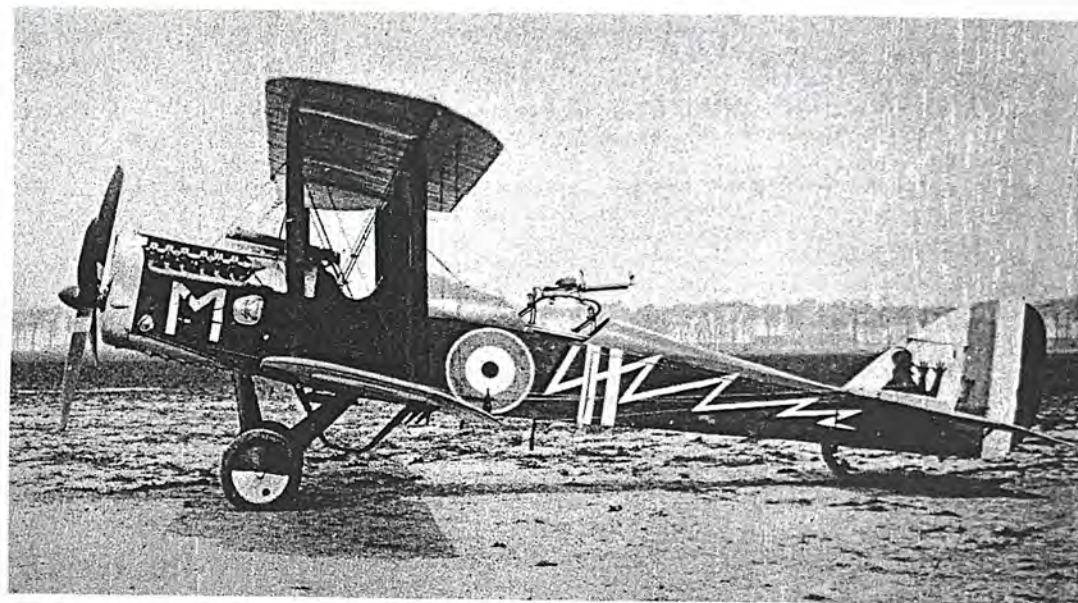


# 202 Squadron

1 This D.H.4 (N5997) was built by Westland for the RNAS and was on the strength of No. 2 Squadron, RNAS when it became No. 202 Squadron. The elaborate markings soon succumbed to the RAF's desire for anonymity in its aircraft (Photo: MoD. H1536)

2 Fairey IIIDs formed the squadron's equipment when No. 481 Flight was renumbered No. 202 Squadron (Photo: MoD. H1340)

3 The D.H.4 was No. 202's standard type in World War One. The gap between the pilot and gunner seen in this view was a weakness in this design as it impeded communication and made co-ordination under attack difficult. (Photo: IWM. Q68130)



## Over the Belgian Coast

When No. 202 Squadron, Royal Air Force, was formed on 1 April 1918, it inherited the traditions of 3½ years of service as No. 2 Squadron, Royal Naval Air Service. Born on 17 October 1914, No. 2 Squadron was one of two squadrons approved for formation with a view to co-operating with the Royal Flying Corps in France. Squadron-Commander E. L. Gerrard began to assemble his unit at Eastchurch, Kent, and started training with Bristol T.B.8 biplanes transferred from the Military Wing.

On 24 December 1914, two Bristol biplanes (Nos. 1223 and 1224) flew down to Dover for air defence duties. On Christmas Day, No. 1224 was ordered up after an enemy aircraft was reported over the Medway. Over Herne Bay the pilot sighted the enemy a long way off but failed to intercept. However, it was No. 2's first sight of its enemy.

Replaced by Avros of No. 1 Squadron, the detachment returned to Eastchurch on 2 January 1915. By this time the squadron had a collection of varied aircraft including a Vickers F.B.5 (No. 32), an Avro 500 (No. 53), a Short S.28 (No. 66), a Sopwith biplane (No. 104), three Bristol T.B.8s (Nos. 1223 to 1225) and even the Royal Navy's first numbered aircraft, (No. 1), a Short S.34.

During February 1915, even more types were added to the motley collection; an Avro 503 (No. 16) seaplane converted for land use, a B.E.8 'Bloater' (No. 643)

transferred from the RFC and a French-built Blériot parasol monoplane (No. 908). These, augmented by the three T.B.8s, were despatched to Dover on 10 February to take part in bombing raids on Zeebrugge and Ostend.

To guard south-eastern England against enemy airship raids, a detachment of No. 2 Squadron ('A' Flight) was sent to Westgate at the end of April. One pilot from Westgate, Flight Sub-Lieutenant R. H. Mulock, intercepted Zeppelin LZ38 on 17 May 1915. Caught cruising around Kent at 2000 feet, LZ38 hastily dropped bombs on Ramsgate and rapidly climbed out of range, far too fast for Mulock's Avro to catch up. After a chase almost to the Belgian coast, the Zeppelin passed out of sight.

During June 1915, RNAS Squadrons were redesignated 'Wings' and during August, No. 2 Wing spent a short time at Dunkerque. A week after arrival, Flight-Commander J. R. Smyth-Piggott in a B.E.2c succeeded in bombing Zeppelin L12 as it was being towed into Osterd by German torpedo-boats after being damaged by anti-aircraft guns at Dover. Other pilots from Dunkerque followed and the airship was damaged beyond repair. A few weeks later, No. 2 Wing was on its way to the Dardenelles.

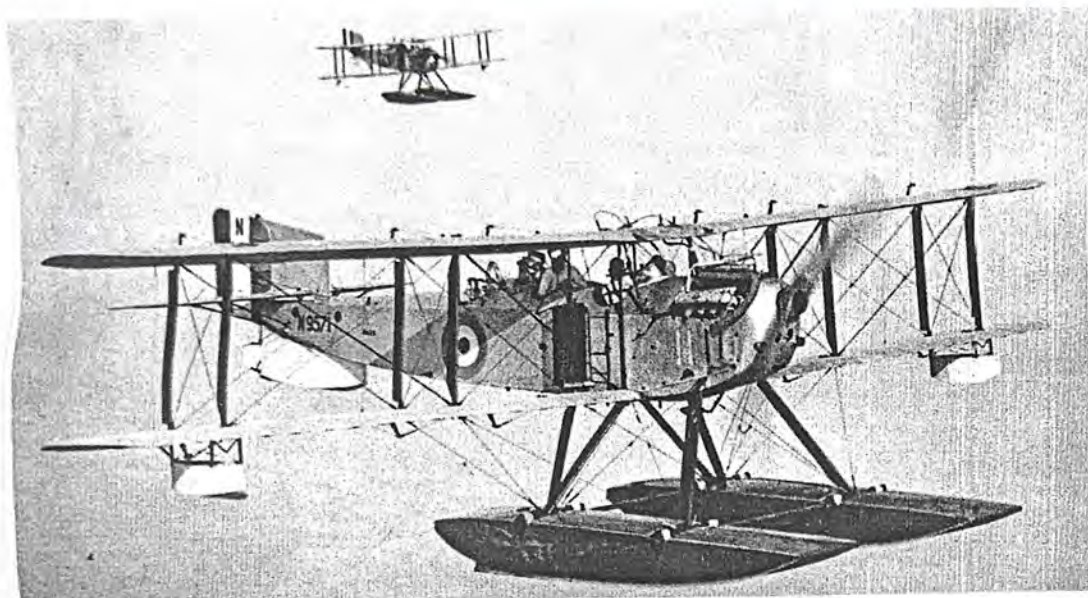
On 1 March 1916, No. 1 Wing, RNAS at Dunkerque, was divided into 'A' and 'B' Squadrons; and, on 5 November 1916, 'B' Squadron became No. 2 Squadron, RNAS. Equipment during this period was mixed. For spotting duties using radio to communicate with

monitors and the old pre-Dreadnought *Retenge* bombarding the Belgian coast Farman F.40s were used. They were backed-up by a pair of B.E.2cs and given cover by Nieuport 10 and Sopwith Pup single-seat fighters. Also on hand in small numbers were Sopwith 1½ Strutter two-seaters which could be used for escort or reconnaissance duties.

Enemy aircraft based on Belgian airfields made many attempts to interfere with reconnaissance and spotting aircraft. Therefore, it was with some relief that the squadron received the first of its de Havilland (Airco) D.H.4s on 6 March 1917 when the prototype (No. 3696) arrived at St Pol followed slowly by production aircraft. By October 1917, No. 2 had 15 D.H.4s (variously powered by three different types of engine) and six Sopwith 1½ Strutters (with two types of Clergerotaries in use). By the end of November, full equipment with D.H.4s was complete.

The translation of No. 2 Squadron, RNAS, to No. 202 Squadron, RAF, on 1 April 1918 meant little change in role. Its sphere of operations was still the Belgian coast and reconnaissance and spotting remained the primary tasks. During May 1918, four D.H.9s were received but returned to the Aircraft Depot within a short time; even though the D.H.9 had been designed to replace the D.H.4, most crews preferred their original aircraft. Despite opposition from enemy fighters, the D.H.4s still got through to their objectives even when operating singly or in pairs.



