Airborne) Battalion Ox and Bucks Light Infantry assigned the mission trained for the ground assault over several days and nights in spring 1944. John Howard's Pegasus Diaries recall: “At the Countess Wear bridges, each platoon [of six



Post D-Day PRU photo showing the successful glider landings at Landing Zone X in Normandy. Today Caen Canal Bridge is known as Pegasus Bridge. © IWM

involved] practised each of the jobs [assigned]....over and over again until they could do it with their eyes shut.”

The small, Normandy bound airborne force departed RAF Tarrant Rushton in Dorset during the darkening hours of 5 June 1944 aboard six Horsas piloted by the Glider Pilot Regiment. Each glider contained 25 infantry and five Royal Engineers. Towed across the Channel by Handley Page Halifax tug aircraft of 298 and 644 Squadrons, the Horsas were released from 6,000ft while still out over the sea some six miles distant from the landing zone (LZ). The glider pilots knew what to expect as the routine had been practised at Netheravon and they'd even watched simulated colour film of the flightpath from cast off to landing under night conditions.

Assessing D-Day's Coup de Main

glider landings Major Thomas Ian Toler, commanding B Squadron 1 Wing Glider Pilot Regiment at RAF Brize Norton, wrote: “Three [gliders] landed correctly at LZ X [Caen Canal Bridge] and one [Glider No 96] at LZ Y [River Orne Bridge].” Major Toler concluded: “An excellent show....navigating under most difficult conditions and [with] very heavily loaded gliders.” As a result it allowed Major Howard's men a rapid exit ensuring the capture of both bridges within 15 minutes of touching down.

The first British troops to land on French soil that night, the force's codewords for operational success – “Ham & Jam” – were then transmitted back to the south coast of England; history does not record Howard's codewords for a failed assault. During the afternoon of 6 June 1944 commandos who came ashore on Sword Beach finally arrived at the bridges to relieve Major Howard and his men.

Eighty years on, the Exeter Canal Bridge ceremony saw an interpretation panel installed beside a D-Day memorial stone dedicated in 1994. Civic and military representatives from the County of Devon, City of Exeter, Royal Marines, RIFLES and Royal Air Force Brize Norton held a commemorative service prior to the unveiling. Devon and Somerset Fire & Rescue Service Corps of Drums sounded The Last Post to remember those killed in the moonlight airborne assault: the first British casualties on D-Day.

In Dorset the RAF squadrons involved were remembered at the former airfield in Tarrant Rushton.

First Solo

By Tony Wilson



Hunting Percival Provost. © Tony Wilson

My introduction to learning to become a pilot started at RAF Syerston in May 1956

As a member of 60 RN Pilots' Course, due to the terrible weather experienced in the preceding winter, the two other courses ahead of us were well behind in their flying programmes. It would be a week or two before 60 Course would start aviating. In the meantime, Ground School and familiarisation with cockpit layout, from sitting in the cockpit of a silent aircraft standing in the hangar, was the closest we got.

The days slipped by, all too often without our getting airborne due to unsuitable weather for brand new trainee pilots like ourselves. But

eventually basic tuition on 'Effects of Controls' and just learning how to fly straight and level was followed by learning how to climb, descend and turn correctly. Then having learnt how to fly the aircraft around it was time to learn how to get it and back on the ground again successfully, circuits and landings and simulated forced landings as if from engine failure. I soon discovered that I was not a naturally gifted pilot and I would have to work very hard at it to be any good at all. What with all the delays and interruptions due to bad weather, more than a month was to pass and 9 hours and 55 minutes dual instruction before Flt Lt Taylor stopped us at the end of the runway and said the magic

words. As he climbed out of the cockpit and buckled up the seat harness over the now empty right hand instructor's seat, he left me with the admonition: "OK, I've had enough. Do the next one on your own and then we can go home. Just the one take-off, circuit and landing and bring it back in one piece 'cos I've signed for it!"

With a feeling of exhilaration and some trepidation, I taxi down to the edge of the runway, stop and run through the pre-take-off check; - Trim-Neutral, Flaps-Up, Propeller Pitch-Fully Fine, Pneumatic Pressure-OK., Fuel Contents-OK., Booster Pump-On, Engine Temperatures and pressures-Normal, Hood-Closed and Locked, Harness-Tight and Locked. A look to make sure the approach is all clear and call up the tower on the radio for permission to line up and take-off. Line up on the runway, brakes on and ease the throttle forward to full power, brakes off and we're rolling. A touch of left rudder to keep her straight down the middle of the runway. A gentle ease forward on the control column and the tail comes up, the speed builds up to take-off speed, gentle back pressure on the stick and we're airborne.

As the aircraft climbs away there's that mixed thrill of achievement combined with apprehension. My delight at having made this first critical solo flight was now mixed with the knowledge that having got up here on my own I now have to get down again! The safety of my teenage neck is now entirely in my own hands. As I turn down wind, motes of dust sparkle in the

bright sun light and the shadows of the cockpit frames move across the faces of the instruments, but the horizon is vaguely blurred in the slightly misty haze of that June morning. Call "Oscar Mike downwind" to the tower and run through the Before Landing checks. Turn on to final approach, ease back the throttle to lose height and control the airspeed with movements of the stick until the end of the runway slips beneath me and I ease the stick back until the aircraft sits just above the ground in the "three point" attitude. Just a little bit too high, for we drop onto the runway with a bit too much of a thump but at least no bounce. I'm back on the ground with the aeroplane, and, more importantly, me, still all in one piece. There's a saying in flying, "Any landing you can walk away from is a good one" but most pilots try to do a little better than that and for my first solo attempt it wasn't too bad at all.

