

# JABBERWOCK 100



SOCIETY OF FRIENDS  
**FLEET AIR ARM**  
MUSEUM

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

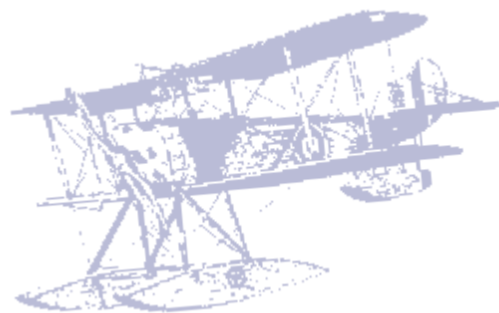
**August 2020**



THE  
NATIONAL  
MUSEUM



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## Magazine design, artwork and typography by:

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## Printed by:

Acanthus Press  
21 Ryelands Business Park  
Bagley Road  
Wellington  
Somerset  
TA21 9PZ

## Cover image

A photo montage of aircraft and artifacts from the Fleet Air Arm Museum and other timelines of the Royal Navy and the Fleet Air Arm over the years.





# Editorial

**Welcome to this special 100th edition of Jabberwock! On this occasion, we have chosen a larger format, but plan to revert to our normal A5 size for future issues. The new professional appearance of the magazine has been enabled by your Editor's handing over responsibility for its format to Council member Richard Macauley.**

We write as the country emerges from the Covid 19 health crisis, during which dreary time the Museum has been closed and Society activities have been put on hold. In this edition, we hold out hope that our monthly talks may re-start later in the year, but all will depend upon the Museum opening for business again and Government policy on gatherings and meetings of every sort.

This 100th issue looks back over the years to the first Society Newsletter, produced in December 1979, when the Society's Patron was Admiral of the Fleet Sir Caspar John GCB. Our present Chairman, Graham Mottram, provides a brief history of the Society and describes how it has evolved over the years. As there have sadly been no recent talks to review, we provide summaries of notable talks of previous years. As

always, we include readers' letters and numerous new articles, also a challenging quiz. There are no prizes for identifying all the various items so carefully photographed by Gil Johnston, but we challenge you to identify every one before looking up the answers!

We include a summary of the recent Council meeting, held for the first time as a virtual event. Readers will see that we are placing continuing emphasis on publicity and marketing and hope to extend our membership base to include younger members and families. This is partly in response to the slow but steady decline in our membership numbers, but also because we plan to reach out to a wider audience.

The small photograph in Jabberwock 99 of a reader's father in an unidentified aircraft carrier at Cape Town has provoked a couple of responses. These do not completely solve the small mystery, but remind us of historical events towards the end of World War II. We often remark that it is contributions such as these that continue to make our magazine interesting and enjoyable. All readers' letters are welcome and we aim to print as many as possible.



Malcolm Smith, Editor

## Annual General Meeting

**The AGM will be held on Thursday 24 September 2020 starting at 7.00pm**

**As usual, the meeting will hear reports from Council members and there will be a vote for council membership.**

Because of the continuing restrictions on public meetings, this will be a virtual meeting, held on Zoom, the online conference call facility. All are welcome to partake. If you wish to do so, you will need to download the Zoom

application: <https://zoom.us/download> (this is free to users). Send an email with your name and membership number, requesting to join the meeting to the Secretary on [smalcolm355@outlook.com](mailto:smalcolm355@outlook.com). This must be done by 7.00pm on Wednesday 23 September 2020, you will then receive an email invitation.



# Letters to the EDITOR

**Hello Malcolm,**

Jabberwock No.98 (Feb 2020) had an interesting article by Chris Howat on RNAS Tiree, with his time on 819 Squadron at Prestwick (*HMS Gannet*) and the ferry salvage using empty oil drums, both of which reminded me of a couple of stories whilst I served in the FAA.

In 1960 when *HMS Centaur* went to Invergordon for a weekend, we couldn't go alongside and the Captain (Horace Law) wanted the ship's Land Rover ashore. No suitable vessels were available to take the Land Rover from ship to shore, so the 'steamies' said they would make a raft. They made a metal platform and welded empty oil drums to it, fixed on wooden deck and a canvas cover, lovely job. It was decided to load the Land Rover on to the raft, whilst on the flight deck, then using the ship's crane lower the whole thing over the side into the water. Great! Crane lifts away and lowers everything down, the raft lands on the water, seems to settle nicely so they keep lowering away. The water starts coming up around the canvas cover, and the raft doesn't seem to be floating so they start hauling back up. The crane feels quite a strain, as the load seems heavier. As the raft and drums clear the water, water can be seen pouring out of the oil drums. The "steamies" had forgotten to put the bungs back into the oil drums after welding.

Fun story to finish, about Invergordon. Scotland used to 'shut down' on a Sunday, nothing opened, no pubs etc.. One of my Scottish friends told me he knew where to get beer and food on a Sunday if I went ashore with him. We had to go to church (which I was happy with) but didn't realise the Service lasted for three hours. After the Service we retired to the marquee behind the Church for free beer and sandwiches.

**Regards,**

**Derek Poulton**

---

**Dear Malcolm,**

Owing to the Coronavirus emergency I have only just received my copy of Jabberwock 99. I believe I may be able to help with identities for the mystery photos.

Firstly the carrier photo (p.7). The shield shape, gun barrel size and above all the blast bags of the gun mount all suggest to me that this is a Mk.XIX twin 4" mount. These were only fitted in such a location to one carrier: the maintenance carrier *HMS Unicorn*. The location of the raised "hockey stick" radio mast and the crane jib (actually mounted on a sponson on the

ship's side) all fit with this identification.

<https://www.armouredcarriers.com/hms-unicorn-maintenance-support>

The fly in the ointment is that I can find no record of *Unicorn's* ever having visited Capetown. However, according to Wikipedia, she was ordered to Durban, South Africa on 7 November 1944 for a minor refit and left there on 1 January 1945 to join the British Pacific Fleet. Could it be that the location is Durban, rather than Capetown?

Secondly the Hellcat FB.II on p.8: from the alleged location and the code presentation on the undercarriage doors I believe this may be an aircraft of 896 Squadron. A photograph of Hellcat FB.II "2AB", similarly RP-armed, of 896 Sq at Wingfield South Africa appears on p.330 of *The Squadrons of the Fleet Air Arm 2nd Ed.* Unfortunately the undercarriage doors are not visible so we cannot see whether the code presentation is as for "AA".

896 Sq arrived at Wingfield on 5 Jan 1945 and re-formed as a single seat fighter squadron on 9 January. In April 45 896 embarked in *HMS Ameer* and sailed for Ceylon. I am wondering if the word read as "*Ahben*" may in fact be "*Ameer*": 2 of the 5 letters are the same! A possible argument against my suggested identity is that "AA" is much more worn (exhaust stains) than the freshly issued "2AB": maybe the photo was just taken later.