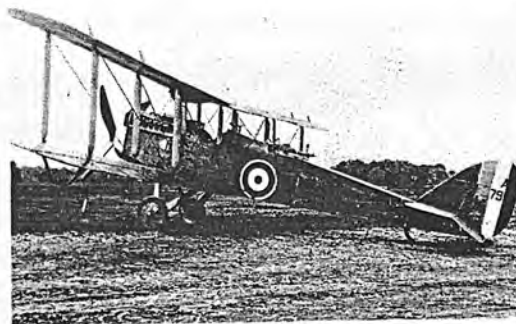


At the end of September 1918, bombardment of the Belgian coast was stepped-up and the Belgian and British armies in Flanders moved forward during October from the lines they had held for four long years. The Germans began to evacuate Belgium rapidly and the squadron was busily engaged in trying to locate the position of his rearguards and verify the towns which had been abandoned. Some methods were unorthodox as when a Camel of No. 210 Squadron 'captured' Ostend by landing in the market place. Varsenaere airfield was occupied by the advancing troops and No. 202 moved in to shorten the range between it and the German armies retiring over the Meuse a few days after the Armistice.

In February 1919, No. 202 was reduced to a cadre as a result of the demobilization of many RAF personnel. The remaining members of the squadron moved to Eastburn airfield, later to become famous as Driffield, in Yorkshire to await disbandment as part of No. 16 (Training) Group. During March, four of its faithful D.H.4s were passed to No. 233 Squadron at Dover and 10 more to No. 98 Squadron at Alquines, France. The end came on 22 January 1920 and No. 202 dispersed.

### In the Mediterranean

No. 202 did not disappear for long from the RAF List. On 9 April 1920, it was reformed at Alexandria as a Fleet co-operation unit. Until the RAF could be disposed of tidily, the Royal Navy had, for want of an



alternative, to work with the new service. On their side, the RAF had agreed to provide a number of squadrons to work with the Fleet and it was logical to allot former ex-RNAS squadron numbers to these units. No. 202's new role was short-lived and lasted just over a year. Small budgets, lack of personnel and little interest in the Royal Navy in shore-based aircraft resulted in No. 202 being disbanded on 16 May 1921. For nearly eight years, maritime aviation in the Mediterranean would be based on the seaplane station at Malta and its resident unit, No. 481 Flight.

A resurgence of the flying-boat squadrons occurred in January 1929. Existing flights were raised to squadron status and on the first day of 1929, No. 481 (Coastal

2 Reconnaissance) Flight became No. 202 Squadron. More precisely, it became No. 202 (Flying Boat) Squadron, a blatant misdescription since the available aircraft consisted of six Fairey IIID seaplanes. Flight-Lieutenant C. Bompfrey DFC, was in command and it was to be seven months before he became a squadron-leader.

The Squadron's Fairey IIIDs were developments of a design that had first appeared during World War One. Outwardly, it had changed little from the first of its line and still possessed the flat-bottomed wooden floats of that era, supplemented by smaller floats at the wingtips and a fifth fitted under the tail. The Rolls-Royce Eagle VIII of the prototype and early production aircraft was replaced by a 450 h.p. Napier Lion of exemplary reliability. With a range of under 500 miles, the search area of the Malta-based Fairey IIIDs was not large.

Although handicapped by a lack of any reserve aircraft No. 202 managed to put up five seaplanes for an air display in May 1929 which marked the first public appearance of the new No. 202. Calafra (the spelling eventually became Kalafrana) was not an ideal place for seaplanes but had been built during World War One as the best spot available. Heavy swells had stopped flying on numerous occasions and the squadron looked forward to newer aircraft capable of operating in sea conditions which put its seaplanes ashore.

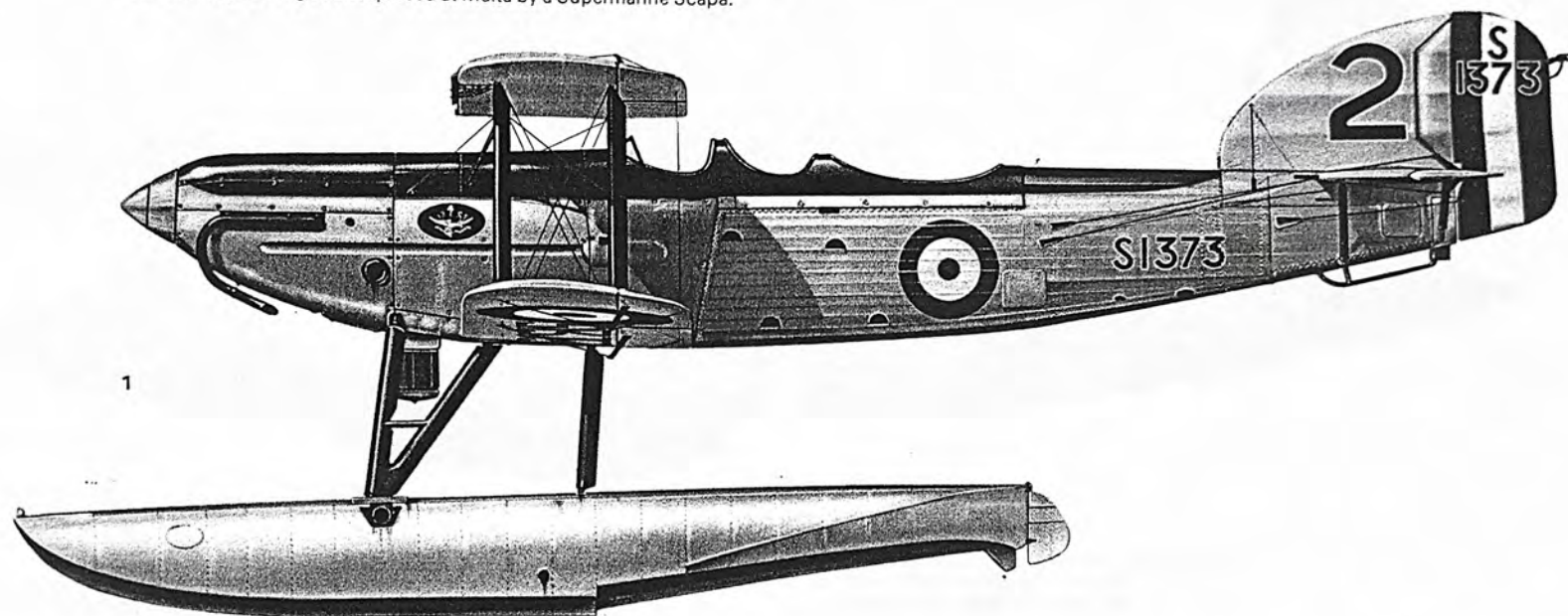
It was to be a long wait for flying-boats. No. 202's replacements were allotted during the summer of 1930. During this time, two Fairey IIID accidents occurred. On 5 June 1930, a IIID (S1078) spun into the ground from 3000 feet and killed the crew; and, on 7 July, another IIID (N9730) collided with a dinghy in the bay, killing the occupant. Nine days later, a Fairey IIIF (S1374) was delivered to begin a re-equipment programme.

Despite the fact that they still wore 'sea-boots', the IIIFs were a marked improvement on their ancestors. Their engines were still Lions but of increased power and fitted into a cleaned-up nose. Floats were more streamlined but, unfortunately, were in short supply. This delayed the new seaplanes coming into full service immediately but, by the time No. 202 had been flying IIIFs for a year, the squadron was ready to begin 'showing the flag' around the Mediterranean.

Leaving Malta on 14 July 1931, the squadron visited Augusta in Sicily, Corfu, Athens, Mirabella (Crete), Aboukir near Alexandria and Sollum, to become well-known when war broke out in the Western Desert. The flight's first casualty occurred with almost indecent haste. A Fairey IIIF (S1382) had total engine failure soon after take-off and was towed back to Malta by the sloop *Aberdeen*. Later, another IIIF (S1380) just made it to Corfu with an engine water-cooling leak but the

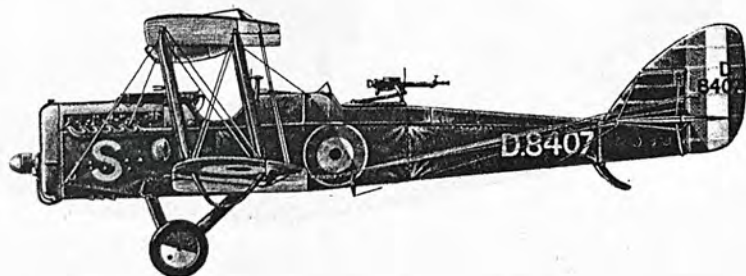


- 1 Fairey III F Mk.IIIM S1373 served throughout its career with No. 202, being one of the first to arrive at Malta. For foreign cruises, it had the squadron's badge of knight's shield and albatross applied and an identity number painted on the fin. After 1020 hours of flying, S1373 was struck-off-charge as not being worth overhauling, having been replaced at Malta by a Supermarine Scapa.



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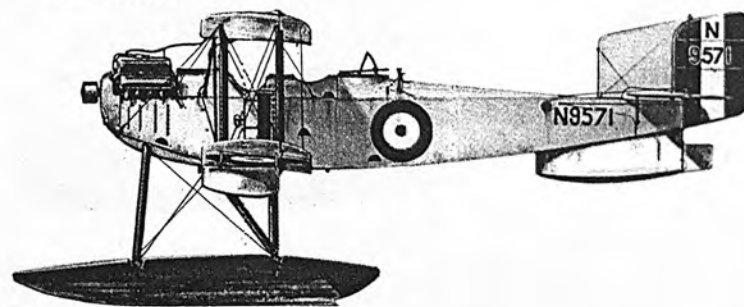
- 2 Airco (de Havilland) D.H.4 D8407 joined No. 202 Squadron on 16 August 1918 and survived the war to be transferred to No. 98 Squadron on 15 March 1919.



