

Fleet Air Arm Association Newsletter
Spring 2025 Issue



Note from the editor

Hello and welcome to the latest issue of the revised Fleet Air Arm association newsletter.

Spring is here, the bulbs are flowering, and there is a birdsong in the air. The darker days of winter are a thing of the past and the lighter nights a welcome herald to warmer weather to come. I hope this edition finds you all well and maybe looking forward to a summer get away!

So have any of you been in touch with old shipmates and recommended the Fleet Air Arm Association as a great place to join, new members are always welcome.

I hope you enjoyed the last edition of the newsletter, and that this issue is also of interest to you. This edition has an article supplied by the treasurer Alan Key titled Farewell Commando Fleet.

Please let me know if there is anything that you would like to see featured in future copy, and I will see what I can find out and include. I thought maybe some reminiscences of your favourite postings might be a good place to start – so please do get in touch.

On a personal note I would like to thank all the branch secretaries that send me their updates, it is so good to hear what branches are up to and a special thank you to Ron Sandry of the Bristol Branch, who is recovering from a stroke earlier this year – but still got me an update to share with you. The whole FAAA family wishes you and the Bill the chairman of the branch speedy and continued recoveries.

Any time you want to get in touch with me please email me direct on editor.faaa.newsletter@gmail.com or leave me a message on the Fleet Air Arm Association website at www.faaa.org.uk

Cut off date for entries into the Autumn 2025 edition is 31 October 2025, if you can please email me any inclusions editor.faaa.newsletter@gmail.com

Regards

Jan Smith

FAAA newsletter editor

Association Officers

Patron:

**Vice Admiral Sir Adrian Johns KCB.
CBE. ADC**



President:

Rear Admiral Tom Cunningham CBE



Vice Presidents:

**Fred Wadley, Ben Worship, Peter
Murray**

Chairman:

Dave Smith

Vice Chairman:

Treasurer:

Alan Key

Secretary:

Jim Moulson MBE

Standard Bearer:

Mick Wyatt

Branches

Daedalus

This is the HQ branch , for those who do not have or don't want to join their local branch.

Membership Secretary: Mick Wyatt
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Daedalus.sec@btinternet.com

Bristol and District

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South Downs

Branch Secretary: Carole Sharpe
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Weymouth / Portland

Branch Secretary: Ian Tate
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Yorkshire

Branch Secretary: Bob Hayden
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List of accoutrements on sale from the Treasurer

Alan.key899@gmail.com

Tel: 02392598000

Item	Cost inc P&P £
Silk Blazer Badge	19.00
Ties	12.25
Beret Badges – Gold Wire	16.50
Baseball Caps	12.50
Lapel Badges	2.50
Life Lapel Badges	1.75
Plastic Medal Holder – Standard Medal Size	5.00
Plastic Medal Holders – Miniatures	3.50
Car Stickers	1.00
Cummerbund	26.00



Branch updates

South Downs Branch

The branch meets on the 4th Wednesday of each month from January to September with the exception of June, and the 3rd Wednesday in October to December. The meetings take place from 11.30 to 13.00 at The Castle Inn Hotel, Bramber, West Sussex. The meetings generally start with coffee, apologies, updates and business (stories, funny tales, news) then a speaker. Some members stay on for a bite to eat.

The AGM etc take place at the January meeting – it is a great time and place for ideas etc to be discussed and to wish the new year in with a toast!

Upcoming events at this branch are:

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| 28 th May | ‘Schnellboot’ Guest speaker – Paul Wilson |
| 25 th Jun | ‘Somebody had to do it’ Reflections of Guest speaker Peter Johnson
CMG Governor of Anguilla 2000 – 2004 |
| 23 rd Jul | Guest Speaker – Stuart Sanderson |
| 27 th Aug | Coalman to Captain Guest speaker Chris Boyle |
| 13 th Sep | Summer Outing to the Amberley Chalk Museum |
| 22 nd Oct | Trafalgar Luncheon with Guest speaker Adrian Bell (CEO BVUK) |
| 19 th Nov | Taranto Luncheon with Guest speaker William McNaught |
| 17 th Dec | Christmas Social with a light luncheon and charity raffle |

Weymouth and Portland Branch

The branch meet at Weymouth & Melcombe Regis Woking Men’s Club, Mitchell Street, Weymouth on 1st Friday of every month at 19:30.

The branch formed in 2019 with a small membership and has grown substantially to the position it is now in with 124 Full and Associate members and with new members joining on a regular basis.

The Christmas Social dinner/disco, organised by the Social Secretary, Jim Mussenden was held at the Crown in Weymouth, attended by seventy members,

wives, partners and guests and was a great success.



On a charity note, members agreed to support Weldmar Hospice Care as the branch Charity for 2024, £210 was raised and a cheque was presented to Eden Fraser, Weldmar Fundraiser by Branch Members Russ Conway, Roger Forbes, Andy Powell, and the Vice Chair Paul D'Arcy in January 2025



On Remembrance Sunday twenty-four FAA Association Members attended the Whitehall Remembrance Parade led by the Parade Marshall Jeff Cook. Whilst other members supported the local Remembrance Day Services at Weymouth, Wyke Regis and Portland.



Some of the Whitehall Mob and the Branch Secretary at Portland Cenotaph

Following a new initiative by the Vice Chair Paul D'Arcy the Branch now holds a monthly Breakfast Club at different venues around the local area, usually held the second week of the month but on different days to give branch members a chance to attend. These are well supported with 20 to 30 members regularly turning up at 9am for an hour or so of socialising and dit spinning.



Breakfast Club at the Granby Diner, Weymouth & Jailhouse Diner, Portland.