Given time, I ought to be able to have a reasonable stab at identifying Hellcat "3X" also shown on p.7: if I do, I will be in touch again.

Thank you for editing Jabberwock and in particular for publishing rare photos such as these: it's the reason I took out a subscription!

**Best wishes,**

**Nick Carlyon (2979)**

**PS:** Further to the photo of Hellcat 3-X on p.7 of Jabberwock 99, as far as I can glean from Theo Ballance's *Squadrons and Units of the FAA* the only Hellcat to wear 3 as a squadron symbol was 898 Sqn. This re-formed at Wingfield, Capetown, on 8 Jan 1945 with 24 Hellcat IIs and embarked in *Attacker* for Ceylon in June 1945. Both location and date fit the limited information we have. Ballance's book shows (p.270) a line-up of shiny new 898 Sq Hellcat IIs in Sea Blue Gloss at Katakurunda, Ceylon in 1945. At first glance the aircraft shown in the Jabberwock photo appears to be in the earlier Temperate Sea Scheme and was probably being used during the squadron's work-up.

**Dear Malcolm,**

I am attaching an account of a bit of history arising from the letters in Jabberwock 99 which readers might find interesting. As I have probably told you in the past, one of my friends was in the reformation of 804 Squadron in September 1944 and it was he who told me about the "driving" of their Hellcats through the streets of Cape Town to the Wingfield airfield. What a sight and sound that must have been for the good people of Cape Town. History books don't tell you things like that.

It was odd that the East Indies Fleet (EIF) never used 898 in operations. There may be a story there. Between August and October 1944 the two *Illustrious* squadrons of Corsairs, nos. 1830 and 1833, were disembarked to Wingfield so the air around Cape Town during the last few months of 1944 must have been very busy - great for plane spotters!

Keep up the good work with Jabberwock. It is, I think, now a serious magazine.

**Regards,**

**Hugh Langrishe**

**Member no. 148**

## Minor mysteries - Hellcats at Wingfield, Cape Town

**By Hugh Langrishe**

**For nine months between September 1944 and June 1945 the skies around Cape Town were filled with the thunder of the Double Wasp engines of Hellcat IIs. Three squadrons were trooped out from the UK, collected their mostly new Hellcat II when they arrived at Wingfield and were officially formed. They were destined for escort carriers of the East Indies Fleet (EIF).**

804 Squadron formed on 7 September 1944, receiving a shipment of 24 brand new Hellcat IIs which were delivered by *HMS Thane* direct from New York on her only visit to Cape Town. So urgent was it to start flying that the aircraft were taxied with their wings folded by the pilots on the public streets through Cape Town to RNAS Wingfield, at that time on the NE edge of the city. Many of the pilots were only recently out of operational training so this must have been a strange introduction to working up. 804 Squadron departed for Colombo in *HMS Ameer* on 4 January 1945 with another set of new Hellcats, arriving on 10 March. They had a busy time over the Indian Ocean, flying from *Empress*, *Shah*, *Emperor* and *Ameer*. The squadron left its aircraft and returned home, disbanding on 18 November 1945. 804 aircraft were identified by a white ring around the front lip of the engine cowling and a horizontal white band across the tail.

Next to form at Wingfield was 898 Squadron, on 8 January 1945. They finally departed on 23 June 1945 in *HMS Attacker* for Ceylon. Although the squadron spent a few days on *Pursuer*, probably practising deck landing, they never saw action. The squadron was shipped home in the same ship without aircraft and was disbanded on 12 December 1945.

The last of the three squadrons was 896. Personnel arrived in Cape Town on 6 January 1945 and the squadron formed on 9 January. There must have been some urgency in the working-up programme because the squadron departed in *HMS Ameer* on 24 April, flying to their ship from the airfield at Stamford Hill, Durban. The squadron conducted operations from *Ameer* in July over the Indian Ocean but subsequently

flew from *Empress* until after VJ-Day, finally leaving their aircraft and returning home in *Ameer* for disbandment in the UK on 19 December 1945. Squadron aircraft were identified by a dark band around the front of the engine cowling.

Connecting all this to the picture of the Hellcat on its belly in Jabberwock 99, I am reasonably certain that this is at Wingfield and is of an aircraft of 896 Sqn. and therefore would have been taken during the first four months of April. I am not sufficiently knowledgeable to identify the carrier in the same group of photographs but it is safe to presume that it is *HMS Ameer*.

Checking various accounts I have been surprised to see that the aircraft delivered to Cape Town during the second half of 1944 were all painted in standard FAA camouflage. It had been early in 1944 that the USN adopted the overall Glossy Sea Blue for all their aircraft and this was accepted by the Royal Navy so that the finishing process was not delayed as RN aircraft came off the production line singly or in random batches amongst those for the USN. By the end of 1944 I was in Australia with MONAB 1 and in February 1945 and beyond. After we had finally exhausted the camouflaged replacement aircraft ferried from the UK and Ceylon or India, we received dark blue Hellcat IIs direct from the U.S. - as well as a few from Ceylon.



804Sqn Grumman Hellcats on board HMS Ameer. © asisbiz

New member questions have revealed that;

- Six joined because membership is value for money
- Two joined for access to talks
- Two joined to improve aircraft knowledge
- One for model research
- One for news of the museum.
- Eight new joiners' interests are stated as general and 1 each for engineering and science design, World War One interest, naval aviation, jets, simulators and 1950's/1960's aircraft.

The Chairman asked the Membership Secretary to produce a brief discussion paper on the subject of membership fees.

#### **The following points arose under Any Other Business:**

Regarding the website, Chris Penney remarked that Richard's report had not addressed the proposal to add a members-only area. He still thought that the site needed a re-design, although he understood that serious changes would incur additional expense.

After a discussion of the inclusion of various photographs of past and present officers of the Society, it was generally agreed that the title page of the magazine should include photographs of current Council members, also one of the President.



## **The Fleet Air Arm Museum and its Society of Friends**

**By Graham Mottram**

**The story of FAAM is inextricably linked to some of the great characters of the wartime generation of the FAA itself.**

The motivation for the museum came from Rear Admiral Percy Gick who, as Flag Officer Naval Flying Training (FONFT), visited NAS Pensacola in the autumn of 1963 and observed the nascent naval aviation museum there. Convinced of the PR value of such an organisation, on his return to Yeovilton he tasked one of his staff, Keith Leppard, to draft a paper for the Admiralty Board. That paper obtained the Board's approval and, at the turn of 1963/64, Yeovilton's Air Engineering Officer, Cdr. Robin Foster, was lumbered with the job of creating the Fleet Air Arm Museum in Hangar 11 with about three months to complete the job.