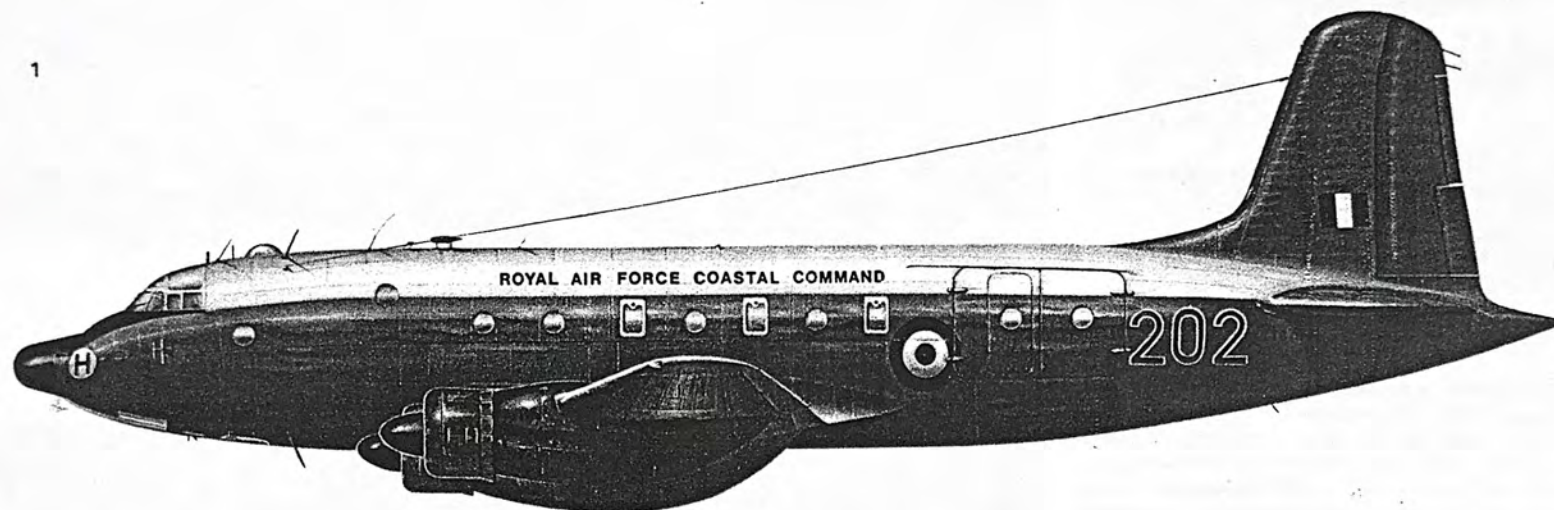
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- 3 One of No. 202's original equipment inherited from No. 481 Flight in January 1929, Fairey IIID N9571 was taken out of service in 1930 and replaced by a Fairey III F.

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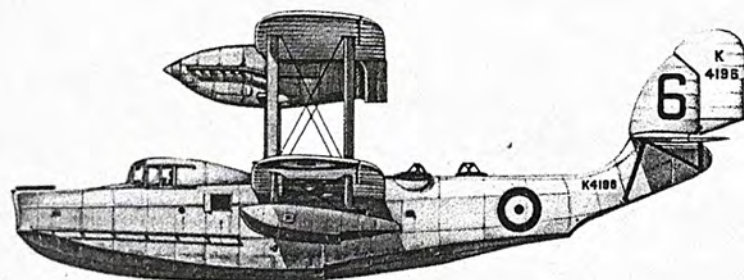


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1 Handley Page Hastings Met. 1 TG565 differed from most of its contemporaries by the addition of a radome in the nose. Revised colour schemes for No. 202's aircraft came into effect in 1963.

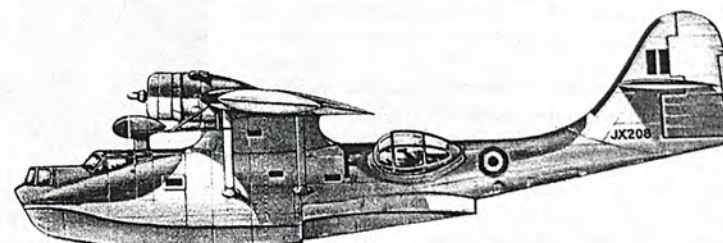
2 Supermarine Scapa K4196 was operated by No. 202 Squadron between August 1935 and May 1937. After being flown back to England, it was scrapped in October 1937.



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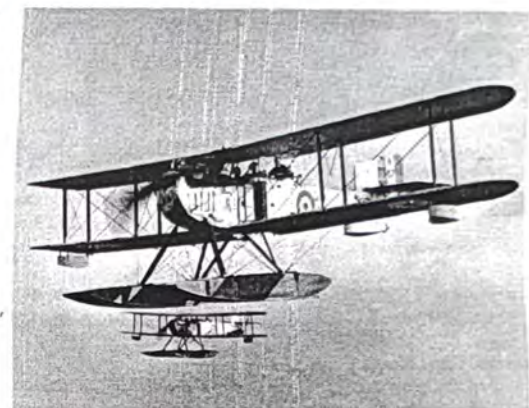
3 Consolidated Catalina IVA JX208 was delivered to No. 202 Squadron on 27 March 1944 but on 19 December 1944 crashed at Castlegregory, near Tralee, with the loss of its entire crew of nine.

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3





remaining floatplanes completed the cruise with only minor ailments.

An early example of air-sea rescue operations from Malta occurred on 16 February 1932. An Italian airline founded in January 1923, SANA, had begun a regular flying-boat service between Rome and Tripoli with stops at Augusta and Malta. One of their *Wal* (Whale) flying-boats, built under licence in Italy from a Dornier design, sent out an SOS from 50 miles south of Malta. Flying-Officers C. W. Grannum and J. A. Rutherford set out in S1384 to look for it and located the downed aircraft with commendable speed. Circling the area, the seaplane's radio calls directed the destroyer *Brilliant* to the scene and she took the *Wal* in tow for Malta. Unfortunately, just outside Marsa Scirocco Bay, high wind capsized the flying-boat. HMS *Brilliant* cast-off the tow and brought the crew and passengers ashore. Next day, two more IIIFs (S1380 and S1382) set off to search for the wreck, and located it 15 miles from Malta. It was later towed in to Calafra and slipped for inspection.

In May, the squadron went to the rescue of the crew of a Fleet Air Arm Blackburn Ripon from the carrier *Glorious* and rescued the pilot by landing alongside, the observer being picked up by a IIIF of 447 Flight.

The squadron set forth on another cruise on 20 June 1932. Four floatplanes left for Khartoum via Sicily, Greece, Cyprus, Lebanon and Egypt on a 25-day trip during which much valuable experience was gained in operating away from base. In 1933, the destination was the Adriatic with visits to Kotor and Split. At the same time, a Supermarine Southampton IV passed through on its way to tropical trizls at Port Sudan after a non-stop flight from Gibraltar in 12 hours. Malta's 'Flying Boat' squadron regarded it with envy unaware that it was the first sign of their future equipment.



1 Fairey IIIIFs beached at St Paul's Bay, Malta  
(Photo: MoD. H842)

2 No. 202's six Fairey IIIIFs lined-up at Kalafrana with a Fleet Air Arm Fairey Flycatcher fighter at the end of the line. Carriers normally fitted several aircraft with floats while they were berthed in Grand Harbour and these were usually based at Kalafrana (Photo: MoD. H1623)

3 The Fairey IIID was normally a Fleet Air Arm type operating with a land undercarriage, No. 202 being the only non-naval squadron to fly them (Photo: MoD. H1341)

4 Five Fairey IIIIFs in echelon formation off the Maltese coast in 1935. No. 202's badge is carried on the forward fuselage in readiness for the squadron's summer cruise and S1385 is flying formation leader's pennants from rudder and wingtips (Photo: No. 202 Squadron collection)

5 Five Fairey IIIIFs moored on the Nile near Khartoum in June 1934 during a cruise from Malta to the Sudan. At the end of the line is a Fairey Gordon floatplane of No. 47 Squadron which had a seaplane flight for local patrol duties (Photo: IWM. CM4499)

SANA's Wals still seemed to play a large part in No. 202's activities. Flying-Officer Dobell was landing their IIIIF (S1385) in the Bay on 7 November 1933 when the SANA boat landed at the same time but at 90 degrees to the wind. Damage was fortunately minor when the two met. Seven days later, another SANA boat had to be located in the sea between Malta and Sicily and was duly towed in. In March 1934, Kalafrana's small craft were out to the south of Malta to collect yet another Wal spotted by No. 202's Commanding Officer. It was all good reconnaissance practice; as was the 1934 cruise, back again to Khartoum with five floatplanes.

May Day 1935 was a red letter day for the squadron. A Supermarine Scapa (K4192) arrived from England to begin the replacement of No 202's IIIIFs. It was the production version of the Southampton IV seen two years earlier and No. 202 (Flying Boat) Squadron at last justified its title. A second Scapa (K4193) arrived on 24 May, to be followed by three others (K4194, K4195 and K4196); the last arriving on 3 August.

The all-metal Scapa was a logical successor to the earlier Southampton which had served the RAF so well for ten years. Two 525 h.p. Rolls-Royce Kestrel IIIs gave it a range of over 1000 miles and a speed of 140 m.p.h. Three gunners still occupied unprotected positions but the pilots had a cabin and there was accommodation in the hull behind the cockpit for the rest of the crew when not manning their machine-guns.