The Standard Bearer, Ted Edwards with support from Branch Members has attended a number of events, with the Standard being paraded at:

Weymouth Remembrance Day Service 10th November 2024

Mick Sylvester Funeral 25th Nov 2024

Kev Shaw Funeral 18th Dec 2024

Paul Knapp Memorial Service 18th Jan 2025

A visit was organised in March 2025 to Portsmouth, to celebrate camaraderie, heritage and support through memorable naval experiences and lasting friendships and was attended by 24 members. The trip included a private visit to the HMS Sultan Helicopter Museum and exploring the Historic Dockyard, HMS Alliance

Submarine Museum, Priddy's Hard, the Explosion Museum of Naval Firepower and the Powder Monkey Brewing Company.



The Old - Warrior



The New

This trip came together thanks to the vision and effort of Vice Chairman, Paul D'Arcy, Jim Mussenden Social Secretary and Branch Treasurer Russ Conway.

Special thanks to Dave MacAskill and Sarah Bewley from the RNA, and RNA Chairman Bill Oliphant, who donated £200 to support 20 RNA/FAAA members.

Museum entry was arranged through RNA contacts. HMS Sultan Helicopter Museum visit was made possible by Neil Crocker and Jim Masson.

Weymouth & Portland FAAA branch provided a grant to cover parking for members, visit supported by H.J. Baker.

Plans are already in motion for the next group event. If this visit proved anything, it is that the Fleet Air Arm spirit is very much alive and well—and when we come together, we lift one another up. Bravo Zulu to all.

The branch AGM 2025 – was held on Saturday 12th April 2025. It was attended by 48 members with confirmed apologies from 12 other members.

The meeting commenced with a presentation of a FAA Association Shield to the Club President Geoff Hanton by the Chair, Helen, in recognition of the support they provide hosting us over the past year. Committee elections followed, with Andy Powell standing down as Membership Secretary and Jim Mussenden standing down as Social Secretary we have a new order, Jim Mussenden was elected as Membership Secretary, Mark Bradbury as Social Secretary and Tony Boyle elected to the vacant position on the Committee vacated by Mark. The following Committee Members all volunteered to re-stand for election, Ian Tate - Branch Secretary, Ted Edwards - Standard Bearer and Richie Fagan – Almoner.

Members also voted on acceptance of the Branch Constitution, Treasurers Report, Membership Fees, and the selection of Weldmar Hospice for the second year as the 2025 Branch Charity.

A presentation and vote of thanks was made to Andy Powell by our Chair, in recognition of his three year tenure as Membership Secretary and hard work in streamlining the membership process and ensuring that we fully comply with GDPR.

Future Events:

Weymouth & Portland Armed Forces Weekend

Summer Ramble

VE/VJ Day Celebrations – Weymouth & Portland

Merchant Navy Day – Weymouth & Portland

Battle of Britain Day – Weymouth Bowleaze Cove Memorial

HMS Illustrious Memorial Service – Portland Marina

Portsmouth Trip 2 (TBC)

National Memorial Arboretum Visit (TBC)

Horse Racing - Wincanton Racecourse

Remembrance Day/Armistice Day – Whitehall/Weymouth/Wyke Regis & Portland

Christmas Social

Bristol Branch

Branch meetings are the 2nd Saturday in the month at 12:00 ish the venue is under review – so please contact the branch for more information.

November 2024 saw the usual addiciting at the Poppy Appeal, the Chairman Bill with Staple Hill Royal RBL, Graham Mewna at Inverness Poppy Scotland and Branch Secretary Ronald Sandry at Cribbs with RBL Stoke Gifford / and Patchway.

On Remembrance Sunday, the branch chairman laid the FAAA wreath at Fishponds War Memorial and the secretary attended the Bristol Cenotaph with family members. Other member chose their local memorials to attend. On Sunday 17th November there was the Patchway Parade and Remembrance Service at the War memorial in Scott Park, and Ronald represented the Branch Standard whilst the Chairman laid the FAAA wreath.

At a Branch meeting later a discussion took place on the lack of new members and the age of existing full and associate members and decided to ballot members on the preferred recipients of Branch Funds. On the return they have agreed to donate the funds to: Navy Wings, Blind Veterans UK, MacMillian Nurses, RNLI and Falklands Memorial Church at Pangbourne.

When the times comes to dissolve the branch would be after all this years events, as someone said "as a mark of respect to the founders of this branch who were the ones that fought in WWII".

Meetings

At this point in time the branch is in a state of flux. The plough Inn is just not suitable, Patchway Sports and Social Club has not reopened, and they are awaiting a reply from Patchway Labour Club about membership. Things became difficult when Ron could not get in touch with the Chairman Bill Rogers, only to find out that he had suffered a heart attach and had a stent fitted. Ron himself has also had some ill health, as he suffered a stroke in January. He has said though that if his speech improves enough and SWMBO agrees he hopes to attend the AGM.

Solent Branch

The Solent Branch meets on the last Thursday of the month at 20;30 in the Lee-on-the-Solent Community Centre, where we enjoy a couple of beers and on numerous occasions, throughout the year, a tot time on completion. From a branch of over 120 members a few years ago, we are now showing our age with many of our members well into their 70s and 80s, with one senior member aged 93. Although the numbers are dwindling, 47 at the last count, we can still muster at least 30 for our monthly meetings.

There was a good turnout for the Remembrance Sunday service at the FAA Memorial, Lee. There is a mall parade along Lee front with a guard provided by HMS Sultan accompanied by the volunteer band and the Solent Branch contingent of 31 members. The service of remembrance was led by the Sultan Padre. Wreaths were laid by the FAA, FAAOA, FAAA, SHAR Association and the WRNS Association. All were invited to the Conservative Club for a tot and drinks along with some solids.



We held our annual Taranto Night dinner in November, at the Conservative Club, at Lee with 59 attendees and Commodore Nick Sergent RN as guest speaker, accompanied by his wife Captain Caroline Dix RN. Nick is the son of one of our members, ex WO Roger Sergent. Another great success.



The Chairman of the National, Dave Smith and I were invited to HMS Sultan for the Ceremonial Divisions to present the Dr Rotman Trophy to the best LAET (M) and (AV) and also an award to best AET. A bitterly cold day but at least a lunch was provided in the wardroom afterwards.

