



The Eye in the Sky Newsletter September 2024



BZ Captain Jim!

Hello members. We're kicking off this edition of the newsletter with the brilliant news that our member, Captain **James Hall**, has been selected as the next Commanding Officer of RNAS Culdrose and will take over the role later in the year. On behalf of the Association, I'd like to extend our warmest congratulations and best wishes.

Membership Update

After some light advertising on various media platforms, we are pleased to report that the Association has experienced a further increase in membership, with a diverse group of people from around the world. A very warm welcome to you all!

Mark (Barney) Buckland. Mark was an engineer on Sea King Mk2, Sea King Mk7 and Crowsnest, and served on 849 HQ, 849 A Flt, 849 B Flt and 857 NAS.

Malcolm McKenzie. In 1992, after receiving his observer wings, Malcolm joined the frontline on 849 A Flt. He returned to HQ in 1994 as a QOI. From 1996 to 1999, he went to sea as an Officer of the Watch and PWO. Following that, he became the AEW/Mk7 desk officer at COMNA before taking command of 849 A Flt.

Cheryl Jones. In 2007, Cheryl gained her Sea King Mk7 observer wings and joined the frontline on 857 NAS.

Brian Hill. Brian was a Gannet observer and served at Culdrose, Brawdy, and Lossiemouth and onboard Victorious, Ark Royal and Hermes.

Bruce Gorrell. Bruce was a US Navy exchange pilot at 849, flying the Gannet AEW3.

Simon (Chubbs) Chamberlain. Simon was a Sea King Mk2 'greenie' engineer on 849 HQ in 1990, before joining 849 B Flt in early 1991.

Martin Russell. Martin completed observer training at 849 HQ in 2002 before joining the frontline on 849 A Flt in 2003. He returned to 849 HQ as a QOI in 2005 and then rejoined the frontline with 857 NAS from 2008 to 2010.

Neil Kippax. Neil was a Sea King Mk7 'pinkie' engineer and served on 849 and 857 NAS from 2004-2007. Today, Neil is the Thales Sea King/Merlin Field Service Rep, a job he has been doing since 2009.

Kevin Morrison. Kevin is an Intelligence Officer and completed three tours as the SKASaC Int Officer in Camp Bastion, Afghanistan.

Grassy Knowles. Grassy was a holdover at 849 NAS before undergoing pilot training on the Merlin. As a Test Pilot, he piloted the first flight of the Merlin Crowsnest. After becoming the CO of 820, he integrated 849 personnel into the squadron and advocated for the introduction of the SOBS ASaC post, which was subsequently implemented.

Stewart Bisgrove. Stewart was a 'grubber' on Sea King Mk2 serving on 849 HQ and A Flt. He was on the engineering team that brought the Sea King Mk7 into service.

Jason (Mo) Morris. Jason was a Sea King engineer who served as Watch Chief on A Flt from 1998 to 2000, and then as Watch Chief and Training Chief on 849 HQ. He was the SMR on A Flt from 2004 until it was recommissioned as 854 NAS in December 2006.

Clare Hunter. Clare was a doctor in the RN from 2000-2010 and worked alongside 849 NAS as an aviation specialist from 2003-2006.

Alan (Pony) Moore. Alan was a Sea King greenie and served on 824 D Flt, embarking in HMS Illustrious to the Falklands when the Sea King Mk 2 was being trialled for service under Project LAST.

William Bowen William was a Sea King Mk2 engineer and served on 849 B Flt from 1996-2000.

Mark Haughton. Mark was a Sea King Mk2 engineer and served on 849 HQ and then A Flt from 1988-1990.

Mark (Thommo) Thompson. Mark was an engineer and joined 849 B Flt in 1989 in charge of the Searchwater Workshop. He also served in 849 A Flt, before a return to B Flt and transition to the Mk 7

Stephen (Popeye) Pope. Stephen was a 'grubber' engineer on 849 A Flt from 1987-1989 and again from 1991-1993.

Peter Richardson. Peter ran the Sea King Mk7 simulator from 2002-2017 and helped set up the current Crowsnest simulator.

