



WARPAINT SERIES No. 52

Fairey ALBACORE

BY W. A. HARRISON

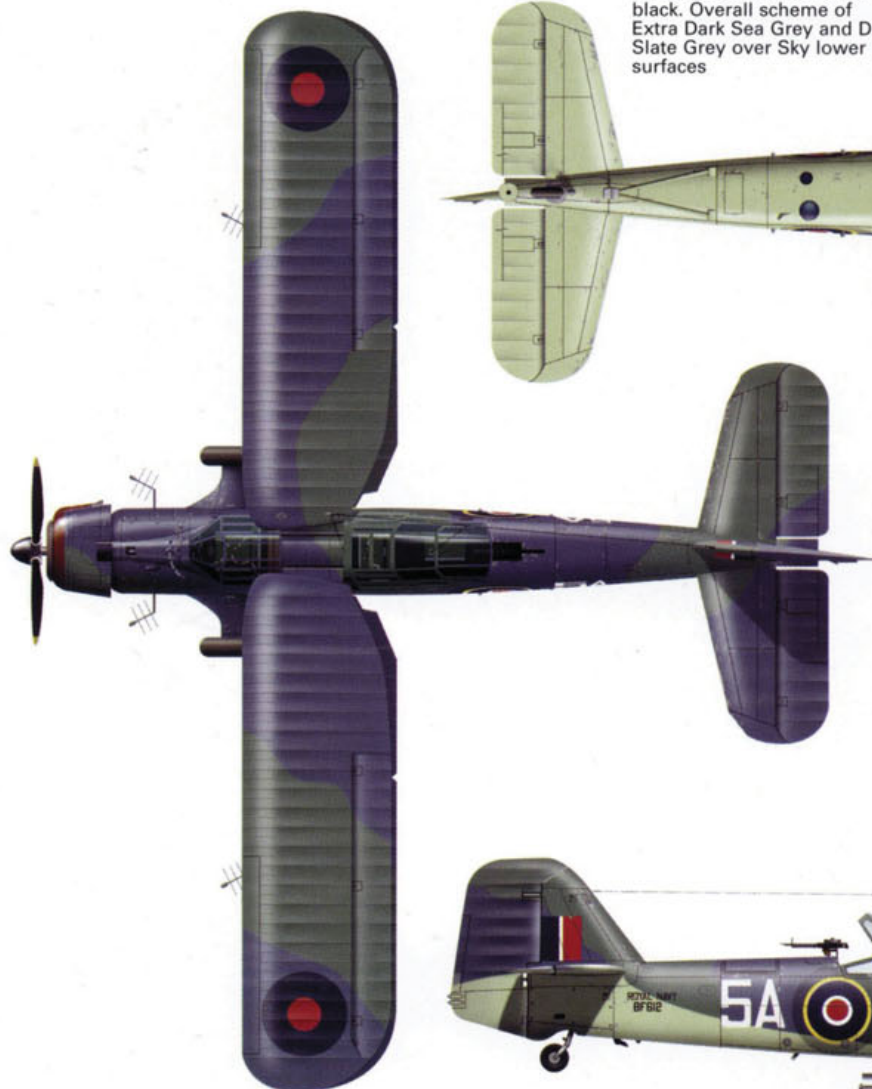
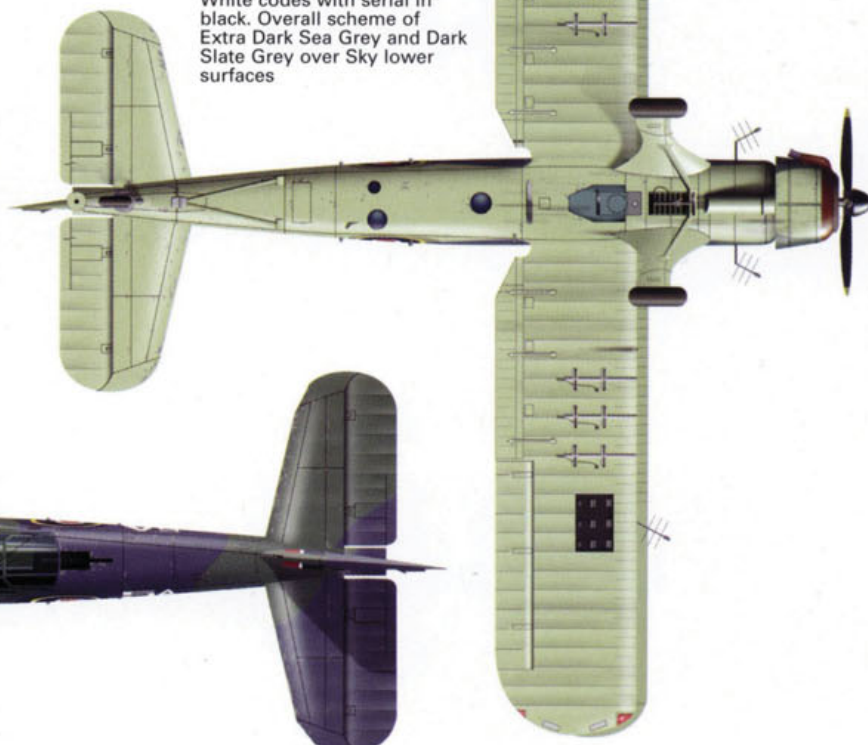
A well weathered Albacore on one of the 'Operation Torch' carriers is loaded with 250lb bombs. Just discernible behind the fin of the inner bomb can be seen the tips of the American star (IWM)



Fairey Albacore



Fairey Albacore Mk II
5A:BF612 817 Squadron, FAA,
1942. Note the overpainting
of the earlier A1 roundel style
with the later B1 roundel.
White codes with serial in
black. Overall scheme of
Extra Dark Sea Grey and Dark
Slate Grey over Sky lower
surfaces



Illustrations by
Tim Brown





Fairey ALBACORE

BY WILLIAM A. HARRISON

There was never anything wrong with the Albacore, for a short time it acted as an important stopgap, providing the Fleet Air Arm (FAA) with an effective operational aircraft until the later more modern types appeared. In fact, if the Air Ministry had accepted one of Fairey's earlier designs they may well have had a monoplane capable of replacing the Swordfish and carrying out similar TSR duties before the Barracuda arrived, and may well have replaced the need for that too! Even after two years of war the FAA were still fighting with biplanes that had free-firing guns and external bomb racks.

THE SPECIFICATIONS

The Air Staff had issued Specification M.7/36 on 8 September, 1936 for a TSR (Torpedo-Spotter-Reconnaissance) aircraft

First prototype Albacore L7074 in natural finish at Fairey's Great West Aerodrome (GWA) from where it made its maiden flight on 12 December 1938 in the hands of test pilot Flt Lt F H Dixon. The blanked off area behind the pilot is the fuselage fuel tank.

to replace the Swordfish, which was just starting along the production lines at Fairey's factory at Hayes in Middlesex. The Admiralty had requested the specification as they became concerned that, in the event of a war, FAA crews would be in open cockpit biplanes.

In the event this was what happened due to their failed efforts to shorten the introduction time of the new aircraft, delaying it by more than six months! The Admiralty told Fairey they wanted the new machine

Viewed from this angle the second prototype, L7075 displays a weathered look. Standing out is the non-retractable step for the crew to get in the rear cockpit. (RAF Museum)

straight off the drawing board, no need even for prototypes, just get on with it.

The specification called for a crew of three, pilot, observer and air-gunner, the latter to have a power-operated twin-gun turret in the rear cockpit. A single fixed forward firing machine gun was to be provided for the pilot. It could be a single or





Above: The second machine L7075 demonstrating the flaps. The wheel spats, while attractive, were not suited for operations from grass airfields and carrier decks and were deleted. Below: Another view of the first Albacore L7074 showing the clean head on view. The single-bay equi-span wings are shown to good effect. The dummy bombs are for publicity purposes.



twin-engined aircraft able to carry out all the tasks of the Swordfish and, like the latter, be capable of quickly being converted for floatplane operation. Within a totally enclosed cockpit cabin heating was called for.

Wing span was to be not more than 50ft (18ft folded), length 37ft (44ft with floats), with a height of 14ft 9in and an All Up

Weight (AUW) not to exceed 10,000lb. Cruising speed at two-thirds maximum engine power at maximum cruising rpm was to give not less than 183 knots at 6,000ft with a stalling speed not below 58 knots. Fuel capacity was to give a range of 600 sea miles at 120 knots at 7,000ft, with allowances for maximum power at sea level when taking off with a torpedo or bomb

load. Not less than six hours endurance was required at 2,500ft at 120 knots. Service ceiling should be above 20,000ft at normal loads.

Take-off distance at normal AUW was to be 200ft against a 20 knot wind. To meet these requirements Fairey's design staff met with the Air Ministry and Admiralty but no-one could make up their minds. Eventually Fairey submitted no less than 17 designs including both biplane and monoplane layouts with different types of engine.

At a meeting on 22 January 1937 the Admiralty said they still preferred a biplane layout. Early as December 1936 Fairey were offering a monoplane powered by a Bristol Taurus or Mercury engine or, as a sop to the Admiralty, a Taurus-engined biplane. They stated 'This aircraft is designed primarily as a torpedo-spotter-reconnaissance machine to Specification M.7/36, but can be used as a dive-bomber to cover the requirements of Specification O.8/36. After having examined various wing arrangements, the conclusion has been reached that, having regard to the present stage of development, the requirements of these specifications are best met by a biplane of orthodox design. This decision is dictated principally by the requirements of take-off, the limitation of dimensions and mechanical difficulties of wing folding'.

Models of some designs were tested in the wind tunnel at the Royal Aircraft Establishment (RAE) Farnborough, Hampshire, providing Fairey with a wealth of knowledge about (biplane) layout, lift and drag under a wide range of conditions. For example, the wind tunnel trials showed that a biplane performance powered by a Hercules engine fared less well than expected.

Looking more warlike this is L7075 in naval camouflage while on spinning trials, hence the package on top of the rear fuselage, and anti-spin strakes at the top of the fin. The camouflage demarcation line, fuselage roundel and fin flash were later changed.

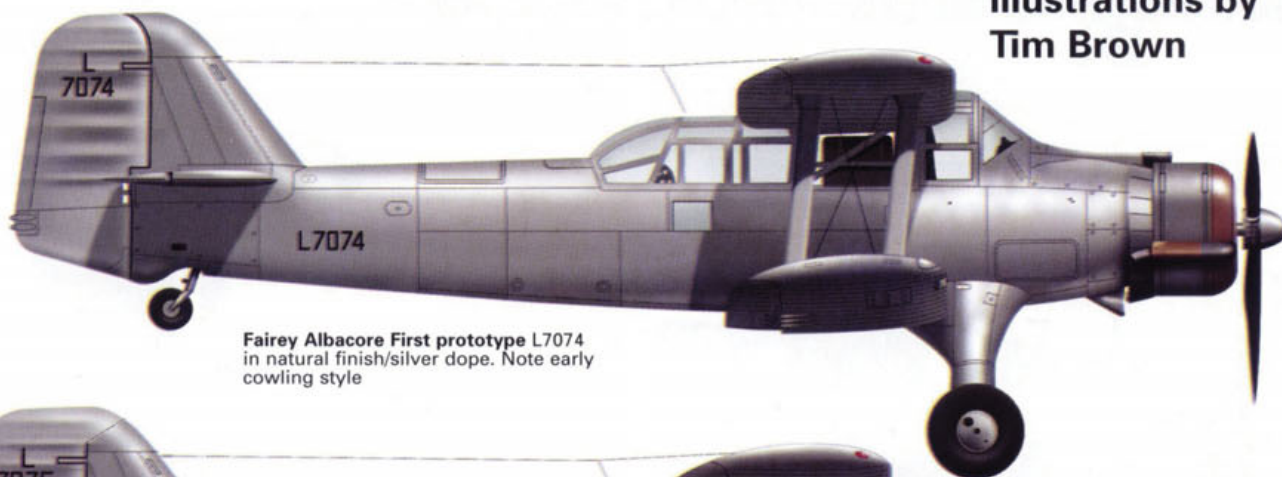


Fairey Albacore camouflage and markings

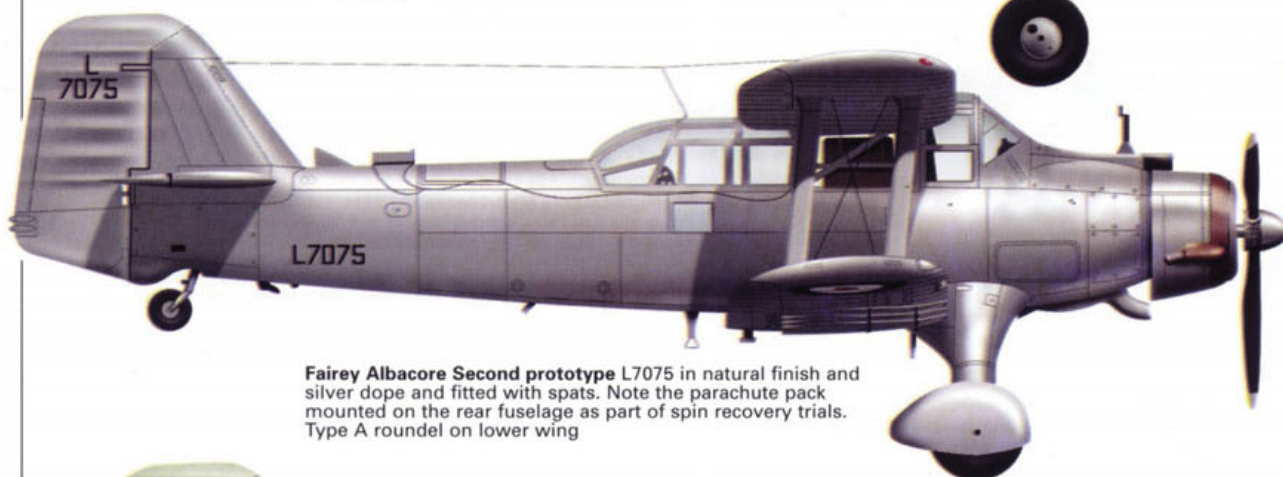
FAIRY ALBACORE COLOUR KEY

												
Night	Black	White	Yellow	Roundel Blue	Roundel Red	Natural Metal	Alluminium	Extra Dark Sea Grey	Dark Slate Grey	Sky	Sky Grey	Bronze

Illustrations by
Tim Brown



Fairey Albacore First prototype L7074 in natural finish/silver dope. Note early cowl style



Fairey Albacore Second prototype L7075 in natural finish and silver dope and fitted with spats. Note the parachute pack mounted on the rear fuselage as part of spin recovery trials. Type A roundel on lower wing



Fairey Albacore Second prototype L7075 again minus spats. Serial in black. Overall scheme of Extra Dark Sea Grey and Dark Slate Grey over Sky lower surfaces. Type A1, B and A roundels



Fairey Albacore Mk I L7083 in factory fresh finish at the Fairey plant, Hayes, 1941. Serial in black. Overall scheme of Extra Dark Sea Grey and Dark Slate Grey over Sky lower surfaces. Note early style A roundel on fuselage and lower wing



Fairey Albacore Mk I 4C: L7097 826 Squadron Bircham Newton September 1940. Serial in black. Overall scheme of Extra Dark Sea Grey and Dark Slate Grey over Sky and Night lower-surfaces. Type A1, B and A roundels with black codes on unusual early style fin flash



MOANA II

Fairey Albacore Mk I 'Moana II' L7114. Damaged by Bf 109s over the English Channel, September 1940. Pilot Lt Cdr Tuke. Serial in black. Overall scheme of Extra Dark Sea Grey and Dark Slate Grey over Sky and black lower surfaces. Type A1, B and A roundels with same style of fin flash as above. The code is unknown but is likely to have been either 4P or 4M

The Admiralty now changed their minds again and said the carriage of a torpedo would not be required. Despite this there was still a requirement to meet Operational Requirement OR.45 which had called for a Torpedo, Spotter and Dive-Bomber for the FAA. A new specification was issued – O.8/36, which was virtually the same as the previous one less the torpedo role. Fairey offered five further design considerations but the Admiralty, still not happy with monoplanes operating from carriers, and, looking for the quick replacement for the Swordfish, opted instead for a biplane design powered by the Taurus engine. In the end the Air Ministry combined the requirements of both specifications and told Fairey on 11 February 1937 to go ahead with such a design to new specification 41/37. There were very few changes to what had been agreed before, except the idea of a gun turret was dropped. Power plant was to be the 1,075hp Bristol Taurus TE-IM rated for 4,500ft. To meet the entry into service date Fairey said that the requirements were best met by a biplane of orthodox design using current tooling and manufacturing processes. As mentioned earlier this decision had been forced on them by take-off requirements, dimension limitations and the mechanical problems of

wing folding. The Admiralty agreed and on 6 May 1937 the Air Ministry ordered 100 Albacores from Fairey.

PRODUCTION

Further orders took the eventual total production to 800 machines, all built in the Fairey factory at Hayes, Middlesex and test flown from the Great West Aerodrome, which now lies beneath London (Heathrow) Airport. At one time it was suggested that Blackburns build the Albacore alongside the Swordfish at their Brough factory in Yorkshire but this was later squashed.

Fairey issued a descriptive brochure on the Albacore which stated 'The aircraft was an orthodox biplane of all metal con-

struction with fabric covered surfaces. The top and bottom wings were of the same dimensions made up of I-section spars and Warren girder ribs. The wing cell was a single box braced with struts and wires, the upper wing joining the fuselage at the top of the cockpit hooding. The lower surface of the bottom wing was metal covered to take drag loads and provide wells in which the bomb carriers were mounted. Frise-type ailerons were fitted to both wings, which had wing tip slots, and specially designed quick operation trailing edge hydraulically controlled flaps were fitted to the top wing only.

The forward fuselage was of braced tubular steel and provided a mount for the Taurus engine and its ancillaries. Aft of the



Looking decidedly smart is Albacore X9151 taken at the Great Western Aerodrome before delivery. It sports a revised camouflage demarcation line, revised roundel and fin flash. It was delivered to Hatston 12 December 1941. (Richard Riding)

Albacore X9217 being readied at the Great Western Aerodrome for delivery to Wroughton on 25 January 1942. (Richard Riding)

cockpit was monocoque construction, innovative at that time for biplanes, providing inherent buoyancy, so essential for carrier aircraft when ditching.

The crew were completely enclosed under a transparent perspex hooding which was arranged to fold quickly to allow emergency exits. The tailplane and fin were metal skin covered, trimming was via servo tabs. Rudder and elevators were metal tubular frames covered in fabric. The undercarriage consisted of a pair of cantilever oleo legs carrying a single transverse spar arranged in front of the front spar of the lower wing, but entirely separate from it. This arrangement allowed the wings to be folded without affecting the position of the undercarriage.

One Vickers forward firing gun was mounted on the starboard lower wing, outside the airscrew disc and operated from the cockpit. One rear manually-operated Vickers 'K' gun was provided on a Battle-type arrangement. Weapon loads could include eight 20lb, six 250lb or three 500lb bombs below the wings, or a single 18in 1,650lb torpedo under the forward fuselage.

During a design conference in March 1937 Fairey said they were concerned that the Taurus engine was behind schedule and that the first production engines would not be available until at least August 1938. This was a bit of a dilemma as Fairey said production of the Swordfish (production of which had been transferred to Blackburns) at Hayes would cease by then to allow production to start on the Albacore. This meant that the production line at Hayes would not

Seen here prior to delivery Albacore X9218 was delivered to Wroughton 26 January 1942 and was known to be serving in 799 Squadron RNAS Wingfield in South Africa during late 1943/early 1944. (Richard Riding)



be making anything for six months!

A mock-up of the proposed biplane was examined by representatives from the Air Ministry and Admiralty on 15 May 1937, a result of which the latter ordered another 300 aircraft – known by now as the Albacore. The major problem was how to get the aircraft built quick enough once Taurus engines were released for use. One plan was to build a dedicated production line factory alongside the existing one at Hayes. Another was to look at other aircraft factories to see whether any had or would have extra capacity by that time. The Air Ministry had cancelled some Blackburn Bothas at their Brough factory and spare capacity would be available there.

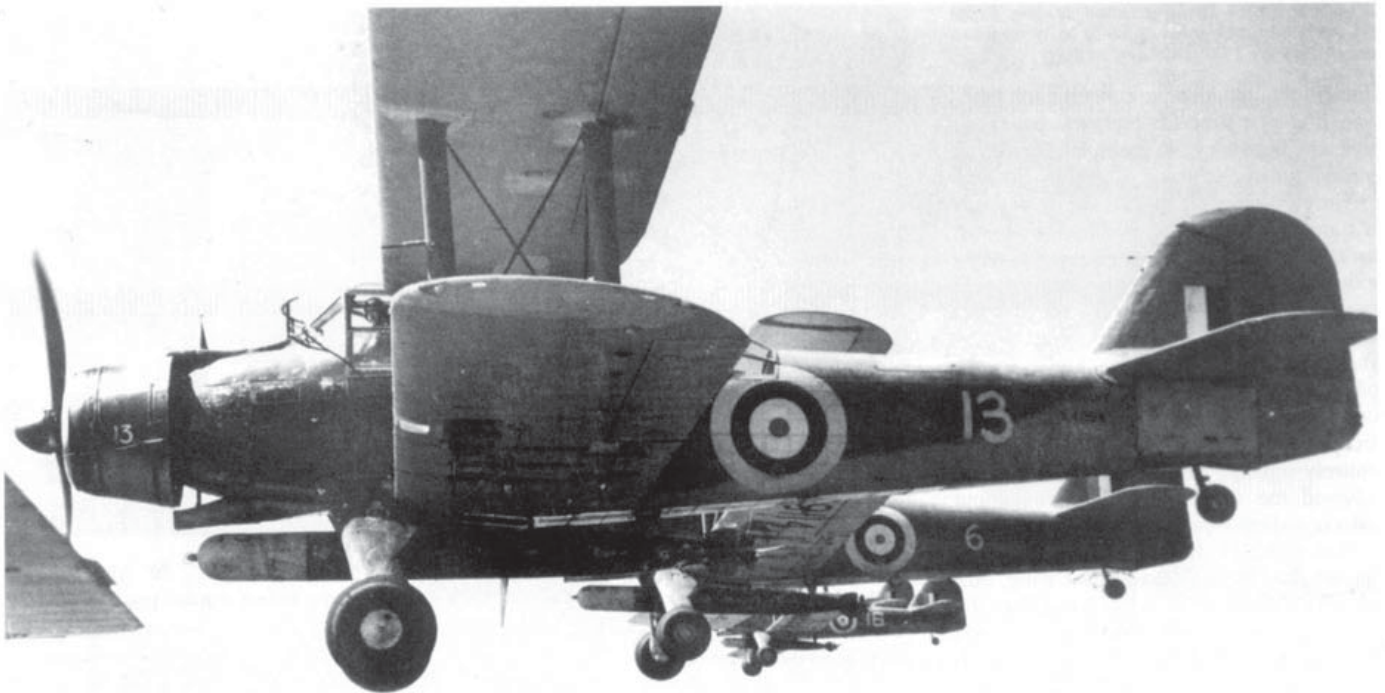
In November 1938 the Ministry decided that Blackburn could build 100 Albacores with plans for final assembly in a purpose-built shop at Brough. To support this plan the Admiralty let on that they were seeking treasury approval for another 400 Albacores and 480 Taurus engines. At a meeting they

stated that they wanted 50 Albacores a month off the Fairey Hayes line and 40 per month from the Brough line, something like 90 Albacores a month! They also suggested that a separate production line could be set up at the Blackburn Dumbarton factory alleviating pressure on the other two.

