Battle-winning edge can only come from an aviation team that can deliver fighting aircraft from the sea. It is that team skill that marks out people in the Fleet Air Arm today.

Rear Admiral Ian Tibbitt CBE
Director General Safety and Engineering

This year the Royal Navy is celebrating 100 years of Naval aviation. On 7 May 1909, recognising the military advantages and threat of the Zeppelins, the Admiralty took a bold and visionary decision to spend £35,000 on placing an order for the first Naval aircraft. Hansard reported that it was ‘a momentous week’ with Mr Asquith stating the unequivocal importance of Naval aeronautics to national defence strategy. Flight Magazine of 8 May 1909 carried the headline ‘Great Britain Wakes Up’ with the report that ‘the highest scientific talent will be brought to bear on the Admiralty’s aviation development programme.’

100 years of Naval Aviation
Celebrating the past and shaping the future

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The launch of such a notable Centenary, fittingly held at the Royal Aeronautical Society, London, heralds a programme of events celebrating not only a distinguished and remarkable past but the crucial role being played by the Fleet Air Arm in operations around the world today, and the fundamental element of joint embarked air power from the sea has to play in operations in the future.

The UK’s political and strategic capability to act with an appropriate level of military response in an increasingly unstable world, thousands of miles from home without having to rely on other countries for support – to be able to strike with global reach – remains at the heart of our national defence policy. The effectiveness of carrier aviation has been frequently demonstrated throughout history and achieving the battle-winning edge can only come from a fully integrated, experienced and worked-up aviation team that can deliver fighting aircraft from the sea. The challenges of bringing two new aircraft carriers and their full carrier air groups into service in the years ahead will be enormous, but in the Centenary year of Naval aviation, there is no more pivotal project than this in defence today.

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Launch Sea King 40

7 May 2009 is not only the Centenary of Naval aviation, it is also the 40th anniversary of the first flight of an AgustaWestland Sea King. To launch Sea King 40, AgustaWestland generously financed a face-lift of Sea King HU MK5 XV648, the search airframe to be built, emerging to have the aircraft re-sprayed in its’ original distinctive dark blue delivery colours. The aircraft, which is still in service with 771 Squadron, still proudly displays ‘V4F’ every at events throughout the year. Rear Admiral Simon Charlier thanked Peter Pepper of AgustaWestland, the Sea King PT, SERCO and Vector Aerospace for their work on the project.

The Naval Strike Wing of Joint Force Harrier operating in Afghanistan during the latter part of last year had the challenge of being the first unit worldwide to deploy the new, next generation smart weapons, the precision guided bomb, Paveway IV on operations.

The highly sophisticated weapon, which can be guided onto a target using GPS, satellite or laser guidance technology entered service in November 2008 and has already proved highly accurate and effective in all weather conditions, day and night. With ground forces often facing unexpectedly unsustainable odds, their lives increasingly depend on the success of pin-point attacks pressed home from the air.

Speaking during a visit to the Naval Strike Wing in Kandahar, Rear Admiral Simon Charlier said, “Few people realise the crucial role being played by Royal Navy pilots in Afghanistan and the excellence of the Harrier GR9 for the task. The GR9 is optimised for international and operational support operations and for employing the latest smart weapons.”

Lieutenant Dave Boque, Royal Navy, serving with the Naval Strike Wing, described the new weapon. “Our primary role is to provide close air support for forces on the ground. We operate within tightly defined rules of engagement and only use the bomb in ‘anger’ in support of Coalition troops taking heavy fire from enemy forces. Paveway IV’S targeting and guidance system not only gives greater levels of flexibility over previous bombs, allowing us to respond rapidly to changing factors on the ground, but the precision accuracy of the system fulfills the crucial imperative of incurring absolute minimal collateral damage.”

