



# The Fleet Air Arm Association



Airey Fairey

Issue No.19 – Spring 2011





## **THE FLEET AIR ARM ASSOCIATION**

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# Fleet Air Arm Association

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## Websites

The Fleet Air Arm Association website [www.faaa.org.uk](http://www.faaa.org.uk)

Fleet Air Arm Museum [www.fleetairarm.com](http://www.fleetairarm.com) (Yeovilton RNAS) 01935 842600

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## Editorial

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As you flick through your copy of Airey Fairey 19 you will spot some changes and as a consequence for some, the copy promised in Airey Fairey 18 is still to be included - for which I offer a sincere apology. Two events have overtaken the planning - the decision to 'wind up' the Telegraphist Air Gunners Association (TAGs) and the inclusion of copy in volume from RNAS Culdrose. The latter follows the efforts made by Peter Roalf, who not only made further contact with 814 Squadron but arranged for press releases from the Public Relations team to be sent to me. The result can be found in the Squadrons section together with news from RNAS Yeovilton. The Squadrons section keeps us (the reader) in touch with today's Fleet Air Arm but the past has not been forgotten.

Our thanks to Vice Admiral Sir Adrian Johns for providing an article titled an 'Update from the Rock', which I know you will enjoy. Our News section includes an update from the activities of the Fly Navy Federation and its future plans and some information on 'The Navy Campaign' (Commodore Steve Jermy). This year is the 70th Anniversary of the first Russian convoy operation and to mark the 'occasion' there is an article that draws on the copy supplied by Fred Udell (Memory Lane).

Also some good news in that the Obituary Section is very short compared with the AF18 copy. The NOTICEBOARD in the Navy News has carried copy for those who have 'crossed the bar' and a request has been received for future copy to give where possible, further information, for example 'nicknames and ships/establishments 'they' served on'. The Navy News has also published articles for the Essex Branch Taranto evening and the award of the Les Sayer Swordfish Trophy.

There have been some changes to the Branch details on the inside back cover. Eric Pitt is covering the Bristol Branch Secretary's post for Bill Sage and the meeting arrangements for the Bournemouth Branch and the Kent Branch have changed. Could the Secretaries please check their Branch entry on the back cover of the magazine?

Although there was recall of the WWII jeep in Fleet Air Arm livery, there was sadly no reply to the feed back that I passed to the seeker of information. No one could give further information on the Fairchild Cornell aircraft (Canada).

I still have to stress that 'Crown Copyright MOD' MUST be respected. No reproduction of photographs in any form please!

Finally a big thankyou to Terry (Hubby) who continues to help bring the Airey Fairey to print and to all who have been keeping me informed or providing me with copy for the magazine. Finally always remember the AIREY FAIREY is your Magazine and it needs your input and support. My telephone number is 01923 676619 and my postal address is 15 Chichester Way, Garston, Watford, Herts WD25 9TY.

*Margaret*

# Update from the Rock

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Vice Admiral Sir Adrian Johns KCB CBE ADC

With saluting guns blazing, flags flying and bands playing, my wife, Suzie, and I made our ceremonial arrival in Gibraltar at the end of October 2009. It hardly seems possible that we have now spent two Christmases here and have been on the Rock for nearly 18 months already. Time has flown by – perhaps a sign of advancing age though I would prefer to believe that it's simply a case of how busy we have been. And we certainly have been busy. We have been up and down and through the Rock exploring the tunnels, seeing the sights and visiting the many organisations, institutions, businesses and charities across this fascinating and unique territory.



much new building in the last couple of decades that parts of Gibraltar, particularly the waterfront areas, are hard to recognise.

Perhaps the one thing that reassuringly has not changed is the people. They are still the warm, friendly open and generous folk that I recall from decades ago. Gibraltarians are never short of an opinion whether it is about politics, sport or any other matter but the one thing that unites them is that they remain steadfastly British and intensely proud of it.

The Governor's job is an interesting mix of diplomatic, political, ceremonial, and representational duties. He is the Queen's representative in the Territory and is thus the de facto Head of State as well as being a constitutional part of the overall government of Gibraltar. Relations with Spain are interesting. She retains her claim to Gibraltar and, in particular, still believes the territorial waters surrounding the Rock belong to her claiming they were never ceded to Britain in the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713.

Many of you reading this will know Gibraltar well, or at least, like me, you will think you do. I certainly found that it took me at least six months to realise that the many visits I had made here in the navy really only scratched the surface of this place. Many of the old social institutions endure – the Donkey's Flip Flop (aka the Horseshoe) and the Mad Monk (aka the Angry Friar) still do a roaring trade with passing sailors. But there has been so





The UK and Gibraltar naturally have a very different view about what are now internationally recognised as British Gibraltar Territorial Waters. All this leads to some interesting confrontations with our big neighbour across the bay. Suffice to say there's never a dull moment!

The Royal Navy has a key part to play in all of this in representing and protecting British sovereignty here. There is nothing quite like the sight of a white ensign to make the point. We have permanently based here two small patrol boats, which do a great job of flying the flag but Gibraltar always welcomes visiting major warships. Sadly, these are fewer and farther between than ever before and, with the latest round of defence cuts, the situation isn't likely to get better. Gone are the days of Fleet or Flotilla visits with huge social and sporting programmes but the RN is still very widely respected and warmly welcomed here.

My appointment as Governor is nominally for 3 years with a possible extension to four. Suzie and I are thoroughly enjoying our time here though the only slight drawback is that it is not always easy to get back to the UK for FAA Association reunions and the like. Nevertheless, you are very much in our thoughts and we both send our warmest regards to members everywhere.

And don't forget, a warm welcome always awaits you on the Rock!



# FAAA and Fly Navy Federation

## News in brief

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### Annual reunion and AGM (2011)

The AGM will to be held at Bournemouth this year. 132 people are expected to attend. Barry Simons is happy with all the arrangements - the Hotel has been fully refurbished. Our thanks to Barry and Dorothy for the time and continuous support they have given to the event over the past years. Barry will definitely be stepping down this year, so for the Event to continue a replacement is a must.

### National Committee

Our Secretary Dickie Bird has for personal reasons been unable to meet the commitments of National Secretary. Let's hope that as the year progresses Dicky will move into happier times. Peter Murray (Watford Branch) has agreed to take up the National Secretary Post. Ben Worship has given notice of retirement as FAAA National Treasurer in 2012 – after 21 years of service. Arnold Thompson is looking for someone to take over as Daedalus Branch Secretary.

### Airshows 2011

There are 3 airshows taking place at North Weald – **April 17<sup>th</sup>**, **June 5<sup>th</sup>** (family day), **July 2/3** (Meeting of the Warbirds). FAAA Contact is Peter Roalf (Essex Branch Secretary). Bournemouth Council have invited the FAAA to attend their Airshow – **18-24<sup>th</sup> August**. This will give us an opportunity to display our Marketing tent –perhaps within the 'Navy Village' area. Increased Insurance liability has been arranged. Other airshows are being considered. Yeovilton Air Display is on **June 9<sup>th</sup>**.

### The Fleet Air Arm Association Website

Our Webmaster, like the Editor is always looking for copy. He has arranged for full web access for FAAA Members. On line members with access can post FAAA related messages to the website. To gain access you have to be a paying member. For more information contact Ray Day directly – [webmaster@faaa.org.uk](mailto:webmaster@faaa.org.uk)

### The Eastchurch Aviation Pioneer Memorial Service

There will be a service at the Pioneer Memorial in Eastchurch on **Friday 6<sup>th</sup> May**. Standards will be paraded. In the absence of our Chairman, Vice Chairman Ray Thomas will liaise with the Eastchurch Council and distribute paperwork as necessary. All Associations are invited to attend. The main event is open to all but there is a limit of 30 places for the post-service social (but a good pub nearby for all others).

### TAG Association

A final date for winding-up of the TAG Association has not yet been agreed. For the next three years the FAAA has agreed to run the TAG Memorial service at Lee-On-Solent. This year the service will be on **Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> May**.

### The FAA Memorial - National Memorial Arboretum

The repairs to the Memorial are in hand and final completion will be in spring. Costs are now available for the ground-works and blank sandstone plinths (approx. £8000-£9000) and the ground-works will start in



spring subject to funding being available. Pledged monies from the Associations have to date reached £3500. Each sandstone block will cost approximately £200 per association/squadron for: removal, sandblasting with logo/crest, final placement (once the ground-works have been completed).

### **Remembrance Day Cenotaph March Past**

The ticket allocation for the Cenotaph parade did not give the FAA Associations the opportunity to form up as a column or to co-ordinate arrival at the FAA Memorial for the ceremony at the Embankment. The **November 13<sup>th</sup> 2011** march will be more tightly controlled. A robust plan will be in place to ensure that all organisations arrive at the FAA ceremony on the Embankment at the same time. The FAA will march as a column again, but as individual associations as per the 2009 event. Individual Associations will apply for their own tickets and, to be discussed at the next Federation meeting, the possibility of a 'single organisational lead' on the day.

### **Auction of 100th whisky bottle**

The '100 year' Celebration Whisky Bottle No.1 (50 year old) and Bottle No.100 (25 year old), will be auctioned. No.1 at the FNHT Sea Fury dinner, and No.100 at the Fixed Wing dinner, with maximum return to the FNHT and NMA memorial fund. All present at the 12th meeting of the Federation agreed that this was a suitable use of Federation funds (£179). There is one final bottle of 25 year old to be sold.

### **The Navy Campaign**

At the twelfth meeting of the Fly Navy Federation, Commodore Steve Jermy gave a brief on '**The Navy Campaign**' -. A project led by senior retired officers to redress some of the major issues facing the Navy - and specifically the FAA - following the \*SDSR. The travesty of the cancellation of the Harrier programme and its knock-on effects is one of the issues. The Campaign has had success in raising the temperature of the political debate, and is going from strength to strength. A website is being set up which will soon go live. The information on the site will be available for all to use. Associations can help by using the web information on their own websites, lobbying MP's and writing to the papers. Web Address - [www.thenavycampaign.com](http://www.thenavycampaign.com).

### **The Government's Defence Committee SDSR (Editor)**

\*On January 11th the Government announced a major new inquiry into the outcomes of the Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) within the wider context of the National Security Strategy (NSS). The points to be discussed are: how the NSS and SDSR relate to each other as strategic and coherent documents, the role of the Ministry of Defence, what capability gaps will emerge due to the SDSR, whether the prescriptions of the SDSR will allow the MOD to balance its budget and make the required efficiency savings, whether a funding gap still remains, how the implementation and success of the NSS and SDSR will be measured, and the timing of future SDSRs and the ability to plan for the medium to long term, and the process for renewing and updating the NSS, including the regeneration of lost capabilities.

## Events

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### The National Standard Bearer's engagements - 2010

Our National Standard Bearer Alan Breward has had a busy year. At least 4 events on the National programme, 3 at the National Memorial Alreswas (NMA), and further three known requests (see below).

- Armed Forces National event in Cardiff.
- Battle of Britain veterans' service
- Aviation Pioneer Memorial Eastchurch
- Remembrance Day Service at Lee on Solent
- Dedication of the tree to HMS Jupiter -NMA
- National Service Foundation Day NMA
- Armistice Day at the NMA
- RAF Battle of Britain Memorial at Capel le Ferne
- Weymouth & Portland Veterans Service of Remembrance and parade
- RAF National service day (Cosford)

Alan is seen here talking to the RAF man in charge of the Parade at St Paul's Cathedral following the RAF World War II veterans' service (September 7th). Mick Wyatt, Watford's Standard bearer, was nearby but not in the shot. The rain fortunately stopped for the parade to the Guildhall.

On June 26th Alan attended the Armed Forces Day Parade at Cardiff. Stand as Right Hand marker - the FAAA Standard being one of the senior Standards on parade. The Event was attended by Prince Charles, who took the salute, and Lady Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall. An estimated 80000 people supported the parade.

"It was very hot and the 'Ticker-Tape' shower was so thick I couldn't see if I was in or out of step (nor could anyone else!). Support from the people of and in Cardiff that day was brilliant, the clapping and cheering was deafening, it brought tears to your eyes and a lump in the throat."

National Service Day at the National Memorial Arboretum 27th June 2010 saw Alan once more Senior Standard Bearer on Parade, Right Hand Marker, 23 Standards on Parade. There were over 1000 people at the parade and Service. Some competition though this time – dogs are not normally allowed on site. There are two exceptions a Guide and a Regimental dog. More from Alan in the next issue.