The branch also held our annual Christmas lunch at the Crofton pub in Hillhead, a great time was had by 61 members, which included the competition for the best Christmas outfit and our usual quiz.

This year, 2025, has been busy as usual, social wise, with a dinner at the Fareham College, Catering Restaurant in March, excellent food and value for money, prepared and delivered by students at the college.

Dave Smith and I were invited to an Affiliates Day at Sultan, where we were shown aspects of the training programmes for both the air engineering and marine engineering, visiting workshops. The highlight of the day was a trip around Alverstoke and Browdown on the Sultan steam lorry, followed by a good lunch.

A contingent of 28 attended an impromptu service of remembrance on VE Day at the FAA Memorial, Lee. A two-minute silence was observed and the Solent Standard was paraded by Tony Fenn.



We have also had the privilege of attending a VE Day party organised by the Not Forgotten by courtesy of HMS Collingwood, followed by the Not Forgotten Garden Party at Buckingham Palace. All in all, a good start to the year.

Tony Fenn and I have also been involved with the Daedalus Commemorative Stone, which has now been erected alongside the Control Tower at Solent Airport. The unveiling will take place on 20th June.



Kent Branch

The branch meetings are held on the 4th Sunday of the month at 1100hrs in the RNA Club 9 Church Hill, Ramsgate CT11 8RA.

NFAAA Standard along with local Association Standards.



Army V Navy Rugby Match 3rd May.

This has become a much attend event at the RNA Club by Kent Branch members, this year it started with Brunch in the bar before watching the game projected on to the big screen. The bar was full with roughly 50/50 Army/Navy Veterans, plenty of banter both ways that was until the final whistle then the Army went quiet. Result ARMY 33 NAVY 37.

The rest of May is going to be busy, FAAA Reunion & AGM, 85th Anniversary of Operation Dynamo and the Little Ships, FAA/Tag's Memorial Service.

Looking forward, Armed Forces Day 28th June, FAAA Kent Branch Lunch 11th October, Remembrance Week End in November, 6th December Kent Branch Christmas Lunch.

They may only be a small Branch but are a busy one.

Yorkshire Branch

No update in this newsletter

If there is no branch in your area, and you would like to set one up, please get in touch and we can give help and guidance on how to go about this. It would be really great if we had more members, but remember if you are not near a local branch you can still join the Daedalus Branch.

An Interview with the Fleet Air Arm Associations' National Chairman Dave Smith

Q. At what age did you join the Navy? And how long did you serve for?

A. I joined the Royal navy at 16, in July 1976 and served until May 1990.

Q. What made you join the Navy, instead of one of the other Armed Forces?

A. My father had served from 1946 – 1968, so it seemed only natural that I followed in his footsteps.

Q. Why did you pick the Fleet Air Arm as the branch of the Navy to go into?

A. When I went to the careers officer in Leicester with my dad, I was offered a general service role, to which my dad said no! It is the Fleet Air Arm or nothing!

Q. What was your favourite posting when in the Navy and why??

A. RNAS Portland / HMS Osprey. This was my first posting after training and it was where I worked on actual service helicopters and the Weymouth night life was great.

Q. What skills do you think that you learnt in the Navy that you could use in your working life after you left the service?

A. I was trained in Avionics which stood me in good stead when I became a civilian as I worked in satellite tracking first and then satellite broadcasting.

Q. What is your fondest memory of your time in the service?

A. My final deployment with 800 NAS on HMS Illustrious with a trip up and down the east coast of America, then around the Caribbean before leaving the service in 1990.

Q. When and why did you join the Fleet Air Arm Association?

A. Around 2018 and I wanted to see if I could reconnect with my old shipmates.

Q. Why do you think that associations like this one should exist and how can they be kept going?

A. They bring people together that have had similar experiences in serving their country, whether that was a long time ago, or they are serving now. We need to encourage more people to join, while they are still in the service, and to continue as members when they are civilians.

Q. When did you become Chairperson of the Association, and why did you want to take on the position?

A. I became Chairperson in 2023 and wanted to help increase our visibility which also led me to becoming the associations webmaster!

Q. Is there anything else you would like to say to members reading this article, while you have their attention?

A. We want to make the association a place where both serving and veteran FAA people feel it is the association for them!

Article by Alan Key

FAREWELL THE COMMANDO FLEET

A new government comes into power and immediately the military take the brunt of money saving decisions; this has been the case for millennia and has not changed with the new Labour Government. Announcements on 20th November by Mr John Healy MP that the two Landing Support Ships HMS *Bulwark* and *Albion* are to be withdrawn with immediate effect has finally ended the Commando Fleet as part of the Royal Navy's arsenal.

THE COMMANDO FORCE

The effectiveness of HMS *Ocean* and *Theseus* for the Suez campaign operating helicopters to work at sea with the Royal Marines demonstrated how having dedicated ships to operate helicopters supporting the Royal Marine Commando Brigades was a necessity for the UK's defence strategy. It was decided that the Fleet needed ships specifically to operate in the role. As there were no current aircraft carriers on the stocks the smaller aircraft carriers were reconfiguring as Commando Carriers; HMS *Bulwark* (1959-60) and *Albion* (1960-61) and then *Hermes* (1971). Furthermore, two specially constructed commando landing ships were announced in 1962 as part of this commando force entering service on completion of their build, HMS *Fearless* (1965) and HMS *Intrepid* (1967).



HMS *Theseus* Operation Musketeer

The two carriers along with the two LPH ships carried out continuous operations from their commissioning around the globe both in operations defending British Territories, supporting friendly nations and in humanitarian roles. But like the fleet before them they were to be axed by successive Governments. The *Albion* had the shortest life being withdrawn in 1973 when her refit was cancelled as a cost saving and broken up.



HMS Albion Cdo Carrier

Bulwark was earmarked to go the same way, due to be withdrawn in 1976. She was fortunately not broken up but held in reserve in Portsmouth. With the withdrawal of HMS *Ark Royal* and the late arrival of HMS *Invincible* she was refitted as a combined commando and anti-submarine warfare role until Mr John Knott announced her immediate withdrawal in 1981 on her return from the Spring Norway cruise. When the Falklands war broke out in 1982 it was announced that she would return to service to go down south, however, it was deemed she would not be reactivated in time and that idea was cancelled and she was eventually sold for scrap.



