



# AIR PICTORIAL

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## Contents

Window on South America . . .	2
World Air News . . .	4
TSR-2 and Concord . . .	7
Russian Trapeze Artists . . .	8
W.W.I German Aircraft . . .	12
Midget Racer Designs . . .	14
Fortress Is in R.A.F. . . .	17
Dear Sir . . .	20
Sopwith "Atlantic" . . .	22
No. 20 Squadron History . . .	24
Your Questions Answered . . .	27
Register Review . . .	28
Airport Movements . . .	30
Aviation Bookshelf . . .	32

**COVER:** A sight for sore spotters' eyes are these two Spanish Air Force CASA-2.111s (licence-built Heinkel He 111Hs with Rolls-Royce Merlin engines), nestling under the wing of the prototype Short Belfast which has recently been to Torrejon for hot-weather performance trials.

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## The R.A.F. is in danger!

THE TIME IS approaching for publication of the next Government White Paper on Defence. Many people expect it to reveal far-reaching changes of policy and fear that it will seriously diminish the status of the Royal Air Force as a fighting service. If that should happen, it would only be because of a failure to understand the way air-power works.

The most important thing about air-power is that it is not, and never has been, an end in itself; it is a means to an end, for the whole recent history of war is full of examples showing that neither land nor sea battles can be fought successfully in the face of an enemy who dominates the sky. It was because the *Luftwaffe* failed to master the R.A.F. in the Battle of Britain that the Germans were unable to invade England. Conversely, it was only because the Allied Air Forces dominated the skies of North-West Europe in 1944, after four years of bitter air warfare, that the invasion and liberation of Europe were able to proceed.

Recent smaller wars have tended to obliterate memories of the lessons learned, or re-learned, in the 1940s. In French North Africa, in Indo-China, and in the present Malaysia/Indonesia conflict light, slow and unprotected aircraft have been able to operate with a freedom only possible in the absence of any effective air opposition. But it needs little imagination to see what havoc could be caused by the sudden appearance over Borneo of a few determined Indonesian pilots flying MiG-21s. Until the R.A.F. gets its P.1154s and the Fleet Air Arm a modern equivalent, this hazard will continue to exist.

The Royal Navy also, who have not forgotten the loss of the *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*, must continue to feel insecure—despite modern radar and missiles—until the waters in which their large carriers have to operate are protected, not only locally, but also by air-power which can strike at the home bases of Indonesia's missile-armed Tu-16 "Badger" jet bombers.

This leads to our second point, for it is widely believed that it is the Government's intention to hand over to N.A.T.O., and to sign away the right to get it back, the whole of Britain's nuclear deterrent forces, including Bomber Command. The reasoning seems to be based upon the utterly fallacious argument that Bomber Command has no other role than that of nuclear deterrent. What would happen, for example, if Australia, or Malaysia, threatened by Indonesian heavy bombers, asked for R.A.F. aid to liquidate the threat? Would we say "Sorry, we have given Bomber Command to N.A.T.O. and we cannot have it back"? Our Malaysian friends and Australian relations would certainly remember that relatively small forces of Bomber Command using high-explosive put the Egyptian Air Force out of action at the time of Suez, and would see no logic in an anti-nuclear policy which at the same time deprived them of high-explosive aid.

*Air Pictorial* has stated previously, many times, all the powerful arguments in favour of Britain's retaining her own airborne nuclear deterrent. The points to be emphasised here are: first that, whilst close air support of land and sea forces is a proved necessity, the whole operation must be in hazard unless it is possible to protect the fleets of helicopters and other small aircraft increasingly in demand for such work; and secondly that the air-power to give such protection comprises both fighters and bombers.

With a few exceptions the real experts, the Air Marshals who created British air-power, have remained silent on these matters. It is time for them to speak up, for if, as seems possible, Bomber Command is to be corralled in European custody, and our ageing Hunters, Scimitars and Sea Vixens are not replaced, all that remains of our Air Services will be driven out of the skies by the first opponent who musters enough MiG-21s to put against them. It is no exaggeration to say that the future of the Royal Air Force (and the Fleet Air Arm) is now at stake, and that this is what the forthcoming White Paper on Defence will really be about.