## The Pioneer Aviation Memorial service at Eastchurch October 8th 2010



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The Pioneer Memorial Service was held at Eastchurch on October 8th 2010. In years to come it is expected that the annual service at Eastchurch will be held on the first Friday in May. Eastchurch Parish council will continue to host the memorial (erected in 1955 as a tribute to the first naval aviators who commenced training on 1 March 1911).

Commodore Martin Westwood RN led the tributes to the Pioneer Aviators and drew attention to the fact that 2010 was the 70th anniversary of the attack at Taranto (1940) by Swordfish aircraft of the Fleet Air Arm operating from HMS Illustrious where, “for the first time in history, a strike force from sea-based air power delivered a decisive blow to an enemy fleet which led to naval, air and land outcomes that greatly benefitted the allied cause. This was, in other words, a truly joint operation”. Commander Geoff Bowker RN joined him in thanking council staffs for their help in organising the event.

Then it was eyes to the sky as the Royal Navy Historic Flight Seahawk flew over head in tribute to the service rendered by generations of naval airmen. It was viewed with pride by all. Picture (L to R) Commander Geoff Bowker RN, Commodore Martin Westwood RN, Rear Admiral Chris Clayton - current chairman of the Federation of FAA Associations, Arnold Thompson Chairman of the FAAA. This year the Memorial Service will be on Friday May 6th 2011.



## RAF World War II Veterans Service St Paul's Cathedral September 7th 2010

On the 70th anniversary of the day the first German bombs fell on London a small group of FAAA members made their separate ways to St Paul's Cathedral (despite the tube strike) to remember all those who fought off the Germans to win the Battle of Britain and for those old enough to remember – the 'Blitz spirit'. The Service of Remembrance was the City of London's salute to Battle of Britain and World War II Veterans. Former pilots and other military personnel were standing alongside fire-fighters, nurses, ambulance workers etc. from the era. The Duke of Kent in the uniform of Honorary Air Chief Marshall in the RAF and the Lord Mayor of London were among the dignitaries attending the service. The Duke took the royal salute outside the cathedral as air cadets and current servicemen and women joined veterans for the parade through the city of London which terminated at the Guildhall – one of the Reception venues for the invited guests (Guildhall for the FAAA). Onlookers crowded the street to watch the flypast of a Dakota, Spitfire and Lancaster. Of great interest was the Spitfire that stood at the bottom of the cathedral steps and at the Guildhall the fire engine that survived the Blitz was the centre of attention despite a Spitfire being nearby. A rewarding day for many and the spirit of the comradeship, throughout the days of the Blitz poignantly recorded at the Service, continued throughout the day.



## Tree Dedication Service HMS Jupiter 25th September 2010, Doug Heath

On Saturday the 25th of September 2010 the Local and Lichfield RNA Branches and the Tamworth Sea Cadets supported the HMS Jupiter Association at the Arboretum where a tree was dedicated in memory of the Ship and Crew of the WW2 Destroyer which sank in the Java Sea in 1942. The Parade was led by the Fleet Air Arm National Standard.

The Lichfield and Tamworth RNA standards were supported by the Sea Cadets who carried their own Standard and also the Standards of the Tamworth Fleet Air Arm and Royal Marine Associations.

*Editor: A 'good all round' turnout. Doug with his RNA and FAAA Daedalus links was asked by the Jupiter Association to provide support to the dedication.*







## Remembrance Sunday – Fleet Air Arm Memorial November 14th 2010, Margaret Gidman

There were seven members of the FAAA at the Cenotaph Parade and the Ceremony at the Embankment. A much reduced number than the previous year. The various FAA Associations were not able to march as a group (as in 2009), given the ticket allocation. This made it difficult for all to march together to the FAA Monument at the Embankment. Peter Murray laid the wreath on behalf of the FAAA. As the picture shows there were 10 wreaths laid including one from the Fly Navy Federation laid by the current chairman of the Federation of FAA Associations -Rear Admiral Chris Clayton. The hope is that arrangements can be made to ensure that this year we march as a group and then continue together to the FAA Memorial.



## St Peter's Church Martindale

Whilst waiting for the service to start we met the Chairman of GLARAC (an Association formed to perpetuate the memory of 1531 officers and men of HMS Glorious, Ardent and Acasta). There is a small Church – St Peter's Church, Martindale, which has a window dedicated to the memory of Lt Cdr W H Parkin, a Swordfish pilot and member of the Fleet Air Arm, who was one of the men killed when the German battle cruisers Scharnhorst and Gneisenau sank the aircraft carrier HMS Glorious and two accompanying destroyers, Ardent and Acasta, during a surprise attack in the Norwegian Sea on June 8th 1940. An Annual Service is held at the Church in memory of those who died on that day. Last year was the 70th Anniversary year.



## The Lee-on-Solent Fleet Air Arm Memorial

The Lee-on-Solent FAA memorial is dedicated to the 1925 men of the Fleet Air Arm who have no known grave, most of them having been lost at sea. Why Lee-on-Solent? It was the location of the Naval Air Station HMS Daedalus. The Fleet Air Arm served in almost every theatre between 1939-1945. Among those remembered are 20 men from the Portsmouth area. In just this small sample the extent of the FAA can be seen through the description of the locations where those who are remembered died. HMS Audacity (Atlantic); HMS Avenger (transit US to England); HMS Dasher (at anchor in the Clyde); HMS Ferret (Derry Northern Ireland); HMS Formidable (South Atlantic/Mediterranean); HMS Furious (Air attack on Petsamo); HMS Glorious (off the coast of Norway); HMS Goshawk (Trinidad); HMS Hermes (South Atlantic); HMS Illustrious (launching diversionary air raids on Sabang); HMS Puncher (Alesund Norway); HMS Sparrowhawk (Orkneys); 838 Naval Air Squadron.



## Telegraphist Air Gunners Association Memorial Service

Lee-on-Solent May 16th 2010

Every year the Members of the Telegraphist Air Gunners Association assemble at Lee-on-Solent in front of the Fleet Air Arm War Memorial to pay tribute to their departed colleagues. The 16th May 2010 (63rd Anniversary) was no exception but sadly, time is taking its toll - where there used to be many there are now a few. Old age is the culprit - travel becomes difficult. It was anticipated that this year's Memorial Service at Lee could well be the last one. The Fleet Air Arm Association has agreed to 'take over' the responsibility for the organisation of the Service from 2011. This year (2010) was the first

time members of the FAAA were invited to join the TAGs at Lee. A good number attended and shared the informal supper and musical entertainment at the Lee Golf Club on Saturday, followed next day by the service on the front and lunch in the Senior Rates Mess at HMS Collingwood. TAG Secretary, Ken Davies and his wife Barbara had both worked so hard to put this reunion together, but Ken was not well enough to attend for the second year running and sadly crossed the bar in September 2010.

## The Pearly Kings and Queens Costermonger's Harvest Festival

Some may have spotted the Navy News cover of last year's Costermonger's Harvest Festival celebration (December issue). The Gidmans have attended this event at the invite of the Pearly King and Queen of the Old Kent Road (Larry and Doreen Golding) for the last two years and they have thoroughly enjoyed it, whilst at the same time representing the FAAA. It is a truly English Event which is held in the London Guildhall courtyard, in full view of any visitor passing by 'on the day'. It is followed by a march to the Church of Bow Bells for the traditional harvest festival service and presentation of gifts.

Amongst those taking part in the parade were the former chairman of the HMS Glory Association, Gerald Evans, and secretary Patrick Williams, along with a contingent from London Reservist unit HMS President. Sadly, Larry (whose last ship, during World War II was HMS Glory) was unable to attend the event because of ill-health. Airey Fairey 17 (P10) has a picture of Doreen and Larry in his much talked about Pearly King suit which has anchors, FAA badge, an aircraft carrier on each knee, etc. all formed with pearl buttons.





## Memory Lane

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### The Russian Convoys 1941-1945 Fred Udell Hitchin Branch

This year (2011) there is a school in Murmansk that will be celebrating the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the first Russian convoy operation that arrived in Russia on the 31<sup>st</sup> August 1941. These convoys were to continue until 1945. Thousands of service men lost their lives and many ships were destroyed during that time.

Convoy veterans (including Fred) visited the school in 2005. They were shown around the school Museum in which the teacher and pupils have assembled items donated by the veterans. This activity has been part of their history lessons. Also in 2005 Fred and wife Violet attended a Downing Street reception to honour the war effort of servicemen on convoys. The visit marked the culmination of an eight year campaign to have 'their' effort recognised by a medal. No medal was awarded but a badge - The Arctic Emblem (more detail later). Fred was interviewed by the Comet Newspaper in March 2005 and from this Newspaper cutting the story of a 17 year old on Russian Convoys has evolved. Also with Fred's help, plus web searches, details of the aircraft carrier, HMS Campania, has been assembled. Fred at 17 years old, volunteered in 1943 to join the FAA. He served as a Leading Aircraft Mechanic aboard the aircraft carrier HMS Campania. On board were 900 men, aircraft (18 including American Wildcats to deter torpedo bombers), Swordfish and Fairy Fulmars) piloted by 'the most skilful pilots ever'. His main duties were to maintain the munitions for the aircraft including bombs and depth charges.

Fred went on five convoys – each 20 'on board' days at a time, under constant threat of attack - plus having to face the appalling weather conditions – storms, gale force seas, huge waves that rolled the ship to 45° angles. There was no 'proper clothing' and typical food would be dried cod and beetroot. As a volunteer Fred never complained because he felt that whatever befell him it was his own fault! But the constant pressure of cold and exhaustion took its toll. The German planes would perform nuisance flights, to disturb sleep and interrupt routines; the alarm would constantly go off – the call for 'action stations' no matter where you were at the time. Teams would work until they dropped - aircraft had to be repaired there were no replacements.

But the biggest challenge was the -43° cold. It was so cold people could make snowmen on decks. The decks were completely iced over making them top heavy. Crashes were a regular occurrence. The arrester wires would slow down the aircraft on landing. The ice stuck the wires to the deck and as a consequence planes and aircrew were lost overboard. Attempts to rescue anyone, who had been in the freezing water for more than 10 minutes, were abandoned because by that time they would already be dead.

I hope that for those who 'gave of their all' on the Russian convoys, there will be public recognition in the UK this year for the 70th anniversary of the Russian Convoys.

## HMS Campania

There were two HMS Campania. The first was a seaplane carrier (1915-18) which was wrecked in November 1918.

The second was a 'Naval' Escort carrier that was laid down in 1941, launched in 1943 - converted from an incomplete hull of a refrigerated cargo ship and launched in June 1943. The ship received the first Action Information Organisation (AIO)

suite to be fitted to a carrier and had type 277 radar. The height indication and good coverage at low level given by the radar system proved invaluable for directing both her own and other carriers' aircraft. HMS Campania was one of the escort ships providing protection for the merchant ships carrying material to Russia. Her Swordfish aircraft sank the German submarines U921 and U365 (December 1944) and 3 BV 138 flying boats on the Arctic Circle. In 1945 HMS Campania 'flew the flag' for Rear Admiral McGrigor (1<sup>st</sup> Cruiser squadron Home Fleet) and Vice-Admiral F Dlymple-Hamilton (10<sup>th</sup> Cruiser Squadron Home Fleet) whilst escorting Russian convoys. Between December 1941-1945, convoys of merchant ships and Navy escorts delivered more than 16 million tons of material to Russia, including key military supplies\* - tanks, aircraft, trucks, tons of ammunition. The Ships sailed from the Clyde or Scapa Flow to Murmansk or Vayenga in northern Russia.

HMS Campania survived the war to be loaned, in 1949/50, to the 'Festival of Britain Organisation' for use as a mobile exhibition ship prior to being put on reserve in 1951. Her last task was to serve as Flagship of the Special Squadron, under Rear-Admiral Torlesse, which went to Australia to carry out the atom-bomb trials on Monte Bello Island (October 1952). On her return she was paid off at Portsmouth (December 1952).



## The Arctic Emblem

The Arctic emblem consists of a small white star with a red dot and an arc with the words 'The Arctic' printed in blue. It is a unique emblem that can be worn as a recognised addition to medals. The red dot represents the fields of the flags of Russia and Norway. The Arctic Emblem – 'a unique symbol to be worn on the lapel' – is available to all Armed Forces and Merchant Navy personnel who served north of the Arctic Circle and west of the Urals between September 1939 and 8th May 1945 and next of kin of those who have died'. The Emblem was first announced by the Government in March 2005 at a reception for Arctic veterans. The first presentation of the Emblem took place on the quarterdeck of HMS Belfast on 10<sup>th</sup> October 2006 – the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first regular convoy's arrival at Archangel, North Russia. This Arctic Emblem is in addition to the Atlantic Star medal (which Arctic veterans received) which was presented at the end of the Second World War.

