



THE PLAN

Order

McDonnell F-4 Phantom

Hawker Siddeley P.1127

Lockheed C-130E Hercules

**Hawker Siddeley Comet (M.R.
version to replace Shackleton)**

**BAC TSR-2 or General Dynamics
F-111**

Scrap

Hawker Siddeley P.1154

Hawker Siddeley 681

The McDonnell F-4 Phantom (with Rolls-Royce Speys) is intended as a "partial replacement" for the Hunter—and to provide air cover

R.A.F. will be the loser

Re-equipment plans discussed

by Humphrey Wynn

ONE OF THE tragedies of the current battle between the Government and the aircraft industry is that, whoever wins, the Royal Air Force is bound to lose. Another is that since the R.A.F. is now part of the Ministry of Defence, which is the industry's main customer, it cannot speak out loudly with an independent voice to say what it really wants. As a result, a proud air force is being reduced to a second-rank fighting arm; and the mighty reverberations of Air Marshals have become whispers in the corridors of power.

As the Chief of the Air Staff surveys the weapons in his armoury, he sees a V-force diminished in strength because Valiants have come to the end of their

operational life and their role as tankers has to be taken over by a limited supply of Victors; Canberras which have outlived their original terms of employment; Lightnings which need extensive ground aids for them to operate successfully, and in-flight refuelling for deployment overseas; Hunters which can ground-attack but in air fighting, like the Javelins, are seriously outpaced by their enemy opposite numbers; Beverleys and Hastings which lack in one aspect or another the requisites for tactical transports; Comets and Argosies which fulfil specialised roles; Shackletons which pound faithfully but ageily over the seas; and helicopters which, compared with the variety and size

of other countries' rotating-wing equipment, make the R.A.F. look beginners in this form of tactical transport. All in all, the armoury is beginning to look rather full of out-of-date weapons.

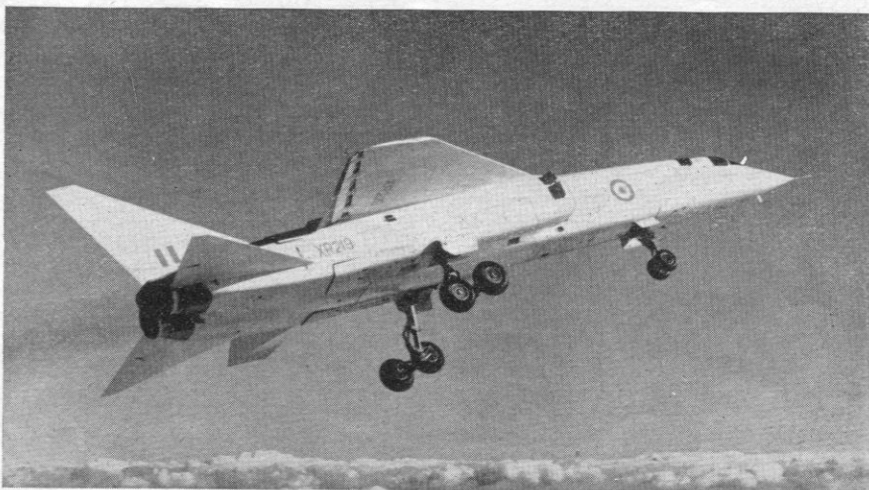
Ideally, the R.A.F. would like whatever it buys to be British, designed and built to its requirements. Thus the TSR-2 would perform the tasks of the Canberra and much more—with greater range and speed, plus automatic reconnaissance and terrain-following ability; the P.1154 (had it been ordered into production) would be a Hunter replacement with V/STOL capability and Mach 2 speed, and the H.S.681 (now, likewise, a non-starter) would back it up as a close-support tactical transport with short take-off and possibly vertical take-off ability.

The P.1127 is of limited value to the R.A.F., because in world trouble spots where its V/STOL virtues will confer a bonus, this is likely to be nullified by Mach 2 opposition. The ten Belfasts which are coming into service are too small in number to form a decisive asset in the strategic transport field, and the VC10s will have a specialised role like the Comets. In being given modified Comets for maritime duties, the R.A.F. is being told what it must have, after turning up its nose at the NATO maritime aircraft in the hope of something much more elaborate.