Such success wasn't automatic. Five or six of our original course number were "scrubbed" and disappeared, some back to civilian life and a couple to move on to RNAS Culdrose to retrain as observers. There would be plenty of other hurdles along the way, before I qualified for my pilot's "Wings", but at last, tonight it will be my turn to buy the drinks in the bar.



Provost Line Up Syerston 1956. © Tony Wilson

SS Steel Vendor - October 1971

By Commodore (retd) John Madgwick OBE



HMS Eagle in the Mediterranean 1971. © Ships Nostalgia

HMS Eagle was the younger sister ship to Ark Royal. Displacing 55,000 tons, she was in markedly better condition and was much better equipped.

Nevertheless, because of its decision to withdraw from east of Suez, the Labour government had chosen to decommission *Eagle* early. In 1971 she was engaged on her final deployment, and had just visited Australia, New Zealand and Singapore before commencing the long passage back to the UK by way of the Arabian Gulf and South Africa. It was during the visit to

Singapore, following a moving ceremony at the naval base, HMS *Terror*, that the Far East Colour was embarked in *Eagle* for eventual laying up in Portsmouth. The author was the Colour Officer for this significant occasion.

Eagle's powerful Air Group included Buccaneers for long-range, low-level strike; Sea Vixens for air defence; Gannets for airborne early warning; and 826 Naval Air Squadron's brand new Sea Kings in the anti-submarine role. The Sea King had only recently entered RN service and represented a

step change in capability, enabling long range operations to be conducted for the first time.

Eagle's next and final port of call in the Far East was to be Hong Kong. However, the weather forecast was for typhoons raging through the region, and in particular, Typhoon Elaine. A series of passage exercises with regional navies had been programmed, but these were cancelled because of the severe weather conditions.

As the ship passed through the South China Sea on 8 October, a distress message was received from the SS *Steel Vendor*, operated by Isthmian Lines. The Vietnam war was still underway, and she was an American cargo ship carrying war materiel, mainly cement, from Manila to Saigon. She had suffered a major engine failure and for the best part of three days had drifted, pitching and rolling violently in appalling conditions, while her engineers attempted to resolve the problem. Unfortunately, just as limited power was restored, the ship grounded on a coral reef close to the uninhabited Loaita Island, part of the Spratly chain. The low-lying reef, the remains of a long-extinct volcano, was not visible except for breaking waves; and it proved impossible to lower boats or life rafts as these would have been ripped to shreds on the sharp coral below. There were no other vessels in the vicinity, and it was rapidly assessed by the crew that the only way off the ship would have to be by helicopter - in the unlikely event that such an aircraft might be available.

Eagle was approximately one hundred miles away when she received



Embarkation of Far East Colour in HMS *Eagle*.

the call from *Steel Vendor* in mid-afternoon. The severe weather had precluded flying operations, but two Sea Kings were raised from the upper hangar to the flight deck and hurriedly prepared for a search and rescue mission. They launched together in extremely hazardous conditions, when the two ships were about sixty miles apart. In addition to the challenging circumstances, it was clear that the task was going to be affected by the relatively early sunset near the equator.

We found the *Steel Vendor* firmly wedged on the reef, listing to starboard, and with waves breaking over her superstructure. She was equipped with unusually high kingposts, further complicating the task of lifting personnel from the deck. The forty crew members were huddled in the lee of the deck house, cold, wet, and frightened. The initial task was to lower the aircrewman. Due to the hazards posed by the kingposts, normal winching from low level was not practicable. However, lowering the rescue strop from high level to the deck against gale force winds was problematic and a high line

transfer proved to be the only option. In this case, a long weighted line extension to the winch wire, connected via a weak link to the aircraft's winch hook, was lowered: Ship's staff took the line in hand, and guided the aircrewman to the deck as the wire was paid out from the aircraft.

The aircrewman needed to reassure the crew that their ordeal was almost over; and then to ensure that each member was safely in the strop before being raised - individually - over eighty feet up into the aircraft. The lower end of the high line was controlled from the ship's deck to keep the survivor, unavoidably swinging in the turbulent air, clear of superstructure, masts, kingposts and other solid obstructions. It was a slow process.

Over the next hour, notwithstanding deteriorating conditions, storm force

winds causing severe turbulence, driving rain, heavy spray breaking over the ship and failing light, the two aircraft successfully completed the rescue. Two more Sea Kings were dispatched from *Eagle* for photographic purposes and to provide essential backup in case of emergency. The aircraft were designed for anti-submarine work, and crammed full of sensors, navigation and detection equipment, leaving little room for survivors. They were bundled into the aircraft, each clutching the pillowcase of personal belongings they had gathered together when disaster struck. It is fair to say that all of them were extremely grateful. *Steel Vendor's* crew were flown back to *Eagle*, where they were properly clothed, fed, and rested. Following a night onboard, they were airlifted to Cubi Point, a military airfield near Manila, the following afternoon.



A survivor being recovered into one of the 826 Sqn Sea Kings, with the coral reef clearly indicated by the white water. The anchor had been lowered in a vain attempt to stop the ship striking the reef, but once wedged on the coral, there was no escape.. © John Madgwick

With no other ships in the vicinity, and in any case no way of disembarking survivors by boat due to the sharp coral on which the ship was aground, the only avenue to safety was by helicopter. With the exception of the military, relatively few ships embarked a helicopter of any type in 1971 and there were no other warships so equipped in the South China Sea at that time. *Steel Vendor's* crew were truly fortunate that *Eagle* happened to be close, with Sea Kings embarked, capable of operating over long distances and remaining on task for a sufficient period to achieve a successful rescue. The following day, a Buccaneer was launched to conduct a photographic sortie over the reef and found the *Steel Vendor* had broken her back overnight and was rapidly sinking. Had *Eagle* not been in the region, there is no doubt that the crew would not have survived.