They also asked Fairey to consider alternative engines if the Taurus proved a failure. One suggestion was the new Rolls-Royce Boreas engine, also known as the Exe and one was allocated by Rolls-Royce to Albacore development. Rolls were to deliver an Exe engine to Fairey at Hayes by 11 November 1939 for installation in the first prototype Albacore L7074.

The programme slipped when L7074 was required for trials so Rolls installed the engine in Fairey Battle K9222 for flight testing at their Hucknall Flight test establishment about two miles north of Nottingham. It was May 1940 before the engine was ready to be submitted for a 50-hour Type Test at a FAA rating which had to





Torpedo training Albacores, including N4294:13 and X9114:6 have numbers crudely painted on while serving with 786 Torpedo Training Unit, Crail in 1941. The second aircraft still has its serial numbers below the wings. (R.E.F. Kerrison)

be followed by dedicated flight testing in an Albacore. To try and speed things up it was suggested that Rolls could do the flight testing and L7074 was delivered to Hucknall in July 1940. This was to allow detailed drawings to be made for modifications to the engine bay so it would accommodate the Exe engine. It was found that mounting such an engine necessitated complete redesign of the nose section and cowlings. Further delays!

The engine mountings were made and fitted to L7074 but now events overtook the rate of progress when it was found the Taurus engine would, after all, be available as Albacores came off the line. As the Admiralty were desperate for Albacores to replace the Swordfish as soon as possible it was, after many meetings, decided to drop the Exe-engined version of the Albacore.

The fuselage of L7074 languished alongside one of the hangers at Hucknall for a time and then quietly scrapped. Due to the slippage on the Albacore programme the Admiralty ordered further Swordfish to be built at Blackburns and cancelled their plan to build Albacores at Brough/Dumbarton. Consequently the orders were transferred to those at Hayes where all 800 Albacores were built by Fairey – as originally planned. Once production got under way semi-complete aircraft were taken by road to the Fairey airfield, known as the Great West Aerodrome, where final assembly and flight testing took place.

Basically, the Albacore was a fabric-covered all-metal three-seat single-engine



Above: Albacore X9259 delivered to Wroughton 8 February 1942 – was still with the Aden Communications Flight in 1946. (Richard Riding) Below: Albacore N4259 was delivered to Lee-on-Solent 1 January 1941 and by April was with 786 Torpedo Training Unit at Crail. (Real Photographs)





Albacore BF604 was delivered to Lee-on-Solent 3 April 1942. It joined 823 Squadron and moved to 822 Squadron in May 1943 as L but crashed in sea 6 July 1943. (Richard Riding)

biplane designed for carrier duties. Up front a 14 cylinder, double-bank, air-cooled, sleeve-valve radial engine, the moderately supercharged Bristol Taurus II or XII gave 1,065hp or 1,130hp respectively. The engine was started by an L-type Coffman cartridge starter, spare cartridges being stored in the rear cockpit. Fitted to the engine was a de Havilland three-bladed, bracket-type, variable pitch propeller with constant speed control.

Aft of the engine entry to the pilot's cockpit was by footsteps in the port side of the fuselage. Not immediately obvious, but very useful, was a hand-hole on top of the leading edge of the port upper mainplane. The

fuselage was of metal monocoque construction but the wings and tail surfaces were fabric covered. Hydraulic flaps were fitted to the lower wing only and could be used as a dive brake, although there was hardly any need in a biplane with a fixed undercarriage!

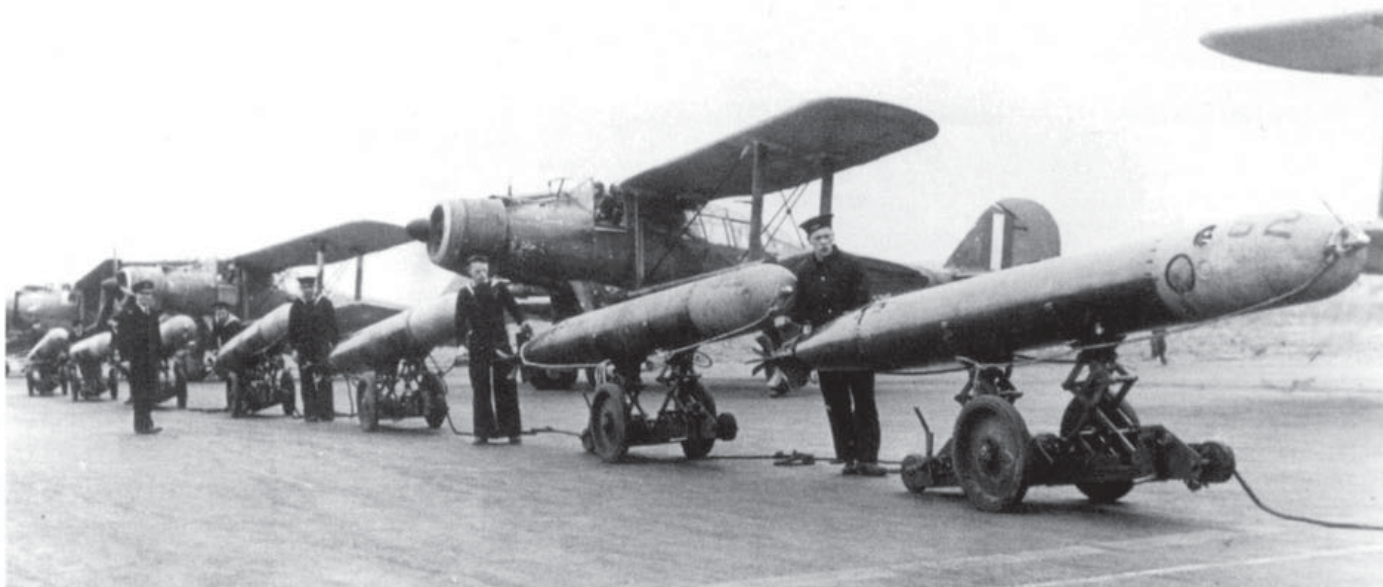
The cockpit canopy was opened by a Bowden cable aft of the canopy, but release from inside was by means of a twist grip on the port side of the canopy roof. The top half of the cockpit side panel could be slid down into the frame by gripping two pegs on the inside of the lower side panel. On the port side an inward opening door allowed access to the rear cockpit area.

The main fuel tank, holding 193 gallons, was located in the fuselage between the front and rear cockpits. An auxiliary tank could be fitted in the rear cockpit at the

expense of one crew member, or carried externally in the torpedo crutches. An 18 gallon oil tank was fitted aft of the firewall. On early production machines an oil cooler was fitted, the cooling flap being operated by the pilot. On later models the cooling flap was only adjustable on the ground. At the rear, a deck arrester hook was fitted beneath the fuselage forward of the tail-wheel. The hook was held up by a snap gear and released by the pilot.

Flt Lt F H Dixon, a Fairey test pilot, first took L7074 into the air for its initial flight from the Great West Aerodrome on 12 December 1938. This proved without problems and both L7074 and L7075, which flew shortly afterwards, went to the

A posed shot at the torpedo training school at Crail. The nearest aircraft has a non-standard fin flash.





Fairey Albacore Mk I 4F:N4159 826 Squadron mid-1940. Note lack of yellow surround to A roundel and large tail flash. Black codes and serial. Overall scheme of Extra Dark Sea Grey and Dark Slate Grey over Sky lower surfaces. Wing shackle carries large depth charges



Fairey Albacore Mk I 4Q:N4421 832 Squadron Crail, Scotland, 1943. Black codes and serial. Overall scheme of Extra Dark Sea Grey and Dark Slate Grey over Sky lower surfaces. Type A1, B and A roundels



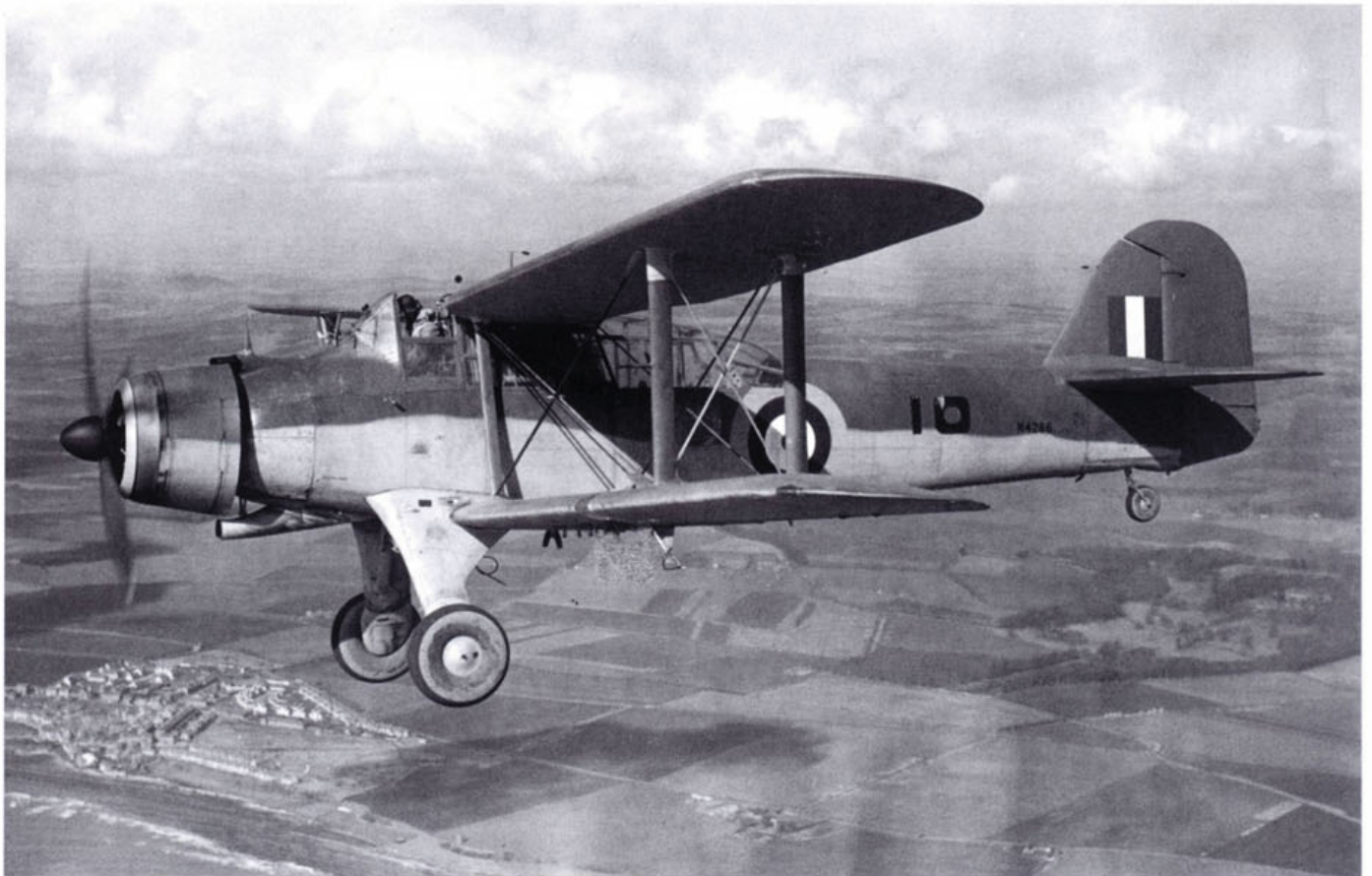
Fairey Albacore Mk II 4L:X9034 832 Squadron, Kaladarnes, Iceland, 1942. Sky codes with serial in black. Overall scheme of Extra Dark Slate Grey and Dark Sea Grey over Sky lower surfaces. Type A1, B and A roundels. armed with depth charges and bombs



Fairey Albacore Mk II 13:N4294 785 Squadron, Crail, 1942. Note crude application of the white code, repeated on the cowlings. Serial in black. Overall scheme of Extra Dark Sea Grey and Dark Slate Grey over Sky lower surfaces. Type A1, B and A roundels



Fairey Albacore Mk II 6:X9114 785 Squadron, Crail, Scotland, 1942. White code, repeated on the cowlings. Serial in black and repeated large under wings. Overall scheme of Extra Dark Sea Grey and Dark Slate Grey over Sky lower surfaces. Type A1, B and A roundels



Albacore N4286 flying off the Scottish coast. It was delivered to Crail 4 March 1941 and originally coded 18. The lower colour has been refreshed and painted over the lower part of the numbers.

Aeroplane and Armament Experimental Establishment (A&AEE) Boscombe Down for preliminary handling trials.

In an effort to get the Albacore into squadron service as quickly as possible L7075 was used for deck landing suitability trials. A&AEE test pilots from Boscombe Down test flew L7075 at the Great West Aerodrome during 5-6 May 1939. It then moved to Martlesham Heath where it was subjected to more trials between 16 and 25 May, during which L7075 carried out deck landings on *Ark Royal* over 23-24 May. The results were favourable, pilots found some directional instability and a slight heaviness with rudder applications, otherwise it was pleasant to fly and suitable for flight deck operations. It was pointed out that, due to the sheer size of the Albacore the pilot had quite a climb to get to the cockpit, but once there it was comfortable and he had an excellent view.

Trials had shown up one undesirable feature – the aircraft had been selected so it could carry out both torpedo and dive-bombing roles. Entering a dive to carry out these roles it was found that once it had settled into a stable dive velocity, the controls became so heavy that it was difficult to pull out.

Trials with a torpedo showed up all sorts

Ratings prepare a torpedo about to be loaded on an Albacore.. The spinner has a black tip with rings of green/red/green and black round the hub. The position of the torpedo sight in front of the pilot's windscreen can be seen with the sighting lights. (IWM)





Nice atmosphere picture of Albacore X9185 which came from the fourth production batch and was delivered on 11 January 1942.

of problems with handling – in the stalled condition either wing could drop which induced aileron snatch and when the leading edge slots were in the free position the stall became unpredictable and vicious. If the pilot had the stick fully back, which was where it should be in a fully developed stall, the aircraft could swing in either direction into a descending flat spiral turn but not develop into a spin. These were undesirable features for an aircraft to carry out dive bombing and torpedo attacks.

L7079 joined L7076 at Boscombe Down for further performance and handling trials, the latter carrying out a series with extended Centre of Gravity positions further aft. This and a number of other small changes combined to overcome the handling problems and aircraft started to enter service.

Production aircraft were to vary slightly to the two prototypes – spats had been fitted over the mainwheels on L7074 and L7075 but this was unrealistic and would have proved difficult to maintain in operational use, so they were discarded. Also, on these two machines, untapered cowlings enclosed the Taurus engine but production aircraft featured tapered cowlings.

The third machine, L7076 went to MAEE at Felixstowe in March 1940 where it underwent floatplane trials on the Solent. It was quickly found that the Albacore floatplane was unsuited to water operations – a disappointment as, like the Swordfish, this was

The Albacore was a pleasant aircraft to look at, the pilot sitting right up front having an excellent view. There was a definite art to delivering a torpedo to be in the right place at the right time – so long as the enemy didn't put you off!

one of the operational requirements of the specification. It was found that, even in relatively calm conditions, it had a tendency to porpoise with water being thrown up into the engine and propeller area. Under the circumstances it was decided that floatplane operations would not be recommended and the role disappeared.

After that there proved to be very few changes to the Albacore during its production and service life. The only major problem to appear when the Albacore joined operational squadrons was the early unreliability of the Taurus II engine with aircraft force landing all over the place. The fault was traced to the maneton bolt but after Bristol cured it there were relatively few in-service problems. Bristol used L7078 during 1939-40 to flight test the 1,065hp Taurus II, with L7125 joining the programme a year later to test the slightly more powerful and

efficient 1,130hp Taurus XII.

ALBACORES JOIN COASTAL COMMAND

It fell to No.826 Squadron to be the first front line unit to receive the new Albacore when it accepted 12 at Ford on 15 March 1940. It formed up under the watchful eye of Lt Frank H. E. Hopkins, who became the Senior Observer when Lt Cdr C. J. T. Stephens took over command of the squadron on 7 April.

During April and early May the squadron flew more than 400 training sorties on the ranges at Littlehampton, Sussex. On 21 April they flew to Jersey for a week of dive-bombing, night-flying training and formation flying.

Returning to Ford the squadron were tasked with supporting the Dunkirk evacua-



tion and on the 29 May 11 Albacores flew to RAF Bircham Newton, Norfolk as a dive-bombing strike force under the mantle of RAF Coastal Command.

Nine Albacores flew south to RAF Detling and set off on their first operation on 31 May to attack German targets in Belgium. A daylight raid, they each delivered six 250lb General Purpose bombs on enemy positions at the crossroads behind Nieupoort Harbour in West Flanders. No fighter escort was provided but they were lucky by not encountering flak or enemy fighters.

That night a number of Albacores carried out anti-E boat patrols in the Flushing area and although one crew attacked three enemy boats damage was slight. One Albacore pilot nearly made a name for himself when he came up behind a He III bomber, only to find his single 0.303 Browning frustratingly refused to fire.

The squadron flew back to Bircham Newton on 1 June but requests for operations did not arise. On 5 June they provided convoy patrols, escorting shipping between Flamborough Head and Orfordness with similar duties over the next few days.

Lt L.E.D. Walthall said that such patrols were long and boring, he went out one day in Albacore L7081 for just over five hours and saw nothing except the convoy he was covering. The next operation, on 12 June, was when six Albacores carried out a night strike against enemy E-boats in Boulogne harbour.

No.826 now took up another role, mine-laying. Six Albacores went out during the night of 15 June to lay mines over a specified area. Other mines were laid during 17

Right: 4L is Albacore X9034 when serving with 815 Squadron when ashore on Malta and in the Western Desert. (RAF Museum) Below: Formation of Albacores from 817 Squadron when aircraft such as BF632:5M sported one of the Snow White seven dwarfs on the lower engine cowl. (Real Photographs)

Albacore Production

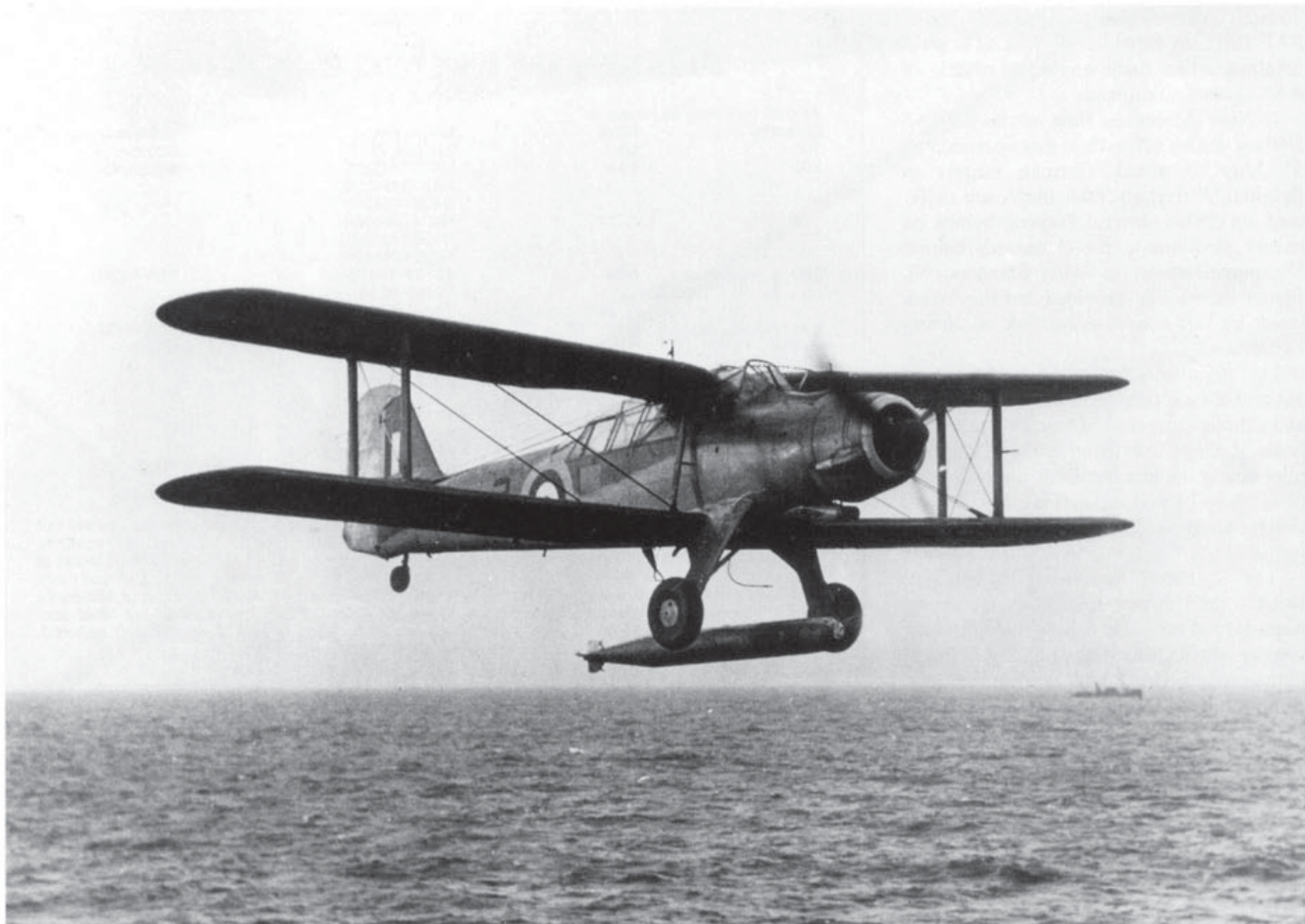
All built by Fairey at Hayes

Quantity	Mark	Serial range	Contract No.
100	Mk.I	L7074-L7173	625954/37
200	Mk.I	N4152-N4200	625954/37
		N4219-N4268	
		N4281-N4330	
		N4347-N4386	
		N4387-N4391	
		N4391-N4425	
100	Mk.I	T9131-T9175	359/44/39
		T9191-9215	
		T9231-T9260	
250	Mk.I	X8940-X8984	359/44/39
		X9010-X9059	
		X9073-X9117	
		X9137-X9186	
		X9214-X9233	
		X9251-X9290	
150	Mk.I	BF584-BF618	359/44/39
		BF631-BF680	
		BF695-BF739	
		BF758-BF777	

Survivors

Very few Albacores survived beyond 1945. Three were sent to Canada to be used for training but were never taken out of the cases. N4389 coded 4M can be seen in the FAA Museum at Yeovilton, having been rebuilt from a number of other crashed machines including N4172 which was found at Tongue in Scotland. Serving with 828 Squadron it force-landed in 1941 and the remains stayed there until 1974. The remains of another was found at Glen Cove. The remains of a number of Albacores shot down during the raid on Kirkenes/Petsamo are still extent where they crashed but other sections have been moved into storage – the tail of one being fitted to N4172 when being restored. Identified were N4325 5B of 828 squadron and N4389 4M 827 Squadron.