The Harriers in Afghanistan are on alert to scramble at a moment’s notice. Any delay can mean coalition lives lost. They also fly daily reconnaissance flights gathering intelligence for the patrols on the ground and ‘shows of presence’ and ‘shows of force’. In the hearts and minds of everyone onboard a carrier, the aircraft are hard-wired into the life infrastructure for the aircraft. It is a symbiotic relationship. In the hearts and minds of everyone onboard a carrier, the aircraft are hard-wired into the life-blood of the ship. The airmen, engineers and supporting staff are all-of-one company in the Royal Navy. As we celebrate this Centenary year and work towards shaping the way we will operate in the future, it is important to remember that it is the Fleet Air Arm’s specialist expertise, inherent understanding of the maritime and fully worked up high readiness capability that gives UK Defence its embarked fighting edge.

As Admiral Cunningham said in his autobiography “It should never be forgotten that in the Fleet Air Arm, the Navy has its most devastating weapon.”

“Operating aircraft from sea is a capability that takes years to develop. Naval aircraft form an integral component of the organisation and operational efficiency of the ship. Indeed, the aircraft squadrons and their people are an indispensable component of the ship’s weapon system and the ship provides the complete operational infrastructure for the aircraft. It is a symbiotic relationship. In the hearts and minds of everyone onboard a carrier, the aircraft are hard-wired into the life-blood of the ship. The airmen, engineers and supporting staff are all-of-one company in the Royal Navy. As we celebrate this Centenary year and work towards shaping the way we will operate in the future, it is important to remember that it is the Fleet Air Arm’s specialist expertise, inherent understanding of the maritime and fully worked up high readiness capability that gives UK Defence its embarked fighting edge.”

Rear Admiral Simon Charlier
Chief of Staff (Aviation and Carriers) and Rear Admiral Fleet Air Arm.
Simply the Best!

Celebrated Royal Navy veteran Test Pilot, Captain Eric ‘Winkle’ Brown MBE, OBE, CBE, DSM, AFC RN celebrated his 90th birthday last month. To mark the event Captain Brown was visited by a Royal Navy Lynx from 702 Squadron. Eric, the Navy’s most decorated pilot and the first man to land a jet aircraft on a ship at sea, said of his 31 years service with the Fleet Air Arm “It was exciting, a staggering 487 and the most carrier deck landings at 2407 and was also the first British pilot to fly a helicopter. In November 2008 he flew to America to see the new F-35 Joint Combat Aircraft. He sat in the cockpit and flew the simulator.

Black Cats
Royal Navy Helicopter Display Team

The Royal Navy helicopter display team, the Black Cats, will be performing at air shows around the country during 2009 celebrating the Centenary of Naval aviation with an exciting high-speed display of breathtaking close formation, cross-over passes, vertical nose dives and opposing manoeuvres.

The team of two Lynx, a MK 35 and a MK8 are flown by instructors from 702 Naval Air Squadron, the Royal Navy’s Lynx training Squadron based at Royal Naval Air Station Yeovilton. The Lynx did not feature on the 702 Squadron crest. The Black Cats were formed in 2003 and are the first official Royal Navy Helicopter Display team since the Hawks disbanded in the 1990s.

Over 95% of Iraq GDP passes through the Northern Arabian Gulf and around two thirds of the world’s oil supply passes through the oil installations and strategically important waterways of the Arabian Gulf.

Not surprisingly, Coalition Security Operations in the waters of the Northern Arabian Gulf are a high priority. Supporting the safe passage of tankers and protecting the oil infrastructure is not only essential to the security of Iraq, but to energy security around the world.

Operation Telic is the UK contribution to the multinational operation. Working closely with governments, national and international authorities, UK forces are tasked to deliver a co-ordinated approach to the maintenance of security in the region. Given the vulnerability of the Iraqi oil platforms, the convergence of shipping through critical choke points and the delicate relationship with Iran, the task of keeping vital resources flowing is a challenging one requiring a high degree of vigilance, responsiveness and information sharing.

