

Fleet Air Arm Developments

by J. D. R. Rawlings

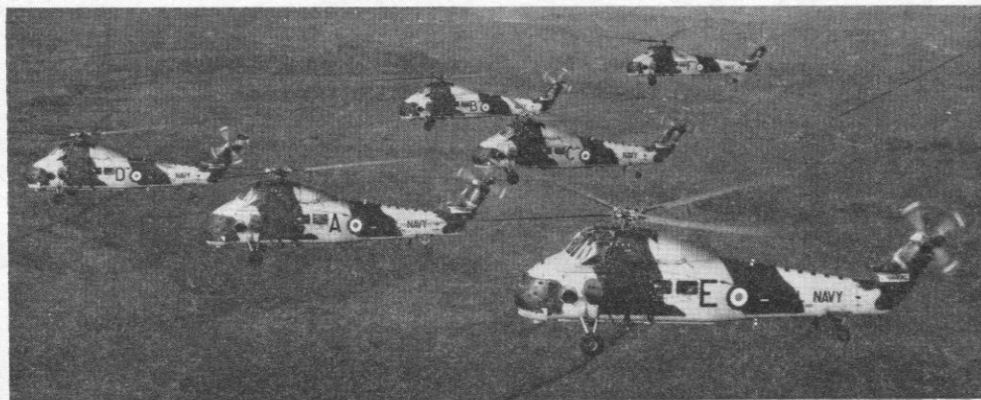
"IN THE FLEET Air Arm we have no fat—we are fully committed." These words of Rear-Admiral P. D. Gick, C.B., O.B.E., D.S.C., Flag Officer Naval Flying Training, aptly sum up the position in 1964 and in the foreseeable future for the Fleet Air Arm. Such a position has come about largely as a result of two policy decisions over the past few years: one to maintain two fleet carriers "East of Suez" at all times; the other to maintain two active Commando carriers.

Such a situation has meant some re-adjustment in the naval flying training programme and has also put a premium on naval aircrew, a premium which is not easily devalued for although the Service receives many volunteers there is a high failure rate (60 per cent overall) during training, owing to the exacting nature of carrier operations and the consequently very high standard of ability required.

Present line-up*

At present there are two carriers East of Suez: H.M.S. *Centaur* which, although drawing towards the end of her useful life, has aboard No. 892 Squadron (Sea Vixen FAW.1s), No. 815 Squadron (Wessex HAS.1s), and No. 849 Squadron "B" Flight (Gannet AEW.3s); and H.M.S. *Victorious* with No. 893 Squadron (Sea Vixen FAW.1s), No. 814 Squadron (Wessex HAS.1s), No. 849 Squadron "A"

* This can be compared with a previous survey of the Fleet Air Arm, published in the June 1962 issue, pp. 160-3.



No. 848 Squadron twin-Gnome Wessex HC.5s—the version for Commando carriers

Flight (Gannet AEW.3s) and No. 801 Squadron, the first Buccaneer squadron afloat. Also East of Suez is the Commando carrier H.M.S. *Bulwark* with No. 845 Squadron with Wessex HC.1s and the remnants of No. 846 Squadron which won the Boyd Trophy for 1963 for its work in Borneo with Whirlwind HAS.7s (see March issue, page 70).

Of the other carriers H.M.S. *Eagle* will soon be running trials after an extensive refit, H.M.S. *Albion* and *Ark Royal* are undergoing short refits for recommissioning later this year, and H.M.S. *Hermes* has recently docked for an extensive refit.

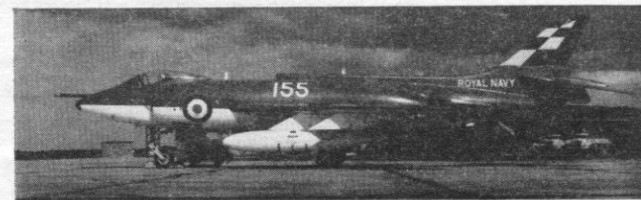
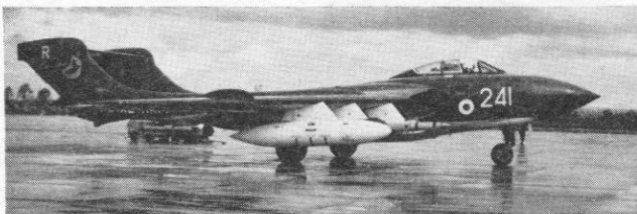
Ashore, developments are going on apace, mainly to prepare Air Groups for *Eagle*, *Ark Royal* and *Albion*. As well as working up new squadrons, this involves bringing into operational service two new versions of existing types, the Sea Vixen FAW.2 and the Wessex HC.5.

At Yeovilton No. 890 Squadron, lately off *Hermes*, is refitting to join *Ark Royal*, still with Sea Vixen FAW.1s. The first Sea Vixen FAW.2s are now in service with No. 899 Squadron, the "headquarters" and development squadron for Sea Vixens, which is scheduled to join *Eagle* later in the year. Sea Vixen FAW.2s will gradually

replace the earlier version in the squadrons—and then Yeovilton will limber up for Phantom IIs.

