



FLEET AIR ARM ASSOCIATION



"THE AIREY FAIREY"

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NATIONAL FLEET AIR ARM
ASSOCIATION

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EDITORIAL

I am pleased to say that it appears that the first issue of the new style Newsletter has met with general approval. However there was one exception. One of our members wrote complaining that the name of the carrier on which he served was not mentioned on page 9. This was the page on which a poem by the late Stan Stanford was printed. Since this was in total as Stan had produced it and was included as a tribute to him, I make no apologies.

In keeping with the committee's aim to provide an improved service to our members and to increase our influence within the RN and in particular the FAA, it is our intention to produce a Journal twice each year. To enable us to keep to our aim, we need a good supply of news items and articles whatever the subject matter. Until now I have received some very interesting items. Some of these have been cuttings from newspapers complete with photographs. However there are one or two problems. I am unable to copy newspaper photos because of the way they are printed so therefore would need copies of originals and, I am unable to use either without the necessary written permission. Please get permission before sending them and include that permission with your entry. When requesting this remember to tell them that we do not charge for our journal and explain that they will get recognition for their paper. We have recently heard of a case when a member attempted to obtain permission and was told that as it was copyright the charge would be £50.00. Needless to say he withdrew his request.

Those of you who have seen our latest format will no doubt have realised that to produce it was not cheap. Together with postage it cost just over £53 for 40 copies. We would like in future to mail a copy direct to each of our Members and Associate Members and to Air Stations and Ships' Flights. This will cost a considerable sum which, without raising extra cash, we cannot afford. Since we are unable to charge without incurring charges for the use of copyrighted articles, we are suggesting that the capitation fees should be increased by £2 per year. As someone said, "just under the normal pub prices for a pint". Not unreasonable? After all a branch maybe able to raise the extra money by running a raffle rather than increasing membership cost.

We are now fortunate in having links with The Gosport Aviation Society who are kindly allowing us to 'lift' items from their journal. The first of these "Remembering the Barracuda" appears in this issue. We have of

course agreed to a reciprocal arrangement.

As we announced in the last Newsletter, we are now on the Internet and so far we have received a number of enquiries from various parts of the world.

I am also very pleased to be able to include some material from an ex FAA member who is now residing in Australia. Who knows this maybe the start of an International theme?

NATIONAL NEWS

The following are extracts from the Chairman's report given at the last meeting.

Doug Wyatt stated that the past year has been most successful in the recruitment of new members. The distribution of posters and the advertisement in the Sunday Express have produced some good results but we still have a long way to go.

Bob Ridout organised a very successful reunion at Yeovilton, although the numbers attending were a little disappointing. Those who did attend seemed to have a very good time, which was due to the hospitality by the WO's and Senior Rates mess. A full account appears later in this issue.

The Bristol Branch are to be congratulated for their work in the preparation for the 'Laying Up' ceremony of the Daedalus Paying Off Pennant. The Pennant is now resplendent in its purpose built cabinet and may be viewed at the Museum. He apologised for what appeared to be the lack of publicity but this was due to information received which had indicated that there was a shortage of space and therefore numbers would be limited.

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We are obviously doing something right. Peter Roalf of the Essex Branch commented that he had received a back handed compliment in that "the RNA should be like the FAA Association". How right they are!

Videos of the "Laying Up" ceremony of the Daedalus Paying Off Pennant are available cost £5 each (not including P&P) £1 of this is being donated to the R.N.H.F. Please contact Eric Pitt, Bristol for more information.

THE NAVAL HERITAGE CENTRE

The following is published at the request of Rear Admiral T. Loughran.

The fund-raiser for the Swordfish Heritage Trust, Ian Lauder, has moved on to greater things (can anything be more important than our Naval Heritage?) and has been replaced by Mrs Allison Dufosee. She is the wife of a serving Naval pilot but has a track record of corporate sponsorship and runs her own business from her home in Wiltshire. Whilst Allison's first priority is to fund raise in support of the Royal Naval Historic Flight, the Trustees of both the Fleet Air Arm Museum and the Swordfish Heritage Trust see the wisdom of forming a much closer association between the two not only to benefit from their synergy but to avoid competing fund raising efforts. The current appeal for the National Fleet Air Arm Memorial is but one example where we might benefit from a more corporate view of Naval Aviation Heritage. We will keep you abreast of these developments but for the moment would ask you to give Allison Dufosee your strongest support in continuing the good work to preserve our historic aircraft flying.

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YEOVIL BRANCH

Much has happened since my last contribution to the newsletter, the main item being organising the reunion at R.N.A.S. Yeovilton, to which I must thank many members of the Yeovil Branch who helped out in many ways.

For the June meeting the Chief Test Pilot of Westlands Helicopters gave us an illustrated talk about EH110 and all its service and civilian variants, and capabilities of the newest acquisition of the Fleet Air Arm. Well received any very informative.

In July we paid a visit to the Bournemouth Branch at their Hurn Airport headquarters. One of our members sent his wife on a flight in a light aircraft as a birthday present. In his words "she came back though". She was joined by two other members for the 30-minute trip and took some interesting aerial photographs of the local countryside. As last year, we had marvellous weather, good company and to top it all, a fish and chip supper on the way back to Yeovil. Our grateful thanks to all members and especially to the Bournemouth Branch for their hospitality in making it a lovely evening.

In August, a wonderfully warm and sunny evening saw us on a coach trip to Bath. From the coach, a short walk along the canal towpath and embarkation onto a canal barge. This transported us along the Kennet and Avon Canal for about one and a half hours. Bar facilities available – wonderfully calm and relaxing. On leaving the barge, a short walk to a pub for a pre-ordered evening meal. Unfortunately the service at the pub was not very good. We did get an apology from the manager together with a 25% discount which, incidentally, was paid about a month later.

September saw us having a very enlightening talk about the work and facilities in a children's' hospice at Barnstaple, Devon. Our raffle proceeds from that evening together with a small contribution from our funds resulted in a donation of £70 to the hospice.

Our next major outing is for a weekend on the Isle of Wight. This is due to take place in February of next year when we also hope to make contact with members of the I.o.W. branch and enjoy a convivial cup of tea or ??? See the next issue for a report.

Our branch meets 20.00 on 3rd Tuesday of the month in the Bishop Room, Old Barn Club, Old Barn way, Yeovil.

Bob Ridout

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JUNE 1998 REUNION, RNAS YEOVILTON

I was first asked if I would organise this reunion in September 1997, a task I had never attempted before. After establishing that we had permission from FONA and Yeovilton's Commanding Officer the wheels were set in motion. Many of the Yeovil branch members assisted me in various ways, but without the support and cajoling of my wife, it probably wouldn't have happened.