Dropping a torpedo was an art – the usual practice with an Albacore was to approach the target at about 8,000 feet and then dive to within a 100 feet of the surface, allow for speed of the target on the sight in front of the pilot's windscreen, release and get out of there!

and 18 June and on the 19th six Albacores bombed the port of Ijmuiden in Holland leaving some targets in flames. Two days later six Albacores were tasked with finding an enemy convoy around the Frisian Islands in daylight but they became separated in low cloud and were unable to locate it. Rather than take their bomb loads back they attacked the Dutch airfields at Willemsoord and De Kooy but ran up against Bf 109Es – two Albacores were shot down with one crew killed and the other making a crash landing, Albacore L7111:4L was badly damaged. The Telegraphist Air Gunner (TAG) in 4L, Naval Airman C. J. H. Homer retaliated with his gun and shot one of the Bf 109s down. This was confirmed and he received the Distinguished Service Medal (DSM).

On 24 June an Albacore was out on anti-submarine patrol over the North Sea when the propeller just stopped. The TAG sent out an SOS which their base, Bircham Newton picked up but said 'wait', which they found difficult with no engine to keep them aloft. However, the TAG SOS message was picked up by two stations and the cross bearing told the rescue people where they were – 17 miles off Grimsby, but it was many hours later before they were located

Arbroath 1940 and a pilot under training is pulling the side cockpit window up. The picture gives some scale to the size of an Albacore.

and picked up safely. Then it was back to convoy patrols and night attacks on Dutch harbours but on 3 July 1940 all Albacores were grounded with the Taurus engine problems. Over the next few weeks the grounded Albacores all received new engines, armour plate for the pilot's head and self-

sealing fuel tanks. During this period – 5 July to 3 August, 826 operated 10 Swordfish on convoy patrols.

In the meantime, No.829 Squadron had formed up with nine Albacores on 15 June 1940 at Ford under Lt Cdr O S Stevinson. They flew to Campbeltown on 14 July and



stayed there working up until September when the squadron moved to Cornwall operating out of St Merryn and St Eval under Coastal Command before moving north to Crail in November for carrier duty.

The squadron lost its commanding officer on the night of 9 October during a raid against enemy shipping. Lt Cdr J Dalyell-Stead took over as CO on 12 October. During September No.828 formed up at Lee-on-Solent with nine Albacores, initially under Lt E A Greenwood but Lt Cdr L A Cubitt took over as CO on 26 September.

The squadron moved to Scotland to work up and carried out anti-submarine patrols under RAF Coastal Command. In fact, during 1940 shore-based operations by Albacore squadrons was their main use. It was well into 1941 before any Albacores embarked in carriers and by then they were flowing from the factory.

During 1941 a further six Albacore squadrons had formed up – in March No.817 (Lt Cdr D.Sanderson, DSC RN) in April 831 (Lt Cdr P.L.Mortimer RN) and 832 (Lt Cdr A.J.P.Plugge RN), June saw 820 formed (Lt Cdr W Elliott RN), followed in August by 815 (Lt Cdr F.M.A.Torrens-Spence RN) and finally in November 818 received Albacores (Lt Cdr D.G.Goodwin RN). In 1942 four other front line squadrons received the Albacore – in March 821 (Major A.C.Newsom RM) and 822 (Major A.R.Burch, DSC RM) formed followed by 823 (Lt Cdr A.J.D.Harding, DSC RN) in April and 841 (Lt R.L.Williamson, DSC RN) in July. The only other front-line units to fly the Albacore were No.119 Squadron of the RAF and No.415 Squadron of the RCAF.

On 3 August Albacores were released again for operations, 826 being on standby duty during the day in case of invasion and attacking enemy shipping and harbours at night. On the night of 12 August the crew of 4P were lucky when they encountered a balloon barrage at Harwich and after running into a cable managed to cut it and return to base.

Through the rest of August and into early September the Albacores went out almost every night attacking invasion barges in Channel ports plus any E-boats they saw. All too often the part played by these biplanes and their crews has been overshadowed by the efforts of the RAF, who were also attacking enemy ports. On 24 August they bombed the oil tanks at Vlaardingen, near Rotterdam and on 2 September the ones at Flushing, losing one Albacore to flak. Six Albacores of 826 went out on 11 September to locate a convoy off Calais. They were escorted by six Blenheim fighters of No.235 Squadron but failed to stop a bounce by Bf109s which shot one Albacore down and damaged three others. The Bf109s did not have it all their own way, the TAG in 4P NA Bugden shot one down and another was shared by TAG R E Mathews in 4M and a Blenheim.

This highlighted the importance of carrying a TAG on operations when using slow aeroplanes. Such operations continued until 3 October 1940 when 826 was withdrawn and on 7 October flew south to St Merryn in

Albacore First Line Squadrons

It would be impracticable to list all the bases that Albacore squadrons operated from and those listed are examples in order of use.

Squadron	Dates	Shore bases	Examples
810	Jan 43 – Jul 43	Tanga, East Africa	BF715
815	Oct 41 – Aug 43	Dekhella, Egypt, Haifa, Palestine, Nicosia, Cyprus	X9158 J
817	Mar 41 – Aug 43	Crail, Hatston	BF612 5A
818	Nov 41 – Jun 42	Hatston, Machrihanish, Ceylon	X9084
820	Jul 41 – Nov 43	Hatston, Crail	X8968 5G
821	Mar 42 – Oct 43	Dekhella, Nicosia, Western Desert, Hal Far, Castel Benito, Monastir	T9207 S5L
822	Apr 42 – Aug 43	Crail, Donibristle, Twatt, Gibraltar, Lee-on-Solent	BF603 4A
823	Apr 42 – May 43	Lee-on-Solent, Machrihanish, Hatston, Tangmere, Manston	BF613 L
826	Mar 40 – Aug 43	Ford, Bircham Newton, Jersey, St Merryn, Nicosia, Dekhella, Haifa, Hal Far	N4319 4F
827	Sep 40 – Jan 43	Yeovilton, Stormoway, Thorney Island, St Eval, Hatston, Aden	T9206 5C
828	Sep 40 – Sep 43	Ford, St Merryn, Campbeltown, Hatston, Crail, Hal Far	X8942 S5B
829	Jun 40 – Aug 41	Lee-on-Solent, St Eval, St Merryn, Dekhella	L7127
830	Sep 40 – Jul 42	Malta	T9232
831	Apr 41 – Jun 43	Norfolk USA, Wingfield SA, Crail, Lee-on-Solent	BF661 4B
832	Apr 41 – Dec 42	Lee-on-Solent, Campbeltown, Hatston, Crail	X9086 4Q
841	Jul 42 – Nov 43	Lee-on-Solent, Machrihanish, Middle Wallop, Manston	X9290 D
119 (RAF)			
415 (RCAF)			

Albacore Second Line Squadrons/Units

700	Jan 46 – Feb 46	Middle Wallop	BF764
733	44 - 45	Minneriya, Ceylon	BF714
747	Mar 43 – Sep 43	St Merryn	X9215
750	Dec 40 – Apr 45	Piarco, Savannah – Trinidad	BF615
753	Aug 41 – Dec 44	Arbroath	X9022 A5N
754	Feb 43 – Dec 43	Arbroath	N4324
756	Oct 43 – Feb 44	Ceylon	X9156 Q
763	Mar 40 – Jul 40	Jersey, Worthy Down	L7089
766	Apr 42 – Oct 43	Machrihanish, Inskip	X9165 3
767	Feb 40 – Dec 43	France, Hal Far, Arbroath	X9109 E2A
768	Jan 43 – Sep 43	Machrihanish	X9169 E2A
769	Nov 41 – Feb 44	Arbroath, Easthaven	N4264
771	Nov 41 -	Twatt	L7134
774	Sep 40 – Jun 44	St Merryn	X9041 S6K
775	Sep 41 – Nov 43	Dekhella	T9150
778	Feb 40 – Sep 43	Arbroath, Crail	BF631
781	Jun 42 – Dec 42	Lee-on-Solent	X9282
782	Dec 40 - 41	Donibristle	N4240
783	Dec 42 – Feb 43	Drem	BF597
785	Aug 41 – Nov 43	Crail	N4221 C1N
786	Nov 40 – Dec 42	Crail	N4287 14
787	May 42 – Mar 43	Duxford	X9220
788	Feb 42 – Mar 44	Ceylon, Tanga, Mombasa	X9081
789	Jul 42 – Sep 44	Wingfield-South Africa	BF642 D
791	Mar 41 -	Arbroath	N4246
793	Nov 43 – Oct 45	Piarco-Trinidad	T9167
796	Jul 42 – Jul 43	Tanga-East Africa	BF588 M
797	Jun 43 – Oct 43	Ceylon	BF724
799	Sep 43 – Jun 44	Wingfield-South Africa	X9283
Stn Flt	Dec 43 – Aug 44	Eastleigh	
Comm Flt	Mar 43 – May 43	Ceylon	
Comm Flt	Sep 43 – Dec 43	Coimbatore	
Unknown	43	Donibristle	L7173 D43

Cornwall for armament training.

Operationally, the crews flying the new Albacores under the banner of 16 Group, Coastal Command, dropped over 55 tons of bombs on enemy targets, laid seven tons of magnetic mines and escorted over 100 convoys for five Albacores lost, four damaged, eight aircrew killed or missing of which five turned up as prisoners of war.

No.819 Squadron was operating from

Manston, but this became the home of two squadrons of Typhoons to combat the invasion by V-1 flying bombs. So in August No.819 moved to Swingfield, which was basically a steel plank and grass runway near Folkestone. They were joined the following day by No.119 Squadron equipped with Albacores as part of No.155 (GR) Wing. No.119 Squadron had taken over the Albacores belonging to No.415 Squadron



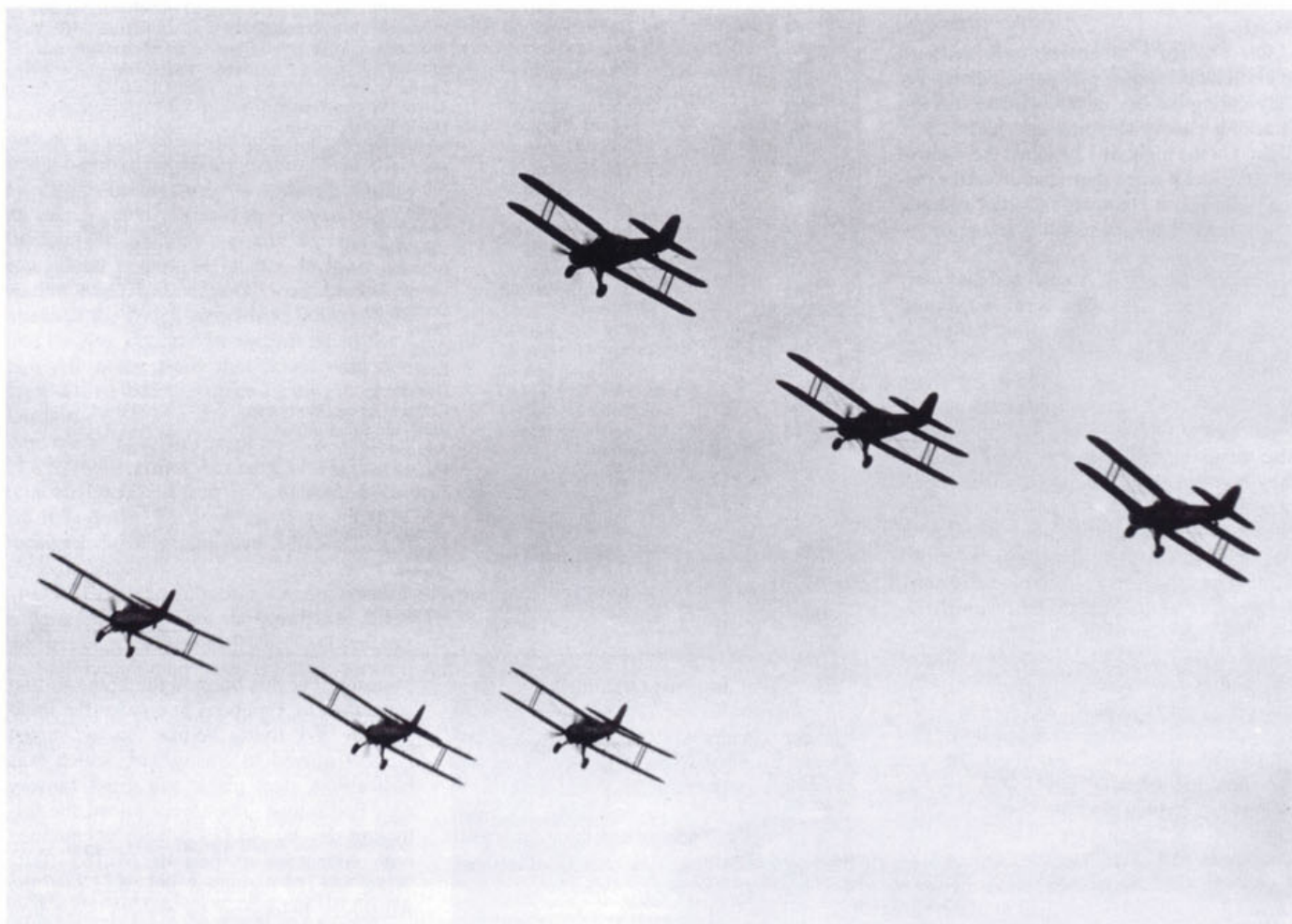
Fairey Albacore Mk I 40 C: X9255 789 Squadron Fleet Requirement Unit. Wingfield, South Africa, 1942-1945. White codes with serial in black. Overall scheme of Extra Dark Sea Grey and Dark Slate Grey over Sky lower surfaces. Type C1 and B roundels



Fairey Albacore Mk I 5C: X9053 817 Squadron 1943-44. Note 'Sleepy' dwarf on nose. Equipped with ASV radar on nose and wing positions. Sky codes with serial in black. Overall scheme of Extra Dark Sea Grey and Dark Slate Grey over Sky lower surfaces. Type C1 and B roundels with signs of over-painting of the earlier A1 style



nose motif



This picture taken in November 1941 shows an Albacore with the wings removed which gives lots of detail.

(RCAF) when the latter began to re-equip with the Halifax.

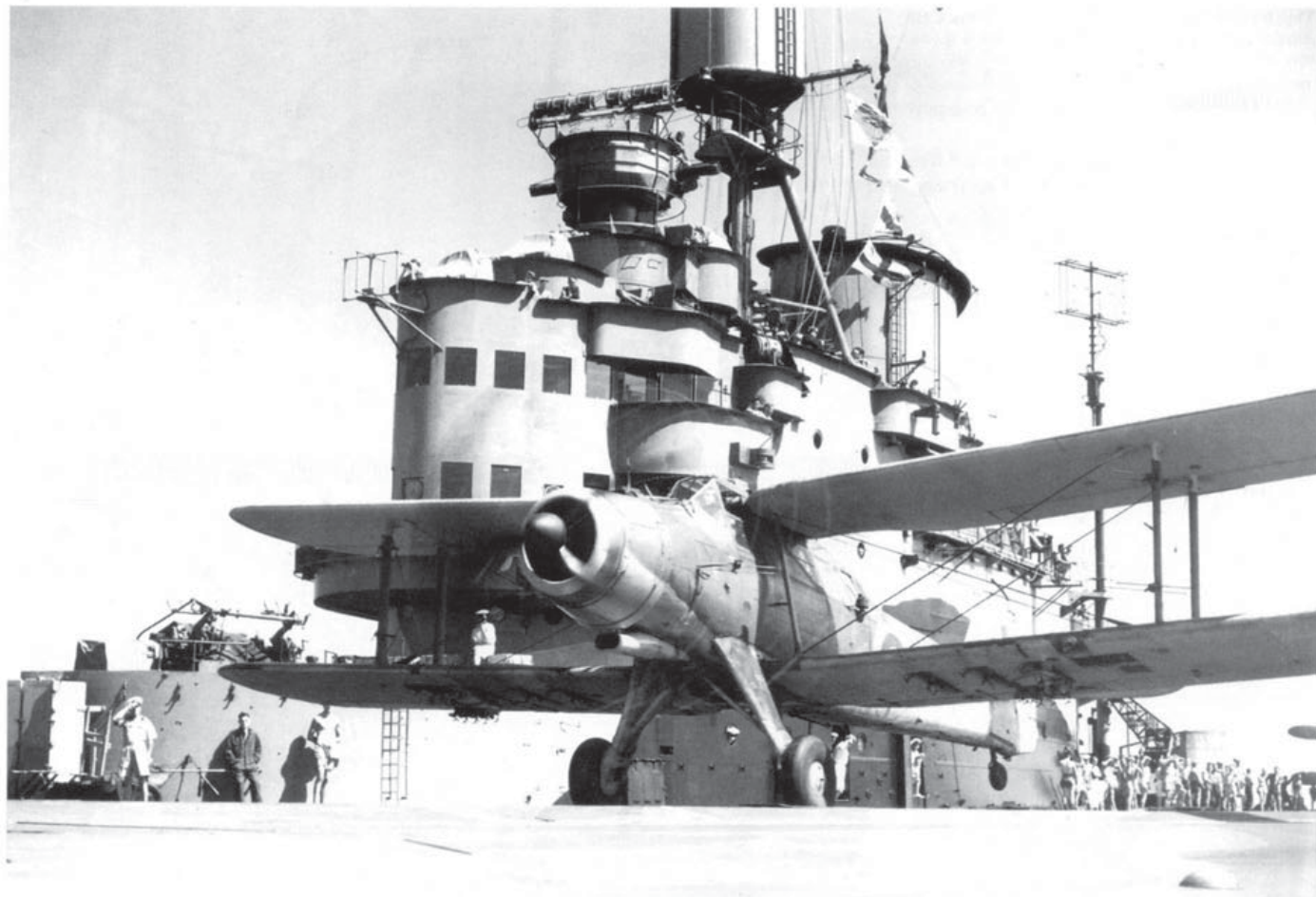
No.415 had formed in July 1941 in a torpedo-bombing role, initially flying Beauforts and Blenheims, then moving on to Hampden and Wellingtons, later adding an Albacore and Swordfish Flight. Both types flew with No.415's codes, eg, Swordfish L2739 NH-F and Albacore X9281 NH-K. No.415 RCAF Squadron operated within Coastal Command and was based at Bircham Newton, although a lot of the time, the biplanes were detached to Thorney Island. They carried out similar duties to the other squadrons attached to Coastal Command. On 9 April 1944 Albacore X9117 and its crew, pilot Flg Offr Mackie, Observer Flg Offr MacFarland were tasked to carry out a fighter affiliation exercise. As this was a non-operational flight they agreed to take Flying Control Officer, Flt Lt L.G.Loft and AC2 A.L.Thomas along for the ride. Flg Offr Mackie took off from Thorney Island in formation with another Albacore X9281 flown by Flg Offr William George Brasnett.

Once airborne and in position, Mackie made a pass at Brasnett attacking from above and to starboard. However, he got it wrong and lost control as he went into a steep right turn and dived into the grounds of Walton Farm Nursury, near Bosham, Chichester, killing all four of them.