Eagle subsequently received a signal from the Commander US Naval Forces, Philippines which read: 'Your rescue of the SS *Steel Vendor* was noted with great pleasure. The professional manner in which the rescue was affected, the care afforded the survivors while on board, your fine communications and efficiency demonstrated in putting the survivors ashore was most noteworthy and should be a source of pride to all concerned. Please convey my sincere appreciation and well done to all hands.'

A telegram was also received from the President of Isthmian Lines: 'We wish to convey to you our heartfelt thanks and admiration for the magnificent performance of your officers, crew and

aircraft in the rescue of the entire crew of *Steel Vendor* on 8 October 1971'. And on arrival in Hong Kong, a delegation from the shipping line presented an appropriate award to the Squadron.

Although there were many similar rescues to follow in subsequent years, this was arguably the first such operation carried out by the Royal Navy and was only possible due to the capability of the new Sea King aircraft. The rescue was conducted in a distant sea, long before the days of satellite communication and social media and so attracted little interest in the UK. But the 40 personnel who were saved understood that without the RN's Sea Kings, fortuitously in the area at the time, and with no other means of escape, they would have faced a miserable and watery fate.

As a result of the rescue, 826 Squadron was awarded the Boyd trophy by the Flag Officer Naval Air Command, for 'the finest feat of naval aviation in 1971'.



The Boyd Trophy. © IWM

WE 177 in Service

By Malcolm Smith



WE 177 British Nuclear Bomb on display at the National Museum of Nuclear Science & History in Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA. © Kelly Michals

Britain's contribution to the development of nuclear weapons is well documented and includes the decision by the UK's post-war government to continue to develop an indigenous capability after being cut off from co-operation with scientists in the USA in 1946 (the McMahon Act).

It is reputed that the Atlee government was at first opposed to continued development because of the cost, but at a meeting in October 1946, the Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin declared: "We've got to have this thing

over here, whatever it costs... We've got to have the bloody union jack flying on top of it!" The first UK-designed tactical weapon was Red Beard, known in service as the 2000 lb High Explosive Medium Capacity (HEMC) weapon. In the RN, it was initially to be deployed by the FAA's strike aircraft, the Supermarine Scimitar, although the concurrent fighter, the Sea Vixen, was also theoretically capable of deploying it. We had this bulky weapon in HMS *Hermes* in 1969, when I served in 801 Buccaneer squadron, commanded by Roger Dimmock.

The UK's independent development programme culminated in the detonation of a hydrogen fusion bomb in Operation Grapple in 1957 and recognition by the US Government that future nuclear weapons development should be co-operative. This led to the 1958 US-UK Mutual Defence Agreement and subsequently in the 1960 agreement that the US would supply the Skybolt missile with its lightweight W59 nuclear warhead to the UK. British scientists were unhappy with some safety aspects of W59 and started a programme to develop a warhead that would meet more rigorous standards. The Skybolt programme was cancelled, but W59 development, code-named "Cleo", continued, to provide a replacement for Red Beard. In 1966, now known as WE177, the weapon entered service with the RAF and the RN started to deploy the weapon in 1969.

The service appellation of the WE177 was 600 lb HEMC. Of much smaller diameter than its 2000 lb predecessor, it was altogether easier to handle in the confined spaces in warships. Much of the length of the weapon was taken up by tightly packed drogue parachutes, which were needed for the laydown delivery option. Once the Buccaneer left service, the remaining naval role for WE 177 was as a Nuclear Depth Bomb (NDB) to be delivered principally by helicopter. This would have been a decisive weapon if used against a submarine target, with the enormous side-effect that an underwater nuclear explosion would not only have killed huge quantities of whales and fish,

but also have completely deafened antisubmarine sonars for many hours, if not days.

Warships that carried stocks of nuclear weapons as part of their permanent war stock were called "peacetime ships". These are known to have included aircraft carriers and the Type 22 frigates. After the Falklands War, it was revealed that HMS *Hermes* and other vessels had deployed to the South Atlantic with their complete outfit of weapons. The author was in *Hermes* at the cessation of hostilities and witnessed the complex evolution in which all the weapons were brought up to the flight deck, boxed up in their transit containers and transferred by heavy jackstay to the Royal Fleet Auxiliary *Resource*, a process known as "disembarrassment".

Every aspect of the handling, servicing, loading and unloading of nuclear weapons was covered by specific printed instructions and every activity had to be read out by the loading supervisor and repeated by the operative. Each nuclear-capable aircraft (not all Buccaneers were so modified) had to be regularly tested to ensure that the relevant electrical circuits were serviceable and a full loading and unloading exercise, using a training round, had to be exercised at regular intervals. The training round had no warhead but in all other respects, including electrical connection to the aircraft, was identical with the real thing. These time-consuming evolutions were usually fitted in during breaks in the workload of the daily flying task.

Whenever a nuclear-capable ship had been in an extended period out of service, as in a refit, regulations required confirmation that its capability to embark and deploy the weapon had not been compromised. To this end, the Flag Officer Third Flotilla (FOF3) was responsible for carrying out a Nuclear Weapon Capability Inspection (NWC). After the Falklands war, as the Staff Air Engineer Officer (SAEO) to FOF3, responsibility for leading these inspections fell to me. In aircraft carriers, inspections were usually carried out alongside, making it easier for the inspection team to assemble and board. The team consisted of individuals from organisations not normally encountered at the front line, including the Magazine Group, based in Portsmouth, and specialists from other organisations whose names escape me. As well as inspections of various

aspects of organisation, magazine arrangements and handling routes, the highlight of the inspection was an elaborate evolution in the hangar, in which a weapon was supposedly involved in an accident so severe that the warhead had been breached and nuclear material released. This unlikely event (using a training round of course) would involve practically every department of the ship and required a Weapons Electrical (WE) officer to don an all-encompassing polythene overall and breathing mask to enter the hangar and identify nuclear material with a radiation detector. This evolution would be strictly limited, as the polythene suit was not ventilated and the WEO would soon feel the effects of heat stress. On completion of the inspection, it would be my job to debrief the team and meet the captain to inform him that his vessel was now declared nuclear weapons capable.



