



Flight Against The Bismarck

A Tribute to all Swordfish Air and Ground Crew

by

Philip E. West

Philip E. West is recognised as one of the world's finest aviation artists. Collectors of his original oil paintings span the globe, many waiting patiently for his next breathtaking canvas to appear. Self taught, Philip has won many accolades for his paintings, not the least of which was the prestigious Duane Whitney Award for Excellence at the 1997 American Society of Aviation Artists Exhibition.

***Sub Lieut (A) Stanley T. Brand RNVR (Pilot).** Although in a reserved occupation volunteered on his 18th birthday to train as pilot in the Fleet Air Arm. He flew open cockpit biplane Swordfish aircraft from Merchant Aircraft Carriers called "Macships". These were 8000 ton grain-ships or oil tankers fitted with a flight deck, carrying their usual cargo and manned by a Merchant Navy Master and crew. They sailed in convoy back and forth across the North Atlantic in all the extreme weather conditions experienced on that ocean. The oil tankers lacked a hangar, so maintenance was carried out on open deck exposing the aircraft, ground crew and aircrew to the fury of the sea, ice and gales. By keeping U-boats submerged instead of allowing them free range on the surface, in 24 months only two merchant ships were sunk by the enemy in convoys protected by Macships. This was in spite of there being greater numbers and more efficient U-boats at sea in this period than at the time of our greatest losses in the Battle of the Atlantic.

Lt Cdr. (A) John Moffat RNVR (Pilot) joined the Royal Navy in September 1939 and moved to flying school in December 1939 at Belfast then Netheravon. Then to FAA fighters at Eastleigh on Skuas and Gladiators. Transferred to Torpedo carrying Swordfish then to HMS Ark Royal 818 Squadron at Gibraltar. Convoy Duties – captured supply ship in Bay of Biscay. Two attacks on Bismark accredited with rudder strike. Served on carriers Argus and Furious and as Deck Officer on Formidable. Became Officer Commanding flying at RNAS Cowdray Park in 1943 and was demobbed in 1946.

Commander Sidney Hal (Jim) Suthers DSC DFC RN (Pilot) joined the Air Branch of the Royal Navy in January 1939 and gained his pilot's wings in July 1940. Joined 824 Naval Air Squadron operating Swordfish from HMS Eagle in January 1941. Operations in Red Sea, Indian Ocean, South Atlantic and Mediterranean until September 1942. Instructional duties thereafter until the end of World War II. Post war he converted to helicopters commanding 705 and 848 (Malaya) Naval Air Squadrons.

***Sub. Lieut. Bruce Vibert (Pilot)** volunteered for the Fleet Air Arm in May 1941 and helped to form 842 Squadron, the Royal Navy's last to be formed with the Fairey Swordfish in March 1943.

Working mainly from the escort carrier HMS Fencer during the squadron's two-year existence, the role was anti-submarine, ranging from the occupation of the Azores to North Russia. Protection to the Home Fleet was also given during two operations against "Tirpitz", sheltering in Northern Norway. The Squadron finally came under Coastal Command to work the Western Approaches and English Channel. It achieved several successes against the U-Boats.

He later served in the Pacific as a deck landing control officer before, post war, joining the RCN and there becoming a helicopter pilot. Today he supports the RNHF as a speaker about the Swordfish.

***Lieut (A) N C Gillis RNVR (Pilot)** volunteered for training as a pilot in the Fleet Air Arm in 1940. After training he was posted to join HMS Indomitable and sent to the Far East. The posting did not materialise and after some months in Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) and Nairobi, Kenya, joined 810 Squadron in HMS Illustrious. 810 was a Swordfish squadron and remained so until HMS Illustrious returned to UK.

The squadron then reformed with Barracuda aircraft and rejoined the Illustrious. After a short spell with the Home Fleet the Illustrious was despatched to serve with the Mediterranean Fleet, subsequently returning to the Home Fleet. 810 Squadron served in the ship during this time and was retained in the ship when she returned to the Eastern Fleet and was actively engaged in the Burma campaign. During joint operations with the US Carrier Saratoga Lt Gillis was mentioned in Despatches during the operation at Sabang in Malaysia.

Having overspent his time in an operational squadron he was returned to UK where he served as Dive-Bombing Instructor at RNAS Crail, then converted onto twin-engine aircraft and flew in a Mosquito squadron until demobilised in 1946.

* Signed all the prints, including Artist Proofs and Remarques.

The remaining two men signed only the Artist Proofs and Remarques. These have a total of five signatures.