

# 813 Squadron Aboard Campania

By Graeme Lunn



While searching for a photograph of Lieutenant (A) 'Bill' Henley DSC, a loan officer among many who were vital in founding the modern Australian Fleet Air Arm in 1948, a low resolution image of Bill's 813 Naval Air Squadron was found on the website of the Russian Arctic Convoy Museum. This excellent little museum is located on the banks of Loch Ewe, where the merchantmen would assemble for those hazardous Arctic convoys supplying war matériel to Russia. The image (part of the Admiralty Official Collection but unattributed) had been provided by an electrical engineering officer, John Boothroyd,

who had been attached to the squadron in 1944-45.

Contacting Alison, John's daughter in Canberra, hoping for access to the original, proved a revelation. By return, with the high resolution scan provided, came the information that John had covered the back of the photograph in his retirement years with sticky label notes naming all the individuals he could remember. Finally there was a verified contemporary image of Bill Henley, standing solidly behind his Observer 'Chappers' Chapman. Along with a second Swordfish crew they had hunted down U-365 in December, 1944. (See 'A Loan Officer' in FlyBy November 2022).

Continued on page 39

*Formal squadron photographs, officers and men posed with one or more of their aircraft at an air station or on a carrier alongside in harbour, are numerous. Also relatively common are operational images of aircrew, perhaps being briefed before a launch or with their individual aircraft and ground crew. What is strikingly singular about this 813 Squadron image - on the flight deck of the escort carrier Campania - is that it is a formal squadron portrait occurring in the midst of active operations close to the Arctic Circle on 6 February 1945, and just minutes away from one of these young aviators losing his life. ✈*

813 Squadron aboard Campania 6<sup>th</sup> February 1945





# Escort Carriers

Small, cheap and with a design life of only three years, Escort Carriers were Britain's answer to the U-Boat threat.



Fleet carriers were a prime target and suffered heavy losses proportionate to their numbers early in the war - *Courageous*, *Glorious*, *Ark Royal*, *Hermes* and *Eagle* all being sunk. Escort carriers, two-thirds the length and half the displacement of a fleet carrier, and taking a fraction of the time to construct, were desperately needed. Most especially to turn the tide in the Battle of the Atlantic where a deadly air-gap existed between 30° and 40° west over the convoys mid-Atlantic.

*Audacity*, the first Royal Navy escort, or 'Woolworths' carrier, was commissioned in June 1941. There followed another forty-three of which the 12,450 ton *Campania* was, in February 1944, the forty-first escort carrier commissioned. Constructed in both US and UK yards, often from mercantile hulls purchased on stocks, their main machinery, whether diesel or steam turbine on a single shaft, could rarely exceed 20 knots. Not expected to keep up with the faster fleet and light fleet carriers their usefulness was, however, immediately valued.

*Audacity* only survived six months active service before being sunk, with one of her rescued aircrew being Sub-Lieutenant Eric 'Winkle' Brown DSC. Unarmoured, intensely susceptible to torpedo and fire, the vulnerability of escort carriers was only acceptable given the desperate lack of alternatives. Once sufficient numbers were available for the convoy escort role more specific tasking was given as ever more hulls commissioned.

Escort carriers would be assigned to detached hunter/killer groups, or converted to assault carriers, providing fighter air-cover over invasion beaches until airfields were captured ashore. Relieving the bigger carriers from deck landing training duties they also found wide use as ferry carriers. In the Pacific, escort carriers would hang back from the main striking fleet as replenishment carriers and spare decks. While providing Combat Air Patrols for the vulnerable Fleet Train they would launch replacement aircraft and crews to the forward fleet carriers as needed. Some escorts even took their place in the British Fleet's line-of-battle as Strike Carriers.

By late 1943 the Naval Board in Melbourne was starting to consider the possibility of a post-war carrier based FAA, but recognised that relevant experience was lacking in the seaman Executive Branch. Captain Harold Farncomb DSO MVO RAN, slated for an RN battleship after his command of the cruiser *Australia*, was instead sent to the UK to take command of the assault carrier *Attacker* in March 1944. Likewise Captain John Armstrong CBE DSO RAN was posted to *Ruler*, operating as a replenishment carrier with the British Pacific Fleet, in August 1945 but did not take command until after the Japanese surrender. ✈

Sub-Lieutenant (A) John Boothroyd RNVR, the Squadron's Air Radio Officer, is sitting cross legged at the feet of *Campania*'s Captain. A 1943 graduate in Mathematics and Electrical Engineering from Cambridge University, John was privately interviewed on graduation and steered towards joining the Royal Navy's expanding Air Branch to specialise in radar.