WE177A test round released from a Canberra B6. The parachute drogue has deployed © MoD

Captains, who usually had many more pressing matters to consider, used to receive this news calmly.

POSTSCRIPT

The 2000lb bomb was taken out of service in 1969, but in *Hermes* in the Mediterranean we still retained on board a 2000 lb relic known as the "Shape". This was an entirely inert object, aerodynamically identical to the real thing. Orders were received that it should be disposed of at sea in deep water, but the ship obtained agreement that it could be air-dropped. The thing was loaded on to a Buccaneer, which was launched on its sortie to drop the Shape using the Long Toss profile. This involved the aircraft approaching at high

speed and low level, then pulling up into the first half of a loop. At the appropriate instant, the weapon system released the bomb, which would follow a ballistic arc to the target while the launch aircraft rolled out of its inverted position and departed. News of this event had spread around the ship, so that the after end of the flight deck saw quite a few "goofers", all looking out to port. Soon eagle-eyed spectators saw the tiny dot, low on the horizon. It was the approaching Buccaneer. The aircraft pulled up and disappeared in the distance and a long pause ensued. Then, literally out of the blue and from a great height, the Shape came whistling down and disappeared with a great splash into the wake. Nobody was sorry to see it go.

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845 steps in to get Czech veterans to 80th anniversary D-Day event

From the Royal Navy website



The Czech contingent and some of the 845NAS aircrew. © Jon Guegan/Jersey Evening Post

Fleet Air Arm aviators stepped in to ensure two D-Day veterans attended events in Normandy when they were stranded in the Channel Islands.

Commando Helicopter Force (CHF) Merlins from 845 Naval Air Squadron came to the aid of Czech veterans Charles Strasser and Jirí Pavel Kafka when the pair and their entourage became stuck in Jersey. The two WW2 survivors were due to attend

the international commemorations at Omaha Beach, but the civilian aircraft which landed in Jersey carrying the party to pick up 97-year-old Mr Strasser, who settled in the Channel Islands after the war, suffered a minor technical issue and was stuck on the tarmac.

Enter the two Merlins, callsigns Navy 750 and 751 of the CHF, which were using Jersey as a forward operating base while supporting the 80th anniversary

events just a few miles away.

The question the Czechs posed: "Could you take our VIPs to Caen for us to get them there in time for their commemoration event at Omaha Beach?" The message was passed on by one of the Merlin crew to Lieutenant Commander Bob Powell, aircraft commander of Navy 751, who said: "Our thinking was: Can we do it? Yes - and morally we must do!" Normally, beyond some quickly-arranged UK and diplomatic clearances, the 80-mile flight from Jersey airport to Caen would be a relatively simple affair. But with world leaders converging on Normandy, security was at its highest possible level and the airspace over the region was a restricted zone.

Thanks to the efforts of both crews, in particular Lieutenant Commander Edwin Adams and Lieutenant Charlie George especially, their higher staffs, and all those controlling the activity in France, the Merlins received permission for the special flight. The flight itself was uneventful - until the helicopters arrived at Caen, where they found the normally-quiet provincial airport a buzz of activity: the German Chancellor's aircraft was just landing, while Air Force One, a UK Royal Flight and the Ukrainian president's jet had only just arrived.

In 1945, Mr Strasser had served as a despatch rider with the Czech Independent Armoured Brigade which went on to liberate his homeland. Fellow veteran Mr Kafka, aged 100, was one of 669 children rescued from occupied Czechoslovakia by Sir Nicholas Winton and others on the eve of World War

2. As a Jew he would almost certainly have perished in the Holocaust had he not left Prague. He joined up aged 18 and became a radio operator/gunner with the RAF. Assigned to 311 (Czech) Squadron, he flew in Liberator bombers providing cover against U-boats and German surface craft to protect the invasion fleet. They and their travelling companions - two Czech Generals, a Colonel and five civilians - reached the event at Omaha in time before the Merlins returned to their home base at RNAS Yeovilton.

"It was an entire team effort by the eight aircrew involved as well as the support provided by our two higher headquarters to get permissions quickly in place," said Lt Cdr Powell. "It was an absolute honour to be able to support the veterans get to Normandy for the 80th anniversary of D-Day and to be a part of the international commemorations. We owe their generation so much and it meant not only so much to us to be a part of it, but also to our friends and colleagues who have thanked us since then for doing it. As a Junglie, it was an incredibly rewarding, albeit unexpected, sortie to be involved in."

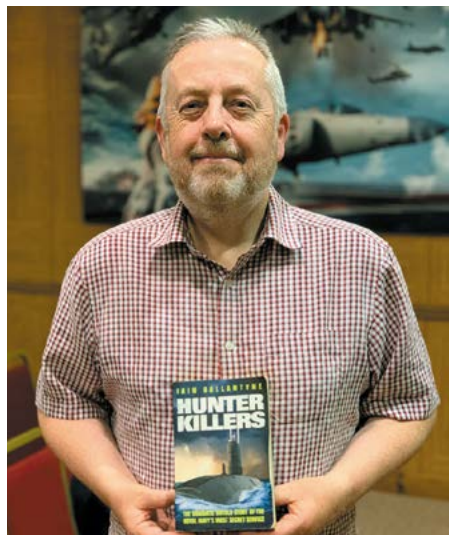
For the record, the 845 good eggs were: **Navy 750:** Lt Cdr E Adams RN, Lt C George RN, Sgt J Warwick RM, POACMN J Edworthy RN.

