



ABN 3007 129 1677

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A periodical of the Fleet Air Arm Association of Australia
Edition No 6 Jan 18.

END OF 2017 LETTER FROM COMFAA



I write this only a couple of days after we have celebrated the retirement of the S-70B-2 Seahawk and the AS350BA Squirrel on 1 Dec 17. Divisions at ALBATROSS was resplendent and the evening function, attended by more than 600 of the FAA family, was full of stories regaled, memories resurfaced and glasses lifted in toast to us and our machines. While both aircraft have a couple of final flights to achieve as they disperse to final 'resting places' the end of this chapter of the FAA will be recorded in history as 1 Dec 17. These aircraft, and far more importantly, those who maintained, engineered, supported and flew them, have served their country, their Navy and our FAA well. What a chapter in our history it has been.

The **AS350BA Squirrel** entered service in 1984 after the Government agreed the purchase of 18 aircraft in 1982, six for Navy and 12 for RAAF. As the year progressed, the RAAF passed their helicopters to Army, and then Army ceased Squirrel ops when the ADF helo school closed down in 2001 - the final AS350 operator was the FAA. 'Cyril', or otherwise known as the 'Battle Budgie', has ended its time with over 33 years of service in the Navy, Army and Air Force, in both peace and war amassing over 179,000 hours, of which nearly 95,000 were flown by Navy. This machine, designed for civilian service, ended up serving on Gulf War 1, East Timor, many disaster relief missions and has trained our aviators for these many years. I would doubt anyone involved in their delivery would have foreseen a gun mounted on the side, GPS and other systems installed and it flying top cover for boarding operations in the MEAO. It was entirely fitting that on the day of withdrawal from service LCDR Tony Reyne, who amassed over 10000 hours of flying (of which some 5,300 hours were in the Squirrel), completed his final flight over the skies above NAS - Tony will retire at the end of the year having served nearly 48 years in the RAN and

30 years on AS350: an exceptional contribution.

The Squirrel flew for the last time on Tuesday 5 Dec 17 with one departing to Point Cook for the RAAF museum and another to Oakey for the Army Aviation museum. We already have one at the FAA museum and another has been delivered to the Australian War Memorial.

The **S-70B-2 Seahawk** has an equally impressive story marked by 28 years of exceptional service. This is a uniquely Navy story and one, to the best of my research, appears unequalled. We will retire the same side numbers we purchased having not lost any aircraft and the aircraft has served near continuously on operations since Gulf War 1, a period from 1990 until this year. There is, to my knowledge, no prior example of a combat aircraft being purchased and not losing one through life of type, nor of a unit maintaining the level of operations in an area of ops for the period 816 Sqn has with the Seahawk 'Classic' - of course those ops continue today with the new MH-60R Seahawk. This is a truly exceptional piece of history and one we may all be proud of. On Monday 4 Dec 17 the final flight occurred as we sent Tiger 72, somewhat affectionately known as 'Christine', to the Australian War Memorial. In war, peace and in support of so many disaster relief programs this machine served us well.

What a way to bookmark the end of 2017! We have celebrated 100 years of Naval Aviation, the 50th anniversary of Helicopter Flight Vietnam, embedded the evolution of 723 Sqn's AS350BA to the EC135 and Helicopter Aircrew Training system along side the S-70B-2 Seahawk to the MH60R which has already amassed over 10,000 hours of flying, achieved our first Manned-Unmanned Teaming deployment on operations, albeit for evaluation purposes along with a wonderful year of operations for the MRH90 including deploying to Vanuatu for relief operations, Talisman Sabre, and a good old fashioned up top trip in IPE 17. I name just a few of the achievements of the current caretakers of what is the FAA and I could not be more proud of their achievements.

It seems a little too predictable to say it has been a busy year but it has been and a good one also. Similarly I would suggest 2018 will bring its own pace and challenges. Indeed it will, and we all look forward to another year of flying, deployments, operations and assisting our nation, allies and friends. The new year does indeed represent the completion of the re-capitalisation of the FAA.