Robin set to with a vengeance and so, when HRH Prince Philip visited RNAS Yeovilton to mark the 50th anniversary of

the founding of the Royal Naval Air Service, his programme included the opening of the Museum. Although a charitable trust was established in 1966 FAAM was very much a department under command until Admiral John Treacher became Flag Officer Naval Air Command (FONAC) in 1972. Under Lt. Cdr. Les "Harpy" Cox, who had become Curator in 1966, the aircraft collection had grown substantially and many of them were outside, quietly corroding away. John Treacher told the trustees that they were facing a "crisis of corrosion" and that the trustee body needed to be widened to bring on board civilian trustees who had the financial connections to construct a fund raising appeal and build additional space to house the aircraft. It was at this point that people like Sir Donald Gosling, Bill Regan and Sam MacDonald Hall joined the board and put a fund raising campaign into operation. A





# A first hand dim view – Norway 1940

By Telegraphist Air Gunner Dickie Rolph



A Sea Skua of 800 Squadron landing on HMS Ark Royal.

**Some events have had a fair share of publicity, some have been casually mentioned as of little consequence and some a mere whisper of a mention in passing.**

There are those who have said (if a disastrous cock-up was made) that such events are best forgotten. But that view is hardly fair to those who had to carry the can, and certainly not the memories of those who failed to return. Above all it was unfair to those who came after because they were denied the benefits of the lessons learned from those experiences.

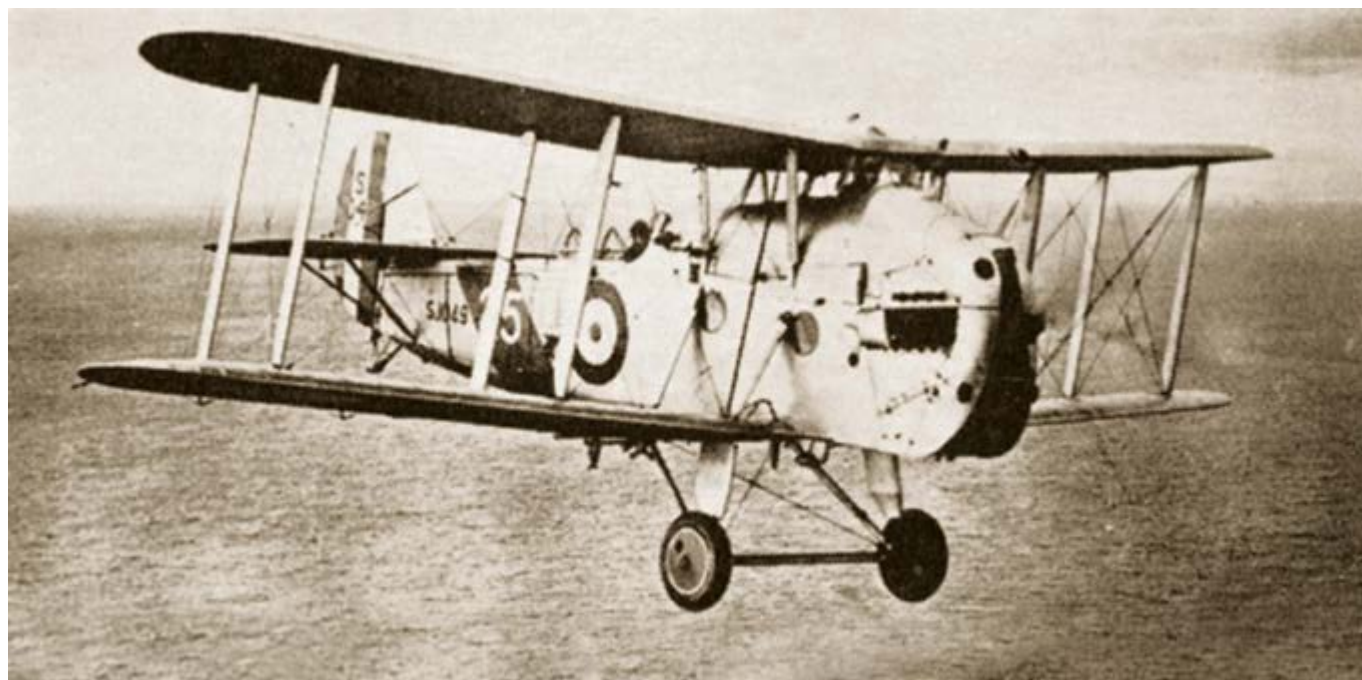
Having covered the withdrawal of British, French and Polish troops from Narvik to a little north of Trondheim, the ships carrying them back to England and France were being escorted by units of the Home and other fleets. In the afternoon of 7 June 1940, HMS Ark Royal was closing HMS Glorious and we were treated to the sight of five Hurricane fighters being landed on Glorious by RAF pilots who had not seen a carrier's deck before and did not have the benefit of arrestor gear. All made a good landing and we thought that perhaps it would be a starter for a better fleet fighter. We in Ark Royal and attendant destroyers parted company to go

about our own business of providing wide cover for transports whilst Glorious and her destroyers set off for Scapa Flow. The German heavy ships, Scharnhorst and Blucher, caught up with them early the next morning and sank the lot before any clear alarm signal was transmitted. Later that evening, Ark Royal changed course towards the Norwegian coast. The German heavy ships had come to rest in Trondheim and secured close to the town jetty.

An attack on these ships was planned, using 15 Skuas, armed with 250 lb SAP bombs. We were to have the protection of six long range Blenheim 4Fs as fighter cover and six Beauforts of Coastal Command, which would bomb Varnes airfield near Trondheim to keep the numerous German fighters on the deck. The scheme of the attack was that the Beauforts were to attack at 01.58 and our attack was to begin at 02.00, using our usual kind of approach, gliding from 13,000 feet to about 9,000 feet before going into the final dive before dropping the bombs. We had a bit better briefing than before such occasions, but much was still left unanswered, particularly so when we were handed £40 in

# The Fleet Air Arm's twin ugly ducklings of the 1920s: Bison & Blackburn

By Jim Humberstone



Blackburn Blackburn - developed to meet a naval requirement (Specification 3/21) for a carrier-based reconnaissance and gun spotting aircraft. © MoD

**Examination of the Royal Navy's attempts to obtain the right aircraft types for their needs in the period between the Fleet Air Arm's loss of autonomy in April 1918 and the 1950s is a well trodden path for historians.**

Writings on this subject highlight the way protracted development periods and design culs de sac plagued some procurement and delayed the entry into service of some machines. As an example, in the mid 1940s, British manufacturers such as Fairey, Westland and Blackburn appear to have made heavy weather in the development of their strike aircraft for the Fleet Air Arm, as shown in the troubles that beset the Firebrand, Spearfish and Wyvern during the gestation of their designs.

