

# JABBERWOCK 118



SOCIETY OF FRIENDS  
**FLEET AIR ARM**  
MUSEUM

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

**February  
2025**



## IN THIS ISSUE

SoFFAAM announces new Patron • HMS *Indomitable* in WWII • The Fleet Air Arm 1943 • The Night High Speed Run • Canada's Contribution • Hercules by Scott Bateman • Supremacy at Sea • HMS *PoW* bestowed City Freedom • Princess Royal visit to FAAM • Schools Bursary report • Summer Events 2024 • 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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## **CONTRIBUTIONS**

We are extremely grateful to all those who contribute articles and material to the magazine, even though it is not always possible to use every item!

## **ADMISSION**

Members of SoFFAAM are admitted to the Museum free of charge, 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.

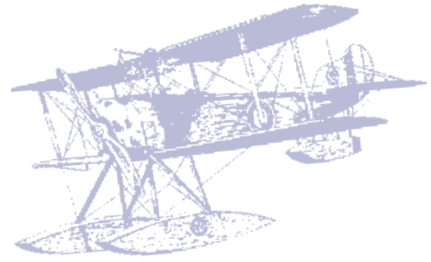
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The FAA 1943



The Night High Speed Run



HMS *Prince of Wales*



HRH the Princess Royal

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## COVER PHOTOGRAPH

This edition's cover photo is obviously a Lynx but did you recognise its nationality? This German Navy Sea Lynx Mk.88A of Marinefliegergeschwader 5 was photographed at the end of AirPower 2024 at Zeltweg Air Force base, Austria last September. The crew is preparing to return to their base at Nordholz, Northern Germany.  
© Richard Macauley

# Editorial

**We wish all our readers a happy and prosperous New Year. 2024 was a most successful year for the Society - the slow decline in membership numbers seems to have been halted and we have enjoyed a splendidly varied programme of monthly talks. Attendance at talks has really picked up to pre-Covid levels, which makes for convivial and enjoyable events.**

The Society has benefited from a most generous endowment from the estate of the late Gerald Owen and we are well-positioned to respond to requests for funding from the Museum. As reported in our previous issue, we were able to fund the acquisition of a display cabinet for the flying suit worn by the (then) Prince of Wales during his flying training and we provide brief coverage of the visit to the Museum by HRH the Princess Royal.

The Society's Christmas lunch was held early in the New Year and proved to be an enjoyable event, although illness prevented some members from attending. In this issue we provide a description of the outside events attended by Society members as part of our Outreach programme. These enjoyable visits provide an opportunity for members to meet the public and to

spread information about the Society and the benefits of membership.

We also provide information on the Schools Bursary project, funded by the Society, in which the Museum is enabled to offer financial help towards travel costs for school parties visiting the Museum. This has had a slow start, but we hope that more schools will take up the offer soon.

As usual, we provide summaries of recent talks, including the presentation on the Westland Lysander. This drew an enthusiastic capacity crowd, who hugely enjoyed the idiosyncratic style of the speaker, Paul Hurt. All these talks are available on Zoom and we are pleased to see that more members are taking up this option, which is available to anybody with access to the internet.

The Society is once again reviewing the potential for a Members' Day, to be held later in the year. It is hoped that the highlight of this event will be a tour of the Museum's reserve collection in Cobham Hall.



Malcolm

# Council snippets

## From the December Council Meeting

**The General Manager said that visitor numbers fluctuate from week to week, but we broadly remain slightly in front for the financial year forecast.**

Efforts have increased to publicise the Travel Bursary (Schools) which is funded by SoFFAAM. The Museum's Lead Curator had reported that we were offered the Logbooks and medals of Ian McKechnie, who was awarded the Boyd Trophy in 1974 for his contribution in operations off Cyprus. In March 2025, the Museum will host a tour entitled "Collections Uncovered - Behind the Scenes", which will show some of the collections not currently on display to the public and how the museum cares for the thousands of items held in its stores.

The Vice Chairman reported the establishment of two Working Groups to support the Society's activities in Outreach and Publicity. Attendance by SoFFAAM members at outside events had been positive, generating several new members and meeting many current members. The Yeovil model show in November went well and the organiser was supportive of the idea of a SoFFAAM Trophy for best British Naval Aviation Model for the April 2025 show. Chris Penney had proposed a Members' Day. The Working Group

supported the idea but recognised that this would require considerable effort to deliver. Details of the Society's talks programme are now carried on the Leonardo company's Intranet. The potential to re-vamp the SoFFAAM display in Hall 2 is being considered by the Outreach group and we hope to be able to report back on this soon.

Richard Macauley said it is heartening to see the auditorium appear full for each talk recently. He will prioritise improvements to Zoom broadcasts and increasing its take-up. Speakers for 2025 are over-subscribed with some ready to step in should anyone cancel last minute, subject to their availability.

Regarding future visits, Rosanne was planning a visit to the Royal Mint in March 2025. There is also the possibility of a visit to the Glascoed Heritage Centre. The Centre is not normally open to the public and no charge for entry is envisaged. She awaits confirmation that a visit can be arranged.

The Treasurer, Laurence Whitlock, reported that we successfully submitted our Charity Commission report for FY23/24. This has highlighted the need for a more formal statement of the Society's Policies and Procedures.

# Letters to the editor

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## Dear Malcolm

The beautiful model of the Sea King at Portland in Jabberwock 117 has inspired me to attach photographs of a model I made a few years ago of a Sopwith Camel being prepared for take off from a lighter towed by the destroyer HMS *Redoubt* in 1918.

It celebrates the occasion when Flight Sub-Lieutenant Stuart Culley won the DSC shooting down the German Zeppelin L53. I did not model the destroyer.

The takeoff must have been quite a scary event for both Culley and the flight deck crew but it was one way of getting a non-float plane airborne out in the North Sea to challenge the supremacy of the Zeppelins.

Please use the photographs as suits the excellent magazine. I like being called an old friend now nearing age 88!

**Regards,  
Chris Howat**



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## Dear Malcolm

Thanks again for producing another excellent Jabberwock; always a good read!

I was most interested to read your article regarding the WE177. During the late 70s I was serving on a Wasp flight, attached to the Type 21 Frigate, HMS *Ambuscade*. On several occasions the flight's electronics bods were tasked with setting up the device using a simulator kit and going through the arming procedures. I think it was during a couple of inspections we were tasked with loading the bomb (training round). On one occasion we were disembarked at Portland, and along with the weapons mechanic I was tasked to go and collect the 600lb bomb. The pair of us trundled back around the airfield on foot with the bomb in what looked like a long, flat shopping trolley with brake handles and the white bomb covered in a tarpaulin cover. Some time later I was talking to a chum based at RAF Wittering who told me that when they drew the bomb out, it had to be escorted by a large armed guard from

the RAF Regiment with associated vehicles!

I recollect that our Wasp (323/XT778) also flew on one occasion with the bomb when we were embarked. For some reason that I can't remember, probably the length, the bomb was fitted diagonally under the fuselage. Also, anything that could be removed from the aircraft was taken off; doors, seats, aircrewmembers, AS12 sight etc. I can't remember if the flotation gear came off as well. We joked with the flight commander that he didn't need it anyway as it would be a one-way Kamikaze mission! In retrospect this was probably the truth.

As a footnote, *Ambuscade's* Wasp survives in the FAAM collection. HMS *Ambuscade* was sold to the Pakistan Navy in 1993, but has been gifted to a Clyde maritime heritage museum and plans are underway to return the ship to its birthplace in Glasgow.

**Regards,  
David Marchant**

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## Dear Editor

Thanks to the Aviation History in Hellas-Greece Facebook group for sharing this model of Supermarine Seafire LIII NF638, which flew with 809 Squadron from *Attacker* class escort carrier HMS *Stalker* in the Aegean during October 1944. Pilot Sub-Lt Anthony Donald Perry RNVR was shot down over the

Dodecanese Island of Kos and his name is recorded on the national Fleet Air Arm Memorial at Lee-on-Solent, Hampshire; he was just 22. 809 NAS hold the Battle Honour "Aegean 1944" and ashore their Seafires utilised RNAS Dekhelia/HMS *Grebe*, Egypt.

My understanding is the mark

number L prefix designates a Rolls-Royce Merlin 55M that resulted in improved low altitude performance. This weblink provides more information on the aircraft loss <https://www.w2wrecks.com/portfolio/seafire-l111-nf638s-z-from-hms-stalker-809-sqn-lost-on-october-7th-1944-during-operation-outing-ii/>

**Regards,  
Chris Penney**



Photo courtesy of the Aviation History in Hellas-Greece Facebook group

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## Dear Editor

I enjoyed reading the recent issue of *Jabberwock*, especially the review of “Cinderella Boys” about the exploits of Coastal Command. However, I was a bit surprised to see the claim on the cover of the book that the Command was “the forgotten RAF Force that won the Battle of the Atlantic”. I hardly think that Coastal Command was a “forgotten” force, but this claim sent me to my copy of “The Central Blue”, the autobiography of Sir John Slessor GCB, DSO, MC, an outstanding book that has been in my possession since its publication in 1956. Slessor was Air Officer Commanding Coastal Command during the battle and gives a good account of inter-Command rivalry and the difficult relationship with Admiral Ernest King USN. He was aware of claims that it was the escort carriers and hunting groups of ships that proved decisive in defeating the submarine “with a bit of help from shore-based aircraft” and provides a

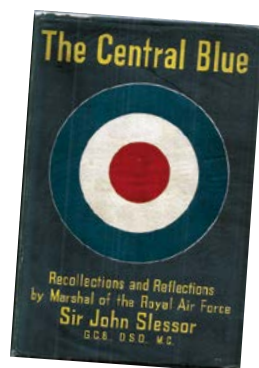
statistical table showing the total number of enemy submarines destroyed by all causes during Hitler’s war.