*Editor note: \*There are detailed numbers for 'materials and ships' on various websites but as they differ numbers have been excluded.*



## Auditing the Air Force

### Steve Chinnock MBE

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On promotion to Fleet Chief Petty Officer (Warrant Officer) in 1973, I became Air Engineering Officer (AEO) of Culdrose Station Flight - at the time, the Flight incorporated the Search and Rescue Unit (SAR).

My home and family were a long way away in Kinross, Scotland, but with the rundown of the Northern air stations I did not hold much hope of serving nearer, especially as I had spent the last twelve years on rotary wing units. Then Father Christmas smiled on me. I received a phone call from the appointments Commander telling me to present myself at RAF Leuchars in Fife (January 3<sup>rd</sup> 1974). Although pleased, I was also intrigued. 892 Squadron with their Phantoms were disembarked to Leuchars. There was only one Warrant Officer (Jeff Williams) on the books - he was fit and able, so why me?

On joining the Station I found out why. Wing Commander Ram, (of Indian origin) had joined the Station in command of the Engineering Wing. On learning he was technically responsible for 892 and the Phantom Flight (PTF) whilst they were on his patch, he decided he wanted Naval backup. Thus, I was given an office, desk, chair and telephone in his headquarters and the grand title of Royal Naval Liaison and Inspection Officer (RNLIO)). Having eventually organised myself I spent the next few months awaiting the RN aircraft and facilities, writing up reports on my portable type-writer and submitting them to Wing Commander Ram and the Navy. Charles Ram had not come across such a system workshops in the Air Force and was so impressed, he summoned me and said 'Right, off you go and inspect all Leuchars Squadrons and support and report to me.' Having recovered from the shock, I returned to my 'caboose' to think about it. Knowing little, if anything about RAF technical policy, I had to learn. So I obtained a copy of their technical bible, which was three times as thick as ours (NAMMS). Eventually, I braced myself for the inspection of an Air Force Unit. Suffice to say I was not welcomed with a cup of coffee. To be frank, I was met with hostility. By this time I was also President of the WO. and Sgts. Mess (Chairman of the Mess Committee. CMC).

Life was not exactly a bowl of cherries.

Gradually, the Station got used to the ‘Gestapo’ probing their inner secrets and receiving reports which Charles Ram followed with gusto to ensure all recommendations were actioned. There are many occurrences I could relate from this period, some funny, some not so funny, but this is not the place to do so. However, the good side came when RAF Leuchars won the Strike Command Efficiency cup. I believe that was in 1974. Wing Commander Ram was convinced that the inspection reports instituted by him were a major contributory factor.



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On completion of my secondment to the RAF, I relieved Jeff Williams as the Senior Maintenance Rating (SMR) of 892 Squadron.

I was the Inspection Warrant Officer during the last commission of the fourth HMS Ark Royal and an Admiral came on board to say, ‘Those Phantoms and Buccaneers are transferring to the RAF in two years time and we don’t want complaints.’ Fortunately there weren’t and I was subsequently honoured with the award of the MBE.

The other aspect of life at Leuchars took an amazing turn. One night in the mess, after a couple of beers, a member of the Station Pipe Band was bemoaning the fact that the base drummer had been posted and they needed a replacement. I joined the band, graduated to Drum Major, and led the band to win the RAF Pipe Band Cup, then to appear at the Edinburgh Tattoo. The final icing on the cake came when I led the massed pipe bands of the RAF at the 1977 Queen’s Jubilee celebrations at RAF Finningley. They were happy days.

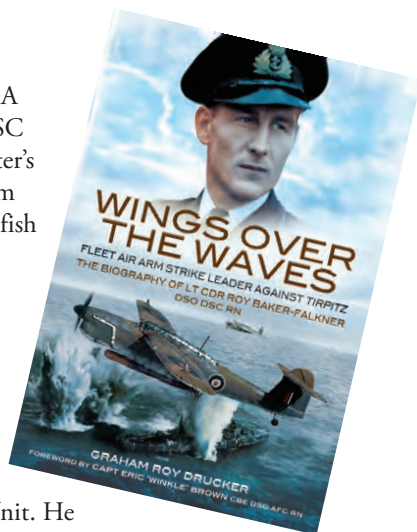
### Update from the New Zealand FAA Museum

**B**ook sale of the New Zealand FAA Museum’s publication - ‘FLYING NAVY’, has exceeded 500 copies. The majority of sales have come from the North Island and overseas. More sales are required to keep the now established ‘one book publishing unit’. The unit has saved thousands of dollars in expenses and distribution charges, but it still has to retrieve the remaining production and despatch costs etc. of the publication. When these costs are paid, all profit will be channelled to the NZ Fleet Air Arm Museum. One spin-off from the book has been letters received from the widows, sons and daughters, grandchildren, parents and other relatives and friends of FAA aircrew killed on active service. For some, the service careers and photographs are the only accessible memorial of their loved ones. There is another book underway by Paul Sortehaug which will record a wide range of wartime activities of many more New Zealand aircrew of the Fleet Air Arm. The Publication date is to be announced.

## Lt Cdr Roy Baker-Falkner DSO DSC RN

**W**ings over the Waves: strike leader against Tirpitz, A biography of Lt Cdr Roy Baker-Falkner DSO DSC RN (Pen & Sword, 27 October 2010) written by his sister's son Graham Roy Drucker - Director of the Fleet Air Arm Archive 1939-1945 and honorary member of the Swordfish heritage Trust.

The Foreword below has been written by Captain Eric Melrose 'Winkle' Brown, CBE, DSC, AFC, RN – Former Chief Naval Test Pilot.



"I first met Lt Cdr Roy Baker-Falkner on 1 February 1943, when he arrived as the pilot of a Barracuda II at the Royal Naval Air Station, Arbroath, where I was serving in the Service Trials Unit. He was about to undertake deck-landing trials on the aircraft carrier HMS Illustrious with this new type of aircraft. I knew of him by repute, for he was a distinguished Fleet Air Arm squadron commander, and a very competent pilot, who had been chosen to introduce the Barracuda II into service. In person he was tall, handsome and personable, and after our meeting I could well envisage him as a role model for young pilots designated to be torpedo-bomber aircrew, for he had already built up a background of operational experience in Swordfish aircraft, as his award of the DSC bore witness. After carrying out intensive flying trials with the Barracuda, not the most loved of aircraft, he became CO of the first Barracuda squadron and a wing leader in the Fleet Air Arm, and was particularly involved in attacks on the German battleship Tirpitz in Norway, for which he won his DSO. With such a fine record he was earmarked to become the CO of the Naval Test Squadron at A&AEE, Boscombe Down, but sadly was lost on 18 July 1944, two weeks before he was due to take up his new posting. His final flight was on anti-submarine patrol from a carrier operating off Norway, and failed to return in poor weather. A great loss to the Fleet Air Arm, which will not forget him".

For those who are interested the book is available from 'Pen & Sword Books'. The 400+ page, hardback was on sale (October 2010) at a discount price of £20 + pp £4.00. Web address: [www.pen-and-sword.co.uk](http://www.pen-and-sword.co.uk)

Graham Drucker would like to hear from anyone who knew his uncle Lt Cdr Baker Falkner, 'BF' or 'Daddy' to those who knew him. (Contact Editor for more detail).

# Telegraphist Air Gunners Association (TAGs)

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## Letter to members of the Merchant Navy Association Fred Good Watford Branch

*Editor: Fred Good submitted this letter to the Merchant Navy Association (MNA) as a result of the MNA Chairman's suggestion that the MNA be used to keep MNA members who were TAGs 'together'. This letter was printed in the MNA November circular. Currently there is no way of knowing the whereabouts of any MAC TAG. This gives a good summary of the situation that the TAGs currently face.*

### TAGs

I am a DEMS (Defensively Equipped Merchant Shipping) member of the Merchant Navy Association and proud to be included. I was with the Fleet Air Arm 836 squadron during WW2 and once served on the Empire MacKendrick, one of 19 MAC Ships, (Merchant Aircraft Carriers).

There were 19 MAC Ships altogether, oilers and grainers, and each carried three or four Swordfish anti submarine aircraft. So with about 60 aircraft, each carrying three crew, there were about 180 aircrew and a similar number of service crew, which made us the largest squadron in the Fleet Air Arm. Each aircraft carried a crew of three; Pilot, Observer and Telegraphist Air Gunner. I was one of the latter, and we were known as TAGs. There were only ever some 3000 TAGs and today after about 70 years there are now only about 170 of us 'hanging on'. TAGs served in all areas of maritime conflict during the war and built a record to be proud of. After the war a group of us set up the Telegraphist Air Gunners Association but, sadly, after 63 years we have decided to call it a day. We are a small group of old men, scattered around the country and the difficulties of assembling a Committee and carrying out the onerous jobs of Secretary, Treasurer etc. are insurmountable.

So on 26th October we held our AGM at the Union Jack Club, where the overwhelming majority of members present voted to wind up the Association. It was a very sad occasion which left the members present looking stunned and dismayed. But it was the sensible thing to do and we will continue to hold our annual Memorial Service in May for the next five years at the Fleet Air Arm Memorial at Lee-on-Solent under the auspices of the Fleet Air Arm Association. In conclusion, if there is anyone out there who served on the MacKendrick or any MAC ship I would be delighted to hear from them.

Fred Good, Ex Po (A) 836 Squadron. FAA.

### Memorial Service Lee-on-Solent 2011

The date of the Lee-on-Solent Memorial Service is Sunday May 15th 2011. The arrangements for the Service have already been made by FAAA Chairman Arnold Thompson. Val Sayer has made arrangements for an evening dinner (Saturday 14th May) and a buffet lunch following the Memorial Service at Lee-on-Solent. Contact address: Mrs Val Sayer, The Observatory, Rowneys Farm, Mt Bures Road, Wakes Colne, Colchester, CO6 2AS.





## The inimitable Ken Davies PO (A) TAG Roy Gibbs

Our old comrade Ken ‘passed over the bar’ September 10th 2010 at the great age of 87. Early in WW2, he volunteered for Aircrew under the Fleet Air Arm Y Scheme and was accepted as a Telegraphist Air Gunner (TAG). After the usual joining period at HMS Royal Arthur, he started his Initial TAG’s training at HMS St.Vincent, graduating from there to Flying Training at RNAS Worthy Down. Having successfully won his ‘wings’ he joined 758 squadron in 1943, and then 766 Squadron, followed by a short period with 813 in Gibraltar and a draft to 845 squadron on HMS Battler in the Indian Ocean. It was here he was involved in the sinking of the German Tanker ‘Brake’ that had been supplying enemy submarines. 1945

saw him back at Lee-on-Solent (798 squadron) until he was released and referred to the Royal Fleet Reserve. Ken was a dedicated Swordfish man and did all his flying service in these obsolete biplanes which still managed to carry out so many operations for the Fleet Air Arm.

On his return to ‘Civvy Street’ he went back to his career in Banking.

When the TAG Association Hon. Sec. resigned some 25 years ago, Ken volunteered for the job. He was a great Hon. Sec., nothing was ever too much trouble – as other Committee Members died, he took on their jobs. At the finish, he was Hon. Sec., Membership Sec., Association Archivist and Magazine Distributor. He was greatly assisted in all these tasks by his wife Barbara who continued to deal with his work while he was fighting what was to be his final illness.

He will be very much missed and I would like to offer a big thankyou from the Association to Barbara, who is still holding down the job until the Association comes to terms with his loss. He leaves behind his loving wife, daughter and his latest pride and joy two grandchildren. Ken is pictured here with Barbara on the occasion of her 60th Birthday.

“Happy landings Ken and I hope you always pick up the first wire”.





## The self welding wing

### Roy Gibbs

It was May 1945 and The British Pacific Fleet, now operating as Task Force 57, was taking part in the invasion of Japanese Okinawa. Our brief was to protect the American's rear by continually attacking the many airfields and installations on the Sakishima Islands and Formosa to prevent any Japanese planes getting through. The operation had started in March 1945 and was eventually to become the longest continual operation carried out by carrier based aircraft against land based targets in WW2. We were totally supplied at sea by a large Fleet Train although they had to come from our nearest base in Australia. This meant that we were sometimes lacking in replacements necessary for continual operations and there was even a period when aircrews were flying two operations a day due to a shortage of aircrews.