At Culdrose, the largest Naval Air Station, is No. 848 Squadron, recently reformed from No. 700V Intensive Flying Trials Unit and flying the new twin-Gnome Wessex HC.5 in the Commando role, ready and waiting for H.M.S. *Albion*. Also at Culdrose is No. 847 Squadron which looks like being the last operational Whirlwind squadron in the Navy (also in the Commando role). It will later re-form as No. 820 Squadron with Wessex HAS.1s for *Eagle*; *Ark Royal*'s Wessex squadron is to be No. 819 which is at present attached to the Joint Anti-Submarine School. A third operational squadron at Culdrose is No. 829 which is busy working up Wasp HAS.1s and crews for detachment to *Tribal* and *Leander* class frigates. Five ships have so far been equipped and within eighteen months it is expected that twenty ships will have received a Wasp apiece. The last remnants of fixed-wing flying at Culdrose, the Gannets of No. 849 Squadron, are shortly to move to Brawdy to continue their task of training and preparing crews for the AEW Flights; more specifically they have to prepare "C" Flight

TOP: Sea Vixen FAW.1s of No. 890 Squadron are to embark in *Ark Royal* later this year, while the first FAW.2s (RIGHT)—note extended booms—of No. 899 will join *Eagle*. BOTTOM: No. 800 Squadron Buccaneers, with standard underwing slipper tanks, are destined for *Eagle*. A Scimitar of No. 803 with black and yellow checks on the fin (Author's photos)





TOP: Wessex HAS.1 with two torpedoes (Author's photo). An 829 Squadron Wasp HAS.1 at Culdrose
 BOTTOM: No. 738's Hunter GA.111s and T.8s at Brawdy. Gannet AEW.35 of No. 849 (Author's photo)

for *Ark Royal* and "D" Flight for *Eagle* this year.

Lossiemouth is the strike base of the Fleet Air Arm and thus in transition from Scimitars to Buccaneers. The last operational Scimitar squadron, No. 803, is there, just off *Hermes* and working up to join *Ark Royal*. Also working-up at "Lossie" is No. 800 Squadron, the third Buccaneer squadron, already carrying *Eagle's* letter "E" on the fins of its aircraft, which have reverted to the grey top and white underneath finish on the original Buccaneers.

Training changes

The Hunter is now the standard advanced fixed-wing trainer in the Navy and to cater for the number of pilots required for Sea Vixens and Buccaneers, No. 759 Squadron has re-formed at Brawdy with Hunter T.8s to provide advanced flying training *per se*. There it has been joined by No. 738 Squadron, from Lossiemouth, which provides the operational flying on Hunter T.8s and GA.111s. "Lossie" still has No. 764 Squadron with Hunters, which provides ground-attack training before conversion to Scimitars or Buccaneers.

Lossiemouth will also become the home of No. 750 Squadron (the Observer School) when this unit moves back to the U.K. from Hal Far, Malta. Hal Far is to be handed over to the R.A.F. in March 1965. The Royal Navy will then be left with seven air stations in the U.K.—Arbroath, Brawdy, Culdrose, Lee-on-Solent, Lossiemouth, Portland and Yeovilton—and one, Sembawang, in Singapore.

F.A.A. museum

On 28th May H.R.H. the Duke of Edinburgh opened the Fleet Air Arm Museum at Yeovilton, the headquarters of Naval Flying Training. The museum, which will be open to the public from Easter until October each year, lies alongside the main London-Plymouth road (A.303).

Dominant in the museum, which is contained in Yeovilton's No. 11 Hangar, are the aircraft exhibits. These comprise: Sopwith Triplane N5912; Fairey Swordfish III "V6105" "H" (ex-HS608); Grumman Martlet AL246; Vought Corsair IV KD431 "E2:M"; Supermarine Seafire F.17 SX137; Supermarine Attacker F.1 WA473 "146J" (No. 803 Sqdn.);

Hawker Sea Fury FB.11 "WE726" "1150" (ex-WJ231); and Westland Whirlwind XK944.

The Swordfish does not carry its original markings or serial numbers but has been repainted to represent the aircraft in which Lt.-Cdr. Eugene Esmond won his V.C.; likewise the Sea Fury appears in Korean war markings to represent the aircraft flown by Cdr. D. T. McKeown.

These aircraft are backed up by a selection of models of aircraft and carriers; unfortunately all the ship models are at present of modern carriers but it is hoped that pre-war or wartime carrier models may later be available. There is also a representative selection of engines (seven at present) and armament, and displays to indicate the development of specifically Fleet Air Arm equipment such as arrester wires, catapults, mirror landing aids, etc.

The Fleet Air Arm is to be congratulated in getting such a compact and representative museum in operation. It is understood that the intention is for it to be a live museum varying its exhibits as more material becomes available, and one of the forthcoming highlights will be the arrival of a Walrus amphibian.

Aircraft preserved in the new museum at Yeovilton include Seafire F.17 SX137 (LEFT) and Martlet AL246