HMS Bulwark I (R08) Cmdo Carrier

HMS *Fearless* and *Intrepid* were regularly operated in the same roles as the carriers both individually and with the combined commando force. Both were to be withdrawn at the end of the 1970's, *Intrepid* in 1976 and *Fearless* in 1979. In 1981 it was announced that both ships were surplus to requirements and were withdrawn and mothballed in Portsmouth.

They were reprieved with the withdrawal of Bulwark when it was realised there were no permanent ships available to carry out the roles in support of the Royal Marines. It was a good job they were as they went into action in the Falklands regularly operating from Bomb Alley.



HMS Fearless & Intrepid

Not long after the conflict was over both ships were in need of modernisation Intrepid being refitted in 1984/5 re-entering service as part of the Dartmouth Training Squadron finally being placed in reserve in 1990 and laid up in Fareham creek until being scrapped in 2008. Fearless was decommissioned in 1985 refitted from 1989-91 replacing Intrepid with the Dartmouth Training Squadron until 1995 and returned to commando operations until withdrawn in 2002 and laid up alongside her sister ship broken up in 2007.

HMS *Hermes* was converted into a commando carrier in 1970 to save her from being withdrawn following the run down of British Strike Carriers. Entering service in 1973 and serving alongside Bulwark until an increase in the Russian Submarine threat saw her refitted to operate Sea King ASW helicopters alongside the commando helicopters in 1977; finally in 1979 she was refitted as a Harrier Carrier. It was announced a year later that she was to be withdrawn in 1982 when she was to be replaced by HMS *Invincible*. The Falklands War changed that decision and she served as the Flagship during the conflict. She was finally paid off with her arrival in Portsmouth on 12th April 1984 and sold to the Indian Navy serving as INS *Viraat* until finally going to scrap in India in 2020 a career lasting 41 years.



HMS Hermes

ALL WAS NOT LOST A NEW FLEET IS ORDERED

The Commando Force were to receive replacement ships, first ordered in 1993 was HMS *Ocean*, entering service in 1998 as the first purpose commando assault ship (carrier) for the Royal Navy. The ship was the largest ship in the fleet on introduction, capable of carrying 830 Royal Marines alongside the 250 ships crew, operating all the helicopter types in UK service carrying up to 18 under normal operating conditions. Serving for just 20 years she was sold as surplus to RN use in 2018 to the Brazilian Navy who still use her to this day - the first death knell to the modern Commando Force! Once again the government selling off perfectly good operational ships!

Two LPH Assault ships were ordered to replace the *Fearless* and *Intrepid*, these were similar in design with a stern dock operating landing craft and assault boats/hovercraft and helicopters but without a hangar deck. HMS *Albion* in June 2003 followed by HMS *Bulwark* in April 2005.



HMS Ocean



HMS Albion & Bulwark

THE FINAL NAIL IN THE COFFIN A series of reports from the BFBS Forces News.

22nd September 2023

Uncertainty over HMS *Bulwark's* return to operations as farewells made to HMS *Albion*

A special ceremony has taken place on HMS *Albion* to say goodbye to the ship, although it is still unclear when her sister ship HMS *Bulwark* will take over as a Landing Platform Dock ship for the UK Commando Force. Sailors and Royal Marines gathered in the well dock of Albion to reflect on their time on the ship and say farewell to the Royal Navy workhorse, as her term as the UK's amphibious flagship ends. Albion has been integral to Commando Force operations all around the world – but for now, it is farewell to the fleet.

Brigadier Duncan Forbes, the commander at Headquarters Commando Forces, commended the crew during the special ceremony, calling HMS *Albion's* reputation "bomb-proof". He said: "You've delivered time and time again, no faff, no fuss, no nonsense, just quiet excellence, day in and day out on behalf of the defence, so for that I really am grateful for all you have achieved over those last weeks and months." Over the coming weeks specialist parts and equipment will be moved from Albion to Bulwark. Brig Forbes added: "None of us, if we are really honest, quite know how long it will be before Bulwark is back in the game and at the door and set for operations."



HMS Intrepid

8th January 2024

While no decision has yet been taken about whether HMS *Albion* and HMS *Bulwark* are to be mothballed, Forces News takes a look at what this could mean – and why if this does happen there would probably be a considerable reduction in capability.

Albion and Bulwark are the Royal Navy's Landing Platform Docks, designed to deliver the punch of the mighty Royal Marines to land by sea or by air. The two ships, which are 176 metres long, can carry four big landing craft (Landing Craft Utility or LCU) inside their floodable well docks, plus four smaller landing craft hanging from the sides (Landing Craft Vehicle Personnel or LCVP) – crucial to commando operations.

Mothballing the Albion-class vessels would certainly raise some eyebrows in terms of what this would mean for the Royal Marines - and would likely place the Littoral Response Group (LRG) deployments that the Navy has been championing for the past three years, in jeopardy.

The Royal Fleet Auxiliary does offer some similar capabilities and with both Albion and Bulwark currently out of action, the RFA's Bay-class Landing Ship Dock (Auxiliary) (LSD (A)) are supporting the deployment and training of Royal Marines. Bay-class vessels such as RFA *Lyme Bay* can carry one LCU inside and one or two LCVP on the deck, but these have to be craned on board, making the process much slower.



RFA Lyme Bay

RFA vessels cannot defend themselves as well, so this is where ships like Albion and Bulwark can make a difference. Marines have been increasingly doing more with the RFA after Bulwark was not ready on time to relieve Albion.

There have been few updates on Bulwark's return to operations, but the ship did share on social media at the start of December that she had undergone a "partial flood-up", describing it as a "major milestone" in the regeneration programme.