At an earlier stage however, at the beginning of the 1920s, manufacturers appear to have been more successful in their response to the clear expressions of naval requirements. Experience of the recently concluded conflict meant that reconnaissance over the ocean and spotting for fleet gunnery continued to be key requirements. To satisfy these primary functions in a deck landing form, two designs were produced in response to Specification 3/21 issued by the Air Ministry, namely Blackburn's Blackburn and its contemporary, the Avro Bison. Without doubt these two types possessed a degree of ugliness unsurpassed by any British military aircraft before

or since. It could be argued that the need for these planes to accommodate three or even four aircrew did not absolve the respective designers from creating more pleasing lines for their progeny, bearing in mind the way in which, at a later date, the Grumman people with their Avenger managed to meet a similar multi crew brief, with some degree of functional elegance. Even a much derided design of the mid 1940s era, the Fairey Barracuda, appears as fairly rational when compared with the 1920s offerings of Avro and Blackburn.

In both Blackburn and Bison, accommodation was provided for pilot, observer and telegraphist, with scope for a fourth crew member in the deep profiled fuselage of conventional construction. Power was provided by a 450 hp Napier Lion. The Lion was for a while the most powerful aero-engine in existence, its 12 cylinders arranged in three banks of four sharing a common crankcase. Performance in both types was similar, with a maximum speed at 3,000 ft of 122 mph. Both could carry a forward-firing Vickers machine gun and a Lewis gun for self-protection.

The Bison's progress from drawing board to production appears to have been uneventful. First flown in November 1921, a modified prototype undertook trials at AAE Martlesham Heath from early August 1922. It then joined its competitor, the Blackburn Blackburn at Gosport later in the month. The



# Displaying the Sea Fury

SoFFAAM talk – Summarised by Robert Heath



Lt. Cmdr Chris Götke taxis out in Sea Fury T20 VX281 at Duxford Flying Legends in 2014. This is the same aircraft that Chris did a forced landing at Culdrose Air Day a few months later, for which he was awarded the Air Force Cross for his skilled airmanship. © Richard Macauley

**This is a summary of a talk given by Lieutenant Commander Chris Götke and first published in Jabberwock 74, February 2014.**

Many decades ago as a spotty 40 year old, I bought the Royal Naval Historic Flight (RNHF) video tape entitled 'The Sea Fury', featuring pilots John Beattie and Don Sigourney. As a treat, I still slink off to my toy-room and indulge myself with 92 minutes of sheer, drooling delight as I watch it, yet again. It is lovely. And that is how Chris Götke, the current pilot also summed it up in his talk.

Once airborne, from high speed to low speed, you barely need to re-trim, the control harmonisation is so right. The power available is immense and yet it is so smooth. Chris's involvement started as a volunteer pilot for RNHF in 2003. He had joined the RN in 1992 and has since accumulated 3,800

hrs in his log book.

Like all tail draggers, the Sea Fury can, and will, bite the unwary at any time it chooses on the ground. Power comes from the Bristol Centaurus 18 cylinder, 54 litre, sleeve valve engine, which happily runs at 2,700 rpm. Training commences in the Chipmunk, followed by the T6 Harvard, where in the rear seat you become familiar with not seeing much ahead of you on the ground, then the piston Provost polishes and embellishes all you have learnt so far.

On your first flight in the Sea Fury, you line up, lock the tail wheel and slide the throttle forward - having done so, you are committed, there is nothing you can do to stop it. You have to be very quick on the rudder to correct any slightest deviation. If you are not quick enough, the aircraft takes control and you are a helpless passenger waiting to see what messy event happens next. Closing the throttle makes no difference; the aircraft is in complete control. That knowledge surely concentrates the mind and gets the adrenalin on the move.

In all, 729 Sea Furies were built, many of which were exported. It was developed from the Hawker Tempest and first flew in September 1944. Today the typical cruise speed is around 240kts and higher speeds are at around 330kts in level flight. Stall is around 80kts. It carries up to 183 gallons of avgas, which will comfortably take you to Liverpool, do a



HRH Prince Phillip talking to Chris at The Honourable Company of Air Pilots annual Awards Ceremony where he received The Master's Commendation for outstanding service in the air.  
© THCAP

# Captain Winkle Brown

SoFFAAM talk – Summarised by Malcolm Smith



Me-262V7, WNr-130303 Germany 1945. © Bundesarchiv

**For more than 90 minutes, a frail, elderly man held an audience of more than 100 in the palm of his hand. This was Captain Eric 'Winkle' Brown, CBE DSC AFC RN, addressing an audience of Royal Naval Reserve officers and SOFFAAM members on the afternoon of 12 March 2015 in the FAAM's Swordfish Centre.**

In the morning, SOFFAAM members had witnessed the unveiling of a bronze bust of Captain Brown by Kirsty Young, the BBC broadcaster who had been fascinated by the 93 year old aviator when he was the castaway on the 3000th edition of "Desert Island Discs in November 2014.



Sculptress Jenna Gearing, Captain 'Winkle' Brown and Kirsty Young.

An upright figure at the lectern, referring only occasionally to his notes, Eric Brown took us back to the end of the Second World War when he was serving at the Royal Aircraft Establishment. A fluent German-speaker and already renowned as an exceptional test pilot, he was selected to travel to Germany to investigate the technology of all things aeronautical in the conquered country. The Germans were known to have developed highly-advanced weapons, including ballistic missiles and various turbo-jet and rocket powered aircraft. Did we know, he asked the audience, that Wernher von Braun, the celebrated German aerodynamicist, had established a Mach 4 wind tunnel in 1939? No, we did not, it seemed. Wind tunnels were not the only objects of Eric's quest; there were many high-technology aircraft for him to examine and, given his outstanding piloting skills, actually to fly. The most advanced of these was the tail-less rocket-powered Messerschmitt 163. Although not allowed to ignite its powerful rocket motor in flight, Eric conducted several gliding test flights after having been towed to altitude by a Spitfire.

Eric illustrated probably the most advanced German fighter to go into service in any numbers, the Me 262. He described the Jumo turbo-jet engines, slimmer and more streamlined than their contemporary British jet engines because of their axial-flow compressor design. This aircraft carried four 30 mm cannon, capable of seriously disabling their main target



# 'Down in the Drink'

SoFFAAM talk – Summarised by Robert Heath



Bill (second from left) with the Captain of the rescue vessel *USS St George*. © Bill Reeks

**I think an alternative title could have been: "The intrepid adventures of 'Avenger' Bill". If you were not there, you missed a very engaging and profusely illustrated talk by our long-time SOFFAAM stalwart - Our man in the Pacific, literally.**

Bill was a FAA observer from 1942 to 1946 (one of my numerate colleagues immediately calculated that that makes Bill aged about 92!). This particular sequence started on a cold day in December 1944. Bill had been given a rail warrant to Glasgow and set off with all his heavy winter gear, plus of course the bulky navigator's kit. En-route he met an old colleague, Lt Cdr Bobby Bradshaw, carrying just a small, light suitcase. Conversation revealed that they were on the same posting and Bobby was better informed. He knew that winter kit was unnecessary in the tropics and his suitcase mostly contained liquid refreshment.