The 12,450 ton *Campania* commissioned in February 1944. Originally launched as a Cunard Line refrigerator ship for the New Zealand mutton trade, the lion of the Cunard House Flag was incorporated in the ship's crest with the motto 'Of One Company'. Her conversion into an escort carrier had been undertaken by Harland & Wolff in Belfast.

*Campania* was the first escort carrier to be fitted specifically for an Action Information Organisation and with a Type 227 radar. Her operations room was capable of controlling fighters for convoy air defence and directing anti-submarine search and strikes. The welcome addition of BABS (Blind Approach Beacon System) allowed aircraft to find the carrier at night and acquire the flight deck lights to make a visual circuit for landing.

Commissioning Captain of *Campania* was a pre-war observer from the 22nd Naval Observers' Course of 1932/33, Acting Captain (O) Kenneth Short. His Staff Officer (Air) was Lieutenant-Commander (P) Anthony 'Puppy' Kennard DSC, who had commanded 811 Squadron on *Biter* in early 1943 when the first aircraft from a convoy's escort carrier participated in the sinking of a U-boat (U-203).

An escort carrier, the majority constructed from mercantile hulls, only truly becomes a warship when aircraft embark. *Campania* was assigned 813 Naval Air Squadron as ship and squadron commenced their respective and joint work-ups. Both Short and Kennard survived when the 813 Swordfish flying them ashore to inspect the Squadron at *Landrail*/Naval Air Station Machrihanish ditched after launch on 13 March 1944.

813 had first formed in January 1937 as a TSR (Torpedo Spotter Reconnaissance) squadron equipped with nine Swordfish I aircraft for service on the China Station with *Eagle*. When World War Two commenced they searched for German raiders in the Indian Ocean with the Eastern Fleet based in Ceylon. Arriving in the Mediterranean in June 1940 813 became a composite squadron when four Sea Gladiators were taken on strength.

The most notable of numerous actions was contributing three Swordfish to the twenty-one aircraft



L→R. 813's Senior Pilot Lieutenant (A)(P) Charles Neville RNVR, Sub-Lieutenant (A) John Boothroyd RNVR, Captain (O) Kenneth Short RN, Rear-Admiral Rhoderick McGrigor CB DSO RN, Squadron Commanding Officer Acting Lieutenant-Commander (A)(P) Stewart Cooke RNVR and the Senior Observer Lieutenant (O) Cyril Chapman RNVR. ✈

night strike by *Illustrious* against the Italian Fleet on the original Taranto Night of 11/12 November 1940. After service in the Atlantic the squadron disembarked from *Eagle* in October 1941 to *Landrail* in Argyle, their first return to Britain in five years.

Re-equipped with nine new Swordfish, and two Sea Hurricane's, 813 embarked on *Eagle* for Gibraltar and the Mediterranean. They had fortunately disembarked their Swordfish to RAF North Front in Gibraltar when *Eagle* was torpedoed on 11 August 1942, taking the squadrons Sea Hurricanes down with her. Continuing to operate ashore from Gibraltar and North Africa 813 next embarked on *Illustrious* to return to the UK in October 1943.

The observer Lieutenant-Commander (A)(O) Joseph Parish DSC reformed 813 at *Merlin*/Naval Air Station Donibristle with nine Swordfish IIs on 1 November 1943. Taking an additional three Fulmar fighters on strength the squadron embarked on *Campania* in April 1944 for Atlantic convoys under Western Approaches Command. From September 1944 *Campania* joined Home Fleet for Arctic convoy duty, and 813 gained a flight of four Grumman Wildcat fighters. *Campania* sailed from





Scapa Flow on 16 September escorting JW.60 to Murmansk.

Now commanding 813 was Lieutenant-Commander (A)(P) Cyril Allen. The force protecting the thirty-one merchant ships included the second escort carrier *Striker*, the battleship *Rodney* and nineteen other warships. Established routine would see the warships assemble in the Tail of the Bank in the upper Firth of Clyde while their Merchant Navy charges gathered in Loch Ewe, before emerging in convoy to face the challenges of the arctic weather and the grim toll exacted by the waiting German submarines and aircraft.