Navy 751: Lt Cdr R Powell RN, Lt J Gallimore RN, CPOACMN S Evans, LACMN J Keirle RN.

This story is kindly reproduced from the Royal Navy website. Unfortunately, Charles Strasser after returning to Jersey, passed away just a few days later on Monday 10 June.

'Undersea' in the Cold War

July Talk summarised by Robert Heath



Iain Ballantyne with his excellent book 'Hunter Killers'. © Richard Macauley

The Cold War lasted officially from 1947 to 1991. It was a threatening period and our speaker tonight, Iain Ballantyne, reminded us of one important element - underwater warfare.

In February 1945, HM Submarine *Venturer* tracked U864, which was in transit to Japan, carrying a cargo of precious materials, including components for the V2 rocket. *Venturer* fired four torpedoes while submerged, one of which struck and sank U864, the only occasion in which this has been achieved.

Wartime submarines used diesel power on the surface and battery power submerged. A common German submarine in WW2 was a Type VII, around 220ft long, displacing 770 tons, with speeds around 17 kts on the surface and 9 kts submerged. Later Nazi technology produced the type XXI submarine, designed to operate underwater for periods up to 50 hours. They could attain 17kts submerged and incorporated the snorkel system, to enable batteries to be recharged at periscope depth. Fortunately, of 118 Type XXIs built, only two entered service before the end of the war. Nevertheless, the Type XXI was a significant design and captured examples were taken by other nations to use as a basis for their own future designs.

A significant step in submarine design was the nuclear-powered USS *Nautilus*, which entered service in 1955 and in August 1958 sailed under the ice pack to the North Pole. Meanwhile, the RN submarine service still deployed the T-class diesel-electric boats such as HMS *Taciturn*, in which the crew lived in squalid conditions and condensation dripped off the bulkheads. On one occasion, HMS *Turpin* remained closed-up for 39 days when it undertook a covert operation in

Russian waters. On another occasion she was depth charged and a Russian submarine attempted an attack by submerging directly above it. These exploits received no publicity.

Throughout the 1960s the Russian submarine fleet was the largest in the world and in 1962 the Cuban Crisis brought the confrontation between Russia and the USA to a head. Russia was installing nuclear missiles in Cuba and the USA demanded that they be removed immediately. Russia sent four diesel electric Foxtrot class submarines to the region, one of which, B59, was detected by US naval vessels, which dropped training depth charges. The B59 Captain interpreted this as an attack and ordered nuclear torpedoes to be prepared to fire. Fortunately, a senior official on board B59 rescinded the order and a nuclear war was averted.

The RN's first nuclear boat, which used a complete US-supplied nuclear plant, was HMS *Dreadnought*, launched in 1960. *Dreadnought's* underwater speed was 28kts and surface speed 20kts. The principal business of submarines was to spy on enemy submarine activity. In 1968 HMS *Warspite* survived a collision with a Russian Echo class submarine. Both HMS *Splendid* and HMS *Sceptre* notched up encounters with Russian boats.

In 1968, the nuclear-powered USS *Scorpion* failed to return from observing Russian naval activities in the Atlantic. It was subsequently discovered on the seabed southwest of the Azores. An enquiry suggested that one of its

torpedoes detonated accidentally. 1968 also saw a Soviet diesel-electric ballistic missile submarine, K129, disappear in the north Pacific. By 1969 the Russian submarine inventory included 375 boats including 60 nuclear powered; the USA listed 156 diesel and nuclear; the RN offered a total of 45 submarines including 8 nuclear.

The 1970s saw the RN introduce the *Resolution* class Polaris ballistic missile boats and these were replaced in the early 90s by the *Vanguard* class Trident submarines. During the Falklands War in 1982, HMS *Conqueror* sank the Argentine cruiser ARA *General Belgrano* using a Mk 8, 21-inch torpedo, first designed in the 1920s. Since WW2 only three vessels have been sunk by a submarine and *Conqueror* is the first nuclear boat to do so.

In 1986 the Russian ballistic missile submarine K219 suffered an explosion, ultimately resulting in the loss of the boat and some of its heroic crew. The boat and its outfit of nuclear missiles now rests at a depth of 18,000ft. Some remarkable Russian vessels include the Delta class and the much-vaunted Alfa class with an underwater speed in the order of 45 kts. The Alfas could dive to 2,460ft (twice that of other submarines), but were noisy. The Russian Typhoon class nuclear powered ballistic missile submarine was 23,200 tons (48,000 tons submerged). Fortunately for the West, the cost of these submarines has led to their abandonment.

Thank you to Iain Ballantyne for an engrossing and eye-opening evening.

Military Aircraft Procurement Decisions and Follies

September Talk summarised by Malcolm Smith



Jock Heron

Subtitled “79 Years of success or failure ... with the wisdom of hindsight”, tonight’s talk by Jock was mostly of failure.

In 1945, Britain was deeply in debt, facing unpredictable emerging threats, yet paradoxically with a buoyant, capable and productive aircraft industry. Who now remembers Airspeed, Boulton-Paul and Percival? Helicopter manufacturers included Cierva and Saunders Roe. These eminent companies were all active in 1945, representing a huge over-capacity in the face of reduced demand. The same could be said of the variety of engine manufacturers (Alvis, de Havilland, Napier etc) and suppliers of electronic equipment and allied systems.

