SUPERBASE 22

YEOVILTON

Defenders of the Fleet

Mike Verier

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Superbase Yeovilton would not have been possible without the kind permission and support of Captain Shercliff and the two Commanders (Air) who have occupied the post of 'Wings' during the compilation of this book, Cdr Benbow, and currently Cdr Hugh Clark.

The job of organizing my visits fell primarily on the shoulders of Wings' Air Staff Officer Caroline Salisbury. I am eternally grateful for her administrative and logistical skills, exercised with unflagging good humour.

The author is indebted to PO(phot) 'Mac' MacKenzie, his wife L/Wren(phot) Fiona MacKenzie and LA(phot)s Joe Mercer and Jon Garthwaite for contributing some of their superb photographs in this Superbase volume.

Special mention must be made, however, of Lt Cdr Les Port and 846 who hosted me in Norway. Their hospitality, geniality and flying ability easily surpassed anything this correspondent had previously encountered. Nor must I forget to mention the unsung heroes of CHOSC who provided the essential arctic kit and made it all happen.

Similarly, 3BAS went to extraordinary trouble to ensure that I got the shots, particular thanks here to WO Candlish and Sgt Jeff Carvell.

Lastly, Lt Cdr Steve George and his wife Roslyn; Nick Dunsford; everyone in the tower; and my incredibly understanding wife and children — thank you one and all.

Published in 1991 by Osprey Publishing Limited
59 Grosvenor Street, London W1X 9DA

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Verier, Mike
Yeovilton – (Superbase v. 22)
1. United Kingdom. Air bases
I. Title II. Series
358.4170673

ISBN 1 85532 138 6

Editor Dennis Baldry
Page design Paul Kime
Printed in Hong Kong

Front cover A pair of British Aerospace Sea Harrier FRS.1 V/STOL fighters from No 800 Sqn head back to RNAS Yeovilton after a practice bombing sortie at the Holbeach range. Leading this two-ship formation is Lieutenant Al McLaren, the only Royal Navy Reserve Sea Harrier pilot in the Fleet Air Arm. His wingman on this occasion is Lieutenant Dicky Payne, a former Lynx helicopter pilot with No 815 Sqn (*Tony Holmes*)

Back cover This fascinating line-up of naval airpower, past and present, greeted visitors to Yeovilton's Families Day in June 1990. The historic aircraft in the front row, all of which are normally on display in the FAA Museum in the background, are (right to left): Vought F4U-6 Corsair Mk 4: Armstrong Whitworth Sea Hawk FGA.6; de Havilland Sea Venom FAW.21; Douglas Skyraider AEW.2; Supermarine Scimitar F.1 and de Havilland Sea Vixen FAW.2. Back row (right to left): a pair of Sea Harrier FRS.1s; Hawker Hunter T.8M; Hunter T.7 and English Electric Canberra TT.18. Sharp eyes will spot the ex-US Marine Corps McDonnell Douglas F-4S Phantom II parked outside the Museum (*Dennis Baldry*)

Title page Two of the three Fleet Air Arm Sea Harrier squadrons deploy from their shore-base at RNAS Yeovilton to the Royal Navy's three *Invincible* class aircraft carriers as required. Lashed securely to the flight deck of HMS *Ark Royal* (R07), this Sea Harrier FRS.1 of No 801 Sqn displays its 190 Imp gal underwing fuel tanks and two belly-mounted 30 mm Aden cannon pods (*Tony Holmes*)

Right Capt Robin Shercliff, Yeovilton's current commanding officer is well suited to the post having flown fast jets (Scimitars and Sea Vixens) as well as commando helicopters (Wessex); he also commanded HMS *Hermes*' carrier air group during the Battle of the South Atlantic, so knows better than most the capabilities of the Sea Harrier. Apart from his duties as boss of one of NATO's busiest airfields he also heads the station's determined efforts to restore St Bartholomew's — Yeovilton's 'own' church — bounded on two sides by taxiways and very dear to Fleet Air Arm hearts. More donations are needed if the bells are once more to ring without the tower falling down

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Introduction

Royal Naval Air Station Yeovilton is situated in the English county of Somerset. The sheer diversity of aircraft operating from the base is simply amazing and spans almost the entire history of Naval aviation, from the Swordfish to the Sea Harrier.

What really makes Yeovilton different from other Superbases though is its singularly *British* naval character. RNAS Yeovilton is, to the Royal Navy, HMS *Heron*. Although a shore establishment it is run and organized exactly like a ship and, like a ship, it has a sense of community and robust good humour unequalled elsewhere. The Army would call it *esprit de corps* but it's more subtle than that, and to *really* understand it the outsider has to learn to speak 'pusser'.

Thus Commando Sea Kings become 'junglies' (because they're painted green and it distinguishes them from the rival 'pingers' of the anti-sub community). The Sea Harriers become SHARs, and if you want to enquire about any aircraft in general you ask about the 'cabs'. Occasionally, Jack injects his own ready wit and quite senior officers can also find themselves describing an unserviceable aircraft as having 'gone tits'.

In the half-century since Westland's chief test pilot Harald Penrose first landed in a marshy Somerset field, RNAS Yeovilton has seen many changes, hosted many famous people and aircraft, and garnered for itself an impressive list of 'firsts' and records; today you can also watch the comings and goings of this front line base from a special viewing gallery in one of the best aviation museums in the world.

If you do, spare a moment to look across the airfield. Tucked into a corner of the south side is the tiny village from which the station takes its name. The tower of its church, St Bartholomew's, is a clearly visible landmark.

St Barts has a special place in Yeovilton's affections; more than a few naval aviators have married there, and others, young men all, rest in the quiet part of the churchyard set aside for them. If ever there was a reminder of the price we pay for peace it's when the great airbase falls silent for the lone bugler.

The *last post* is, however, always followed immediately by *revellie*. With the Church no longer able to maintain it, St Barts was threatened with an inevitable decline into disrepair and collapse. Happily, its stewardship is now in the hands of the air station and restoration, funded entirely from voluntary contributions, has begun.

The 'sharp end' of naval aviation may be the carriers, but their aircraft are merely deployed to them—they *live* at Yeovilton. Like flocks of migratory birds they always return.

Home is HMS *Heron*—Superbase Yeovilton.

Right Now sadly replaced by strong, but decidedly unaesthetic, security gates, the wardroom had for many years these impressive carved examples (the other half featured a Scimitar which should indicate their date of inception). Do not be fooled by the young woman's disarming smile if you're a potential terrorist though—the rifle sling is worn in the streetwise fashion of those trained to deal with such people

Contents

Hawker Heritage

Right This SHAR is being prepared for some minor work on the nosewheel. The aircraft is 'armed' with a Sidewinder acquisition round for use in air-to-air combat training. Of similar appearance is the ACMI (Air Combat Manoeuvering Instrumentation) pod which would be carried when deployed to instrumented ranges such as Deci and the North Sea

Below 'Cranials' are a vital and necessary piece of kit when aircraft are operating whether on land or at sea. Aside from the obvious 'hard hat' benefits, the ear defenders are essential—quiet the Harrier is not! There is a long-standing tradition of decorating one's personal cranial. Designs, as we shall see later, can get quite complex


712

Above The Sea Harrier's big bubble canopy is a great improvement over the RAF GR.3. With only the comforting shape of Martin-Baker's handiwork between the pilot and 360 degree vision, this one-time 'ground attack' aircraft is a combat-proven dogfighter, too

Right This Sea Harrier is about to depart for an air-to-air sortie against the Hunters of FRADU (of which more later) the small vane ahead of the windscreen is a simple weathercock to assist the pilot in judging crosswinds in the hover. The canopy may be big, but it's still a tight fit in there. The seat in question is the Mk 10 zero-zero version — essential in view of the Harrier's remarkable flight envelope — egress through the canopy being aided by the miniature detonating cord moulded into the Perspex