Escorting Convoy RA.60, the return convoy from Murmansk, two ships were lost to U-310 one day out on 29 September. The next evening Sub-Lieutenant (A)(P) Malcolm 'Mitch' Mitchell and Lieutenant (A)(O) David Bentley, flying a patrol at 25nm around the convoy, attacked U-921 with depth charges and rocket projectiles, sinking her. This success was dampened by the loss early that morning of Cyril Allen and his Observer, Lieutenant (A)(O) Keith Tilley, who failed to return from a night anti-submarine patrol. Prioritizing convoy protection with a wolfpack in the area, and given the sea temperature 370nm north of the Arctic Circle, no search was undertaken.

By January 1945 six Arctic convoys had been escorted, two U-boats sunk and many Luftwaffe aircraft shot down. At the end of the month 813 Squadron carried out night shipping strikes near Vaagso in Norway. With the full moon of 28 January six Swordfish, each armed with eight 25lb rockets, and four Swordfish with flares, launched at 20:00. Four enemy ships were struck before landing back on at midnight.

When John's sticky labels were removed it revealed that on the rear of the photograph was written among other notations "Feb 1945" and "RA, JW 64". These are the convoy designators for Operation Hotbed, escorting Russian Convoy JW.64 to Murmansk 3 - 15 February, and the return Convoy RA.64, 17 - 28 February. As preparations were made for Convoy JW.64 twelve Swordfish IIIs, four

Wildcat fighters and one Fulmar night fighter of 813 were embarked.

On 5 February 1945 Rear-Admiral Rhoderick McGrigor CB DSO, Rear-Admiral First Cruiser Squadron, transferred his flag from *Norfolk* to *Campania* in Scapa Flow for Operation Hotbed. The powerful escort force included a second escort carrier *Nairana*, cruiser *Bellona*, sixteen destroyers plus nine sloops and corvettes. The following day the escort force rendezvoused with the convoy, and shortly after 16:00 all available 813 Squadron aircrew and officers mustered on the flight deck for this photograph.

Very much an operational image the photograph shows the redoubtable Rear-Admiral, with his binoculars still around his neck, having obviously just come down from the bridge. John in his later years would remember vividly this officers direct personality and confidence-inspiring leadership in the trying conditions.

A junior officer at Gallipoli and the Battle of Jutland McGrigor had specialised in Torpedoes. At 5'4" (162cm) he was known as 'Wee Mac' and had been Flag Captain of the battleship *Renown* through hard fought Malta convoys. Made Flag Officer, Sicily, during the 1943 invasion of that island, he was wounded while flying his flag from a motor launch leading a subsidiary landing to cut off retreating German troops.

Although the Escort Force Commander, ship's Captain and Squadron Commanding Officer, are present for the photograph not all of the aircrew are gathered. The absent would have been airborne on anti-submarine patrols and flying Combat Air Patrol. The next crews to launch or on alert are already in their flying gear. Two Swordfish crews are standing left and right wearing immersion suits while the kneeling Wildcat pilots have donned Mae West lifejackets only, no doubt grateful for their enclosed cockpits in these northern latitudes. Both the Senior Pilot and Senior Observer, like many of the others, have warm wool pullovers under their jackets rather than shirt and tie. Only needing to remove a jacket made donning their immersion suits much quicker.

As the photograph was being taken a Luftwaffe Ju88 bomber on a routine meteorological flight was approaching the convoy. John has written on the back of the photograph the names of two Wildcat pilots, Fleishmann-Allen on the left and Smyth on the right. There is also the notation "took off 15 minutes later & never

# Swordfish

Although it looked obsolete, the Fairey Swordfish was, however, an ideal match for the Escort Carrier, and was a potent anti-submarine weapon.

Powered by the reliable nine-cylinder radial air-cooled supercharged Pegasus engine, the Fairey Swordfish was considered a lucky aircraft by crews, having a fabric construction too flimsy to often trigger a cannon shells impact fuze. With a very low stalling speed and docile controls, the type ensured a relatively safe return to a night landing on the narrow pitching deck of an escort carrier.

A Swordfish TSR (Torpedo Spotter Reconnaissance) three-crew Mark 1 with Vickers or Lewis machine guns could carry a 1600lb torpedo or 1500lb mine or wing mount 1500 lbs of bombs and depth charges. To extend operational range a modification was introduced to add an extra fuel tank in the TAG position when required.