Royal Navy sources say many personnel understand HMS *Albion*, HMS *Bulwark* and HMS *Westminster*, a frigate reportedly facing decommissioning, will never come out of Devonport or go on operations again.

25th January 2024

The two Royal Navy amphibious assault ships HMS *Albion* & *Bulwark* which the Royal Marines rely on, will not be scrapped or mothballed ahead of schedule, a minister has said.

This announcement ends weeks of speculation which suggested they could be retired to free up sailors for other vessels amid a recruitment crisis. Foreign Office Minister Andrew Mitchell assured MPs that both ships would remain in service until their planned out-of-service dates in the early 2030s.

Mr Mitchell confirmed the fate of the two ships. Responding to questions about the ships, he said: "Sir Julian Lewis asked me about the two LPDs, the landing platform dock Albion and Bulwark, and he asked for an undertaking that they will not be scrapped.

"I am able on behalf of the Government to give him that undertaking that neither of them will be scrapped."

Sir Julian, the chairman of Parliament's Intelligence and Security Committee, asked: "Would he like to confirm that HMS *Albion* and HMS *Bulwark*, whose planned out-of-service dates are 2033 and 2034 respectively, not only will not be scrapped ahead of time, but will not be mothballed either?"

Mr Mitchell responded: "He is absolutely right to determine the supportive view of the Secretary of State for Defence Grant Shapps."

What makes HMS Albion and Bulwark special – and why the Marines would miss them.

HMS *Albion* and HMS *Bulwark* are capable of landing Royal Marines ashore by air and sea. The two ships which were only commissioned in 2003 and 2005 respectively are crucial to Commando operations. Royal Marines have been increasingly doing more with RFA *Lyme Bay* after Bulwark was not ready on time to take over from Albion.

The Times had previously claimed Albion and Bulwark would be mothballed under Government plans to make up for a shortage of sailors. But defence minister James Cartledge, speaking in the Commons, assured MPs no final decision had been made. And an MOD spokesperson told Forces News: "The Royal Marines Commando Force are highly trained and highly skilled and ready to be deployed globally. "The landing platform ships continue to be part of the Navy's fleet and they have further amphibious capability through Bay-class ships."The operational requirements of the Royal Navy are kept under constant review and the Ministry of Defence is committed to ensuring the Navy has the capabilities it needs to meet current and future operational requirements."

HMS Albion has spent recent years leading the Littoral Response Group (North), a force that is able to deploy across Europe and react to crises and world events. "Littoral" refers to working in coastal regions, which is crucial in getting troops, resupplies and munitions from sea to shore.

24th May 2024

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Royal Navy will have up to six new state-of-the-art amphibious ships to bring the punch of the Royal Marines Commandos ashore wherever in the world they are needed.

The new Multi Role Support Ships (MRSS) will replace HMS Albion and HMS Bulwark, the Royal Navy's current amphibious flagships which will remain in service until **2033/2034**. The MRSS will also take place of the three Bay-class amphibious support vessel, RFAs Lyme Bay, Mounts Bay and Cardigan Bay and support ship RFA Argus.

MRSS will be extremely versatile warships, able to deploy on a wider variety of operations, and designed to carry vehicles, aircraft, insertion craft and a broad range of uncrewed systems for complicated missions. They will also be able to act as primary casualty receiving ships, providing urgent medical care to British forces wherever they are deployed.

The MOD has entered the first, or concept, phase of the MRSS Programme and will work with industry as part of early market engagement ahead of developing the vessel design. MRSS Programme Director, Commander Alex Allen said: "As the son of a Royal Marine who fought in the Falklands War, I recognise the importance of this capability to a global navy.

"But these ships must be ready to meet a future threat where they will be required to exploit new technology and change roles quickly. "Adaptability and flexibility will be central to the Multi Role Support Ship design, as will interoperability with our NATO allies. "This announcement is a significant step in the programme bringing these ships into service and modernising the Royal Navy's littoral strike capability."

The First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Ben Key, said: "I am delighted that the Secretary of State has cemented the future of our Royal Marines by committing to this new class of up to six amphibious vessels. "These will be the most capable amphibious warships the nation has ever owned, designed to be fully interchangeable with our closest allies in Europe, and in NATO."

THE ANNOUNCEMENT WE WERE DREADING!

20th November 2024

HMS *ALBION* AND *BULWARK* TO BE AXED AS PART OF HEALY'S COST CUTTING DRIVE.

Two former Royal Navy flagships, a frigate and a pair of support tankers will be decommissioned under a series of cost-saving measures announced by Defence Secretary John Healey. The savings, were blamed on the "dire inheritance" left by the

Conservatives, will see the assault ships HMS *Albion* and HMS *Bulwark*, which have both been flagships, decommissioned. He said the ageing Type 23 frigate HMS *Northumberland* was beyond economic repair and would be decommissioned, along with two Wave-class tankers.

Mr Healey told the Commons: "For too long our soldiers, sailors and aviators have been stuck with old, outdated equipment because ministers wouldn't make the difficult decommissioning decisions.

"As technology advances at pace, we must move faster towards the future. So today, with full backing from our service chiefs, I can confirm that six outdated military capabilities will be taken out of service.



"These decisions are set to save the MOD £150m over the next two years and up to £500m over five years, savings that will be retained in full in defence."

He said both ships had effectively been retired by previous ministers but had superficially been kept on the books at a cost of £9m a year.

"They have provided a valuable capability over the years, but their work is done. We must look now to the future," he explained. "Be in no doubt the future for our Royal Marines and their elite force will be reinforced in the SDR [Strategic Defence Review]."

Conservative MP and former defence committee chairman **Sir Julian Lewis** said the announcement marks "a black day for the Royal Marines".

Shadow defence secretary **James Cartlidge** blamed Chancellor Rachel Reeves for the cuts. He said: "Whatever the Chancellor's true grasp of economics, she's certainly been able to force her priorities onto the country, getting the MOD to scrap major

capabilities before they've undertaken the department's much-vaunted Strategic Defence Review."