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Left A return to Yeovilton means that the engineers can catch up on the deep maintenance not possible in the confines of a carrier. The SHAR, like Ed Heinemann's Skyhawk, doesn't need wing folding for stowage on board. The folding nose provides access to the radar 'black boxes' (*Jon Garthwaite*)

Above Lined up like knights ready for the joust, 899's SHARs await their pilots. 'DANGER—AIRCRAFT ARMED' the sign says. The Sea Harrier's Blue Fox radar has proved highly effective in combat. Its elegant nasal contours are due to be replaced by the somewhat less aesthetic lines of the radome for the Blue Vixen radar, a feature of the FRS.2 mid-life update which will enable the Sea Harrier to engage targets at beyond visual range. The large building in the background is the Fleet Air Arm Museum, and the recently extended 'History of V/STOL' gallery overlooks this very flight line. This uniquely allows study of the earliest history of vertical flight whilst the sight, sound, and aroma of the latest developments can be experienced just outside. This is very much a *living* museum


001

Below These pictures were taken in the summer of 1990 as the V/STOL gallery was being readied for opening. This resulted in 'Great Grandad' coming out for some air and a fresh coat of paint. Progenitor of the SHARs it proudly overlooks, this early development (P.1127) airframe is a very different machine indeed from today's complex and capable multi-role fighter

Left The overall dark grey 'low vis' scheme dates from the Falklands campaign, where the Harrier/Sidewinder combination proved deadly. Trialled and delivered during that conflict was a twin launcher for the 'Winders which doubled the aircraft's AAM armament without compromising the inboard pylons. The SHAR can carry a variety of weaponry, including iron and cluster bombs, 'smart' laser-guided munitions, and Sea Eagle air-to-surface missiles for the anti-shipping role. Also visible are the belly-mounted Aden 30 mm cannons—an essential adjunct for both air-to-air and air-to-surface combat at close ranges (*'Mac' MacKenzie*)

Above *Grey on grey.* Under a storm-laden Somerset sky, 800's SHARs await the deluge. The nearest aircraft is carrying an ACMI pod. This unit was the first Naval Air Squadron to be formed (in May 1933), and holds many battle honours—including over a dozen kills in the Falklands. Several of the aircraft in this line served in that conflict

Left The two-seaters are designated T.4Ns and are not really navalized aircraft at all, being identical in most details to RAF machines. From this angle the Rolls-Royce Pegasus turbofan's cavernous intakes can be readily appreciated. No 899 is the Royal Navy's OCU for the Sea Harrier force and their T.4s are much in demand

Above All Harriers benefit from the invention of the ramp take-off. Conceived by Lt Cdr D Taylor the ramp adds considerably to the payload a Harrier can lift off the deck by imparting a ballistic component to the vital first moments in the air. As can be seen in this view the longer nose of the two-seater is balanced by a taller fin and extended tail boom housing the aft reaction jets (for yaw control in the hover). A ventral fin completes the mods required

Left Nozzles fully down a SHAR fitted with the bolt-on flight refuelling probe comes to the hover over the approach to the ramp, stirring up a cloud of recently mown grass. Evident in this view is the rural nature of Yeovilton's surroundings

It's late afternoon as this SHAR hits the ramp for another launch. Being flung skywards in this way may seem drastic but is a straightforward operation for the pilot. The increased weight take-offs made possible by the ramp significantly improve the aircraft's range and payload

Above The raised cockpit gives the instructor an excellent view, but adds to the gawkiness of the two-seater on its bicycle undercarriage. This is further emphasized by the substitution of airflow strakes in place of the twin cannon

Left Next! A Sidewinder-toting Sea Harrier cranks up for its turn on the ramp

There are three Sea Harrier squadrons home-based at HMS *Heron*. No 899 NAS as the training unit is of course the most frequently seen, their distinctive winged gauntlet (dating back in its present form to the days of the Sea Vixen), being easily identifiable

Nos 800 and 801 Sqns are the 'front line' units and one or both are constantly deployed to the carriers. This immaculate example is 801's 'bossmobile'. The Fleet Air Arm is noted for its social traditions and squadrons have been known to attend wardroom functions with cummerbunds in 'unit colours'. In the case of 801 this is of course black and white chequers!


4

Left As day becomes evening the aircraft are pushed back into the hangars. Flying may be over for now but essential work will continue through the night to ensure that the 'cabs' are on the line in the morning

Above This picture provides a neat link to an earlier Hawker thoroughbred, the Hunter, about which more anon. Sea Harriers fly air combat training missions against the F-15 Eagle during deployments to the vast NATO range at Deci (Decimomannu in Sardinia, the subject of SUPERBASE 4 and known universally as 'Deci'—pronounced 'Detchee'). The F-15 has a formidable long range kill capability, but it is by no means certain to beat the SHAR in a visual dogfight. Impressive victory tallies against the F-15 are reported by Sea Harrier pilots whenever the two fighters tangle. Indeed, there are certain air forces who refuse to play *at all* once they know the adversary is a Sea Harrier
(*'Mac' MacKenzie*)

'Hello mum!' These two photogenic fellows are two of the civilian pilots who fly Hunters with FRADU—the Fleet Requirements and Air Direction Unit. FRADU has a number of tasks ranging from providing targets and simulating hostile aircraft for Royal Navy ships, to assisting in the training of RN fighter controllers (another of Yeovilton's many facets). Flying military aircraft (especially Hunters!) full-time as a civilian is clearly one of the better jobs in aviation, and the FRADU pilots certainly give the impression of being a very contented bunch

Above Hunter '872' a few moments earlier having just arrived on the south dispersal's busy flight line. The groundie runs a quick external check for any leaks or problems before shut-down, following which the pilots will be allowed out. As befits their many hours on type the aircraft has been very precisely taxied onto the chock, hence the exactly placed ladders


872
72

Preceding pages Ignition! The Hunter's trusty Avon turbojet howls into life using the standard three-shot turbo-starter system which, by means of a miniature gas turbine and self-reduction gear and clutch, drives on the front of the main engine shaft and accelerates the engine to a self-sustaining 2000 rpm (*Dennis Baldry*)

Right Even in its two-seat form the Hunter retains its classic elegance of line. The year 1991 will see the 40th anniversary of Sir Sydney Camm's much loved design, and there is every reason to suppose that more than a few will still be around for the half-century

Above Reminiscent of a scene from San Carlos Water during the Falklands conflict in 1982, a Hunter T.7 masquerades as the 'enemy' as it swoops in between the Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA) *Blue Rover* and the Type 42 destroyer HMS *Birmingham*. During the course of this Basic Operational Sea Training (BOST) mission, this FRADU Hunter performed both 'attacking aircraft' and 'sea-skimming missile' attack profiles (*Tony Holmes*)


812

Right As the next sortie gets under way the tailhook and bumper which differentiates the naval T.8 from other marks can be seen. Aside from the 'strap-on' airbrake under the rear fuselage, the Hunter has retained exceptionally clean lines throughout its long career

Below The two-seat Hunter's canopy was a source of some difficulty at the design stage, many different configurations being tried before the definitive shape was achieved. The principle of area rule, which in 1956 was a very novel feature in British aircraft design, was ultimately to solve the canopy's aerodynamic problems


871

Left A flashback to an earlier age. In the late sixties and early seventies 'dayglo' was much in vogue for training aircraft. Similarly, the silver or natural metal base finishes of yore gave way to the rather smarter Light Aircraft Grey seen here. As ever the Royal Navy came up with a distinctively different scheme for their aircraft (*Fiona MacKenzie*)

Below Whilst the airframes belong to the Navy, FRADU is operated under contract by Flight Refuelling Ltd, who provide all the manpower on the ground as well as the pilots. The *rad haz* patch on this chap's cranial presumably means he can stop the oncoming Hunter by sheer willpower if necessary