To cope with the stress of firing eight 60lb high-explosive or 25lb armor-piercing rocket projectiles the lower mainplane of the Mark 11 was strengthened with a metal undersurface. Losing a crewman and gaining the latest ASV radar the Mark III, even with the more powerful 759 hp Pegasus 30 engine, needed to be fitted with rocket-assisted take-off gear to enable escort carrier operations at max weight in low wind conditions.

The 'Stringbag' nickname reflected the all purpose nature of a housewife's string shopping bag. Whatever was deemed useful for the mission - bombs, depth charges, torpedo, rocket projectiles, flares, sonobuoys, mines, searchlight or radar - was attached to the forgiving airframe and sent out on operations.

Reliable, lucky and successful in action the type outlived its planned successor, the Albacore. An initial order for eighty-six Swordfish saw delivery commence in February 1936. Albacores commenced their delivery flights in 1939 with production ceasing 800 aircraft later in 1943. After 2,392 production aircraft the final Swordfish Mark III was delivered in August 1944. ➔



came back.” Despite being a formal group portrait this immediacy to action by time and place, coupled to identifiable participants and impending loss, makes the image not just singular but possibly unique to the Fleet Air Arm of those war years.

Sub-Lieutenant's (A)(P) Richard ‘Flash’ Fleischmann-Allen DSC and Robert Smyth were on standby to man and launch their Wildcat day fighters. Operating from *Fencer* with 842 Squadron, Flash had been awarded a DSC when he shot down a Condor in the Bay of Biscay while protecting Convoy OS.60 in late November 1943. When *Campania*'s radar detected a contact at 28 miles they launched to intercept at around 16:50, fifteen minutes after this photograph was taken. Flash was in Wildcat Z7 and Robert, his wing man, in Z5. It took almost thirty minutes flying before the Ju88 was acquired visually.

Intercepting at 17:18 in position 63°36'N 2°14'W over the Norwegian Sea they were 180nm south of the Arctic Circle and almost due east of Trondheim. As the enemy aircraft rapidly descended towards a cloud layer at 1000 feet Flash fired in bursts and watched the twin-engined bomber, trailing smoke, dive into the sea. Any satisfaction at the victory was instantly muted as the Ju88's defensive fire had hit his wing man, and Robert's Z5 also went down. Flash forlornly stated that: “we had flown together for the last two years, and it was a very sad moment for me.”

Low on fuel and unsure of the carriers exact position Flash eventually found *Campania* in the dark and managed to land safely. Sailing ever north the weather deteriorated with heavy snow and frequent gales. The Ju88 crew had, however, managed to report the convoy's position. Alerted, the



Sub Lts Richard “Flash” Fleischmann-Allen DSC (left) and Robert Smyth (right) who featured in the Squadron image on page 1 were on standby to launch their Wildcat fighters. Minutes after the photo was taken, Smyth was shot down and killed. ➔

Kriegsmarine formed eight U-boats into Wolfpack Rasmus and positioned it ahead of the convoy. Day and night - though daylight was soon only six hours long as they advanced northwards - JW.64 now became the concentrated subject for enemy attacks.

The Luftwaffe Commander-in-Chief, Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring, in a teleprinter order to the bomber wing KG 26 at Trondheim-Vaernes on 7 February, personally demanded that the escorting carriers, *Campania* and *Nairana*, were to be sunk. Hours later a force of forty-eight Ju88 torpedo bombers were detected on radar and several days of massed torpedo bomber attacks followed. The aggressive flying of the carrier's fighters, and the ships anti-aircraft barrages, resulted in twenty-three attacking aircraft being shot down. KG 26 reported twenty-one airmen confirmed killed and forty-five missing. No merchantmen were lost although a corvette, *Denbigh Castle*, was torpedoed



A U-Boat of the Kriegsmarine in Arctic Waters. Winston Churchill later revealed that Germany's assault on maritime shipping was, in his opinion, the single greatest threat to Britain's ability to prevail. ➔

# Arctic Convoys

Described as ‘The worst journey in the world’, the Arctic Convoys were the lifeblood of the Russian front - but at a dreadful cost.