The Mess President, Buck Taylor; Mess Manager, John Cash and catering Manager, Joyce Grant, could not have been more helpful and enthusiastic about the occasion. The costing for the reunion was determined by the fact that nowadays you have to pay for civilian catering, bar staff and wages for the waiters. This led to calculation of ticket prices of £7 for Saturday and £11 for Sunday, a 50p increase in cost from the previous reunion in 1995 at HMS Daedalus.

From an advertisement in the Sunday Express and Saga Magazine, I received about thirty enquiries about the reunion, most of those enquiring had not heard of the FAA Association and about eight attended the reunion. All were put in touch with the secretary of their nearest branch.

The numbers attending were approximately 130 on Saturday and 150 on Sunday. Branches represented were:- Birmingham, Bournemouth, Daedalus, Derby, Eastbourne, Essex, Helston, Hitchin, Manchester, Solent, Watford, Wrekin and Yeovil.

Commodore of HMS Heron took the salute, and the photograph below shows some of the attendant branch Standards.



March Past of Standard Bearers. Crown Copyright.

I have received some feed back about the organisation of the reunion, fortunately mostly positive, and the answer some of those queries are as follows.

1. *"Why didn't we have a Royal Marine Band for the Sunday parade?*
The cost of hiring a RM band is in the region of £2,000 + expenses.
The combined volunteer band from Heron and Seahawk cost £10.

"Why couldn't the church service have been held in a hangar?" RNAS Yeovilton, unlike HMS Daedalus is a fully operational air station - no spare hangar space and no ratings under training to prepare seating etc. There is also a lot of building taking place.

"Why didn't we have a propoer G.I. as parade marshal?" Being an operational station, personnel are no longer available for those sort of tasks, unless they volunteer.

"People didn't attend because there was no accommodation available on the air station". The accommodation was not available due to rebuilding for the absorption of Portland ratings when the base closes down in the near future. For those who attended the reunions at HMS Daedalus, accommodation on the base was limited to about a dozen, and was only allocated to deserving cases such as those with wheelchairs or with some infirmity

FINANCES:	Income including opening balance of £350 =	<u>£3,633.35</u>
	Expenditure	= <u>£2,753.57</u>
	Credit Balance	= <u>£609.78</u>

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REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY, 1998.

This year again saw our Association represented by about 60 members at the Remembrance Parade at the Cenotaph, Whitehall. As usual, even if you have paraded before, it was a very moving occasion.

Following the march past at the Cenotaph, the salute was taken opposite the Guards Memorial, by the Duke of Kent. Our Chairman thanked all those who attended and, along with most of us, expressed his sorrow that more of our members had not turned up.

Since that day, I have been asked on numerous occasions by non ex-service people and indeed two ex-FAA officers *"why do the FAA Officers Association march as a separate unit to our Association when all other groups, ex-officers and men, march together? After all you are all ex-service"*.

Perhaps someone out there can supply a logical answer, so that next year I can give a sensible answer?

REAR ADMIRAL I. R. HENDERSON, CBE
FLAG OFFICER NAVAL AVIATION

Rear Admiral Iain Henderson was educated at Epsom College and entered the Royal navy in 1965 as a full career Seaman Officer. After initial training at Britannia Royal Naval College, he served in HM Ships Cambrian and Corunna as a Midshipman and in HMS Leopard as a Sub-Lieutenant.

In 1971 he underwent flying training as a helicopter pilot, joining 826 Naval Air Squadron embarked in HMS Tiger, flying Sea King helicopters. After attending a preliminary staff course at the Royal Naval College Greenwich in 1974, he volunteered for an attachment to the Royal Air Force and, after two years fixed wing training, joined 111 Squadron based at RAF Leuchars where he flew Phantom air defence fighters.

Promoted Lieutenant Commander in 1978, his next job was at the Royal Naval Air Station Yeovilton, lecturing on aviation topics.

In 1980 he was appointed as Second-in-Command of the frigate HMS Plymouth which, during the Falklands conflict suffered substantial damage when attacked by a number of Argentinian aircraft. He attended the Staff Course at Greenwich and, on promotion to Commander in 1983, took command of the frigate HMS Ariadne, followed by a brief spell in command of HMS Charybdis.

He was then appointed as Training Commander of Britannia Royal Naval College, overseeing the initial training of some 550 young officers annually. In 1988 he joined the Ministry of Defence in London as the Fleet Air Arm Appointer, responsible for the appointing and career counselling of approximately 1300 Pilots and Observers.

On promotion to Captain in 1989, Admiral Henderson took command of the Type 22 anti-submarine frigate HMS London, which acted as the Flagship of the Royal Navy Task Group during the 1991 Gulf War, resulting in his award of the CBE.

He then returned to the Ministry of Defence as the Assistant Director (Warfare) in Directorate of Navy Plans. From 1993 until 1996 he commanded the Royal Naval Air Station Yeovilton and, later that year, became the Naval Base Commander, Portsmouth together with being

appointed ADC to Her Majesty The Queen.

He took up his appointment as Flag Officer Naval Aviation in October 1998 having been promoted to Rear Admiral.

Rear Admiral Henderson is married and he and his wife Rosalind have four children, two boys and two girls His principal interests are riding and general outdoor pursuits.

Naval Air Command, Public Relations.

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I am sure that all members of the Fleet Air Arm Association join with me in offering Admiral Henderson our congratulations and wishing him every success in the future.

B.J.S.

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ESSEX BRANCH

The eight members of the Essex Branch who attended the reunion wish to pass on their congratulations to Bob Ridout and members of the Yeovil Branch for their work in arranging this year's.

The facilities offered by the WO's and Senior rates mess made me for one quite envious of today's Fleet Air Arm. I only hope that we shall be able to visit many times in the future.

Those of you, who appended their names to the cloth I had on display at the reunion, will no doubt be interested to know that donations amounted to £63. This together with £9 raised at our social on the previous Thursday meant that I was able to send a total of £72 to the Swordfish Heritage Trust.

Essex Branch is now affiliated to 814 Naval Air Squadron. This came about from the long affiliation of the Harlow Branch of the RNA with 814. The Squadron Commanding Officer sees the affiliation as a means of establishing closer links with the population of East Anglia. It is our hope that at some time one or more of the Squadron aircraft together with maintenance staff may be able to visit the area.

Peter Roalf.

ANGUS BRANCH

In October of this year the Angus Branch of the Fleet Air Arm Association celebrated its fifth anniversary. It was formed in 1993 following a suggestion by Colin Davis that a local branch of the National Association be formed in Arbroath.