On May 4th we were briefed to bomb anti aircraft positions on Hirara airfield on Miyako Jima an operation known as 'Flak Busting'.

Take off time was 0600 and as we took off I had a strange presentiment that all was not well. However it was a sunny day with a clear blue sky as we formed up over the fleet into a strike force. As we approached the target Alan my Pilot came through on the intercom and said 'No fighter opposition reported, why don't you use the Sting Gun for some ground strafing Jinx' (my squadron nickname)? The Sting Gun was a Browning 300 under the tail. Always glad to get a break from the turret I got down and cocked the gun. As we pulled out of our dive and dropped our bombs - I had started firing - there was a loud explosion. My immediate thought was the gun had blown up but suddenly realised we were diving steeply to port and that the starboard side was a mass of flame. I thought, "better get the side door open" and pulled on the emergency handle, but nothing happened, it was stuck. Almost as quickly as it happened the flames had stopped and we were flying level again. There were several small fires in the cockpit which I put out with the extinguisher, my water bottle and a more personal method. The interior of the cockpit was chaotic and I desperately tried to remember the radio course we had when switching to Avengers from Barracudas. To my own amazement, after fiddling with a few wires, the radio came back on. I called Alan on the intercom and he said 'clear the air and I'll get a Mayday out'. After

*The loss of a plane but not the pilot  
An incident where an Avenger actually fell  
into the water – unlike the one involved  
in 'The self welding wing' which had to be  
pushed over board.*



*An Avenger about to fall overboard  
with the pilot still 'on board'*



### *Pilot escapes as aircraft drops into the sea*

Unfortunately, there was no way I could get to him as the small tunnel was jammed with debris. 'Jinx, you'd better get back in the turret in case there are any stray Jap fighters about'.

Back in the turret I could see an Avenger alongside us and in its turret was my old pal Joe Hattersley who was signalling all sorts of rude messages to me. After a nerve stretching period of time, during which the wing seemed to be holding, we saw the Fleet below. Permission was granted to make a crash landing on deck and I don't think my joke about 'Coming in on a wing and a prayer' was really appreciated.

Alan, with a superb bit of piloting picked up the first wire and with a rending and shrieking of metal we skidded to a halt just short of the port side. Dropping down onto the cockpit floor I found the jammed door had fallen off and also the starboard wing. Frank was carried off on a stretcher and Alan and I were taken by the Doctor into the Island Sick Bay. Having ascertained we were OK we got his usual treatment for shock, a large medicinal brandy.

After debriefing I suddenly realised I had left some gear in the aircraft and went up to the Flight Deck to see if I could recover it. "Hard luck chum" they said "Your kite's been written off and thrown over the side". After a brief moment of sadness, I thought "No aircraft, No observer, No flying tomorrow". No such luck, a spare aircraft and observer were found for us and it was back over Sakishima the next morning.

*Editor: The crew - Pilot Sub.Lt Alan Ryman, Observer Midshipman Frank Burgess and Roy (Jinx) had been together as a crew for about a year. The Squadron was 820 Avengers (flying from HMS Indefatigable— one of 4 fleet carriers (the others were HMS Victorious, Illustrious (later replaced by HMS Formidable) and Indomitable). The BPF was permanently at sea for this operation and serviced by a large Fleet Train - apart from one shore visit to Leyte (HMS Indefatigable) for damage repairs from the Japanese Kamikaze (Suicide Bombers) attacks.*

the Mayday I heard Jonah our CO detail another Avenger to escort us. Alan came back on and reported: 'We have been hit in the starboard wing petrol tank, there is a massive hole in the wing and I don't know what is holding it together but I think the heat has welded it. We have one wheel jammed up and one jammed down and no hydraulics, so no flaps. It would be difficult to ditch so I'm going to try to reach the Fleet and request an emergency crash landing, Are you both OK?' Frank our Observer, said I have been hit in the right arm but have put a tourniquet on and have managed to stop the bleeding.

## Donations

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### Dr Rotman Plate

FAAA Chairman Arnold Thompson presented the Dr Rotman trophy for the Leading Technician Award 2009 on July 23rd 2010. The silver salver was presented to the Commander in charge of the Air Engineering School Commander Martin Jukes RN. The plate will be kept in the Trophy Cabinet at HMS Sultan with an honours board placed along side the cabinet. The recipient of the 2010 engraved trophy is still to be announced. Congratulations to Leading Air Engineering Technician (Avionics) Craig Merralls.



Picture © Crown Copyright MOD

### Gift to Chappel Church of England Primary school

For the past two years, Chappel Church of England Primary school has presented a very special award for Outstanding Achievement to a deserving pupil in the final year at the school. The prize, which is given in memory of CPO (TAG) Les Sayer MBE DSM, husband of Val Sayer, has been awarded to the 2010 winner - Abigail Thorn.

To win the prize a pupil has to show fortitude, compassion and strength of character, with or without academic aptitude. - the very qualities which made Les Sayer an exceptional individual. He started life as a Barnardo's Boy and went on to achieve great things during his life. Sadly he 'crossed the bar', aged 91 on 1st November 2008. He will be remembered by those who knew him during his lifetime and for many years to come, through the award of this fine trophy, which was donated by the Royal Navy Historic Flight. Until now, the trophy had no permanent home at the school but thanks to the generosity of A. Barber & Son – a Colchester building and joinery company, a trophy cabinet has been installed to not only display the trophy but one with enough room for a poster in recognition of the winner. (This award was reported in the Navy News).



### Wootton Bassett

Following a letter to the Mayor of Wootton Bassett, Bob Ridout received this reply: "Thankyou for your recent letter and for the support and thanks expressed for the people of Wootton Bassett, which are much appreciated. Every one of the repatriations is a sad event which reinforces the pride and gratitude we feel for our armed services personnel. We have received many letters and messages from people all over the world, wishing to share with us their own feelings of great sadness at the loss of our troops in Iraq and Afghanistan and who would themselves join us in Wootton Bassett to pay their respects if they could. My thanks once again, on behalf of Wootton Bassett and best wishes to the Fleet Air Arm Association Yeovil Branch."



Once again the FAAA has been thanked for its donation to provide Christmas boxes to “our brave Servicemen and women who are serving away from their families and friends”. A small desk calendar has been received, as a token of the Trustees’ appreciation of the Association’s generosity. The calendar was produced by a number of companies who paid, not only for its printing and publishing but also its distribution. This year 22,500 boxes were sent to the frontline – not only Afghanistan but to other hotspots and the ships and submarines are not forgotten.

The **uk4u-Thanks!** should be congratulated on its low running costs – 99.5p of every pound donated goes to the purchase of presents for the troops. Plus they have gained a prestigious national award (presented by the British Forces Foundation), for ‘The best Morale Item’ given to the frontline troops. One thankyou letter taken from many “The Box was a great morale booster for us in Afghanistan. The only thing that would have cheered me up more would be to be holding my baby daughter. Thanks from all of us for caring”.



### The Royal British Legion

One May morning in 1921 four men solemnly laid a wreath at the base of the Cenotaph in London and ‘laid’ the foundations for what was to become the Royal British Legion. To mark the Legion’s 90th year (2011) a fundraising appeal to raise £90 Million – a million pounds for each year, has been launched. Young, injured Servicemen needed help in 1921 and all will be aware that in 2011 we have young, injured Servicemen and women also in need of help. Given the huge improvements in field medicine, survival from horrific injuries on the battlefields of Afghanistan, have increased. The £90M is needed to create a centre for ex-servicemen and women where there is specialist help available that focus on ‘recovery through sports and adventure’. The centre will give the residents the opportunity to discover what they can do, rather than what they cannot do.

There are many in the FAAA who as individuals or through their Branches already donate/raise funds for the various organisations that support the country’s injured Servicemen. The RBL is certainly no exception.

The RBL in its own right has a range of activities including Darts tournaments, Pedal to Paris annual bike ride, Cathedral Concerts and the Poppy Appeal in November. There are two activities for groups. The weekend of June 11th/12th - Great Poppy Party time (a weekend set aside for a common purpose – a time for individuals to raise funds by ‘throwing a party’ for the ‘Heroes’) and the RBL annual Poppy walk (July 17th) which will take those on the walk to places of interest in central London. For more information go to: [www.britishlegion.org.uk](http://www.britishlegion.org.uk)

## HMS Illustrious sailors remembered

On Sunday 17th September 2010, a dedication and unveiling ceremony took place at Portland Marina, Dorset, of a Memorial commemorating the memory of twenty-nine sailors of HMS Illustrious who lost their lives when the liberty boat in which they were returning to their ship sank in Portland Harbour. The event marked the sixty-second anniversary of the tragedy which occurred on Sunday 17th October 1948. The HMS Illustrious Association was responsible for the production of the Memorial and for the organisation of the Ceremony. Over 120 members of the Association attended the Ceremony, including four survivors of the tragedy.

Twenty nine serving sailors from HMS Illustrious were there - each one representing a sailor who died in the tragedy. Mr Alf Lowe, GC, was awarded the George Cross for his bravery that night, and came from New Zealand to be present at the unveiling of the Memorial.

The First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Mark Stanhope GCB OBE ADC carried out the unveiling of the

Memorial, made from Portland Stone. The memorial 'looks out' across the harbour close to the spot where so many young lives were lost. The Fleet Air Arm Association was among those who donated funds to the HMS Illustrious Appeal. Its Honorary Vice President Rear Admiral Tom Cunningham ADC laid a wreath on behalf of the FAAA.



## The Fly Navy Heritage Trust (FNHT)

On November 25th 2010 The FNHT launched its new Website. It is well worth a visit. Not only is there an update on the RNHF but dates of events and online facilities related to subscriptions and donations. The FNHT raffle raised £7000 last year. The Trust now has a full time campaign director – Cdr Sue Eagles. There have been some new recruits - a core of well-known and wealthy personalities to help with the fund raising. This is already starting to produce results, with a major dinner to be held at Yeovilton on the 23rd of June. There are other events planned, including the 'Sea Fury' charity auction dinner (£75 per head) at HMS Wellington, a charity flying day with classic aircraft flights and tours of the Historic Flight, golf day at Bowood in Wilts and the Yeovilton Air day on June 9th 2011.

Further information is available on the FNHT Website: [www.fnht.co.uk](http://www.fnht.co.uk)



## Royal Navy Heritage Flight (RNHF)

As always, the RNHF funding is under threat and fundraising has been given priority to enable the Flight to continue. The Swordfish LS326 created a great deal of interest at Duxford – the last display of the season. LS326 is fully booked for the 2011 season. The RNHF will be represented at all of the major air shows, with an FNHT-owned, civil-registered, 2-seat Sea Fury and a loaned Seafire amongst the assets. The single seat Sea Fury is awaiting its engine, and a second Swordfish will hopefully be ready by the end of 2011. It is expected that in 2011 all of the Flight's aircraft will be airborne at some stage. Real progress is being made and funds allowing, the flight hopes to take on future projects – for example a Sea Harrier, 2 Wessex 5s and 2 Lynx 3s. For further pictures and regular updates, go to the RNHF Website.



© RNHF Lee Howard

The RNHF currently has a 'guest star' – Amy Bear the Third. She is one of several toy bears which the UK charity Aviation Without Borders uses to help raise funds for its work. This furry bear is a well travelled bear (see Page 40). She has also appeared on the Royal Navy Historic Flight Website: [www.royalnavyhistoricflight.org.uk](http://www.royalnavyhistoricflight.org.uk)

Aviation Without Borders (AWB) is a UK aviation charity dedicated to providing humanitarian support through aviation services, irrespective of politics, religion, race, or nationality. Further information on Aviation Without Borders available: [www.aviationwithoutborders.org](http://www.aviationwithoutborders.org)

## Go Yeovil – Go Jim!

Let Jim Fraser RN, a pilot from 815 Naval Air Squadron, based at RNAS Yeovilton, will be making an attempt to break a world record by running a half marathon whilst wearing his gas mask. He will be running the Yeovil Half Marathon on 27 March 2011 whilst wearing a fully functioning military issue gas mask.

He normally quite enjoys running but says, "Running any distance in a military gas mask is extremely unpleasant. Not only will my oxygen intake be restricted by up to 30%, the mask is also hot, claustrophobic and heavy."