The disastrous losses of Convoy PQ.17 in June 1942 showed that air cover was just as desperately needed in the Arctic as it was in the Atlantic or Mediterranean. A Russian convoy's passage, where no allied land-based air cover was possible for perilous days, skirted the ice pack as far as possible from the long Norwegian coastline with its numerous Luftwaffe airfields, and those remote northern fjords hiding Luftwaffe catapult ships and Kriegsmarine warships.

Convoy PQ.18 in September 1942 had been escorted by a powerful force, which included the escort carrier *Avenger* with embarked Sea Hurricanes and Swordfish to close that Arctic air-gap (see ‘SNO Number One’ Flyby October 2022), but no further carriers could be spared until *Chaser* escorted Convoy JW.57 in February 1944. Since early 1943 the Admiralty had recognised that two escort carriers per convoy was optimal. In the Arctic this was finally achieved for Convoy JW.58 in March 1944 with *Activity* and *Tracker*. Aboard *Tracker* the Staff Officer (Air) was the newly promoted Lieutenant-Commander Victor Smith (O) DSC RAN. ➔

## RAAF SWORDFISH - Fact Stranger Than Fiction!

March 1942 was a fraught time for the Group Captain based at RAAF Pearce just north of Perth. The Lockheed Hudsons of 14 Squadron were flying maritime reconnaissance and anti-submarine patrols to protect the convoy routes into the Port of Fremantle, while 25 Squadron was tasked to defend Perth with her obsolete Wirraways and Brewster Buffaloes. 77 Squadron was hurriedly forming at the base with Curtiss P-40 Kittyhawks prior to deployment north to defend Darwin against the continuing Japanese air attacks.

Only four months earlier aircraft had been sent out in the forlorn search for the missing *Sydney*. Since then *Parramatta*, *Perth* and *Yarra* had also been lost in action. With war declared against Japan in December 1941 Singapore had fallen by mid-February 1942, and Darwin was attacked for the first time on 19 February 1942. The Group Captain was struggling to find the resources to man detachments along the vast Western Australian coastline, and losing a third of his Hudsons to Northern Command made him desperate for additional aircraft assets.

Just arrived in port was the US merchantman *SS Robin Tuxworth* with nineteen boxed Kittyhawks for 77 Squadron. On 17 March the base's Duty Officer informed his Group Captain that another six wooden aircraft cases had arrived from the port at the local Bullsbrook railway siding. On opening the crates it was discovered that the expected P-40's were in fact six Fairey Swordfish I aircraft. The paperwork showed they had been taken on Royal Navy strength in September 1941. Something had gone well astray in the worldwide shipping of vital war matériel during the intervening months.

Not one to pass up this ‘Fairey Godmother’ sent gift the grateful Group Captain instructed a Sergeant with Wapiti airframes experience to assemble the Swordfish. Despite a lack of technical and flying manuals the Group Captain safely test flew the first one assembled by the various trade specialists under the direction of that very competent Sergeant. For several months Western Australia became used to the sound of a ‘Peggy’ engine as the Swordfish flew anti-submarine patrols as well as communication duties between Pearce and the Squadron detachments up the coast.

Inevitably RAAF Headquarters in Melbourne intervened. They ordered the enterprising Group Captain to have his unofficial fleet disassembled and re-crated in May. The crates were then shipped on to their rightful naval owners via the Royal Naval Aircraft Repair Yard in Nairobi. One (pictured above) went to Boscombe Down where, in October 1943, it underwent handling trials fitted with the latest Mk.XI ASV and pumpkin searchlight proposed for the Swordfish III. ➔





with eleven dead on 13 February as the convoy approached the Kola Inlet leading to Murmansk.

Knowing that the return convoy RA.64 would face the waiting U-boats as soon as they left the Kola Inlet McGrigor's tactics, that had served him well in similar circumstances in December 1944, saw the close escort group sortied the afternoon before on an anti-submarine sweep. The corvette *Alnwick Castle* and sloop *Lark* sank U-425 that night. As the thirty-six ships of RA.64 sailed on 17 February *Campania*'s Swordfish immediately commenced patrols. *Lark* was torpedoed by U-968, who also struck the merchantman *Thomas Scott*. John witnessed from the flight deck the corvette *Bluebell* explode later that day. An acoustic homing torpedo from U-711 hit her stern and set off the readied depth charges. Sinking within 30 seconds there was but a lone survivor.

