



1980's

The Fleet Air Arm in the 1980's was fighting for its life. The UK responded to the end of the Cold War with defence cuts and a foreign policy that had no ambition to intervene in world affairs. The days of expeditionary warfare capability and aircraft carriers in particular were numbered.

Following these cuts, as the Royal Navy's carriers were in their final days, Argentina invaded the Falkland Islands. What followed showed the fundamental necessity of sea-based air power. The Fleet Air Arm fought so effectively that by the end of the conflict, not only had it played a major role in liberating the Falkland Islands but in doing so, had also justified its own existence.

BAE SEA HARRIER FRS 1

Role

Ground attack/Air Defence

Entered Service

1980

Weight Empty

Empty: 5942kg

Loaded: 11884kg

Maximum Speed

690mph @ sea level fully loaded

Weapons

Sidewinder air-to-air missiles

Sea Eagle anti-ship missiles

Aden 30mm gun pods

Free fall bombs (including nuclear)



KEY EVENTS

1981:

In the Nott Review, the government decides the future Royal Navy will have no need to launch offensive operations. The aircraft carrier programme is scrapped.

1982:

Argentina invades the Falkland Islands. Two aircraft carriers, *HMS Hermes* and *HMS Invincible* set sail, each carrying the new and untested Sea Harrier FRS1 vertical take off fighter.

1982:

The only land-based aircraft to take a combat role are the Vulcan bombers, flying 8000 mile round-trips from Ascension Island. Each Vulcan required multiple air-to-air refuels involving around 20 tankers for each of the 5 missions that were flown.

1982:

Ship based Harriers flew more than 1200 missions, losing 6 aircraft. 34 Harriers kept 220 Argentine aircraft at bay, scoring 23-0 in air-to-air combat.

1982:

Royal Navy and Royal Air Force helicopters operate from ships 24 hours a day on vital missions to support the war ashore.

1982 and 1985:

New aircraft carriers *HMS Illustrious* and *HMS Ark Royal* are commissioned, securing the future of the Fleet Air Arm.



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