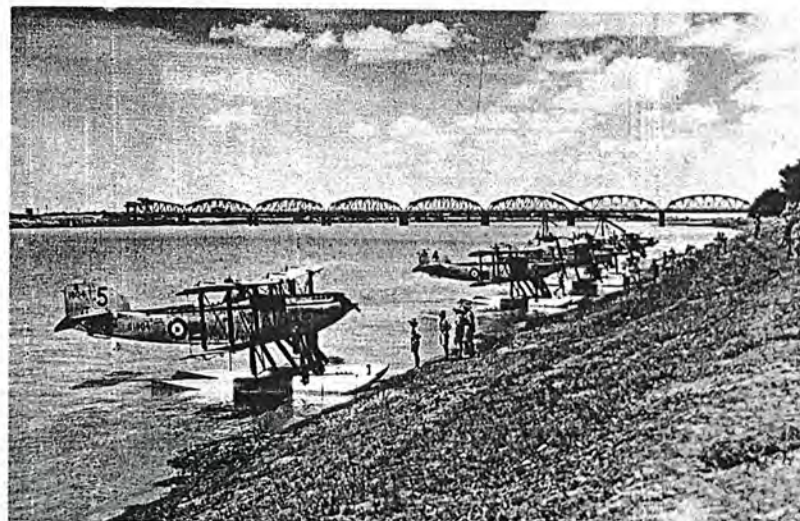
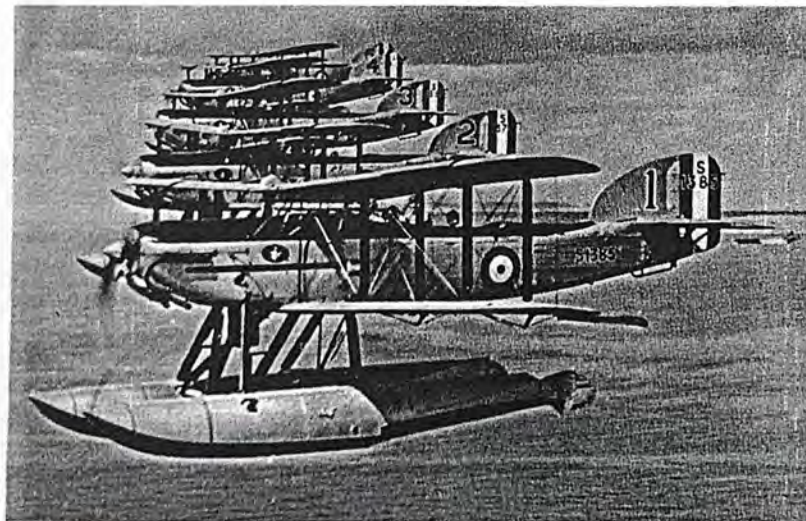
No. 202's boats arrived just in time to become engaged in more active operations. The international crisis caused by the Italian invasion of Ethiopia had

more repercussions on British units than those of other countries not directly involved in the war. In support of a League of Nations resolution, many RAF units moved to the Middle East. No. 202 began flying anti-submarine patrols around Malta on 9 October 1935 and aircraft began using other mooring areas in case of air attack. Within a year, most of the squadrons were back home and tension in the Mediterranean relaxed.

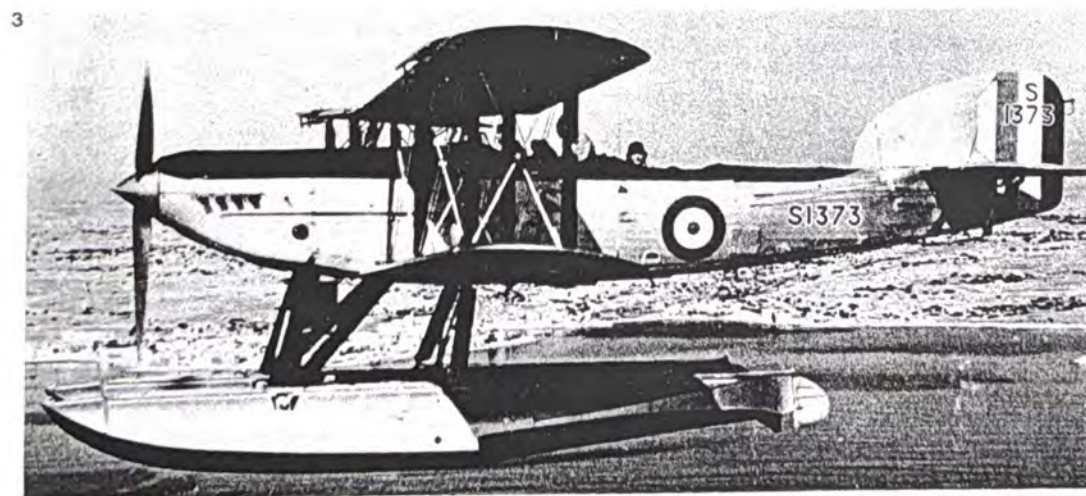
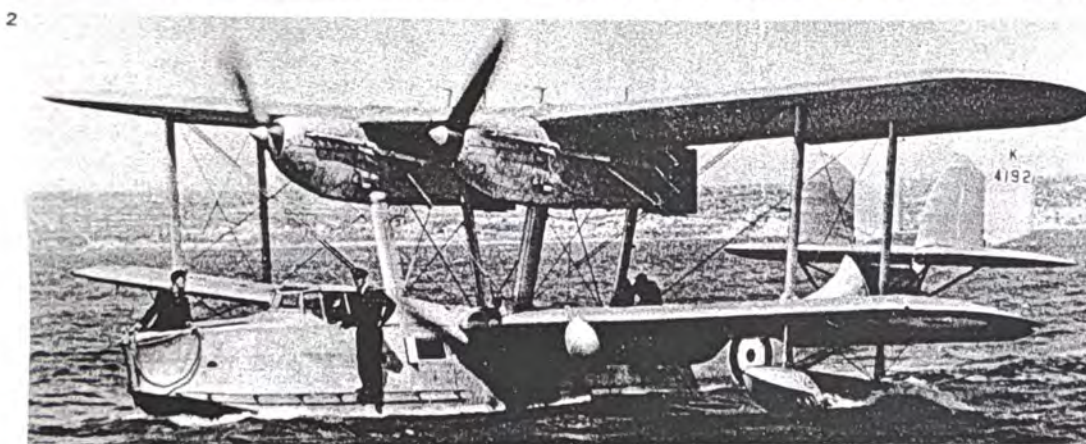
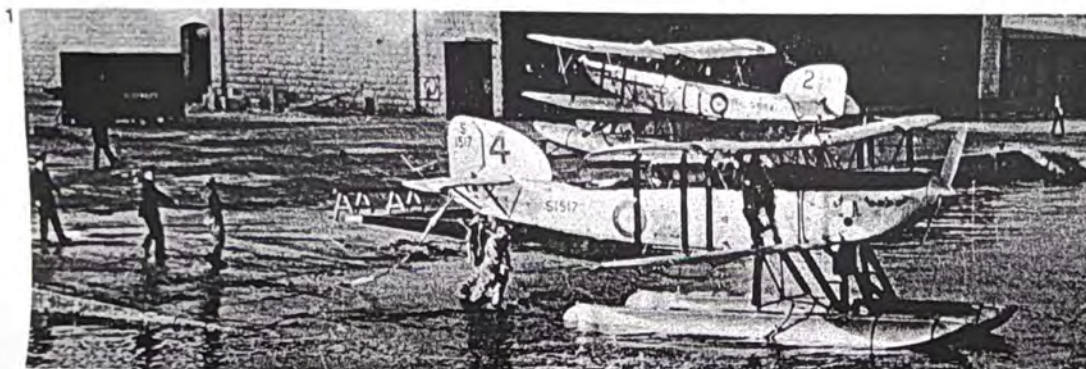
Two Scapas (K4194 and K4196) left Malta on 12 December 1936 for a cruise to West Africa and followed the African coastline as far as Freetown where one (K4194) lost an engine. The remaining Scapa continued on to Lagos while an engine change was carried out with the aid of two jetties and a fortunate lack of swell. Both flying-boats returned to Malta on 23 January 1937, having surveyed potential flying boat bases, many of which would be used during World War Two.

During September 1937, Saro Londons began to be flown out from England to replace No. 202's Scapas. The latter were flown back by ferry crews and it was during this exercise that the sole Scapa (K4200) to be lost by No. 202 crashed. While taking off for a full-load test in preparation for its long flight home, this Scapa hit a bad swell and broke-up; fortunately, without injuring any of the crew seriously.

Almost immediately, the Londons and remaining Scapas became involved in anti-submarine patrols. Events in the Spanish Civil War had been complicated by the support given to both sides from outside sources. Germany and Italy sent war material to equip the Fascist forces while the USSR saw the opportunity of







installing a Communist government by supplying arms to the Republicans who, if successful, would be taken over by Russian-trained elements. Several neutral merchant ships were torpedoed, apparently by trigger-happy Spanish submarines which were later found to have been Italian. At the Nyon Conference in September 1937, it was agreed that an International patrol would be set up which, in effect, would consist of British and French ships and aircraft.

While British-based Short Singapore flying-boats descended on the French seaplane station at Algiers/Arzeu, No. 202 began patrols from Malta. The squadron joined French seaplanes from Bizerte/Karouba and flying-boats from Berre to form a circle round the western Mediterranean. Each boat carried four 112-lb. bombs and full armament; later amended to two 250-lb. bombs. Twenty-three patrols were flown from 20 September till the end of the month, all but one by Scapas. 50 were added to this total during October and 27 more in November; with Londons playing an increasing part as they replaced Scapas. Up to 20 December, when patrols were suspended, 11 more brought the total to 111. Sinkings ceased, more probably due to Italian diplomatic nervousness than fear of a successful attack. Several destroyers had dropped depth charges and the chance of a submarine being attacked coinciding with the necessity of announcing an 'accident' would have taxed the powers of the Italian Foreign Office considerably in providing a believable explanation.