Currently, a Royal Navy Merlin helicopter from 829 Naval Air Squadron operating from HMS Lancaster and a Lynx MK 8 from 815 Naval Air Squadron embarked in HMS Portland are working tirelessly to patrol, monitor and safeguard against a complex and potentially volatile tactical situation. Their roles include compiling the surface picture with radar and onboard surveillance equipment, providing force protection to the oil platforms and protecting our ships at sea. Their sensors enable them to investigate suspicious contacts from a distance and they carry weapons to deter or respond to hostile action.

The Lynx has Sea Skua missiles and a powerful 0.5mm cable M3M gun and the Merlin is equipped with guns and torpedoes.

In 2008 Sea King Mk 7 Airborne Surveillance and Control (ASuC) helicopters from 854 and 857 Squadrons in RFA Argus, fulfilled a similar role building the picture in the Arabian Sea using their powerful Searchwater radar. They will deploy to the area again later this year.

Royal Navy ships and helicopters are also employed in the Gulf of Oman and Gulf of Aden countering a range of illegal maritime activities including piracy, human smuggling and illegal trade in narcotics and weapons. The emerging high incidence of piracy off the Horn of Africa, including the hijacking of a super tanker on the high seas last November, led to a call by the Defense Secretary, John Mutton, for a determined counter piracy offensive and the deployment of a British-led force to patrol a large international corridor in the region to protect ships taking food aid to Somalia. In an increasingly interdependent world, maintaining the freedom of the seas is crucial to global security. If our energy supplies are disrupted, the UK runs out of fuel in a few days. Ship-borne aircraft extend the range and reach of maritime forces and the operability of Naval aviation, including carrier strike, airborne surveillance, anti-submarine warfare, intelligence gathering, rapid mobility and the ability to deliver early-entry forces are capabilities which history continues to prove that the UK and global community cannot afford to be without.
The Fleet Air Arm

‘All of One Company’

The Fleet Air Arm is an integral part of the Royal Navy, extending the range and reach of UK forces and providing a cornerstone of maritime operational capability.

Today’s Fleet Air Arm, however, is much more than simply a Naval asset. The Navy operates over 200 aircraft which makes up a significant proportion of the UK’s wider defence aviation capability. The Fleet Air Arm continues to deliver integral embarked aviation and sea-fighting capability from our ships, but its aircraft and people are also deployed across a whole range of other Defence priority operations. The underlying theme that enables the Navy to do this is the flexibility and adaptability of Fleet Air Arm aircraft and people.

Since the First World War, defence strategists have recognised that combat winning capability in a range of maritime scenarios can only come from a fully worked up aviation team that can deliver fighting aircraft from the sea and it is that team skill that continues to mark out people in the Fleet Air Arm today.

Members of the Fleet Air Arm are best at what they do because they are trained in the maritime environment. Their complementary aviation-focused capabilities ensure maximum operational effectiveness in a way that can only come from applying their unique understanding developed over years of professional training and experience and a mutual affinity for the sea. Naval Aircrew, Engineers, Technicians and Mechanics, Aircraft Handlers, Air Traffic Controllers, Survival Equipment and other trade specialists are seamen first and foremost, but they are aviators too, forming an essential part of the highly professional, experienced and close-knit team that makes up the full complement of a warship.

Over 5,500 Royal Navy or Royal Naval Reserve personnel work in some way or another with Naval aviation and Naval aviators often command ships and rise to the highest ranks in the Naval Service. In aircraft carriers and at Naval Air Stations operational flying staffs are commanded by a Commander (Air) who is directly responsible to the Captain of his ship or station. Under the Commander (Air) is a flying control organisation including Air Traffic Control Officers, Meteorological Officers and the aviation support specialisations responsible for all activities on the flight deck or runways. Fleet Air Arm personnel also include Aviation Medicine specialists, Mobile Air Operations Teams, Fighter Controllers, Air Engineering Technicians, Aircraft Handlers, Aircraft Controllers, Survival Equipment Specialists and Photographers – Aviators.