On 19 July 1944 No.415 Squadron swapped its Wellingtons, Swordfish and Albacores for the Halifax and moved to Bomber Command. Coastal Command wanted to retain the Swordfish and Albacores and formed a new squadron, No.119, under the command of Sqd Ldr J.I.J.Davies, DFC, and based it at RAF

Facing page: Formation practice was an essential part of any pilot's training and these six Albacores show how its done. (IWM) Below: Early picture of an Albacore showing the single bay wings and rigging. Note that underwing roundels have been retained.





Above: Look at the picture! This appears to be one of an Albacore taking off from a flight deck – but on closer examination a number of things become apparent – the pilot already has the tail lifting, there are two aerials on each outer wing strut and one just below the pilot's cockpit. A compass has been left in its locating hole outside the navigators position. (IWM) Below: Albacore X9058 reveals the shape of the wings and roughly where the camouflage dividing line is. The aircraft was based at Worthy Down at the time.



Manston. This re-organisation took time and it was January 1945 before the first two Swordfish were made available for training.

Throughout January they carried out dive-bombing practice but even though more Swordfish turned up they all had to have the latest modifications put on before being released for operations. In the meantime the new squadron decided the Albacores were not as suitable as the Swordfish for the type of role expected of it. By the end of January four Albacores had been 'pensioned off' to the MU at Wroughton and Swordfish strength had increased to ten.

The squadron diarist remarked, 'Former Albacore enthusiasts were rapidly becoming expert Swordfish manipulators!' On 6 February 1945 Flg Offr Rabbets flying Swordfish 'J' carried out the squadron's first operational patrol. The squadron operated day and night, on the night of 24-25 February Flg Offr Rabbets released four bombs on a target only identified by radar blips, and later that day six Swordfish flew anti-E-boat patrols. Five more Albacores were retired on 10 March ending their association with both No.119 Squadron and Coastal Command.

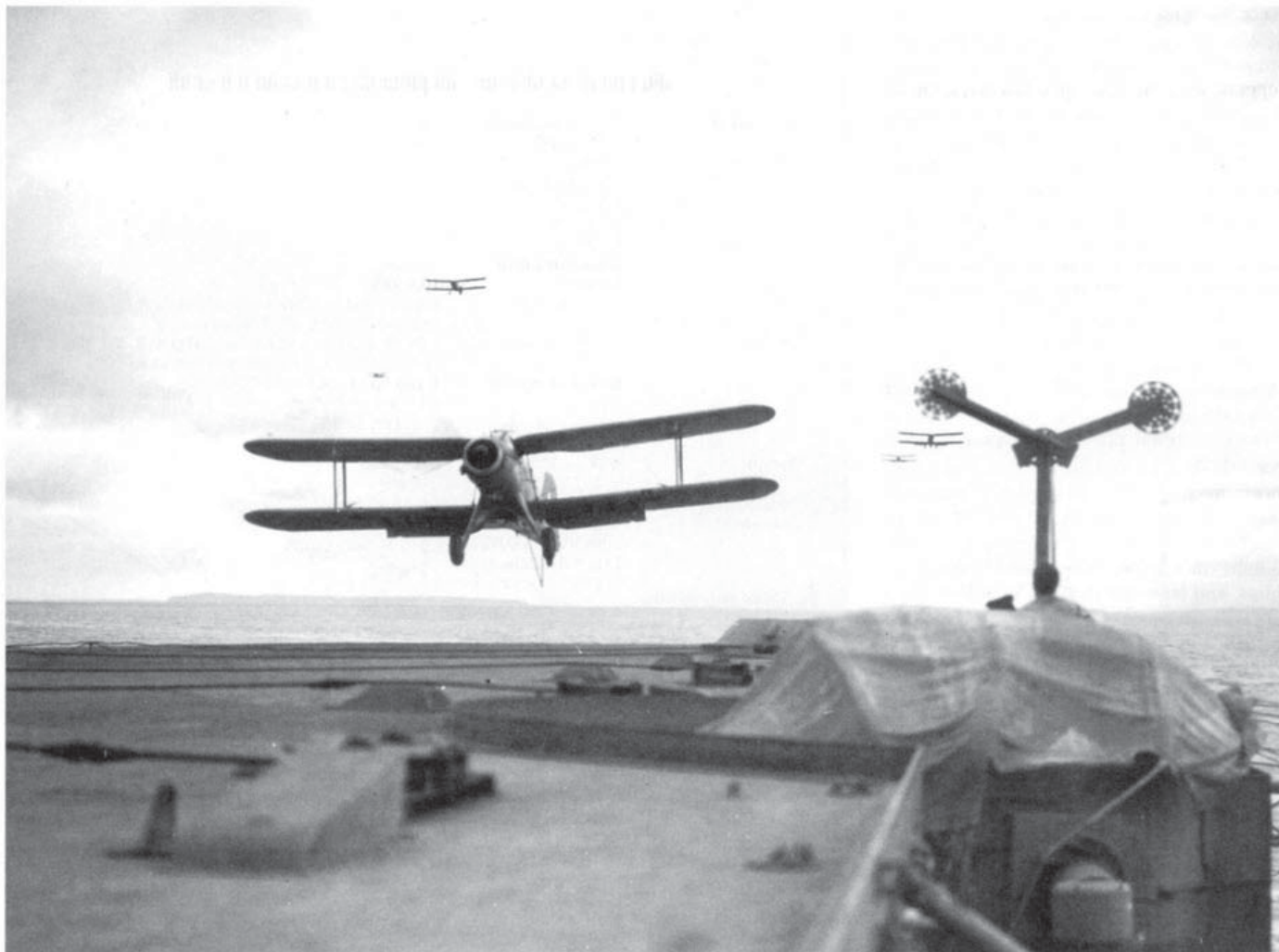
BATTLE OF CAPE MATAPAN

The first Albacores to embark on a carrier were those of 826 and 829 Squadrons when they joined *HMS Formidable* on 26 November 1940 to provide cover for a convoy going to Freetown, Sierra Leone and then on to Cape Town. When *Illustrious* was damaged in action *Formidable* was required in the Mediterranean, where her Albacores of 826 and 829 took a decisive part in the Battle of Cape Matapan. However, on the way five Albacores of 826 laid mines in the Italian Somaliland port of Mogadishu. Two others joined 829 to dive-bomb the wharves and port installations. On 13 and 21 February 1941 two attacks were made on the Italian naval base at Massawa, 826 carrying out 12 dive-bombing sorties to detract defences while 829 delivered 11 torpedoes. Although damage was limited it gave crews



Above: February 1941 and Sub Lt Howell poses against an Albacore of 767 Squadron at Arbroath where he undertook the deck landing course. (Howell) Below: Though to be an early production aircraft, this Albacore L7083 displays a pre-war style of markings





vital combat experience.

On 1 March five Albacores of 826 went back and bombed the docks. One aircraft had been lost during these strikes. After passing through the Suez Canal the squadrons disembarked to Dekheila near Alexandria. Six experienced crews flew to Benina airfield, east of Benghazi, where three of them attacked enemy shipping on 18 March. Sub Lt A.H. Blacow RN used his torpedo to sink a 1,500 ton ship and the others sank two lighters off the Tripoli coast.

Embarking on *Formidable* the Albacores took part in their first major action as a carrier strike aircraft. In what became known as the Battle of Cape Matapan Albacores of

826 and 829, on 28 March 1941 carried out nine torpedo strikes with others providing shadowing cover. That morning an Albacore had been launched to carry out a search after reports of enemy shipping. With Fulmars of 803 and 806 providing fighter cover the Albacores were launched to carry out a strike. Swordfish of 815 squadron, ashore at Maleme on Crete also joined in. The Italian Navy battleship *Vittorio Veneto* was attacked through intense flak but all efforts missed. That afternoon a second strike led by Lt Cdr J. Dalyell-Stead RN resulted in one torpedo hit but he was shot down pressing home an attack during the action.

As dark approached another strike con-

Approaching to land on, an Albacore displays its flap area and with tail hook down settles into the landing configuration. Other Albacores line up behind leaving little room for error – no angled deck overshoots in those days! (IWM)

sisting of six Albacores and two Swordfish, under the leadership of Lt Cdr W.G.H. Saunt DSC, pressed home their attacks despite intense anti-aircraft fire including the battleship throwing 15in shells at them as a splash barrage in an effort to thwart the attack.

This attack was joined by two Swordfish which had flown from Maleme on Crete. A 10,000 ton cruiser, the *Pola*, was hit by a torpedo and stopped in the water. Two other cruisers, the *Fiume* and *Zara* tried to intervene but by then British surface ships were arriving on the scene and both cruisers were sunk in an exchange of gunfire. All but one of the attacking aircraft returned safely.

In a statement after the war the Italian Admiral Iachino said, 'It was conducted with particular ability and bravery by aircraft of the Swordfish type. It was a concentrated bomb and torpedo attack... They kept formation at low level, machine gunning the bridge and upper works of the escort vessels so as to distract the anti-aircraft fire. The leading aircraft (Lt Cdr Dalyell-Stead) showed great skill and courage and I saw him hit several times and his machine seemed to stagger and dip violently across our trail some dozen metres from our bows, then fall into the sea, the bold pilot perishing without the satisfaction of seeing the

An Albacore comes to grief aboard HMS *Victorious* probably from 817 or 832 Squadrons embarked during 1941-42.



successful results of his shoot'.

During April 1941 a number of Albacores flew up to El Adem, south of Tobruk, to operate with the RAF for a few days. On 25 May 1941 the Mediterranean Fleet steamed to the aid of the Allied forces on Crete. The following day Albacores of 826 attacked the enemy airfield at Scarpanto Island bombing enemy aircraft while Fulmar fighters carried out strafing runs. Nine hours later enemy Ju87 and Ju88 aircraft dive-bombed the *Formidable* scoring two direct hits and a number of near misses. Damage was sufficient for *Formidable* to withdraw and proceed to the USA where it underwent repairs. No.826 now moved to Dekheila where over the next 20 months or so they were in almost constant action in support of RAF operations.

PETSAMO AND KIRKENES

In June 1941 Hitler launched his attack on Soviet Russia – Operation Barbarossa which immediately put pressure on the Royal Navy to support its new ally using direct or indirect means. A decision was made that British carrier forces would carry out attacks on German communications in Northern Norway. *HMS Victorious*, with 827 and 828 squadrons embarked with 12 and nine Albacores respectively plus 809 with 12 Fulmars was to sail with *Furious*, which had 817 with nine Albacores, 812 with nine Swordfish, 800 with nine Fulmars and 880A with four Sea Hurricanes escorted by two cruisers and six destroyers proceeded from Scapa Flow to Iceland to refuel.

The plan was to attack Petsamo in Finland and Kirkenes in Northern Norway while the minelayer *Adventure* delivered a stock of mines to the Russian base at Archangel. During the afternoon of 30 July 1941

This shot, although poor, shows that there could be no doubt about the identification between the Albacore and Swordfish.

Albacore Specification

Dimensions:	Wing span (both)	49ft 113/4 in
	Width folded	17ft 9in
	Length	39ft 113/4in
	Height tail down	15ft 3in
	Height on floats	17ft 9in
	Wing area	623 sq ft
Weights	Empty	7,250lb
	Disposable load	3,210lb
	Loaded	10,460lb
	All up weight	Recce 9,910lb, Torpedo 11,020lb, Bomber 11,300lb, 12,600lb max.
Engine	Bristol Taurus II	1,060 hp, Take-off power 1,090 hp at 3,300 rpm
	Bristol Taurus XII	Rated at 925/965 hp at 2,800 rpm at 5,000ft
Speeds	Max	1,130 hp, Rated at 3,500ft
	Max cruise	161 mph at 4,000ft
	Economical cruise	140 mph at 6,000ft
	with 1,610lb load	116 mph at 6,000ft
Range	With 2,000lb load	930 miles
		710 miles
Service ceiling	20,700ft with normal load, 15,000ft with max weight	
	Armament	One Vickers 0.303in in starboard wing
		Twin Vickers 0.303in 'K' gun in rear cockpit
		One 1,610lb torpedo
		Six 250lb bombs or four 500lb bombs

Furious launched nine Albacores, nine Swordfish and six Fulmars against Petsamo while *Victorious* launched 20 Albacores and nine Fulmars to Kirkenes. Fighter cover for the ships rested with three remaining Fulmars on *Victorious* and the four Sea Hurricanes from *Furious*.

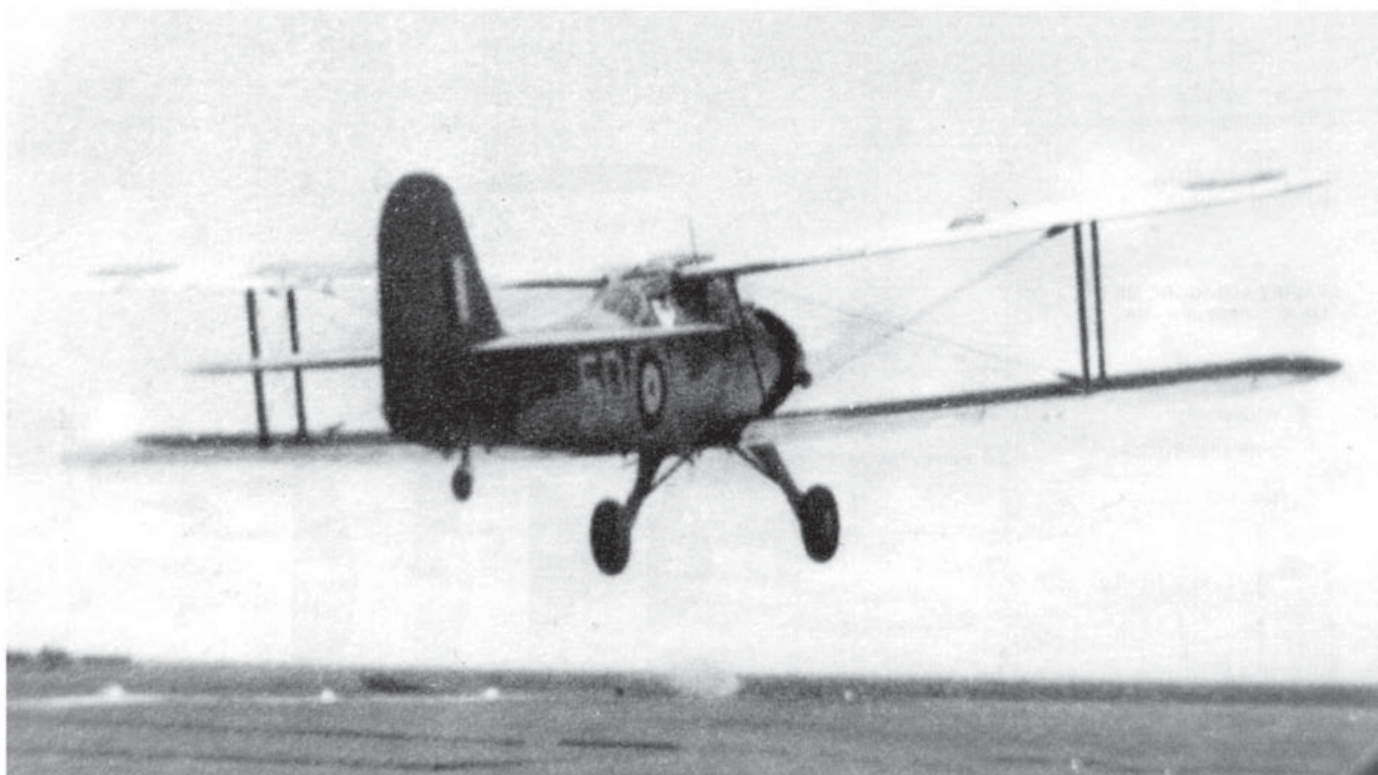
Unfortunately the strike force had been detected by a shadower which had alerted the bases. It was decided that the situation warranted the strikes and they went ahead. Nine Albacores of 817, six with torpedoes and three with bombs, flew low over the sea and swept into the Gulf of Petsamo – only to discover one small ship, which they sank and then destroyed wooden jetties – but lost one Albacore and two Fulmars.

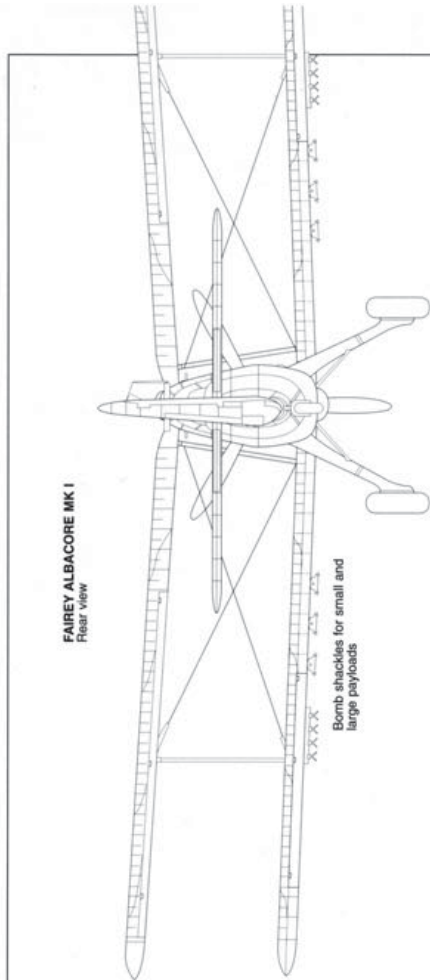
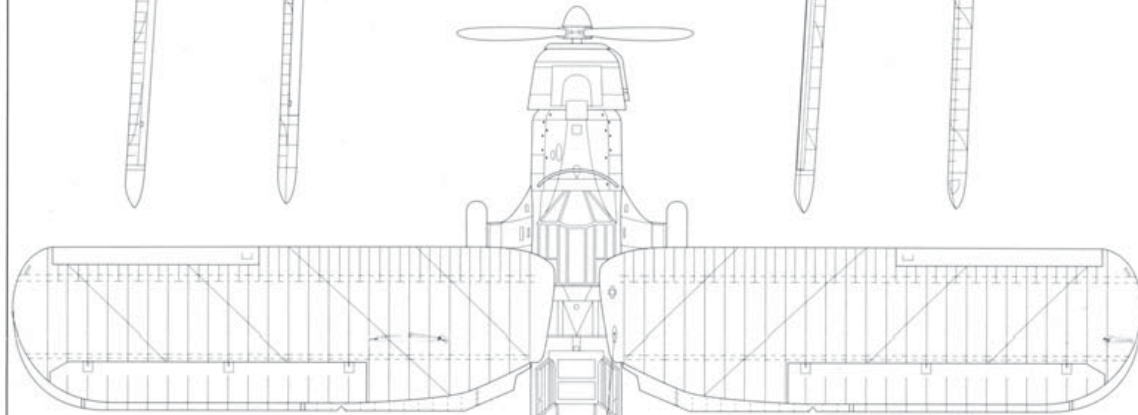
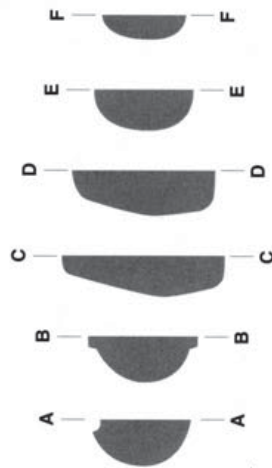
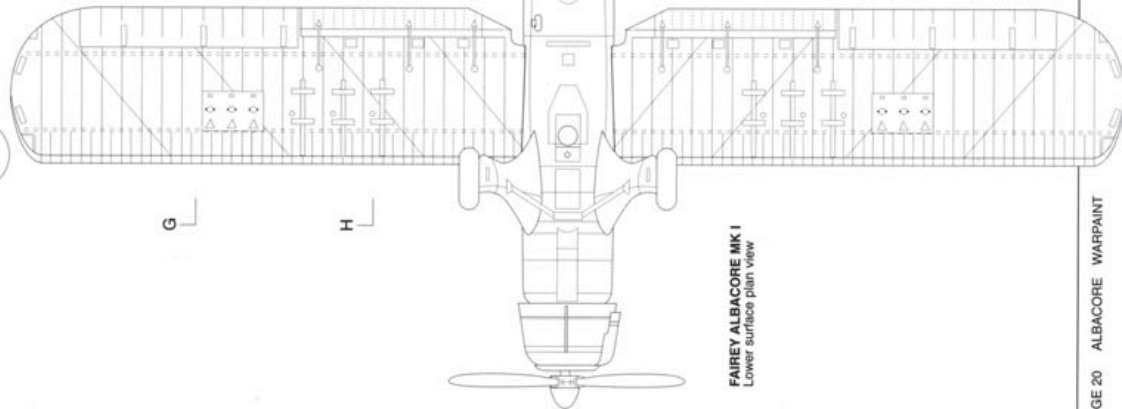
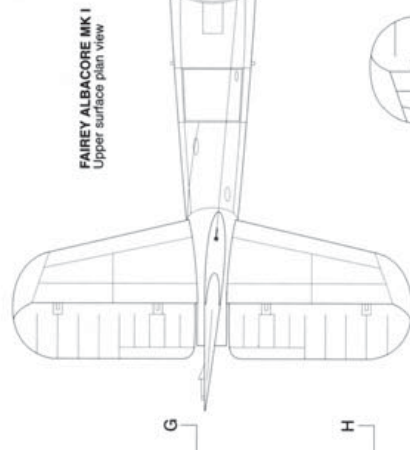
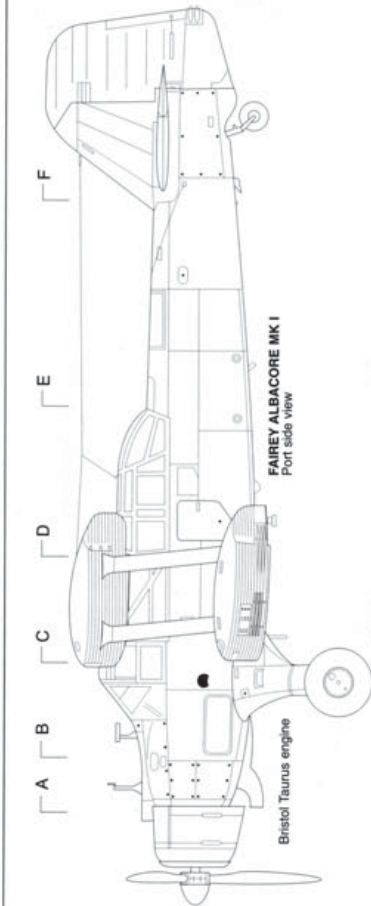
At Kirkenes it was different with defences manned and Luftwaffe air cover. The Albacores sank the 2,000 ton freighter

MVRottver set another ship on fire and damaged shore installations. At the end the strike force had 11 Albacores hacked down by flak and fighters and only one of the survivors was undamaged and that one shot a Ju87 down with its front gun. Fulmars accounted for two Bf110s and one Bf109 but lost two of their number. Some of the British aircrews survived crashes to become POWs. Surviving Albacores on *Furious* were transferred to *Victorious* to make good her losses. Plans for further strikes were abandoned to await more suitable aircraft types.