On 10 December 1937, two more Londons (K9684 and K9685) arrived to complete re-equipment. Nine months later another crisis brought No. 202 to action stations again. In the weeks of the Czechoslovakian crisis, RAF squadrons were placed on a war footing. No. 202 was ordered to move to Alexandria. In consequence, on 26 September 1938, four Londons flew non-stop to Alexandria, followed next day by two more. Ground crews sailed in the depot ship *Maidstone* which became a floating base for the squadron at Alexandria on arrival. On 10 October, she sailed for Malta followed by the squadron's boats as the Munich Agreement gave 'peace in our time'. The RAF was distinctly lacking in confidence in this political dream and during the next few weeks No. 202's Londons photographed ports and airfields in Sicily and Libya, in addition to the restricted island of Pantellaria.

During April 1939, a further move to Alexandria was begun but cancelled before the sea party left. At the same time, the squadron was informed of its impending re-equipment with Short Sunderlands. Two Londons were to be flown to Calshot and on the afternoon of the following day, a Sunderland (N6135) flew in over the moored Londons to join the squadron. Two Londons



(K6932 and K9684) left on 30 April for Calshot and conversion training began on 4 May. Unfortunately, it was not to be. No. 202's conversion was suspended on 10 May and the prized Sunderlands were reallocated to No. 228 Squadron. The pair of Londons returned to Malta three days later.

During June 1939, the squadron managed to fit in a last peace-time cruise. Four boats toured Greece and the Aegean. At the Greek naval station at Phaleron, one of the Londons (K9684) was rammed by a taxiing Greek flying boat. It was, inevitably, No. 202's traditional nemesis—a Dornier Wal.

Time was running out for peaceful activities. A merchant ship, *SS Dumana*, had been chartered to act as a mobile base for No. 86 (General Reconnaissance) Wing, which was to control Nos. 202 and 228 Squadrons. On 27 August, maintenance parties moved into dispersed billets and 'scatter' points manned at St Paul's Bay, Cala Mistra, Komino and the motor torpedo-boat trots in Mgarr Harbour. Kalafrana (which had changed its initial letter to conform with local spelling) remained the main repair base but was vulnerable to attack from the Sicilian airfields only 50 miles away.

When war broke out, No. 202 had six Londons manned by 12 officers and 69 ncos and airmen; 51 short of establishment. Three Sunderlands of No. 228 Squadron were also based on Malta. On 9 September 1939, orders were received for the squadron to move to Gibraltar; and, next day, five Londons were winging their way to the Rock.

### Guarding the Straits

The squadron's new home was unique even by the elastic standards of the RAF's ideas of normal bases. The great outcrop of rock projected from Spain on a peninsula of only a few square miles. Honeycombed with caves used as magazines and storage areas, Gibraltar was extremely short of level ground. The town huddled around the base of the rock and the only flat area was the land between the North Front of the rock and the Spanish frontier. Here was to be found the race-course which could serve as a primitive airfield but the proximity of the border and the definition of part of the flat area as 'neutral ground' seemed to prevent its development to any great degree.

A naval base of Gibraltar's importance could not be left without air support. As the key to the entrance to the Mediterranean, its approaches had to be patrolled and No. 202's Londons were now on hand for this task. Operating from Algeciras Bay and hemmed in by neutral territory, flying was difficult even in good weather. Fascist Spain owed its existence to Germany and Italy and was not disposed to be accommodating to

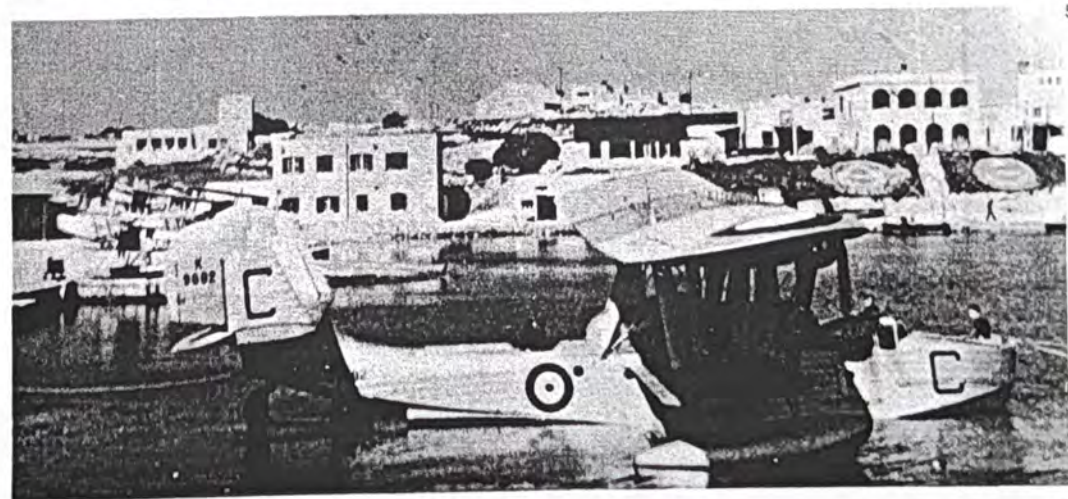
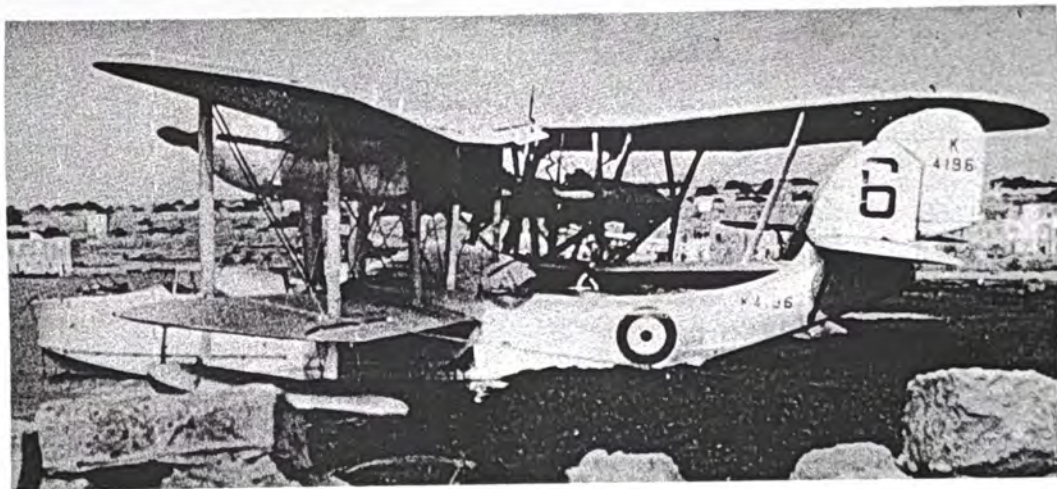
1 Farewell to the Fairey IIIF. The last of No. 202's floatplanes at Kalafrana in June 1935  
(Photo: No. 202 Squadron collection)

2 No. 202's first Scapa (K4192) taxis into Marsaxlokk Bay on 1 May 1935 with Flight Lieutenant C. W. Dickson nonchalantly manning the side (Photo: No. 202 Squadron collection)

3 S1373 flying near the Kalafrana oil installation is fitted with early-type exhaust stubs, later replaced by 'ram's horns'. (Photo: No. 202 Squadron collection)

4 Resting on the shingle of Marsaxlokk Bay a Scapa (K4196) beside a Short Rangoon of No. 210 Squadron in 1936 (Photo: No. 202 Squadron collection)

5 A London (K9682) just after launching at Kalafrana. In the background are two Supermarine Walrus amphibians of the Royal Navy's Mediterranean Fleet whose aircraft were frequent visitors to the seaplane station (Photo: No. 202 Squadron collection)





the occupiers of a piece of territory which it hoped to acquire in the event of a German victory. Straying aircraft were met by anti-aircraft fire from the mainland.

A London (K9683) set out on the squadron's first patrol from Gibraltar on 11 September. At first, a major requirement was the location of any German shipping in the area. Many merchant ships were identified in Spanish harbours and a watch was kept for any excursions. For short-range patrols, the Londons were supplemented by Fairey Swordfish floatplanes from No. 3 AACU (Anti-Aircraft Co-operation Unit). For night landings, the Admiralty tug *St Day* acted as a replacement for a flarepath, using marker lights and a 10in searchlight. In December *Dumana* arrived to serve as headquarters for No. 86 Wing and doubled as an officers' mess.

On 26 December, a No. 202 London (K6931) sighted the German freighter *Glucksberg* off Cadiz and signalled the ship to stop while informing by radio the destroyer *Wishart*. The freighter chose to ignore the London's signal and headed for the mouth of the Guadalquivir as *Wishart* raced to intercept. Cut off from her objective, *Glucksberg* ran herself aground on the Spanish coast and was abandoned.

Throughout the winter, patrols were kept up in spite of a lack of spare parts. Strength was nominally eight boats but the number available each day averaged about three. Maintenance was still being carried out at Kalafrana.

By June 1940 the events in Europe brought about

major changes in Gibraltar's tactical position. France retired from the war and Italy joined in for what Mussolini thought were the last few weeks of fighting. At a stroke, Gibraltar was isolated. Instead of friendly bases in Morocco and Algeria to divert to if the weather closed in at Gibraltar, there was now no alternative base closer than Cornwall, Malta or Gambia; none of them were even remotely within reach.