By February's end we expect to have moved on all the S-70B-2 and AS350BA aircraft and equipment, except of course for our two new gate guards - look out for a couple of fine looking aircraft next time you come into ALBATROSS. The Bell 429 will stay with us for another 18 months or so, but the MRH90, MH60R and EC135 are here for the long haul; this is our future and we could not be more pleased. Those who went before us shaped a future and we are here – now it's up to us to make the most of it. The grass does not however grow beneath our feet as we will stand up a new Squadron in 2018 for Maritime Tactical Unmanned Aircraft Systems. We've got the ScanEagle and S100 Schiebel and these systems are helping us set out vector in this space; our future is most certainly one of crewed and remotely crewed systems working together supporting our Task Groups afloat, and we are well underway if not ahead of the pack.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish all the Association members a wonderful New Year. I feel so very fortunate, and honoured, to have been able to spend time with many of you and our other FAA members, past and present, throughout 2017 and I have enjoyed each and every chance to speak with you. You have all set the legacy that I and the current serving members of the FAA have proudly inherited; we are honoured to be caretaker and to nurture that legacy and will do all we can to hand it on even better. I look forward to catching up with as many of you as is possible in 2018, our 70th year of the Fleet Air Arm. I trust all will enjoy a safe holiday period rich with the company of our loved ones. The new year awaits.

Chris Smallhorn, COMFAA. ✈

FAAAA General Reunion 2018

Early advice has been received of the planned FAAAA reunion, to be held in Nowra over the period 25-27 October 2018. This date coincides with the Federal Council Meeting (26 October) so people supporting the reunion can also attend the FCM if they so wish.

Although there are some months before this event it would be helpful if you could complete a registration form. This is only available in hard copy but can easily be downloaded from the website. Click [here](#) for advice on the program and for the registration form. ✈

Detachment Names



I never cease to be surprised at the quality and speed of the feedback I get from *FlyBy* readers. I'd asked the names of the A4 guys in the photo, and Ray 'Dutchy' Brauer obliged in a flash! Standing from left are Danny Joyce, Ken (K) Fielding and Alf Atkin; Barry (Knocker) White is kneeling centre between two USS Ticonderoga personnel. The aircraft behind them was either 884 or 885 – one of which survived to old age and the other didn't...if you want to know more about their history, click [here](#).

Incidentally, I mentioned on a separate subject that a Tracker crew did cross-deck ops with Ticonderoga at the same time, and that LEUT R. Williams was the TACCO. I've since been advised that his correct initial was 'P' (for Peter) Williams. ✈

WANTED
**AS350B photographs of the
manufacture, delivery, or flying
training in France, and/or of the
aircraft conducting MEO boarding
or surveillance on Op Damask.**

Australian Service Medal (CT clasp) Update

Some time ago *FlyBy* alerted readers to possible eligibility for the Australian Service Medal (Counter Terrorism) to aircrew engaged in the protection of offshore oil rigs over the period 1980 to 1989, known as Operation *Bursa*. This was executed by personnel from HC723, HU816 or HS817 Squadrons at various times over that period. You can read all about it [here](#).

Bursa involved components of the SASR and 5 Aviation Army Blackhawk helicopters (once Navy relinquished responsibility for the task). Eligible Army personnel were subsequently awarded the ASM(CT), but this facility was never extended to the RAN.

Following representation from the Commander Fleet Air Arm last year, in-principle agreement was given for retrospective award of the medal to qualifying RAN aircrew. A 'test case' has been generated which is currently with the Honours and Awards Directorate in Canberra for consideration. If this test case is successful then eligibility will be extended to other qualifying Navy aircrew, who will most likely be required to prove their involvement. More information will be provided in due course. ✈

REST IN PEACE

We have become aware of the loss of **Bernard Bradley** and **Frank Larbaestier** since the last edition of 'FlyBy'. You can read of these sad events on our Obituary page [here](#).

Subscription Payments

2018 subscriptions for members of the FAAAA are due now, so if you haven't already paid, please help us out by doing so. See the final page of this newsletter for details. If you do pay by Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) please make sure you put a reference: either your surname or membership number, so we can assign the payment to you. We continue to get unmarked payments which means that your record won't get updated – for example, a recent payment from ADCU with no other details. If you think it was you please contact the editor [here](#) with the date you paid and the amount, so we can assign it.

If you are not sure of your current financial status you can log into the 'Members Only' section of the website and check out the list of members, or you can contact the editor. ✈

Feature Story: The Loss of the 'Lady Be Good'

Reproduced with the kind permission of Alan Bellows, webmaster and creator of [DamnInteresting.com](#). Original article by Alan Bellows. Additional photographs have been added courtesy of Wikipedia.