It seemed that this was a logical location since HMS Condor was the centre for most of the engineering training of Fleet Air Arm personnel from 1946. Initially up to 1,000 Aircraft Artificer Apprentices were undergoing training at any one time and this was followed later by Aircraft Mechanics and Junior Naval Air Mechanics.

Naturally a number of those serving at 'Condor' married local girls and after leaving the service settled in the area.

There were some 27 founder members but as the only branch in Scotland the membership has grown to 96.

We meet regularly in the Royal British Legion, Scotland clubrooms Helen Street, Arbroath on the last Tuesday of each month July excepted.

The committee endeavour to provide a variety of events, which include trips to places of special interest, guest speakers and of course general 'fun nights'. Our sporting events tend to revolve around golf.

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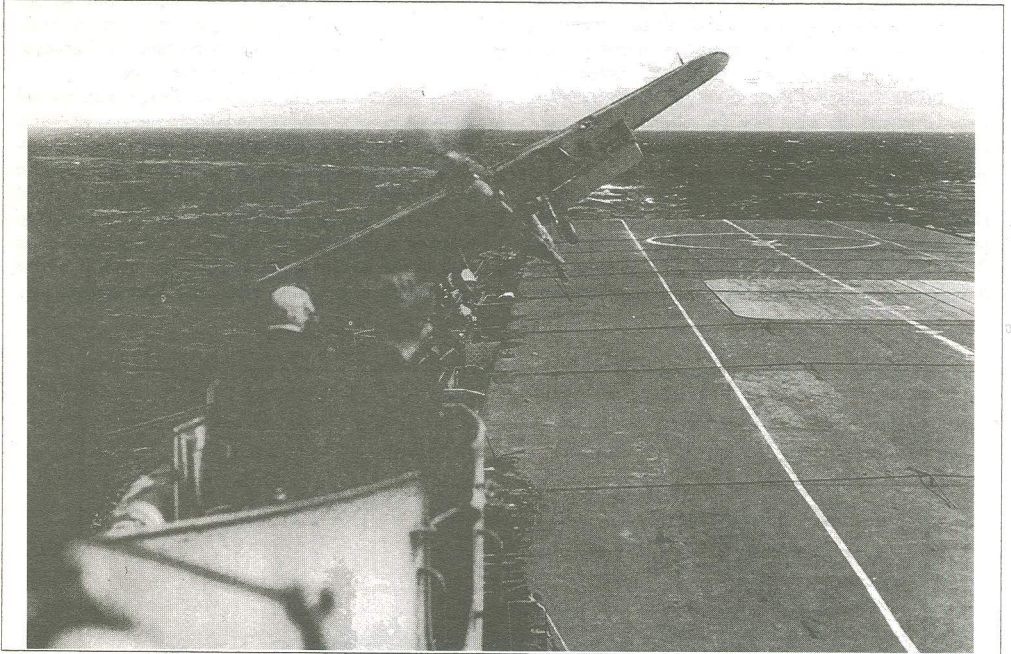
FAA MUSEUM

It was interesting to see the first FAA Museum Newsletter in particular the reference to the Barracuda.

It stated that "The Fairey Barracuda was produced in larger numbers than any other aircraft procured for the Royal Navy, before or since yet, today. No complete example is known to exist.." It goes on to say that staff at the museum are reconstructing one from material recovered from two crash sites".

On the following page is an article by David Gardener on the Barracuda.

Remembering the **BARRACUDA**



Whenever the name "*Barracuda*" is mentioned to many old members of the Fleet Air Arm it brings about sardonic laughter or cries of derision. When pressed, most of them will say that in fact they never served on a *Barracuda* squadron and most of their scepticism has been picked up from reading or hearing about the aeroplane from others.

Derided by most aircraft historians, it was an aircraft often disliked and considered dangerous, but like many other possibly more famous aircraft it was only dangerous if incorrectly handled. Like many aircraft produced for the Fleet Air Arm prior to and during the early part of the war, it suffered from too much interference in design by both the Admiralty and Civil Servants who constantly amended the manufacturers specifications and wanted the aeroplane to cover almost every aspect of Naval aviation (at one time the fitting of a four gun turret similar to that on the Blackburn Roc was seriously mooted!). The *Barracuda* was heavy

enough as it was: the Lord knows what would have happened to its performance if they had proceeded with this idea.

The original specification was issued in 1937 with the full spec. being taken up by six aircraft manufacturers in January 1938. The Fairey Aviation Company finally won the contract for an aircraft designed around the Rolls Royce sleeve valve, high pressure engine air cooled Boreas engine (popularly referred to as the X engine). In the event, this engine was cancelled at the outbreak of war in order to release capacity for the Rolls Royce Merlin. With all the other problems the *Barracuda* subsequently had to face, it is probably as well that this complicated engine was dropped. Having to re-design the *Barracuda* to accept the Merlin Mk 30 engine, plus the shortage of Merlins required for fighter aircraft at the time, lead to severe delays in the production of the aircraft. The Merlin 30 was supplanted by the Merlin 32 of 1640 h.p for the

Barracuda Mk II when the Mk.I was found to be seriously underpowered.

The major cause of derision of the Barracuda was no doubt due to the high wing necessitating the peculiar looking under-carriage, the Youngman flaps hanging off the trailing edge of the wings and the high tailplane. When the wings were folded it certainly looked like the result of a major accident. All of these appendices however were remarkably efficient in operation. The undercarriage offering a wide track was proven to be very strong for heavy deck landings. The Youngman flaps increased the wing area for take off from short decks and made the aeroplane an excellent dive bomber when the flaps were used as dive brakes

It fell to 778 Squadron, the service trials unit based at HMS Condor, RNAS Arbroath, to sort out the problems with the Barracuda. The Mk I (of which only 24 were built) & Mk II versions had already been through squadron trials and the Mk II was in squadron

service, the first being 827 formed at Lee-on-Solent in September 1942, later moving to RNAS Stretton for 'work up'. The aircraft was getting a very poor press from the squadrons who seemed to be losing more of their fair share of aeroplanes and aircrew. In fact the accident rate plus the delay in delivery of production aircraft was even raised in Parliament and serious consideration was given to its cancellation. Unfortunately, this early reputation gave the Barracuda a bad name which it never really overcame.