879

Left This shot from Yeovilton's archives clearly has a story attached to it. The aircraft is a T.7 complete with RAF colour scheme and squadron crest, but it had undoubtedly been taken onto FRADU's strength as evidenced by the nose number and 'VL' tail code (*LA(phot) Thomas*)

Above Also on the south side flight line are two T.8Ms which belong to No 899 NAS. These aircraft are fitted with a Sea Harrier-type cockpit layout and, more obviously, the Blue Fox radar nose. The T.8M enables SHAR pilots to train effectively on the Blue Fox radar system without burning expensive Sea Harrier hours. These Hunters often carry AIM-9 acquisition rounds on the outboard pylons (above which the sharp-eyed amongst you will detect the tower of Yeovilton church shimmering in the jet efflux), and are also distinguished by the 'high vis' presentation of the squadron's tail emblem

Above Nasal variations: four different types of Hunter on the line. Acquired towards the end of the fifties, 71 surplus Hunter F.4s were obtained from the RAF and converted to naval standards, emerging as GA.11s (the T.8s were converted on the production line from the basic T.7). As the Hunter will continue to serve 'for the foreseeable future', the £30,000 paid for each F.4 has proved to be very cost effective

Right In late 1990 Yeovilton still had one last Hunter in the old grey and white scheme, a nostalgic sight amongst all the toned-down schemes of the post-Falklands era


834


34

Left An instant recognition feature of most of Yeovilton's Hunters is the Varley light in the nose. It is mainly used to assist in tracking the aircraft when engaged in calibration work (*Dennis Baldry*)

Above A delightful study of the classic Hunter in its element. The lineage of active Hawker aircraft stretches back even further at Yeovilton . . . (*Joe Mercer*)


88

Left . . . the Sea Hawk, a first generation straight-wing jet, served the RN well for many years, and was last used by FRADU (then known simply as the Fleet Requirements Unit—FRU), under the auspices of Airwork at Hurn). Painted all-black, these aircraft were guaranteed to cause a stir wherever they went in an era of Phantoms and Buccaneers. This magnificently restored example—the only airworthy Sea Hawk in the world—was originally a Culdrose project. As operating costs mounted it was brought under the wing of the Historic Flight and moved to Yeovilton. After several seasons on the airshow circuit it received a major overhaul, emerging in late-1989 in pristine condition. The markings are those of No 806 NAS

Above Sadly it has been decided that the funds to keep the Sea Hawk flying simply aren't available. At the time of writing its fate is undecided, but it seems possible that it could be sold to a private buyer. This may well mean that it goes to America, a major loss for British historic aviation (*Joe Mercer*)


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Also to be seen and heard at Yeovilton until recently were the Historic Flight's two examples of Hawker's ultimate piston-engined fighter, the Sea Fury. Representing the peak of piston-engined fighter development, the Sea Fury was actually a match for some of its jet contemporaries. Indeed, during the Korean War a MiG-15 jet fighter was shot down by a Sea Fury. No one would suggest that the encounter was in any way the norm (the Sea Fury was used primarily in the ground attack role), but it serves to illustrate that the basic design, by then two generations old, was exceptional. TF956, the Sea Fury FB.11 seen here, was in fact the first production aircraft, being completed in 1947. After an active service life it was re-purchased by Hawker Aircraft in the early 1960s with the intention of including it in a collection of historic company types. This scheme proved to be impracticable and the fully refurbished aircraft was presented to the Historic Flight, who delighted airshow crowds with it for many years. It was lost in 1989 when its pilot, unable to persuade both undercarriage legs to come down, was left with no alternative but to abandon the aircraft over the sea. With the loss of the FB.11, the Flight's silver Sea Fury T.20 continued to demonstrate that the two-seater version has virtually the same performance as its more belligerent relative. Those lucky enough to be invited to Yeovilton's families day in 1990 were treated to a majestic display of power and agility from the T.20. Sadly the sound of its mighty Centaurus was not to echo around the Somerset hills for much longer. A little over a month later WG655 suffered an engine failure on take-off, and was written off in the subsequent forced landing. Fortunately, the pilot and aircrewman were only slightly hurt. With supreme ill-luck the pilot was the same officer who had suffered the earlier undercarriage mishap in the single-seat FB.11 (*'Mac' MacKenzie*)


ROYAL NAVY

Ah! de Havilland

Hawker isn't the only great *marque* to be found at Yeovilton. The products of the de Havilland company – both the parent and its Canadian subsidiary – are also much in evidence. Heron Flight operates two Chipmunk primary trainers for Historic Flight proficiency flying and, at weekends, for glider towing. Something of an anachronism in the jet age, the 'Chippie' mixes metal and fabric construction and is not exactly overpowered. Unlike many modern 'club' types it is not viceless either and needs to be treated with the proper respect due to an old lady (this author actually did once find himself 'upside down with nothing on the clock . . .' but that's another story). Nevertheless it is fully aerobatic and a joy to fly

Right December 1989. Below the cloud layer it's a crisp winter day, but up here two of Heron Flight's appropriately named de Havilland D.H.114 Sea Herons practice for their last formation flight in unbroken sunshine

Above After a long and distinguished career these immaculate and elegant aircraft are finally to be replaced. First built in the mid-fifties, these airframes have seen service with operators as diverse as Nigerian Airways and Jersey Airlines before coming to the RN. Here Lt Cdr Fergus Woods and PO Blackburn bring XR441 in close for the camera


ROYAL NAVY


ROYAL NAVY

Above These fine aircraft are not to be scrapped, but sold to private collectors. They will no doubt continue to operate for as long as spares can be found

Left With three greens indicating that the landing gear is down and locked, we descend from the sunlit plains above to the more familiar Somerset landscape. A formation approach to land seems appropriate to the occasion

In July 1990 there remained but one Heron—albeit a rather special one. XM296 was delivered new in the red and blue livery of the Queen's Flight. As befits the Sovereign's transport, it had a VIP interior. Austere by today's standards, there were nevertheless comfortable leather seats and a telephone by which an Important Person could communicate directly with the pilot. Following its time with the RAF, 'Z96 eventually came on RN charge in 1972. Still a VIP transport, it features the traditional and distinctive green cheat line of an Admiral's Barge, in this case FONA—Flag Officer Naval Aviation

The ultimate development of the D.H.100 Vampire single-seat jet fighter which first flew in September 1943, the Sea Venom was the Fleet Air Arm's first all-weather jet fighter. Although no beauty compared to the piston-engined D.H.103 Sea Hornet which it replaced, the Sea Venom was capable of 590 mph and featured finned tip tanks, power-folding wings and, in the case of the FAW.21 version seen here, US radar and the redesigned tail of the RAF Venom NF.3 night fighter. Not before time, final production batches of the Sea Venom incorporated Martin-Baker Mk 4 ejection seats (many early Sea Venoms were similarly retrofitted). The Sea Venom served the FAA faithfully for fifteen years, the last machine being retired from what was then the Fleet Requirements Unit (FRU) at Yeovilton on 6 October 1970. This gleaming Sea Venom FAW.21 (WW138) is in the care of the FAA Museum

Right Moving from forties to fifties technology, the next generation RN fighter, the D.H.110 Sea Vixen, was to serve the FAA for over a decade until replaced by the world-beating McDonnell Douglas F-4 Phantom II in 1968. Armed with four Firestreak or Red Top (FAW.2 only) air-to-air missiles, the Sea Vixen was the first fully missile-equipped fighter in Fleet service. In conjunction with the totally new weapons system fitted to the FAW.2, Red Top enabled the Sea Vixen to intercept targets from virtually any aspect, especially head-on. Alternatively, armed with 1000 lb bombs, Bullpup air-to-surface missiles and/or rocket pods, the Sea Vixen could pack a punch in the attack role. No FAA Sea Vixen was ever as colourful as this visitor from Llandbedr in Wales. One of a pair of FAW.2s operated by the Ministry of Defence (Procurement Executive) as chase aircraft and for missile trials work, this Sea Vixen is strangely reminiscent of the D.H.110 prototype which first flew on 26 September 1951

Above The Sea Vixen's large central nacelle, highly swept wing and twin-boom fuselage—with the horizontal tail carried at the top of sharply raked fins—made it almost impossible to confuse with anything else in the sky. Another distinctive recognition feature is the pilot's canopy, offset to the left so as to make room for a radar operator (still called an 'Observer' by the Navy), lower down on the right in the central nacelle. With only a tinted roof window above to give him a view of the outside world, the poor observer definitely came off second best in the cockpit stakes; not for nothing was his position known as 'the coal hole'. As the last of the 146 Sea Vixens built were withdrawn from FAA use in 1971, stocks of spare parts for the two Llandbedr aircraft (the world's last airworthy Sea Vixens), are probably on the low side—which may explain the Automobile Association 'Relay' breakdown sticker noted on the observer's window of this machine . . .