For further information please visit his charity page: [www.bmycharity.com/jamesfraser](http://www.bmycharity.com/jamesfraser)



## Branch

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### Bournemouth Branch

The Bournemouth Branch joined up with the Veterans Association for a coach trip to the FAA Museum at Yeovilton. A great time was had by all. Apologies to Jo Towler who was Secretary for 13 yrs not the 17 as printed in AF18. A welcome to 3 new Branch members - Lawrie McCarthy (joined as an O/tel (Chatham), received a Commission as a S/Lt, flew in Gannets as an observer), Margaret McCarthy (signals wren) and Mavis Warwick-Oliver (Wren Cine Gun Assessor). Sadly the Branch lost their curator Arthur Wisbey in February 2011.

### Ford (Peregrine) Branch

Thirty two members attended the Taranto Night Dinner at Ham Manor Golf Club in Angmering (West Sussex). Following their buffet (carvery), Bill Chick presented an award to Blenda Bingham – wife of ex National FAAA Chairman Brian - on behalf of all the members This was in recognition of the work she has done over many years in organising raffles etc., at the Branch's social events. The presentation was followed by an informative talk given by Stan Richardson on the events surrounding the action at Taranto. Stan, who was serving aboard HMS Illustrious, was ashore in Malta during the actual attack.



Blenda - front row (2nd left), directly behind her to the right, Bill Chick, Stan Richardson, (1st step, 1st right) and other members of the Ford Branch.





## HMS Fencer (Essex and Greater Manchester Branch)

Peter Roalf and Jim Buie unite to track down FAAA members who have served on HMS Fencer (particularly 1944 when HMS Fencer was providing air cover for RA.29. The acting Captain was Wolf Bentinck). Can you help?

### Essex Branch (Peter Roalf)



Every year the Essex Branch holds a Taranto lunch and 2010, the 70th Anniversary of the Battle, was no exception. Invited guests were Rear Admiral Tom Cunningham COS (Aviation and Carriers); Commander Geoff Bowker RN (who has recently joined the Military Aviation Authority (MAA) and, to represent 814 Squadron (affiliated to the Essex Branch) LAET

Roy Ogondo (R) and LAET Daniel Mecedo (L) both stationed at RNAS Culdrose. Branch Chairman, Shipmate Harry Bass, welcomed our guests and gave a resumé of that well reported Battle of Taranto. In the absence of the Rear Admiral due to the exigencies of the Service, the Commander, who has attended both Services held at the Aviation Pioneer Memorial at Eastchurch, replied on behalf of the guests which included an apology for absence from the Admiral. He also briefly touched on what is happening to 'our old service' and offered some encouragement by saying that it was not all doom and gloom, and that there was hope of light at the end of the tunnel.

A presentation, by the LAETs, of a framed photo, of one of 814 Squadron's Merlins, followed. It is hoped that it can be displayed in the RAFA Club (Chelmsford) where Essex Branch hold their monthly meeting.

A new member, John Todd, a former 1939/45 Corsair Pilot, who is still in flying practice (albeit flying Cessnas etc.), was welcomed aboard.

The Essex Branch will expect to have Members attending the 3 Air Days planned for North Weald in 2011 to promote the FAAA and to make their usual collection on the day. The dates of the displays are given in the FAAA News Section. This picture was taken at the North Weald April 2010 Air show.



## Greater Manchester Branch

The Greater Manchester Branch Members have in the last 12 years visited the Lee-on-Solent War memorial to honour those men who gave their lives serving their country. It is a September Event and this year (2010) it was held on Wednesday 8th September. 'The News', Portsmouth were 'on hand' to take a photograph and interview Chairman Arthur Gardner. Part of his quote ... "It gives us a chance to remember our time in the Fleet Air Arm. It is something that is a big part of our lives and something we hold very dear". Arthur is on the right (Front row 2nd in), Standard bearer – Len Millward, and joining the FAAA Members were a group of trainee Chaplains.



*Copyright: The News Portsmouth*

## Kent Branch

The Kent Branch meets the 4th Monday of each month at 1900. Branch Members have agreed that during 2011 they will hold 2/3 meetings at Pembroke House rather than their usual venue - the RNA Club. One such meeting was held at Pembroke house (RNBT residential Home Gillingham) in July last year and 14 members were able to attend. In February the Channel Dash Association Memorial unveiling took place in Ramsgate. The FAAA National Standard was paraded, and there was a good turn out of Branch members, despite the wintry conditions. At the reception held after the Memorial Dedication, Branch member Ben Parish met up with his old CO Captain Winkle Brown.

In August the staff and residents of Pembroke House invited Branch members and guests to attend their annual summer garden party in the grounds of the home. In residence there are 6 ex FAA people; 4 were able to join the Members at the February meeting. Ken Whittingham – a Daedalus Member has now transferred his Membership to the Kent Branch. September saw members attending the 70th Anniversary Battle of Britain Parade, organised by RAFA - Ernie Coppard laid a wreath for the Kent branch.

For Web users, more can be found on the Branch website (Sheppey, Taranto, Remembrance Services, Christmas lunch, group photographs etc.).

<http://fleetairarm.channeldash.org>

## Remembrance Sunday at Lee-on- Solent (Ben Worship)

The day dawned misty and dank not the sort of day to stand around on the sea front at Lee-on-the-Solent. By the time I left the house at ten o'clock it had started to rain not heavy, but enough to make it uncomfortable. I arrived at Lee and met up with the chairman, then went to find the National Standard bearer Alan Breward to direct him to the Solent branch veterans platoon (which had 25 members marching and Curley Hay on his buggy) to meet up with the Solent Branch Standard bearer Ron Chitty.

At 10.40 the Band (Blue Jackets) Guard, Unarmed platoon and the Standards leading the Veterans marched on. The Standards took up post and the wreath layers fell in awaiting the arrival of Rear Admiral Tom Cunningham, Rear Admiral Fleet Air Arm.

At the appointed hour the Exultation was read then the two minutes silence, after which a sailor read the Kohima Epitaph. Wreaths were then laid by Rear Admiral Fleet Air Arm, HMS Sultan, Gosport Council, Royal British Legion, Fleet Air Arm Officers Association, Myself for the Fleet Air Arm Association, TAGs Association and the Fleet Air Arm Masonic Lodge.

The church service started with the Hymn, 'I vow to thee my country', not the old faithful 'O God our help in ages past'. The service finished with 'For those in peril down at Lee'. On completion (we were wet through) Standards fell in and Rear Admiral Tom Cunningham took the salute as the Guard, Unarmed and Veterans Platoons (Curley at the rear) marched past with the Band bringing up the rear.

Then much to our surprise, out of the rain, came the Swordfish which made three passes before heading back to Yeovilton. (*Editor Note: the white ensign and the Lee-on-Solent Memorial – bottom RH corner.*)



## Watford Branch (Ray Thomas)

In December 2010 Chairman Ray Thomas provided a 'light-hearted' summary of the Branch activities for the year. Here are some of the highlights.

Eleven members attended the TAG's reunion (a very pleasant evening at the Solent Golf course where the Swordfish prints were signed), followed on the Sunday by the Memorial service at Lee-on-Solent. Sunday morning breakfast was partaken at the old Bluebird cafe on Lee front (memory time for the 'old' Daedalus ratings). Being close to London, in August, we were able to get some 'sea time' in when we embarked at Runnymede for a round trip to Windsor – someone should ask Ray what happened in the Dungeons of Windsor Castle!

**September 7<sup>th</sup>** A few of our members were privileged to be invited by the Royal Air Force Association to attend the City of London Salute to the Battle of Britain and RAF World War Two Veterans Service in St. Paul's Cathedral, followed by lunch in the Grand Hall of the City of London Guildhall. Our Standard Bearer (Mick Wyatt) carried the Watford Standard and Alan Breward the National Standard, with the various RAF Standards on parade. During lunch at the Guildhall, our members were introduced to the new Rear Admiral Fleet Air Arm and Chief of Staff (Aviation and Carriers) Rear Admiral Tom Cunningham. In spite of the day being subjected to a tube strike, all managed to attend and a very pleasant time was had by all.

**October 8<sup>th</sup>** Six Members attended the Eastchurch Aviation Pioneer Memorial Service at the Eastchurch FAA memorial. An address was given by Commodore Martin Westwood and a reading by Commander Geoff Bowker. Also in attendance was Rear Admiral Chris Clayton, Chairman of the Fleet Air Arm Federation. The



National (Alan) and Watford(Mike) Standards were paraded. A fly over was given by the Historic Flight Seahawk but sadly the Lynx was fog bound and unable to attend. A very pleasant lunch and chat was had in the Village Hall.

**November 20<sup>th</sup>** The Annual Taranto Dinner at Carpenders Park. A warm welcome with a glass of sherry (donated anonymously) and many thanks to Dave Caw, who produced our table placings. Sheila didn't disappoint, we heard some great monologues. 'Pussers' served from Secretary Fred's superb Rum Tub was thankfully received!!! Flowers for the Ladies, Swordfish beer for the men – both kindly supplied at the bequest of the late Frank Warrington.

Eric Gower, one of our Founder members and 'Boz' Bosworthwick were made Life Branch members. Sadly Boz and his wife Eleanor have since crossed the bar.





## Yeovil Branch (Bob Ridout)

### Yeovil Branch Social Programme

The Yeovil Branch meets on the 3rd Tuesday of each month. A wide range of activities is planned. The 1st month (January) was the AGM. Other activities planned for the year are, Card Bingo, Horse/frog racing, Fish 'n' chips, Associations quiz night, Cheese and wine, Skittles evening, Games night, Chinese raffle, Christmas draw and meal and a talk by David Gibbings (Westlands Helicopter test pilot).

## The unveiling of the Liberty Boat Disaster Memorial

### Bob Ridout

Sunday 17th October, we were up about 7am on a cold frosty morning, getting clothing right for the day to Portland for the unveiling of the Liberty Boat Disaster Memorial. By the time we left about 9.30 the frost had cleared and the sun was up and out promising a fair day.

Lots of roads en route were closed and diversions in abundance due to preparations for the 2012 Olympic games. However, about an hour's drive to Portland marina, avoiding Weymouth and we were there. We found our way to the marina and were met by some Portland RNA members. The standard bearer, Tony Seal, was in my entry at Fisgard in 1956. So we had some catching up to do.

We were all shown to our reserved chairs in time for the ceremonial party to come and get settled. The service and the unveiling took place with great respect and exactly on time the flypast consisting of two Lynx helicopters, the Seahawk and the Swordfish flew over Portland harbour and dropped a poppy wreath approximately where the tragedy took place.

On completion of the ceremony we were entertained by the Royal Marine Band doing 'Beat the retreat'. So odd to see young ladies in the band, some only just over 5ft tall.

A buffet lunch in the yacht Marina bar and lounge followed which afforded us the chance to speak to some of the sailors, officers, admirals, etc.

We concluded our visit with a walk around the marina sea front formerly part of the Portland helicopter pads followed by a pleasant drive home still in glorious sunshine.

*Editorial: On that tragic night the ship's Liberty Boat, left Weymouth Pier to return to HMS Illustrious moored in Portland Harbour. The boat was carrying fifty men, including a crew of five. As the boat passed through the northern entrance of the breakwater to Portland Harbour, it began to ship water when meeting the full impact of a south-westerly gale and blinding rain squalls. The young Midshipman in charge did all he could to keep the boat trimmed and her bows out of the water, but regrettably it sank some sixty yards astern of HMS Illustrious. Rescue boats were launched immediately from HMS Illustrious and other warships in the vicinity but despite all the efforts made to save the men, twenty-nine of the fifty young sailors lost their lives.*

## Yorkshire Branch (Peter Shephard)

### York Minster - 70th Anniversary of the Battle of Britain

Following the Battle of Britain Memorial Service held in York Minster (September 2010) Peter Shephard brought to the attention of the York Press and York Post the role the Fleet Air Arm played in this Battle. Here is a copy of the letter.

“Members of the Yorkshire Branch of the Fleet Air Arm Association attended the 70th Anniversary of the Battle of Britain at York Minster, supporting our Branch Standard which was on Parade. The Minster was full and the very moving service was enjoyed by all. The preceding Parade was a credit to the RAF Personnel who took part.