The Barracuda did have inherent design faults but not all the accidents were attributable to the aircraft. Most of the early pilots had converted from fixed under-carriage bi-planes such as the Swordfish and Albacore where coarse applications of the stick and rudder could be tolerated and spin recovery was easy. The change to a heavy monoplane with a high power loading often led to the aircraft biting the unwary, even if all the instructions in the Pilots Notes had been meticulously



Heading photograph: How not to land a Barracuda! This Barracuda II is seen making a pretty hair-raising, yet apparently successful, attempt at a go-around aboard (IWM Neg A30652)

This page: Factory-fresh Barracuda IIs with engines running. The aircraft nearest the camera, DP883, had a brief career with 823 Squadron from August 1943 until 24 April 1944 when it was belly-landed after the pilot had been overcome by exhaust fumes. 823 Squadron was based at Lee-on-Solent at the time this aircraft was delivered to the unit (later moving to Fearn) and, although the background does not look familiar, the fact that these aircraft are all in pristine condition would seem to suggest that they had just been delivered from the manufacturers - making Lee a stronger possibility. (IWM Neg A20060)

observed.

The main faults with the early marks which resulted in often fatal accidents was a lack of strength in the main front wing spar, the wing fold locks and the wing leading edge. Although designed as a dive bomber, the increased loading on the wings if it was pulled out too sharply could result in failure of the wing spar. 'Popped' rivets were frequent to the extent that one Barracuda squadron included in its squadron song book one which began "Every time it rains, it rains rivets from heaven".

It fell to 778 squadron, working with the manufacturers to try and overcome these shortcomings, and particularly to restore morale in service squadrons which was at a pretty low ebb. Some of the rumours which caused great concern were things like "the wing locking pins had not been properly heat treated" resulting in the wings folding in flight. It is beyond comprehension that hardening of whole batches of locking pins would have escaped A.I.D. inspection, but such rumours persisted. There was a problem with wing locking pins which was overcome by re-design, but poor inspection was never an issue as far as is known.

Several Naval test pilots were on detachment to 778 Sqdn, the most notable being Lt Cdr (later Captain) Eric 'Winkle' Brown. He took the Barracuda under his wing and spent several weeks wringing the bugs out of it. Because of the morale problem among service pilots, the C.O's and Senior Pilots from many squadrons were brought to *Condor* to be briefed by Lt Cdr Brown and to witness a demonstration of flying the aircraft by him. The writer was privileged to witness this flying demonstration during which he carried out an exhibition of aerobatics which would not have shamed a Spitfire. Such was the programme, that most people, if asked, would have stated that it was impossible to do with a machine of this size and weight. When he landed, it was to loud applause from the assembled pilots and ground crew. More importantly *not a single rivet had popped*, he had flown the Barra entirely within its design envelope - one of the World's great test pilots!

From the work 'Winkle' Brown did in development flying and the investigations carried out by 778 Sqdn, the Mk III and later versions of the Barracuda became a very good work horse, and it had some remarkable successes in operation. Some of the faults could not be corrected, such as the rudder overbalance which caused the aircraft to flick onto its back when pulling up sharply in a turn from low speed, but amendments to the Pilots Notes ensured that the pilot did not place his mount in such a position for the onset of the problem.

From the point of view of maintenance, the

Barracuda was easy to service. The height meant that inspection platforms were required to reach the engine, but apart from this the Merlin installation was neat and accessible making routine maintenance simple. Although awkward looking, the manual wing folding could be accomplished by four men. The Youngman flaps and wing trailing edge inboard of the ailerons were power folded with the engine running (or laboriously by hand pump when not!), an extending lever pulled the wing pins out and three or four men on the retractable hoops under the wings allowed the wings to be folded and locking pins to engage in slots in the tailplane.

Although by no means perfect, the Barracuda was quite an adequate aeroplane and served the F.A.A. well. It flew off virtually every sort of carrier including the small escort types, rocket-assisted take-off gear being frequently used. This "RATOG" was developed at *Condor* for the Barracuda and it was quite a sight to behold the smoke and flames as the aircraft leapt into the air! Although designed as a torpedo bomber, it was rarely used in this capacity and it was its use as a dive bomber that it achieved its main claim to fame. The bombing of the *Tirpitz* in Kaafjord in 1944 was a huge success and ensured that the ship never sailed again. In the Far East the Barracuda also served with distinction, particularly in the battles of the Nicobar Islands, the Adamans and against the oil-fields in Sumatra.

Only thirty of the much revised Mk.V version with the Griffon engine had been built by the time the war ended, further contracts being cancelled in November 1945. This version did not join first line squadrons, being mainly used for training. The Mk.III was recalled to service with 815 Sqdn taking twelve aircraft on charge for ASW work in 1947, where it remained active until 1953.

The remains of one Boulton & Paul-built MkII, DP872 still exists at the FAA Museum at Yeovilton. Work has started to rebuild this and a complete engine 'power egg' with radiator intakes and top and side cowlings has already been completed. The cockpit centre section has gone away for refurbishing but unfortunately a cash shortage has brought the remaining work to an indefinite halt; £140,000 is needed to complete the work so if any Barracuda fan wins the lottery, this world may yet see a complete 'Barra' once again.

David Gardener

BRISTOL BRANCH

Our Fleet Air Arm Association wreath was placed on the Memorial in the Taiping war cemetery by former members of the 2nd Guards Brigade whilst they were in the area.

In June, some of our members attended the Tarrant Rushton Airfield Memorial parade and service. The National Standard together with our own was paraded among the many Standards present.

Why may you ask were Fleet Air Arm Association Standards paraded at such an occasion at a wartime RAF airfield? From a previous article "Sailors in the RAF" it was mentioned that a number of FAA members were seconded to the RAF to assist in preparations for 'D' Day. Some took part in operations over the south of France dropping supplies to French freedom fighters. Each year a memorial service is held at Tarrant Airfield to remember all airborne forces who departed from central and southern airfields on 'D' Day, all RAF aircrews from 38 and 46 squadrons and those of the Fleet Air Arm who made the supreme sacrifice. There is a memorial at 'Windy Corner' to those FAA personnel who failed to return.

It was an honour for us of the Bristol Branch to present the Daedalus Laying Up Pennant to the FAA Museum for safekeeping. Our Chairman, Eric Pitt, made the presentation to the Museum Curator, Commander Hobbs RN.

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EASTBOURNE BRANCH

Did you know that Eastbourne has had close links with the Fleet Air Arm? Well to be more correct, the Royal Naval Air Service.

In 1912 Fred Fowler and Frank Hucks formed the Eastbourne Aviation Company. They leased an area of land on the area known as the Crumbles. Frank Hucks was a seaplane pilot and therefore a base close to the sea was an advantage. His two floatplanes formed the basis of the company.

The RNAS became interested in the Crumbles site and leased one of the hangars for use by their own seaplanes. By 1913 Eastbourne had become one of the most important naval training schools in the country.

In addition to the building of aircraft, some aircraft repair work was undertaken for the Admiralty.

Although the area is still known as the Crumbles, little if anything is left to remind us of its previous history.

On a lighter note, 25 of our members and friends travelled to Blackpool, en route picking up 24 members and friends of the Hanworth Branch, in order to attend the Taranto dinner organised by the Greater Manchester Branch. We took the opportunity to extend our stay and turn it into a weekend break.