This shows that, for German and Italian submarines, the tallies are as follows:

- Total sunk by ships and submarines  
– 251 German and 58 Italian
- Total sunk by shore-based aircraft  
– 248 German and 11 Italian.

The totals are so similar that it seems only fair to conclude that surface ships and the aircraft of Coastal Command played an equal part in the battle against the submarine.

**Sincerely,  
Trevor Robert Harris**





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## Dear Editor

Tarrant Rushton airfield in Dorset is a location I have been meaning to visit for many years.

With my forays to Bournemouth to speak with Peter Lovegrove and this airfield being mentioned in recent Jabberwocks, I swung by to find many wreaths placed on the main memorial (see photo below). As well as the main commemorative plaque honouring all who operated from this airfield, there were two specific plaques; one

honouring the 298 and 644 Squadrons Glider Pilot Regiment and another to Royal Navy and Fleet Air Arm personnel who served on the airfield 1943-1945.

One of many websites available to learn about this important airfield's history with the RAF and FAA is Friends of Tarrant Rushton Airfield at: [www.raftarranrushton.org](http://www.raftarranrushton.org).

**Regards,  
Richard Macauley**



## In Memoriam - Christopher Shores

We are sad to report the death of Christopher Shores, aged 87. He was a most courteous and agreeable person and a long-standing member of the SoFFAAM Council, from which he retired in 2021. He was a renowned military historian, publishing numerous books, often in collaboration with other specialists. We reviewed Volume 4 of his monumental "History of the Mediterranean Air War 1940-45", written with Giovanni Massimello, in Jabberwock 95.



With thanks again to Peter Lovegrove who showed me this photo from his collection of one of the aircraft pans at RNAS Yeovilton.

No prizes for the identities of the aircraft in this wonderful line-up of naval fighters but can anyone identify the year that this photograph was taken?



Though old news, this interesting photo shows the Hall 3 aircraft exhibits temporarily occupying the Fleet Air Arm Museum car park while changes were made to the Carrier exhibit. © Stephen White

# SoFFAAM announces new Patron

By Malcolm Smith



Cdre. Bill Covington CBE

He served as Commander (Air) at RNAS Portland; in HMS *Illustrious*; as Commodore RNAS Yeovilton and Commodore Joint Force Harrier (JFH), at RAF Strike Command.

Operations included the Cold War, Falklands and Bosnia; and supporting aviation roles to Kuwait, Iraq, and Afghanistan. He remains a Trustee of Navy Wings, hung up his General Aviation flying gloves in 2022 and having been a Trustee of the Fleet Air Arm Museum, he is now delighted to have been asked to be the Patron of its Society Of Friends.

**The Society is pleased to announce that Commodore Bill Covington CBE RN (Retd) has agreed to step into the post of the Society's Patron.**

Bill tells us that he loves 'boats' and 'planes' and military operations so a 36-year career in the Fleet Air Arm suited him admirably. After first navigating a Minesweeper, he went on to fly the Airborne Early Warning Gannet from the catapult and arrestor wire HMS *Ark Royal*, as a stepping stone to understanding carriers and flying from sea. His first "Harrier" tour was with the US Marine Corps before converting to the Sea Harrier, later Commanding 801 Squadron and 899 training squadron.



With thanks to the Harrier Special Interest Group, this model depicts Bill in front of his FRS.1 onboard HMS *Hermes* during Operation Corporate. © Model and photo Mark Atrill

# HMS *Indomitable* in WWII

By Richard Macauley



*Indomitable* bustling with Fairey Albacore aircraft. © IWM

**HMS *Indomitable* was a modified *Illustrious* class aircraft carrier, laid down on 10 November 1937 and commissioned on 10 October 1941. She was christened by Clementine, the wife of the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill.**

Originally planned to be the fourth in the *Illustrious* class, she was redesigned to enable her to operate more aircraft, 48 instead of 36. A second hangar was added above the original, raising the flight deck by 14 feet. To compensate

for this increase in her freeboard, a reduction was made in the hangar-side armour to maintain her stability.

*Indomitable* sailed to the West Indies within a month of her commissioning as her maiden voyage and to work up. While there, she ran aground on a coral reef near Jamaica, though she was able to return to service soon afterwards. This unwelcome distraction meant she would not reach Southeast Asia in time to provide air cover for Force Z which consisted of the battleship *Prince of Wales*, the battlecruiser *Repulse* and four destroyers. The carrier HMS *Hermes* was destined to be part of this force but was considered too slow to be effective for this battle group.

Assembled in 1941, the purpose of Force Z was to bolster the British colonial garrisons in the Far East and deter Japanese expansion into British possessions, particularly Malaya and Singapore. The direct lack of aircraft to protect this naval group and an underestimation of the Japanese armed forces, coupled with the political rather than naval motive for its deployment are blamed for the sinking of both *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*. This proved another valuable lesson of the importance of protective air cover at sea and the vulnerability of capital ships.

In January 1942, *Indomitable* joined the Eastern Fleet at Ceylon and ferried much needed Hurricanes to Java for the RAF at the end of that month.

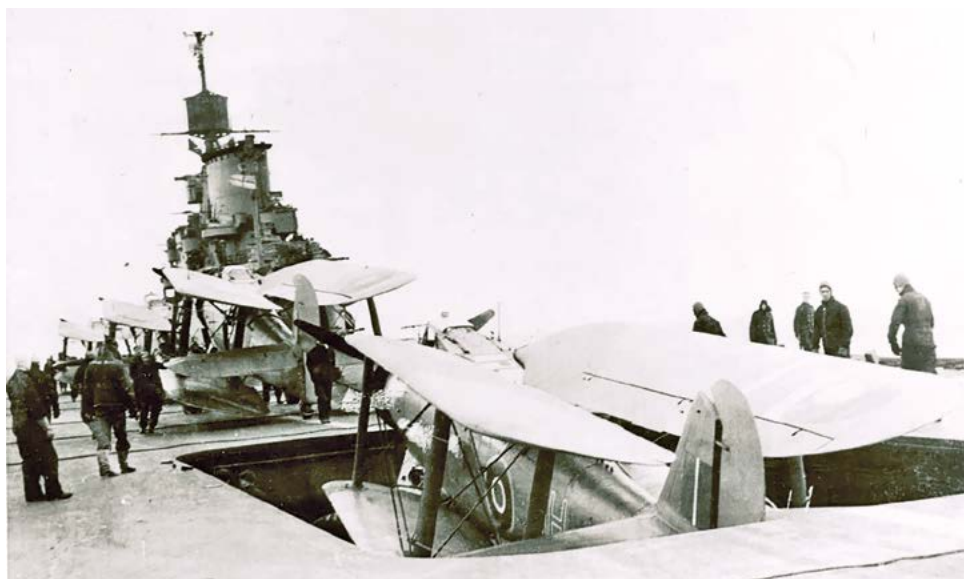
An Allied campaign to capture the Vichy French-controlled island of Madagascar was hatched in early 1942. The island has three ports which the Imperial Japanese Navy coveted as a perfect operating base for their ships and submarines to harass the hugely important allied shipping routes that ran from the Cape to all parts of the Empire in the Far East and Australasia.

On 5 May 1942, Operation Ironclad began as the initial part of the Battle of Madagascar, and conducted by Force H, constituting the aged battleship *Ramillies*, carriers *Indomitable* and *Illustrious*, cruisers *Hermione* and *Devonshire*, eleven destroyers, six minesweepers, six corvettes and

auxiliaries. It was a formidable force to bring against the 8,000 troops (mostly conscripted Malagasy) at Diego-Suarez, but the Chiefs of Staff were adamant that this seaborne operation, the first British amphibious assault since the disastrous landings in the Dardanelles twenty-seven years before, was to succeed.

Diego-Suarez (now Antsiranana) is a large bay, with a natural harbour and gently sloping beaches, near the northern tip of Madagascar, a very important key strategic objective.