Mr Cartlidge said he had been assured HMS *Bulwark* and HMS *Albion* could have been made battleworthy in the event of a war. He said: "I personally sought and received assurances from the Navy's leadership... that in the event of a full-scale warfighting scenario where the priority for the Navy was littoral capability, those ships could have still been regenerated to a condition able to fight, and the crews found.

"Permanently scrapping the landing ships means we remove that capability entirely. So what impact will this have on the operational effectiveness of the Royal Marines?

"MRSS [multi-role support ship] is intended to fill the gap – but will be at least eight to nine years away."

Liberal Democrats defence spokesman **Richard Foord** praised Mr Healey's emphasis on defence people but said the decommissioning decisions left "alarming gaps" in capability. The announcement about the reassignment of personnel across the force comes as a former head of the Royal Marines expressed his concerns over the axing.

Retired Major **General Buster Howes** warned Royal Marines won't be as effective operating from RFA vessels which have supported recent Commando deployments and training.

Defence Procurement Minister **Maria Eagle**, responding to a written parliamentary question, confirmed: "All of the remaining crew have been reassigned: either to other platforms, to training courses or into other positions supporting the Royal Navy's highest priority outputs."

She also explained how a "small number" of Royal Navy personnel had been retained to manage onboard systems and safety until the final disposal of the two vessels.

THE END OF AN ERA? like other cancellations (CVA-01, TSR2, Nimrod MK4) and withdrawal of serviceable equipment (Buccaneer, Phantom, Sea Harrier and Harrier and numerous ships after or during refit – Albion (LPD), Ocean (LPD)(in service with the Brazilian Navy, Victorious, Hermes, Ark Royal (CVS) and now Bulwark which was close to returning to service post upgrading; the military and RN in particular are the brunt of cost cutting measures. Whats next the QE class!

Crossed the bar

We celebrate the lives of those who have Crossed the bar in the last 6 months

Cdr Charles Giles Died 24.2.2025

A commander in the Royal Navy died peacefully at home with family aged 93.

He flew Scimitars with 736 and 800 Squadrons (Ark Royal) from 1959 before converting to the Buccaneer in 1964.

He was SP of 801 (Victorious) and then CO 800 (Eagle) from late 1965 to late 1966.

He told the 1965 story in Charlie Manning's "View from the Cockpit – P124) - Noting that the Buccaneer Mk 1 had no air to air armament, the legendary Jack Smith got the 801 armorers to fake a Sidewinder out of used beer cans, mounted on a Buccaneer in plain sight, for the benefit of the resident Russian spies along the Suez Canal.

He retired in 1978.

Donald (Tucker) Bell (1931 – 2024)

A distinguished veteran of the Royal Navy Fleet Air Arm and a dedicated public servant. Donald's life was one of service, courage, and unwavering commitment to his country and community.

Donald enlisted in May 1949 training at Ariel as Aircraft Radio & Radar Mechanic.

On completion March 1950 served at St Meryne NAS, Cornwall.

Then to HMS Gannet, nr Stranraer June 1952 on 825 Squadron on HMS Theseus and HMS Ocean which transferred to St Meryne.

The squadron embarked on HMS Theseus to sail to the east.

Then the squadron transferred to HMS Ocean and passed through Suez and then on to Korea.

The ship routine was to attack North Korea for 4 days and then 1 day refuelling and a further 4 days attacking North Korea.

Then replaced by an American carrier before returning to attack North Korea. This continued for 6 months before returning to home waters.

His time in the Fleet Air Arm was marked by bravery and dedication, embodying the spirit and values of the Royal Navy.

Followed by clean and repair ship until demob in 1965.

Following his naval service, Donald transitioned to the **Police Service**, where he continued his lifelong commitment to protecting and serving others. His second career reflected his sense of duty and integrity, earning him the respect and admiration of colleagues and the community alike.

Donald's funeral was a fitting tribute to his life of service. The ceremony was graced by the presence of four **standard bearers**, including the **National Standard for the Fleet Air Arm**, a poignant reminder of his proud naval career.

His coffin was adorned with the **ensign**, a symbol of his allegiance to the Royal Navy, and the ceremony featured a moving rendition of the **Last Post**, performed by a Royal Marine Bugler from **HMS Collingwood**. These honours reflected the high regard in which Donald was held and the legacy he leaves behind.

If you want to notify us of any members who have crossed the bar please inform Mick Wyatt the Membership Secretary – memsecfaaa@btinternet.com or 01582 608828

Obituaries for all former FAA personnel will be accepted to be placed in this newsletter and on the website. Please email the editor or leave a message on the website.

Recent Events

2025 AGM and REUNION GET TOGETHER

The reunion was held again this year at the refurbished Holiday Inn (now called the VOCO Hotel) in Southampton over the weekend of 9-11th May. The hotel had been very generous with the room rates saving attendees about £150 on the going rate for the weekend. The hotels in Southampton were full and rooms in demand due to the amount of cruise liners in port over the weekend. They again gave us a 10% discount on our bar bill and did not charge us for the function rooms and private bar. A big thank you to George Pick for his negotiating skills. A few members arrived on Thursday and some staying until Monday for an extended weekend.

The small gathering of members joined together for an evening buffet and quiz in a private room on Friday evening. Once again, the hotel did us proud with the buffet which was plentiful. Alan had put together a quiz with categories such as general knowledge, backing groups, England towns and a dastardly post code table quiz. The Chairman's table took the honours of winning by a narrow margin.

The AGM on Saturday was very productive with many things being discussed including some changes to the constitution, agreeing to support Operation Christmas Box again this year and also support a special rugby match in memory of Lt Rhodri Leyshon RN who sadly lost his life in the 846 Sqdn. Merlin accident last September. The match will be held in September near to the anniversary of the accident.



The low attendance at the weekend event brought about discussions of future AGM's and reunions and we shall be exploring through branches the feelings of having a combined AGM meeting with a ZOOM link for those who are unable to attend in person; and a separate social event, along with suggestions of where to hold it. There was a short lunch break where a hot finger buffet was available – there was enough food especially small sausages to feed the whole hotel! The hot pork pies were terrific something it appears none of us had experienced before.