Included during the weekend was a trip to and indoor market in Fleetwood followed by a visit to the Marina Factory Outlet. Many of our members suggested that we should pre warn them of such visits so that they could conveniently omit to bring credit cards!

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TARANTO DINNER, BLACKPOOL

The Greater Manchester Branch social committee, under the guidance of Trevor Martin, arranged for their Taranto dinner to be held in the Norbreck Castle Hotel, Blackpool and guests, if they so wished, were able to combine this with a week end break. This invitation was extended to other branches. Apart from the Manchester Branch contingent, Doug Wyatt, our National Chairman, 25 guests from Eastbourne, 24 from Hanworth and 6 from Yeovil made up the assembly, in all well over 100.

The food, entertainment and above all the convivial company (sorry and the wine) made the evening a great success.

One outcome has been the suggestion that maybe the FAA reunion should be combined with a Taranto dinner and the venue could be in different area of the country each year. Why not discuss the idea at branch level and let your thoughts be passed onto the National Committee? Over to you!

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THE BUILD UP TO D-DAY & FAA WRNS

by Eric Mutton. ex PO AM(A) RN FAA
(as written for an Australian magazine)

The beginning of 1944 saw the massive build-up of armed forces all over England. The tide of war had turned from defensive to offence. The south of England was rapidly becoming a vast armed camp, all three services establishing bases along the coastline where training for seaborne landings went on continuously.

I had just returned from foreign service leave and was drafted to the storage section at Lee on Solent on the south coast as supervisory PO of T.B.R. flight. The other sections were fighter flight and communications flight. The latter being all non-operational aircraft. It was soon apparent that our role was more than just supplying aircraft to active squadrons. We were actually mothballing many of the older types and training on the new British and American aircraft that were arriving daily. These were mostly Seafires, Sea Furies, Albacore's and the American Corsairs and Avengers. A new aircraft made its appearance at that time, the Fairey Barracuda a high wing monoplane, which also made a name for itself as a low-level bomber. All these were very complex planes and we had to be re trained on many aspects, especially hydraulic systems. What better was to learn than by going to the factories where they were being built? I was sent with a group to the Fairey factory for a course on the Barracuda, then to Supermarine on Seafires. On these aircraft, the old manual wing folding mechanism had been replaced by hydraulic systems operated by the pilots. Those courses were much sought after not only for their technical value but for their social side as well. We were billeted in civilian lodgings and had all our evenings free to go partying with the factory girls. But, more work than play. We had to return to base and pass on our knowledge.

Whilst serving my requisite as acting PO, I had to do my HRD (higher ratings disciplinary) course at the naval gunnery school on Whale island in Portsmouth Harbour. There junior officers, CPO's and PO's had to undergo extensive drill, learning to take charge of a drill squad and instil discipline. We did it the hard way, believe me? Two weeks on the parade

ground followed by a week on the assault course under the Navy's toughest GI's. In those early days Fleet Air Arm ratings were regarded as not true sailors like seamen, stokers etc. In a derogatory term we were termed "men dressed as seamen" and given a hard time. I think at one time or another we all suffered the indignity of "round the island" for wearing caps 'flat-aback' or some other misdemeanour. "Round the island," meant doubling the 5k perimeter of the island with a rifle at the slope. With plenty of "about turns" from bloody-minded CPO's on the way round, it was a very long 5k. Hard on wind and limb and painful to the shoulder. We weathered the storm; finally finishing the course with a hard run over the assault course hassled by the equally bloody-minded GI's and 'Bootnecks' all the way.

The shortage of experienced mechanics had become a problem, which was relieved by WRNS mechanics coming from the technical training schools. Very capable young ladies, they were well trained in theory but short in practical work. With the amount of work on hand we were soon able to give them the experience they needed. I was transferred to Communications Flight, having all Wren mechanics with just a couple of men to do the heavy work. There were a few problems to begin with but in all they did a great job. My course at Whale Island did neither cover drilling women nor how to instil discipline in them; one had to be so very careful. We did a lot of marching at that time, transport being in short supply. One day I had to collect a squad of Wrens from the depot and march them to our dispersal area. All neatly fallen in and ready to march off I noticed that one of them had a little kitten in her jacket. I told them that such behaviour was frowned upon and that in future Wrens would not be allowed to bring their pussies on parade. Lots of laughter of course, but I never saw any more pets. I did however get a few meows from time to time. The biggest problem was keeping all the Romeo's at bay, especially the off duty pilots, they would wander over with all manner of excuses and hold up work.

An unusual event took place at this time. There was a large influx of amphibian aircraft, mostly biplanes, which had to be parked on 'out of the way' dispersals. They were spotter aircraft from British and American battleships and cruisers. With the German navy not so much a problem, it was decided that the pilots could take a more active part in the forthcoming invasion of Europe. They were given a quick conversion course on Spitfires for ground support, low level strafing and so on. For this purpose, we received a large number of Spitfire fighters which had to

be modified immediately. We had in fact to produce what soon became known as the clipped-wing Spitfire, so evolved to make it more manoeuvrable at low altitude, ideal for ground support work. A very successful modification although it did affect altitude and rate of climb. To do this, the familiar elliptical wingtips were removed and replaced by short square tips supplied by the manufacturers. This reduced the overall wingspan by about 1 metre. This mod was done in record time, one AM(A) and one Wren to a plane. There were a few blackened fingernails but no serious mishaps.

Once our Wrens became experienced in servicing aircraft under operational conditions, they gradually replaced the men who were returned to more active service, leaving a few senior rates for training and supervisory duties.

We all knew that the invasion of Europe was imminent. The streets were crammed with troops and equipment. Cycling in town was, at times, extremely hazardous, with convoys of tanks and heavy trucks heading for loading areas. Just down the road was a 'hard', a section of the foreshore where at high tide L.S.T's could come in for loading. Enemy aircraft activity was light, mostly reconnaissance planes looking to see what was afoot but our fighters gave them a hard time. Our biggest problem was the flying bombs, V1 pilotless aircraft - "Doodlebugs". Intended to be a terror weapon they were not all that successful. We could see one heading our way and hope that the engine didn't cut out until it had passed. If it did it was time to dive for cover. Very few hit our area but I saw many fly over and explode in the open country beyond. With fighter planes patrolling overhead all day we were able to press on with our job uninterrupted.

A few days before D-Day, we received orders to paint large black and white stripes around the wings and fuselage of all aircraft. There were no exceptions. All hands were pressed into service, even off duty cooks were in my squad. Of course no reason was given and it wasn't until the invasion started did we learn what it was all about. It turned out that every allied aircraft, literally thousands, were painted in the same manner. On D Day, all allied pilots and gunners were ordered to shoot down any aircraft not so marked.