In 1960, the UK military deployed many different front line fixed wing aircraft, all designed, manufactured and supported in Britain, The RN operated seven types (Sea Hawk, Scimitar, Sea Venom, etc.) while the RAF had no less than 11 front line types and 14 in training and support roles. By contrast, in 2024 only one RAF type, the BAE Hawk, is an all-British design. The Typhoon is the product of international co-operation, while most of the other types are of US or French (Airbus) derivation.

“Where did it all go wrong?” Our speaker described various government decisions affecting the industry. The wartime Brabazon Report led to building two enormous white elephants, the Brabazon and the Princess flying boat. The Berlin airlift in 1948 exposed the RAF’s lack of adequate transport aircraft, while the Korean War in 1950 – 53 revealed the inadequacy of Gloster Meteor and Hawker Sea Fury against the Russian-built MiG 15. In the early 1950s, there was an urgent need to develop our nuclear deterrent (although did we need four separate V-bomber designs?) Priority was given to the Comet, Viscount and Britannia, but there was little emphasis

on research and development (R&D) and cost pressures were increasing. In 1957, the Sandys Defence Review led to the cancellation of all RAF manned aircraft projects except the Lightning and the Canberra replacement. The Blackburn NA39 (Buccaneer) survived, but national defence was to rely on missiles and the aircraft industry was to be ruthlessly re-configured.

Aircraft manufacturers were consolidated into two groups (British Aircraft Corporation and Hawker Siddeley) but there was little Government support for aerospace research and the RAF lost an entire generation of aircraft capable of supporting the NATO low level strike role. Hawker Siddeley used its own funds to develop the P1127, capitalising on the brilliant Bristol Pegasus engine (also privately funded) and this led to the successful Harrier. The RAF initiated three major projects - the low-level strike TSR2, the STOL capable HS681 transport and the supersonic STOVL fighter, the P1154. The 1957 (Healey) Defence Review identified the submarine-launched Polaris as Britain's nuclear deterrent and looked abroad for future equipment. The new Labour Government in 1965 cancelled all three UK projects. In place of TSR2, the RAF was directed to procure an anglicised version of the General Dynamics F111. Transport requirements would be satisfied by the C130 Hercules. The McDonnell F4 Phantom would meet both RAF and the limited RN fighter requirement. The F111 order was cancelled and BAC were directed

to co-operate with Dassault Aviation of France to produce a joint fighter, the Anglo-French Variable Geometry (AFVG) project.

Lord Plowden's depressing report of 1959 concluded that the British aircraft industry on its own had little prospect of future sales and supported the concept of a unified European defence industry. "We should ... also collaborate with the US" he said. The Gazelle, Puma and Lynx helicopter projects survived, but the AFVG was cancelled in 1967. The variable-geometry wing design had many proponents and the concept eventually led to the Tornado multi-role aircraft, although the design challenge of the wing hinge led to delays and the resultant aircraft was much heavier than planned. The Government did partly fund BAe's Experimental Aircraft Project (EAP) which ultimately led to the multi-national Typhoon. An example of entirely British-led design was the BAe Hawk, which has gone on to major export success.

Looking to the future, Jock identified the vital investments made into Technology Development Projects, such as BAE Systems Taranis and Tempest projects. He reviewed the post-war period, listing the "headline misjudgements", citing Government indecision, poor judgement and erratic policies. The policy of buying "off the shelf" has led to a loss to the nation in advanced technology, manufacturing and support expertise. This was something of a depressing picture, although Jock's inimitable style made it an enjoyable evening

Future Talks

By Richard Macauley



Shuttleworth Collection Lysander V9367.
© Richard Macauley

I gave notice at the SoFFAAM June Council Meeting of my need to relinquish my role as Talks organiser.

Although I am fairly relaxed about my actual departure date and prefer to think this will be a gradual handover rather than an exact cut-off point, I am hoping there is someone amongst the membership who would be interested in working along side me and eventually take over this role?

Please get in touch if you are interested in taking on this important position in the society and I can discuss and provide details of what is involved. Please ring me on 07768 562976 or email me at soffaam@btinternet.com

I will continue to feed names of potential speakers to any new post holder due to my links and memberships with other organisations, both aviation and historical. Other rich sources I receive speaker suggestions from

includes SoFFAAM members, FAAM and other society contacts, which keeps a steady flow of names of volunteers who offer their services to provide a Talk to the society. Therefore we always have a steady flow of suggestions the Talks organiser can call upon. So you do not need to think that identifying prospective speakers is only down to a single individual. We have speakers lined up for the whole of 2025 and I update the Talks page of the SoFFAAM website as speakers are confirmed.

www.fleetairarmfriends.org.uk/talks/

All talks start at 19:30 on the last Thursday of the month but please note that our occasional Saturday Talks are in the morning and start at 11:00

Paul Hurt - The 'Lizzie' (Lysander) and Westlands
Thursday 28 November 2024

Marc Heighway - D-Day Launch Pad - RAF Needs Oar Point ALG
Saturday 7 December 2024 at 11:00am

Sqn Ldr (ret'd) Rod Dean - Flying the Hunter operationally and for fun
Thursday 30 January 2025

Alan Lawson - Saddam Hussein - my part in his downfall in 2003
Thursday 27 February 2025



LECTURE PROGRAMME 2024

The Great War Aviation Society - www.greatwaraviation.org



Our online Lecture Programme brings together aviation enthusiasts and experts from around the world. FREE for members of The Great War Aviation Society, or £5 for guests.