The gala dinner was attended by our President rear Admiral Tom Cunningham CBE and his wife Sally for a very enjoyable evening of good food, wine and dancing. Lots of reminiscing amongst those attending and some great banter. The final group departed for bed at around 2am and a good time was had by all.



A big thank you to Alan, George and Alice (Hotel events manager) for putting on an excellent weekend and all the staff for their brilliant service.

Fleet Air Arm TAGA Memorial Service

Telegraphist Air Gunners (TAGs) served in Fleet Air Arm aircraft from 1922 – 1950, providing communications by Morse Code and manning the rear gun.

Three thousand TAGs were trained in the 28 year life span of the branch. 507 were lost through enemy action and/or flying accidents, 69 became Prisoners of War. Most TAGs served only for the period of WW2, returning to civilian occupations in 1945/46. TAG's were awarded 2 CGMs, 115 DSMs, 20 BEMs and 134 Mentions in Despatches.

They served in 77 different Aircraft Carriers. Each year the Association presents the TAGA Trophy and Medal to the outstanding Air Engineering Mechanic of the Year chosen by the Air Engineering staff at HMS Sultan.

The Telegraphist Air Gunners Association has held a Memorial Service on the third Sunday in May since 1953 when the Duchess of Kent unveiled the Fleet Air Arm Memorial at Lee on Solent.

Since 2013 when the TAG's Association dissolved, the service has been organised by the Fleet Air Arm Association.

There were 26 people who attended the lunch this year including four personnel representing HMS Sultan and the Royal Naval Air Engineering and Survival equipment School (RNAESS) on the 18th May. This was followed by a service at St Faiths and a wreath laying at the Memorial. It was a lovely occasion and was also attended by the FAAA President and Patron.





The Sultan personnel were: Lt Matthew Dunn RN, WO1 Ian Morcom, (current RNAESS staff), and AETs Issac Sutton and AET William Vinney (representing current trainees).

Sadly there are few TAG's left, but thought your would like to see a photo of Ron Underwood, sent to me by Tom Cunningham. This is Ron who is 100 years old (he was 99 at the time), leading the Brightlingsea VE Day Parade in May this year.



Fleet Air Arm Aircraft 1939 to 1945

HELP WANTED!

Help Wanted - did your relatives fly with the Fleet Air Arm in World War 2? If so, you might be able to help naval aviation's most dedicated historians.

Between them Lee Howard, Theo Ballance and the late Mick Burrow and Ray Sturtivant, have been responsible for a series of definitive works on naval aircraft/units (*Fleet Air Arm Fixed-Wing Aircraft since 1946*, *Fleet Air Arm Helicopters since 1943* and *The Squadrons and Units of the Fleet Air Arm*).

Sadly, Mick passed away in August 2024 while he and Lee were busily updating the 'bible': *Fleet Air Arm Aircraft 1939 and 1945*, which is now a quarter of a century old with second hand copies fetching upwards of £400. That has involved charting and updating the history of somewhere in the region of 25,000 airframes – a daunting task made all the harder by the authorities who destroyed much of the official documentation shortly after the war's end.

For the much improved and updated second edition, Lee is continuing to put right any errors from the original version, cram in extra info, and add scores of new photographs. Aircrew logbooks (pilot, observer and telegraphist/air gunner) could help plug the gaps – as well as add to the Fleet Air Arm story.

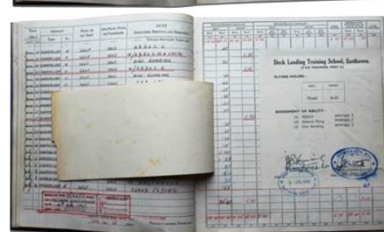
Most fliers who survived the war kept hold of their logs; the books of those killed in action eventually ended up in the War Office's document warehouse in Middlesex... until the beginning of the 60s when a clear-out prompted some families to claim logs, but with hundreds more being pulped including, it is thought, those once belonging to *Bismarck* chase/Channel Dash hero Lieutenant Commander Eugene Esmonde VC DSO.

Despite the wholesale destruction of hundreds, if not thousands, of logbooks, over the years the FAA historians have pored over more than 3,000 such examples to help their research and are hopeful many more are still out there.

"While, on the face of it, many owners may think their logbooks contain no meaningful information, the devil is in the detail," Lee explained. "Meticulous analysis can often extract the data needed to piece the histories of the aircraft and squadrons, as well as helping to highlight the sacrifices of those individuals involved."

Though the emphasis for now is on wartime logbooks, the team are also keen to see logs – or copies – from post-war fliers from Suez and Malaya through the Falklands to Afghanistan, as well as long-running SAR duties in the UK to build up the knowledge base for future naval aviation reference books. Personal photos featuring wartime aircraft are also sought to help make this the most comprehensive book on the subject.

Lee can be contacted via lee.howard@air-britain.com or by scanning this QR code: -



Other items you may be interested in

Combat Stress Study

Combat Stress and partners are looking for male veterans to participate in a study exploring how veterans cope with challenging or stressful experiences. Following on from work with women veterans, the team want to understand the different coping skills and strategies that are used during military careers and beyond. Any man who has served in the UK armed forces can take part by completing an online questionnaire, with a selection then being invited to an online interview. They hope that the findings can help services and programmes better harness veterans' unique skillsets and experiences. For more information please go to www.tinyurl.com/veterancope or email research@combatstress.org.uk

North East Lincolnshire Armes Forces Weekend 27 – 29 June 2025

Cleethorpes, NE Lincs DN35 0AR

Keeping the UK Armes Forces Community (Serving military, reservists, veterans and cadets with their families) in the public eye. A series of build-up attractions to promote civil-military integration and a full programme on the day including parades, entertainment, flying displays and capability demonstrations.

Please check online for ticket information and prices.