Christopher (Shrek) Carey. Christopher was the US Navy exchange observer on 854 NAS from 2009-2011.

Gavin Edwards. Gavin served as the Deputy AEO on 849 NAS before becoming the AEO of 854 NAS from 2008 to 2010. He was part of the initial deployment to Camp Bastion in support of Op Herrick.

Will (Bob) Gasson. Will was a 'greenie' on Sea King Mk 2 and Mk 7. He first joined 849 NAS in 2000 and rejoined in 2004 after completing artificer course. He moved around the flights and squadrons in various roles until 2016.

Greg (Lurch) Lawrance. Greg was a Sea King Mk2 pilot on 849 B Flt from 1995-1998.

Elaine Gosden. Elaine is the widow of Marc Lawrence. Marc was tragically killed in the Red Rat collision in 2003 whilst serving as an observer on 849 A Flt during Op Telic.

Alan Pearson. Alan is a Crowsnest observer who gained his wings on 849 NAS in 2007. He has served in the ASaC community ever since across all squadrons and flights, including 824 and 820 NAS.

Al Summers. Al was a Sea King pilot and served on 849 and 857 NAS from 2004-2008.

Harry Silcock. Harry is a brand new Crowsnest observer and was awarded his wings in March 2024.

David (Dicky) Bird. David was a Sea King pilot and served on 849 B Flt and then as Senior Pilot of 849HQ, from 1995-1999

Adam MacDonald. Adam is a brand new Crowsnest observer and was awarded his wings in July 2024, along with the Roue Trophy for best ASaC student.

Stef Marandola. Stef was Sea King Mk 2 observer on 849 A Flt from 1991-1999

Recent Events

National Memorial Arboretum – 6 August 2024

Thank you to those who attended the gathering at the National Memorial Arboretum. The group held a remembrance event at the recently refurbished Red Rat Bench. We are very grateful to **Jan Cox** for organising this event.



Upcoming Events

The Field of Remembrance at Westminster Abbey

The Poppy Factory's Field of Remembrance will be open to the public from Friday 8 to Sunday 17 November. For those who wish to visit, the AnyFace plot is number 99, located to the right of the entrance to St Margaret's Church.

The Poppy Factory was opened in 1922 by Major George Howson MC to produce poppies and provide employment for veterans injured during WW1. Today the Poppy Factory still produce wreaths, crosses and symbols for the RBL and also provides support to veterans with health conditions on their journey into civilian employment.



Cenotaph Parade, Whitehall - 10 November 2024



This year the Association will be led by our President, **Michael Clapp** with 21 members on parade. If you are in London spectating, then please join the Fly Navy Federation service on the Embankment which will start once all FAA Associations have completed the main parade.

AnyFace Reunion 2025, Portsmouth - 4-6 April 2025

To follow up on the email earlier this month, we have confirmed that our 2025 reunion will take place in Portsmouth from 4-6 April 2025. The main events will take place on Saturday 5 April and will include a visit to HMS Queen Elizabeth and a dinner at HMS Nelson. The ticket price for dinner is still to be confirmed but we are hoping for £60-65.

Around the main events on Saturday will be informal meet-ups and possibly a trip to the D-Day Room at Southwick House for those interested. Members and guests will be included in all activities. If you would like to join us then please RSVP here [AnyFace Reunion 2025](#)



Latest Dits

I'm always grateful for 'dits' and very thankful that **Karl 'Birdy' Bird** agreed to write something for us after his recent operational deployment.



I was the last front-line RAF exchange officer on the SKASaC and returned to my light blue roots in August 2013 after swapping squadrons from 854 to 857 and completing a final HERRICK detachment. On return to the RAF I was posted to V(AC) Squadron to learn to operate the Sentinel, but a promotion to Squadron Leader in that November put pay to that - a desk job had my name on it before joining 14 Squadron operating the

systems the Shadow R aircraft. A promotion to Wing Commander and several desk jobs and Advanced Command and Staff College followed.