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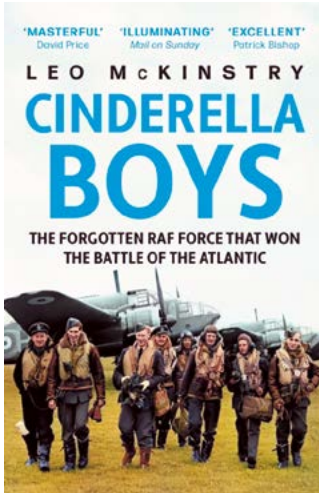
An excellent Christmas gift which they can enjoy for the whole year. Download a Membership Form from the website (address below) complete it and email it to soffaam.mem@gmail.com or you can print it out and send to David Merrett whose address is on the inside back cover. Ring **07521 723477** if you have a membership query.

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If you need help with downloading and completing the Membership Form, call Richard on **07768 562976** or email soffaam@btinternet.com

Cinderella Boys, by Leo McKinstry

Reviewed by Malcolm Smith



Subtitled “The forgotten RAF force that won the Battle of the Atlantic”, this is an absorbing account of Coastal Command throughout WW2.

It relates how poorly the Command was equipped at the outbreak of war and its growth into the formidable organisation that played a vital part in the Allied victory. Pre-war estimates of the submarine threat were that it could be contained by the newly developed ASDIC in surface ships. This complacent view was shared by the Air Staff, who were wedded to the Trenchard doctrine of the bomber offensive. In 1939, the Command was equipped with aircraft such as the Blackburn Botha,

Vickers Vildebeest and Saunders Roe Lerwick flying boat, all of which proved hopelessly unsuited to operations. Surface patrols were carried out by the Anson, while even Tiger Moths were pressed into service on “scarecrow” patrols. The first modern type to reach the squadrons was the Bristol Beaufort torpedo bomber, which proved to be unreliable. Better performance was available from the Lockheed Hudson, a military conversion of the Electra airliner, which soon proved its worth on anti-submarine patrols. Blenheim light bombers became available and the first of the versatile Vickers Wellington. The Command also operated the splendid Short Sunderland flying boat. However, early operations against surfaced U-boats revealed the ineffectiveness of the depth charges then in service.

The Command rapidly expanded, establishing bases at Gibraltar and Iceland, to widen its operational range. Aircraft were fitted with better equipment, including the first versions of Air to Surface Vessel (ASV) radar. Operational tasks included anti-submarine warfare over the Atlantic and strike missions against German coastal convoys, in which attack aircraft were protected by the formidable Bristol Beaufighter. A long-running dispute

commenced over the availability of long-range aircraft to patrol further out into the Atlantic, with the Lend-Lease Liberator being particularly demanded by the Command. Also wanted were quantities of Wellingtons and Lancasters. These demands were vigorously rejected by Arthur Harris, the Head of Bomber Command, who believed that the bomber offensive against Germany should be the supreme war-winning effort. Air Chief Marshall Portal, the chief of the air staff, who privately thought Harris a bit of a cad, supported him in the argument, knowing that Churchill's pugnacious spirit welcomed the policy. The dispute over availability of aircraft rumbled on almost to the end of the war, but the extended range Liberator Mk V gradually became available to Coastal Command. These were the only aircraft with the range to cover the "Gap" in the centre of the Atlantic, beyond the range of other types.

Operational effectiveness was enhanced in the Command by Professor Patrick Blackett in Operational Research. The lethality of depth charges was increased when the new explosive, Torpex, became available. The "Leigh Light" developed as a private venture by Humphrey de Vere Leigh, when fitted to the Wellington and used in conjunction with ASV, made a dramatic improvement to success in catching surfaced submarines at night. By the end of 1942, Coastal Command had expanded to include effective numbers of Sunderland and Catalina aircraft, together with a small group of Liberators.

The climax of the anti-submarine war came in early 1943, which opened with calamitous losses of allied merchant shipping. The painstakingly slow process of co-ordinating groups of escort vessels and airborne activity decisively turned the tables by the middle of the year. McKinstry describes the ferocity of the battle over the Bay of Biscay, which might have gone better for the enemy but for the profound antipathy of Herman Goering to naval operations. This meant that the Luftwaffe did not have enough Condors to fight the battle, nor sufficient fighters to protect their surface traffic. The Command trialled new weapons, of which the rocket projectile, developed by the renowned scientist Sir Henry Tizard, became a resounding success. Although the Command did not succeed in suppressing U-boat traffic through the Bay, having to cope with surfaced submarines vigorously fighting back against attacking aircraft, the continually improving ASW battle of the Atlantic meant that by the end of the year many convoys reached port unscathed.

McKinstry describes the monotony of many patrols and the primitive conditions enjoyed by airmen at remote locations. He also provides a detailed picture of inter-allied disputes over the availability of assets, which were often acrimonious. He includes numerous anecdotes of individual bravery and the book is a moving tribute to Coastal Command.

Cinderella Boys, by Leo McKinstry.
ISBN 978 1 529 31937 8

Visit to Bovington Tank Museum

By Malcolm Smith.



Our happy band of brothers (and sister) outside in front of a Challenger I Tank. © Richard Macauley

The splendid Tank Museum at Bovington claims to have the largest collection of tanks and the third largest collection of armoured vehicles in the world.

The small group of Society members who visited on 24 September would have had no cause to disagree. Armoured vehicles are arranged to clearly illustrate their development from primitive beginnings to the sophisticated weapons of today. The "Trench Experience", with its numerous WW1 lozenge-shaped tanks, takes us back to a more primitive era. The variety of armour on site is astounding, ranging from the very first British designed vehicle of 1915, named "Little Willie", to a recent model Challenger. We were able to sit in the

claustrophobic space in the turret of a Chieftain and to see at first hand the only remaining fully functional German Tiger tank. We saw the huge French Char B, which was easily beaten by Wehrmacht tactics in 1940, as well as the low-profile Soviet-era T72, inside which the crew cannot stand upright. Many thanks to Rosanne for her organisation.