All told, the outlook is unpromising; and the R.A.F. must be doing some heart-searching as to how to keep up its image in the eyes of young men whom it needs to keep up its fighting traditions. Further, how can its efficiency be maintained if the right modern weapons are not to hand?

The Government has decided, in the terms of the Prime Minister's announcement on 2nd February, that the R.A.F. is to have an operational version of the P.1127 under a limited development programme but that it is not to have the P.1154 because this could not be in service in time to serve as a Hunter replacement; instead, it will have McDonnell Phantoms as a "partial replacement". It is not to

The future of the TSR-2 is still in doubt, but meanwhile BAC are pressing on with its development flying (see page 76)



The P.1127 (Kestrel) for ground-attack is being ordered under a "limited development programme"—but will need Phantoms for air cover

have the H.S.681 because development was authorised so late that it could not enter service at a date which would meet the real needs of the Forces, but is to have C-130 Hercules transports bought from the United States. For maritime duties, it will have specially modified Comets to replace the Shackleton Mk.2.

As to whether the R.A.F. will get its TSR-2s, this is still undecided; the aircraft is being looked at against a background of "long-term commitments and requirements" and its final cost, so a decision will not be known until such information has been assembled—a matter of some months, according to the Prime Minister.

This leaves the R.A.F. in the situation of having ground-attack aircraft to replace its Hunters which will be trans-sonic at best, and tactical transports which are already—long before delivery—an obsolescent type. It still leaves the question of a low-level strike aircraft undecided.

Air Staff operational requirements, it has been stated, have not changed. The Minister of Aviation has said that we are at "the end of the road" so far as exclusive British manufacture of complicated weapons systems for an exclusively British market is concerned, and that we must be prepared to buy some of the products of other countries. If it is decided to cut the TSR-2 order to fifty on the grounds of cost and buy fifty or a hundred F-111s, we shall have the rare sight of the R.A.F. concurrently flying three types of American aeroplane.

Unless these are treated as stop-gap types, and plans put in hand for British aircraft to succeed them, we can expect follow-on orders to be placed with U.S. manufacturers—an unhappy prospect for the British aircraft industry and a none-too-encouraging one for its biggest and most enthusiastic customer, the Royal Air Force.



The S.B.A.C. comments

FOLLOWING THE Prime Minister's statement in Parliament on 2nd February about military aircraft orders, the Society of British Aerospace Companies commented as follows:

"While we wish to study more fully the Prime Minister's proposals for supplying this country's defence requirements, our first reaction is one of the most serious concern for the future of the British aircraft industry.

"We naturally welcome the Prime Minister's statement about the need for a healthy and balanced industry but find it difficult to equate this with the Government intention to order an obsolescent aeroplane like the Lockheed C-130—which first flew over ten years ago—particularly as the latter cannot nearly meet the operational requirement for which the H.S.681 was intended.

"It appears that no British company was given the chance to tender for an aircraft to this down-graded specification. Cancellation of the H.S.681 is bound to lead to considerable unemployment at one of the industry's main centres.

"Secondly, the decision to order the Phantom in part replacement of the Hunter means that now the Royal Air Force and Royal Navy will be operating American aircraft well into the 1970s, and that British design and development effort in the field of supersonic military aircraft will be concentrated exclusively on the TSR-2.

"However, if the aircraft to be ordered from America are, as we are told, stop-gap equipment the industry looks forward to hearing details of the Government's future requirements so that design teams may be set to work immediately and the technological lead held by Britain, particularly in vertical take-off aircraft and engine design, may be maintained.

"Apart from the immediate serious effects on employment, and in the light of the Prime Minister's statement about the importance of a healthy industry, it seems completely illogical to risk jeopardising an industry for the sake of a saving of no more than £30 million per annum over ten years, in a defence budget of more than £1,500 million a year."

LEFT: Alternative to the TSR-2 is the General Dynamics F-111, seen here (lower aircraft) with an F-106B chase plane. With less than 60 per cent of TSR-2's installed thrust, the F-111 lacks the former's payload/range capability; see also February issue, page 40. RIGHT: Beverley and Hastings replacement will be the C-130E Hercules

