Into History

It came as a surprise to me that my first dealings with the Lynx were in 1967, 50 years where did it all go?

The operation of helicopters from small ships was viewed by the Royal Navy as an important feature, a series of trials were carried out by the Saunders Roe Company using the P531 during which a range of undercarriage configurations and deck securing systems were assessed. And it was a direct result of these trials led to the production of the Wasp

The early 1960s were stirring times, the Royal Navy using the Wasp had confirmed that a small ships helicopter was a force multiplier, all three services had identified the need for helicopters on the battlefield, industry responding to the proliferation of project studies identified three categories of aircraft and predicted a need for some 250 helicopters for the UK alone

There were at the time four major aircraft companies involved in rotorcraft; namely Bristol Helicopters, Fairey Aviation, Saunders Roe and Westland Aircraft, these were brought together form Westland Helicopters. Some 20 widely different project studies led to the aircraft that was chosen to meet the Royal Navy's and Army requirement.

These were the times of 'Britenter' which resulted in the Anglo-French package deal to produce three aircraft thought necessary for the future. Lynx or WG 13 was then known was for a helicopter to operate from small ships and Utility helicopter for the Army.

The magic words, 'Intention to Proceed' came in 1967 by which time Westland Helicopters were Britain's sole helicopter company. Around this time a serious episode caught the world's navies by surprise.
A single small fast patrol boat from Egypt succeeded in sinking the Israeli destroyer 'Eilat' with Russian 'Styx' missiles. Role of the new helicopter was immediately adjusted to include anti surface vessels with the Sea Skua missile.

Work commenced to produce the most complex program ever undertaken by Westland. Thirteen prototype aircraft were assembled and four major airframe rigs were built, the experimental shop, yes we did used to have one, looked like a production line,
First off was the rotor rig, we planned a long ground running program in advance of first flight. Peter Wilson Chalon was in charge of that (familiar name) and it was situated here at Yeovilton.

Pre-flight Development testing was comprehensive, rotor blades, deck hook, and the bold introduction of a semirigid rotor head were all crucial to the deck handling,
A scaled rotorhead was assessed using a small Scout helicopter, this indicated a resonance problem which resulted in the lag dampers we all know and love.

The first five basic aircraft were a colourful bunch, yellow, grey, red, blue and orange, this proved an effective way to keep track of where your particular aircraft was.

First flight took place on March 21st 1971, a Sunday afternoon of course, with Ron Gellatly and Roy Moxam at the controls, I rode economy in the back, monitoring stresses and quite a lot of vibration.(I have my own vibration problem now) We were able to have the aircraft available for a press demonstration flight the next day.

Little over a year later, we had six aircraft flying, including the first Naval.
There followed five years, during which time Westland had flown three naval prototypes s
The first Naval Lynx entered service in January 1976 and the best small ships helicopter in the world showed the way.

One of the first customers was the Royal Netherlands Navy, who took the unusual step of sharing the IFTU with the RN here at Yeovilton. These were the heady days of Sa Vixen and later Phantom.

10 years later, having already claimed a speed record in its class, Lynx became officially the world's fastest helicopter, a title it can still lay claim to today. I was one of 17 people who suggested the name Lynx. For that we were each given a £5 prize, the nearest to a 'Bankers Bonus' I achieved in my whole career.

So today, we say farewell to the Lynx after over 40 years in service with the Royal Navy, and in the hands of many of those here today served with distinction, often in 'Harms way'.
Several nations are still operating Lynx with some 100 aircraft
The Lynx Mk 8, was a quantum leap forward and has led to The Wildcat which has Lynx DNA within its advanced avionics system and the lessons learned about operation of helicopters are evident in NH90 and Merlin.

So we are not closing the book yet, and a few more good things may yet come up from Somerset