Battle of Britain Airshow 28 – 29 June 2025

Headcorn Airfield, Nr Maidstone Kent TN27 9HX

The show features representative aircraft of the Battle of Britain era and family friendly attractions. For 2025, in its 10th anniversary year, the show is reduced to 2 days and will celebrate the 85th Anniversary of the Battle of Britain.

Please check on line for ticket information and prices.

Royal International Air Tattoo 18 – 20 July

RAF Fairford, Gloucestershire GL7 4EG

The biggest military airshow in the world, featuring modern military and classic aircraft, static and flying , from many continents.

In 2025 is set to highlight specialised aircraft used for intelligence, surveillance, maritime patrol, search and rescue etc.

See online for ticket and price information.

HMS Collingwood Open day 28 June 2025

What could be better than a fun-filled family day out with displays that'll capture the imagination of everyone at the largest Royal Navy training establishment in the UK? Once the entrance fee is paid, all entertainment and attractions are free of charge, including the fairground rides!

Come and say hello.

Tickets are now on sale for our Annual Open Day featuring the Royal Navy & Royal Marines Charity Field Gun competition

Under 3s enter free, no ticket required. Free onsite parking. Only service dogs allowed.

Check out the link below to buy your tickets now!

<https://royalnavy.ticketsrv.co.uk/>

HM Armed Forces Veterans Card

The card is a recognition of your service, and having one can help you maintain a link with your service identity.

It will help you access the many services, concessions and offers that organisations make available to veterans.

From 2025 it will also act as proof of identity for voting in UK elections.

If you have left the service since 2019, you should have received one when leaving. For everyone that left before that date you can apply online at [Apply for an HM Armed Forces Veteran Card - GOV.UK](#) or if you are unable to apply online you can contact the Veterans UK Helpline details shown below. They'll send you a form that you can return by post. The form is available in English or Welsh.

Veterans UK Helpline

veterans-uk@mod.gov.uk

Telephone: 0808 1914 218

Monday to Friday, 8am to 4pm

Welfare

Fleet Air Arm Association Welfare Fund

The welfare fund is administered by four officers serving on the National Committee. Branch secretaries have the full welfare policy guidelines and claims procedure. Any qualifying member requiring assistance from the fund should contact their Branch 'Almoner' or Branch Secretary. Contact will be in full confidence.

Help for Heroes

Offer a wide range of support, whether you're having money troubles, or need support with housing or applying for benefits. You might just need a listening ear, and they can provide that too.

Look at their website at www.helpforheroes.org.uk

The Veterans Charity

They can provide support to veterans who find themselves battling hardship and the distress it causes. Despite being a small charity, they operate nationally throughout the UK including Northern Ireland. They are able to assist with essentials such as food shopping, utilities support, clothing and footwear, household items and single appliances, smartphones/tablets and calling credit/data. They are available to anyone who has served within UK Armed Forces and can verify their service. They have formed a partnership with The Royal Naval Benevolent Trust to deliver immediate needs support where it is needed.

Contact them at www.veteranscharity.org.uk/sprtreq

SSAFA

SSAFA support forces through the transition process to joining civvy street. They also provide welfare services to the family members of the Armed Forces community, and give physical and emotional support to older veterans. They can give advice, social care and housing for the Armed Forces. They also support serving personnel, their families and veterans with anything relating to disability and also help with mental wellbeing on coping with bereavement, injury and other forms of stress.

Call them on 08002606767

Royal British Legion

The Royal British Legion is there to help members of the Royal Navy, British Army, Royal Air Force, veterans and their families. They support serving and ex-serving personnel all year round, every day of the week.

Call on 0808 8028080 or email info@britishlegion.org.uk

The Royal Naval Benevolent Trust

They assist thousands of people who are serving or have served as warrant officers and below in The Royal Navy & Royal Marines, and their dependants, who find themselves in need or distress. Their aim is to help them enjoy a reasonable quality of life mainly by providing wide ranging financial assistance. They also care for older people in their own care homes and almshouses.

Email them on help@rnbt.org.uk or call on 02392 690112

Royal Naval Association

The Royal Naval Association is the biggest collective group of Royal naval veterans and serving personnel, with over 270 branches in the UK and overseas. The association provides those with a link to the Royal Navy access to a life-long community of like-minded and supportive individuals. The community provides companionship, resilience, comradeship and unity to anyone and everyone with a Naval story, supporting them through life's highs and lows.

Check out their website to join www.royal-naval-association.co.uk

Women's Royal Naval Service Benevolent Trust

This exists to provide worldwide advice and financial relief in cases of necessity or distress among its members and their dependants. They can also make grants for the education of members.

Email them on gransadmin@wrnsbt.org.uk

And Finally - Did You Know?

Ivor Novello the famed Actor, dramatist, singer and composer who was born in Cardiff in 1893 served in the Royal Naval Air Service (the forerunner of the Fleet Air Arm) from 1916 when he was called up, and reported for training as a probationary flight sub-lieutenant. After he twice crashed aeroplanes, he was moved to the Admiralty office in central London for the rest of the war.

Sir Laurence Olivier joined the Fleet Air Arm during WWII as his friend and fellow actor **Ralph Richardson** was already in the service. Richardson had gained a reputation for crashing aircraft, which Olivier rapidly eclipsed. Olivier and Vivian Leigh settled in a cottage just outside RNAS Worthy Down, where he was stationed with a training squadron. He spent much of his time taking part in broadcasts and making speeches to build morale, and also made propaganda films for the war office.

Captain Eric "Winkle" Brown – One of the most famous Fleet Air Arm pilots, Brown holds the world record for the most aircraft types flown (487) and the most carrier landings (2,407). His career spanned World War II and beyond, including testing captured German aircraft.

Admiral Sir Caspar John – The first British naval aviator to become **First Sea Lord**, leading the Royal Navy from 1960 to 1963.

Vice-Admiral Richard Bell Davies – The first naval aviator to receive the **Victoria Cross (VC)** and the first Fleet Air Arm officer to reach flag rank.

Prince Andrew, Duke of York – Served as a **Fleet Air Arm helicopter pilot** during the Falklands War in 1982.