For days, all our fighter planes were fuelled and armed ready for instant action. On D Day itself a scratch squadron with British and American navy pilots were having a ball. Taking off at dawn, they were flying

across the Channel shooting up anything that moved behind the German lines then back to be refuelled and rearmed. Attractive young ladies were waiting to wave them into dispersal, service their aircraft, do a quick check for damage, patch up a few bullet holes and off they'd go again. This kept us all busy until the allied forces captured enemy airfields in France. Our temporary squadrons then joined up with the regular squadrons closer to the scene of action.

I was proud of my girls; they learned quickly and worked hard. They did a marvellous job. Most were youngsters, some straight from school, but with the help of a few older and more experienced Wrens they grew up very quickly. Some of the latter had joined the WRNS in 1942 and based near London were part of a 'mine-spotters' team whose action stations during air raids on London were on the Thames bridges plotting the location of any mines dropped into the river by enemy aircraft. An extremely dangerous duty with no chance of taking cover whilst bombs were falling. After about a year of this Admiralty, in their wisdom, decided it was too hazardous a duty for a young woman so they were replaced by men. These were mostly older seamen who in normal time would have been retired on pension.

You might say that those young ladies were battle hardened veterans by the time they were drafted into the Fleet Air Arm.

* * * *

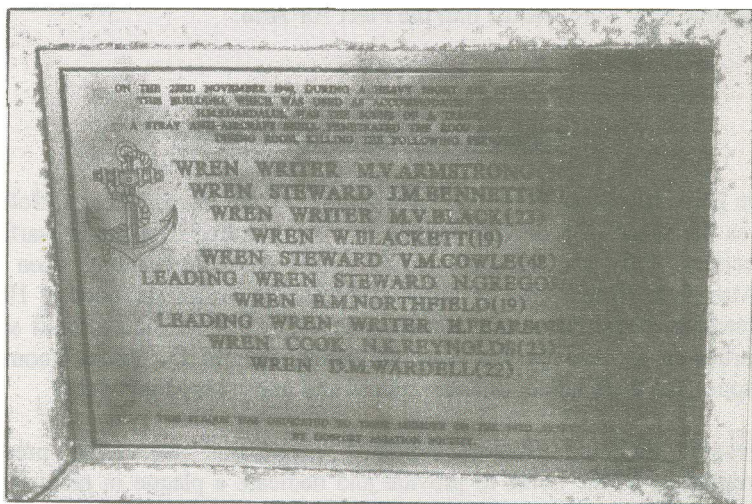
Memorial Service at Lee-on-Solent

On 23rd November 1996, the 'Glen Heathers Care Home', Lee-on-Solent, was the scene of a moving tribute to Wrens killed in a tragic wartime accident. Fifty six years previously to the day, the building, then the "Mansfield Hotel" used as accommodation for wrens stationed at HMS Daedalus Royal Naval Air Station, was hit by a faulty anti-aircraft shell during an air raid on the area. Of twenty-four in the dining room at supper, ten were killed, thirteen injured and one escaped unharmed.

Gosport Aviation Society obtained permission from the present proprietors of the home to provide and dedicate a plaque in memory of the ten fatal casualties. This event was blessed with a perfect day and was attended by approximately 100 people, many from ex-service organisations and ex -service personnel.

Representing Rear Admiral McAnally, FOTR, was Captain Pippa Duncan, Chief Naval Officer Women, Mrs. Janet Crabtree represented the President and Chairman of The Association of Wrens, the Mayor of Gosport attended on behalf of the local area. Standards were provided by the Slough/Windsor, Isle of Wight, Southampton and Portsmouth Branches of The Association of Wrens, together with The Fleet Air Arm Association, Solent Branch and the Lee-on Solent Royal British Legion Womens' Branch. Buglers of the Royal Marine Cadet Light Infantry Band sounded the 'Last Post'. The service was conducted by Rev. Peter Sutton of St. Faith's church which was the venue for the original burial service in 1940. The unveiling was carried out by the sole uninjured survivor, Mrs. Patricia Brookman (nee Fletcher), and Mrs. Patricia Dymott (nee Humphies), the most seriously injured survivor, both travelling long distances to attend. Also present were two ex-FAA members who were duty emergency party on the tragic night and, it transpired during conversation, that Ray Crawford carried the terribly injured Pat Humphies from the wrecked building.

Mr Ron Jones, who carried out the research on behalf of the Gosport Aviation Society expressed disappointment that in spite of messages on Teletext 'Service Pals' and messages in papers local to the next of kin listed by the I.W.G.C., no relatives of any of the Wrens could be traced.



* * * *

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ON THE MURMANSK RUN

By P. Ross, 824 Squadron

Courtesy of the *Legion Magazine*

PETER ROSS joined 824 Squadron of the R.N.'s F.A.A. in 1944 and served under its Canadian Commanding Officer, G.C. (Teddy) Edwards. Ross, who became a Canadian citizen after the war, participated in three round trips to Murmansk.

On the morning of August 16 1944, the British Escort Aircraftcarrier Striker sailed out of Scapa Flow. I was a navigator with the Fleet Air Arm Squadron that had been assigned to the attacker class warship. Our C.O. was Lieut. Comdr G.C. (Teddy) Edwards of the R.C.N.V.R.

Edwards was a fine pilot and an innovative tactician. He was well respected by the aircrews and maintenance ratings who came from different parts of the Commonwealth. Teddy, it seemed, always had time to speak to anyone who had a problem. In other words he looked after his men.

The weather that morning was misty and cool. It was the same day that the British Escort carrier Nabob, which was commanded and manned by the Royal Canadian Navy, sailed out of Scapa Flow as part of a large force bent on sinking the German battleship Tirpitz. Our C.O. advised us that Striker was going to join a large supply convoy that would travel east across the Norwegian Sea and Barents Sea to the ice-free port of Murmansk in the Soviet Union. Late in the afternoon we spotted a large number of merchant ships being escorted by British destroyers and frigates. It wasn't long before we caught up with them and took our position in the middle of the convoy. The convoy contained approximately 90 ships, about half of them American. Most of the

merchant ships were about the same size as Striker, which had originally been laid down as a cargo ship by Western Pipe and Steel Co. of San Francisco, Calif.

Our squadron consisted of one flight of Fairey Swordfish and one flight of Grumam Martlet fighters, 18 planes in all.