The wreck of the Lady Be Good. The aircraft was largely intact with machine guns still in place. (Wikipedia)

In early November 1958, a British oil exploration team was flying over North Africa's harsh Libyan Desert when they stumbled across something unexpected... the wreckage of a United States Army Air Forces (USAAF) plane from World War 2. A ground crew eventually located the site, where a quick inspection of the remains identified it as a B-24D Liberator called the *Lady Be Good*, an Allied bomber that had disappeared following a bombing run in Italy in 1943.

When she failed to return to base, the USAAF conducted a search, ultimately presuming that the *Lady* and her crew perished in the Mediterranean Sea after becoming disoriented.

The British oil surveyors found that the desert environment had preserved the aircraft's hardware astonishingly well; the plane's 50 caliber machine guns still operated at the pull of the trigger, the radio was in working condition, one of the engines was still functional, and there were still containers filled with water on board. But the remains of the crew were nowhere to be seen.

The tail turret of the B-24D Liberator. (Wikipedia).



It took the US military over a year before they took the sighting seriously, but eventually they dispatched a search operation which scoured the desert for the remains of the crew. The search teams found several improvised arrow markers at varying distances to the northwest— one made of boots, others made from parachutes weighed down with rocks— but the markers stopped at the edge of the vast, shifting sea of sand known as Calanscio. The group was unsuccessful in finding any further trace of the crew.

The *Lady Be Good* had been crewed by nine men:



1st Lieutenant William J. Hatton, Pilot
2nd Lieutenant Robert F. Toner, Copilot
2nd Lieutenant D.P. Hays, Navigator

2nd Lieutenant John S. Woravka, Bombardier
Technical Sergeant Harold J. Ripslinger, Flight Engineer
Technical Sergeant Robert E. LaMotte, Radio Operator
Staff Sergeant Guy E. Shelley, Gunner & Assistant Flight Engineer
Staff Sergeant Vernon L. Moore, Gunner & Assistant Radio Operator
Staff Sergeant Samuel R. Adams, Gunner.

The official search was eventually called off on account of equipment problems from the harsh environment. But quite by accident, all but one of the crew were located during the year of 1960, over sixteen years after the *Lady* had disappeared into the desolation. Combined with the findings from the crash site, the clues found with the remains of the crew told the story of men's final days.

The April 4th, 1943 bombing run on Naples had been the first call to action for *Lady Be Good* and her crew. That afternoon they launched from the Benina air strip in the city of Soluch in Libya. They departed amidst a sandstorm which incapacitated two other bombers in the flight group, forcing them to return to base. *Lady's* engines ingested some of the airborne sand as well, but seemed to be running normally, so Lieutenant Hatton opted not to abort the mission. En route to the target, the aircraft was buffeted by severe winds that pushed her off course and further away from the bomber group, forcing numerous course corrections on the way to Naples. By the time they neared the target, the other Liberators had long since come and gone, and visibility was reportedly poor. So the pilot turned back, dumping their bombs into the Mediterranean Sea.

The last contact from the crew of *Lady Be Good* was a radio transmission from her pilot, William Hatton: "My ADF has malfunctioned. Please give me a QDM." This indicated that his position-finding equipment had failed, and due to the thick cloud cover he had become disoriented. For reasons unknown, Lt. Hatton never received a response to this request for a position report, but it has been suggested that the radio tower suspected a German trick. Later, in the darkness, the distinct droning sound of a B-24 emanated from the clouds over Benina airport. Flares were launched to signal the bomber, but the engine sound passed overhead, and faded into the distance.

Realizing that they were hopelessly disoriented, several members of the *Lady's* crew made notations in their logs indicating that they had become lost. A notepad belonging to bombardier Lt. John Woravka revealed one side of a written conversation, probably penciled so their pilot wouldn't hear them over the intercom. It suggests that there may have been some disagreement in the cockpit:

"What's he beeching (bitching) about?"

"What's going to happen?"

"Are we going home?"

Running dangerously low on fuel and probably believing they were over the Mediterranean Sea, the nine men donned parachutes and ditched the aircraft to take their chances. It's likely that the men were surprised when their boots hit sand rather than water. Using revolvers and flare guns, the seven scattered survivors managed to find one another in the

desert. They decided to get underway immediately, knowing that the unforgiving Libyan desert reached daytime temperatures of up to 130 degrees Fahrenheit.

