

Vignette – Lt Cdr Hartley – Variety of Employment

Admiral Key Sir

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my great honour to talk briefly about my experience flying the Lynx. I can't possibly compete with Nick's operational focus – indeed the closest I came to being shot, was by celebratory gunfire on a particularly committed run ashore in South America.

What I can do is describe the wide variety of work that's come my way and the rich and fulfilling career that I've had flying this fantastic airframe. I joined the Lynx Force 28 years ago and flew the aircraft in a wide range of roles in 6 continents.

I flew a loadlifting sortie off Okinawa with Commander Phil Richardson, I laid down a fuel dump in the Antarctic, I flew low level Nav sorties down the Everglades, through the Patagonian Canals and along Sondrestrom Fjord. And I rounded Cape Horn and the Cape of Good Hope on more than one occasion.

I had a wide range of opinion about the kit on-board the Lynx: The engines and the governors I loved and the Westland Spider remains an engineering stroke of genius; in terms of range, endurance and tail rotor authority - I might have wished for a little more; while the windscreen wiper system would have been rejected by the bloke who designed the Vauxhall Nova.

Through the Lynx I saw human lives lived in great contrast. I landed on Tristan da Cunha where 262 people scratch out a life on a tiny speck in the ocean. And I rubbed shoulders with royalty. I escorted the Royal Yacht into Grand Harbour Valetta to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Malta's George Cross. I winch transferred Flag Officer Royal Yacht onto HMS Battleaxe to partner him in a game of bridge, I flew an IRT with the Duke of York and flew the Queen of Denmark on her 60th birthday.

The Lynx flew me high. On vertical photography tasking in the Southern Ocean we mapped under water obstructions on volcanic islands that had erupted in the 60's and had never been visited. The training was a little less glamorous – believe me, no one wants to hear a dit about 8,000' photographs of Wolverhampton.

The Lynx flew me low. There is nothing to focus the mind quite like flying over the sea at 50' while pondering how much bank you can apply without your blades touching the sea.

And the Lynx flew me hot and cold. Night flying in the Caribbean at 40 degrees when the rules said Goon Bags were mandatory. And 2 Antarctic seasons when signing in the aircraft was a challenge with involuntary shuddering and your fingers unable to grip a pen.

I went through a wide range of emotions in this aircraft: Uncertainty, Frustration, Determination. Hilarity – on a formation sortie many years ago, Admiral/Commodore Willie Entwistle (then a young Lieutenant) told me a joke so funny, it induced a fit of giggles so severe that we had to invent a minor malfunction to ease out of the formation and take charge of ourselves.

Also fear – whether running low on fuel over a cold dark sea, or fighting self-doubt trying to land on a pitching deck. But that's what your Buddy's for - I remember coasting out over the Mull of Kintyre, in poor weather, low on fuel and confidence when my good friend Rob Taylor shouted "the Mull of Kintyre - Cool – let's sing it" and spent the next 2 minutes playing imaginary bagpipes and crooning like Paul McCartney. That's why they send us up in twos.

The mighty Lynx brought me into contact with a huge variety of wildlife. I saw a 30' Whale Shark feeding, mouth agape; I saw Humpback whales bubble netting and Orcas peeping over ice floes. I circled 2,000 Flamingos as they launched themselves over the Bahamas. And I saw Penguins – Dear Lord I saw my share of Penguins. Has anyone else here been trained how to count Penguins from a helicopter.

So when Sir David Attenborough says there are 3,000 Macaroni Penguins living on the South Shetlands, it may be because a Lynx Crew said so.

I flew important, compassionate sorties in this airframe. I flew my Commanding Officer and the Padre to the parents of a man in my division who had died. I flew the bodies from a fatal air show crash, from an inaccessible site to a hospital in Manchester. I picked up a heart attack victim from the top of a container ship at night in the Mid Atlantic and flew him to the Ascension Islands. And I flew a sailor through the night from the South Coast Exercise

Areas, to a Hospital Car Park in Chester, in time to be with his Father before he died.

I searched for things and I delivered things. I searched for feral cattle in the Falklands, Russian submarines in the Greenland Gap, pollution in the Baltic and marijuana plantations in the West Indies.

I delivered bacon sandwiches to the 7 hills range in Belize the night before the artillery boys flew out to the First Gulf War, I delivered a Lynx Mk 80 from Copenhagen to Keflavik and I delivered the Royal Marines parachute display team out of the Lynx cabin door.

I flew with other aircrew from around the world: I flew with Germans, Pakistanis, Portuguese, Americans, Australians, Malaysians, Brazilians and Danes. And I learnt a foreign language on exchange for 3 years with the Royal Danish Navy.

I feel genuinely privileged to have spent my working life associated with such a fine aircraft. I flew 3,370 hours in her and I was always the weakest link in the partnership, she never let me down.