It is this ‘all of one company’ ethos that ensures maritime aviation success. The effectiveness of carrier aviation, particularly, and all that it encompasses – the safety, maintenance and repair of aircraft and their weapon systems and the specialist knowledge and expertise of the pilots and observers who fly the aircraft – is part of a much larger community. They could not function without the support of the staff officers who plan operations, the logistics officers who provide them with stores and supplies, the communications, the engineers and stokers below decks and the chefs and stewards who have a hot meal ready for them when they land on after hours in the air.

“Let us show ourselves to be all of one company,” Drake exhorted his men in the Golden Hind. The Fleet Air Arm is not just all of one company in the Royal Navy but at the same time is a company within a company, sharing the intimacy of the Naval Air Squadron or Flight to which they belong. They look to their Commanding Officer or Flight Commander as seamen look to the Bridge, in the same sort of fellowship as a regiment, born of a tradition of 100 years of Naval aviation and of experiences of adventure and danger shared.

Such is the cadre of expertise upon whose professionalism and skill the safety of the aircraft, ship, fleet or task force may depend.

Naval Air Engineering

The particular demands of the maritime environment have always required Naval aircraft to be robust, flexible and adaptable (generally a bit special) and exactly the same can be said of the men and women of the Naval Air Engineering specialisations who service and maintain them.

The strong undercover necessary for dark hangars, folding wings to allow for carriage on lifts and storage in hangars, tail hooks and strengthening of the fuselage to take the strain of the arrestor-gear and the weight of weapons, instruments and warships with many all important considerations in the design of early carrier and ship borne aircraft. These ideas, approaches and materials were often used and the development of Naval Air Engineering evolved to match.

An aircraft can be rendered entirely useless by a simple fault, perhaps more easily than any comparable piece of machinery and the role of engineering support, particularly in action at sea, is vital. The ethos of Naval Air Engineering is to keep the aircraft serviced and repaired as quickly as possible so that they can be airborne again. “The ethos of the Fleet Air Arm is to work on until the job is done, overcoming problems and difficulties by all sorts of ingenious means,” said Rear Admiral Ian Tibbitt, Director General Safety and Engineering. “The quality and capability of Naval Air Engineering has in many ways blazed a unique trail bringing a special expertise to military aviation generally and joint operations in particular. It has also been widely recognised by industry as being a key enabler to the introduction of new, challenging, high performance technology.”

The Navy can also be proud of the fact that many Royal Navy Air Engineering practices are now embodied in joint regulations and that the ethos and approach of Naval Air Engineering continues to stand out as we start to deliver the next century of jointly capable high performance aircraft.
Preserving our National Naval Aviation Heritage

From the first airship flights and early years of Naval aviation to the development of the latest super-fighter, the distinguished history of Naval aviation is an important part of our national heritage.

It was very evident from last November’s coverage of the 90th anniversary of the end of the First World War, that there is an increasing interest and enduring sense of gratitude and pride in our aviation history that continues with current operations around the world today.

The heroic arrival of the Swordfish, flying anti-submarine missions from hastily constructed aircraft carriers based on merchant ship hulls had an immediate effect on stemming the losses. With its low speed and good manoeuvrability the Swordfish was the only aircraft available to operate from these tiny decks and have enough fuel and weapon load to be viable. For the brave men who flew her, however, there were no luxuries. Flying in unheated, open cockpits often in appalling weather conditions, the impact on the outcome of World War II is very evident.

Keeping this iconic aircraft flying 85 years later is perhaps the greatest tribute we can pay to all those who have flown, maintained and supported aircraft at sea. Like the Fleet Air Arm Museum and the Memorial Church, the Historic Flight is only part funded by the Royal Navy and it relies to the Fly Navy Heritage Trust to find additional support. To find out how you can help please contact the FNHT on Tel: 01953 842005 or email: office@fnht.co.uk.