OPERATIONS FROM MALTA

Lying between Libya and Sicily the island of Malta provided a strategic military point in the central Mediterranean – both for the



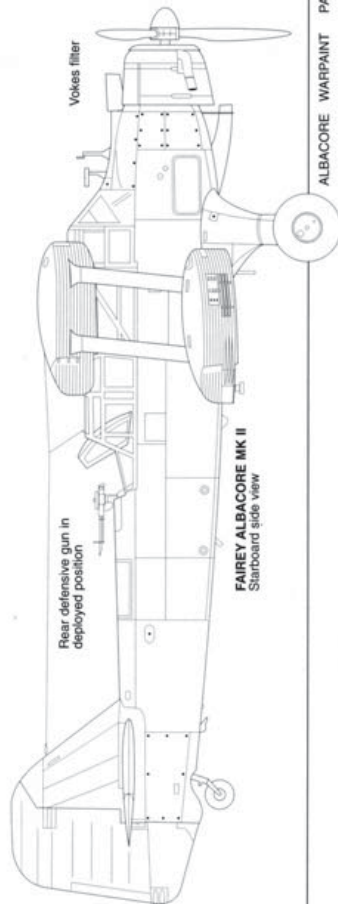
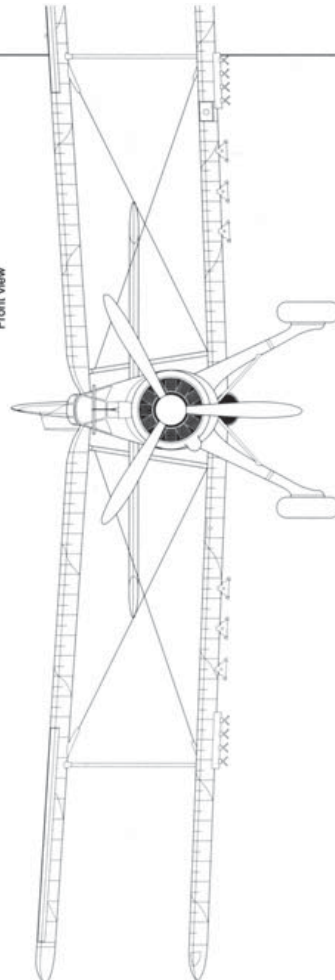


FAIREY ALBACORE

Drawings by Tim Brown



FAIREY ALBACORE MK I
Front view



Positioning a torpedo beneath an Albacore on Malta. (R.E.F. Kerrison)

Allies going to/from Gibraltar/Alexandria and the Axis trying to maintain supply routes into North Africa. During the First World War a RNAS base was set up at Kalafrana, located on the east coast, to carry out anti-submarine patrols. With the opening of the Suez Canal, allowing the British to have access to the Indian Ocean without having to go right round Africa, a naval base was established in Grand Harbour. In 1929 an aerodrome was established at Hal Far, near the base at Kalafrana. Two others, Luqa and Ta'Qali (other spellings include Ta'Kali and Takali) were constructed with the latter near the centre of the island. Firmly established on the island the RAF moved in with No.3 Anti-Aircraft Co-operation Unit flying Swordfish on target-towing duties. More importantly, an AMES (Air Ministry Experimental Station) Mk.1 Type 6 radar site was erected at Fort Ta' Salvatur but known as No.241 Transportable Radio Unit (TRU). With a range of 100 miles up to 8,000ft in all directions it was to become an essential item of equipment during the forthcoming conflict. A second one was being set up when war was declared. Two other radar sets of the COL(Chain Overseas Low Type 5) type were delivered by sea early in 1941. One was set up at Ta Silch and the other at Fort Maddalena, north west of Valletta.

The western end of the Mediterranean was mostly in French hands with a relatively strong fleet operating out of North Africa and the south of France. Britain, with bases in Egypt, dominated the eastern end while the Italians looked after the central area. Since Mussolini had risen to power he had

Idyllic view of Albacore X9182 S5 of 821 Squadron on Malta. Two Army soldiers sit on the fuselage to hold the aircraft down as it prepares for a ground run of the engine. (IWM)



expanded and modernised the Italian forces and their navy had a young and powerful fleet with modernised harbours and ports. They lacked two items which the British had, aircraft carriers and radar.

When France capitulated on 24 June 1940 Admiral Cunningham, Commander-in-Chief of the British Mediterranean Fleet set about strengthening his base on Malta. Having to make do with what he had. A quantity of uncrated Gloster Gladiators were opened and four assembled for the defence of the island.

A number of Swordfish from No.767 training squadron arrived during June. They had been operating from a French base at Hyeres, near Toulon to take advantage of the better weather. When the war started 12 of them attacked Genoa using 12 inch artillery shells 'borrowed' from the French. These had been attached with spun yarn and had to be fused before taking off. They then flew to Bone in North Africa where half

continued on to the UK and the other half flew to Malta – where they had difficulty landing due to lots of old transport vehicles being scattered across the airfield to stop an airborne invasion

The Swordfish merged with others on the island and became No.830 Squadron. Their first operation on the night of 30 June-1 July 1940 was dive-bombing Italian oil storage tanks and a refinery at Augusta on the east coast of Sicily. From then on until the squadron was stood down these Swordfish were a thorn in the enemy's side, operating constantly in attacks on enemy shipping and installations.

ALBACORES FLY IN

On October 18, 1941 828 Squadron disembarked from *Ark Royal* with 11 Albacores and one Swordfish and joined 830 in their nocturnal battle against the Axis forces in the Mediterranean. The Albacore's first





Three Albacores taking off from Malta. All three have a torpedo mounted with the air tail showing. Wartime pictures usually had the air tail censored out. (IWM)

strike in its new role was on the night of 28 October 1941 when seven bombed Comiso aerodrome attacking hangers and other targets. One Albacore failed to return.

Four Albacores attacked the submarine base at Augusta on the night of 5 November using 250 and 500lb bombs. The following night four more repeated the attack, all successful against light and heavy accurate flak.

Factories on Sicily were the target for the 7 November when four Albacores dive-bombed three different ones. Five Albacores attacked the submarine base at Augusta the following night using 500lb GP (for the submarine pens) 500lb SAP (for any submarines) and 25lb incendiaries which were released at 3,500ft to give a good spread. Flak was heavy but hits were also made on oil storage tanks. The following night five Albacores went to Augusta again but two had to return with engine trouble and the other three bombed from 4000ft.

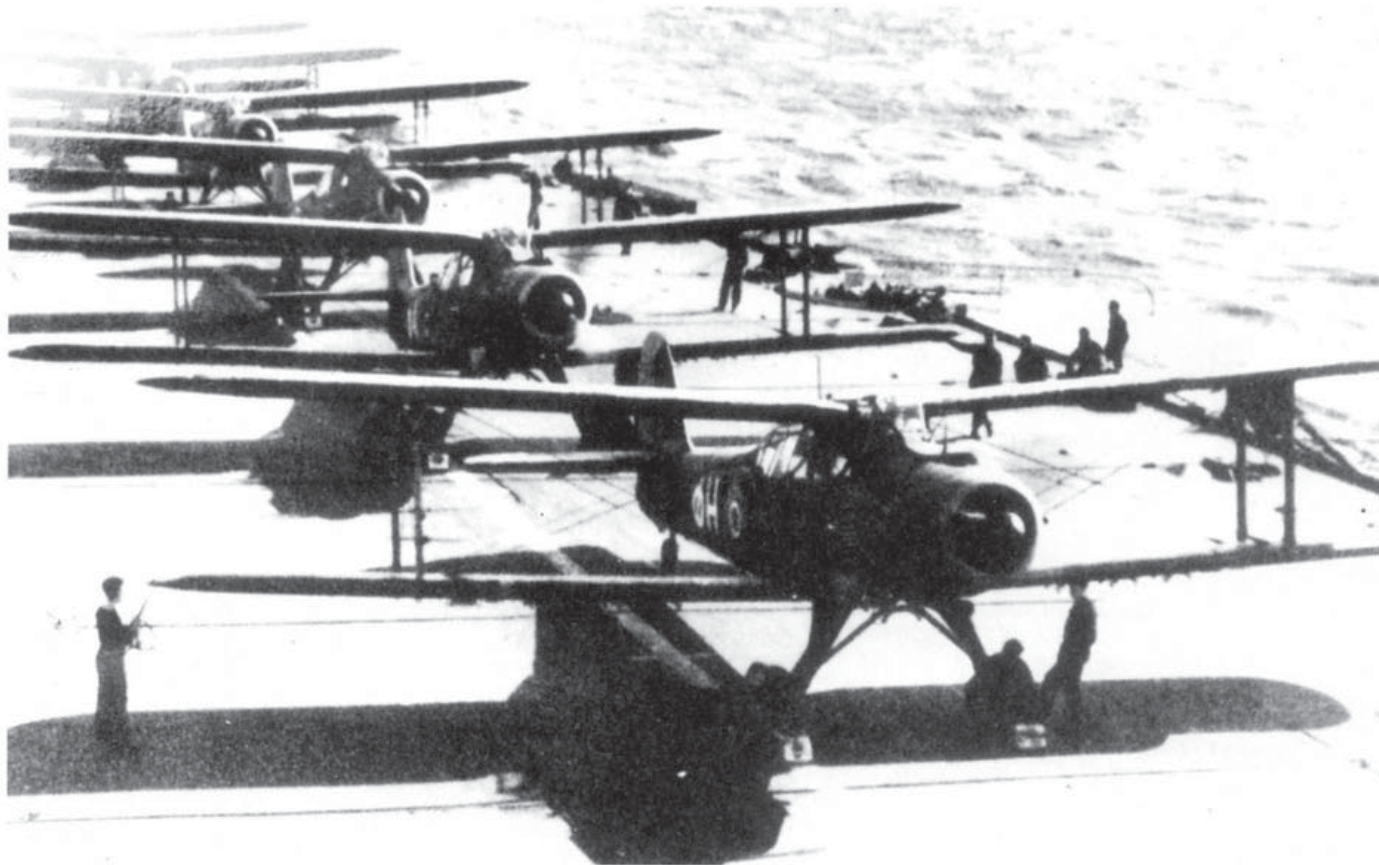
Twenty four hours later, flying through poor visibility and heavy rain, four Albacores dive-bombed the airfield at Catania. Mine laying was added to the tasks for the Albacores and in the early hours of 19 November five flew line abreast and laid mines across the path used by Rommel's supply convoys.

The first combined operation by 830 and 828 took place on 20 November when six Albacores (828) and five Swordfish (830) attacked Tripoli harbour. The following day a Malta-based Sunderland reported a con-



Above: You can't blame this one on the enemy! Swordfish M of 830 Squadron taxied too close to Albacore G and chopped off the tail. Below: A sad end for an Albacore on Malta after a German air raid. (R.E.F. Kerrison)





Flight deck of *Formidable* with Albacores of 820 Squadron ranged to take off. No.820 gave a good account of itself during 'Operation Torch' – the Allied landings in North Africa November 1942. (A.W.Hall archives)

voy 12 miles south of Cape Spartivento. Two Zara-class cruisers and four destroyers were escorting four merchant ships towards Benghazi. An ASV-equipped Swordfish led a formation of three Swordfish of 830 followed by four Albacores of 828 to attack the convoy. All seven strike aircraft carried a torpedo fitted with Duplex pistols set to detonate on contact or by magnetic influence. Weather, as usual, was bad with lots of cloud and poor visibility. Despite this attacks were made and three Albacores made hits on two 7,000 ton vessels and one of 6,000 tons. A Swordfish had also badly damaged the cruiser *Duca degli Abruzzi* which was out of action for seven months.

Most raids were made up from the small numbers of Albacores and Swordfish resident on Malta. Quite often, due to enemy air raids, combat damage and general wear and tear, the numbers available for a raid could be counted on one hand. Although the efforts of the small number of biplanes operating from Malta, along with their courageous crews, may seem incongruous to all that was going on around them, their continuing strive against the enemy was out of all proportion to the results – over 400,000 tons of much needed supplies and shipping were sunk by 830 and 828 squadrons by 1942.

Six Albacores laid mines off the entrance to Ras Makhaby on November 22 –

although they should have been laid in the harbour at Tripoli – 30 miles to the east! On 27 November five Albacores were tasked with bombing Castel Benito aerodrome but got split up in thick cloud, although three got through and dive-bombed the target. Twenty four hours later they tried again but got embroiled in a thunderstorm. Pressing on, they were rewarded on emerging from the other side and bombed the aerodrome, losing one Albacore to a direct hit by flak.

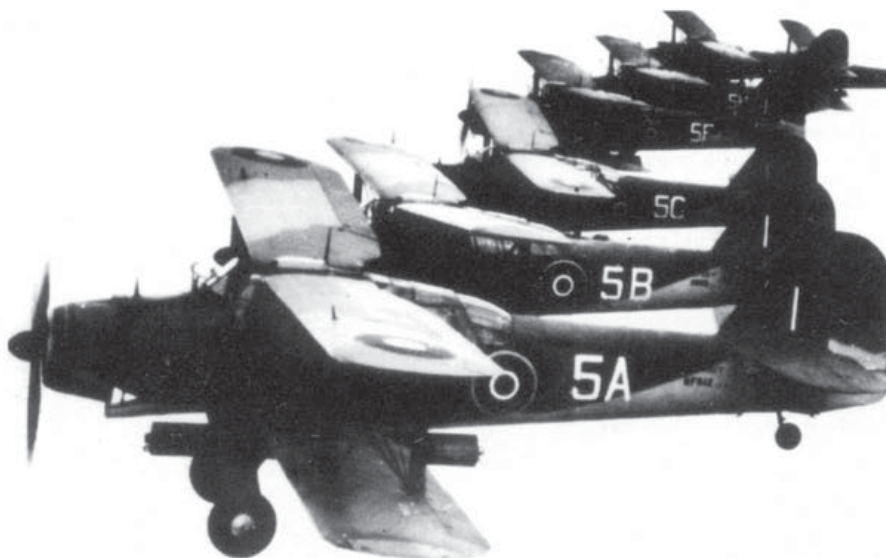
Throughout late November and early December the weather was so bad very few operations were made, the grass airfields becoming mud baths. However, some days/nights it was possible to get strikes away, on 3 December four Albacores attacked Augusta and three days later another four attacked airfields near Tripoli.

In an attack on enemy supply ships a few nights later one Albacore released a torpedo

so low it dipped and hit the surface which smashed the port undercarriage and damaged the rudders of the air tail on the torpedo so that it did not go towards the targets. It crashed landing back at Hal Far.

Just to keep the enemy on their toes a force of Albacores and Swordfish laid mines at Tripoli on Christmas night. Torrential rain, gales, electric storms and continual low cloud heralded the arrival of 1942. The enforced grounding enabled ground crews to carry out repairs to their well worn biplanes.

It was found that the Albacore was not as reliable mechanically as its sister, the Swordfish – an example being on 1 January 1942 when four Albacores took off to mine Zuara – one returned early with generator problems and was shot up by a Bf109 as it came in to land; one jettisoned its mine due to an electrical fault resulting in all its lights



A tight formation of 817 Squadron Albacores including BF612:5A. The squadron embarked in *Furious*, then *Indomitable* where it saw action in the Mediterranean. (A.W.Hall archives)



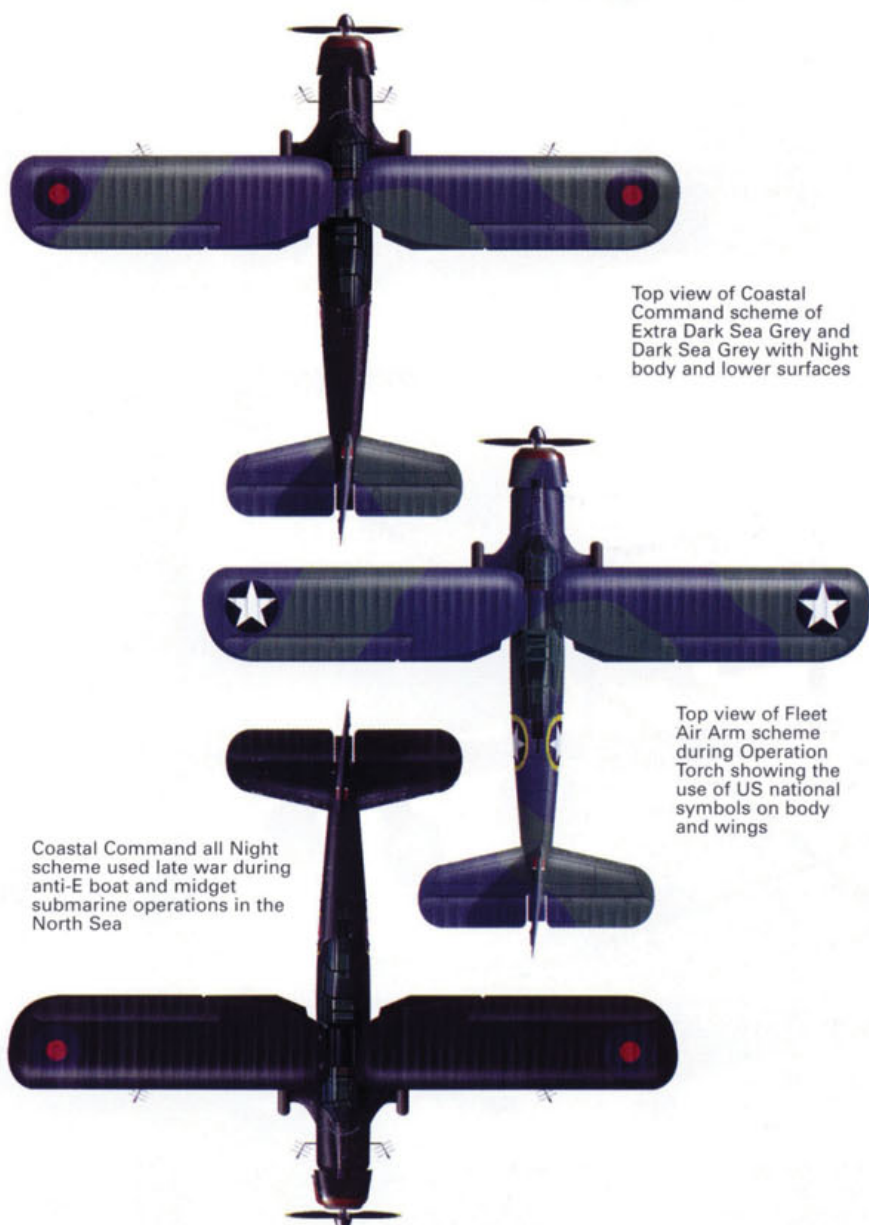
Albacore BF708 of 821 Squadron at Sidi Barrani 1942. These Albacores went out night after night carrying out a multitude of tasks such as dropping flares to light enemy positions for RAF and USAAF bombers. (RAF Museum)

coming on and another jettisoned its mine after developing engine trouble and was last seen crossing the Tunisian coast with smoke pouring from the engine bay. The last one dropped its mine at the harbour entrance and returned safely.

Guided by a Wellington with radar two Albacores went out in bright moonlight the following night to attack two merchant ships. Although hits were claimed one Albacore was damaged by flak. 828 were now down to eight Albacores and 830 could only muster two Swordfish to lay mines at Tripoli. This usually meant a round trip of six weary and nerve-racking hours in open cockpits, sometimes to find the flares or flame floats did not work.

During the poor weather a move was made to Luqa which had hard runways. The odd Albacores, and Swordfish, were now being fitted with ASV (Air-Surface Vessel) radar which helped considerably to locate enemy shipping at night. The problem was there were only a few Albacores left to fly operations.

Admiral Boyd asked one of his pilots in Egypt to take a squadron of replacement Albacores to Malta, but when he arrived at the maintenance hangar only two could be found, and they were not ready. He left on 9 February 1942 flying along the North African coast, arriving at Hal Far the next day. Three more set off later that month but one crashed at Gazala, one disappeared at sea between Benghazi and Malta and the third one made it to Malta, bringing the



Top view of Coastal Command scheme of Extra Dark Sea Grey and Dark Sea Grey with Night body and lower surfaces

Coastal Command all Night scheme used late war during anti-E boat and midget submarine operations in the North Sea

Top view of Fleet Air Arm scheme during Operation Torch showing the use of US national symbols on body and wings



Above: Albacores of 826 Squadron over the coastal region of the Western Desert – 4A:T9141, P:T9153, 4G:T9214 and 4K. (IWM) Below: Albacore B of 821 Squadron flying over Egypt January 1942. (I. Templar)

strength of 828 up to five Albacores! There were only six crews to fly them anyway – and 830 were no better off with their Swordfish.

