

1960's

Helicopters had first seen operational service towards the end of the Second World War, but it was not until the development of efficient gas turbine engines that they became truly useful. In the early 1960's the Fleet Air Arm introduced two helicopter types into service that represented a massive change in capability: the Westland Wessex and the Westland Wasp.

To complement this new type of aircraft, the Royal Navy introduced the first ships to be designed around the operation of helicopters: the Commando Carriers and Tribal Class Frigates.

WESTLAND WASP HAS Mk 1

Role

Anti-Submarine helicopter

Entered Service

1964

Weight

Empty: 1566kg

Loaded: 2495kg

Maximum Speed

120mph

Weapons

Mk44/46 torpedoes

Mk44 depth charges

600lb nuclear depth bomb

SS-11/AS.12 wire-guided missiles

General Purpose Machine Gun



KEY EVENTS

1960:

Light fleet carrier *HMS Bulwark* re-roles as the first Commando Carrier.

1961:

Westland Wessex HAS 1 enters service. The anti-submarine version of the Wessex was later fitted with a radar for hunting submarines, and a troop carrying variant (the HU5) was built to carry Royal Marines in the new amphibious assault role.

1961:

Iraq threatens Kuwait. 848 Naval Air Squadron delivers 600 Royal Marines of 42 Cdo by air assault from *HMS Bulwark* and *HMS Victorious* arrives with fixed-wing air group. Demonstration of power defuses the situation and proves the concept of the Commando Carrier.

1961 November:

HMS Ashanti commissioned, a Tribal Class Frigate. First class of warship to be designed from the start to operate a helicopter, the Westland Wasp HAS 1.

1962-1966 :

Indonesian Confrontation: 845, 846 and 848 Naval Air Squadrons operate Wessex helicopters from jungle clearings, resulting in their nickname 'the Junglies'.

1964:

Wasp HAS1 into service in an anti-submarine role on the new Tribal Class Frigates. The Wasp carried no sonar or radar so relied on direction from the ship to launch its torpedoes before the submarine was in range to fire its own weapons.