“With so few of the early Naval aviators still alive, the importance of our memorial flight has never been more poignant or clearly reflected,” said Manager of the Royal Navy Historic Flight, John Beattie. “Preserving the finest Naval aircraft in the world today.

The Fly Navy Heritage Trust and Royal Navy Historic Flight are very largely supported by the generosity of individual donors. This month’s auction dinner at HMS President aims to raise funds specifically to celebrate and preserve the Fairey Swordfish biplane, a much loved aircraft that had a truly phenomenal impact on the outcome of World War II.

In mid-Atlantic, out of range of land-based aircraft, the U-boat packs were picking off our merchant ships at a prodigious rate. Vital convoys bringing fuel, ammunition, food, aircraft and troops from North America to Europe were being sunk and some 20,000 Merchant seamen lost their lives. Churchill declared the Battle of the Atlantic to be the one ‘must win’ campaign; if the nation was to survive and mount the counter-offensive in Europe.

Speaking of the restoration project, John Beattie, General Manager of the Royal Navy Historic Flight said, “BAE Systems have already helped us greatly by restoring the wing spars on the Swordfish LE26; a problem that threatened to ground the type almost indefinitely. As well as problems with the wing spans, which are long lengths of thin sheet steel rolled into shape and riveted to form a 15 foot long beam that has to be strong in any direction, additionally both British Pegasus’ engines survive and continuing to keep them running has also become a more challenging task. It only takes a single broken rib to destroy the strength of a fin. It is only the devoted work of maintenance crews together with generous support from Industry and other fund raising initiatives that we can continue operating these lovely old aeroplanes.”

The restoration project is expected to involve many months of painstaking work. “There is no finer account of Naval flying at war than ‘War in a Stringbag’ by Commander Charles Lamb. It is a testament to Charles Lamb’s enduring vision, humility and endurance epitomises the indomitable spirit of the Fleet Air Arm.”

BAE Systems £1 Million Restoration Programme for Swordfish

BAE Systems has offered to restore a second Swordfish bi-plane to flying condition for the Royal Navy Historic Flight. The company is making £1 million available for this restoration project. For a Flight that relies considerably on the support of industry and donations from benefactors, the offer has been received with enormous gratitude.

“BAE Systems has given the Royal Navy Historic Flight significant support over the years” said Admiral Sir Jonathon Band GCB ADC, First Sea Lord. “These aircraft are a national treasure. The offer, in this our centenary year, to start the restoration to a second flying Swordfish to the collection, is such a magnificent and generous gesture, not just for the Royal Historic Flight, but for the heritage of future generations.”

“With so few of the early Naval aviators still alive, the importance of our memorial flight has never been more poignant or clearly reflected,” said Manager of the Royal Navy Historic Flight, John Beattie. “Preserving the finest Naval aircraft in the world today.”

The new exhibition, which highlights the roots of the Royal Navy Air Service from the shoe-string days of the historic flight of the Short S.18 biplane in 1911, will be officially opened at the Fleet Air Arm Museum on 2 July 2009. The new exhibition, which highlights the roots of the Royal Navy Air Service from the shoe-string days of the Sopwith Pup to today’s battlefield operations in Afghanistan, will include an impressive collection of classic Naval aircraft.

Royal Naval Air Station Yeovilton will be celebrating 100 years of Naval Aviation at the annual Air Day on Saturday 11 July 2009. In 1909 the Admiralty placed its first order for a Naval Airship which at the time was a radical shift in military thinking that was to lead to the formation of the Royal Naval Air Service and later the Fleet Air Arm. This marked the beginnings of the formidable versatility and capability of Naval Air Power as we know it today. This year’s exciting Centenary Flying display will feature rare Naval aircraft including the Swordfish, Sea Fury, Seafire and Sea Vixen, coming together with other vintage aircraft, historic warbirds and classic jets existing memories of 100 years of Naval flying in service to the nation.