We were also there to remember the Fleet Air Arm Air Crews who served under RAF Fighter Command from July to October 1940. 804 and 808 were the two Naval, Battle of Britain, Squadrons to operate under RAF Fighter Command, with 33 Aircrew and supporting ground crews. Twenty three Naval Pilots served with twelve RAF squadrons flying Spitfires and Hurricanes. 242 Canadian Squadron RAF had 3 Fleet Air Arm pilots assigned to it. Douglas Bader was CO and his Wingman was Sub Lt R J Cork RN, who was awarded the DFC during the Battle of Britain. Seven Naval pilots were killed and two wounded. All 56 Naval Aviators are listed on the Battle of Britain Memorial on the Embankment in London.

The contribution made by the Fleet Air Arm of the Royal Navy is rarely recognised however those with an interest in Naval Aviation history should never forget the bravery of the ‘Few’ within the ‘Few’ who fought in naval uniform.”

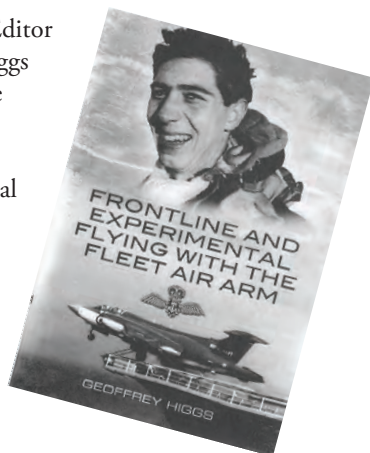
## Cotswold (Late entry)

Mike Humphries (Branch secretary) has given the Editor a reference to a book written by Cdr Geoffrey Higgs who drew together, for family use, a copy of his wartime experiences. He has since been persuaded to ‘send it to print’.

The result is a book titled ‘Frontline and Experimental Flying with the Fleet Air Arm’. It is printed by Pen and Sword Books Limited (ISBN 9781848842625.

Quote Ref 104531 for a Special Offer price of £20.00 + £4pp).

*Editor note: Geoffrey Higgs was 18 when he volunteered for the FAA as a pilot. He trained in Canada and began a Naval flying career that spanned 30 years. He survived World War II to qualify as an experimental Test Pilot. He flew nearly 100 types of Aircraft and was the pilot who flew the first Royal Navy aircraft to cross the Atlantic non stop without in-flight refuelling or navigational aids. Also he carried out research flying in support of a number of aircraft including Concorde.*







# RNAS Culdrose

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## The Navy's First Female Senior Observer

**8**29 Naval Air Squadron at Royal Naval Air Station Culdrose has just seen a Fleet Air Arm 'first' with the appointment of the Navy's first female Senior Observer. Lieutenant Commander Kay Burbidge took over the position in November after completing a Flight Commander's appointment in HMS Monmouth.

Lt Cdr Burbidge joined the Royal Navy in 1988 as a Wren Air Engineering Mechanic (Weapons Electrical) and was selected for commission in 1995. During her time as a mechanic she worked on Hunters, Chipmunks and Devon aircraft, and on Sea King Mk 5 helicopters on 820 Naval Air Squadron during the Adriatic conflict.



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She gained her Observer 'wings' in 1997 whilst on 810 Squadron, flying in Sea King Mk 6 helicopters. Since completion of her Operational Flying Training she has served with 820 Squadron in HMS Ark Royal and on 771 Squadron carrying out Search and Rescue duties. She later qualified as the Navy's first female Helicopter Warfare Instructor (HWI) and since converting to Merlin Mk 1 helicopters in 2004, she has served as the HWI on both 814 Squadron and 824 Squadron, teaching tactics and instructing on gunnery courses for the Merlin Helicopter Force. After the instructional tours she then took up the role of Flight Commander on HMS Monmouth during their recent OP TELIC deployment, spending 6½ months in the Gulf region protecting the oil platforms off the Iraqi coastline.

Lt Cdr Burbidge said: "I am delighted to have been appointed as the Senior Observer of 829 Squadron. From the challenging environment of a Type 23 Flight Commander, I now look forward to the demands of helping to provide five operational flights to Navy Command. Joining up as a non sea-going, blue-badge-wearing Wren, my recent appointment is a true reflection as to the advances in the opportunities available to females in the Armed Forces today".

*Editorial note: HMS Monmouth is the sixth of the Type 23 Duke class frigates. She was launched in 1991 and commissioned two years later. Affectionately known as the 'Black Duke' HMS Monmouth is easily recognised by the black flag she flies from the mainmast. The black flag is flown in honour of James Scott (illegitimate son of Charles II – Battle of Sedgemoor). His bravery was recognised in later years but his assets remained dissolved (blacking out of his coat of arms). She is based in Devonport (Plymouth), and is the seventh warship to bear the name and has more battle honours than any other ship in the Fleet. (Royal Navy Website).*

## The Flying Tigers head to the Med



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For the first time a Royal Navy Helicopter Squadron will participate in NATO's largest Mediterranean Anti-Submarine exercise: Exercise Proud Manta. Merlin Mk1 maritime patrol helicopters from 814 Naval Air Squadron (also known as 'The Flying Tigers') will fly 1400 miles across Europe from RNAS Culdrose in Helston to Sicily in order to take part in the exercise and practice hunting for submarines.

Personnel including Aircrew and Engineers and their Merlin helicopter, will be hosted by the US Navy at Naval Air Station Sigonella in eastern Sicily, for the duration of the exercise. Proud Manta 2011 will involve ships, aircraft and submarines from USA, Canada, Spain, France, Germany, Italy, Greece and Turkey and will provide a realistic, challenging training environment to all participants in order to improve the readiness, proficiency and tactical skills of all the participating units. It will give the Merlin crews an excellent opportunity to practice their primary role of Anti-Submarine Warfare as they operate against a wide variety of exercise 'adversaries' not normally encountered in British waters.

The Commanding Officer of 814 NAS, Commander Darran Goldsmith said "Proud Manta will provide the opportunity for 814 to hone its Anti-Submarine Warfare skills whilst working closely with other NATO maritime air, surface and sub-surface Forces. Additionally, for the aircrew new to the front line the transit to and from Sicily will offer excellent navigation training and experience. Interaction with our Italian Merlin counterparts in terms of engineering practices and flying procedures is a most welcome bonus in an exercise which promises much in a concentrated period of focussed tactical activity. Can't wait!"

*Editorial: Note the 'Tiger' on the nose of the helicopter.*



## Petty Officer Aircrewman 'Cags' Lacy - QGM



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Petty Officer Aircrewman 'Cags' Lacy has been awarded the Queen's Gallantry Medal (QGM) for his part in a dramatic and difficult rescue at sea. The medal was presented by HRH the Prince of Wales at a ceremony in Buckingham Palace (December 2010).

On New Year's Eve 2009, late in the afternoon, Falmouth Coastguard received a mayday call, from Fishing Vessel Trevesa, that reported a fire onboard with associated loss of steering some 50nm South West of the Isles of Scilly. The 4 man crew were

abandoning ship. Within an hour of the initial call, Rescue 193 and its four-man crew, which included PO(A) 'Cags' Lacy, arrived on scene to be greeted with heavy rain, a sea state 5-6 and a wind of 35-40 knots, and of course pitch darkness.

The fishing vessel was dead in the water with no power due to fire damage. On the first descent PO Lacy was lowered to the pitching and wallowing deck to assess the situation. He managed to hook the heels of his boots over the guardrail, and then desperately tried to heave himself onto the deck. A heavy swell caused the trawler to pitch down and he fell backwards 20 feet into the icy waters of the Atlantic.

'Cags' said: "I remember vividly looking up and seeing the greeny glow of the aircraft lights above me. In my headset I could hear someone onboard saying I was underwater. It was quite surreal."

Fully submerged but still attached to the winch wire, he was recovered back into the helicopter. Despite his ordeal, PO Lacy immediately decided to go back down for a further attempt to board the vessel and, after crew consultation, the aircraft was positioned for a second attempt. This time a successful hi-line transfer was conducted and, despite the heavy and unpredictable roll of the vessel, PO Lacy co-ordinated the safe evacuation of all 4 trawler men from the stern which took some 50 minutes in the appalling conditions.

Cags has now left the Royal Navy but has remained in aviation. He is working for Augusta Westland at Newquay airport where he is an instructor at the Operational Flying Training Centre. He is a member of the Royal Naval Reserve Air Branch where he continues to provide part-time support to 771 Search and Rescue Naval Air Squadron. The retention of his experience and skills is invaluable. He is one of the team of trained and current volunteers available to support the Royal Navy, and the Fleet Air Arm, whenever and wherever it may be required.

## Updated Helicopter Simulator Preparation for Afghanistan

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Two of the Airborne Surveillance and Control (ASaC) Squadrons based at Royal Naval Air Station Culdrose are currently tasked for operations in Afghanistan. Between deployments the crews undergo a thorough training programme, building on their maritime experience and adapting to new procedures and skills necessary for the hostile environment of Afghanistan.

A vital part of this training is the ability to fly at low level, at night using ‘Night Vision Goggles’. The dynamic full motion flight simulators at Culdrose enable trainees to experience the challenges of low-level night flying before getting airborne for real. They are an invaluable training aid especially for night operations to unlit landing sites and ships’ flight decks. Three ‘dual input’ high definition LED projectors are used to give a pilot’s eye view from the cockpit and allows aircrew to operate in both normal light and with Night Vision goggles, simultaneously.

The value of the Sea King Simulator at Culdrose is summarised by Lieutenant Commander Steve King, the Officer in Charge of the Simulator as “a world class training facility which provides cost effective, unique and invaluable training for all Royal Navy Sea King aircrew. Recent upgrades designed to enhance training for front line operations, include a full Defensive Aids Suite and a new Afghanistan package with bespoke graphics and hostile environments, providing realistic and challenging simulator training. It also has a 200° field of view which is representative of what the pilots can see from the actual helicopter cockpit.”

In addition Commander Sea King, Commander Pat Douglas said “The simulator prepares our aircrew for every eventuality. By testing them far beyond anything that they are likely to experience in Afghanistan, they should be better prepared if they are faced with difficulties in theatre. In the simulator, they will be shot at, engines will fail and the weather will be extreme. The new graphics actually replicate actual areas of Afghanistan – in fact I recognised the terrain I had seen in the simulator on my recent visit!” Lt John Wade, a Pilot from 854 Squadron who has recently returned from Camp Bastion and is due to deploy again soon said: “... I am pleased that it gives me the chance to hone my skills before going back out to theatre so that I feel more confident if I have to dodge hostile fire or tackle an extreme malfunction.”



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## Top national award for Sea King Helicopter Force

Against particularly strong competition, the 2009/10 winner of the Rolls Royce engineering efficiency trophy has been given to the Navy Command Sea King Helicopter Force based at Royal Naval Air Station Culdrose. Unusually this year, the highly coveted Trophy has been awarded to the whole Force rather than to an individual unit, in acknowledgement of the exceptional combined engineering achievements of the Airborne Surveillance and Control (ASaC) and Search and Rescue (SAR) Squadrons. Apart from those operating on frontline duties in Afghanistan, the whole of the Sea King Force was present.

Some of the Royal Navy's Sea King aircraft date from the 1970's, but they are equipped with the most technically advanced radar and communications equipment available. With its high tempo of operations and training requirements, the Sea King Force places a heavy workload on its engineers requiring them to provide fully serviceable aircraft round the clock and across the globe. The Sea King Force is made up of five Naval Air Squadrons. 857, 854 and 849 Squadrons provide the Airborne Surveillance and Control (ASaC) capability, while 771 and Gannet SAR Flight provide SAR cover in Cornwall and Scotland. The ASaC squadrons use their far-reaching and sensitive radar to detect enemy aircraft and missiles at sea, and since 2009, this skill has also been utilised by joint forces in Afghanistan where 854 and 857 Squadrons provide vital tactical information to coalition forces in the war against the Taliban. Engineers had to quickly adapt the helicopters to suit this new environment working in extreme temperatures to keep the aircraft airborne for a busy flying schedule. 771 Squadron and Gannet SAR flight provide search and rescue cover to Cornwall, the West of Scotland and the Lake District. At 15 minutes notice by day and 45 minutes by night, engineers work around the clock to ensure that helicopters are available when required.

Commander Pat Douglas, the Sea King Helicopter Force Commander said:

“The Maritime Sea King Force at RNAS Culdrose has been awarded the Rolls Royce Engineering Efficiency Trophy for their achievements over the past year. The last 12 months have seen many of the Force operating in Afghanistan in the fight against the insurgents whilst back in the UK others, based both here in Cornwall and up at Prestwick in Scotland, have continued to conduct Search and Rescue duties around the clock. The achievement of these tasks is no mean feat and we only succeed with the support, dedication and focus of our engineers and maintainers. This is a very proud day for all of us in the Sea King Force” (Press Release January 2011).