As a prelude to the beach landings, Arrachart airfield was attacked, with five of the Vichy Morane-Saulnier 406 fighters destroyed on the ground by *Indomitable's* Sea Hurricanes and another two damaged, while two Potez 63s were also damaged. This attack effectively resulted in the Vichy air



HMS *Indomitable* striking Albacore aircraft below, during 1940. © IWM

strength on the island being reduced by 25 per cent. Two Morane fighters did briefly appear and strafe the landing beaches at Courier Bay. As a diversionary attack *Indomitable's* Albacore and *Illustrious's* Swordfish attacked Vichy shipping offshore. The Swordfish sank the armed merchant cruiser *Bougainville* and the submarine *Bévésiers*, although one Swordfish was shot down by anti-aircraft fire and its crew was taken prisoner. This aircraft had been dropping leaflets in French to encourage the Vichy troops to surrender.

On the morning of 6 May three Vichy Potez 63s attempted to attack the beach landing points but were intercepted by Martlets from *Illustrious* and two were shot down. Albacores from *Indomitable* were used to bomb the defences, while a Swordfish from *Illustrious* managed to sink the submarine *Le Héros*.

The assault continued into May 7 when *Illustrious's* Martlets encountered three Morane-Saulnier 406 fighters, with one Martlet being shot down but with the loss of all three of the Vichy fighters. This meant that by the third day of the attack on Madagascar, twelve Moranes and five Potez 63s had been destroyed out of a total of 35 Vichy aircraft on the entire island.

By the end of day three, Operation Ironclad had effectively concluded. In just three days of fighting the allies had seen 109 men killed and 283 wounded, with the Vichy French defenders suffering 700 casualties. The campaign to take the whole of Madagascar continued down through the island until

an armistice was signed in Ambalavao on 6 November 1942. But the *Indomitable* left the campaign and returned to the Clyde in July 1942 to prepare for another important operation.

She was soon back in action, participating in Operation Pedestal, the largest relief convoy to supply the besieged island of Malta. The size of this convoy was unprecedented. The heavy escort was provided by two venerable sister battleships, HMS *Nelson* and HMS *Rodney*, each displacing 34,000 tons and armed with nine 16-inch guns and twelve 6-inch. Vice Admiral Sir Neville Syfret flew his flag in *Nelson*, as flag officer commanding. Three aircraft carriers were included in the force, *Indomitable*, *Victorious*, and the ageing *Eagle*. The carrier force was commanded by Rear Admiral A L St. George Lyster who flew his flag in *Indomitable*. 'Indoms' air wing comprised 45 aircraft, Sea Hurricanes, Grumman Martlets and Fairey Fulmars to provide fighter cover. In a separate operation to Pedestal, the carrier *Furious*, with a destroyer escort, flew off 38 Spitfire fighters as reinforcements for Malta.

On 3 August 1942, *Indomitable's*



Seen from the flight deck of *Victorious*, an Albacore takes off from *Indomitable*. © IWM

aircraft claimed 27 enemy destroyed for a loss of 4 of their own. On 12 August, enemy bombers scored 2 hits and 3 near-misses on her. One of the 500 kg bombs penetrated an unarmoured portion of the flight deck, causing damage that required her to withdraw for repairs, although she was able to steam at 28 knots just two hours after the hits. Casualties were 6 officers and 40 ratings killed, and 70 ratings wounded.

She sailed to Liverpool's Gladstone Dock, where repairs were completed in February 1943. After which she worked up off Scapa Flow and in the Clyde area before returning to the Mediterranean to participate in the build-up to Operation Husky, the allied invasion of Sicily and the start of the Italian Campaign.

During these preparations, she was torpedoed on 16 July 1943. Conflicting reports have this as either an Italian Air Force Savoia-Marchetti SM.79 or a Luftwaffe Junkers Ju88. Whichever the aircraft, the damage necessitated her withdrawal from theatre and she proceeded to the United States where repairs were undertaken from July 1943 to February 1944. When completed, she commenced sea trials on 10 April 1944.

Sailing to the Far East in June 1944, she joined the British Pacific Fleet and alongside *Victorious* undertook air strikes against targets on Sumatra. This was followed by air strikes against the Nicobar Islands again with *Victorious* on 17 and 19 October. She was involved in an unsuccessful attack on Medan, Sumatra with *Illustrious* on 20 December 1944.

On 4 January 1945 with *Victorious*

and another fleet carrier *Indefatigable* she was successful this time in air strikes against Medan. A little later on 24 and 29 January 1945 she was involved in further strikes against refineries in Palembang, Sumatra.

*Indomitable* sailed to Sydney in February 1945, returning to active duties with air strikes against Sakishima Gunto and Formosa in March and April 1945.

On 4 May 1945 she was hit by a kamikaze aircraft, but her armoured flight deck saved her from serious damage. The aircraft simply slid up the flight deck and over the side.

She sailed back to Sydney for a refit in June 1945, departing in mid-August to support the liberation of Hong Kong and arriving after a landing party from HMCS *Prince Robert* had taken the Japanese surrender. Her aircraft flew their last combat missions around Hong Kong on 31 August and 1 September against Japanese suicide boats that were attacking the allies, they did not recognise the surrender of Japanese forces.

She finally returned to the UK in November 1945 with British personnel repatriating from Australia. She also ditched all her aircraft overboard in the open sea after she left Sydney. What an inglorious end to such noble beasts.

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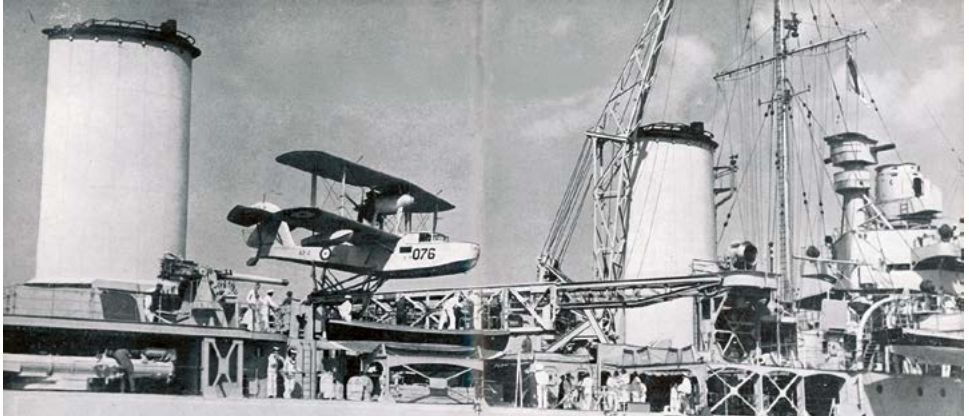
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# The Fleet Air Arm 1943

By Richard Macauley



A double page spread showing a Supermarine Walrus on the catapult from the publication.

**My good friend Roger sent me a document he came across entitled 'Fleet Air Arm - The Admiralty Account of Naval Air Operations'.**

Prepared for the Admiralty by the Ministry of Information it proudly announces on page 1 that it was published in 1943 by His Majesty's Stationery Office for the princely sum of one shilling and sixpence. The following is taken unedited of one of the articles within.

## The Eyes of the Fleet

Reconnaissance was the earliest duty of naval aircraft, and remains one of their most important functions today. On reconnaissance responsibility falls

heaviest upon the observer, for then he must be master of all the lessons he has learnt during his long training. He needs a practised eye,

an acute mind and a resolute spirit. He must not only see clearly but appreciate the significance of what he sees and must be able to describe it with precision, conscious that on his report the admiral may act. Thus he may make or mar a battle. He is as essential to the modern fleet as were the frigates





of Nelson's day; had Nelson been able to catapult an aircraft from the *Victory* there would have been no need for him to search the Mediterranean for the French fleet, or to follow Villeneuve in the long pursuit across the Atlantic to the West Indies and back again.

Naval reconnaissance aircraft have not altered the principles of sea warfare, but they have vastly enlarged its scope. Their primary duty is to find and fix. Reports concerning the enemy may come in from many sources: from the RAF, from naval ships operating independently, from merchant ships, or from Admiralty intelligence.

Flying to a range of 200 miles from the Fleet, the reconnaissance aircraft investigates such reports, or searches out enemy ships to plot and report them with precision. Raiders at large may entail months of continuous ocean search, as in the hunt for the *Admiral Graf Spee*, or a more intensive form of reconnaissance for a short period, as when the Swordfish of the *Ark Royal* were searching for the *Bismarck*, or those of the *Formidable* for the Italian fleet before the Battle of Matapan. Having found the enemy at a distance it is the duty of the aircraft and that of its relief to keep continuous touch until the enemy is no longer within air range.

Nor is this the only duty of reconnaissance aircraft. In the first months of the war, when magnetic mines were causing the Admiralty grave anxiety, naval observers, on account of their navigational experience, were attached to RAF flights which had been equipped with devices for

minesweeping, and operated off the coast of England and Egypt. Naval aircraft have reconnoitred enemy harbours, and the photographs they have secured, both before and after an attack, have proved of great value.

They have found and reported the position of British convoys and outlying naval units and by passing orders to them by visual signals have enabled the Fleet to preserve wireless silence. They also carry out close search and anti-submarine patrols ahead of the Fleet from dawn to dusk, and when the Fleet is in harbour maintain daylight and moonlight searches to seaward from shore bases. For many months Walruses from HMS *Albatross* were employed off Freetown on anti-submarine patrols and convoy escort duties.