On 31 January three Albacores found a freighter in the moonlight and left it listing after at least one torpedo struck home. The usual practice was that the leading Albacore (or Swordfish) was the one fitted with ASV to locate the target and also carried flares, which would be released up wind and slightly ahead of enemy shipping, when the torpedo aircraft would make their attack. Such was the case on February 15-16 when one ASV Swordfish and four torpedo Albacores attacked a force of four enemy cruisers and nine destroyers north-west of Malta. Although the Albacores were under standing orders to be back on the ground at Malta before dawn to avoid the first daylight patrol by Bf109s, the leader decided the target was too important and stayed to carry out the attack – hits being recorded on two cruisers and a destroyer. The last Albacore did not touch down until 9am but for once the 109s were late!

Other attacks by small numbers of Albacores were made during the month but on 22 February the Luftwaffe bombed Hal Far destroying three and damaging three of 828s Albacores. Such raids were stepped up during March with losses by both squadrons. To make the best use of the few aircraft available No.830 and 828 were formed into one unit, a 'Naval Air Squadron' to give greater operational capability but both retained their identity for administrative purposes.

As an example, when an enemy convoy was detected 25 miles off Linosa an ASV-equipped Swordfish led three Albacores to make an attack, but with no discernable





Fairey Albacore Mk II 4H:N4378 of an unknown unit, Western Desert, 1942. Black codes and serial with partial white outline. Overall scheme of Extra Dark Sea Grey and Dark Slate Grey over Night black lower surfaces. Type A1, B and roundels



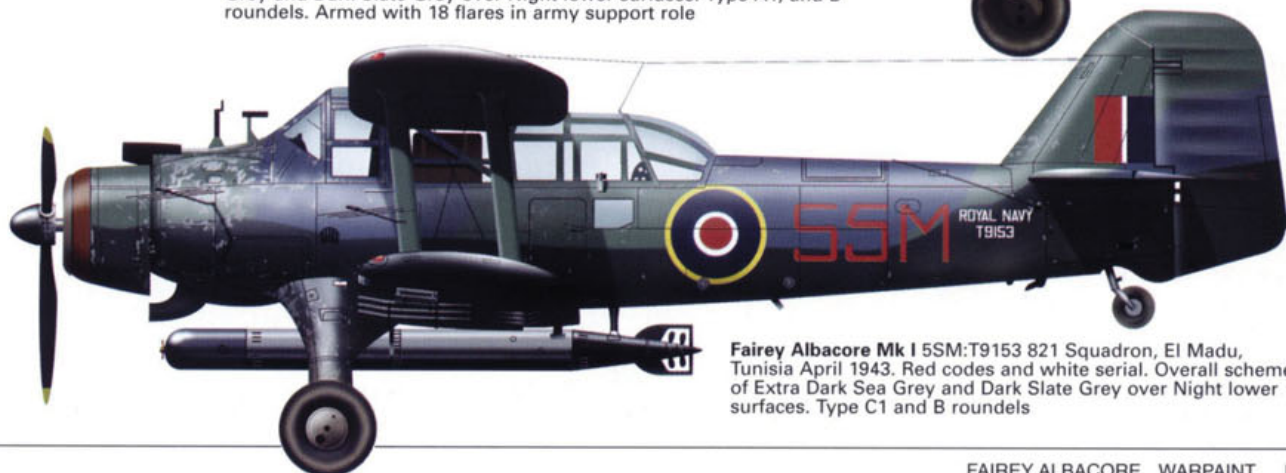
Fairey Albacore Mk I S5B Serial unknown assigned to either 821 or 828 squadron in the Western Desert, 1942. Aircraft is fitted with camera for torpedo training. Note crude application of white codes. Royal Navy logo in red. Overall scheme of Extra Dark Sea Grey and Dark Slate Grey over Night lower surfaces. Type A1, B and roundels. Note the fuel tank on the torpedo crutches



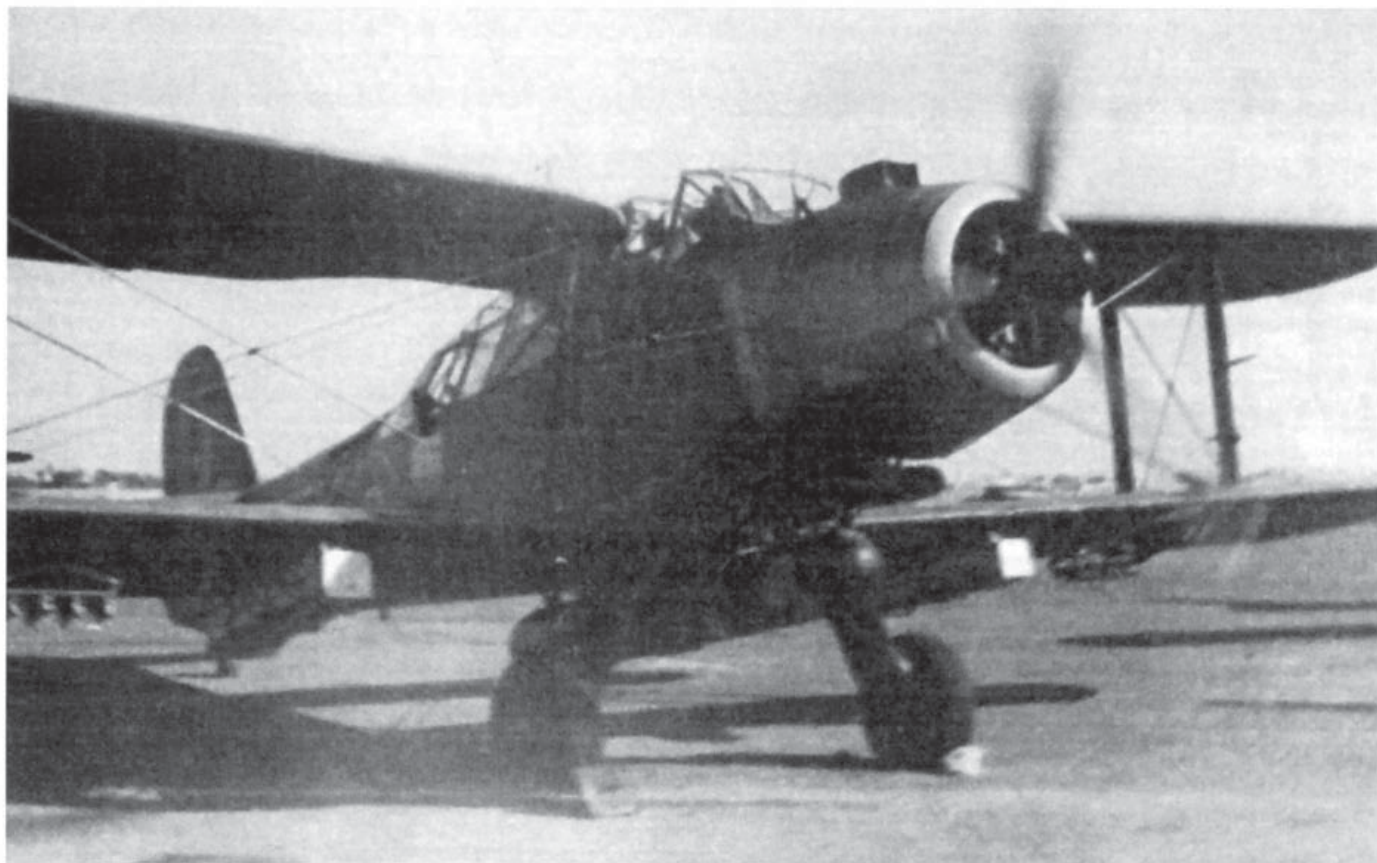
Fairey Albacore Mk I 40:X9981 of an unknown unit, Western Desert, 1942. Red codes outlined in white with serial in white. Overall scheme of Extra Dark Sea Grey and Dark Slate Grey over Night black lower surfaces. Type A1 and B roundels



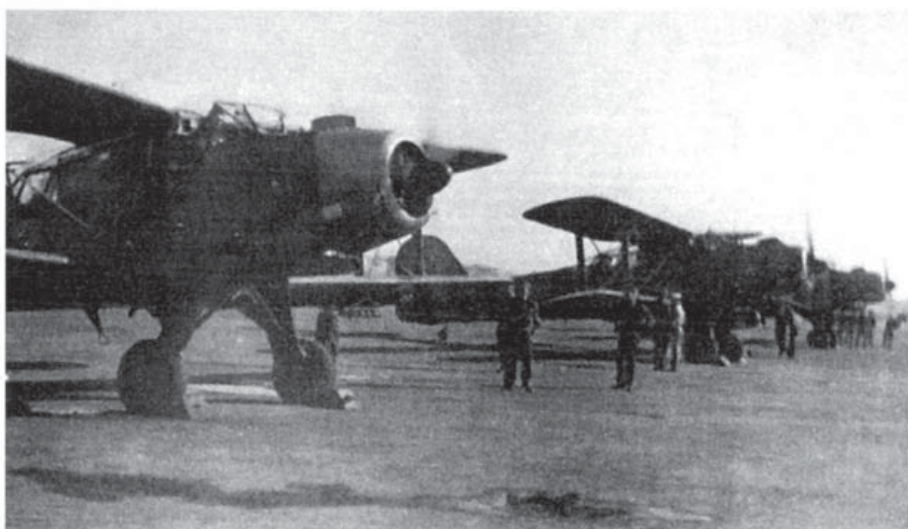
Fairey Albacore Mk I 4C:N4323 826 Squadron ex HMS Formidable, later wrecked and abandoned during Tobruk retreat 1941. Black codes outlined in white with serial in black. Overall scheme of Extra Dark Sea Grey and Dark Slate Grey over Night lower surfaces. Type A1, and B roundels. Armed with 18 flares in army support role



Fairey Albacore Mk I 5SM:T9153 821 Squadron, El Madu, Tunisia April 1943. Red codes and white serial. Overall scheme of Extra Dark Sea Grey and Dark Slate Grey over Night lower surfaces. Type C1 and B roundels



Above: An Albacore of 821 Squadron about to set off for Malta with what appears to be a long range fuel tank under the fuselage and stores containers under the wings. Below: Albacores of 821 Squadron warm up at their base in the Western Desert prior to flying to Malta to join 828/830 Squadrons in December 1942. (I. Templar)



seven destroyers, sinking one of the supply vessels.

It was down to one ASV Swordfish leading one Swordfish and one Albacore on 19 October when they attacked an enemy ship and left it stationary in the water. They went out again the following night and scored a torpedo hit on 6,000 ton tanker.

Spares had become a joke and some Swordfish and Albacores were flying with parts taken from crashed German aircraft! Perhaps one story to illustrate this was when the groundcrews of 828 and 830 combined in the rebuilding of an Albacore written off in a bombing attack. Examination revealed more than 200 holes in the metal stressed-skin fuselage alone, all the crew and other transparencies were blown out or broken along with many serious structural problems, such as shrapnel damage to all four longerons, the main fuselage longitudinal structures that carried the load. Using components and parts from other wrecked air-

results. There were so few Swordfish that they quite often provided the ASV and flare-dropping service for the Albacores.

By July 1942 the two squadrons only had a few aircraft between them and flare-dropping, and other tasks were being gradually taken over by RAF Wellingtons. And so it went on – one Swordfish and two Albacores made a torpedo attack on a 5,000 ton vessel on the night of 2-3 September forcing it to beach – an enemy destroyer was hit on 28-29 September in a strike led by an ASV Swordfish with one other Swordfish and two Albacores hitting it amidships – 18-19 October one Albacore and two Swordfish attacked a convoy of four supply ships and

A communications Albacore taking off in Egypt. They were used as aerial taxis when not in use or surplus to requirements.





Above: With the wings removed the masses of detail become apparent. The crew door, cockpit glazed area showing the gunner's position, pilot's steps, torpedo sight, torpedo crutch, oil cooler intake and undercarriage stance. Below: A view from the starboard side of the Albacore again with lots of detail including the exhaust manifold and small window just ahead of the roundel. (FAA Museum)





craft on the airfields, including German aircraft shot down over the island, the Albacore was completely rebuilt. Many of the repairs were very unofficial using whatever could be made up in the workshop, for instance, breaks in the longerons were filled by non-standard hand-made components. An entire refabricated tail section bulkhead was fitted and all the smaller holes were plugged with patches or other insertions.

All the work was under the watchful eye of leading air fitter John Leech (later Lt

Cdr) who recalled that the serial number T9235 and the letter W were etched in his mind forever more! Talking to other surviving air and groundcrew, they say they were just doing their job, but going out night after night in all weather, for sorties lasting five and six hours over open sea and in aircraft only suited to the scrap yard – every one was a hero, and none more so than the groundcrews who kept them flying.

The Afrika Korps was in full retreat by the end of 1942 and two other Albacore

Albacore BF712:S5R of 821 Squadron came to grief in Malta during December 1942, although the damage is slight and repairable with the limited facilities available. (I. Templar)

squadrons, 821 and 826 (only half the squadron, as the other half with their Albacores were needed in the final battles in the Western Desert) arrived on Malta to help prevent supplies getting through to them.

On 31 March 1942 830 Squadron was finally absorbed into 828. The new squadrons became operational on the night of 1-2 December 1942 when they were airborne for over five hours, without finding the enemy convoy.

Three Albacores of 821 were out during the night of 19 January 1943 and torpedoed a 5,000 ton ship which was left on its side and a smaller one of 2,000 tons which broke in half and sank. Two Albacores were lost on two operational sorties but the good news was that the Afrika Korps finally pulled out of Tripoli on 23 January.

On 9 February it was back to minelaying when four Albacores of 828 laid 1,500lb magnetic mines at the entrance to Trapani harbour. On 22 March 826 Squadron was recalled to North Africa taking its much needed Albacores.

In poor weather a formation of Albacores of 828 set out across Sicily on 12 March

An Albacore pilot watches the finishing touches being made to his load of 250lb bombs. Just noticeable are the ASV aerials below the pilot's windscreen and on the extreme right between the wings. (IWM)





Fairey Albacore Mk I 5B:X8942 828 Squadron, Hal Far, Malta, December 1942. Code red/Sky. Serial in black. Overall scheme of Extra Dark Sea Grey and Dark Slate Grey over Night lower surfaces. Type B1, and B roundels



Fairey Albacore Mk I 5S:BF712 821 Squadron, Malta, December 1942. Sky codes with serial in black. Overall scheme of Extra Dark Sea Grey and Dark Slate Grey over Night lower surfaces. Type C1, and B roundels

1943 to look for enemy shipping, being the first since hostilities began. Only one Albacore got through and was hit by heavy flak over Palermo. Despite this they continued looking and later released their torpedo at a 8,000 ton tanker which they hit amidships. A quick look before setting off back to Malta revealed the tanker stopped with a destroyer alongside.

The following night another tanker was sunk by one of 828's Albacores but there were losses including the CO of the squadron. Further attacks were made during the month, some with torpedoes and some with 250lb bombs, the Albacores from 828 and 821 joining up for some raids but targets were now starting to get fewer. Many of the ships were of less tonnage and were trying to sneak through at night to pick German troops up from the Tunisian coast.

Also, German night fighters were active along the Sicilian coastal region but for some reason had a small red light in the nose, which gave the Albacore crews some warning of a possible attack and could take evasive action, but some were shot down.

Throughout May and June 1943 821 was active minelaying and flare dropping while 828 made strikes against any enemy shipping. On 31 May *Operation Corkscrew*, the plan to capture Pantellaria began when 828's Albacores dropped flares and spotted for the bombardment by the cruiser *Orion*. These types of operation continued until 11 June when Sicily surrendered.

The Italian tanker, *Velino*, was sunk by an

Albacore of 828 on 19-20 June in Syracuse harbour. By the end of the month 828 was down to three flyable Albacores and 826 returned from North Africa to take over, 828 then ceasing to exist. The southern coast of Sicily was invaded by Allied forces on 10 July and, as the war moved further north and into Italy itself, the work of the naval forces on Malta started to decline.

ALBACORES IN THE WESTERN DESERT

Who would have thought that naval aeroplanes, and biplanes at that, would have any contribution to a war fought in a desert! But both the Swordfish and Albacores were used in North Africa in the fight against the Italians and later Rommel's Afrika Korps. On 30 May 1941 the Albacores of 826 squadron disembarked from *Formidable* to Dekheila. They found themselves loaned to the RAF Middle East Air Force for a short time – but which turned out to be 20 months.

Six of their Albacores flew up to a satellite airstrip at Fuka, east of Mersa Matruh and then to Ma'aten Bagush. They were put straight into action night bombing enemy airfields and supply depots. Following a short break, when they were sent to carry out a series of strikes on Vichy-French shipping they had returned by 1 August.

Raids started the following night and most nights it was strike after strike against airfields, ports, enemy transport, ammunition

and supply dumps. Some 337 night sorties were flown over the next few months delivering over 150 tons of bombs and incendiaries.

That November the British 8th Army advanced into Libya and on the 25 November 1941 five Albacores moved to Landing Ground (LG) 75, a forward refuelling and re-arming strip. Eleven sorties were flown over the next few nights attacking enemy armour near Sidi Omar.

To keep the crews on their toes the squadron was withdrawn in January 1942 for torpedo refresher training. They moved back in the line on 23 January but located at Berka, near Benghazi so that if required they were within striking distance of enemy shipping detected between Italy and Benghazi.

That same night five Albacores of 826 attacked a convoy 185 miles west of Benghazi. One aircraft sank the liner *Vittoria* and another damaged a destroyer but the CO was shot down with the crew becoming POWs. Early in February the squadron moved back to Ma'aten Bagush where they combined anti-submarine patrols with 51 dive-bombing and flare dropping desert trips. Acting as pathfinding aircraft Albacores dropped flares over enemy positions to allow RAF Wellingtons to bomb by the light of the flares.

No.73 Squadron flying Hurricanes also requested this service and used it for night strafing attacks. On 5 March the new CO of 826 was flying four passengers in an



Albacore N4424 4K operating out of Malta. The black underside marking has a different demarcation line to others on Malta suggesting that some were painted up roughly after arrival. (Canadian Armed Forces)

Albacore by daylight but got caught by the Luftwaffe and was shot down.

Two marauding Bf109s had a go at two Albacores four days later but the Albacores got away, with three crew members wounded. To give some idea of the constant strikes against the enemy, extracts from the squadron record book for 826 during July 1942 states –

Night 1-2 Six Albacores provided flare illumination for an attack by RAF bombers on enemy concentrations west of El Alamein, and on a forward landing ground. Many explosions among parked aircraft (estimate three destroyed and nine damaged) and among vehicles.

Night 2-3 Six Albacores illuminated and dive bombed enemy concentrations in co-operation with the RAF. Hits and violent explosions were observed among parked vehicles; an ammunition dump exploded.

Night 3-4 Seven Albacores dive bombed tank repair unit at Mersa Matruh. Heavy explosions and Germans later admitted that 12-15 heavy tanks put out of action. Ammunition train derailed and left exploding.

Night 4-5 Nine Albacores provided flare illumination for RAF bombers for three hours.

Night 5-6 Eight Albacores dive bombed

enemy shipping in Mersa Matruh.

Night 6-9 Eight Albacores continually illuminated and dive bombed enemy transports and tanks.

Night 9-10 Four Albacores dive bombed enemy tanks; six Albacores located and dive bombed enemy ship convoy 100 miles north of Tobruk. Two 5,000 ton ships sunk and others damaged; one Albacore bombed oil storage tanks in Tobruk.

Night 10-11 Six Albacores dive bombed enemy shipping in Mersa Matruh and three illuminated and dive bombed enemy concentrations.

Night 11-12 Six Albacores spotted and illuminated for shore bombardment by RN; six Albacores dive bombed enemy transport.

Night 12-20 Nightly attacks providing illumination for RAF bombers.

Night 20-23 Albacores from 826 and 821 squadrons dive bombed enemy tanks, M/T and troop concentrations.

Night 24-25 Ten Albacores illuminate landing strip for attacks by RAF Wellingtons. One Albacore failed to return.

Night 25-27 Twelve Albacores provide illumination for RAF bombers.

Night 28-29 Three Albacores bomb E-boats in Mersa Matruh, one sunk, one damaged.

Night 30-31 Four Albacores dive bombed enemy shipping in Mersa Matruh. One merchant ship sunk, one damaged. Three Albacores dive bombed enemy repair shops with two direct hits.

These continual nocturnal raids by Albacores and RAF Wellingtons meant that

the enemy could not relax at all and units had to be shunted around to try and fox the British. However, such were their skills that the USAAF asked for the Albacores to illuminate targets for their B-25 Mitchells as well.

Now the squadron were dropping flares for the Wellingtons, Hurricanes and Mitchells, laying mines in Derba harbour, bombing enemy transport and airfields. All this contributed to the Axis armies being fought to a standstill just outside El Alamein in September 1942.

From May the Albacores had flown 414 missions, including 91 during July, when there was bitter fighting for Ruweisat Ridge. Five Albacores were lost on operations and four to enemy night fighters and flak but spare aircraft were now more readily available from Egypt and the squadron could quite often muster 12 Albacores to cover all the tasks required of them. Also, during May and June 821 Squadron had arrived with Albacores to give them a break – but the Navy thought otherwise and sent them to practise torpedo dropping!

No.821 Squadron had been operating Swordfish until 1 March 1942 when they re-equipped with Albacores. April saw them on anti-submarine patrols and early in May the squadron aircraft were all fitted with internal long-range fuel tanks. The squadron flew to Gambut on 30 May and that night carried out their first flare-dropping sorties. They went out nearly every night over the next few days illuminating positions at

Martuba and Derna for the bombers. Flare-dropping sorties were usually three to four hours duration with accurate and intense flak.

On top of their normal duties the Albacores were often asked to carry out other raids. An enemy convoy was detected off Tobruk and on the night of 9 July nine Albacores of 826 flew 250 miles behind enemy lines, were refuelled at a secret strip by Bombay transport aircraft and then carried out a night attack on the enemy convoy.

Mersa Matruh harbour quite often had enemy ships and light craft such as E-boats, the practice being to glide in, drop the bombs and be off into the darkness before the flak started. On 24 August Albacore X8972:H of 821 was flare-dropping for bombers and unintentionally lit up 10 enemy tanks trying to move at night. The crew called in the Wellingtons and continued to drop flares until the attack was over.