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***Air Engineering Officers Lt Cdr Matthew Flegg (849 Squadron) and Lt Cdr Steven Skittrall (771 Squadron) holding the Rolls Royce Engineering Efficiency Trophy.***

*The photo has been taken by RNAS Culdrose Ldg Phot, Dave Sterratt*



## Rebuilding at RNAS Culdrose

The Royal Naval Air Station at Culdrose (HMS Seahawk) is under renovation. The latest phase – to demolish the existing Keppel block built in the early 1970s, to accommodate young naval officers under training, is now underway.

Commander Jerry Ovens, the Executive Officer at the base was on hand to symbolically begin the demolition using a 20 metre long-reach mobile crushing machine – a poignant link for the Commander who was one of the first young officers to live in Keppel block. He was ‘relieved’ after a short time by the expert operator of the machine who was soon hard at work bringing the upper floor of the building to the ground. The replacement of the building is part of a wider project to bring accommodation particularly for younger members of the Royal Navy, up to a modern standard. A prime consideration has been to ensure that the buildings and their surroundings create a pleasing environment; in keeping with their rural surroundings. Some of the accommodation blocks have been named after the local villages such as Helford, Mawgan and Mullion.

*Editorial note: One of Europe's largest helicopter bases, RNAS Culdrose delivers highly capable Helicopter Squadrons specialising in Anti-Submarine Warfare, Anti-Surface Warfare and Airborne Surveillance and Control. Its frontline Squadrons are deployed to ships all over the world to support the Royal Navy in its global operations. Back at the Air Station, trainee Aircrew, Engineers, Air Traffic Controllers, Fire-fighters and Flight Deck crews undergo intensive training prior to joining Naval Air Squadrons for duties at sea. Additionally, the 'Search and Rescue' Squadron is on constant standby 365-days a year to react to emergencies throughout the Southwest region. Its red and grey helicopters can be seen braving all types of weather responding to calls for help on land and sea.*



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# RNAS Yeovilton

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## New Commanding Officer for 815 Naval Air Squadron (NAS) Cdr Louis Wilson-Chalon

The world's largest helicopter squadron, 815 NAS based at RNAS Yeovilton, has a new Commanding Officer - Louis Wilson-Chalon (age 44) from Yeovil. He was inspired to fly the Lynx, by his father, who helped build the helicopter 40 years ago at Westland's Yeovil factory.



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Cdr Wilson-Chalon said: "I used to go to the factory with dad at times as a boy. I always had an idea I wanted to fly helicopters and that I wanted to fly helicopters from ships."

His father was a flight test engineer working on the first prototype of the Lynx helicopter and now, four decades later, Louis is taking responsibility for some 25 Royal Navy Lynx helicopters and nearly 400 personnel.

Louis joined the Royal Navy in 1988 as a General List Seaman and on completion of training at BRNC Dartmouth was awarded the Queen's Sword by Diana, Princess of Wales. Appointments followed in HMS Birmingham, HMS Ledbury and HMS Sandown and he was selected for flying training in 1990.

His first flying tours were with 814 NAS, flying ASW Sea Kings in HMS Invincible before transferring to the Lynx and assuming the role of Flight Commander in HMS Norfolk. Appointments to 815 NAS, FOST and an exchange with the Army Air Corps ensured he had a varied career before coming back to 815 NAS as Senior Pilot, followed by a spell as the Pilot's Career Manager and then off to America as the first RN officer to attend the American Joint Advanced Warfighting School in Norfolk, Virginia.

Promoted to Commander in 2008, he became the Aviation and Capital Ship's Scheduler in Commitments at NCHQ before assuming Command of 815 NAS in December 2010. Of coming back to 815 NAS he said:

"It feels fantastic and a great honour to come back to be the boss. It is a great Squadron with great people and I know I am very lucky to have been chosen for this highly coveted Command".

*Editor: Flag Officer Sea Training (FOST) provides Operational Sea Training (OST) for all surface ships, submarines and Royal Fleet Auxiliaries of the Royal Navy by a dedicated team of experts, led by Flag Officer Sea Training. Navy Command Headquarters (NCHQ) is the organisation responsible for the direction and management of the Royal Navy.*

## Lynx Flight on first Type 45 overseas deployment



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In 2010, 200 Flight of 815 Naval Air Squadron, RNAS Yeovilton were aboard HMS Daring to train with the US Carrier Battle Group led by USS Enterprise on the Eastern seaboard of the USA. It was the first time the new Type 45 Destroyer has deployed overseas. The purpose of the deployment was to prove that the Royal Navy's newest capability was able to integrate and operate effectively with the might of the United States Navy. HMS Daring achieved full integration with the USS Enterprise Carrier Strike Battle Group. Plus it was used, not only to provide area defence as Air Defence Commander, but also to defend the carrier from surface and subsurface borne threats.

The Yeovilton based Mk8 Lynx played a key role in the exercise by providing an over the horizon search and attack capability, detecting and warning of enemy air, surface and subsurface units as they closed the Carrier Battle Group. HMS Daring was the only UK unit within the Task Force that consisted of over 30 US Naval ships and multiple F-18 aircraft, rotor and fixed wing maritime aircraft.

Fight Commander Lt Vince Owen, 31 from West Coker, Somerset, said: "This deployment has been the most memorable of my career in the Royal Navy so far; aside from the challenge of being the first Flight to deploy on the new Type 45 Destroyer, we have flown over Central Park, Manhattan and fulfilled a childhood ambition to conduct a fly-by of the USS Enterprise. It has also been a great opportunity to test and show off the ship in company with the might of the US Navy."

One particular highlight for both the Flight Commander and Pilot Lt Simon Dixon was that both enjoyed the opportunity to fulfil their boyhood ambition – operating with USS Enterprise, the same Aircraft Carrier in the film *Top Gun*.

Outside of the exercise other sorties were also conducted overland and along the coast of the Eastern Seaboard, including an unforgettable sortie around Manhattan at low altitude. HMS Daring returned to her homeport (Portsmouth) at the end of November for a refit period before continuing her sea training for her first operational deployment in 2011.



## CHF begin operations with a new gun

Since late 2007, the Commando Helicopter Force (CHF) has been operating their Commando Sea King HC4+ helicopters in support of Operation Herrick. The aircraft can now be armed with either the 7.62mm General Purpose Machine Gun (GPMG) or the new 0.5” (12.7mm) M3M - recently fully cleared for operational duties with CHF. This now provides the Sea King HC4 with a defensive and offensive capability, helping to increase the Commando Sea King’s operational versatility and allowing CHF to undertake a wider range of support missions.

The M3M is able to put down a higher rate of fire than the GPMG, and being 12.7mm cal instead of 7.62 each round has greater effect. The rounds have much greater energy so not only do they travel further but their flight path is affected much less by gravity; this means the gunner can lay down rounds accurately from a safe range or altitude.

The M3M is fitted into the Sea King using a specially adapted base-plate which allows the weapon to be stowed. The cabin door can then be closed when the gun is not in use. A specially mounted canister holding 600 rounds is attached to the side of the cabin just aft of the main door.

846 Naval Air Squadron began training aircrew on the FNHerstal M3M.50” NATO calibre door mounted weapon system in July (2010). CHF have their own Royal Marine, Air Door Gunner Instructors (ADGI) on both the GPMG and M3M. Aircrew undertake ground instruction followed by day and night shoots to become qualified on both weapon systems. These shoots cover a range of operational profiles. Aircrew operate both the M3M and GPMG using Night Vision Goggles.

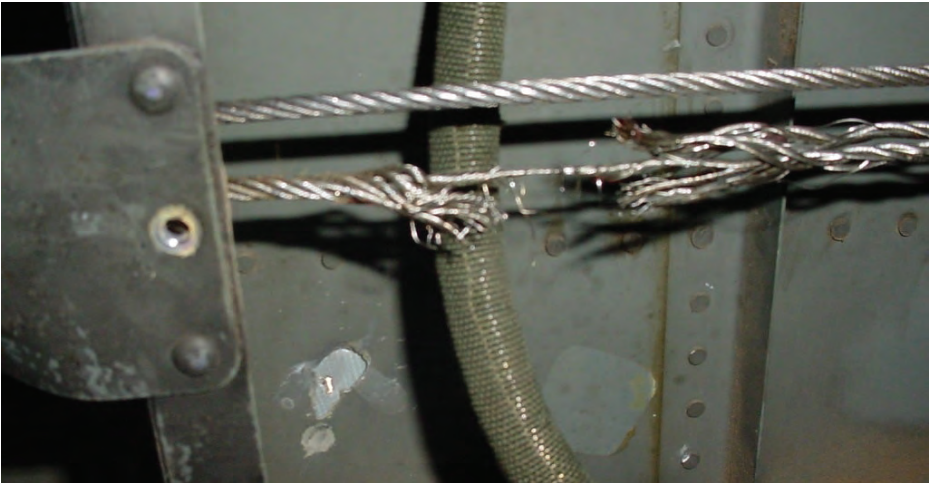
The M3M is in use with a number of other air arms including the Royal Navy Lynx HMA-8 and Army Air Corps (AAC) AgustaWestland Lynx Mk9A.

Commando Helicopter Force (CHF) consists of five squadrons, four Naval Air Squadrons (NAS) and a Combat Service Support Squadron, integrated under the command of an HQ, established to operate helicopters afloat or ashore in support of the UK armed forces. It is a combined Royal Navy and Royal Marine force that flies Sea King and Lynx helicopters that specializes in amphibious warfare.



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## A 'lucky' escape



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The men and women of the Naval Air squadrons continue to operate in Afghanistan. The Sea King helicopters and their crews are in constant demand. This is an account of a Sea King helicopter and its crew who 'won' against the odds.

Lt Cdr Gavin Simmonite and his crew, in January 2009, were tasked to fly their Sea King helicopter, with an under-slung load, to ground forces. As the helicopter approached the drop zone it was hit by sustained and accurate Taliban fire. Bullets pierced the fuselage and ricocheted in the cabin.

In the ensuing mêlée, Door Gunner Naval Airman Thomas Saunders was able to return fire and pin down the Taliban attackers. His quick reactions, and the use of a recent fitment – an additional gun on the port side of the helicopter – provided the vital seconds of respite needed for him and his fellow crew members to evade. (He later praised the excellent training provided by the Squadron).

Lt Cdr Simmonite's exemplary airmanship and handling skills enabled him to get the aircraft out of the danger zone without loss of life. His aircraft was so severely damaged by enemy fire that under normal circumstances it should have been landed immediately.

Lt Cdr Simmonite was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his exceptional airmanship and handling skills that enabled him to nurse the aircraft back to a safe location and in doing so saved the aircraft and his crew. Naval Airman Saunders also received an award from the Commander Joint Helicopter Command.

The Sea King proved its resilience yet again in battle. In addition to the skill and determination of the crew they had 'phenomenal luck' as when the damaged aircraft was inspected the control cable for the aircraft's tail rotor was found to have been struck by a Taliban bullet slicing all but one of the strands. Loss of this cable would have put the aircraft into a potentially catastrophic spin.

## The Breitling Trophy

Last year RNAS Yeovilton announced that 845 Naval Air Squadron had been awarded the Breitling Trophy. This prestigious award is presented annually, to the Naval Air Squadron achieving the best overall assessment, during a Naval Flying Standards inspection in recognition of professionalism and excellence in Naval Aviation, marking them out as the best in the Fleet Air Arm. 845 NAS were inspected in Kenya whilst conducting Exercise Grand Prix, an environmental element of their training prior to future operations in Afghanistan. Flying in extremes of temperature and altitude both day and night, and operating from austere conditions, the Squadron planned and maintained an innovative programme to maximise the training opportunities presented without compromising safety. Focussed leadership coupled with energetic commitment at all levels significantly added to the enthusiastic attitude to which the assessment was approached. This award also recognised the outstanding engineering effort that enabled all the planned and additional serials to be completed. 845 Naval Air Squadron were commended for their very strong performance and were subsequently awarded the Breitling trophy. Commodore Martin Westwood, Assistant Chief of Staff (Aviation) presented the award to the Squadron's Training Officer.