This time away from the front line saw me bored and slightly frustrated so when the chance came to volunteer to be the Commanding Officer of the RAF's annual NATO Air Policing detachment, I jumped at the chance. Preparations soon flew by and pre-deployment training was conducted in January, and I was then appointed to the role and waiting for the deployment to begin in mid-March. For those who do not know, the RAF conduct enhanced Air Policing North (aka Operation AZOTIZE) and South (aka Operation BILOXI) and this iteration was to be a return to Mihail Koglaniceanu (MKAB) in Romania after a gap of a year where we were in Estonia. The CO is found each year from outwith the deploying squadron, and I was to be taking IX(Bomber) Squadron from RAF Lossiemouth, with around 100 of their personnel and 6 Typhoon FGR4s. The Sqn OC would accompany me for most of the detachment and be responsible for the safe delivery of air power and supervision of flying operations, but everything else, including the additional team of 100 Individual Augmentees taking us to around 200 people was on me. No pressure!

I took my advance party of around 35 people out on 16 March, joining a small team who had already been there for 2 weeks. Sadly, the infra build of nearly 100 shipping containers had not been finished, diesel had not been delivered, and this put us about 2 weeks behind. I had a single Royal Engineer Sapper, who working to a Staff Sergeant Deployed Facilities Manager, was responsible for the electrical testing of all the cabins. He managed a small handful each day and grafted through, quickly getting us into the technical site and, in time, our permanent rooms. The shipping containers were comfortable and apart from myself, the 9 pilots (including a FAA exchange Typhoon pilot), MT drivers and one or two others most people shared 2 to a room with bunk beds and wardrobes. Certainly not the 5 hotels we are famed for (believe it or not, it's really not true!) but far better than tents like in 2022, or a warship for that matter!*



Another week and we were soon up to over 220 people, the jets arrived and we began flying. The plan was to hold a week of QRA as Hot weeks, bolstering the Romanian's own capability in the F16 at Fetesti, just up the road, and a week of a relaxed readiness and NATO Shield activity, such a large-scale exercise and flying with other nations. Halfway through we were to be joined by the Ilmavoimat, the Finnish Air Force, which would be joining us

for the last 2 months with their F/A-18s, conducting their first long deployment and learning from the RAF how NATO Air Policing works.

MKAB is around 20km from Constanta on the Black Sea coast. It's about £15 in an Uber and as the detachment went on, the seaside resort and its adjacent famous strip called Mama got livelier! I had decided from the start not to put a curfew in place. A double edged sword of having everyone living in an enclosed camp is seeing the times that they signed in, often well into the next morning, occasionally keeping the RAF police detachment busy but generally everything went well. But if you can't beat them, join them and we all made the most of it, working 5/6 days a week and ensuring everyone got at least a day out, and able to go off camp if they wish.

It wasn't all cocktails and dancing, though! Our Typhoons conducted over 500 hours of flying in the 4 weeks, conducting 40 training scrambles and over 150 missions. We flew and trained with NATO partners from 16 nations and redeployed to Cyprus to bolster Defence Counter Air sorties in the face of Iranian threats to Israel and twice for major NATO exercises testing the concept of Dynamic Force Employment. 3 Typhoons and 50 people left MKAB each time for exercises in Poland and Finland. One thing I was not quite prepared for, but a sign of modern operations, is that we hosted 57 news teams from around half a dozen nations. We had over 210 articles and posts written on our activity, 35% up from the previous year and I imagine we will just see this grow and grow, after all, if you do not tell people what you are doing then you may as well not do it, so they told me!



I've now returned back to the UK with my team and will head off to command an RAF flying squadron at RAF Waddington, but I still regularly look back fondly on my time as a Bagger and will tell anyone who listens what a great aircraft it was to fly. I hope there is space on the wall of my new office for some of my Sea King pictures!

Wing Commander Karl Bird, Commanding Officer 140 Expeditionary Air Wing, Operation BILOXI.