A refusal by the new Vichy regime in France to order the French fleet to a British or neutral port to prevent it falling into German hands resulted in a No. 202 London (K5913) being sent to Oran to photograph the naval base. Two battle-cruisers, two old battleships, a seaplane carrier, six destroyers and four submarines were plotted. The purpose of this flight became obvious on 3 July when, after an ultimatum requiring the French Fleet to place itself out of reach of the Germans was rejected, a force of British ships bombarded Oran and blew up one battleship and damaged many other ships.

Two Sunderlands of No. 228 arrived to supplement No. 202's patrols which had now to cover areas previously the responsibility of French aircraft from North Africa. Being near Italian air bases, Kalafrana had become too vulnerable to permit maintenance to continue there and the Londons were now flown back to England for overhaul. Occasionally, submarines were sighted and attacked and air raids from Italian and French aircraft took place. These caused no

damage to the squadron but mechanical failure did. A London (K5260) made a forced landing 20 miles out to sea on 12 August and sank under tow. Another (K5909) en route from Britain failed to arrive and a London set off to search for the missing boat. The crew were fortunate in being located in the open sea by a Royal Navy Blackburn Skua and the London was towed into Gibraltar by the destroyer *Forester*.

An attempt to capture Dakar by the Free French during September required the Londons to keep watch on Casablanca to report any movement of French warships. As Vichy fighters were based there, it was not a task which should have been allotted to obsolete flying-boats; but there was no other unit within range. On 13 September, two Londons (K6930 and K5908) took turns to watch the French naval base and were fired on. Next day, five more Londons maintained patrols and one (K9682), with Flight-Lieutenant MacCallum and crew, sent out an SOS and disappeared. Casablanca later signalled that the crew had reached the coast safely. Another London (L7043) was shadowed by four French fighters for a time but was not attacked. In many French units, feelings differed among their personnel, some supporting the Vichy regime and others still hoping for a British victory. A number succeeded in escaping with their aircraft to join the Free French, others avoided action with British aircraft while some were fanatically hostile—they blamed Britain for France's defeat.

On 18 October 1940, hours of fruitless patrolling





paid off. Flight-Lieutenant N. F. Eagleton and his crew (in K5909) and Flight-Lieutenant Hatfield and crew (K5913) sighted oil bubbles and dropped depth charges on the spot which damaged the Italian submarine *Durbo* sufficiently for it to surface and be captured by destroyers. It was to be the London's only success against an enemy submarine.

The Swordfish of No. 3 AACU were transferred to No. 202 Squadron on 27 October 1940 and became 'B' Flight. The three floatplanes were used for patrols over the approaches to Gibraltar and gave good service. Being designed to operate from the decks of aircraft carriers, Swordfish could stand up to rough handling with minimal maintenance.

Wing-Commander T. Q. Horner was subjected to the attentions of a pair of Vichy French Curtiss Hawk 75As while patrolling off Casablanca (in K5909) on 28 January 1941 but escaped with a few bullet holes. Next month, another London experienced difficulties and force-landed in heavy seas while escorting a convoy. The destroyer *Isis* rescued Flight Lieutenant Nicholls and his crew but the flying-boat (K5263) foundered under tow three hours later. A strong easterly gale on 11 April resulted in a No. 202 boat (K6930) becoming airborne while attached to its buoy. On falling back to the water, it turned turtle and the two occupants escaped through hatches and were picked up with difficulty. The Bessoneau hangar housing the floatplanes on Gun Wharf was blown down and a Swordfish (L9770) was wrecked.

These losses were made up on 24 April when two Consolidated Catalinas (AH537 and AH538) were taken over by No. 202. The Catalina was the US Navy patrol boat equivalent of the Sunderland but had only two engines. Earlier versions had set up several records for long-range flights with the US Navy but had not been selected by the British Purchasing Commission as they were not up to the standards of RAF requirements. The improved PBV-5 version lacked armament, its four hand-operated machine-guns offering only light defence against enemy fighters. Despite this, the need for more maritime reconnaissance aircraft resulted in orders being placed after war broke out. Once in service, they proved their worth in very long patrols over areas out of range of enemy aircraft, leaving the heavily-armed Sunderlands to cope with more dangerous regions.

No. 202's new boats were powered by 1200 h.p. Pratt & Whitney R-1830 'Twin Wasp' radials which gave them a speed of 190 m.p.h. and a range of about 4,000 miles. Fifteen-hour patrols were common and some lasted up to 24. Visibility from a pair of large transparency 'blisters' was excellent. During May, three Catalinas arrived at Gibraltar, W8410 being the first to take up station on 7 May.

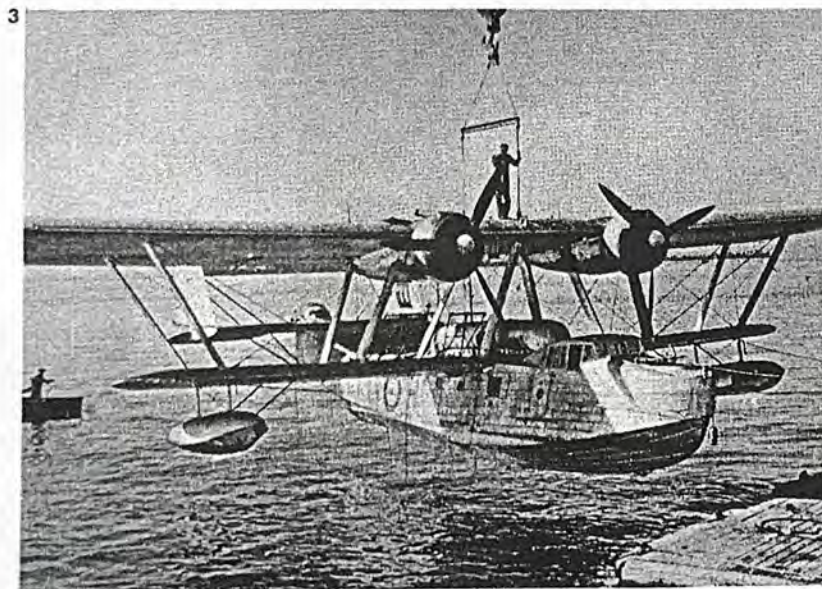
When, on 4 June 1941, Flight Lieutenant Levien landed, he had completed the last patrol by a London (K5911) of No. 202 Squadron. Three days later, one of the Catalinas (W8407) was lost en route from England; having sent out an SOS warning Gibraltar that its

1 'B/202' (K6932) moored in the harbour at Gibraltar. Fitted with the then-standard long-range saddle tank, it is London carries four anti-submarine bombs (Photo: No. 202 Squadron collection)

2 Gun Wharf, Gibraltar, home of No. 202 from September 1939. The hangar was used to house the Swordfish floatplanes and aircraft were hoisted on to the quay by means of the steam crane whose smoke partly obscures a London (Photo: No. 202 Squadron collection)

3 'H/202' is hoisted on to Gun Wharf, Gibraltar. The three-blade propellers have replaced the original four-blade variety (Photo: No. 202 Squadron collection)

4 A Catalina lies over Gibraltar in 1942. On the extreme left is the airfield where a Vickers-Armstrongs Wellington is taking-off and Lockheed Hudsons are parked on the edge of the 'Neutral Zone.' At the eastern end of the airfield are parked the Gloster Gladiators of the local meteorological flight and some fighters. (Photo: IWM, CM 6239)





Patrols over the convoy routes continued with occasional encounters with enemy aircraft from the west coast of France, usually Focke-Wulf FW 200 Condors. On 25 October, 'A/202' (AH538) with Squadron-Leader Eagleton and crew aboard was searching ahead of convoy HG75 when a submarine was sighted. Running in, the Catalina blazed away with machine-gun fire and dropped two depth charges. Both failed to explode so an escort vessel was signalled. The destroyer *Lamerton* opened fire on the submarine which was then scuttled—its survivors identified the victim as the Italian *Ferraris*.

Flight-Lieutenant Powell and crew in 'C/202' (AJ162) caught a U-boat submerging on 2 May 1942 and dropped all depth charges in a salvo on the vanishing craft. This submarine, U-74, was finally despatched by a pair of Royal Navy destroyers. Another Catalina ('F/202'; AJ158) was less fortunate while escorting a convoy bound for Malta on 18 May. Investigating two small ships on fire, the Catalina was attacked by Vichy French Dewoitine D 520 fighters off Algiers and forced down. A destroyer, HMS *Isis*, rescued the crew, including the badly-wounded pilot. But a Royal Navy Fairey Fulmar carrierborne fighter which came to the scene was immediately shot down by one of the D 520s. A Sunderland of No. 10 Squadron, Royal Australian Air Force, had intercepted signals from the Catalina and arrived overhead to cover the destroyer. Two French fighters were seen approaching and the Sunderland climbed to intercept them. After firing a burst of cannon from long range, the D 520s

made off before coming within effective range of the Sunderland's own guns. That evening, Catalina 'C/202' (AJ162) landed near the destroyer to take off the wounded pilot and fly him back to Gibraltar.

To supplement No. 202's Catalinas, some Sunderlands were added to the squadron's strength, T9084 making the first patrol on 26 December 1941. Eighteen served with the squadron at various times during the next nine months. A Sunderland ('R/202'; W6002), with Flying-Officer Walshe and crew aboard, sank the Italian submarine *Alabastro* on 14 September 1942 with six depth charges in the eastern Mediterranean. Six days later, the last Sunderland patrol was flown and the three remaining aircraft flown back to Britain to be reallocated to No. 119 Squadron.