Having faced down the Kriegsmarine and Luftwaffe, RA.64 now faced the worst weather recorded of any Arctic convoy as they encountered two consecutive Force 12 hurricanes with winds of 80+kts. *Campania* at one stage was rolling 45° (basin heeling trials would only risk a little over 30°) while shipping green water down the full length of the flight deck necessitating her temporary heaving to. John remembered 60 foot waves, twice the height of the flight deck, and when he saw the Senior Engineer looking worried decided it was time for him to be worried.

Rear-Admiral McGrigor reported '...much difficulty in keeping stragglers with the convoy. Engine troubles, defective steering, ice-chipped propellers,

shifting cargoes, and splitting decks were among the very genuine reasons for dropping astern...' At one stage the convoys average speed of advance was only 3½ knots. Maintaining aircraft in these huge seas, with its penetrating cold and frozen gear while occasionally shipping green water the whole length of the flight deck, was arduous in the extreme. Twelve of the sixteen escorting destroyers had to dock on return for hull repairs, as did *Campania* herself.

The squadron disembarked to Sparrowhawk/Naval Air Station Hatston in the Orkneys, and then on 1 March 1945 flew on south to *Landrail*. Safely ashore in Scotland the opportunity was taken for another squadron photograph of all those not on well-earned leave.

These men of 813 Squadron escorted a further four Arctic convoys before the war finished.

There had been seventy-eight Arctic Convoys since August 1941 and *Campania*, with 813 Squadron embarked, had escorted ten percent of them. At the German surrender in April 1945 Loch Ewe, in grim irony, became one of the marshaling points for many of the German U-boats that had surrendered while at sea. ➔

Landing on a small deck, even in benign conditions, was hazardous - as shown here. This Swordfish has 'ballooned' over the crash barrier and is heading towards the folded aircraft, to the consternation of the deck party who are displaying discretion rather than valour. ➔



813 Squadron ashore at HMS Landrail March 1945





## Postscript 1

Wee McGrigor with the Captain of HMS Amythest



Captain Short (left) with McGrigor (right).



formally known as 'The Festival Ship *Campania*' and visited ten ports.

Back under the White Ensign *Campania* arrived in Fremantle at the end of July 1952. With two Sea Otters and three Dragonfly helicopters embarked she was the Headquarters ship for Operation Hurricane - the first atomic bomb test at the Monte Bello Islands off Karratha, Western Australian. The Admiralty in London had suggested the site to which the Australian government acquiesced. (See "[Monte Bello Burning](#)")

Eleven RAN ships led by *Sydney* (with 805 and 817 Squadrons embarked) supported the RN force. *Campania*, at 15nm, was closest to the explosion - in the hull of the frigate *Plym* - on 3 October 1952 when the UK became the world's third nuclear power. Two Dragonflies then immediately flew into the lagoon site to take samples.

*Campania* arrived back in the UK mid-December and was returned to reserve. She went to the breakers yard in 1955.✈

**Rear-Admiral McGrigor**, promptly promoted Vice-Admiral, became Second-in-Command Home Fleet, and was knighted several months later. 'Wee Mac', the smallest Commander-in-Chief since Nelson, was made First Sea Lord in 1951, and an Admiral of the Fleet in 1953. Throughout that decade Sir Rhoderick proved a formidable advocate for carrier air power.

**Captain Short** was awarded the Distinguished Service Order for Operation Hotbed.

**Sub-Lieutenant Fleischmann-Allen** earned a second Distinguished Service Cross for his Arctic flying with 813. Shortening his surname to Allen he resumed the tertiary studies that had been interrupted when he joined the FAA in 1941. Qualifying as a civil engineer Flash became a 'Ten Pound Pom' and emigrated to Australia.

**Sub-Lieutenant Boothroyd** worked post-war with the electronics company A.C.Cossor. Moving into research with English Electric he helped develop DEUCE, the Digital Electronic Universal Computing Engine, one of the first commercial computers. John, like Flash, emigrated to Australia. In 1964 he was appointed Officer-in-Charge of the Computer Centre at the University of Tasmania and for the Hydro Electric Commission. Retiring early, in 1975, John Boothroyd died in Melbourne in 2007.