Lady Be Good flew on through the dark night, slowly



descending to crash-land sixteen miles from the men's gathering place. Not realizing that their plane and its supply of food and water were a scant sixteen miles away, the men estimated that travelling northwest would bring them back to the airbase in Soluch. They set out on foot with what supplies they carried. By their calculations, they were no more than 100 miles from the base. In reality, the distance was over 400 miles.

When the plane's wreckage was located in 1958, desert survival experts predicted that the airmen could only have moved up to thirty miles on foot, particularly considering the fact that they were unprepared for the unforgiving desert environment. Much to the amazement of investigators, the remains of the first group of men were found about eighty miles north of the wreck. A British oil survey team discovered the five bodies, closely grouped together in an area strewn with personal effects such as wallets, flashlights, pieces of parachutes, flight jackets, first-aid kits, and most importantly, the diary of Lieutenant Robert Toner which described his final eight days with a sober brevity:

Sunday, Apr. 4, 1943. Naples—28 places—things pretty well mixed up—got lost returning, out of gas, jumped, landed in desert at 2:00 in morning. no one badly hurt, cant find John, all others present.

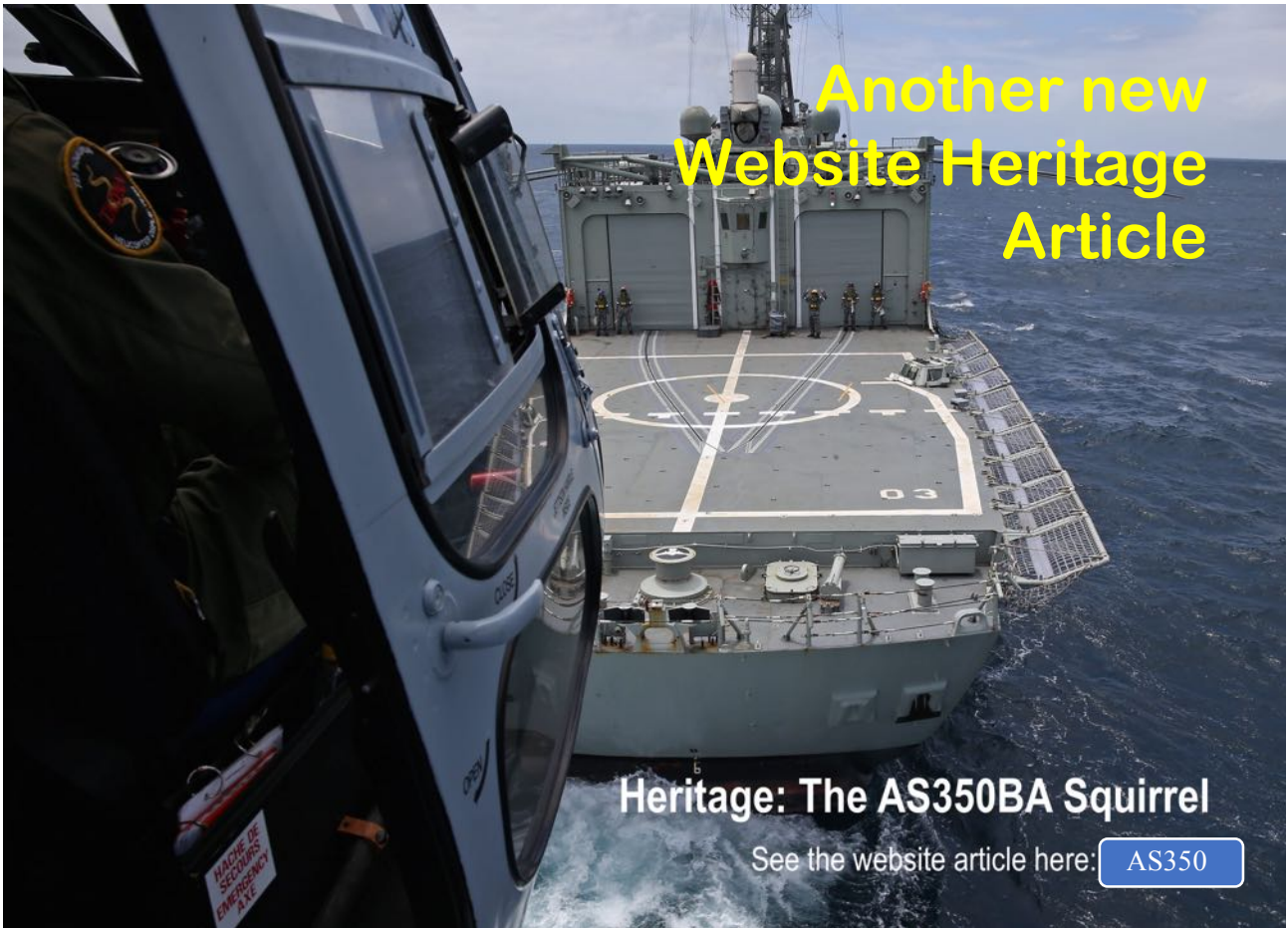
Monday 5. Start walking N.W., still no John. a few rations, 1/2 canteen of water, 1 cap full per day. Sun fairly warm. Good breeze from N.W. Nite very cold. no sleep. Rested & walked.