This is a defensive duty, but in the first weeks of the war, before it was possible to put the convoy system into full operation, Swordfish and Skuas from the *Ark Royal*, the *Courageous* and the *Hermes* were employed offensively to hunt U-boats in home waters. While one or two aircraft patrolled ahead of the carrier, a striking force was kept in readiness to attack any U-boat reported. They sighted and attacked a number of U-boats, and their watchfulness undoubtedly forced the submarines down during this critical period. The carriers faced grave risks, however. The *Ark Royal* had a narrow escape from being torpedoed on 14th September, 1939, and the *Courageous* was sunk three days later. The Admiralty then decided that aircraft-carriers were too valuable to be risked in U-boat

areas when the work could be done equally well by shore-based aircraft co-operating with anti-submarine vessels.

After the Admiralty's decision to withdraw carriers from submarine hunting, several were engaged in the interception of enemy raiders and merchant vessels. While the German pocket battleship *Admiral Graf Spee* was at large, the *Ark Royal* was searching for her in the South Atlantic, the *Eagle* in the Indian Ocean. The *Ark Royal's* aircraft missed her by only a narrow margin. In their daily searches, arduous, monotonous and unspectacular, they covered millions of square miles and contributed to her being brought to action off the River Plate. The *Glorious* was also employed on trade protection in the Indian Ocean and the *Hermes* on the convoy route to Dakar, in co-operation with French naval forces.

During this period a number of German merchant ships were intercepted, including *SS Uhenfels*, loaded with a rich cargo of opium by the aircraft of the *Ark Royal*. Catapult aircraft from the cruisers operating independently on the trade routes also made their contribution. Among others, the *Shropshire's* aircraft found *SS Adolf Leonhardt*, which was scuttled and abandoned. In March, 1941, the *Ark Royal's* Swordfish intercepted the British ships *San Casimiro* and *Bianca*, which had been captured by the *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*. They, too, were scuttled, but *Renown* took off the imprisoned British crews and the German prize crews, and landed them at Gibraltar.

While the *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* were still preying upon merchant shipping in the Atlantic the Swordfish floatplane from *Malaya*, piloted by Lieutenant GR Brown, DSC, RN, sighted them on reconnaissance during the afternoon of 8th March 1941. The *Malaya* was then escorting a north-bound convoy from Sierra Leone and was between the Canaries and the Cape Verde Islands. The speed of the German warships, which turned away as the *Malaya* prepared to open fire at long range, made it impossible to bring them to action before dark and the Swordfish was accordingly ordered to return to the ship.

At 6.21 p.m. the Swordfish reported that it could not find the ship owing to the decreased visibility and the failing light. The Commanding Officer of HMS *Malaya* (Captain, now Rear-Admiral, AFE Palliser, DSC, RN) was then placed in a grave dilemma. A submarine was suspected to be shadowing the convoy (five ships had been torpedoed on the previous night) and the two enemy battle-cruisers, capable of high speed, were within miles. To give the Swordfish a bearing might divulge the position of the convoy and enable the enemy to creep up and attack during the night. On the other hand, if he maintained wireless silence his aircraft would have to make a forced landing in the dark, with little prospect of being picked up. For a time he waited, hoping that the Swordfish might still find the ship. At last, as there was no sign of it, he authorized the transmission of two DF bearings, without using call signs. An Aldis lamp



Fairey Swordfish floatplane being hoisted aboard the battleship HMS Malaya. © RN

was shone skywards in the direction of the last position given by the Swordfish, and lights were shown through the roofs of the gun turrets. At 7.38 the Swordfish made a signal "Landing any minute now." That meant its endurance was nearly at an end. There was still no knowing if it would find the ship in time. A little later it signalled "Good luck—cannot find you." Then the final words "Forced landing."

All that night the Swordfish lay helpless, breasting the Atlantic swell like a gull. But the crew kept it afloat and next morning those in the *Malaya* heard it sending out distress signals. The *Malaya*, with the convoy in her charge, could do nothing, but the signals were picked up by the Spanish ship *Cabo de Buena Esperanza* and by the *Alfonso Perez*, a Portuguese. On being asked to give his call sign the telegraphist-air-gunner, Petty Officer RH George, suggested replying "Aircraft belonging to HMS *Valiant*" to avoid disclosing

the whereabouts of the *Malaya*. Both the neutral ships searched for many hours and at 8.42 that evening the *Malaya* intercepted a message from the *Cabo de Buena Esperanza* stating that she had found the aircraft. At 3 the following morning the observer, Sub-Lieutenant(A) RG Drake, RN, signalled that all the crew had been rescued alive and were on board, bound for Teneriffe.

When the *Cabo de Buena Esperanza* reached Teneriffe the arrival of the naval airmen raised a knotty problem of international law. They had been picked up outside territorial waters, but Teneriffe is a Spanish possession. Were the crew to be interned, or not? After what the Vice Admiral Commanding the North Atlantic Station described as "considerable telegraphing," the Spanish authorities decided to solve the question by releasing the crew and interning the Swordfish.

German shipping was frequently found to be sailing under neutral flags. In

June, 1941, when the *Eagle* was operating in the South Atlantic, one of her aircraft on anti-submarine patrol reported the Norwegian steamer *Kristiania Fjord* 30 miles from the carrier. On being sighted she altered course and increased speed. It seemed evident that the vessel was disguised, and an armed searching force was despatched to make her close the *Eagle* for examination. If she failed to comply, she was to be attacked with bombs. One of the searching aircraft sighted her after 90 minutes flying and signalled her to alter course. She paid no attention. The aircraft opened fire across her bows with the rear gun, but she continued to steam at full speed. The aircraft dropped two 500lb bombs, which fell 20 feet from the port side amidships, then shadowed her for a further two hours. The pilot eventually landed back on the *Eagle* with barely ten minutes petrol left, having been in the air for over five hours.

Meanwhile another striking force had been despatched, led by Lieutenant Commander AJ Debenham, DSC, RN. They found the ship stopped, on fire, and being abandoned. The Norwegian ensign had been hauled down. Two boats were lying off and another was being manned under the stern. Debenham ordered the ship to steer to the southward. There was no response to his signal. The striking force then attacked the ship with bombs, obtaining one direct hit abaft the funnel and three near misses. They left her settling by the stern and blazing fiercely. She sent out an SOS in German to all ships stating that she was being bombed by aircraft

and had scuttled herself, revealing her identity as the *Elbe*. At daylight next morning the *Eagle's* aircraft searched for the boats to a depth of 60 miles, sighting nothing but oil, wreckage and a large number of empty 50-gallon drums, which suggested that the *Elbe* had been a submarine supply ship.

Some weeks later the *Eagle's* Swordfish intercepted a similar enemy vessel flying the Dutch flag. When ordered to stop, the crew began to take to the boats, but were compelled to return to the ship by machine gun fire, which was directed on the water. To prevent the ship being scuttled the aircraft remained over her for nearly five hours until HMS *Dunedin* came up and put a prize crew aboard. The vessel was found to be carrying a large stock of torpedoes and other stores, together with reliefs for the submarine crews.

No reconnaissance by naval aircraft has made a greater contribution to the success of momentous operations than that which brought the news that the German battleship *Bismarck* and the heavy cruiser *Prinz Eugen* had sailed from Bergen.

The two ships left Kiel on 19 May 1941, and were sighted and photographed on the 21st in one of the unfrequented fiords near Bergen by an aircraft of Coastal Command. In the afternoon the weather broke and became so bad that a further reconnaissance across the North Sea was perilous. Next morning flying conditions were even worse. Nevertheless it was of vital importance to the Commander in Chief, Home Fleet, to know whether the ships were still in



Left to right: Lieut Cdr (A) Noel Ernest Goddard, DSC, RNVR, pilot of the *Maryland* which flew over Bergen to discover the *Bismarck* and awarded the DSC; Rear Admiral Clement Moody, Rear Admiral Naval Air Stations; Captain Henry Lockhart St John Fancourt, RN; Commander Henry Austin Traill, OBE, RN;

the fiord or whether they had put to sea, for until he had that information it was impossible for him to dispose his forces to the best advantage.

Captain HL St J Fancourt, RN, who was then in command of the naval air station in the Orkneys, HMS *Sparrowhawk*, accordingly obtained permission to send out a reconnaissance aircraft in an attempt to break through the fog belt on the Norwegian coast. Commander GA Rotherham, OBE, RN, an observer of great experience, but as executive officer of the station not appointed for flying duties, volunteered to go, and Lieutenant(A) NE Goddard, RNVR, volunteered to act as his pilot. They were accompanied by Leading Airmen

Milne and Armstrong. The aircraft selected was an American-built Glenn-Martin *Maryland*, attached to the station for target-towing.