Unencumbered by armament, radar, flight refuelling probe and assorted items of naval paraphernalia, the Llandbedr Sea Vixens are probably spritely performers compared to operational FAW.2s. Powered by two Rolls-Royce 208 turbojets with a sea level static thrust rating of 11,250 lb, the Sea Vixen is capable of sustaining about 650 mph (Mach 0.94) on the level at medium altitudes

Left After the disastrous disintegration of the prototype D.H.110 during the Farnborough Air Show in 1952, de Havilland were determined to eliminate any possibility of structural failure in production aircraft. As a result the second, semi-navalized D.H.110 emerged in June 1955 as a somewhat 'overbuilt' aircraft with a greater empty weight than was strictly necessary for the design mission. Seemingly 'fettled' into shape by craftsmen, the Sea Vixen proved to be a tough aircraft which stood up reasonably well to the rigours of carrier operations

Below The dark skies which threatened the barbecues on Families Day provide a dramatic backdrop for some of the FAA Museum's aircraft. In the foreground is a Sea Vixen FAW.2 bearing the winged gauntlet motif of No 899, the last squadron to operate the aircraft in Fleet service. Compared to the FAW.1, the FAW.2 had considerably greater endurance due to the additional fuel contained in the pinion tanks formed by the overwing extensions of the tail booms and the addition of a flight refuelling probe

Ships and SHARs

HMS *Ark Royal*, somewhere in the North Sea, September 1990. The *raison d'être* of Yeovilton's Sea Harriers is of course deployment at sea with the Fleet. Without the Harrier and the carriers HMS *Invincible* and HMS *Hermes* (the latter now serves with the Indian Navy as INS *Viraat*), the UK would not have been able to mount Operation Corporate and successfully recover the Falkland Islands from Argentina in May 1982. Prior to the Falklands conflict, the Navy's fixed-wing airpower was in decline; Britain's last conventional carrier, the fourth HMS *Ark Royal*, had followed HMS *Eagle* to the breaker's yard in 1979 and her Phantoms and Buccaneers transferred to the RAF. The advent of the much smaller Invincible class 'through-deck cruiser' and the Sea Harrier was seen as a cost-effective way of maintaining a useful carrier capability; even so, HMS *Invincible* was almost sold to Australia as part of a further round of defence cuts which planned to reduce the number of RN carriers from three to two. Post-Falklands, the Navy now feels able to again talk openly about its carrier force, being reasonably confident that at last British politicians understand the need for organic naval airpower (*Jon Garthwaite*)

A pair of Sidewinder-toting SHARs prepare to come aboard as an AEW Sea King runs up. Instantly recognizable due to its external radar dome, the airborne early warning version of the long-serving Sea King is a direct result of lessons painfully re-learned by the Navy during the Falklands conflict; attack aircraft of the Argentine air force and navy pressed home their attacks from low level (below the radar horizon of warships defending the task force), and sank HMS *Sheffield*, *Coventry*, *Argent*, *Antelope*, RFA *Sir Galahad* and MV *Atlantic Conveyor*. So acute was the need for AEW in the South Atlantic that even the FAA Museum was approached to see if any Fairey Gannet AEW aircraft (retired from service after HMS *Ark Royal* was decommissioned), could be made airworthy. The AEW Sea King is known colloquially as a 'bag'; its grey-painted cousin, the Sea King HAS.5/6 anti-submarine warfare (ASW) aircraft is called a 'pinger' for fairly obvious reasons. ASW Sea Kings do not live at Yeovilton; they are based at RNAS Culdrose in Cornwall (*Jon Garthwaite*)

Right The 'Boss's' Sea Harrier lands on. Arriving on the flight deck in a SHAR is quite straightforward compared to a conventional, arrested carrier landing. The Sea Harrier is brought to the hover on the port side of the ship and then manoeuvered sideways until directly above the appropriate 'spot'; power is then reduced and the aircraft descends vertically on to the deck. The use of vertical/short take-off and landing (V/STOL) techniques on small carriers avoids the danger, complexity, inflexibility and huge expenditure inherent in operating aircraft which need catapults and arrestor wires (*Jon Garthwaite*)

Above An ordnance man works on an AIM-9L. The combination of the SHAR and the latest Sidewinder variants is deadly in the air-to-air role (*Jon Garthwaite*)

Flight decks are noisy, crowded, and potentially dangerous places. It is therefore essential to ensure that there is no misunderstanding and much emphasis is placed on visual confirmation of any action. Here we see a SHAR being positioned. Elsewhere a deck 'pinkie' (radio tradesman) indicates the ship's position and speed so that the pilot can exactly align the aircraft's nav system, whilst the removed retraction locks and tie-down chains are shown to the pilot of a third aircraft. Amongst the trophies held aloft for approval is a 'noddy cap' from a Sidewinder. These stay in place until internal power is available to cage the seeker head and are amongst the last items to be removed before flight. (Uncovered too soon, the seeker works itself into a frenzy trying to acquire all the heat sources around it.) A further aid to visual identification is the 'colour coding' of deck personnel. Yellow denotes directors, handlers are blue whilst green is for electrical trades, inevitably known as 'greenies'. The unfortunate engine and airframe folks are known as 'grubbers' and wear brown surcoats (*Jon Garthwaite*)


MSUP
SO1

Salt water and machines are not best mixed. To prevent corrosion at the end of each day's flying, fresh water is drawn through the still-running engine (*Jon Garthwaite*)

Cranials, Hawks and Hot Potatoes

Below Working with aeroplanes is not much different from any other engineering job when they're static. But add rotors, jet wash, slippery surfaces, extreme noise levels, and a rolling, pitching ship; season the mixture with a dash of Murphy's Law and human failings, and you have an excellent recipe for accidents. In the circumstances it is a great tribute to the training and professionalism of the maintainers that so few incidents do occur. An essential part of the business of being safe around operating aircraft is the 'cranial'. Now general issue, this American designed piece of kit was once a much sought-after prize whenever the Brits got anywhere near a source of supply, such as a visiting US carrier (*Jon Garthwaite*)

Right *Unlike* the Americans however, the Fleet Air Arm issues cranials to individuals—thus providing scope for the traditional artistic talents of sailors the world over. This rather splendid example of an electric cranial (a headset rather than simple ear defenders) was spotted at dawn as the first sortie prepared to launch from Tretten

Above A little later in the day as our cab was refuelled this less elaborate, but none the less intriguing, cranial emerged. Yellow hammer and sickle on the back — 'CCCP' on the front

Right When the aircraft aren't working things take on a less dramatic air. But life ensures that the maintainers don't have it *too* easy as this example of an improvised maintenance platform illustrates