Tuesday 6. Rested at 11:30, sun very warm. no breeze, spent P.M. in hell, no planes, etc. rested until 5:00 P.M. Walked & rested all nite. 15 min on, 5 off.

Wednesday, Apr. 7, 1943. Same routine, everyone getting weak, cant get very far, prayers all the time, again P.M. very warm, hell. Can't sleep. everyone sore from ground.

Thursday 8. Hit Sand Dunes, very miserable, good wind but continuous blowing of sand, every[one] now very weak, thought Sam & Moore were all done. La Motte eyes are gone, everyone else's eyes are bad. Still going N.W.

On 9 April, Lieutenants Hatton, Toner, Hays and Sergeants Adams and LaMotte ended their trek, too exhausted to continue. Sergeants Shelley, Moore & Ripslinger continued (continued on page 5)



The little AS350BA Squirrel has retired. It doesn't seem that long since it arrived, but thirty years have passed and it has proven to be one of the most versatile and reliable light helicopters to ever serve in the RAN. Bought originally as a training aircraft, it expanded to be a firefighter, reconnaissance platform, PR star and – most importantly – to fill a gap in embarked helicopter capability, including operational service in the MEAO. It served with distinction and is now remembered in a remarkable heritage article on the FAAAA website. Click on the button above to read all about this little helicopter with a big heart. ✈

The Loss of the 'Lady Be Good' (continued from page 4)

northward in search of help. There was no further written record for the three men who departed, but with negligible water, no food, and temperatures as high as 130 degrees, the misery of their last few days is difficult to imagine. Lieutenant Toner continued to keep his diary as they waited:

Friday 9 Shelly [sic], Rip, Moore separate & try to go for help, rest of us all very weak, eyes bad, not any travel, all want to die. still very little water. nites are about 35, good n wind, no shelter, 1 parachute left.

Saturday, Apr. 10, 1943. Still having prayer meetings for help. No sign of anything, a couple of birds; good wind from N. — Really weak now, cant walk. pains all over, still all want to die. Nites very cold. no sleep.

Sunday 11. Still waiting for help, still praying. eyes bad, lost all our wgt. aching all over, could make it if we had water; just enough left to put our tongues to, have hope for help very soon, no rest, still same place.

Monday 12 No help yet, very cold nite

The entry from Monday, April 12 was the last, written in thick pencil lines.



Left-to-Right: Staff Sgt. Vernon L. Moore, 2nd Lt. Lieutenant Hays, 2nd Lt. John S. Woravka, Staff Sgt. Guy E. Shelley, and Technical Sgt. Harold J. Ripplinger

Of the three men who continued on, the remains of two were eventually found; Staff Sergeant Guy E. Shelley was discovered twenty-one miles north of his five crewmates, and Technical Sergeant Harold J. Ripplinger may have been

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the last to fall, having crossed an incredible 109 miles of open desert. Radio operator Moore has never been located.

Later that year, the remains of the bombardier, 2nd Lt. Woravka, were found a few miles from the crash site. His parachute was still attached but appeared to have malfunctioned during evacuation, causing him to fall to his death. Under the circumstances, he was probably the most fortunate of his crew.



Diorama of the Lady Be Good at the Lone Star Flight Museum in Houston, Texas (Wikipedia)

When they set out after evacuation, had the survivors trekked southeast towards the wreckage of *Lady Be Good*, they would have greatly increased their chances of survival by retrieving the food and water stored there, and using the radio to call for help. But they had no way to know how far *Lady* had glided before landfall. And had their emergency maps included the area where they bailed out, they might have realized the severity of their predicament, and instead headed for an oasis to the south. Good fortune certainly did not favor the crew of *Lady Be Good* on her first—and last—battle mission. But the toughness of the crew is unquestionable, surviving days of marching across unforgiving desert with only a half-canteen of water to share between them.