War in a Stringbag by Commander Charles Lamb

‘War in a Stringbag’ by Commander Charles Lamb DSO, DSC has been compulsive reading for the Fleet Air Arm for many years and to mark the Centenary of Naval aviation this much loved book is to be re-published by Orion Publishers on 7 April 2009. Admiral Sir Michael Layard KCB, CBE, former Second Sea Lord, Flag Officer Naval Aviation and now Vice President of The White Ensign Association said, “There is no finer account of Naval flying at war. Charles Lamb’s story of the iconic action against the Italian Fleet at Taranto and his experiences as a prisoner of war in North Africa is both extraordinary and inspiring.”

“War in a Stringbag” is not only a tribute to our rich aviation heritage but is also a testament to Charles Lamb’s other lasting legacy – as a founder of The White Ensign Association. The postscript to the book describes how he helped establish and run the charity for sixteen years.

“We hope today’s continued Admiral Layard, “he would unquestionably be very proud of the strong affiliation that The White Ensign Association has with the Naval Service and that last year the Association also celebrated a significant birthday – the 50th anniversary of its founding by Charles Lamb. His enduring vision, humility and endurance epitomises the indomitable spirit of the Fleet Air Arm.”

100 years of Navy Flying

An exciting new exhibition setting out the story of 100 years of Naval Flying will be officially opened at the Fleet Air Arm Museum on 2 July 2009. The new exhibition, which highlights the roots of the Royal Naval Air Service from the shoe-string days of the Sopwith Pup to today’s battlefield operations in Afghanistan, will include an impressive collection of classic Naval aircraft including a replica of the Short bi-plane on which the first four Naval aviators learned to fly, the highly successful Lynx helicopter and combat veterans of the Falklands War, including the Sea King helicopter flown by HRH The Duke of York and a battle-winning Sea Harrier. The exhibition will also feature a range of interactive displays that illustrate the Service’s glorious past and the stories of the gallant men and women who flew and maintained some of the Nation’s best loved Naval aircraft.

**”There is no finer account of Naval flying at war. I highly commend it to all members of the Fleet Air Arm past and present”**
The newly formed Sea Harrier Association has made a dramatic launch in the Centenary Year of Naval Aviation with nearly 200 members of the Sea Harrier community signing up to join.

Founded as a result of the overwhelming response following the memorial dinner held in honour of Lt Cdr John Pooley in September 2006, the Association has appointed Commodore Duncan Reid MBE, as President and has elected Committee representatives under the Chairmanship of former Chief Petty Officer, Tom Dawson.

The Sea Harrier Association expects to play a full part in the Fleet Air Arm Federation and plans to team up with its successful sister association, the Buccaneer Association, for a joint weekend reunion in Coventry in June 2009.

The Sea Harrier was in service with the Royal Navy for twenty seven years, contributing to over a quarter of a Century of Naval aviation. During the Falklands Conflict in 1982, 34 Sea Harriers from HMS Hermes and HMS Invincible flew over 1200 missions, keeping 220 Argentine aircraft at bay and inflicting serious losses on the Argentine air force. Between 1993 - 1995, Sea Harriers played a major role in Operation Deny Flight in Bosnia and in 1995, Sea Harriers operating from HMS Invincible brought a swift and effective conclusion to the end of Operation Deliberate Force. In 1999, Sea Harriers saw action again in a 78 day bombing campaign finally and successfully persuading Serb forces to leave Kosovo. In 2001, when a British military force was tasked to restore order in war-torn Sierra Leone, the Sea Harrier was once more operating in support of ground forces. The end of an era finally came for the Sea Harrier in March 2006 with a fitting farewell dinner at the Royal Naval College Greenwich.

Membership of the Sea Harrier Association is open to all ranks and rates both current and former serving personal from the Harrier community. Speaking at the inaugural AGM, Chairman, Tom Dawson said: “We look forward to welcoming all SHAR shipmates and hope you will join us in celebrating 100 years of Naval aviation. There is no better time to join.”