10 RN 00

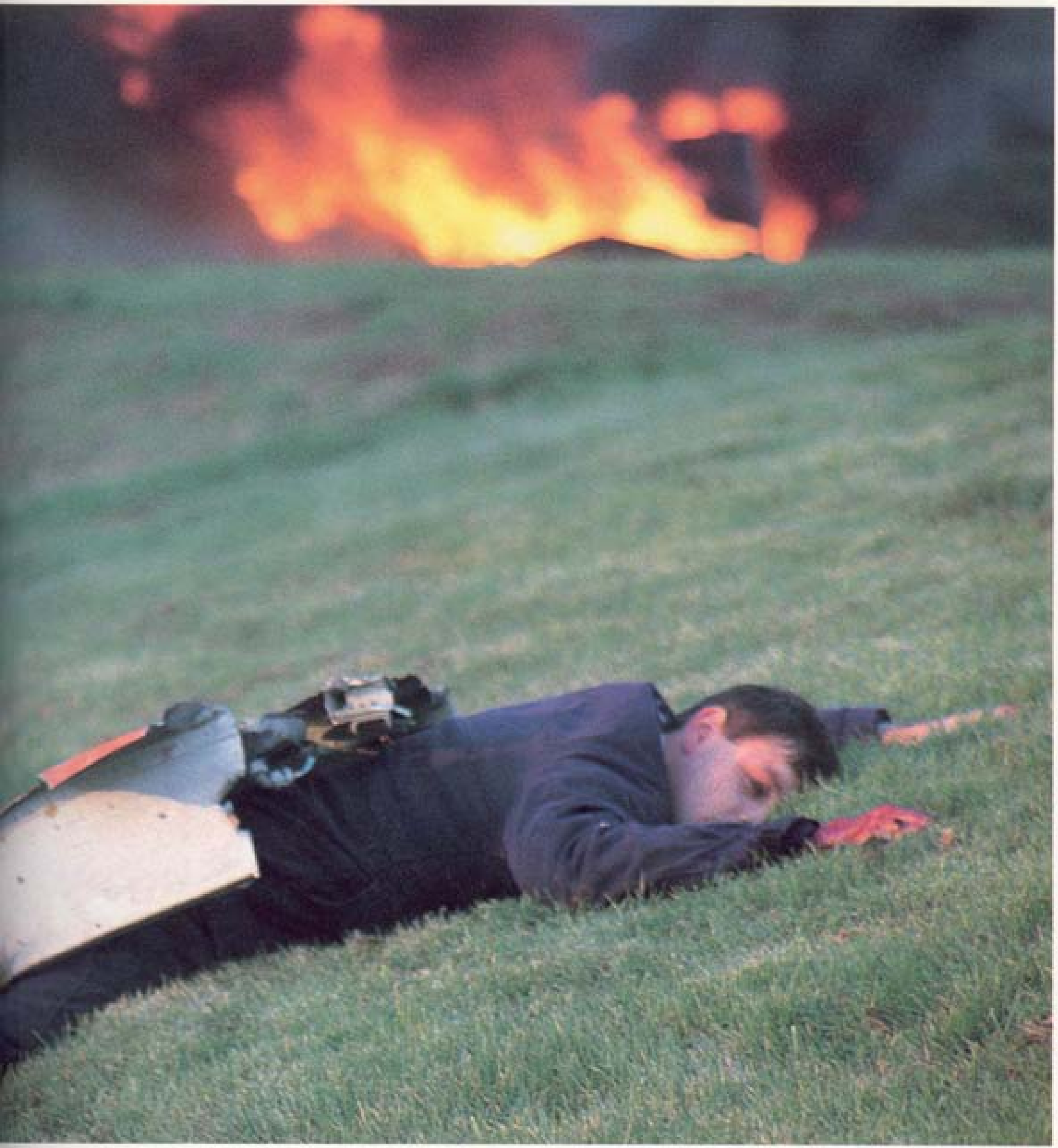
Above The Royal Navy, in common with other services around the globe, has long recognized that women can do most jobs that men can and engineering is no exception. One of Yeovilton's many responsibilities is training these young women, who may well be amongst the first to serve alongside the men at sea. As the Sea Harrier training squadron, 899 has a commitment to teach the maintainers of various trades the special requirements of the SHAR

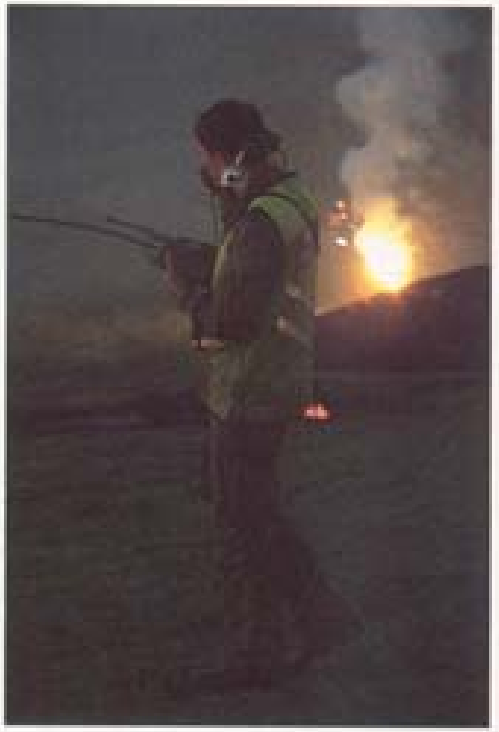
Right Similarly, 707 has the same function within the junglie community, and it too has trainee tweakers. These two are clearly impressed by an intrepid cameraman balancing precariously on the top of their aircraft

Another unique Yeovilton feature is a breeding facility for birds of prey. The falcons are in fact an invaluable addition to the armoury of the Bird Control Unit. Bird-strikes are a major hazard to military aircraft which, by the nature of their trade, must trespass ornithological airspace. The effects of even a 1 lb bird striking an aircraft travelling at 600 knots does not require much elaboration, rather spoiling the bird's day, and possibly leading to the loss of the aircraft. Not surprisingly, a lot of effort goes into keeping birds and aeroplanes apart. The BCU uses all the conventional methods—broadcast distress calls, pyrotechnics, and even shot guns, but the unit has found that there's nothing like a falcon overhead to get a flock of birds on the move. The need for falcons led to the establishment of a breeding facility. Such is the level of expertise, knowledge and commitment needed for the job that the leader of the unit, CPO Jim Logan, is now an internationally respected authority on falconry. His work in this field was subsequently recognized with the award of the BEM. No lesser expert is PO 'Taff' Jones seen here with Ailsa, a Lanner Falcon hatched at Yeovilton in 1986. PO Jones has two assistants, namely LAM Hughes and NAM Cole. These four men and their 18 birds have between them ensured that Yeovilton has one of the lowest bird-strike rates in the world

Right Every now and then the fire section (with scarcely disguised glee) drops a 'hot potato' in the station's lap. These are no-notice drills designed to test response times and efficiency in the event of an emergency. To be truly effective the hot potato must be arranged in secret, a difficult task in a community as close as a naval air station. The unfortunate chap seen here was from a party which had been flown up from Portland thinking they were to visit the 'dunker', followed by a quiet afternoon in the Museum—and is probably still wondering quite how he ended up in a field, several miles from Yeovilton, liberally covered in theatrical blood and gore

Above At the appointed hour a co-conspirator in the tower calls the crash alert. With only an estimated track for the supposedly incoming aircraft to work from, anything airborne in the area is requested to search for the 'casualty'. First on the scene was one of 707's Sea Kings. Once the position of the incident is known the station's crash and medical teams scramble. Other aircraft quickly arrive and assessments are relayed concerning landing sites, casualties, and the scale of assistance required





Above Twenty minutes since the first alarm and the sun is already well down in the west. (The gathering gloom just adds a little more to the rescuers' difficulties.) Things are now much more ordered, casualties accounted for and prioritized for medevac. One of the first people off the rapid response aircraft is the incident control officer who co-ordinates rescue activity directly from the site