During September and October 821 continued to illuminate enemy airfields for the medium bombers – on 20 October one Albacore, trying to drop flares on LG21, was driven away five times by intense flak and eventually illuminated LG19 not far away and bombed it themselves. The aircraft was peppered with hits by the flak.

On 4 November 821 was withdrawn to rest but by the end of the month were at Hal Far on Malta looking for convoys again.

No.826 Squadron moved back into the line during mid-October and by the end of the month had flown 89 bombing and flare sorties in support of the pre-El Alamein offensive. On the night of 1-2 November 1942 the Axis forces started their retreat with the Albacores following them, illumi-

nating and bombing them all the way, until they were out of the range of normal Albacore endurance.

Six Albacores were ferried to Malta for 828 Squadron and the other six moved up to Wadi Zem Zem to provide illuminating sorties when required. A number of spare aircraft were at Dekheila being fitted with ASV radar for when the squadron returned to its normal naval duties such as anti-submarine patrols. Boring after the exciting actions over the desert or Malta.

No.826 flew 12 Albacores to Algeria on 11 February 1943 for strike duties against enemy shipping. One merchant vessel attacked by torpedoes was found to be already aground. On the night of 16-17 April four Albacores attacked a small convoy at sea. The 5,324 ton tanker *Monginevro* was hit and sank while nine other aircraft attacked a convoy off Cap Bon but with only one torpedo hit being claimed.

The Axis forces in Tunisia surrendered on 8 May 1943 and the squadron flew to Blida where some 350 anti-submarine patrols were flown over Allied convoys going between Malta and Alexandria.

Moving to Hal Far, Malta on 10 July 826 provided anti-submarine patrols over Allied shipping during the build up to the invasion of Sicily. After the invasion 826 was disbanded. Their record was exemplary – over 41 months of almost continual operations the Albacores had made more than 1,000 bombing and flare-dropping sorties delivering over 700 tons of bombs, mines, flares, torpedoes and leaflets.

During February-March 1943 815 Squadron, then based at Dekheila with 12 Albacores was tasked with spotting for the

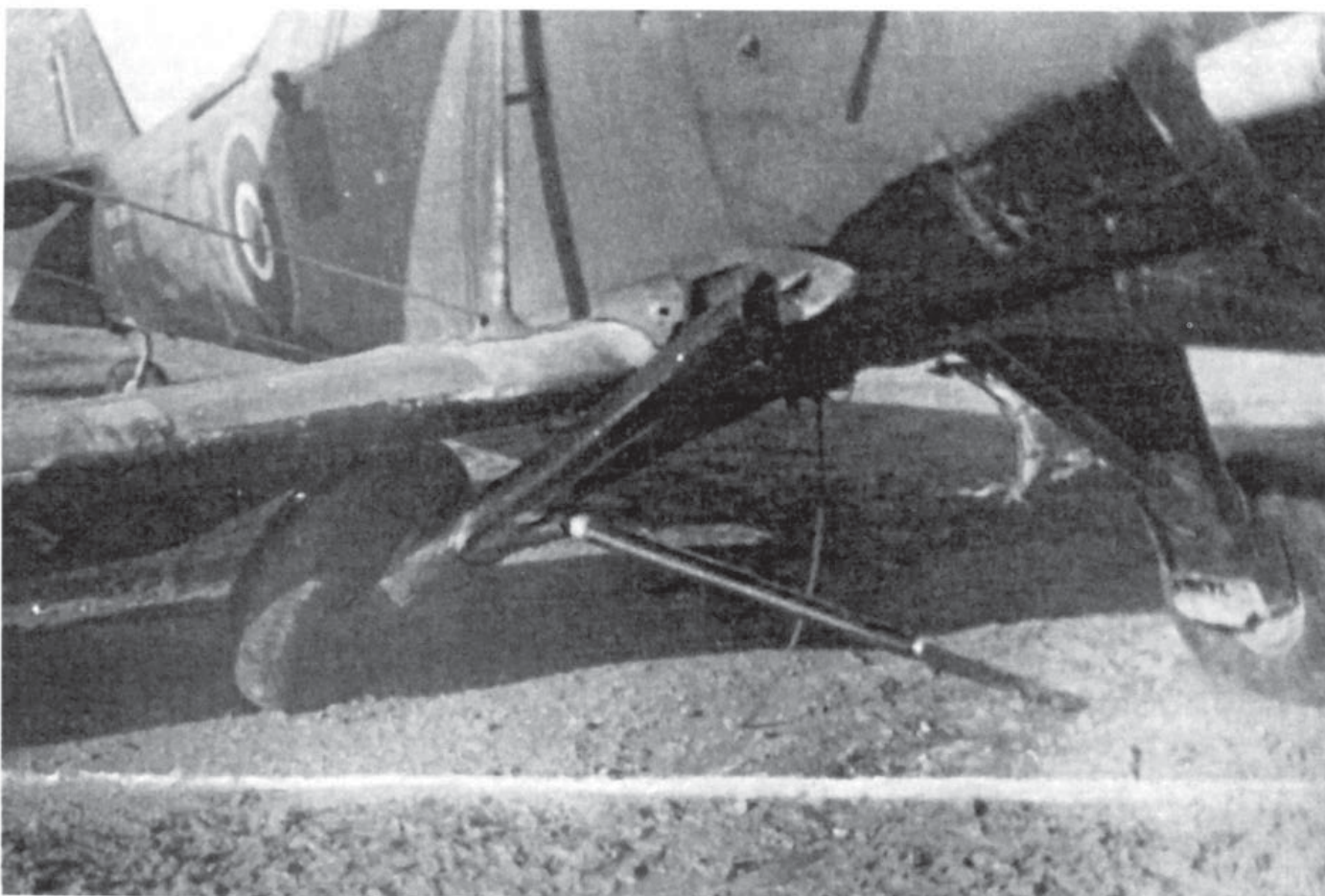
bombardment of enemy ports along the coast by ships off-shore.

Detachments from 815 were based at Haifa in Palestine and Nicosia, Cyprus during which some 17 air attacks were made on U-boats. The squadron then moved into the Western Desert to support the other Albacore squadrons, taking with them two ASV-equipped Swordfish. Albacores continued in action until the squadron was disbanded at Mersa Matruh on 24 July 1943.

OPERATIONS PEDESTAL AND TORCH

Any supply convoys running across the Mediterranean were subject to attacks by Axis aircraft. Malta was in desperate need of supplies just to exist so *Operation Pedestal* was planned for August 1942. It was decided that one convoy would try to get through to Malta starting from Gibraltar at the western end. The convoy consisted of 14 merchantmen protected by two battleships, seven cruisers, 20 destroyers and three Fleet carriers – *Eagle*, *Indomitable* and *Victorious*. *Eagle* did not carry Albacores; on *Indomitable* were 24 Albacores of 827 and 831 Squadrons (with 24 Sea Hurricanes of 800 and 880 plus six Martlets of 806) *Victorious* had two Albacores, nine being on detachment elsewhere, and 12 Albacores of 832 Squadron (with 18 Fulmars of 809 and 884 plus six Sea Hurricanes of 885). *Furious* had nine Albacores of 822 Squadron and six Sea

Close up of the collapsed undercarriage on Albacore BF712:S5R of 821 Squadron. (I Templar)





Albacore C of 821 Squadron in the Western Desert. A TAG, Leading Airman Grainger, checks his gun before a sortie. (I. Templar)

Hurricanes and was ferrying 38 Spitfires.

The convoy passed through the Straits of Gibraltar on the night of 9-10 August 1942 and were detected the following day. *Eagle* was hit by four torpedoes from U-73 and sank in less than eight minutes, *Victorious* received a direct hit by a bomb on her flight deck and later that day *Indomitable* was bombed, two hits on the flight deck and a near miss holing her below the waterline. Eventually five merchantmen made it into Valletta harbour, two of those being assisted by other ships. Many aircraft on the carriers were destroyed or damaged in prolonged attacks with the Swordfish and Albacores limited in their usefulness against modern aircraft.

British carriers supported the Allied invasion of North Africa in November 1942 – code named 'Operation Torch' seven carriers were to provide air cover and close support. The carriers were *Argus*, *Avenger*, *Biter*, *Dasher*, *Furious*, *Formidable* and *Victorious*. The carriers with Albacores embarked were *Formidable* with 12 Albacores of 820 Squadron, *Furious* with eight Albacores of 822 Squadron, *Victorious* with nine of 817 and eight of 832 Squadrons.

All aircraft had an American star painted over the British roundels for easy identification for American forces who were unfamiliar with British aircraft. The Albacores flew anti-submarine patrols and carried out bombing raids when required. Eight Albacores of 822 Squadron bombed La Senia airfield on 8 November destroying 47 aircraft and five of the six hangars. Dewoitine D.520 fighters of the Vichy-

French Air Force got among them and shot down three plus one lost to flak, although one Albacore TAG shot down a D.520.

Albacores of 820 Squadron dropped leaflets over Saouille and set up a smoke screen to protect ships from shore batteries at Sidi Ferruch. Returning for a second attack six Albacores dive-bombed coastal batteries at Fort D'Estre dropping about 30 bombs within 30 seconds of each other – the battery surrendered! An Albacore of 822 Squadron put a torpedo into a disabled U-boat (U-331) which quickly sank, taking 32 of her crew but 16 who were on deck survived. The action moved away with Albacores escorting convoys of ships that had been withdrawn from the action.

With the Tunisian campaign over the Allies now cast their eyes on Sicily and planned Operation Husky. The carriers were not required for close support this time as there were sufficient airfields available in Malta and North Africa. On 10 July 1943 Allied forces landed on the beaches of Sicily – off-shore the carriers *Indomitable* (817 with 21 Albacores) and *Formidable* (820 with 18 Albacores) waited in vain to be called into action but were not required, the Albacores carrying out anti-submarine patrols.

By the time of the Salerno landings in September 1943 there was only one squadron of Albacores embarked and this was 820 aboard *Formidable*. After that the TBR squadrons were equipped with Barracudas.

FAR EAST AND INDIAN OCEAN

When the Japanese invaded the Malayan Peninsula in December 1941 the airfield at

Seletar housed, among others, Nos.36 and 100 Squadrons of the RAF, both equipped with ancient Vickers Vildebeests. In mid-December No.36 Squadron received five Albacores and these were in constant action until the country was over-run.

Three of the Albacores joined No.100 Squadron on 24 January 1942 to bomb and destroy a bridge at Labis. A Japanese convoy was sighted about 20 miles north of Endau and Vildebeests of Nos.36 and 100 Squadrons carried out classic daylight torpedo attacks, scoring hits on three enemy ships but losing five aircraft during the attack. A second strike was laid on for the afternoon included nine Vildebeests and three Albacores, escorted by a few Hurricanes and Buffaloes. Intercepted before they reached the convoy five more Vildebeests and the three Albacores were shot down, effectively ending their contribution to the war in the Far East.

Indomitable was at Cape Town when the Japanese over-ran Malaya and Singapore, her air fleet consisting of 827 and 831 Squadrons with 12 Albacores apiece, 800 with Fulmars and 880 with Sea Hurricanes. To strengthen fighter cover in an effort to slow down the Japanese advance into the East Indies, *Indomitable* called at Aden, disembarked one squadron of Albacores and the Fulmars, and loaded 50 Hurricanes. These were for the depleted RAF squadrons in Batavia and were flown ashore over 27-28 January 1942.

Within 48 hours of arriving most of the Hurricanes were destroyed by Japanese bombing and strafing attacks. A second batch of 50 Hurricanes were ferried by *Indomitable* to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) to provide a fighter force after which the carrier returned to Aden and embarked her



Fairey Albacore Mk II 4L:BF758. White codes with serial in black. Overall scheme of Extra Dark Sea Grey and Dark Slate Grey over Sky lower surfaces. Darker colour over area in front of the cockpit applied to cover sheen from flaking paint revealing aluminum. Type C1 and B roundels



Fairey Albacore Mk II 4L:BF609 822 Squadron, Crail, 1942. Red codes, outlined in white with serial in black. Overall scheme of Extra Dark Sea Grey and Dark Slate Grey over Sky lower surfaces. Type C1 and B roundels



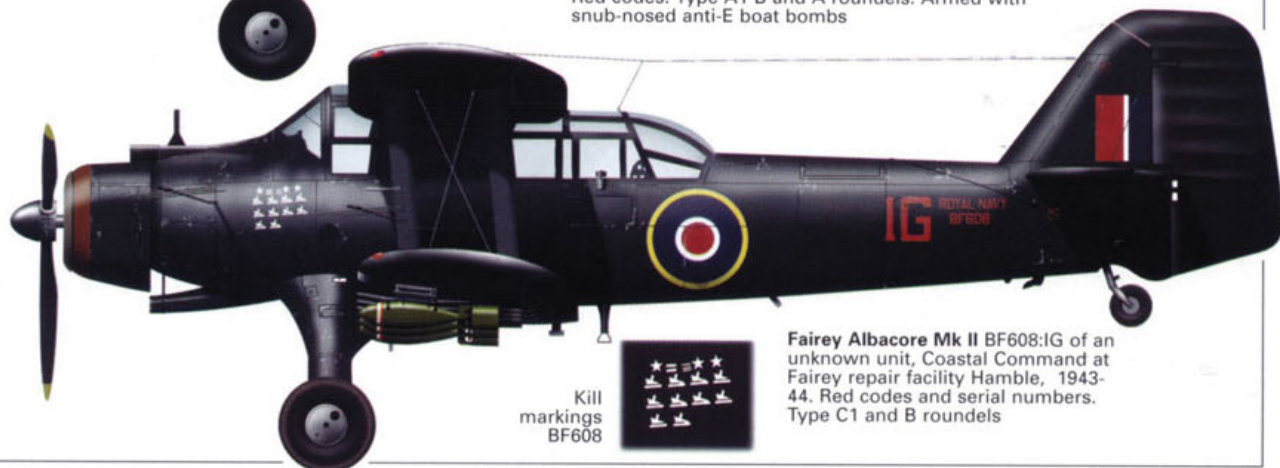
Fairey Albacore Mk II G:T9250 Coastal Command, 1944. Red codes and serial. Overall scheme of Night with Extra Dark Sea Grey and Dark Slate Grey on upper surfaces and tail only. Type C1, B and A roundels



Kill markings
T9250



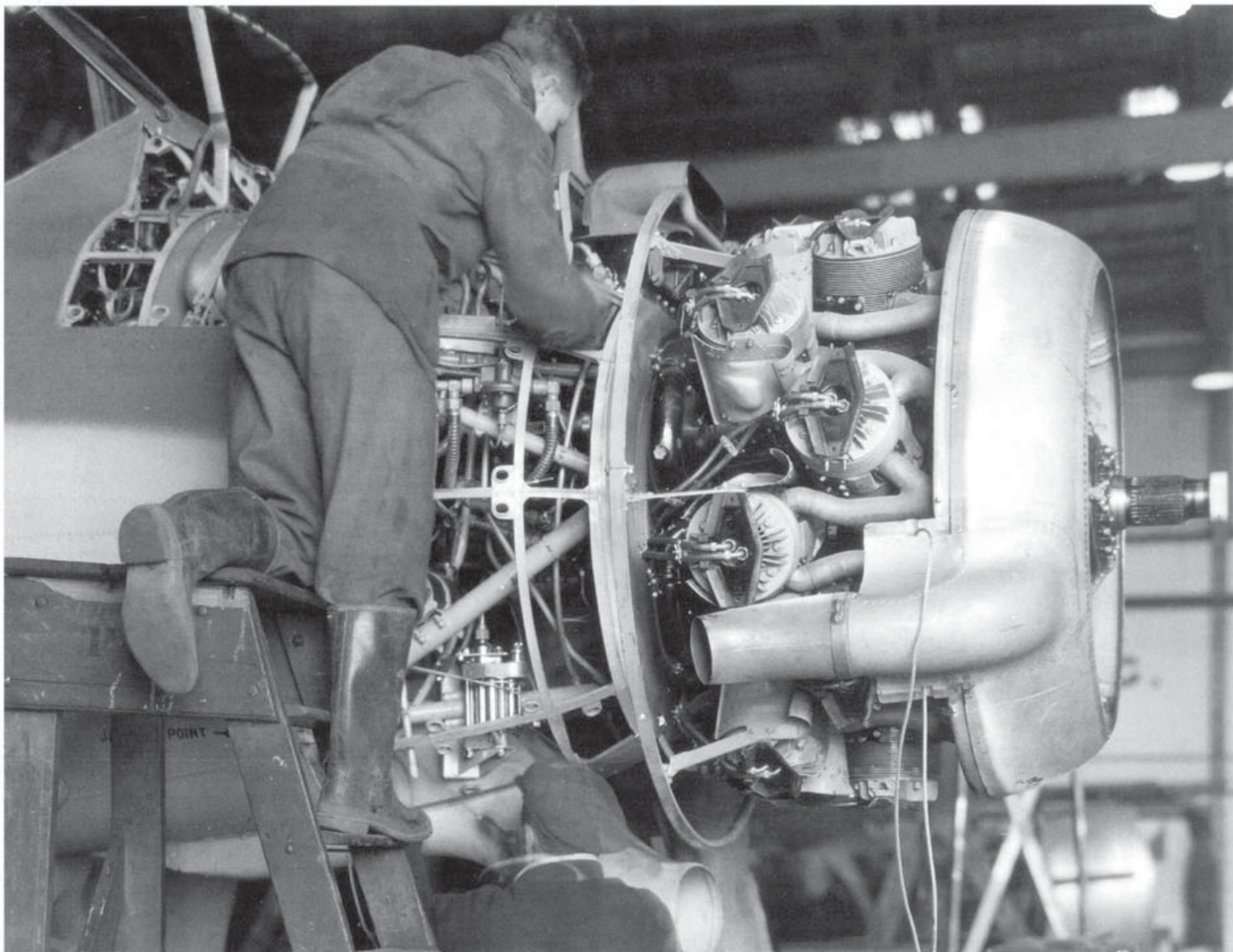
Fairey Albacore Mk II NH Serial Unknown. 415 Squadron RCAF, based at RAF Manston 1944-45. All Night finish also extended over side window panels. Red codes. Type A1 B and A roundels. Armed with snub-nosed anti-E boat bombs



Kill markings
BF608



Fairey Albacore Mk II BF608:IG of an unknown unit, Coastal Command at Fairey repair facility Hamble, 1943-44. Red codes and serial numbers. Type C1 and B roundels



Workshop mechanics doing the complicated job of connecting up the pipework and wiring to the Albacore's Taurus engine following a major inspection.

Albacores and Fulmars. She then joined Admiral Sir James Somerville's Eastern Fleet operating out of Addu Atoll in the Maldives.

The Japanese fleet under Admiral, Nagumo, moved into the area with the intention of completely destroying the British Eastern Fleet – he needed the airfields and harbours on Ceylon to support his future moves in East Africa and beyond. Nagumo's fleet included over 300 naval aircraft embarked in five carriers. Admiral Somerville, with only limited numbers of strike aircraft and fighters, used RAF Catalinas during the day to look for the enemy fleet, and at night sent out torpedo-carrying Albacores. The Eastern Fleet retired to Addu Atoll and on 5 April 1942, Easter Sunday, the Japanese force attacked Ceylon – six Swordfish of 788 Training Squadron had taken off from Trincomalee to fly to Minneriya to become the island's sole land-based strike force – all were caught in the air and shot down. Fortunately only two aircrew were killed, the rest ending in hospital. The cruisers, *Cornwall* and *Dorsetshire*, sailing without air cover were detected and both sunk. Albacores from *Indomitable* went out most nights looking for enemy shipping, but without success. The reason was that Somerville was operat-

ing to the south of the island and Nagumo to the north.

A patrolling Catalina sent in a report of an impending raid and the carrier *Hermes*, not wanting to get caught in harbour put to sea – only to be found by the marauding Japanese aircraft and sunk after receiving 40

hits within 10 minutes. Nagumo failed to consolidate his position (like they did at Pearl Harbour) and sailed for the Pacific

Sailors bombing up an Albacore with 250 lb bombs and flares on the underwing racks (Via Richard Caruana)





Above: In the foreground is the wreckage of an Albacore showing the harsh terrain in which it crashed. Below: Albacore S5L of 821 Squadron seen taxiing with an under fuselage store which is probably a mine (via Richard Caruana)



where they took part in the Battle of Midway.