Shortly after the *Maryland* had flown off, the RAF reported that weather conditions were impossible for reconnaissance on the Norwegian coast. The situation was so grave however, that Captain Fancourt felt justified in not recalling the aircraft. The RAF reports had been no exaggeration. The weather was so thick that the pilot was compelled to fly at almost surface level, and more than once came down to within 50 feet without being able to see the water. As he approached the Norwegian coast, however, he found a small break in the mist. The observer's navigation proved accurate and at a height of 1,500 feet the *Maryland* swept round the fiord where the German warships had been seen and photographed. The fiord was empty. Not content with this, Commander Rotherham took the aircraft low over Bergen harbour, encountering intense anti-aircraft fire. There was still no sign of either the *Bismarck* or the *Prinz Eugen*. He reported that the enemy had put to sea and then navigated the *Maryland* back to the Shetlands.

The qualifications of the crew were such that the Commander-in-Chief had no hesitation in accepting the report, and it was on the information provided by this intelligence that the Home Fleet put to sea in pursuit of the *Bismarck* and *Prinz Eugen*. Both observer and pilot were decorated for their skilful and determined reconnaissance.

# The Night High Speed Run

By Tony Wilson



de Havilland Vampire FB5. © Tony Wilson

**For those FAA boys who went flying, what is, or was it, that makes any particular flight stick in the memory. For many it will be one of difficulty or life-threatening danger, for others difficult or spectacular weather that they had to struggle through.**

Something, at least, that would have stirred the emotions. As part of the introduction to the then high-performance jet world, naval student pilots at RAF Valley were initiated into

the various characteristics of subsonic jets, in our case the de Havilland Vampire T11 and FB5. In order that we should recognise and learn how to cope with the symptoms of compressibility as speed was increased, this included an exercise known as the HSR, the High-Speed Run. This manoeuvre, after climbing to height and doing a clearing turn, involved rolling the aircraft into a power-on dive. As speed increased progressive stick force and re-trimming

was required to hold the aircraft into the dive. In a short time at around 0.75-0.78 Mach, symptoms of compressibility would manifest themselves with the aircraft beginning to “shake, rattle and even roll” a little. The instrument panel would definitely start to rattle and severe vibration would make instruments difficult to read. Recovery was simple enough in a straight dive. Throttle back, pop out the airbrakes, and ease out of the dive as the speed and vibrations reduced. Sometimes a little trickier, with compressibility encountered earlier, if pulling some “G” in a turn. Whilst rather disturbing when first demonstrated by an instructor, restoration to normal flight soon instilled confidence in the pupil to deal with these phenomena himself.

Come April 1957, as an 18-year-old Midshipman, on the night flying programme, I was briefed to carry out some HSRs, a QGH let down and a few practice touch and go landings in a Vampire FB5. After take-off I climbed out of Valley heading westward over the sea, with the lights of the Isle of Man out to starboard and those of Blackpool coming into view on my left as I turned back towards land. With just a little trepidation I carried out three HSRs and completed my QGH and circuits. Later, when I was walking back to the mess, there was just enough light from the glow of the distant runway and taxiway lights to see my way along the narrow lane that led off the airfield. I thought of all those other people, living and doing the ordinary things of every day. They haven't been where I've been tonight, way up above in the black night sky,

safely dealing with the symptoms of compressibility in high-speed flight, conquering nerves and controlling a nippy little jet fighter.

All my senses seem incredibly sharp. The grass beside the road had been mowed earlier that day and the smell of new mown grass filled the night air. The smell of burnt aviation kerosene wafting from the airfield is mixed, now, with the damp smell of dew on fresh cut grass and the murmur of the wind challenges the gentle whine of an aircraft in the landing circuit. Even my skin seems more aware of the gentle scratching of the coarse material of the battle dress trousers on my knees. It feels so good to be alive and there's nothing else I'd rather be doing, nowhere else I'd rather be, than a jet pilot walking through the black night on my way to the bacon, eggs and sausage of my night flying supper.

Not that I was anything special. All my 60 Course friends and colleagues would have done the same as I had just done. Even so, not many other 18 year olds had done anything like that lately. And at that point I had a moment of supreme satisfaction and contentment about my nighttime flight, which I still recall today.



**A Vampire T.II. WZ507 now flies with the Vampire Preservation Trust based at Kemble.**

# Canada's Contribution

By Chris Penney



Royal Naval Air Service "Black Flight" of Naval 10 by artist Terry Jones. Image via GWAS.

**The Royal Canadian Air Force is celebrating its centenary and it's worth highlighting some episodes from Canada's rich aeronautical history that have significantly contributed to UK naval aviation during both World Wars.**

Born in Winnipeg, Redford Henry "Red" Mulock DSO\* RNAS enlisted in the Canadian Field Artillery in 1911, but relinquished his commission to re-enlist as a corporal to join the Canadian Expeditionary Force that first arrived in England during October 1914. Aged 28, he joined the fledgling Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS) earning his pilot's certificate on 9 March 1915 at

the RN Flying School Eastchurch to recommission as a Flight Sub-Lieutenant.

Mulock was posted to 1 Squadron (re-named 1 Wing in June 1915) which was performing roles that included fighter patrols, bombing missions, photo reconnaissance and direction of naval gunfire support. Drawing on his service background, he pioneered the use of parachute artillery spotting flares by night. The Wing covered the Fleet operating off Flanders and on 6 September Mulock became the first Canadian aviator to attack a submarine. Flying Nieuport 10 3177 with five 20lb bombs, straddling the diving U-boat.



On 21 May 1916, he scored a double victory and became the first Canadian ace to destroy five enemy aircraft, as well as the first RNAS pilot to achieve that distinction. In 1917 Red was appointed Commanding Officer of 3 (Naval) Squadron at a time when the Admiralty loaned five squadrons to support the Royal Flying Corps on the Western Front. Equipped with ageing but agile Sopwith Pups, the squadron claimed 80 successful combats for the loss of just nine Pups under his command.

Another Canadian Raymond "Collie" Collishaw DSC, DFC, DSO\* became the Great War's highest scoring RNAS ace. He served with No 3 Wing before being given command of the famed B Flight of 10 (Naval) Squadron in 1917. Naval 10 was being re-equipped with the new, fast-climbing and highly manoeuvrable Sopwith Triplane. Britain's Clerget 9Z (110hp) powered Triplane had first flown from Brooklands in May 1916. Entering service over the Western Front in early 1917, only Royal Naval Air Service fighter squadrons operated it. Collishaw had his first Triplane combat on 28 April 1917. Downing a Luftstreitkräfte fighter he became an ace with this fifth victory. B Flight, known as "Black Flight" because of black painted engine cowlings and wheel covers, was composed almost entirely of Canadians. Aircraft names included Black Roger and Black Prince; Collishaw chose Black Maria (referencing a police van). During their first two months at Droglandt airfield on the Ypres front, the Flight claimed over 80 German aircraft destroyed or driven down. While serving with the RNAS squadron Collie was

credited with 27 enemy aircraft kills.

415 (RCAF) Squadron, Canada's fourth coastal and only designated torpedo bomber squadron to be formed in the UK, converted to Fairey Albacores during autumn 1943. Crews commenced conversion training with 841 Naval Air Squadron at Manston in Kent before being handed the Fleet Air Arm unit's Albacores and three Swordfish. Training also began on the Vickers Wellington XIII at Thorney Island, Hampshire. Coastal Command's Mark XIII featured mast-mounted (not chin radome) ASV Mark II radar for the squadron's anti-shiping sweeps over the Channel and along the Dutch coastline. In preparation for D-Day this aircraft pairing saw 415's Wellingtons searching for Albacore targets, with the first operation flown on 3 November 1943. The Wellingtons then moved to East Anglia's Bircham Newton to form a separate Flight.

By 1944 415 Squadron was the only RAF operational unit flying biplanes and their Albacore MkIs were painted overall matt black with dull red codes for the night strike role. That April Albacore Flight moved to Thorney Island with 20 ASV MkII radar-equipped aircraft. However, following the US Army's D-Day Exercise Tiger disaster when Kriegsmarine Schnellboot E-boats raided an amphibious landing practice on Slapton Sands, Devon, eight Albacore redeployed to combat this naval threat. Detached to north Devon's RAF Winkleigh from 8 May, Channel ASV patrols were then flown from south Devon's Bolt Head satellite airstrip to allow maximum endurance with a full



415 (RCAF) Squadron Albacore I X8940/NH-R May 1944 diorama at CFB Greenwood's Military Aviation Museum. © 415 Squadron Association

payload of six 250lb bombs. Having flown 681 missions 415 Squadron's Albacore Flight ceased to be in July 44, its aircraft becoming the nucleus of reformed RAF 119 Squadron at Manston.

RCAF 415 Squadron's battle honours include "Normandy 1944".