Right The most seriously 'injured' are lifted directly out from the nearest landing site — reached by the rescue party after a strenuous climb up a rough track, through a hedgerow and over a ditch into the field. Paramedics brace themselves as the first aircraft leaves. The next helicopter is already orbiting to collect the stretcher cases

Cold Fingers and Junglies

Left One of Yeovilton's major and regular commitments is support of NATO's Northern Flank, the front line of which is north of the Arctic Circle in Norway. The Royal Marines, and therefore their supporting helicopters, spend several months of each year deployed to forward landing sites in Norway. The conditions are harsh and flying almost anywhere involves crossing rugged and dangerous terrain. Survival training is taken very seriously indeed. This view was taken on a relatively warm day. An unseasonal thaw has actually melted the snow down in the valley, and even begun to break up the ice in the fjord below. The mountains in the distance border Hjerkinn ranges, a vast and desolate arctic training area. Film buffs will recognize these from the 'Ice Planet Hoth' scenes in George Lucas' motion picture *Star Wars*

Below Lt Cdr Les Port, 846's boss, demonstrates why junglies have flat bottoms. In the left hand seat is Lt Pafford, an ex-patriot of the Antipodes, whose skill at cocktail mixing provided the author with one of the more memorable experiences during his sojourn with the squadron


VJ

Left Well actually not *quite* flat. The Sea King was originally required to be capable of alighting on water, so Sikorsky built it with a 'boat' shaped keel. The HC.4 Commando is a Westland development of the basic Sea King airframe, designed for the Egyptian Army. Intended for land use, the main gear was fixed and the sponsons deleted to save weight. This view also reveals further evidence of its anti-sub origins in the circular plate covering the old well from which the sonar was dunked. To compensate for the lack of sponsons, floation would *in extremis* be provided by inflatable bags stowed in the canisters on each stub-wing

Right With snow dropping from the wheels 'Juliet' continues upwards before turning to clear the rocks

Below Visible here is the FOD shield ahead of the intakes and the crew entry door, the bottom half of which has built-in steps. The overall green colour from which the HC.4s take their 'junglie' sobriquet dates back to the Wessex (Westland-built S-58), which served in the same role until the late eighties

Above left The days are short this far north and the late afternoon sun emphasizes the wilderness below

Below left Caught against the sheer wall of a mountainside deep in shadow, this aircraft is lit up by the low sun as it turns to run down the valley. This results from observing peacetime minimum heights. In a combat situation 'lit up' is the last thing a tactical helo wants to be and the mission would be flown *much* lower

Above As we head back to Tretten the last rays of the setting sun afford an opportunity to more readily appreciate the contours of the Sea King. The HC.4 has proved a remarkably versatile and capable shifter of both soldiers and supplies. A capacious cabin and very respectable underslung load capability keeps it much in demand

Right Aircraft of both front-line squadrons frequently deploy wherever the Navy goes—which could be anywhere in the world. No 846 Sqn has deployed a number of aircraft to the Gulf on ships of various classes—a considerable contrast to the conditions in Norway, but entirely indicative of the Sea King's versatility

Above Dawn at Tretten. The squadron's six aircraft live for three months in the open on an area not much bigger than a football pitch. The red building has been temporarily taken over as the line shack and operations centre. As a forward operating base it is somewhat makeshift, but positively luxurious when compared with the snow-holes the unit sometimes inhabits. The sudden thaw has turned the top two inches of the field into a quagmire—very slippery and dangerous to move about on as the earth below is still frozen solid

Above 'Shareholders' — 08.00 in the line hut's crew room and the daily briefing gets under way. Subjects covered include the day's tasking, reports from the various department heads and the all-important met forecast. There may also be some recognition training (can *you* identify a Leopard 2 main battle tank at 2000 metres?), and words of wisdom from the Senior Pilot. Every squadron has a Senior Pilot who, unlike his American equivalent, *doesn't* get to be called 'Exec' or the more macho 'XO'. His peculiarly British lot is to go through life as 'SPLOT'. Incidentally, the persons with the long hair are visiting Wrens from the nearby brigade HQ at Lillihammer

Right With flying cancelled by foul weather the last thing anyone needed was a casevac. Fortunately for this young man the clag lifted just sufficiently for an aircraft to reach him. Faced with snow showers and low cloud, a circuitous low level route following valleys and paths to the base camp at Bessheim was necessary. At times the helicopter's speed was reduced to walking pace as wires were negotiated (of which more anon); it took a very high degree of navigational and piloting skill to complete the extraction. Lest anyone doubts the stamina of today's youth this nineteen-year-old Royal Marine suffering from acute appendicitis had no alternative but to struggle out to the aircraft through knee deep snow, carrying his own drip, *on foot*

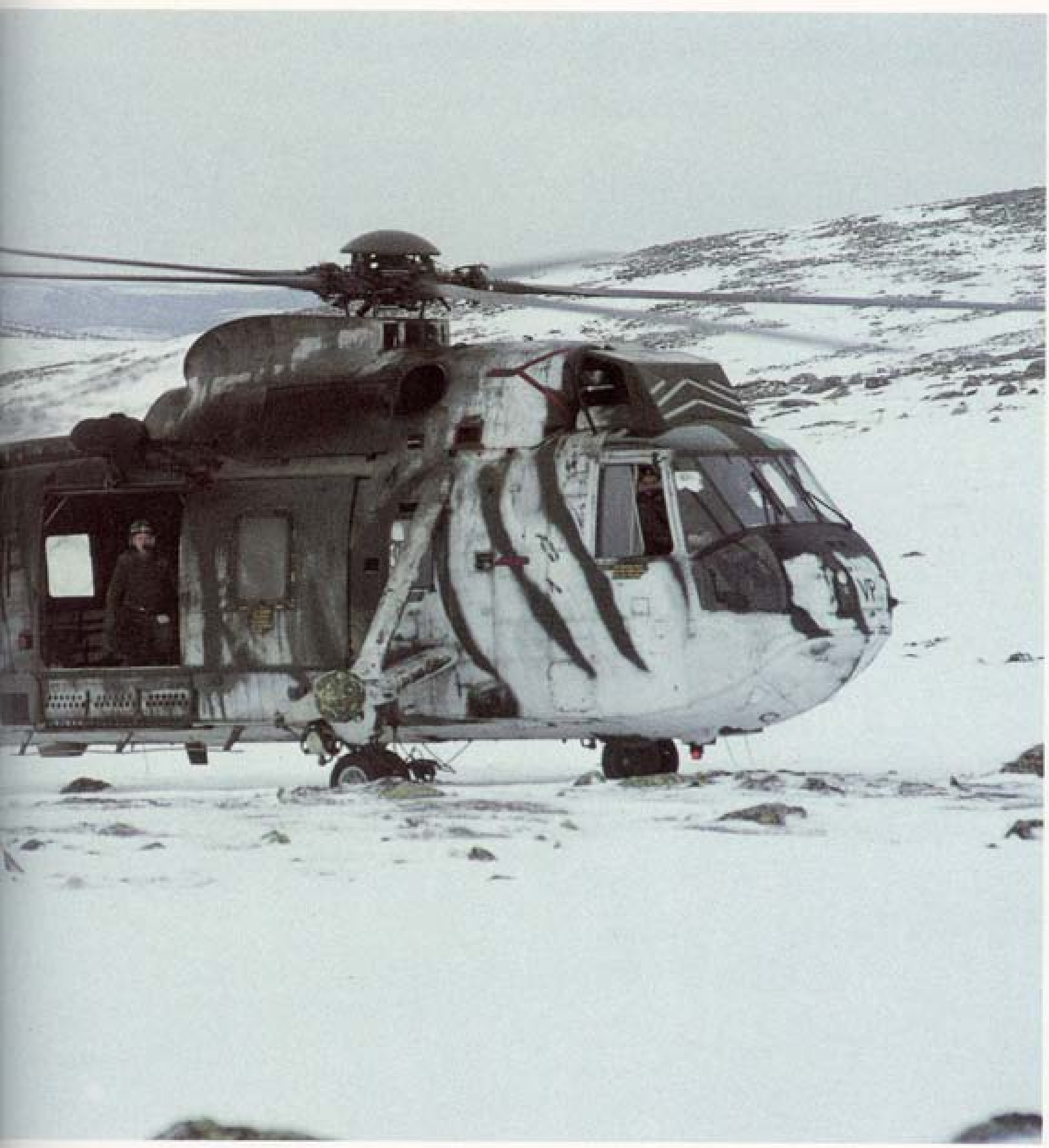
Left 'Victor Juliet' again in somewhat less attractive conditions on top of a snow-laden mountain