The membership fee for 2009 is £10.00. Those wishing to join should contact Jimmy Henrick or Fraz Fraser on 01935 455327 or email sharmship@aol.com

www.seaharrier.co.uk
Steam Catapult

The Fleet Air Arm has led the way in the development of innovative and revolutionary new technologies. In 1954 Commander CC Mitchell OBE RNVR suggested taking steam from the ship’s main boiler to power the catapult. The idea was developed by Brown Brothers and Company Ltd of Edinburgh and trials in HMS Perseus showed an aircraft weighing 30,000lbs could be launched with a speed of over 90 knots. This was a considerable improvement to that of hydraulic catapults already in service. The steam catapult also proved more consistently reliable. By 1978 the steam catapult was regularly launching aircraft weighing over 60,000lbs at over 110 knots.

Fleet Air Arm

Strength in Teamwork

The Royal Navy’s ethos – the spirit to fight and win – has played a key part in the Navy's success over centuries. The strength of teamwork and the qualities of courage, camaraderie and utter commitment of every individual involved are similarly strongly embodied in the esprit de corps of the Fleet Air Arm.

1909 - 2009

Photograph reproduced with kind permission of The Trustees of the Imperial War Museum, London

The Royal Navy's ethos – the spirit to fight and win – has played a key part in the Navy's success over centuries. The strength of teamwork and the qualities of courage, camaraderie and utter commitment of every individual involved are similarly strongly embodied in the esprit de corps of the Fleet Air Arm.

It is perhaps not surprising therefore that in the toughest and most challenging of military competitions – the Field Gun Run – that Fleet Air Arm Field Gun Crews have consistently won more trophies and broken more records than any other teams.

Between 1947 and 1999 the Fleet Air Arm won 94 trophies. In 1962 the Fleet Air Arm became the first crew to beat the 3 minute barrier with a time of 2 minutes 54 seconds and in 1971 again it was a Fleet Air Arm crew that broke the 2 minutes 50 barrier with a time of 2 minutes 46 seconds. Fleet Air Arm trainers led the way in refining and optimising the drill continually looking for greater speed and safer procedures.

Chief Petty Officer Harold Williams, who ran in 7 Fleet Air Arm A Crews and was the first Field Gunner to do 100 competition runs in the Royal Tournament said, "The Field Gun transformed my life. I was a bit of a 'Jack the Lad' in my early years. Doing the Field Gun really sorted me out. It changed my career, made me focus and want to do everything well. It was the discipline and the rigorous training. The run is fast and dangerous. The barrel alone weighs 900lbs, the caisson 550lbs, the limber is 362lbs. You learn to trust the man you are working with and you weld together through pure hard graft, stamina and teamwork. It is the same trust and reliance on every member of the crew playing their part that is the foundation of successful aviation at sea, particularly in a carrier. During the Falklands I worked on 809 Squadron, a Harrier Squadron. It was the strength in teamwork that gave us the fighting edge."

Field Gun has its roots in The Boer War when the Royal Navy played a major role in the defence of Ladysmith landing the 4.7 inch guns of HMS Powerful and HMS Terrible and dragging them on makeshift carriages across the rough South African Veldt. With downward pressure on costs and the tempo of current operations, the Royal Navy Field Gun run competition ended at the last Royal Tournament in 1999.

In celebrating 2009 as our Centenary, it is not so much the date the Admiralty ordered its first airship that is important, but the correction, tenacity and zeal of the early Naval aviators, whose determined pursuit of their belief in the utility of Naval air power convinced their Lordships of the case for Naval aviation in the first place, that is the greater cause for recognition and acclaim. Their convictions were rapidly and ably demonstrated and it is upholding that commitment and continuing to deliver what we believe in strongly that is the backbone of the Fleet Air Arm today.

Commander Sue Eagles QVRM, RD Royal Navy

Fleet Air Arm

Field Gun

Strength in Teamwork

Leading the way in

Innovation

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