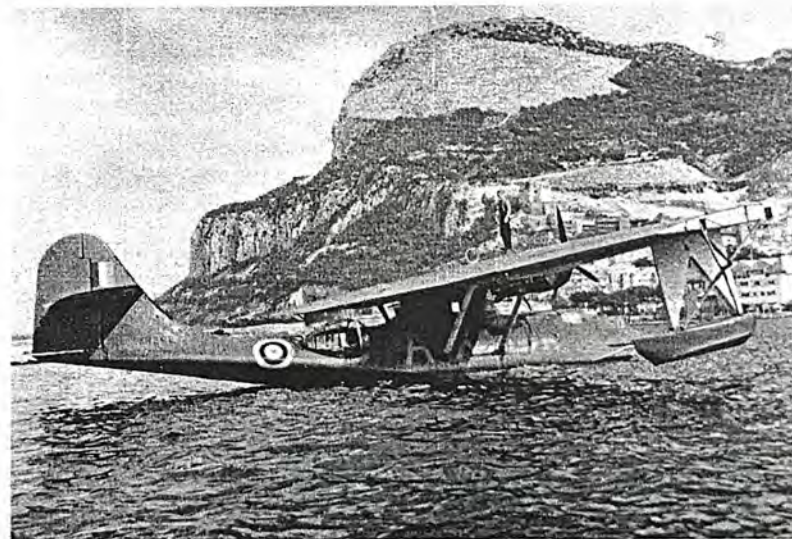
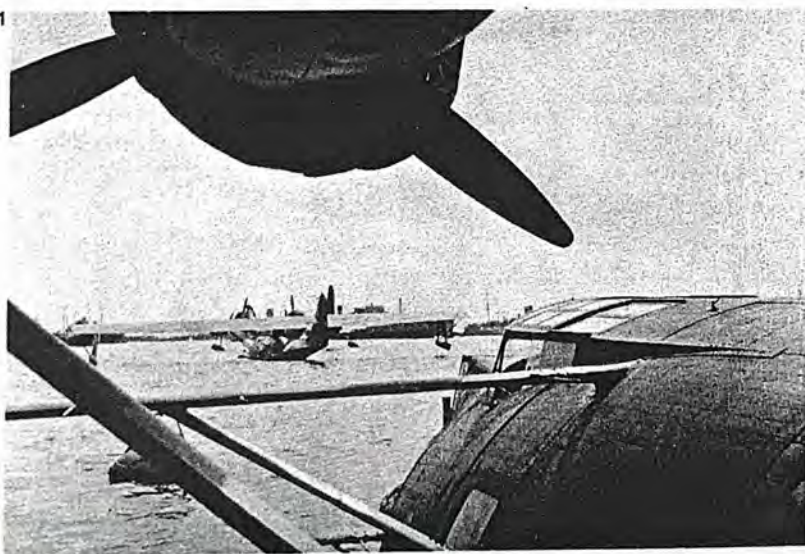
November 1942 was a busy month for No. 202. Operation 'Torch' was under way and large convoys from Britain and the USA headed for North Africa. By this time, the Gibraltar airfield site on the Spanish frontier had been expanded by building a runway and parking areas. Since the neck of land was too narrow to contain a runway aligned in the only possible direction, a wide tongue of reclaimed land was built out into the bay. As invasion time approached, the 'neutral area' became distinctly warlike as numerous Supermarine Spitfires were prepared for the flight to airfields in Algeria as soon as they were captured. Lockheed Hudsons arrived to augment No. 202's patrols and every inch of ground was used to accommodate aircraft. Now uncertain about an ultimate German victory, and relieved that they had turned down an earlier German suggestion

that they should invade the Rock, Spain made only muted protests.

Follow-up convoys increased the concentration of shipping using the Strait and the short duration of French resistance was fortunate as it enabled Gibraltar airfield to be cleared of fighters and allowed patrol aircraft to begin operating from Algeria, supplemented by US Navy amphibians from Morocco. For No. 202, this meant that at last a diversionary base was available from which to escape the weather, if necessary.

German U-boats made many attempts to cut the convoy routes without success. In the process, U-620 was caught by Flight-Lieutenant H. R. Sheardown and crew aboard 'J/202' on 13 February 1943—and sunk while lying in wait for convoy KMS 9. As more anti-submarine aircraft became available and more effective tactics and equipment were evolved, the U-boats changed from hunters to hunted. Sightings decreased as U-boats were forced into operating as far from land as possible.

It was a year before No. 202 added another U-boat (U-761) to its score. Flight-Lieutenant J. Finch and crew (in 'G/202') were on patrol when the radio-operator intercepted a sighting report. Altering course, the Catalina came across two US Navy PBV-5 Catalinas and a Lockheed Vega PV-1 Ventura circling a pair of destroyers. Nearby, the U-boat surfaced, the ships opened fire and a Catalina dropped sticks of bombs nearby. The U-boat then headed south on the surface and 'G/202' began to run up from starboard. A salvo of depth charges straddled the





U-boat which blew up. The assessment board allotted a share in sinking *U-761* to 'G/202' and US ships and aircraft.

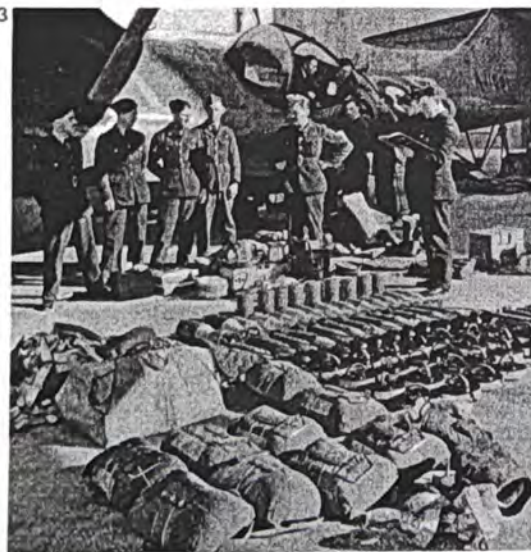
On 3 September 1944, No. 202 was ordered to the UK and its spell of duty at Gibraltar was over. On the 5th, the first three Catalinas left for home.

### Irish Interlude

No. 202's new base was Castle Archdale on the shores of Lough Erne in Ulster. Sunderlands and Catalinas used the calm waters of the Lough as their base for long patrols over the North Atlantic. Unfortunately, the neutral territory of Southern Ireland lay between them and the sea, necessitating a detour round the mountainous region to the west—this hazard claimed a number of aircraft in bad weather.

No. 202's sea party arrived at Castle Archdale on 19 September, where training began on new radar and with Leigh Lights, an airborne searchlight. Strength of the squadron was now 17 aircraft manned by 197 aircrew. Total personnel was 62 officers and 271 other ranks. Operations began on 16 September.

The weather was very bad during the winter of 1944-45. Two boats were lost through crashing into high ground. One Catalina IVA ('P/202'; JX242) failed to return from patrol on 20 November and was found crashed on Magho Hill on the west side of Lough Erne. Eight of the crew of 10 had perished. Exactly one month later, another Catalina IVA ('F/202'; JX208) crashed into mountains at Castle Gregory, near Tralee with the loss of its entire crew of nine.



Despite their long range, the Catalinas were used mainly for coastal patrols. U-boats had been fitted with the 'Schnorkel' device enabling them to recharge their batteries without surfacing. Only a tell-tale ribbon of smoke from the diesels revealed the position of the submarine whose activities were now concentrated in coastal waters. The weather finally stopped all activity on Lough Erne by freezing it solid—an unprecedented event. As the ice grew to six inches thick, as many boats as possible were beached while the marine craft section maintained a constant patrol in their refuellers and bomb scows in an attempt to prevent the remaining boats being nipped in the ice. For seven days, Castle Archdale was out of action until a thaw set in.

For the rest of the war, coastal patrols brought no results despite the use of sonobuoys to locate submerged U-boats. Germany's 'Third Reich' crumbled and the war came to an end with the act of unconditional surrender signed at Rheims on 7 May. Two days later, a No. 202 Catalina sighted *U-1058* flying a black flag and heading for Londonderry; the first of a stream of

1 Catalinas of No. 202 Squadron moored in Gibraltar harbour. The strutter fitted to the hull of the Catalina in the foreground carried a radar array; more compact fittings were normal (Photo: IWM. CM2308)

2 This Catalina (AH562) has acquired No. 413 Squadron's code 'AX' but no individual letter when photographed at moorings in Gibraltar harbour. Several squadrons supplied aircraft for attachment to No. 202 at Gibraltar (Photo: IWM. CM2307)

3 Stores ready for loading on a Catalina for a patrol include bombs, ammunition, flares, emergency kits, rations, parachutes and a dinghy (Photo: IWM. CM2311)

4 Catalina IVBs of No. 202 equipped with Leigh Lights fly over Killadeas on Lough Erne. Sunderlands and Catalinas of No. 131 Operational Training Unit are waterborne on the lough (Photo: No. 202 Squadron collection)



surrendering U-boats. Patrols were maintained until 2 June—the last being flown by 'S/202'.

With squadrons being disbanded, Sunderlands were now available for the remaining squadrons and Catalina units soon disbanded. On 24 June, Wing-Commander Lindsay made the last flight of a No. 202 Squadron Catalina when he flew over London on the occasion of the stand-down on the Royal Observer Corps. The squadron had officially disbanded on 12 June, 24 crews being posted to No. 220 Squadron to fly Consolidated Liberators in RAF Transport Command.

### The Weathermen

In the spite of renumbering that afflicted the RAF squadrons in the years following the end of the war, many famous numbers vanished temporarily. To recreate the pre-war list, many squadrons which still existed—but had very short histories—were renumbered, one of these was No. 518 Squadron at Aldergrove.