On the morning of Aug. 17, I joined Sub. Lieut. D.T. Andrews and Ldg. Aircraftman Peter Dew on a routine, three hour search for U-boats hiding in the Norwegian Sea. Andrews was the pilot, Dew was the air gunner and I was navigator. To protect us from the extreme weather we each wore a canvas suit and fur lined Irvin jacket over our flying suit and battledress uniform. Each of us also wore an inflatable life jacket, sheepskin-lined flying boots, silk gloves under woolen gloves and leather gauntlets. We also wore leather lined flying helmets that featured earphones, goggles and an oxygen mask with a microphone. The lifejacket contained a survival kit that included first aid supplies, emergency rations and dye markers. Over the life jacket Dew and I each wore a parachute harness for the separate 'chutes that were stowed in the cockpit. Andrews had to rely on the seat type 'chute in the event of an emergency.

During patrols and searches we determined the wind's velocity and direction by dropping a smoke float. We would then fly in one direction for one minute, then turn around and fly straight for one more minute. This allowed us to gauge how far we had drifted. I timed it with a stop-watch and from this calculated the speed and direction of the wind on a small manual calculator.

We did what were known as square searches, starting approx 50 miles ahead of the convoy and gradually reducing the distance by 15 miles each sweep.

It is a strange sensation to watch miles and miles of open sea with not a thing in sight.

The Norwegian underground was apparently taking great risks to keep the convoys to Murmansk informed about German air movements. We'd been told members of the underground would position a radio transmitter near an airfield and after each broadcast in morse to London, they would move the transmitter to another location to avoid detection. Some members of the underground even volunteered to drive buses to transport German air crews from their billets to aerodromes, and sacrificed themselves by driving off the cliffs into the sea, taking with them 20 or more German airmen.

On Aug. 21 one of our Martlets NF991 - sighted what was thought to be a U-boat. He reported the approximate location and our Commanding Officer ordered Andrews, Dew and I to take off. We flew off and after spotting the U-boat on the surface, immediately started to dive. Andrews increased speed and fired our rockets at the conning tower just as the vessel was submerging. Unfortunately, we did not secure a hit. I wrote the location on a piece of paper and gave to Dew, who broke radio silence to pass the information to the escorts. On the way back to the carrier we spotted one of the destroyers speeding in the direction of the U-boat.

The next day we took off again in NE991. This time we carried depth charges. When we were approximately 20 miles from the convoy we spotted another U-boat. It quickly submerged, but Andrews got me to drop our depth charges where we thought the U-boat had slipped beneath the surface. There

were two explosions and then we noticed quantities of oil and debris coming to the surface, but we did not know whether it was a definite kill. We returned to the carrier but when we landed the port-side shock absorber supporting the wheel collapsed and that meant our Swordfish had to be taken down to the hanger for repair.

Not long after that, Andrews and I were standing at the ship's rail, watching an American freighter on our port side. Suddenly we saw a huge spray of water go up in the air. A minute later the cargo ship broke in two and both halves disappeared into the sea. A frigate sped into the area and immediately began to drop depth charges. I prayed and gave thanks to God that the torpedo had not hit us. I also prayed for the souls of the poor American sailors who must have perished within minutes of being in the freezing waters. It was an event that has stayed vividly in my mind for more than 50 years.

Later that day, Andrews, Dew and I took off on another patrol in our Swordfish. We wanted to locate another U-boat and sink it in retaliation for the attack on the American freighter. Unfortunately this was not to be so.

It soon became obvious that the Germans knew our large convoy was heading for Murmansk. The Norwegians warned us that there were approximately 100 Junkers, Heinkels and Dorniers ready to take off and attack us. This would have been disastrous, since we only had 9 Martlets to defend us in the skies.

Our Canadian Commander came up with the bright idea to try to deceive the German into thinking there were four aircraft carriers - two American and two British - with the convoy when in fact there was only one. Our new voice radio sets were tuned with crystals and frequencies could be changed by merely pushing different buttons. One was our

operational frequency that we knew the Germans were monitoring. Edwards decided we should use this to our advantage. Also in our favour was the fact that one of the Martlets pilots was from South Carolina. He had joined the R.C.N. before Pearl Harbour and had been eager to be part of the F.A.A. This pilot had a very distinct southern accent and Edwards told him he was to pretend he was the commander of a squadron of U.S. Navy Hellcats. Another Martlet pilot was told he was in command of a squadron of R.N. seafires.

The carriers captain signalled the captains of two American tankers and told them they were to communicate with Martlet pilot from South Carolina, and pretend the tankers were U.S. aircraft carriers. Two radio operators on Striker, meanwhile, would try to create the impression that there were two British carriers. While this was going on, Andrews and I were to pretend we were Seafire pilots. In an attempt to fool German radar, we dropped bits of aluminum foil from 5,000 feet. As the silvery chaff floated down, we hoped it would fool the Germans into thinking there were a lot more planes in the sky. With the Martlets at 20,000 feet and Swordfish at 9,000 feet we started broadcasting:

"This is Red leader, keep in formation red nine"

"This is Brown leader, Keep clear of the Seafires"

"This is Yellow leader, The Hellcats are to patrol at 20,000 feet, we will be at 10,000."

This is Green leader, roger out".

"This is Blue leader. All 12 of our squadron will keep in formation".

Eventually, the carrier and the two American tankers gave directions for the six fighter squadrons to land back on the four carriers.

The Norwegians told us that none of the German fighters had taken off. We

assumed this was because they did not want to face six squadrons of modern fighters. The U-boats could have reported that there was only one carrier, but the enemy subs did not want to break radio silence for fear we would locate them.

However shortly after 1 pm on Aug 23, an escort reported a U-boat that may have been trying to raise the shore with its radio. We had just landed on Striker, but quickly took off again and eventually caught the U-boat on the surface approx 20 miles from the carrier. The U-boat started to dive, but we attacked with rockets. Shortly after explosions debris and oil could be seen on the surface. The next day, the convoy rounded North Cape, Norway, and was close to Kirkness, located approximately 100 miles north west of Murmansk.

While on patrol over the neighbouring Barents Sea, we spotted a Bell Aircobra with Soviet markings. The pilot flew alongside of us and then opened the cockpit cover to wave. While waving back we were surprised to see that the pilot was an attractive blonde woman.

Striker dropped anchor in Vaenga on Aug. 27, and our Captain was welcomed aboard the Russian Northern fleet flagship Arkhangelsk, the former HMS Royal Sovereign. In return our Captain invited some Russian Officers to visit our ship. Before long a concert party featuring musicians from the Moscow Conservatory of Music was taking place in Striker.

We left the Soviet Union on Aug. 29 with a homeward bound convoy. Compared to the trip to Murmansk, the journey back was uneventful.

To a large extent, the success of the August 1944 convoy to Murmansk was due to the ingenuity of a Canadian named G.C. Edwards. He was a modest, yet competent leader who worked his way up to command level.