Above Not all junglies are green. Here we formate on 'Victor Papa', which has been treated to the full temporary arctic scheme. Low level tactical flying in Norway has one overriding hazard — the wires. With no apparent thought for the needs of rotary wing aviators, the Norwegians simply take their power and communication cables by the shortest route. If this happens to be across a valley, the plethora of wires involved can form a cat's cradle to entangle the unwary. The pilots' stay in 'heads up' mode for most of the time when this type of hazard is likely to be encountered, all eyes scanning the terrain ahead

Left Having safely negotiated the valleys below our two aircraft climb towards the mountain peak

Above To get soldiers to places as inaccessible as this is difficult even for a helicopter. There's nowhere on this knife-edge ridge big enough to actually land, and the pilot will have to maintain the hover whilst everyone gets out

'Papa' finally finds a spot slightly lower down with enough room for all three wheels. The once pristine finish has suffered much from the effects of exhaust and oil generated by the turboshaft engines



Two shots that demonstrate the effectiveness of the camouflage, the oil stain actually adding an unintended improvement

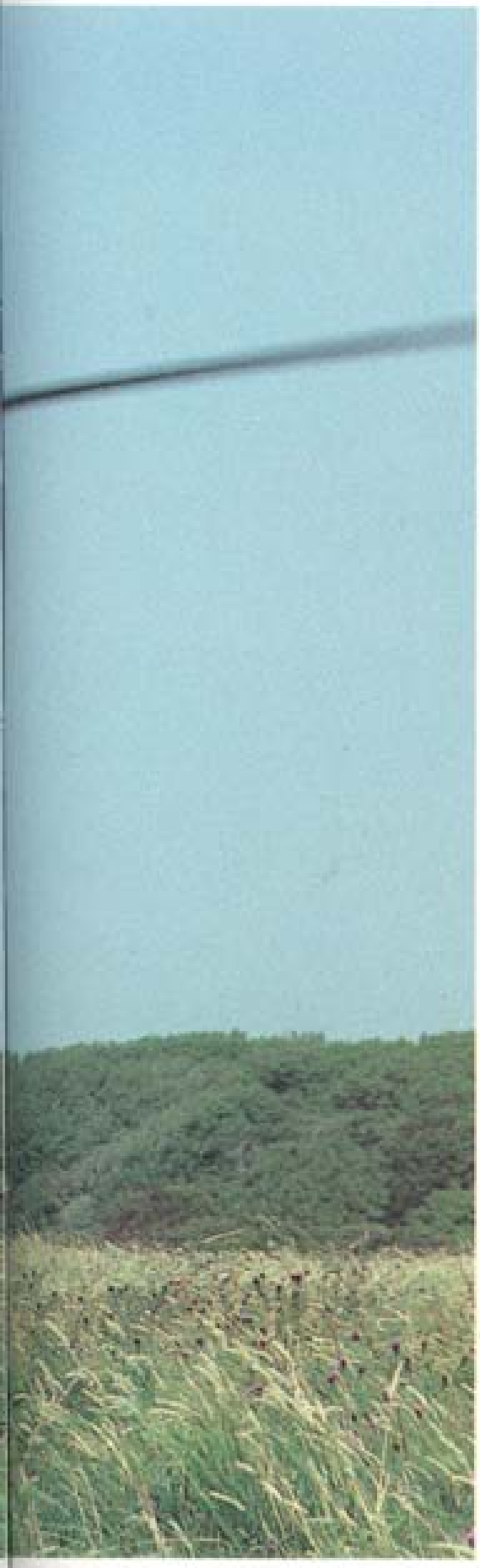
Above Yeovilton's other front line junglie squadron is 845 and they too deploy to Norway during the exercise season. Both units must keep in practice whilst home-based, and frequently use Merryfield, a satellite airfield some miles from Yeovilton, for CALS (Confined Area Landings). Inching the big Sea King into a clearing not much larger than the rotor disc is a tricky business—pilot Neil Thompson and his aircrewman manage to make it look very easy

Right The HC.4 has an exceptionally good nav kit, which is actually better than that fitted to the hi-tech pingers. The aircraft is therefore routinely flown single pilot. The workload is nevertheless high when flying as close to the trees as this

Safely down and a brief pause for the camera before we go-around and do it again

Left Back in Norway the Royal Marines also use the Lynx and Gazelle aircraft of 3 Commando Brigade Air Squadron – known universally as simply '3BAS'. Tasked with support of the brigade worldwide, 3BAS lives at Yeovilton. It will come as no surprise to the reader to learn that it is a unique formation. Firstly, its aircraft are the only ones that actually 'belong' to the Royal Marines. As their role is anti-armour support, they are also unique in that they take to sea virtually un-navalized aircraft. (The Gazelle never has been navalized; the Lynx AH.1 and AH.7 are essentially 'Army' variants, very different from their web-footed relatives)

Above The nimble and attractive Gazelle is an Anglo-French design produced, as are all helicopters in the UK, by Westland Aircraft – based 'just down the road' at Yeovil. Its primary role is observation and reconnaissance, which includes spotting for artillery and Forward Air Control. It is also ideal for the rapid movement of key personnel, which is what this Gazelle is doing



Left *BAS goes hunting* – the Castle Martin FARP in South Wales is the jump-off point for a series of HELARM (anti-armour) exercises which pit the aircraft of 3BAS against tanks on manoeuvre. In this case the opposition are some German Leopard 2s

Above For the purpose of this exercise one Gazelle controls each pair of TOW-armed Lynx. The Gazelle crew have tactical control and strive to get the Lynxes into good firing positions without the 'bad guys' seeing them. At the adjudged moment the weapons helos are told to 'unmask' and engage the target. If they've got it right the Lynx will be near enough to minimize the flight time of the missile (and thus their exposure to return fire) but far enough away to keep them out of trouble. This aircraft is just settling into the Welsh grass as it waits its turn at the camouflaged fuel bowser. Note the skilfully concealed vehicle blending into the hedgerow in the background

Overleaf Returning to Yeovilton over the Bristol Channel a Gazelle escorts its pair of Lynx. All three aircraft are fitted with a roof-mounted telescopic sight for target acquisition. Prominent from this angle is the Gazelle's 'fenestron' shrouded tail rotor


ROYAL MARINES
D
ROYAL MARINES

Above The Lynx is also an Anglo-French design. Westland have enhanced the basic design considerably since the prototype WG.13 first flew in March 1971. A Lynx fitted with the revolutionary BERP rotor currently holds the world speed record for its class at 249.09 mph. For the time being the Royal Marines still use the Lynx AH.1 version (which the British Army have operated since 1976), along with the improved but externally almost identical Mk 7. The airframe is essentially designed for utility and endows a degree of flexibility that 3BAS finds useful. The Lynx is not a dedicated attack helicopter; (an attack variant with a new fuselage was schemed but never left the drawing board). However, armed with eight battle-proven TOW missiles and with space in the cabin for its own re-loads, the Lynx is not to be taken lightly