OPERATION IRONCLAD

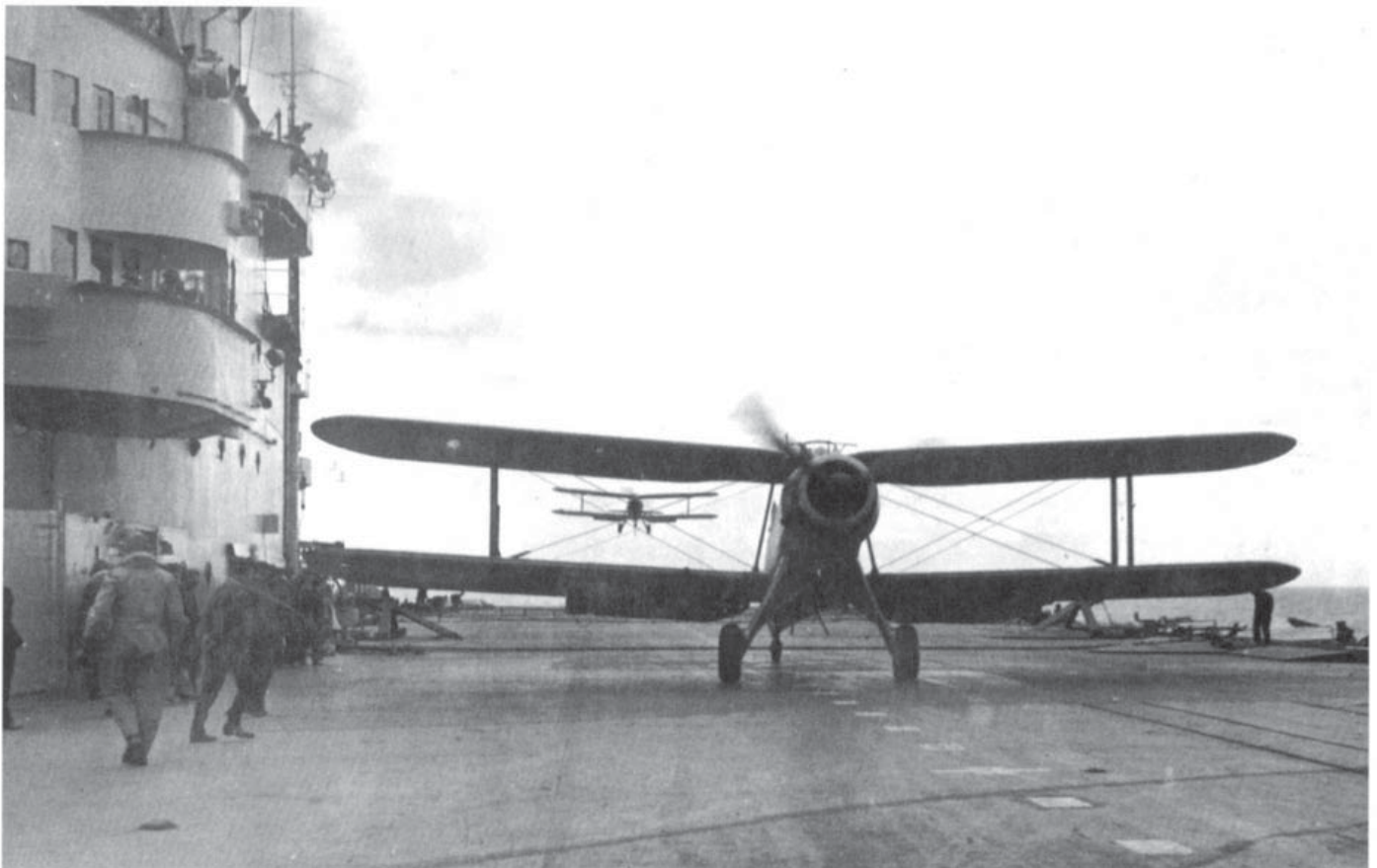
As the island of Madagascar seemed the next logical stepping stone for the Japanese to set their sights on, mainly because of the strategically positioned Diego Suarez harbour to the north of the island and controlled by the Vichy-French. This would be an important base from which to launch strikes on South Africa with its strategic ports and control around the southern parts of Africa.

An amphibious assault on the island could only be supported by carrier-based aircraft so *Illustrious* and Force F was joined off East Africa by *Indomitable* and the Eastern Fleet. It was decided that the aircraft from *Illustrious* would suppress any enemy naval opposition while the aircraft from *Indomitable* would neutralise any airfield activity and support the ground forces going ashore. Landings began on 5 May 1942 with Swordfish attacking and sinking a number of vessels while others dive-bombed shore batteries.

The Albacores bombed Antsirane airfield and destroyed many Vichy-French aircraft in the hangars. Other Albacores attacked enemy positions resisting the Allied ground forces moving off the beachheads. On 7 May all resistance in the north sector of the island stopped. *Indomitable* later sailed for

Continued on page 40

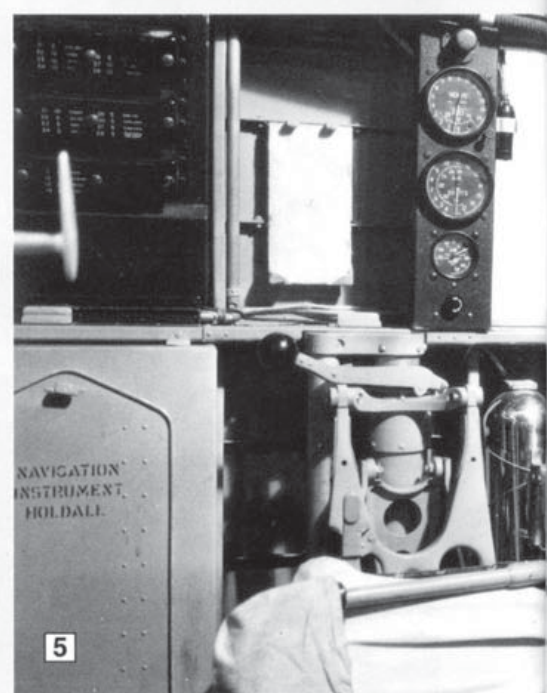
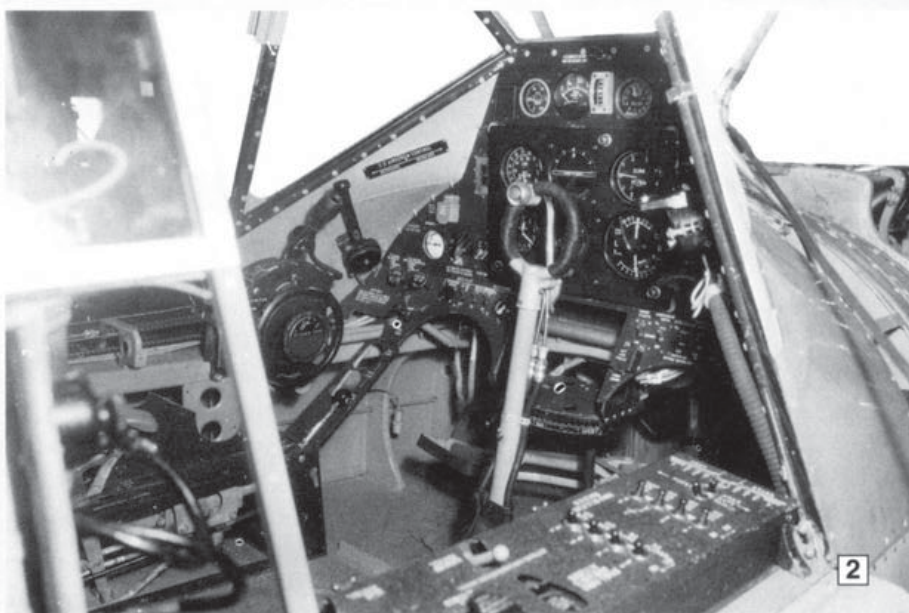
An Albacore taxis forward on the flight deck of *Formidable* as another is about to touch down. Only continuous training can get crews to deck land at short intervals and without incidents. The upper deck crew can be seen on the left waiting to disengage the aircraft tail hook and fold the wings

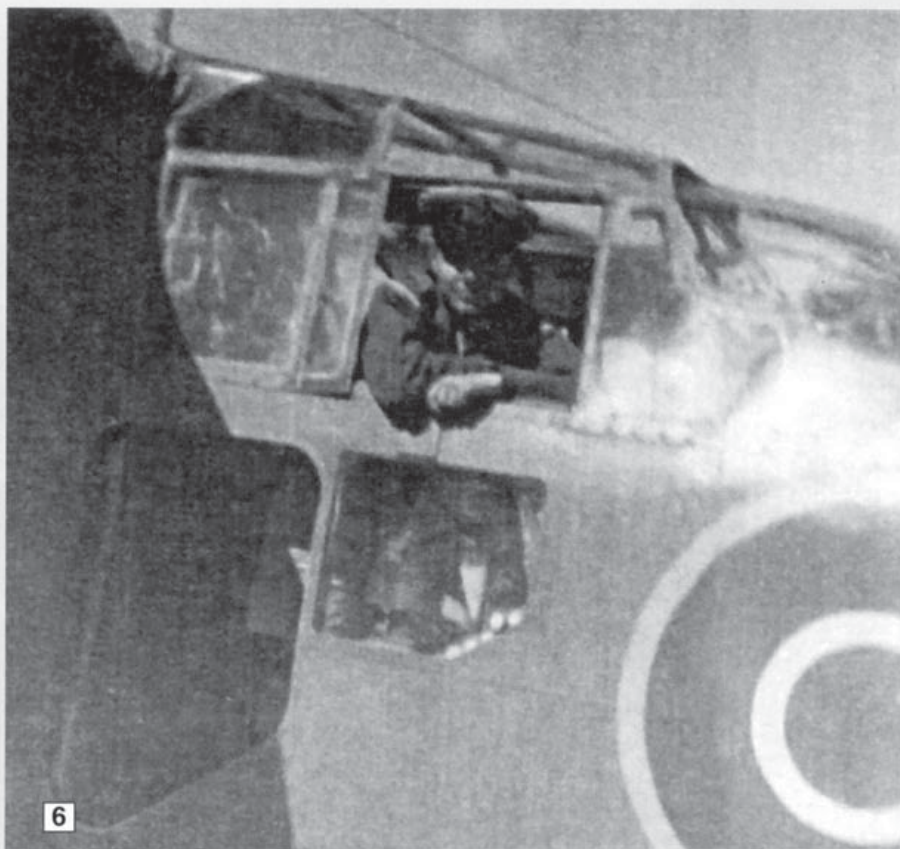
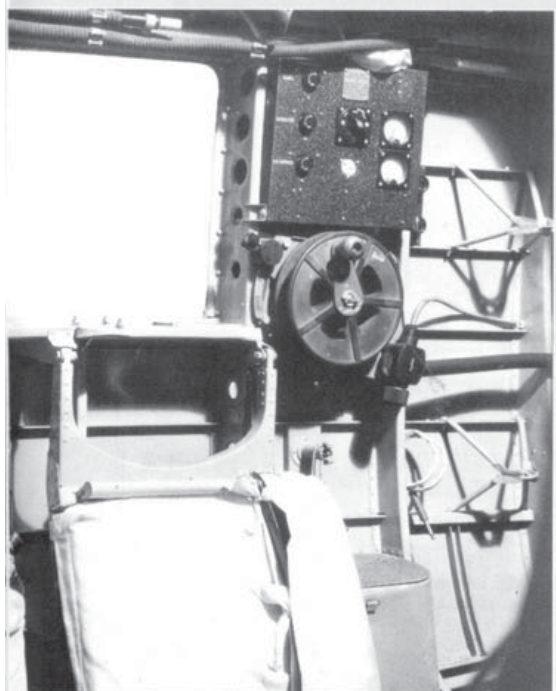
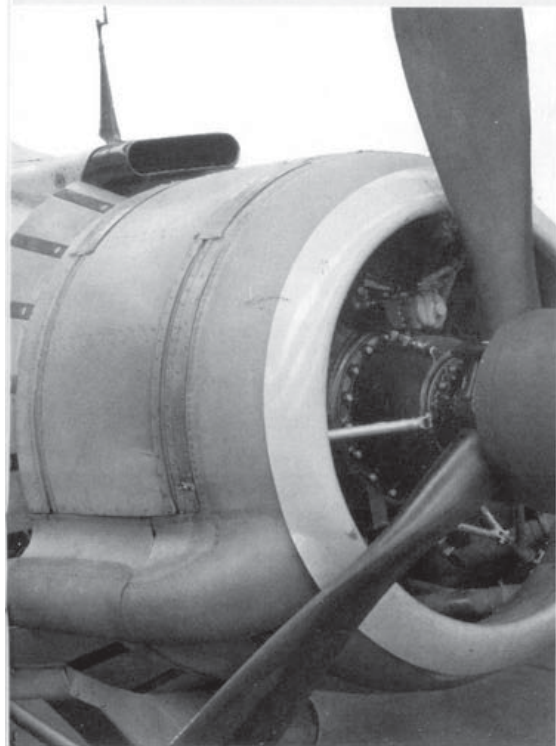




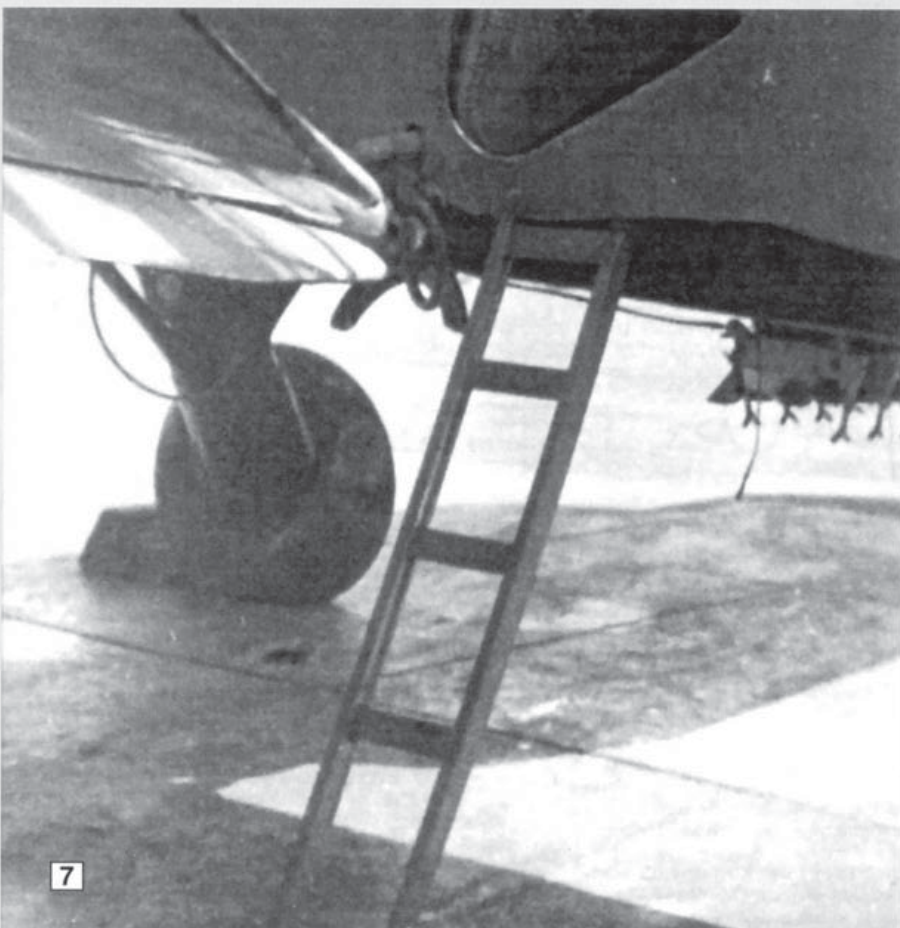
Fairey ALBACORE

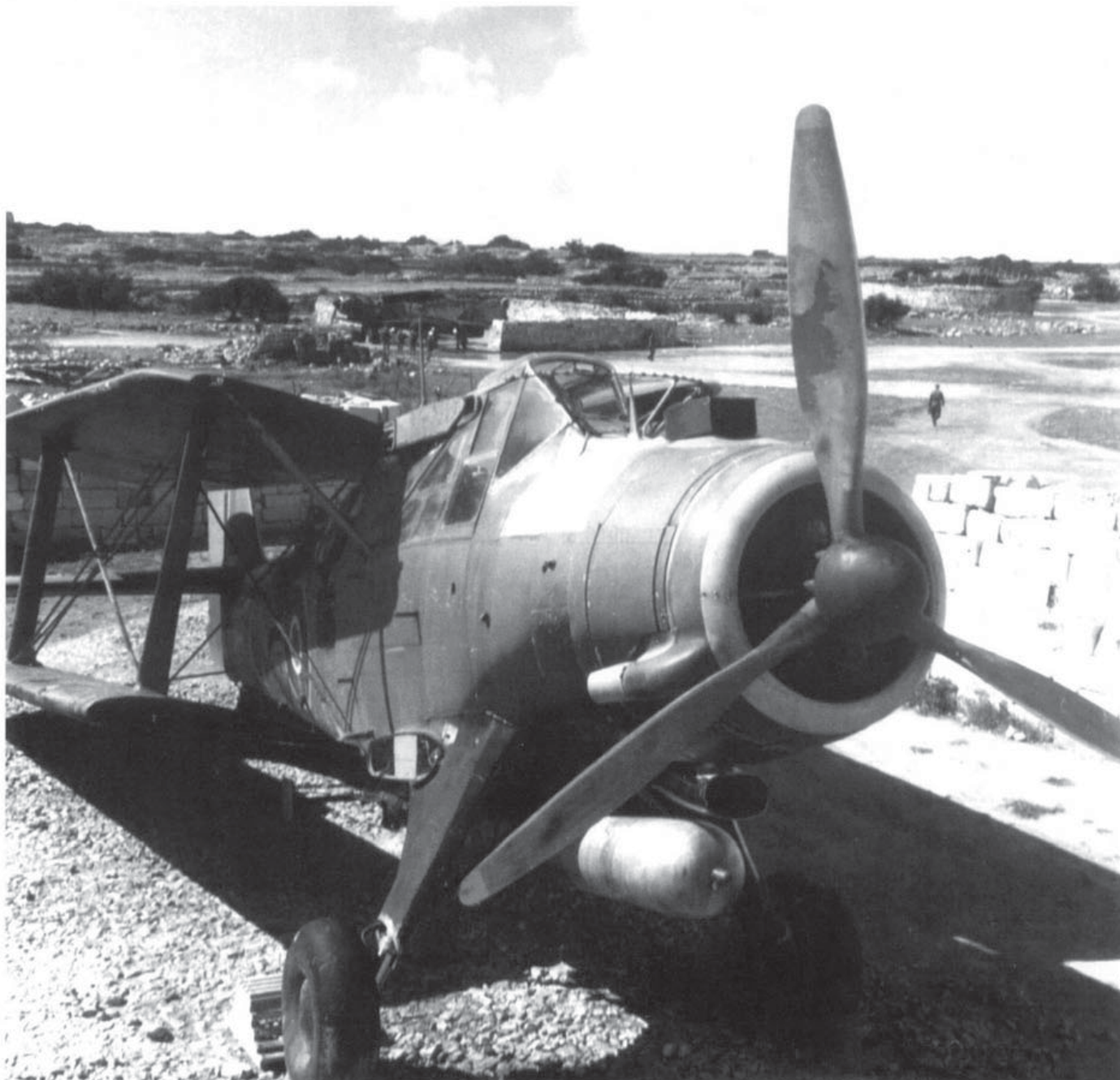
IN DETAIL





1. Pilot's cockpit from port side showing the windscreen frames. The plate on the cockpit wall is for Taurus II engine limits. 2. A port view of the Albacore cockpit, showing the blind flying panel, control column, throttle box. The seat and P compass have been removed to get a better view. 3. The Albacore's forward section. Torpedo sight not fitted. 4. One Albacore was tested at Boscombe Down with cuffs on the propeller roots to see if they would improve performance – it didn't! 5. Observer's position in Albacore with limited panel showing height, ASI, and air temperature gauge. On the other side of window is a voltage regulator for lights, wireless and compass. Below the fuse panel extreme left is storage area for the navigation instrument holdall. 6. An observer poses in the rear cockpit of Albacore X8954:K of 821 Squadron showing rear cockpit area and entrance (I. Templar) 7. Entry to the rear cockpit of an Albacore of 821 Squadron during its time in the Western Desert. (I. Templar)





Above: An Albacore with its wings folded nestles in its protective pen in Malta. Another Albacore this time with the wings extended can be seen in the background. The Maltese airfields were connected by a maze of taxiways as the pens had to be widely dispersed.

Continued from page 37

the Mediterranean, leaving the aircraft from *Illustrious* to help mop up any later resistance on the island. *Indomitable* was torpedoed by a Ju 88 on 16 July 1943 and went to the USA for repairs. When she returned her air complement consisted of Barracudas and Hellcats.



Right: Opening the wings of a parked Albacore at Hal Far, Malta. A curious farmer's wife and daughter can be seen in between the struts of the port wing following the operations from their farmhouse. Civilians often walked on the airfields as in many cases their homes were close to the taxiways. (via Richard Caruana)

Fairey Albacore kits and accessories

Scale	Version	Manufacturer	Reference	Remarks
1:72	Albacore Mk.I	Czechmaster	CMR0063	Resin kit
1:72	Albacore Mk.I	Formaplane	FPD19	Vacuform kit
1:72	Albacore Mk.I	Magna	MAG7264	Resin kit
1:72	Albacore Mk.I	MPM	MPM72095	RAF injection mould
1:72	Albacore Mk.I	Pegasus	PEG4001	Short run
1:72	Albacore Mk.I	RSM	RSM72050	Resin kit



Fairey Albacore Mk II 4L:N9421 of 822 Squadron, *HMS Formidable*, Operation Torch, November, 1942. Black codes and serial. Overall scheme of Extra Dark Sea Grey and Dark Slate Grey over Sky lower surfaces. US star outlined in yellow in all positions



Fairey Albacore Mk I ØC Serial unknown but may still be 'US NAVY' in white following Operation Torch. 820 Squadron, *HMS Formidable*, 1942/43. Note that the US star has been painted out and replaced with type C1 roundel but shape of earlier marking remains. White codes. Overall scheme of Extra Dark Sea Grey and Dark Slate Grey over Night lower surfaces



Fairey Albacore Mk I ØL:BF653 serial overpainted, 820 Squadron, *HMS Formidable*, Operation Torch, November 1942. White codes. Overall scheme of Extra Dark Sea Grey and Dark Slate Grey over Night lower surfaces. Yellow outlined US star on fuselage but without yellow surround on top of wing



Fairey Albacore Mk I ØE:X9075 820 Squadron, Operation Torch, November, 1942. White codes with serial in black. Overall scheme of Extra Dark Sea Grey and Dark Slate Grey over Sky lower surfaces. US star with no yellow surround on upper wing and fuselage only



Fairey Albacore Mk I X9109:E2A 767 Squadron, East Haven, 1943. Red codes with serial in black. Overall scheme of Extra Dark Sea Grey and Dark Slate Grey over Sky lower surfaces. Type C1 and B roundels. Red spinner



Above: Albacore BF759:4L was from the last production batch. Left: 821 Squadron Albacores flying over the Blue Grotto, Weid iz-Zurrieq, Malta. Nearest is BF574:S5L.



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