**Footnote: Redford Mulock and OC 1 Wing, Robert M Groves, were both awarded the DSO in June 1916. Reference: RCAF Association, also Canada's Aviation Hall of Fame Website: cahf.ca**

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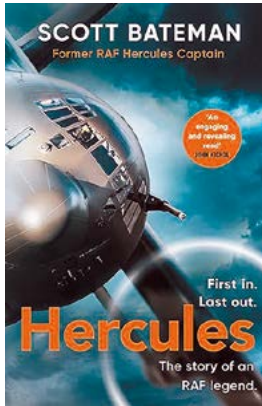
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# Hercules by Scott Bateman

Reviewed by Chris Penney



**In 1965 Labour's cancellation of a four-engine British-designed V/STOL jet transport as replacement for the RAF's obsolescent Beverley and Hastings fleets led to an off-the-shelf buy of 66 turboprop C-130K Hercules from the US.**

Why 66 and not 56 or 46 airframes were purchased isn't explained in this title, which covers not only the Herk's many milestones during RAF operation, but also the type's global footprint. After the Hercules C Mk.1's rapid 1967 service introduction in 'desert' camouflage, the first RAF squadrons were posted to Singapore and Bahrain supporting British forces stationed east of Aden. The Indian Ocean region became a magnet for Hercules operations involving disaster relief and rescue of

stranded Brits in crisis situations, and numerous examples are highlighted in a chapter entitled International Rescue. The extraction of Israeli hostages at Entebbe was facilitated by the Hercules and the legend gets a stand-alone chapter with an interview from the IDF C-130 squadron commander.

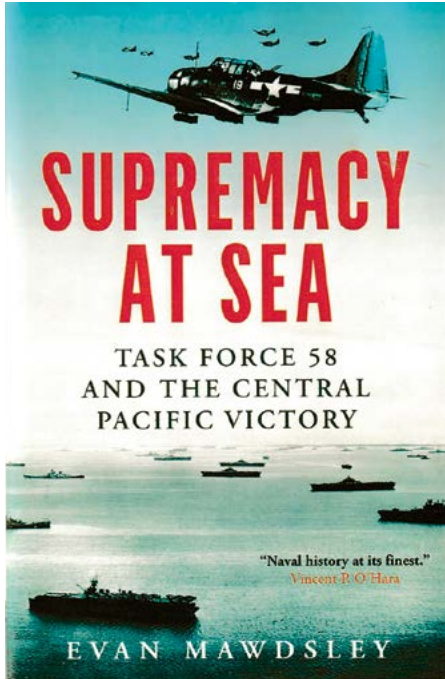
The author details his path from RAF air loadmaster to Hercules captain and the fleet's wider tactical role, not envisaged before the junior service's withdrawal from the Far East. This led after the aircraft's concentration at Lyneham to specialist squadron roles. The 1982 Falklands Conflict caught the RAF off-guard as our Herks had no air-to-air refuelling capability and to combat Argentine missile threats, radar warning receivers were obtained from the Fleet Air Arm. Rightly these intense and demanding South Atlantic missions cover two chapters, although there is only passing mention of the RAF type's recorded presence in Chilean airspace. The author flew extensively with 47 Squadron - designated for supporting British Special Forces - until 2023 and while recounting many personal anecdotes of life on the squadron, he provides little insight into SF operations, which is disappointing.

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**Publisher: Penguin ISBN 978-0-241-65559-7**

# Supremacy at Sea

A book review by Malcolm Smith



**The British historian Evan Mawdsley has produced a superb narrative of the USN's battle to win supremacy in the Central Pacific in 1944.**

He covers the period from January, when the new Fast Carrier Force, commanded by Rear Admiral Marc "Pete" Mitscher, was re-designated Task Force (TF) 58, part of the Fifth Fleet under the command of Vice Admiral Raymond Spruance. The narrative concludes in late 1944, with the capture of the islands

of the Marianas. The intervening story is of relentless advances westward across the three island territories of the central Pacific - the Marshalls, the Carolines and the Marianas. The latter destination, including the islands of Guam and Tinian, were the great strategic stepping stone, enabling the US Army Air Force (AAF) to base its long-range bombers in striking range of the Japanese Home Islands. To put the distances involved in this warzone into perspective, the Marshalls, the closest to American territory in 1941, are 2,400 miles west of Hawaii.

Mawdsley remarks that this naval advance has received little attention from historians, overshadowed by the battles of Midway in 1942 and Leyte Gulf in October 1944, yet it marked the emergence of the US Navy, especially its fast-carrier element, as the most powerful naval force in the world. This was achieved by a stupendous naval shipbuilding programme. In early 1944, the Pacific fleet had absorbed 16 new "fast carriers", of which 7 were the new 27,000-ton *Essex* class (CV) and 9 were 10,000-ton *Independence* class light carriers (CVL). These were accompanied by a fleet of new fast battleships, cruisers and destroyers. To enable these ships to deploy in the

vast reaches of the Pacific, the USN also introduced fast fleet oilers to provide underway replenishment (“unrep”) and huge numbers of support vessels of every type. The fleet had quickly grown to unprecedented size, but at the same time was manned by a mass of relatively inexperienced officers and men.

The attack on the islands of the Marshalls was nominated Exercise “Flintlock”. Adm Mitscher led the four individual Task Groups of TF58 out of Pearl Harbour in January. They were not to return to Pearl until the end of the war. The island of Kwajalein had been selected by Adm Nimitz, the C-in-C of the US Pacific Fleet, as the primary target and the role of TF58 was to neutralise the island defences of the archipelago to enable its capture by the two ground force divisions. The Task Group carriers launched successive strikes of Hellcats and Avengers, meeting some opposition by “Zeke” fighters, most of which were shot down. These air strikes were supplemented by heavy gunfire support from the battleships and cruisers of the force. Once Japanese force had been subdued, an enormous effort started to turn the islands of Majuro, Eniwetok and others into a major fleet support base.

After successful raids on the main Japanese fleet base at Truk, TF58 prepared for the decisive battle for the Marianas, known as Operation “Forager”. This commenced with the landing of two Marine divisions on Saipan Island on 11 June 1944, initiating the Battle of the Philippine Sea. The Japanese made vigorous efforts to

defend these strategic islands and on 19 June, launched four successive strikes of carrier and land-based strikes against Mitscher’s carriers. This led to what became known as the “Great Marianas Turkey Shoot”, so called because the superior skill and training of the American aircrew, together with an overwhelming advantage in the quality of their aircraft, led to a massacre of the inexperienced Japanese aircrew and the complete defeat of their attacks.

Mawdsley describes the aircraft deployed in TF58, including the Grumman Hellcat and Avenger. The former was developed with phenomenal speed by Grumman and entered active service only 13 months after its first flight. The sturdy Avenger could carry a torpedo or effective bomb load in its bomb bay and was equipped with considerable defensive armament. He pays full attention to the logistic complexities of supporting the active fleet, in which fuel, ammunition, spare parts, food and every other necessity were brought forward by specialist support vessels to support the fleet, often delivered by underway replenishment. He describes the training and career structure of USN officers and enlisted personnel, also gives brief pen pictures of the leading Admirals. As well as detailed descriptions of the varied operations of TF 58, Mawdsley details the crucial role played by US submarines in the battle. This is a most comprehensive and illuminating history.

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**Supremacy at Sea, by Evan Mawdsley.**  
**ISBN 978 0 300 25545 4**

# HMS PoW bestowed City Freedom

By Chris Penney



HMS *Prince of Wales* docks in Liverpool prior to receiving the city's Freedom. © Royal Navy

**Queen Elizabeth class aircraft carrier HMS *Prince of Wales* (R09) has received the Freedom of Entry into the City of Liverpool. It is the highest civic honour that an elected council can bestow on a military unit and grants permission in perpetuity for the Royal Navy ship's company to march through the streets with "drums beating, colours flying and bayonets fixed."**

Her crew was welcomed by the Lord Mayor of Liverpool in a ceremony that included a service of thanksgiving and civic reception. The city parade of

naval and RAF personnel was led by the Band of HM Royal Marines Scotland, reflecting the fact that the carrier's air group comprises F-35B Lightning II stealth fighters jointly operated by Fleet Air Arm and Royal Air Force. Members of the 800-strong crew took part in the time-honoured Freedom ceremonial watched with pride by families and friends.

Liverpool has strong links with the Royal Navy, dating from the Second World War when the city became the nation's convoy co-ordination centre

during the Battle of Atlantic. Throughout its visit the ship was berthed at Pier Head within sight of the statue to Captain Frederic 'Johnnie' Walker CB DSO\*\*\* RN. Walker sank more enemy U-boats than any other escort group commander but sadly did not survive the war. *Prince of Wales* has become the UK flagship for the first time in her five-year Royal Navy career, taking over this national duty from sister ship *Queen Elizabeth*. Her seven-day port call to Liverpool included hosting a UK Defence Industrial Strategy forum, a STEM Day for young people and allowed local Sea Cadet Corps units a rare visit. The public also had a chance to go aboard on the final day. This is the second Freedom held by the ship, as the City of Bristol gave *Prince of Wales* the honour in 2023.

The ship earlier took part in live



**HMS *Prince of Wales* on the River Mersey.**  
© Royal Navy

weaponry exercises in Scottish waters, marking 809 Naval Air Squadron's first return to sea since the 1982 Falklands conflict. The *Prince of Wales* then joined US Navy Carrier Strike Group 8 for joint NATO exercises in the North Sea, involving UK F-35B and USN F/A-18E Super Hornets flying together. The *Prince of Wales* Carrier Strike Group will deploy in 2025 to the Indo-Pacific and Japan.