***Campania*** became a Training Carrier, accompanied by its inevitable accidents, in April 1945. After post-war Trooping duties she was placed in reserve. Loaned for 1951's Festival of Britain her hangar became an exhibition hall. Under the merchant Red Ensign she was



# ASV - A New Advantage

John Boothroyd's section of sixteen Radio Mechanics gave the antiquated Swordfish its major tactical advantage in these later years of the war - the ASV (Air-to-Surface Vessel) radar fitted to the Swordfish II and III. Combined with the Swordfish's night strike capability ASV radar made the bi-plane a still potent anti-submarine weapon system. Joining *Campania* in Belfast John hand delivered "those things made in Birmingham" - the top secret magnetrons for the airborne radars.

ASV had first been introduced into service in 1940, but its low power output and poor receiver performance limited its range.

However, technology was rapidly improving. A new material called Polythene solved cabling problems, and a commercial vacuum tube developed for television receivers provided greatly improved power and frequency response in a smaller, more reliable package.

By mid-1940 an improved Mk.II ASV was being fitted to Coastal Command aircraft. In May of 1941 An ASV II equipped Swordfish detected the German battleship *Bismarck* as it attempted to return to France for repairs. This detection led to *Bismarck's* destruction the next day. ASV's acuity was initially more problematic for submarine contacts, however, especially in higher sea states, and improvements continued throughout the war years until the latest Mk.XI centrimetric set, fitted between the wheels of the Swordfish III.

Early sets would lose the contact as the aircraft approached, requiring the use of flares or searchlights to carry out a night action, but forcing the U-boats to dive proved almost as much a tactical success as successfully sinking them and convoy losses rapidly reduced.

To keep that sensitive and fragile radar and radio equipment serviceable in the extreme conditions for maintenance of a small escort carrier's hangar and workshops during Arctic foul weather still evokes admiration. ✈



## Postscript 2

**813 Squadron**, happy with their forgiving 'Stringbag' and her reliable 'Peggy' engine, were not so lucky with its replacement as they converted to single seat strike fighters. From late 1945 they were equipped with the Blackburn Firebrand, branded "a disaster as a deck landing aircraft" by that survivor from *Audacity*, the now famous Navy test pilot Eric 'Winkle' Brown.

Converting in May 1953 to the contra-rotating turbo-prop Westland Wyvern the squadron was the first to take the type to sea on *Albion*. There they discovered its 'disturbing' tendency to flame out from fuel starvation with the g-forces of a catapult launch. After several losses Lieutenant McFarlane gained the unsought distinction of surviving the first underwater ejection when his submerged aircraft was cut in half by *Albion's* bow.

Of 124 Wyverns produced 39 (32%) were lost. 813 Squadron was disbanded in 1958 after two decades of service. ✈







Armourers AM/O Nickel and AM/O Dick load rockets onto the rails under a Swordfish's wing aboard Campania. ➔

## Aussie Swordfish Aviators

While opportunities for Australians keen on a naval aviation career were sparse after the demise of the Royal Naval Air Service in 1918 through until 1947, there were some dozens who achieved aircrew status in both the RAN and the RN over those decades. Aviators who served in Swordfish are an even smaller (and well decorated) handful:

### Lieutenant Commander Palgrave 'Pally' Carr (P)(O) DFC RAN

Flew with the Swordfish equipped 810 Squadron embarked on *Ark Royal* pre-war. In 1941 Pally was Senior Observer of 814 Squadron on *Hermes* with the Eastern Fleet and commanded a Swordfish detachment ashore in Ceylon.

### Lieutenant Harry Gerrett (O) MiD RAN

As Senior Observer with 820 Swordfish Squadron on *Ark Royal* Harry 'led a squadron against the enemy with courage and ability' off Norway and in the Mediterranean during 1940. (See 'On The Shoulders of Giants' Flyby August 2021)

### Acting Lieutenant-Commander Gerald 'Gerry' Haynes (O) DSO RAN

Senior Observer when 828 Squadron embarked on *Victorious* for Arctic strikes against Kikenes in July 1941, Gerry became the first Australian to command an FAA Squadron in December 1941. Operating out of RAF Hal Far during the Siege of Malta he led the Albacore and Swordfish equipped squadron in night strikes against enemy shipping and aerodromes in Sicily and Libya. Gerry was the only one of the squadron's nine original Observers to survive these operations.

### Lieutenant Charles 'Sprog' Lea (P) DSC RNVR

Attached to 819 Squadron Sprog launched from *Illustrious* in Swordfish L5H with his Observer, Sub-Lieutenant Jones DSC, as part of the second strike element of the Taranto Raid in November 1940. Releasing his torpedo at 600 yards (550m) he hit the battleship *Caio Duilio* abreast her No.2 Turret putting a 36ft by 23ft (11m by 7m) hole in her, forcing the Italian Admiral to immediately beach the flooding ship.