FIND THE BIRDS



Hidden in the grid are the names of 14 birds, all of which are HMS designations of RN Air Stations. Find them by crossing them out forwards, backwards or diagonally and the match each Station to one of the birds in the grid and state where in the UK the station is/was located.

RNAS Anthorn	HMS _____	Located _____
RNAS Easthaven	HMS _____	Located _____
RNAS Eastleigh	HMS _____	Located _____
RNAS Crail	HMS _____	Located _____
RNAS Dale	HMS _____	Located _____
RNAS Culham	HMS _____	Located _____
RNAS Culdrose	HMS _____	Located _____
RNAS Arbroath	HMS _____	Located _____
RNAS St Merryn	HMS _____	Located _____
RNAS Lossiemouth	HMS _____	Located _____
RNAS Machrihanish	HMS _____	Located _____
RNAS Twat	HMS _____	Location _____
RNAS Ford	HMS _____	Location _____
RNAS Fearn	HMS _____	Location _____

There are no prizes for the correct answers.

Alec Braybrooke

THE DAY I MET GOD.

One sunny morning I was on my way to school with some friends. There seemed to be much more activity than usual at Naval barracks. Naturally we stopped to see what was going on. Usually we were allowed to stand inside the gates to watch a parade but this time we were being hustled along by the duty Petty Officer, when behind us we heard a very imperious voice saying, "what are you boys doing here?" I looked around to see a 'vision' about ten feet tall, all navy blue and gold. If you have seen an admiral in full ceremonial dress you will know what I mean. Long frock coat, gold braid up to the elbows, medals and orders all over his chest, a gold braided cocked hat and an enormous sword encrusted with gold decoration. He was accompanied by slightly lesser mortals; captains and commanders etc. all gloriously attired. "What are you boys doing here?" he said, "we've come to see the sailors sir", I said. "and so you shall", he replied. To a seaman standing nearby, he said "take these boys to the parade ground where they can see everything and after the parade take them to the galley and ask the cook to feed them".

It was the biggest parade I had seen. The crews of many ships in harbour were there together with the massed bands of the Royal Marines. It was spectacular. Afterwards we were each given a large slice of cake wrapped in bunting (old worn out flag material) to take home.

On the way back to the gate we again met the 'vision' who said "well lads, did you enjoy the parade?" "Yes sir" we chorused. Turning to the assembled retinue he said "must take care of these lads, they are our seamen of the future". How right he was. When he went on his way, I asked our escort "Oos 'e mister"? He replied "im 'e's Gawd". For some time after I thought that God was an Admiral of the Fleet. I'll never forget the day, it was 26th October 1928, Trafalgar Day. My arrival home, proudly bearing a huge piece of cake, caused some merriment. You see, Dad was a pastrycook. Talk about coals to Newcastle.

All six boys joined the navy at the outbreak of the war in 1939. Three were sadly last at sea. I lost track of the other two.

© Eric Mutton, ex PO AM(A).

WE REGRET TO ANNOUNCE THE NAMES OF
THOSE MEMBERS WHO HAVE
"CROSSED THE BAR"

WE WILL REMEMBER THEM.

P.RESTALL	<i>ex - EA1(A)</i>	ANGUS
P.ABBOT	<i>ex - Lt.(A)RNVR</i>	BOURNEMOUTH
B.K.CRANE	<i>ex - Lt.Cdr.RN</i>	BRISTOL
A.CRIPPS	<i>ex - NA(SE)</i>	BRISTOL
P.H.BIBBY	<i>ex - NA(AH)</i>	ESSEX
N.HART	<i>ex - AM(A)</i>	ESSEX
J.W.TURNER	<i>ex - AM(E)</i>	ESSEX
W.BELLIS	<i>ex - LREM(A)</i>	Gtr.MANCHESTER
R.LOWE	<i>ex - AM</i>	Gtr.MANCHESTER
T.TWISS	<i>ex - LAM(A)</i>	Gtr.MANCHESTER
L.RICHMAN	<i>ex - POAF(A)</i>	HITCHIN
G.BELL	<i>ex - AM(O)</i>	NE TYNE & WEAR
M.JEFFRIES	<i>ex - AM(E)</i>	NE TYNE & WEAR
C.A.BEVAN	<i>ex - Lt.RN</i>	SOUTHDOWN
R.E.BROOM	<i>ex - AM(E)</i>	WATFORD

Contributions for inclusion in the "Airey Fairey", the Journal of the National Fleet Air Arm Association, are very welcome and should be submitted by the deadline to the Hon. Editor. It must be appreciated that due to space limitations, it may not always be possible to include them in any particular issue but those not used will be retained for future issues. We will do our best to include forthcoming events that may be of general interest.

We are still receiving articles from magazines, newspapers etc. which, without written permission, we are unable to use. The same applies to photographs. Due to the method of printing, photos in newspapers are not suitable for copying we need a copy of the original.

Should you wish for any material to be returned then it will be necessary to include a S.A.E?

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**DEADLINE FOR ARTICLES FOR THE NEXT ISSUE IS
30TH APRIL 1999.**

LIST OF ACCOUTREMENTS ON SALE FROM THE TREASURER

17th April 1998.

ITEM	Price (Incl. P&P)
Ties	£6.50
Gold Wire Blazer Badges	£11.00
Silk Emb. Blazer Badges	£8.50
Life Members Badges	£1.00
Members Lapel Badges (Gilt)	£1.25
Members Spouse/Associate Lapel Badges (Chrome)	£1.25
Head Scarves	£8.25
Beret Badges	£6.75
Car Stickers	£0.50
Membership Cards	£0.15

ITEMS BOUGHT TO ORDER.

Short Sleeve Pilot Shirts	£15.00
Acrylic Sweaters	£16.00
Lambswool Sweaters	£22.50

Colours available:

White, Navy, Red, Light Blue, Maroon, Black, Grey, Bottle Green,
Royal Blue and Cream.

Sizes:

32" to 56" in 2" stages. Shirts S, M, L, XL, XXL.

Bomber Jacket (Lightweight Polycotton) Navy ONLY. £24.50

Orders to the Treasurer, money with order please. Cheques to be made payable to: Fleet Air Arm Association (National).

Items will be ordered by the Treasurer and they will be sent direct from the manufacturer. The invoice will be sent to the Treasurer for him to pay. This is a safeguard against NON MEMBERS of the Association from purchasing these items.

Note. Berets may be obtained from:

Uniform Clothing Store,
HMS Collingwood,
Newgate Lane,
Fareham, Hants.

Last known cost - £6.71

Tel. 01705 722351

*Front Page
HMS ARK ROYAL, 1978.
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