By mid-January 1945, the transport ship had deposited them in Ceylon to join a 'pool' squadron on a jungle airstrip. They were there to replenish passing aircraft carriers in need of aircraft and crews and in February, Bill was called to join 848 Squadron on *HMS Formidable*. The squadron comprised, unusually, 18 Avengers and 18 Corsairs and they were part of the British Pacific Fleet on its way to Sydney, for leave. Luck? In transit, all the aircraft had their familiar red, white and blue roundels altered to blue with a white centre, to avoid any risk of being mistaken for the red Japanese roundel. In April 1945, the American forces went to battle in Okinawa and the British Pacific Fleet was tasked with keeping Japanese aircraft out

of the way. In Bill's case, this meant bombing the Japanese airfields in the Sakashima Gunto. The runways in these islands were made of crushed coral, so they were very easily and quickly repaired. This meant that bombing was a repetitive task. On 16 April the first operation was at dawn, which caught the Japanese by surprise and everyone was comfortably back on-board for a late breakfast. 17 April was much the same.

On 20 April the planners chose to launch the bombing raid at midday. The Japanese were not caught by surprise and the flak was very heavy, causing Bill's pilot to report that the engine had lost power. Not good news at a time when the Japanese had a reputation (later confirmed) for executing captured aircrew. Fortunately the pilot was able to glide the aircraft several miles out to sea, during which, Bill sent out repeated Mayday messages. The water landing was a good one which, to Bill, felt hardly different from a deck landing. All three crew stepped out and would have remained dry but for the fact that the dinghy emerged upside down and had to be righted from the water. Quite soon a searching RN Firefly appeared overhead, but Bill's signal flare failed to work and the aircraft disappeared over the horizon. Meanwhile, as they learned later, *HMS Formidable* retired from the area for necessary refuelling and replenishment. Not to worry. Bill and team were confident. They had a plan. The dinghy was drifting at a rate of 1 or 2 knots, therefore they reckoned that they would reach Formosa within four or five days. Formosa, although in Japanese hands, had a Chinese population who were friendly to the allies.

27 hours later, including two wet and cold nights, and after



# Future Talks Programme

By Richard Macauley

As we go to press with this anniversary edition of *Jabberwock*, the Coronavirus pandemic is beginning to ease its grip on the world.

However, the enforced suspension of all public gatherings meant that we had no choice but to cancel our monthly talks programme back in March 2020. A huge blow to the membership and also the speakers who enjoy delivering their stories as much as we like to hear them.

The good news is that so far, our cancelled speakers have been understanding and all have re-booked for 2021. Therefore the 2021 Talks programme is already underway, along with potential new speakers also being identified.

As from the March Talk cancellation, as I am the person responsible for arranging speakers, I have taken the following approach in contacting each speaker a month ahead of their appointed date and cancelled their talk. We will continue in this vein for the foreseeable future while the Fleet Air Arm

Museum is closed, as for practical reasons, we cannot hold our talks in any other location.

As the year continues and FAAM eventually re-opens, we can recommence our talk nights subject to regular reviews of Government guidelines for gatherings and meetings. To this end, below is a listing of the speakers we still have booked for 2020 and those who have rebooked for 2021. However do please remember that this is provisional and talks could still be cancelled as we continually review the latest guidance on holding such meetings.

You can check the status of future talks by visiting the SoFFAAM website [www.fleetairarmfriends.org.uk](http://www.fleetairarmfriends.org.uk)

We will also comment on Facebook [#SoFFAAM](https://www.facebook.com/SoFFAAM) about the re-instatement of talks.

So please hold the faith while we await the pandemic to subside and we can all meet again to hear illuminating stories and anecdotes from inspirational speakers.

Thursday 24 September 2020

**Lt. Col. Allinson**

Joint Air Delivery Test and Evaluation Unit  
RAF Brize Norton

JADTEU conducts operational trials and evaluation of delivery by air of personnel, machines and materiel for the military.

Thursday 29 October 2020

**Lt. Cdr. Alexandra Brooks RN - TBC**

A full time reserve officer with postings to Permanent Joint Headquarters, Northwood, Bahrain and Afghanistan.

Thursday 26 November 2020

**Stephen Pitts**

Stephen will talk about his father, James Pitts, a young TAG during WWII and whose Russian Convoy was involved in the last sea battle of the war.

Thursday 28 January 2021

**The RAF Presentation Team**

The RAF Presentation Team delivers an exciting and informative talk about the modern Royal Air Force from serving RAF personnel.

Thursday 25 February 2021

**Gp. Capt (Retd). Jock Heron**

After TSR2, the Birth of Tornado

A very informed speaker to speak on these fine aircraft - one that never was and the other that retired after a very illustrious career.

Thursday 25 March 2021

**Sgt. Mark Service**

Life and times of RAF life

An entertaining speaker with anecdotes on his life in the RAF including being part of the Joint Helicopter Support Unit at Lockerbie immediately after Pan Am 103's fatal crash. Mark will also talk about his tour in North America as part of the C-17 Crew supporting the Red Arrows.

Thursday 29 April 2021

**Sqn. Ldr (Retd). Rod Dean**

The Wooden Wonder - Development of the de Havilland Mosquito

Another welcome return for Rod Dean and his talk this evening is an in-depth study of the development and use of the outstanding de Havilland Mosquito and all its variants.

Thursday 27 May 2021

**Col. Richard Graham, USAF (Retd.)**

Flying the SR-71 Blackbird and its operations

Colonel Graham graduated from Air Force pilot training in 1965.

After Instructor Pilot and Flight Examiner duties, he transitioned to the F4 and flew 210 combat missions over North Vietnam and Laos.

In 1974, he was selected to enter the SR-71 program at Beale AFB and after seven years, piloting the fastest and highest-flying jet aircraft, he was selected to be the SR-71 squadron commander and went on to be the 9th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing Commander.

# The Bristol Pegasus Engine

By Malcolm Smith



A good view of the complete engine, clearly showing the layout of the nozzles.

In “The origins of the Harrier”, published in *Jabberwock 99*, the author, Jim Humberstone, described how the Bristol Aeroplane Company developed the Orpheus lightweight engine, initially to power the Folland Gnat and subsequently, with funding from NATO’s Mutual Weapons Development Programme (MDWP) to propel the NATO lightweight fighter, the G91. The G91 was built in large numbers and operated by several air forces, including those of Italy, Germany and Portugal. The success of its well-developed, reliable engine owed much to its robust and simple design.