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## Amy the charity bear

845 Naval Air Squadron personnel flew a charity toy bear called Amy to HMS Ark Royal to show her how to land on the deck of a ship. HMS Ark Royal had just returned from America. Coming back across the Atlantic, the ship gave a lift to several Sea King Mk 4 helicopters. Several crews from 845 NAS were flown to the ship just off Portland to bring the aircraft home, but for this task they had an unusual passenger – Amy Bear the Third (see Page 22 RNHF). Amy has a Pilot's logbook. When she has enough flying hours she will be auctioned to raise funds for the Charity Aviation Without Borders. The Royal Navy Historic Flight saw the Ark Royal task as an ideal opportunity for 845 NAS to show Amy Bear the unique challenges of operating from the deck of a moving ship and to get a much-vaunted deck landing in her log book. Lt David Tindall was the pilot who gave Amy Bear her flight. Amy has also taken part in rescues with 771 NAS, flown in 815 NAS Lynx and much more besides.



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## Safety Trophy for Commando Helicopter Force

It was with a tremendous sense of pride that Royal Marines and Royal Naval personnel of the Commando Helicopter Force were presented with the Fleet Air Arm's Barbara Flight Safety Trophy for 2009 from Rear Admiral T Cunningham Chief of Staff Aviation. This coveted prize is awarded annually to the Fleet Air Arm unit that is assessed as having the best flight safety record. Admiral Cunningham praised the CHF and its Squadrons for their outstanding achievements on global exercises. He further praised both aviators and support personnel who have worked exceptionally hard in supporting UK and international forces in Afghanistan despite the obvious dangers from the Taliban and the enormous environmental challenges of flying and maintaining the aircraft in extreme heat and dust. In true naval tradition, the youngest member of 845 Naval Air Squadron, Air Engineering Technician Russell Elliot (who has served in Iraq and Afghanistan) accepted the trophy on behalf of the CHF.



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## RNAS Yeovilton Remembrance service

Sailors and Royal Marines from the Royal Naval Air Station Yeovilton conducted its annual Act of Remembrance in the appropriate surroundings of 847 NAS hangar at the RNAS Yeovilton. They were joined by many of the civilian employees from the Air Station together with children from three local schools.

The service which is usually held in the churchyard of the Fleet Air Arm Church, St Bartholomew's, was moved to 847 NAS due to appalling weather. It proved to be a poignant setting to remember the fallen. Brigadier Mark Noble spoke of a need to reflect on the sacrifices made, not only by the service personnel who died in the two world wars but those who have lost their lives, in more recent and current conflicts. The Royal Navy and Royal Marines Roll of Honour was read out and detailed all Royal Naval and Royal Marine personnel who have lost their lives from 2009 to the present day. Following the Act of Remembrance, and the two minute silence, Brigadier Noble Commanding Officer RNAS Yeovilton laid a wreath and The Royal Naval Prayer and the Royal Marines Prayer were said.



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# Members who have ‘crossed the bar’

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## September 2010 - February 2011

Malcolm Armsden	LAF (A)	Birmingham
Alan Booton	AM(A)	Daedalus
Robert ‘Bob’ Blanchard	L/NA(O)	Birmingham
Donald Benstead	POAM(A)	Hitchin
William Challis	NAM 1(E)	Essex
Lawrence (Mike) Farrington	AM(O)	Yorkshire
Don William Hughes	CPO Aircraft Fitter	Greater Manchester
Boyd Reynolds Heath McGeogh	LAM(E)	Birmingham
Albert Merritt	A/POAM(A)	Daedalus
George Charles Mott	AF(MW)	Watford
Ronald Oldham	NA	Watford
Rupert Price	LAM(O)	Birmingham
Anthony ‘Steady’ Tuke	Lt Cdr	Essex
Arthur Wisbey	POAF(A)	Bournemouth

May those who have ‘crossed the bar’ rest in peace.

**B**rigadier Mark Noble Royal Marines CO RNAS Yeovilton laid this wreath at the November Remembrance Service (2010) held, due to adverse weather conditions, in a hangar at RNAS Yeovilton.

The tribute on this wreath reads:

*“Remembering not just the men of Taranto in their 70th year but all the men and women of the Royal Naval Air Service and Fleet Air Arm who have given their lives for their comrades, their Fighting Arm, their service their country since 1909.”*



## The Fleet Air Arm Memorials

- Alrewas Staffordshire
- Eastchurch
- Lee-on-Solent
- London (Embankment)
- RNAS Yeovilton
- The National Memorial Arboretum
- The Eastchurch Aviation Pioneer Memorial
- A tribute, to those with no known grave
- The Fleet Air Arm Memorial
- The Fleet Air Arm Memorial Church

## Short Summaries

A selection of the summaries received.

### Malcolm G.S. Armsden LAF(A)

Malcolm crossed the bar on 11<sup>th</sup> October 2010. He served from 1942 to 1946 and joined the Birmingham branch in 1991. He was a great supporter of the Birmingham Branch even when suffering from Parkinson's disease in 'recent' years.

### Robert 'Bob' Blanchard L/NA(O)

Bob joined the FAA in 1952 and for the first six months he was stationed at HMS Gamecock before going on board HMS Illustrious. He later served with 809 Squadron on the Bulwark (1956) and HMS Albion (six month tour 1956/57) returning to HMS Heron (1957). In July 1957 Bob was drafted to HMS Ariel where he met his wife Joan. Prior to leaving the FAA he served aboard HMS Sea Eagle (1959), HMS Fulmar (1960) and finally HMS Ark Royal (61-63). His demob was at HMS Victory in 1964. Bob joined the Birmingham FAAA branch in the late 1980s. He lived at Chippenham and although he never made it to meetings he was an excellent supporter. He crossed the bar December 17<sup>th</sup> 2010 aged 76.



### Boyd Reynolds Heath

#### McGeogh LAM(E)

'Mac' as he was affectionately known, crossed the bar 'suddenly' on the 28<sup>th</sup> November 2010 aged 88.

He served as an LAM (E) from 1943-1946. He became the Birmingham branch representative (1977). His funeral took place at St John the Baptist, Enderby, Parish Church (Dec.2010). Representing the FAAA

were Alan and Vicky Breward and Peter and Sheila Styles (Birmingham Branch).

### George Charles Mott AF(MW)

AF (M) George Charles Mott crossed the bar on 4<sup>th</sup> January 2011. He served 1943-1946. During this time he served aboard HMS Gosling, Raven, Daedalus, Waxwing, Nabstock, Sparrowhawk and the Aircraft carrier Formidable (Far East and Australia). On leaving the service he worked at De Havilland until 1953. He left to start his own printing business – unfortunately, things did not work out right, so he went back to his first love – engineering. His wife (Peggy), family, friends and 11 members of the Watford Branch attended his funeral where the Watford Standard was paraded.

### Rupert Price LAM(O)

Rupert crossed the bar on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2010 aged 87. He joined the navy at the age of 17 and served from 1941 to 1946. On leaving the service he joined the post office where he stayed until his retirement. A long standing member of the Birmingham branch – he joined in 1983 and took on the task of auditing the branch annual accounts. July 2010 saw Rupert and his wife Hilda celebrate their 65<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary and both greatly treasure the celebratory card received from Her Majesty the Queen on the occasion of their 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

### Don William Hughes CPO Aircraft Fitter

Don joined the FAA 1948. His last ships were Ark Royal (1961) and HMS Hermes (1968). He left the FAA in 1970. He was a member of the Greater Manchester Branch, a life member of the Llandudno RNA. He 'crossed the bar' November 23<sup>rd</sup>, aged 80.



## List of Accoutrements

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### ON SALE FROM THE TREASURER – March 2011

ITEM	Cost (Incl. P&P)*
Gold Wire Blazer Badge	£13.00
Silk Blazer Badge	£ 8.75
Tie	£ 8.50
Beret Badge	£ 8.50
Ladies Head Square	£11.00
Member's Lapel Badge (Gilt)	£ 4.25
Member's Spouse/Association Lapel Badge (Chrome)	£ 2.00
Life Lapel Badge	£ 1.25
Baseball Cap	£ 7.00
Plastic Medal Holder (Large)	£ 4.75
Plastic Medal Holder (for Miniatures)	£ 3.25
Car Stickers	£ 1.25
Membership Cards	£ 0.00

### ITEMS BOUGHT TO ORDER

Short Sleeve Pilot Shirt	£ 15.00
Long Sleeve Pilot Shirt	£ 15.00
Sweaters, Acrylic	£ 16.75
Sweater, Lambs wool	£ 25.00

Colours Available: White, Navy, Red, Light Blue, Maroon, Black, Grey, Bottle Green.

White and Light Blue not available in Lambswool

Sizes when ordering: Sweaters 32" to 59" in 2" stages.

Shirts, S, M, L, XL, XXL.

**\*Prices may change due to an increase in VAT (2011)**

### ORDERS TO THE TREASURER

Cheques made payable to the **Fleet Air Arm Association**.

**Money with order please to:**

Michael Worship, 3 Arundel Drive, Fareham, Hants, PO16 7NP

Items will be ordered by **ME**, and sent direct to you by the supplier, who will invoice me.

This is to safeguard against **non-Members** of the FAAA purchasing these items.

Berets can be obtained from:

Baun & Co. Naval Tailors & Outfitters, 14, Queen Street Portsmouth. PO1 3LH.

Tel. 02392 822045. Cost £9.00 plus Post & Packaging (last known).

# FAAA Branch Details

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**BIRMINGHAM** - 2nd Tuesday at 1100

The Nautical Club, Bishopsgate St. Birmingham  
 Secretary – Sue Halladay 0121 3572783

**BOURNEMOUTH** - 4th Thursday at 1100

Bournemouth War Memorial Home ,Castlelane West  
 Secretary – Ray Wrigglesworth 01202 779321

**BRISTOL AND DISTRICT** - 2nd Monday at 2000,

The Royal British Legion Club, Rodway Road,  
 Patchway, Bristol  
 Secretary – Eric Pitt 01179 241803

**COTSWOLD** - 2nd Monday at 2000

18 Commercial Road, Gloucester  
 Secretary - Mike Humphries 01453 547436

**DERBYSHIRE** - 4th Wednesday at 1200

The Royal British Legion Club, Allenton, Derby  
 Secretary - Roy Pym 01332 701993

**EASTBOURNE** - Last but one Thursday at 1200

Odd months only, Marine Hotel, Eastbourne  
 Secretary - Barry Simons 01825 872539

**ESSEX** - 2nd Thursday at 2000

RAFA Club, Chelmsford  
 Secretary - Peter Roalf 01279 431599

**FORD** - Last Thursday at 1930

The Sportsman, Littlehampton, West Sussex  
 Secretary - Peter Colston 01798 874977

**GREATER MANCHESTER** - 1st Monday at 1300

Ex Servicemen's Club, Stretford  
 Secretary - Jim Buie 0161 8653435

**GREAT YARMOUTH** - 2nd Monday at 1400

Conservative Club, Gorleston  
 Secretary - Mike Denton 01493 664177

**HANWORTH** - 1st Wednesday at 2000

R.N.A. Club, Park Road, Hanworth  
 Secretary - Terry Lowden 0208 9483979

**HITCHIN** - 2nd Wednesday at 2000

The Sun Hotel, Hitchin  
 Secretary - Don Rice 01480 812346

**KENT** - 4th Monday at 1900

R.N.A. Club, Church Hill, Ramsgate  
 Secretary - Mike Foote 07789 080258

**NORTH EAST HANTS** - 4th Tuesday at 2000

Albert Social Club, Albert St, Fleet, Hampshire  
 Secretary - Mike Pomeroy 01276 502358

**SOLENT** - Last Thursday at 2030

Lee on Solent Community Centre  
 Secretary - Peter Westbrook 023 92580158

**SOUTH DOWNS** - 4th Wednesday at 1915

The Restaurant, Shoreham Airport  
 Secretary - Alec Braybrooke 01273 505187

**WATFORD** - 2nd Sunday at 1100

Carpenders Park Community Hall, Herts  
 Secretary - Fred Good 01923 445832

**WREKIN** - 1st Friday at 1930

T.S. Wrekin, Donnington, Telford  
 Secretary - Dennis Blackburn 01952 415423

**YEOVIL** - 3rd Tuesday at 2000

The Old Barn Club, Old Barn Way, Yeovil  
 Secretary - Bob Ridout 01935 424148

**YORKSHIRE** - Last Saturday at 1300

New Headlingly Club, Leeds  
 Secretary - Albert Firth 01924 525656

**DAEDALUS** - Headquarters Roll, No meeting place

Secretary - Arnold Thompson 023 92786443