Admin Director Update

New Joiner Membership Fees

A reminder to all new joiners that 2024 membership fees are as follows:

Full and Associate Members £10

Overseas Members free

I'd be grateful if you could BACS transfer any outstanding fees to the account details below.

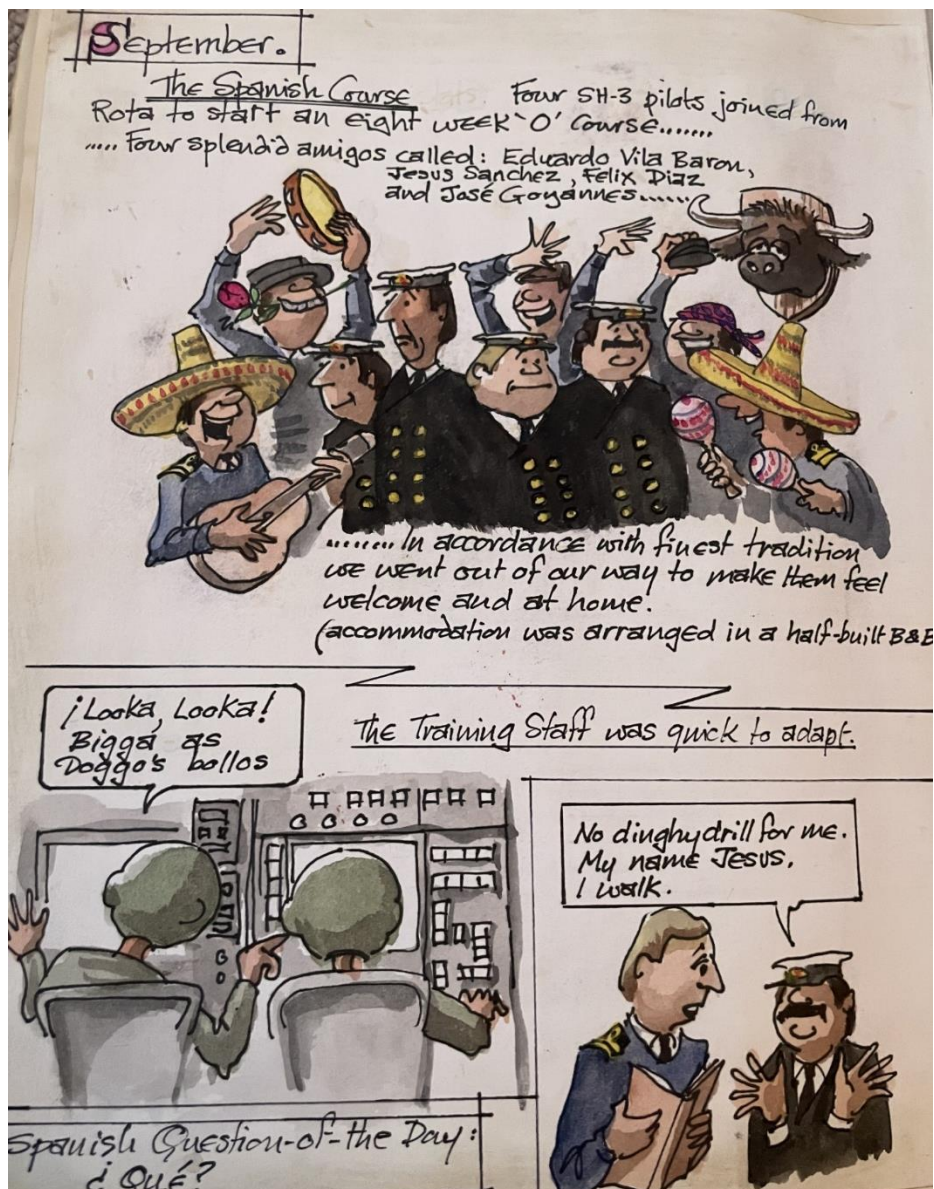
Account: 17736048

Sort: 010155

Ref: Surname 24

Down Memory Lane

A reminder that 849 NAS used to train the Spanish!



Yours aye,

Serena