The remains of the eight crewmembers which were found were all returned to the United States. Today the wreckage of the plane is stored in a compound in Libya, but many of the crew's personal effects and a few parts from the plane are on display at the Army Quartermaster Museum at Fort Lee, Virginia. ✈

30-Second Quiz (answers at foot of page)

- In August 2018, how old will the RAN FAA be?
- On Nov 14, 1910 a young barn-storming aviator made the very first take off from a warship. What was his name?
- Did the RAN ever operate Supermarine Spitfires?
- In 1956 the CO of HMAS Melbourne had an audience with Pope Pius XII. Why did he feel that was necessary?
- How many Vought Kingfishers did the RAN operate at sea? ✈

Did You Know?

That for less than the annual cost of just one cup of coffee per month you can get membership of a professional organisation, four copies of 'Slipstream' delivered to your door and 12 editions of this newsletter sent to your email address. You'll also be in the company of those who served in the FAA, who are of like mind to yourself. How's that for value?

You'll also be helping the FAAAA survive into the future, as our membership is dwindling. Why not renew your membership now (see next page), or if you are not a member, go to our website and click on the **hot pink** button to join. ✈



Image: Mark Webb

Mystery Photo No. 37 is currently on the website and has only attracted one or two responses. Can you pick it? The questions are:

- what type of aircraft is this (shown in 724 Squadron colours), and
- how many of this type did the RAN operate?

If you think you know the answers, contact the webmaster [here](#). ✈

Answer to 30 second quiz. (1) The FAA was authorised by Cabinet in August of 1947, so next year it will be 71. (2) Eugene Ely was the first man to ever take off/land on a warship. You can read his fascinating story [here](#). (3) Yes, the RAN operated 14 Spitfires but only on the dummy deck. See article [here](#). (4) HMAS Melbourne was visiting Rome and some 200 officers and men were invited to the Vatican. The Captain's message to the Pope can be seen [here](#). (5) Just one Vought Kingfisher, and only for a brief time aboard the HMAS Wyatt Earp (yes, there really was a ship of that name on our ORBAT!) It was probably the most ill- conceived event in the history of RAN operations at sea. See [here](#) for details. ✈

Progress On The Circumstances Of ex-Member's Death

In August of 2016 the Commander Fleet Air Arm wrote to ask that we promulgate a message concerning the death from cancer of a past member of the Fleet Air Arm. You can see that message [here](#).

Since then we have been attempting to find out more information. We do not wish to breach any personal details regarding that member, but we believe COMFAA's message raised many questions on his potential exposure to respirable asbestos fibres, petroleum, petroleum by-products, toxins or a combination of these, possibly whilst he was serving on 817 Squadron.

Regrettably our correspondence with various areas of the ADF has proven fruitless thus far. Accordingly, we are in the process of taking this matter to a higher level and will report on its progress when known.

Why We Have Changed Your Email

You will have noticed that we have changed the way we have distributed this newsletter. In the past we simply

attached a .pdf file to a simple email, but this time we've gone for a system that gives a graphically rich outline of what the content of this "FlyBy" edition is, and then invites you to click on a button to view/download it.

There's three good reasons for doing this:

- anybody in marketing worth their salt will tell you that a plain text email simply invites deletion.
- the new system gives us a comprehensive report on how many people opened the email and how many binned it, so we can better judge the appeal of this newsletter and whether it is worth continuing, and
- the new system presents a fresh and professional interface which, amongst other things, allows a one-click unsubscribe. This is actually mandatory for commercial group emails under the *Spam Act 2003* (honest!)

Feedback on what you think of this new system and how we might improve it further would be welcome.

COMING SOON...

OUR HERITAGE: THE HAWKER SEA FURY

The website team is working on the next 'Heritage' article, which will be the Hawker Sea Fury. This was arguably one of the most influential aircraft of its time: the last piston-engine gunfighter and the equal first of the modern generation of aircraft in our (then) brand-new Fleet Air Arm. Together with the Fairey Firefly it brought real air power to the fleet, and it went to war in Korea where it served with distinction.

We urgently need YOUR input to make this a definitive history. We want your old photographs and/or your memories of flying or maintaining this aircraft. Don't let the chance go by...act now by contacting the webmaster [here](#). ✈

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