**With bayonets fixed the ship's company exercise the Freedom of Liverpool.** © Royal Navy

# Visit by HRH the Princes Royal

By Malcolm Smith.



HRH the Princess Royal being presented to our Chairman Malcolm Smith by Elliott Bailey.  
© FAAM

During her visit to the Fleet Air Arm Museum on 13 September 2024 as part of the Museum's 60th Birthday Year celebrations, HRH the Princess Royal was shown the new display case containing an interpretation of King Charles III Flying Suit.

The case is positioned in the Welcome Gallery, alongside his already displayed helmet, and an already donated copy of King Charles' official portrait. Princess Anne was greeted at the display by your Chairman, accompanied by the Vice Chairman, Tim Brandt; the Visits Organiser, Rosanne Crowther; and the Publications Editor, Richard Macauley. The Society donated £11,600 to the FAAM for the purchase of the display case and mannequin and we were pleased to have the opportunity to show it to the King's sister. Princess Anne is the Patron of National Museums of the Royal Navy.



The museum display case containing her brother's flying suit. © Richard Macauley



The Princess Royal spoke at length to each of the four SoFFAAM representatives.  
© Susan Macauley



# Schools Travel Bursary donation

By Elliott Bailey



School Children enjoying a 'hands-on' aviation related activity at FAAM. © FAAM

**Following the generous donation of £5000 for the SoFFAAM Schools Travel Bursary last year, we have this month had our first enquiries by schools wanting to utilise the offer-which is very exciting.**

Whilst ideally we would have liked for it to have been utilised earlier, this delay isn't entirely unexpected due to the way in which schools tend to book their trips in advance - booking in early Summer for the Autumn term, Autumn for the Winter Term, and Winter for the Spring/Summer Term. With us beginning to drip feed information through our schools marketing channels in the autumn, we

are confident that word of mouth will begin to spread!

During this time, we have also been in close discussion with other museums in the South West regarding school visitors - who are also reporting their school numbers being down and schools struggling to afford rising costs of getting pupils out of the classroom. On a recent visit to Bristol Aerospace Museum, who also offer a similar Coach Travel Bursary, they echoed similar sentiments - but also reported positive stories around the opportunities that their bursary offered to those that wouldn't otherwise have been able to visit the museum.

# Summer Events 2024

By Richard Macauley



Bridgwater Armed Forces Day



RNAS Yeovilton Families Day

**A busy 2024 saw the SoFFAAM gazebo at six events this year.**

The Jump Dog Parachute Display Team 'came over the top' of our stand at Bridgwater while at Taunton Armed Forces day we had a retired Vice Admiral, (Asst Chief of Naval Staff, Aviation and Carriers) enquire after the Society and FAAM and wish us well.

The Vice Lord-Lieutenant for Somerset was very interested in Jabberwock at RNAS Yeovilton Family Day as were many serving FAA and AAC men and woman and their families.

Middle Wallop and Henstridge were probably our biggest events in terms of visitors with lots of motor vehicles as part of the displays as well.

We finished off the year at Yeovil Model Show which attracts modellers and therefore aviation enthusiasts from all over the South West. SoFFAAM is providing a trophy for this prestigious modelling event in 2025.



Middle Wallop Wings and Wheels



Henstridge Wings & Wheels

**Please consider volunteering to help man the SoFFAAM stand at these shows in 2025, even if it is for just part of the day. You get time to look around the event too and we always meet some very interesting people. Contact Richard Macauley for more info on 07768 562976 or [soffaam@btinternet.com](mailto:soffaam@btinternet.com)**

# Future Talks

By Richard Macauley

**Can I please start by reminding all those who view our Talks on Zoom that they MUST supply their email addresses in order that we can send those who have booked tickets a Zoom link.**

To send you a Zoom link we have to have a valid email address. If you buy by Paypal, we assume that the email linked to the Paypal account is the one you want to use - if it is not, please tell us. If you pay by BACS or cheque, we have no email address so you must MUST email [soffaam.joinup@gmail.com](mailto:soffaam.joinup@gmail.com) to let us know. We will NOT look up our Membership database to see if you are on it - both for GDPR and because there is too much risk of getting the wrong person.

We have an eclectic mix of speakers lined up for 2025 and as a special offer, while our February speaker entertains our audience in FAAM, we are going to offer free Zoom access to this Talk. You will be able to enjoy this Talk online if you cannot attend in person with our compliments. By joining in you will see how easy it is to access our Talks online. We hope this will encourage you to our Zoom Talks throughout the year. Just email [soffaam.joinup@gmail.com](mailto:soffaam.joinup@gmail.com) to request your February Talk joining link which will be sent out 48 hours before the talk date.

If you have not experienced a Zoom Talk before and do not have the free software on your computer, I can help you set this up over the phone. Call me on **07768 562976** or email [soffaam@btinternet.com](mailto:soffaam@btinternet.com) to arrange this.

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**Alan Lawson - Saddam Hussein - my part in his downfall in 2003**  
**Thursday 27 February 2025 at 7:30pm**

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**Speaker TBC**  
**Thursday 27 March 2025 at 7:30pm**

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**Vic Flintham - The Rover David system and how the Desert Air Force gave Hitler his Dunkirk moment (close air support to the 8th Army 1940 to 1945)**  
**Thursday 24 April 2025 at 7:30pm**

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**Sqn Ldr (ret'd) Michael Morison - Flying the SEPECAT Jaguar in the RAF**  
**Thursday 29 May 2025 at 7:30pm**

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We are pleased to announce that we have secured another Saturday Talk that will take place at the Fleet Air Arm Museum and also on Zoom.

**Tony Buttler AMRAeS - Sea Vixen: 1950s Carrier Fighter**  
**Saturday 17 May 2025 at 2.00pm**

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Tickets will be available mid April

# The Comet airliner - the 75th Anniversary of her maiden flight

October Talk by Alistair Hodgson, summarised by Robert Heath



BOAC de Havilland Comet 4 (G-APDB) takes off from DH's Hatfield Aerodrome, August 1958.  
© BAe Systems

**Alistair Hodgson celebrated the 75th Anniversary of the Comet's maiden flight by reminding us that the origins of the Comet date back to August 1942, when our then Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, travelled to a conference in Moscow in a converted B24 bomber.**

The PM suffered the discomfort of the flight and determined that after the war, commercial passenger aircraft should not be converted bombers. He formed the Brabazon Committee to determine the requirements for British designs. Four interim conversions were planned, all based on wartime military designs. None of these was a match for American designs.

Brabazon's recommendations resulted in the Brabazon aircraft (with just 100 seats) also the Airspeed Ambassador; Bristol Britannia and DH Dove. De Havilland proposed a jet-powered candidate. Early iterations included a design resembling the tailplane-less DH Swallow, but ultimately, a design resembling the Comet emerged, except that it had a 45° wing sweep. This was refined to a 20° swept wing to give a low wing loading and an excellent low speed performance. The original Comet design was 90ft long, with a cockpit crew of two pilots, a flight engineer and radio operator. The pressurized cabin carried just 28 passengers. There was a separate bar, also Gents and Ladies toilets. The engines (also de Havilland designs) were buried in the wing roots to reduce asymmetry if an engine failed, and the flight controls were fully powered.

The prototype first flew on 27 July 1949 and development continued rapidly. On 2 May 1952, the Comet, in BOAC colours, flew from London to Johannesburg. This was the world's first pure-jet, fare paying passenger flight and orders rolled in. However, in

October 1952 a Comet departing from Rome ran off the runway, writing-off the aircraft but with no serious injuries. Then in March 1953 a Canadian Pacific Comet 1A failed to take-off at Karachi Airport, killing all 11 people on board. Three months later, just after takeoff from Calcutta Airport in a thunderstorm, a BOAC Comet 1 crashed, killing all 43 people on board. Initially, each event was attributed to pilot error, but analysis showed that each aircraft had entered a deep stall. Improvements were made to the wings, but in January 1954 a BOAC Comet broke up over the Mediterranean crashing into the sea near the island of Elba, killing all 35 people on board. Shortly after, in April 1954 another Comet departing from Rome crashed into the sea near Naples.

The Comet was grounded and a massive exercise took place to recover as much wreckage as possible for investigation at Farnborough. Fatigue testing was undertaken in a purpose-built water tank. 3,060 flights were simulated before the fuselage structure failed. The findings revealed fatigue, although not just in the square windows, as we have all been led to believe. De Havilland had originally tested the fuselage at pressures well above the regulation levels and for a higher number of cycles. The tests were carried out on the same section of fuselage, which was acceptable practice at that time. However, it became apparent that such a high number of cycles resulted in 'cold working' which affected the crystals in the metal, a discovery from

which industry benefited worldwide.