The Chairman admires the Tiger Tank.



SoFFAAM Christmas Lunch

Please join us

At The Lime Kiln Inn, Knole, Nr Long Sutton, Langport, Somerset TA10 9JH on Saturday 11 January 2025 - 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 _____

_____ Postcode _____

Tel Number(s) _____

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

- | | |
|---|------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Roast Turkey, Pigs in Blankets, Parsnips, Sprouts, Carrots, Stuffing, Roast Potatoes | <input type="checkbox"/> Qty |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Roast Beef, Pigs in Blankets, Parsnips, Sprouts, Carrots, Stuffing, Roast Potatoes | <input type="checkbox"/> Qty |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Water Buffalo Festive Burger with Ham, Mushroom & Brie, Potato Wedges, Coleslaw (gf) | <input type="checkbox"/> Qty |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prawn & Linefish of the Day, Thai Coconut Curry, White Rice, Sambals & Poppadum (gf) | <input type="checkbox"/> Qty |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Harissa Spiced Cauliflower on Hummus, Roasted Parmesan Tomatoes, Pine nuts & Salsa Verde (vgo, gf) | <input type="checkbox"/> Qty |
|
 | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Christmas Pudding with sherry custard | <input type="checkbox"/> Qty |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Merry Berry Meringue with Berries, Ice Cream & Salted Caramel Drizzle | <input type="checkbox"/> Qty |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Caramelised Pineapple with Honey, Toasted Nuts & Vanilla Bean Ice Cream (gf) | <input type="checkbox"/> Qty |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cherry Cheesecake with a Rum & Nutmeg Sauce | <input type="checkbox"/> Qty |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chocolate Fudge Square with Salted Caramel Sauce | <input type="checkbox"/> Qty |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Duo of Ice Cream Selection (gf) | <input type="checkbox"/> Qty |

Orange Juice or Mulled Wine will be served on arrival. Tea or Coffee and Mince Pies will be served after dinner and during the (much easier this year) quiz.

Please return this form and your cheque **payable to SoFFAAM** for **£30.00** per person no later than **Thursday 19 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.

Membership

By David Merrett

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

3905	Mr O Gilkes	West Midlands	3914	Mr A Evans	Somerset
3906	Ms C Taylor	Devon	3915	Mr J Lam	Somerset
3907	Mr M Bunn	Somerset	3916	Mr B Emery	Somerset
3908	Mr C Paille	Australia	3917	Mr G Moore	Devon
3909	Mr M Foster	Somerset	3918	Mr C Bridgman	Devon
3910	Mr N Heywood	Somerset	3919	Mr R Palmer	Devon
3911	Mr J Duncan	Somerset	3920	Mr W Gillam	Devon
3912	Mr L Crowther	Somerset	3921	Mr A Newnham	Somerset
3913	Mrs W Tonkin	Devon			

Total members as of 03/10/2024: **951**

Members who have made a Gift Aid declaration: **722***

***Opting to Gift Aid allows us to claim an extra 25% of your subscription from HMRC**

Subscription Renewals:

If you are not paying by Standing Order, please refer to the application form on the website www.fleetairarmfriends.org.uk to get details of how to pay by BACS, PayPal or cheque. Always quote your membership number. If you have

any queries about your membership number or when your membership renewal is due, just email or call me using the contact details in the orange panel on the next page.

Membership Cards

Remember we no longer issue membership cards. On arrival at the museum, please tell the reception staff

that you are a SoFFAAM member and they will find you on the membership list.

"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! Much appreciated. Easy to do - just drop us an email at soffaam.mem@gmail.com for this and all other membership queries.

Visit our Membership page at:
www.fleetairarmfriends.org.uk/membership

Membership Application

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

- Bank Standing Order PayPal using
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809 Naval Air Squadron joins HMS Prince of Wales

The phoenix has risen

For the first time in nearly 15 years a Royal Navy fast jet squadron has operated from the flight deck of a Royal Navy aircraft carrier.



F-35Bs of 809 Naval Air Squadron, flew from HMS *Prince of Wales* in the English Channel and North Sea early October to conduct carrier qualifications (CQs) and working-up in time for Exercise Strike Warrior. This major NATO exercise took place in the last two weeks of October 2024, focused mainly in Scottish and North Sea waters.

“This is a big moment for 809 Naval Air Squadron, a vital building block to working up with the carrier strike group

in preparation for the deployment next year” said Commander Smith. “To be the commanding officer of a squadron with such a proud heritage is a huge privilege. We are still in our infancy forming as an F-35B squadron, so joining a carrier for the first time is truly a milestone.”

Strike Warrior saw Aurora, Orion, Poseidon and Atlantic maritime patrol aircraft participation from Canada, Germany, Norway and France plus RAF P-8A Poseidons.

Canadian, Polish and USAF strike fighters operated from UK bases, alongside RAF Typhoons with other NATO nations such as Denmark, Germany, The Netherlands and Sweden flew from their own countries into this multi dimensional exercise.

The full might of Carrier Air Wing 1 flying from the USS *Harry S. Truman* (CVN75) also contributed to the exercise. Originally deployed to the Eastern Mediterranean where her Air Wing assisted in the defence of Israel against the missile attacks by Iran and Hamas. By switching to the North Sea and the Baltic demonstrates her abilities to deploy as needed to cover very different scenarios.