Formed on 9 July 1943 as a meteorological unit, No. 518 had no hope of remaining under its original squadron identity. On 1 October 1946, it was renumbered No. 202 Squadron. Its equipment consisted of converted Handley Page Halifax bombers fitted out with thermometers and barometers for meteorological flights.

British weather depends mainly on a westerly wind and what happens over the Atlantic usually affects the British Isles within a short period. During the war, the fate of thousands of aircraft operating over Europe depended on good weather forecasting as unexpected meteorological changes could mean that many would be lost returning to bases which had been closed by fog, rain or low cloud. Several squadrons were formed to maintain regular meteorological flights not only over the sea but also over enemy territory using Supermarine

Spitfires and de Havilland Mosquitos.

The squadron's wartime Halifaxes were far from ideal for long over-water flights in all weathers. Irregular meteorological flights were of little use to the weather experts at the Air Ministry. An international flotilla of corvettes and frigates was positioned in the Atlantic at fixed points to report weather conditions but only aircraft could verify high-altitude data. Many airlines had opened transatlantic routes soon after the end of the war and the Lockheed Constellations, Boeing Stratocruisers and Douglas DC-4s and DC-6s of the time were very dependent on good weather reporting, being relatively short-ranged aircraft by comparison with the jet airliners that replaced them.

In 1950, a replacement for the old Halifaxes became available. The Handley Page Hastings was the RAF's first post-war transport and was a roomy four-engined aircraft which could provide ample space for meteorological crews and their equipment. Its well-tryed Bristol Hercules sleeve-valve air-cooled radials were reliable and gave the Hastings a cruising speed of nearly 300 m.p.h. when required with a useful range to enable it to carry out all the tasks allotted to the squadron.

For many years, a Hastings heading out over the Atlantic was a familiar sight in Ulster. When finally they ceased their sorties, it was because their role was about to be overtaken by a device unthought of when No. 202 first set off with their thermometers. Orbiting in space around the world was a meteorological satellite sending back pictures of the weather far below. In such an environment, Hastings were as obsolete as rowing galleys and the squadron was disbanded on 31 July 1964.

### Search and Rescue

By 1964, the all-yellow Westland Whirlwind helicopters of the RAF had become familiar sights along the beaches

of the British Isles. Two squadrons maintained detachments at stations along the coast for the purpose of rescuing RAF crews unfortunate enough to end up in the sea. In addition, the helicopters were frequently called upon to rescue holidaymakers stranded by the tide, yachtsmen caught by squalls, merchant seamen from ships gone aground in inaccessible places and numerous other human beings who had managed to place themselves in the most unlikely predicaments.

No. 228 Squadron at Leconfield in Yorkshire was dispersed around the East Coast when it was informed that as from 1 September 1964, it would be renumbered 202 Squadron. During the previous year, 393 calls had been made on the rescue helicopters, only a very small proportion being in answer to military requests.

In the succeeding years, No. 202 operated from Coltishall in Norfolk, Acklington in Northumberland and Leuchars in Fife, in addition to its Yorkshire-based headquarters at Leconfield. Rescues were made not only from the sea and coastline but also from mountains where aircraft had crashed or climbers had become lost or injured.

When rescues were called for on account of the weather, it meant that the squadron's Whirlwinds were operating in marginal conditions. One especially hazardous rescue was when the oil rig *Sea Gem* collapsed in heavy seas 40 miles off the coast of Lincolnshire on 27 December 1965. In gale force winds and the temperature below zero, a Whirlwind from Leconfield arrived over the thick patch of oil that marked the place where *Sea Gem* had stood. Three survivors were seen in the water and the helicopter winched down a member of its crew, Sergeant J. Reeson, into 20 foot high waves. One man was successfully hooked onto the cable and hauled up to safety; then to be lowered onto the heaving deck of a ship standing by. Although the rescue crewman had sustained injuries from hitting the mast of the ship and had been affected by seawater and oil swallowed during the first rescue, a second attempt was made. This resulted in success and another man was winched down onto the deck of the rescue ship.

By now, their rescuer was in a state of collapse and had to be replaced by the navigator who managed to collect a third survivor from the sea. For determination and courage, Sergeant John Reeson of No. 202 Squadron was awarded the George Medal.

Today, the Whirlwinds still clatter out from their bases to the rescue of those in peril. Their effective pick-up range is only 82 miles and replacement with something larger and possessing longer-range capability is overdue. But no matter how elderly their helicopters may be, No. 202's Whirlwind crews are always standing by to answer any call for help from those in danger on land or on the sea.







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- 1 Hastings 'B/202' (TG623) heads out from Aldergrove on a *Bismuth* patrol over the North Atlantic to gather meteorological information (Photo: MoD. PRB24284)
- 2 A Whirlwind of No. 202 brings help to a snowbound farm in Yorkshire cut off from the outside world by blizzards. (Photo: Yorkshire Post)
- 3 To spotlight enemy U-boats at night, Coastal Command aircraft used the Leigh Light. On a Catalina, this was fixed in a self-contained pack under the starboard wing (Photo: Saunders-Roe 220)

#### SQUADRON BASES

Bergues, France	1 April 1918
Varssenaere, Belgium	18 November 1918
Driffield, Yorkshire	24 March 1919 to 22 January 1920
Alexandria, Egypt	9 April 1920 to 16 May 1921
Calafra, Malta	1 January 1929
Ras-el-Tin, Alexandria, Egypt	26 September 1938
Calafra, Malta	13 October 1938
Gibraltar	10 September 1939
Castle Archdale, Fermanagh, Ulster	19 September 1944 to 12 June 1945
Aldergrove, Antrim, Ulster	1 October 1946 to 31 July 1964
Leconfield, Yorkshire	1 September 1964
Detached Flights as follows:	
'A' Flight: Acklington, Northumberland	
'B' Flight: Leconfield, Yorkshire	
'C' Flight: Leuchars, Fife	
'D' Flight: Coltishall, Norfolk	

#### SQUADRON EQUIPMENT

Period of Use and Typical Serial and Code Letters

Airco D.H.4	April 1918 to March 1919	A7986
Airco D.H.9	May 1918 to September 1918	B7630
Short 184	April 1920 to May 1921	
Fairey IIID	January 1929 to September 1930	S1078
Fairey IIIF	July 1930 to August 1935	S1386 (5)
Supermarine Scapa	May 1935 to December 1937	K4191
Saro London II	September 1937 to June 1941	K5264 (TQ-L)
Fairey Swordfish I	September 1940 to June 1941	K8354 (TQ-D)
Consolidated Catalina IB	April 1941 to January 1945	AJ160 (TQ-S)
Consolidated Catalina IV	October 1944 to June 1945	JX242 (TQ-P)
Short Sunderland I, II	December 1941 to September 1942	W4024 (TQ-N)
Short Sunderland III	March 1942 to September 1942	DV962
Handley Page Halifax Met. 6	October 1946 to May 1951	RG780 (TQ-J)
Handley Page Halifax A.9	August 1949 to December 1950	RT786 (TQ-A)
Handley Page Hastings Met.1	October 1950 * to July 1964	TG565 (H)
Westland Whirlwind HAR.10	September 1964 to date	XP403

\* Conversion training began in July 1950 before allocation of squadron aircraft

#### COMMANDING OFFICERS

Sqn Cdr B. S. Wemp	1 April 1918
Major R. Gow	7 April 1918
Capt J. Robinson	1 January 1920
S/Ldr W. G. Sitwell	21 March 1920
S/Ldr P. A. Shepherd	15 September 1920
S/Ldr C. Boumphrey DFC	1 January 1929 *
S/Ldr R. H. Kershaw	28 January 1930 †
S/Ldr H. W. Evans	31 July 1931
S/Ldr A. H. Wann	7 September 1932
S/Ldr J. H. O. Jones	17 May 1934 ‡
W/Cdr E. F. Turner AFC	7 December 1935
W/Cdr G. W. Bentley DFC	19 March 1938
W/Cdr E. A. Blake MM	29 March 1939
W/Cdr A. D. Rogers AFC	15 March 1940
S/Ldr T. Q. Horner	28 August 1940
W/Cdr L. F. Brown	4 March 1941
W/Cdr A. A. Case	2 February 1942
W/Cdr B. E. Dobb	6 January 1943
W/Cdr G. P. Harger DFC	12 December 1943
W/Cdr D. S. Lindsay DFC	7 November 1944
W/Cdr L. Coulson	1 October 1946
W/Cdr J. R. Armistead DFC	10 April 1947
S/Ldr E. W. Deacon DSO DFC	10 March 1948
S/Ldr T. A. Cox DSO DFC	10 November 1949
S/Ldr F. Ellison AFC	10 January 1951
S/Ldr G. T. Thain DFC	3 March 1953
S/Ldr R. Wood DFC	21 March 1955
S/Ldr C. A. Sullings AFC	19 March 1957
S/Ldr K. J. Barrett	17 March 1959
S/Ldr M. J. Davis	9 March 1961
S/Ldr C. J. Petheram	17 March 1962
S/Ldr B. A. Spry	2 March 1964
S/Ldr G. Stafford	1 September 1964
S/Ldr D. E. Brett	19 October 1965
S/Ldr W. A. Gayer	29 May 1967
S/Ldr K. Henry	7 July 1967
S/Ldr P. T. Taylor AFC	9 July 1969
S/Ldr R. G. Reekie	8 August 1971

\* Fit Lt until 17 July 1929

† To W/Cdr 1 January 1931 ‡ To W/Cdr 4 June 1934