The investigations revealed that the Comet window structures were designed to be Redux bonded rather than riveted, but during manufacture in the cold winter of 1949, the bonding would not set, so the windows were instead riveted. All openings in the fuselage were affected by fatigue and ultimately, the aperture for the Automatic Direction Finder (ADF) aerial was where the fatigue crack developed and grew. As a result of the Farnborough investigation, de Havilland extensively redesigned the Comet, leading to the Comet 3, using stronger structures, including a greater skin thickness. However, commercial sales for the aircraft died and the RAF took over newly constructed aircraft, employing them for intelligence gathering operations by 51 Squadron, Royal Air Force.

De Havilland developed the Comet 4 series, with more powerful Avon engines and enhanced fuel capacity, able to operate from smaller airfields than its main competitors. Sales of the Comet 4 revived the fortunes of the aircraft and it continued to operate until the early 1980s. Later, the successful Nimrod maritime patrol aircraft was developed from the Comet.

Alistair concluded that the thoroughness of the Farnborough investigation set the pattern for future Air Accident Investigation. "There is something about the Comet", he said, the aircraft almost has a cult following with several museums having examples.

# Westlands and the Lizzie (Lysander)

November Talk by Paul Hurt, summarised by Robert Heath



The Shuttleworth flying example of a Lysander aircraft. © Richard Macauley

## Can there be many people with a mild interest in aviation who are not familiar with the oddly appealing design of the Westland Lysander?

Our speaker, Paul Hurt, knows the Lysander in some detail. He said that Westland Aircraft emerged from the well-established engineering firm of Petters, based in Yeovil. Paul's grandfather had been a woodworker for Petters Aircraft from 1915 and his mother had later worked at Westland on construction of the Lysander. Paul just had to know more, which led him to collect artefacts and photos of the aircraft and of the background of

Petters and Westland. Before the days of computers and the internet he spent many hours in the Yeovil Museum and Library, searching for information, which formed the basis of his talk.

In 1870 John Petter gave his ironmongery business to his son James, who acquired the Yeovil Iron Foundry in partnership with Henry Edgar. In 1913, he built a new foundry, named Westland, which became the largest foundry in Britain. In World War 1 the Government awarded them contracts to build aircraft, including the Short Type 184 seaplane and DH9. Aviation has remained a Westland product ever since.

In 1934 the Air Ministry issued Specification A39/34 for an Army co-operation aircraft, to which Westland responded with a design named P.8, worked up by Arthur Davenport, under the direction of Edward 'Teddy' Petter. The design was aimed at meeting the users' requirements for good low-speed handling, short take-off and landing, and a wide field of view from the cockpit. The design was an unconventional aircraft with high wings, a fixed undercarriage mounted on an innovative inverted square section tube (made from the largest Elektron alloy extrusion of its time)

that supported wing struts at the apex and contained internal springs for the faired wheels. The large, streamlined wheel spats contained a mounting for a Browning machine gun and fittings for removable stub wings that could carry light bombs or supply canisters. A girder construction was used with wood stringers covered in fabric. Power was provided by a Bristol Mercury air-cooled radial engine initially and a Bristol Perseus in later marks. Although an unconventional design, it was aerodynamically advanced, using fully automatic wing slats, slotted flaps and a variable incidence tailplane, giving it a stalling speed of only 65mph. The Ministry issued a production order in September 1936 for entry into service in June 1938.

Lysanders were used for message dropping, artillery spotting, target-towing, reconnaissance, while several squadrons were engaged in air-sea rescue by dropping dinghies to ditched aircrew. Units were also sent out to the Middle East and the Far East, with additional aircraft serving with around seven other nations.

The Lysander really made its mark in the Special Duties Squadrons, which operated from 1941 through to the liberation of France in 1944. Their role was to undertake special missions for the Special Operations Executive (SOE) by providing clandestine contact with the French Resistance. This frequently entailed landing in French fields on moonlit nights to insert or recover agents (spies) or shot-down aircrew. Paul told us about

a US airman shot down in France in the morning and seven hours later was back in England, having had the good fortune to be picked up by the Resistance and taken straight to a field where a Lysander was due to land that night. Yet another interesting yarn was that of a Lysander pilot who landed at night in France but damaged the rear airframe while taxiing. The aircraft could not fly as it was, but a simple repair could be made with the right tools and the right knowledge. A skilled technician was flown out to the field (in enemy territory remember) to complete the repair.

The aerial activities of the SOE were headquartered and conducted from Tempsford Airfield in Buckinghamshire and the aircraft were often forward deployed to Tangmere Airfield in West Sussex, a shorter distance to fly on operations into deepest France. An external ladder was also fixed to the rear cockpit to enable swift exit and entry for passengers. Over 100 agents and personnel were taken into France and even more brought out. 1786 Lysanders were built and its British service life ended in 1946, after 10 memorable years.

At the end of the talk, we saw a lovely video recording from the helmet-mounted camera of a pilot in a restored Canadian Lysander. This showed us start up, take-off, airfield circuit and landing, with direct pilot-eye views of the slats and slots automatically operating. Thank you, Paul, for a very enjoyable history of the Lysander and its origins.

# SoFFAAM Christmas Lunch

By Richard Macauley



Our visits and events organiser Rosanne to the left in this photo.



Peter to the right in this photo who put together this years aviation quiz.

## We gathered this year in early January at a new location - the Lime Kiln Inn.

On arrival we were greeted by our host who served a warm mulled wine or an orange juice while we caught up with friends and chatted, while we waited for lunch to be served. Every one agreed that their main course was delicious be it the Turkey, Roast Beef or for those with adventurous taste buds, a water Buffalo Burger. The sweets were equally delicious and 'disappeared' very quickly. The obligatory but very welcome Mince Pies ensued along with some tasty mini Doughnuts.

Our Vice Chairman Tim then took the floor and reported on the healthy

condition of SoFFAAM and reflected on a busy 2024 for the Society. He thanked the Council for their hard work before handing over to Peter who concocted this years annual aviation themed quiz. Two rounds ensued which really got the brain cells working. A huge thank you to Peter for an entertaining set of questions.

Steev very kindly provided a signed original of one of his cartoons for auction which was eagerly snapped up. The raffle completed the afternoon's merriment so a huge thank you to Rosanne for organising this very enjoyable event. Do consider coming and joining us at our next post Xmas Lunch.





A huge thank you to Jason, the landlord of the Lime Kiln Inn. He made us all very welcome and he and his brilliant team looked after our party very well. This pub is a lovely

venue so if you are looking for an excellent meal in a lovely county pub look no further than the Lime Kiln at Knole, just to the East of Long Sutton on the A372.

# Membership

By David Merrett

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

3922	<b>Mr P Hill</b>	Dorset	3928	<b>Mr C Higginson</b>	Somerset
3923	<b>Mrs K Seymour</b>	Dorset	3929	<b>Mr R Smith</b>	Cambridgeshire
3924	<b>Mr D Seymour</b>	Dorset	3930	<b>Mr N Ellins</b>	Somerset
3925	<b>Mr C Griffiths</b>	Somerset	3931	<b>Mr N Malcolm</b>	Dorset
3926	<b>Mr B Russell</b>	Dorset	3932	<b>Cdre (retd) J Madgwick</b>	Somerset
3927	<b>Mr J Graham</b>	Somerset	3933	<b>Mr C Watson</b>	Kent

Total members as of 06/01/25: **962**

Members who have made a Gift Aid declaration: **731\***

**\*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](http://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

Please remember we no longer issue Membership Cards. On arrival at the Fleet Air Arm Museum, please

tell the reception staff that you are a SoFFAAM member and they will find you on their 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](mailto:soffaam.mem@gmail.com) for this and all other membership queries.

**Visit our Membership page at:**  
**[www.fleetairarmfriends.org.uk/membership](http://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  
soffaam.joinup@gmail.com
- BACS transfer, bank details  
in orange block, payment ref.  Cheque, made payable to  
"your surname) MEMBS" SoFFAAM

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1 Coombe Villas,  
Coombe Orchard,  
Chapel Street,  
Axmouth,  
Devon,  
EX12 4AU.

Tel: 07521 723477

Email: [soffaam.mem@gmail.com](mailto:soffaam.mem@gmail.com)

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

# 40 Commando and 845 NAS

By kind permission of Navy News

**Exercise Predator's Run saw Somerset units in the Australian outback in the form of 845 Naval Air Squadron from Yeovilton and 40 Commando from Norton Manor, Taunton.**

This amphibious and land exercise organised and hosted by the Australian Defence Force in northern Australia, involved troops from the UK and USA.

Flying from the decks of RFAs *Argus* and *Lyme Bay*, to prove the squadron's amphibious specialty, meant island raids, deep reconnaissance missions and personnel extraction in challenging conditions (bush/semi-desert) which proved both punishing and rewarding for air and ground crew.

The six-week exercise, alongside Australian 1st Brigade saw the force push over 400 miles into the austere Northern Territory. A demanding task that saw the Marines 'fight' in challenging conditions along with their aerial support: everything from orientation flying over the bush to flying in dust clouds stirred up on landing/take-off, maintenance in the field and setting up forward refuelling/arming points in the middle of nowhere - a outstanding training opportunity.

