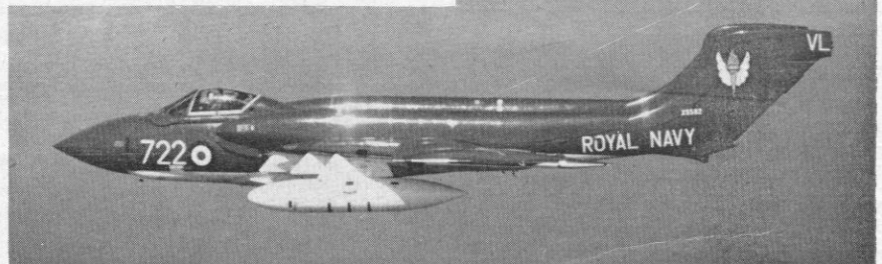


LEFT: Sea Vixen FAW.1 XJ517 of No. 766 Squadron landing at Yeovilton

BELOW: XS582, the first Sea Vixen FAW.2 to be delivered to No. 766 Squadron. The squadron badge on the fin consists of a yellow torch with white wings—motto: "Festine lente", or "Hasten slowly" (Author's photos)

The Naval Air Fighter School (No. 766 Sqdn.)

by Peter R. March



NO. 766 SQUADRON, based at R.N.A.S. Yeovilton, Somerset, celebrated ten years of continuous service as a training squadron on 18th October. Its history, however, goes back somewhat further than this.

The squadron first formed as an Operational Training Unit in February 1943, flying Albacores from Machrihanish in Scotland. It remained an O.T.U. for some time but its headquarters moved to Inskip in July 1943 and Rattray in February 1946, and during this period it operated a wide range of aircraft types, including the Swordfish, Hurricane, Anson, Firefly, Master, Martinet, Defiant and Harvard. In August 1946 No. 766 moved to Lossiemouth, where it remained for seven years, flying Seafires. In October 1953, a move south was made, to Culdrose, continuing the training role with Sea Furies until disbanding in November 1954.

The second phase of commission started on 18th October 1955, when 766 Squadron was re-formed at Yeovilton as the first Naval All-Weather Holding Unit, equipped with eight Sea Venom FAW.20s and eight FAW.21s. Its task was to give flying practice for pilots and observers who had completed, or were about to join, the all-weather conversion course at R.A.F. North Luffenham (No. 238 O.C.U. with Brigand T.4s and T.5s, and Meteor NF.11s). A temporary move was made to Merryfield on 24th November 1956 while building works and runway extensions were being carried out at Yeovilton. No.

766 returned on 20th January 1958, by which time it had completely taken over the training of naval all-weather pilots and observers from the R.A.F., and was officially named the All-Weather Flying School.

On 22nd October 1959 the first Sea Vixens were received, and an Operational Conversion Unit was set up, becoming 766 Squadron "B" Flight in May 1960. The Sea Venom was retired exactly a year after the arrival of the Sea Vixen FAW.1. A further change of title took place in mid-1962 when the squadron was named the Naval Air Fighter School, as it was providing all the crews for the Fleet Air Arm's front-line fighter squadrons (Nos. 890, 892, 893 and 899).

Sea Vixen FAW.2s

Since the introduction of the Sea Vixen FAW.1 the School has flown more than 16,000 sorties, amassing over 21,000 flying hours, with an average of twelve aircraft on strength. The first Sea Vixen FAW.2 (XS582) was received on 7th July this year and by September three of this type were in use, including the first converted FAW.1 to join a squadron (XJ580). While the earlier mark is still in operational use with the front-line squadrons, they will also be retained by No. 766 for training purposes.

The future of this squadron looks equally as interesting as its past; having introduced the Sea Vixen, it is quite con-

ceivable that it will provide conversion and training for the next generation of all-weather fighters, the Spey-powered Phantom, if it materialises as a naval aircraft.

Meanwhile 766 has a very exacting task: to complete the training of the new operational flying training students, both fighters and observers, in the fighter role. The young pilots arrive having finished basic flying training in the Jet Provost (I.F.T.S.), and advanced flying training in the Hunter (Brawdy), for an intensive course of day and night flying in the Sea Vixen. The observers complete their basic navigational and jet familiarisation training in Sea Princes and Sea Venoms at the Observer School, Lossiemouth (formerly at Hal Far, Malta).

The syllabus provides training in all the varied roles of the Sea Vixen, including high- and low-level interception techniques, long-range strike, in-flight refuelling and ground-attack with rockets and bombs. The emphasis is laid on crew co-operation and self-reliance, the aim being to turn out front-line all-weather crews ready in all respects to join squadrons embarked in carriers, usually in the Far East.

With the continued loss of British bases throughout the world, and hence—in the opinion of some defence experts—the decreasing effectiveness of the R.A.F., Britain is relying more and more on the mobility and adaptability of the F.A.A.'s Sea Vixen squadrons.

XJ580, in service with No. 766, was the first FAW.1 converted to FAW.2 standard to join an F.A.A. squadron

Sea Vixen FAW.2 XP924 of No. 899 Squadron, now on H.M.S. Eagle. Badge is a black gloved hand on a white disc