### Acting Lieutenant-Commander Edward Bernard 'Barney' Morgan (P) RANVR

As Senior Pilot Barney flew Swordfish in the Battle of the Atlantic with 811 Squadron under 'Puppy' Kennard aboard the escort carrier *Biter*. Barney took over command of the Squadron in November 1943, when Kennard went to *Campania*, becoming the second Australian to command an FAA squadron.

### Lieutenant Victor 'VAT' Smith (O) MiD DSC RAN

VAT led the unsuccessful June 1940 Swordfish torpedo strike on the battlecruiser *Scharnhorst*. At 240nm from *Sparrowhawk*/Naval Air Station Hatston in the Orkney Islands the strike was conducted at maximum range with hastily fitted long range tanks. Two out of the six aircraft were shot down, with no survivors, and one aircraft landed with only 7 gallons of fuel remaining. ➔

# The Only Australian Aviator To Torpedo A Carrier

In World War Two there were six hundred Royal New Zealand Navy Volunteer Reserve officers in the Fleet Air Arm. In the Royal Australian Navy prior to 1945 there were but two Volunteer Reserve pilots, Hugh Thom and Edward Bernard 'Barney' Morgan. Barney was the only Australian to ever torpedo an aircraft carrier.

The twenty-six year old Barney Morgan from Sydney was appointed a Sub-Lieutenant RANVR in June 1940. Sent to Sydney's *Rushcutter* base to learn the intricacies of anti-submarine warfare it was not Barney's forte. After an initial failure, he passed the Detector Course with only an average rating.

Arriving in the UK in March 1941 Barney was posted to the 850 ton Cricket class trawler *Paynter* before becoming First Lieutenant of the 925 ton flower class corvette *Celandine*. Barney was promoted Lieutenant the same day *Celandine* combined her depth charge attacks with *Nasturtium* and *Gladiolus* to sink U-556 south west of Iceland on 27 June 1941.



There is no record of how Barney managed to commence flying training in October 1941. This time there was no doubt about his aptitude and June 1942 found him undergoing a Swordfish TSR Course before joining 811 Squadron in September 1942. The next few months saw the squadron tasked by RAF Coastal Command with night shipping strikes and mine-laying in the English Channel from RAF Bircham Newton in Norfolk.

With nine Swordfish and three Wildcat fighters 811 Squadron embarked on the escort carrier *Biter* in February 1943. Over the ensuing months in the Atlantic *Biter* operated with various Escort Groups as submarines were hunted down and intruding aircraft shot down. As well as the usual deck crashes and ditchings, the squadron lost a crew in May to the guns of U-230. Active operations mature aircrew quickly, the FAA was expanding rapidly, and by mid-1943 Barney was Senior Pilot. On passage between Halifax and Belfast the SP ballooned over the barrier and crashed into one of the Wildcats in the aircraft park.

811 was equipped with the secret Mk. 24 acoustic homing torpedo codenamed FIDO. On November 16, two days out from Scotland, *Biter* was experiencing a heavy swell. Barney, carrying a Mk. 24, stalled over the round down and ditched on *Biter's* starboard quarter. Torn from its cradle the torpedo went active, promptly acquired 'mother' and blew up against her rudder. 'Biter bitten by FIDO' passed into FAA legend during the four weeks the carrier spent undergoing dockyard repairs in Rosyth.

Acting Lieutenant-Commander Morgan assumed command of the Squadron two weeks later at *Merlin*/Naval Air Station Donibristle where the Squadron had disembarked, becoming the second Australian to command a FAA squadron. All was forgiven when he embarked the Squadron back on the good-as-new *Biter* in January 1944. After operations under Coastal Command from RAF Limavady near Derry in June 1944 Barney was posted to Lancashire in command of 766 Squadron at *Nightjar*/Naval Air Station Inskip. An Operational Training Unit the squadron strength was thirty Swordfish, which were replaced by Fireflies from October 1944.

Barney returned to Sydney in early 1946 and was discharged to shore that September. In July 1947 at St. Marks Church, overlooking *Rushcutter*, he married Marjorie Bain. The couple had five children and retired to Cheltenham. Barney died in 1986 at the age of 70. ➔