In his book “Not Much of an Engineer”, Stanley Hooker (the chief designer of the Orpheus and subsequently Pegasus) relates that he aimed to produce a turbojet weighing only 800 lb but producing 5,000 lb thrust. Previous axial-flow engines had all been designed with three main shaft bearings, one at each end of the compressor stages and a third to support the turbine. With a relatively short seven-stage compressor, Hooker settled on only two bearings, one at each end of the shaft. To avoid “shaft whirling” (the tendency of long rotating thin tubes to bow outwards and fail) the main shaft was made as a thin-walled tube about eight inches in diameter. This proved to be a providential design feature in future developments. The simplicity of the design meant that the development process was extraordinarily quick, with the first engine running in early 1955 and the first production model appearing in May 1957.

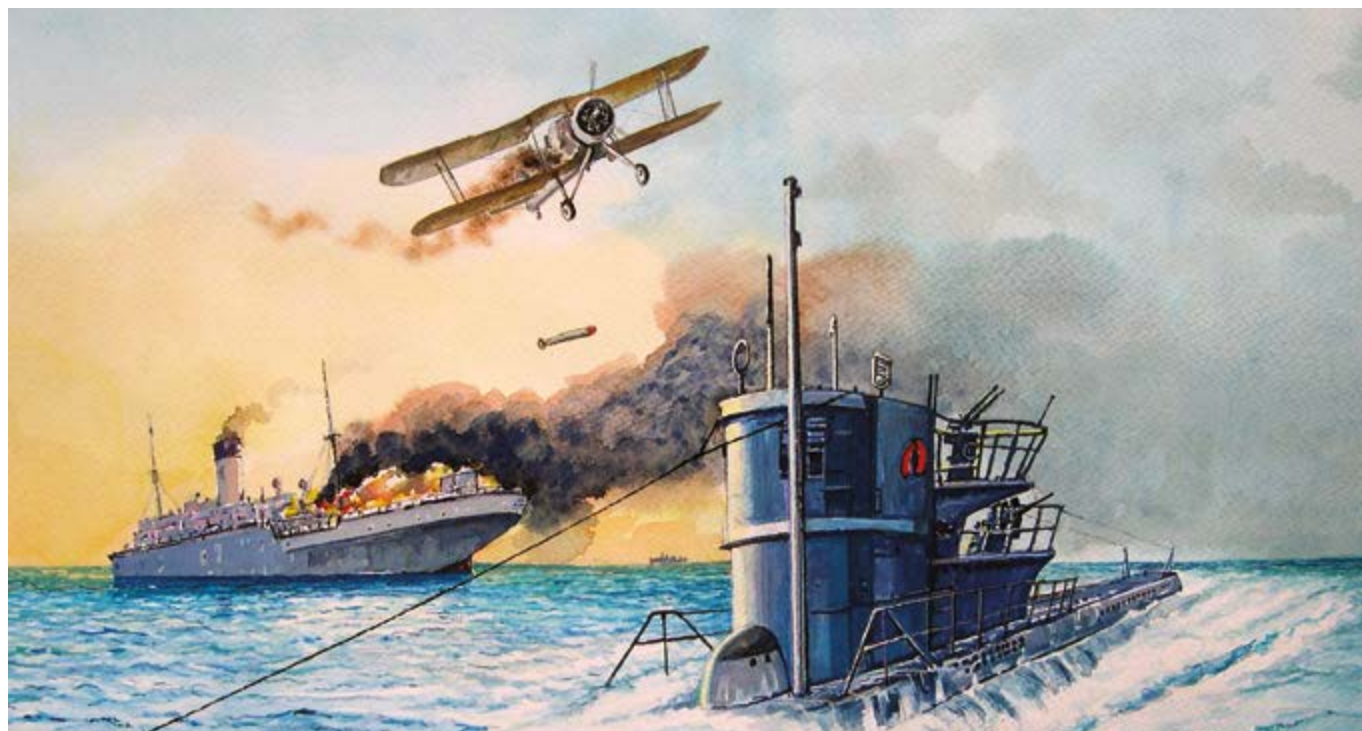
1957 was also the year in which serious attention was being paid to Vertical Take-Off and Landing (VTOL) technology. The emerging technology demonstrator aircraft, such as the Rolls

Royce “Flying Bedstead” and the Short SC1, with two or more engines providing vertical lift, seemed to Hooker to embody unpredictable flight control risk should one of these engines fail. The French aeronautical designer, Michel Wibault, had proposed a more elegant solution, in which a single engine (he had identified the Bristol Orion) provided both lift and thrust. He proposed four large engine-driven centrifugal compressors, arranged like wheels on the sides of a small airframe that he christened Le Gyroptère. The compressors ran inside circular casings, which could be rotated from horizontal to vertical to provide forward thrust or vertical lift as required. This concept became known as “vectored thrust”. Hooker thought the design both practical and realistic, but it required a complex (and heavy) system of shafts and gearboxes to drive the four compressors. Gordon Lewis, one of Hooker’s design team, suggested one large axial compressor to replace the centrifugals with two rotating nozzles, one each side. Hooker concluded that, for a fighter-type aircraft, it would be better to replace the complex and expensive Orion with the cheap, lightweight Orpheus, while the obvious place for the extra compressor would be at the front. He determined to make it an integral part of the engine, with its inner portion boosting the efficiency and power of the original Orpheus compressor. The air from the outer part of the compressor could be ducted to left and right vectoring nozzles, while the central hot gas stream could also be used for lift.

The definitive design of the BS53 (as the Pegasus was originally identified) began in 1958. As with the Orpheus,

# The Fleet Air Arm's Fairey Swordfish and the German U-Boat

By Jim Humberstone



"Battle of the Atlantic (Part 3)" by artist Michel Guyot courtesy of [www.SubArt.net](http://www.SubArt.net). Copyright by artist 2020. All rights reserved.

**The Battle of the Atlantic was against one of the most dangerous threats posed to the British Isles in World War II: the severing of our sea lifelines by German submarines.**

Who could have predicted at the outbreak of the war that one of the U-Boats' most dangerous, sometimes lethal, adversaries would prove to be a large lumbering Fleet Air Arm biplane, first flown in the early 1930s; a machine that was not only largely fabric covered but still providing open cockpits for its three aircrew? This extraordinary aircraft, the Swordfish, confounded sceptics as the war progressed. It accommodated in its stride state of the art ASV radar and helped the allies to pioneer that most devastating of anti-U-Boat weapons, the rocket projectile. The combination of these with an under wing (so-called Pumpkin) version of the famous RAF-developed Leigh Light effectively placed the Mark III Swordfish as a sub-hunting weapon almost equal to its contemporaries, the more modern twin-engined RAF Coastal Command aircraft such as the Hudson and Wellington. In spite of its slow performance and cruel crew conditions, it saw off later Fleet Air Arm additions such as the Albacore and Avenger which were unable quite to match its night performance. In the face of its apparent imperfections, the reputation of the Swordfish actually climaxed in early 1945, for in the closing

months of the war it achieved the most impressive accolade of all: the formation by the RAF in January of that year of two new squadrons of Mark III machines. These were specifically tasked to undertake night patrols in the Channel in the hunt for German Seehund and Biber midget submarines.