Right Back at Castle Martin another aircraft sits quietly in the midday sun whilst the crews brief. Still wearing the 'old standard' black and green Army paint scheme this aircraft will eventually get the 'new standard' grey and green seen on the Gazelles


ROYAL MARINES

Capable of carrying a small infantry squad or recon team the Lynx is occasionally used for specialized people moving. The people in question will, by the nature of their calling, wish to be deposited in remote and inaccessible places where it may not be possible for the helo to land. No matter, the Royal Marines are dab hands at abseiling, and a helicopter is as good a place to do it from as any! This of course is a training session at Yeovilton. A couple of hours' window in the fly pro is being taken full advantage of by cycling as many Marines as possible through some 'heli-abseiling'


RM

HRH and other visitors

Yeovilton's jubilee year in 1990 was marked by a spectacular air display. For the occasion HRH Princess Alexandra graciously consented to unveil a commemorative plaque, and also to officially open the newly extended part of the FAA Museum. The rain having with proper respect abated just as the RAF Queen's Flight Andover came to a halt, Capt Shercliff greets her Royal Highness. A sign of the troubled times we live in is the anti-missile infrared jammer housed in the Andover's extended tailcone

Overleaf The Fleet Air Arm's Phantom FG.1 multi-role fighters were based at Yeovilton from March 1969 until 1972, when No 892 Sqn ended its long association with the aerodrome and transferred to RAF Leuchars in Scotland. The Navy's Phantoms continued to be embarked from Leuchars as required until HMS *Ark Royal* paid off in 1978. Painted in a striking gloss black paint scheme by No 111 ('Treble One') Sqn, this Phantom FG.1 is not an ex-RN machine, having been originally issued to No 43 Sqn at Leuchars in 1969. No 111 Sqn's careful husbandry of the few remaining airframe hours on XV582 allowed the aircraft to complete its scheduled number of airshow appearances in 1990. It is hoped that XV582 will end her days in honourable retirement at the RAF Museum (*Dennis Baldry*)


XV582

Above The Buccaneer strike aircraft's naval credentials made it a must for Yeovilton's Families Day. After the demise of HMS *Ark Royal* in 1978 all of the Navy's Buccaneers were absorbed by the RAF; this example is operated by No 208 Sqn in the maritime strike role from RAF Lossiemouth in Scotland. Following the somewhat under-powered S.1 version, the Spey-engined Buccaneer S.2 first flew in May 1963, entering Fleet service in 1965. After the cancellation of the TSR.2 and F-111, the RAF signed in 1968 for 43 new-build Buccaneer S.2s. Whatever their initial misgivings about operating a 'hand-me-down' naval aircraft, the RAF soon realized that the '*faster, lower—lower, longer*' Buccaneer had few, if any, equals in the low level strike role. Designed by the Blackburn Aircraft Company at Brough in Humberside, the Buccaneer has an exceptionally strong airframe; many people believe that the 'Bucc' wasn't so much built as laid down on a keel and launched!

Right The Families' Day flying display featured two helicopter aerobatic teams. The 'Rotavators' were formed by 707 Sqn specially for the occasion (any resemblance, as the squadron's commentator put it, between their name and an item of agricultural machinery being entirely intentional). The 'Sharks' are a rather more permanent outfit; based at RNAS Culdrose, the Sharks are justly famous for their delightful exploitation of the Gazelle's grace and agility. Despite the gathering storm, they managed to fit in their full routine, including this spectacular cross-over break

Above Another denizen of the Museum is the Supermarine Scimitar F.1—an aircraft which, but for the advent of the Sea Harrier, would have been the Navy's last single-seat carrier-borne fighter. The FAA received the first of its 76 Scimitars in June 1958. In addition to its powerful built-in armament of four 30 mm Aden cannon, the Scimitar was capable of carrying 96 un-guided air-to-air rockets, four Sidewinder AAMs, four Bullpup ASMs or a tactical nuclear weapon. Despite a combined 22,500 lbs of thrust from its Rolls-Royce Avon turbojets, the Scimitar was steadfastly subsonic in level flight. Although popular with its pilots, who enjoyed particularly good visibility from the cockpit, the Scimitar is mostly remembered for its copious fuel leaks—which required dustbins rather than drip trays

Left Using a curved approach technique, the Fleet Air Arm gained distinction of being the first service to operate the Vought F4U Corsair fighter-bomber at sea in World War 2, the US Navy having decided that the view over the Corsair's long snout was unacceptable when the aircraft was low, slow and nose high on the final approach. '*Never mind the deck, I couldn't even see the carrier!*' was how one American pilot put it. Featuring clipped wing tips which allowed the aircraft to fit the smaller hangar decks of British carriers, the Museum's example, KD431, is an F4U-6, designated Corsair Mk 4 in FAA service

FRADU and the flight of the Heron

Right Heron Flight is located on the south side of the airfield and probably has the most wide-ranging responsibilities of any unit on the station. Operating a single Heron and a fleet of six BAe Jetstreams, Heron Flight is the Navy's airline, ferrying passengers and small items of priority cargo speedily and efficiently. It also has the Historic Flight under its wing and acts as the Aircraft Servicing Flight (ASF) for a wide variety of visiting aircraft. The flight line is also shared with the Hunters, Falcons and Canberras of FRADU. The Jetstream seen here is the latest version to be taken on strength by the Navy; powered by American Garrett TPE331 turboprops turning British Dowty propellers, this sleek aircraft is based on the successful Jetstream 31 business and commuter airliner

Below Originally used as cargo aircraft by the American package-carrying giant Federal Express, some sixteen refurbished and re-equipped Dassault Falcon 20s are operated by Flight Refuelling Ltd on behalf of the Navy to perform target towing and electronic warfare training duties


ROYAL NAVY
577


ROYAL NAVY

Two views of the FRADU's unmistakably marked Canberra TT.18 target towing aircraft. The Rushton target system carried under the wings is capable of simulating radar and infrared targets. Apart from the relatively minor modifications required to adapt the aircraft for target towing, this Canberra is virtually identical to the RAF B.2 bomber version which entered service in October 1950 (*'Mac' MacKenzie*)

The much-loved Fairey Swordfish is one of the few great combat aircraft which became legends in their own lifetime. First flown in prototype form in April 1934, the Swordfish was thought by many to be obsolete when World War 2 broke out five years later. But on the night of 10–11 October 1940, two waves of Swordfish from the carrier HMS *Illustrious* attacked the Italian naval base at Taranto and sank three battleships, a cruiser, two destroyers and other warships. A 'Stringbag' from HMS *Ark Royal* jammed the rudder of the German battleship *Bismarck* with a torpedo in May 1941, allowing the Navy's pursuing capital ships to catch and sink her in the North Atlantic. A large volume would be required to do justice to the other exploits of this amazing machine. Thanks to the Historic Flight, the courage of the crews who manned the Swordfish is appropriately commemorated. The white and gray camouflage scheme currently worn by the Flight's Swordfish is representative of that applied to the aircraft when it was engaged in convoy protection duties in the North Atlantic during 1944 (*'Mac' MacKenzie*)

Despite appearances, the Sea Harrier and the Fairey Firefly are not flying in formation but travelling at different speeds. The Sea King helicopter from which 'Mac' MacKenzie took this photograph is flying flat out to prevent the formating Firefly from stalling; it took several 'dummy runs' before the Sea Harrier and Firefly were simultaneously positioned in 'Mac's' viewfinder. The Flight's Firefly is an FR.5 fighter reconnaissance version originally delivered to the Royal Australian Navy in the early fifties; a superb fund raising effort in the wardroom of HMS *Victorious* enabled the aircraft to be transported back to the UK for restoration to flying condition (*'Mac' MacKenzie*)

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Printed in Hong Kong

ISBN 1-85532-138-6
9 781855 321380