

Admiral Key Sir,

Ladies and gentlemen,

When asked by the CO to speak today, I was a little unsure what to talk about. As the youngest and most inexperienced pilot still flying the Mk8, it seemed to me that I was the last person qualified to talk intelligently about this aircraft; something I'm sure Trappers will confirm! However, as the Last Lynx Flight pilot, and having unsuccessfully deployed chaff Last Lynx Flight Commander in an attempt to avoid speaking, the honour of standing in front of you today remains my own.

My Lynx Career began rather unexpectedly. Having spent a two week refresher course in Jan 13 conducting low level nav in preparation for a course on 848; I was somewhat surprised to field a call from my career manager informing me that I would be joining 702 a week later to begin flying the Lynx.

When I arrived at a cold, grey Yeovilton in February to begin the course, my first impression of the Lynx was probably one of disappointment. I had not seen one up close before, and to my ignorant eyes the various upgrades over its life had left the clichéd 'Aston Martin of the sky' looking anything but. Sitting hunched on the dispersal, tail sagging wearily and quietly weeping oil, the mighty Mk8 looked less like a sleek feline predator, and rather more like a tired old greyhound... with warts. But I strove to keep an open mind.

At ground school we were introduced to the beast in more detail: the tiny cockpit, the multitude of switches, the absurd cockpit door; an endless retinue of systems, duplexed systems, potential emergencies, actual emergencies, numbers and limitations. In short, we spent several weeks learning how every part **should** work, and then the variously mild to catastrophic ways in which

every part could break. And slowly, very slowly, this knowledge turned my disappointment to despair.

But eventually we got to go flying. And in the air the Lynx promised to make up for all its flaws. I will not forget the feeling of power and agility the aircraft produced as we raced around the Yeovilton area past lumbering Sea Kings, plodding slowly back from Merrifield at 60kts. After months of uncertainty, I had begun to see what people meant by *'sports car'*.

Yet the honeymoon period was short lived. Because such agility comes at a price, and the cost for the Lynx will be known by every pilot who has attempted to auto rotate one. I suspect there are few pilots here who have not had their egos bruised by the aircraft's lively Nr, and many more who failed to *become* Lynx pilots, having taken just a bit too long to get the knack of it. I was almost one of them, and frankly, three years on I still feel pleased if I can manage a datum without riding the 2hz tone all the way down.

There were other challenges unique to our role. Can anyone remember the horror of their first RDX? I definitely can, if not what those letters actually stand for. Does anyone? Really Dangerous Exercise we called it, and with good reason. For who else but a madman would consider flying an aircraft at 100ft over the sea, at night, without looking where you were going a good idea?

But it had to be done, because sometimes you need to be at 100ft over the sea at night. Whether trying to ID a suspicious vessel, or groping around in the dark for a GPI, the Lynx demanded this skill of her single pilot and no small amount of courage from her single observer.

The ability to land on deck was also a necessity, but one which restored that feeling of joy I had had on my first flight, and whenever I wasn't doing an auto. After only three weeks of deck training I could credibly put an aircraft in roughly the middle of the Flight Deck in most winds, and was trusted to do it on my own. The sense of achievement and satisfaction was enormous, and remains as strong now as it was then.

When I eventually got my wings, I had the same sense of pride and fulfilment; but there was still much more to learn about the Lynx. 702 had taught me how to defeat the Torplugan fleet in the temperate weather of the South West Approaches, but there was little we could do on ARGUS to simulate flying in the heat of the Gulf in summer.

Flying the Lynx in average temperatures about 40 degrees higher than it was designed for required a few special tricks, and a little bit of creative accounting. Cushion creeps, G150s and the miraculous mass change graph were only some of the tools of my craft I had to become more familiar with. Of course, there were still compromises to be made, and I learned quickly that the first casualty was inevitably fuel.

Normal working hours were also quickly sacrificed, but who doesn't love a 3am flying brief followed by a spot of dawn dhow bothering and some breakfast **before** bed? I may have thought it was hard work, but there can be no doubt that any aircraft that has fought a war in such conditions is made of stern stuff. It's impressive.

As I progressed to my Flight Pilot time, I began to realise that the Lynx's real strength is its versatility. In nine months we flew in the Mediterranean, the Gulf, South Africa, South America, West Africa, and everything in between. We

conducted boardings, we barged through anti-submarine exercises with a torpedo and no sonar. We fired Sea Skuas, nose wheel castored unnecessarily on American carriers and fetched the OPDEF stores when nobody else fancied it. We greased the wheels. And that, I think, is what I like about the Lynx.

It gets everywhere. It's a searching, attacking, defending, casevacating, picture taking, Typhoon evading, iceberg searching, pax transferring, mail collecting Jack of all trades. Its cleverly offset yaw pedals numb the left buttock at precisely the right time to prompt a return to Mum. It can fly day and night, and is almost waterproof in rain. And when all the other aircraft are broken, it's invariably a Lynx that picks up the pieces.

Personally, I dislike sentimentality. I eye warily those people who personify inanimate objects, and in particular machines whose ultimate purpose is to deliver violence to Her Majesty's enemies. However, 'Larry the Lynx' has slowly won me over – warts and all. I am genuinely sad to think that this whiney, twitchy, little helicopter will soon be no more. I can only hope 'Willy the Wildcat' will endear the same affection, respect, and gratitude in service that the Lynx has earned over the past four decades. I am very proud and humbled to have been the last Lynx Flight Pilot, and am truly honoured to share today with the Lynx family.