The introduction of small escort aircraft carriers in the convoy escort role, from 1942 onwards, proved to be a highly effective antidote to U-Boat attacks. Swordfish played a critical role in this task, complemented by ship borne fighters such as the Grumman F4F Wildcat (known initially as the Martlet in the RN), the Seafire and Sea Hurricane. These in some instances co-operated in attacks by making strafing passes. While most Fleet Air Arm U-Boat attacks were from carriers, some successes were achieved by aircraft flying from land bases such as Gibraltar and Aden.

As the availability of escort vessels improved, encounters with U Boats increasingly involved Swordfish co-operating with dedicated Escort Groups such as the 2nd, commanded by the legendary Captain Walker RN. These were tasked to act autonomously to hunt down U-Boat packs away from the immediate vicinity of merchantmen in convoy. The presence of these units gave even more scope for escort carrier based Swordfish to participate in successful attacks, such as those



# The destruction of L53

By Flight Lieutenant S. D. Culley

**Although written partly in the third person, this article seems to have been all the work of Culley. It is drawn from a manuscript dated "Milan, Italy, 1959" in the FAAM archive. It previously appeared in print in "Voices in Flight, The Royal Naval Air Service in the Great War" published by Pen and Sword, 2014.**

The Zeppelin was the great "bogy" weapon of Kaiser Wilhelm and his army staff in the First World War. It was employed before the war as a political weapon and the claims for it were, as is usual with such things, far greater than justified. Although the Zeppelin was available from the very start of the war, it was not from the political aspect very different to the claim made by Hitler for secret weapons, which were going to blast the British off the islands towards the end of the Second World War. However, several Zeppelins were destroyed by even very inefficient aeroplanes available at the beginning of the war, when they were used as offensive bombing craft over Britain, so the airship was very quickly relegated to its proper function as a means of reconnaissance for the German Navy.

In this role there is no doubt that the Zeppelin was a most useful aircraft, if expensive. Operating over the North Sea it could remain in the air for long periods, day and night, and able to report on the movements of ships over vast areas of that important sea. The only British aircraft able to operate at any distance from Britain was a flying boat, and that was so heavy and slow that the Zeppelin could practically ignore it. The main base of the Zeppelins was in northern Germany and they were of particular annoyance to the British Harwich Light Force, which operated from Harwich under the command of Admiral Sir Reginald Tyrwhitt. Although some cruisers in the Grand Fleet were fitted with small fighter aircraft, none of the ships of the Harwich Force had been so fitted, so that the ability of the Germans not only to report on every movement of the Harwich Force, but even to bomb the ships (admittedly without anything more than a nuisance effect) was particularly galling to the Admiral. He therefore put the problem to the famous Commander (at that time Colonel) Samson, whose headquarters was at Felixstowe, and requested that he should devise some way of dealing with this great nuisance.

It so happened that in order to give the flying boats of Great Yarmouth and Felixstowe greater range, a lighter had been designed especially to enable a flying boat to be warped aboard. The lighter was towed behind a destroyer to wherever the fleet might be going on patrol and at an appropriate moment, the flying boat would be launched from the lighter,

take off from the water and proceed on its mission, returning to its base in the UK by air. It was decided to experiment by fitting a small land fighting aircraft to one of these lighters. The aircraft chosen was the famous Sopwith Camel, which had the particular ability to climb quickly to what were then considerable heights of 20,000 feet. The original Camel for this special purpose was fitted with skids, not unlike ordinary skis, and these were designed to run along troughs fastened to the deck of the lighter. The destroyer steamed at its highest speed, about 30 knots, and thus ensured airflow over the deck of sufficient speed to give the aircraft immediate lift when released. When all was ready according to plan, the trial was made. Typical of that great character, Colonel Samson himself insisted on being the first pilot to try the idea. It was not successful. As soon as the aircraft started to lift, it appeared to become out of control and plunged into the water immediately in front of the lighter, which swept over it. Naturally everyone expected this to be the end of the career of Col Samson, but not at all, he was recovered intact and as he was hauled into a boat his only remark was "that was no damn good, we had we must do it better next time".

For the next experiment it was decided to fit a flat deck with a Camel on its ordinary wheeled undercarriage. A young pilot, a Canadian in the Royal Air Force by the name of the Lieutenant S. D. Culley, who had had experience of deck flying in the Grand Fleet and who was then stationed at Great Yarmouth, was chosen as the pilot. The experiment, which was made on 1 August 1918, was a complete success. The Camel was prepared for its defensive role and the standard Vickers machine gun, and all accessories, was removed. In place of the single Lewis gun fitted in the top plane of the aircraft it was decided to fit two such Lewis guns, as it would not be possible



Sopwith 2.F1 Camel N6812 at the Imperial War Museum. This is the actual aircraft used to shoot down Zeppelin L53. © Peter Clarke

# 809 Squadron in Ark Royal

By Malcolm Smith

*All photos by the author taken during Ark Royal's Operational Readiness Inspection in summer 1976 unless otherwise credited.*



Buccaneer S2 overflying HMS Ark Royal in the Atlantic Ocean. © MoD

**It is 1976 and the sun shines in a cloudless sky. In the calm blue waters of the western Atlantic, HMS Ark Royal, the fourth Royal Naval vessel to carry that name and the third to operate aircraft, turns into wind and begins to launch its aircraft.**

The first to go is an Airborne Early Warning (AEW) Gannet, followed by a stream of four Buccaneers and three Phantoms, launching alternately from the waist and bow catapults. An hour later, and a similar group of bombers and fighters will be launched before the ship goes to recovery stations to bring the first group home. How is this apparently effortless process, familiar to many from film and video, achieved? To get some idea, we need to turn the clock back a few hours to the previous evening after night flying has finished. The next day's flying programme has been issued and the maintenance effort in the squadrons is focused on the complex task of preparing for it.

Let us go down four decks, through the airlock and into the lower hangar. Here we will find eight Buccaneers, wings folded and airbrakes spread, tightly packed in two rows of four, facing forward to the forward lift well. Several of them are in some form of deep maintenance and will not be expected to fly in the near future. The night watch of maintainers are carrying out varying tasks, rectifying faults and keeping the Duty Air Engineer Officer (AEO) aware of progress. Above, on the flight deck, are the remaining six aircraft of the squadron's complement, lashed down in the deck park where they were re-spotted on completion of the previous day's flying. After they had landed back on, their aircrew had reported their serviceability state. Some may be ready to fly again after routine flight servicing; one or two others may be displaying symptoms that will require longer term work for the specialists to identify and rectify. Those that are definitely out of the running for the next

# US Navy carriers in UK waters

By Richard Macauley

*All photos by the author*



CVN-77 George H.W. Bush at anchor, Stokes Bay.

**Through membership of the ANA (Association of Naval Aviation), I am fortunate to be able to gain access to US carriers when anchored in British home waters. This takes place through Squadron 66, The Buccaneers, the UK affiliate to the ANA.**

Visiting US carriers always anchor in Stokes Bay, between the Isle of Wight and the mainland. This is the area that has hosted numerous Fleet Reviews over the years. This deep anchorage is necessary as the Nimitz class draught is too deep for them to enter Portsmouth harbour.

Access has always been a morning or afternoon visit, which will have the visitors reporting to the ubiquitous security

control to get pier side and transport via Liberty Boat out to the carrier. This is facilitated by military and civil personnel from US Naval Support Activity Naples and the UK American Embassy. They are always very interesting people to talk to during the obligatory wait. Other notable persons over the years that have crossed my path have been the VFA-213 'Black Lions' CO, Cmdr Kevin Robb and his Executive Officer, Cmdr Patrick Baker. Their insights on operations in the Persian Gulf were fascinating plus Kevin's personal comments on the incoming F35C aircraft for carrier operations were thoughtful.

CVN-75 Harry S Truman Navigation Officer, Cmdr Kent Smith was very friendly but tight-lipped on manoeuvring the



CVN-71 Theodore Roosevelt floating landing dock.

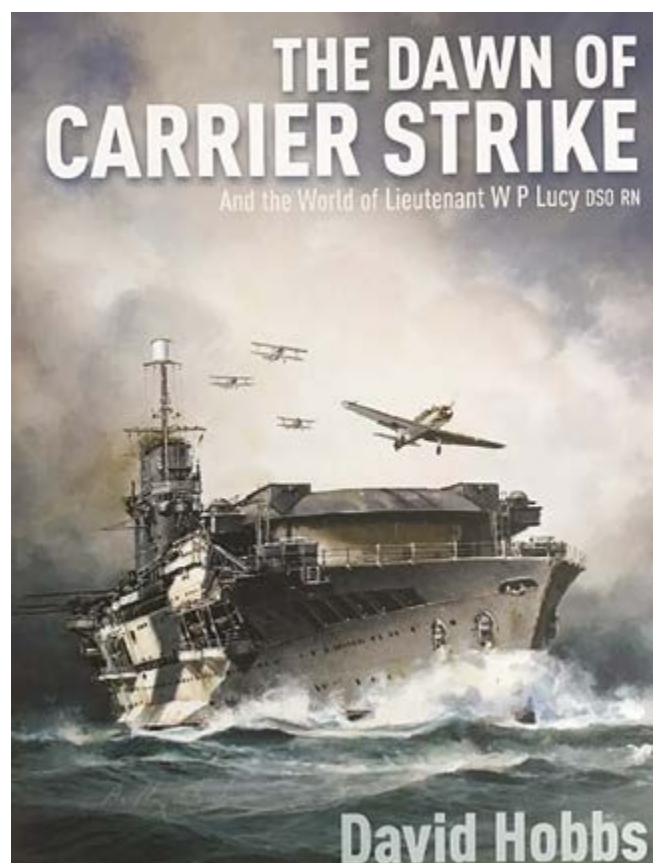


CVN-75 Harry S Truman.



# The Dawn of Carrier Strike by David Hobbs

Review by Richard K Parkhurst



**David Hobbs is a well known author of books about the Royal Navy and naval aviation and this publication is another of his many books about the Fleet Air Arm (FAA).**

The first two chapters cover the years after 1918 when the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) and the Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS) were combined to form the Royal Air Force (RAF) on April 1st, 1918. This was a turbulent time for the naval aviation branch that was to become the Fleet Air Arm before the outbreak of the Second World War. There was much inter-service rivalry and political interference which dragged on for nearly six years before some degree of compromise was reached as to how the RAF and the Air Branch of the Royal Navy should operate their aircraft. The RAF and the Air Ministry were not particularly interested in, or supportive of naval (or army) aviation, and made little effort to co-operate with or provide the necessary support and assistance. Naval pilots came under the control of the RAF and were allocated a rank below that of their RAF equivalent. That did not really change until much later.

Chapter 3 is about joining the RN as an officer and learning to become a pilot. David Hobbs has cleverly used the career path of William Paulet Lucy (b.13/05/1910), from the time Lucy joined the navy at the age of 13 in 1924 through to 1943, to illustrate personnel development alongside that of the ships and aircraft of the period.

Chapters 4 and 5 cover the following:

- Technology: ships, aircraft, weapons and tactics; details of some of the major warships and aircraft in service post WWI are provided.
- Doctrine, operations and exercises; how the RN would fight the next war, operations undertaken during the 1919-1939 period involving various crises around the world.

Chapter 7 deals with the Observer branch, which in the early 1930s was unique to the RN in UK aviation. This chapter covers training in this specialist field and describes how it was integrated into flying operations. Unlike the pilots, who were under the control of the RAF, Observers remained executive officers under the control of the RN and as such were an integral part of a ship's company.

In describing progress in the United States Navy, Hobbs provides an insight to the development in US naval aviation, which differed considerably from that of the Royal Navy. This was because it was controlled by the USN, whereas in the UK, naval aviation development continued to be controlled by the RAF and the Air Ministry.

In 1933, after 15 years of being hamstrung by the Air Ministry, the Admiralty were becoming desperate to bring the control of the Fleet Air Arm (and RAF Coastal Command) into the control of the Admiralty, where it rightly belonged. Despite its efforts, this saga dragged on for another two years until in May 1935 a major effort was made to find a solution to the problem. After two years and two months, and an inquiry, Sir Thomas Inskip, recently appointed as the Minister for Co-ordination of defence, produced a report that recommended that the Air Branch of the Royal Navy should be fully under control of the Admiralty. Known as the Inskip Award, the report was accepted by Parliament, although it was another two years before the transfer was completed, in May 1939. Coastal Command remained with the RAF and Air Ministry.

At that time, whilst the RAF had been taking delivery of Spitfires, Hurricanes and medium bombers, the FAA still had biplanes in the form of the Fairey Swordfish and the Gloster Sea Gladiator and the underpowered, relatively slow – by comparison to a Spitfire – Blackburn Skua fighter/dive-bomber





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