



# The Air League Newsletter

Issue 3: May/June 2011

## PM Responds to Air League concerns

**T**he Prime Minister's Office has responded to the recent Air League statement voicing serious concern over current UK civil aviation policy issues. This provides a good example of the continuing high regard in which the Air League is held, and underlines the collective value of the expertise it is able to bring to the discussions on aviation and defence policy which remain vital to the long term interests of the country. The Air League critique that led to the official reply sent via the Department for Transport can be seen on the Air League website.

The government response stated that Ministers are keen to start a new chapter in aviation policy – one that promotes a competitive aviation industry, supporting UK economic growth, while recognising the need for restraint due to aviation's global and local environmental impacts. It continued, "A key priority for the Department (for Transport) is to improve the efficiency of our airports, as key components of our national infrastructure, in a way which is consistent with our commitments on protecting the environment. We therefore announced on 15 June the establishment of a South East Airports Taskforce with key players from across the industry to explore the scope for measures to make the most of existing airport infrastructure and improve conditions for users of Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted. Theresa Villiers MP, the Minister for Aviation, is chairing the Taskforce whose work programme covers a range of issues around accessing airports, queuing within the airport and operational resilience and efficiency. The Government announced on 3 March that it will also be introducing legislation in the next Parliamentary session to reform the framework for airport economic regulation. These reforms will help improve the quality of service that passengers receive at designated airports and contribute positively to economic growth. They will also strip out unnecessary regulation and support passenger-focused investment in our existing airport infrastructure."

It added, "In addition to this work, we have started the process of developing a longer term strategy for a sustainable future for aviation. Ministers want to provide a policy framework which supports economic growth and addresses aviation's environmental impacts. On 30 March

the Department issued a scoping document, setting out the questions we are seeking to answer, with a view to publishing a draft policy framework for formal consultation in March 2012. The scoping document is available at: <http://www.dft.gov.uk/consultations/open/2011-09>"

"This scoping document begins a dialogue with stakeholders towards developing a long-term high level sustainable framework for UK aviation. We want all those who benefit from or are affected by aviation to contribute towards and influence the future direction of aviation policy. We recognise that opinions will be varied and sometimes difficult to reconcile."

However, the DfT would like to take this opportunity to encourage members to respond constructively with evidence to support their views. It has requested contributions by 30 September 2011.

### FSTA named Voyager



(Airbus photo)

The first FSTA Airbus A330, now officially named Voyager has visited Boscombe Down (See Page 7)

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# Aviation Policy *(continued from page 1)*

**The response to specific aspects of aviation policy criticised by The Air League were dealt with as follows:**

**Regional Air Services:** The Government recognises the importance of air services from UK regional airports and the role they play in local economies. However, there are difficult questions here that need careful consideration since airlines face competitive pressure to use their slots for routes which are the most commercial. At Heathrow, for example, very few slots are not being used, and therefore any proposal to reserve a set number for UK regional services would involve diverting them away from international services. Any proposals for expansion at regional airports should be judged on their individual merits, taking careful account of all relevant environmental considerations.

**RAF Northolt:** The possible use of RAF Northolt either to support Heathrow operations or to provide an alternative for some flights has been considered in the past. Northolt is of strategic significance to the Ministry of Defence and is expected to remain one of their “core sites” for the foreseeable future, with a significant level of activity in terms of both fixed and rotary wing flying. Whilst there is some degree of commercial operation at Northolt in terms of business and private jets, its proximity to Heathrow also means that, from an airspace point of view, the scope for expanding civilian operations is limited.

**Mixed Mode:** The Government remains firmly committed to retaining runway alternation and will not approve the introduction of mixed mode operations at Heathrow. Ministers believe that any potential benefits mixed mode might bring to the airport are outweighed by the negative impact such operations would have on local communities

**Air Passenger Duty:** The DfT points out that aviation taxation is a matter for the Treasury, but highlights that the Government announced on 23 March that it will not introduce a per plane duty in place of air passenger duty and that there would be a consultation on proposed changes to APD. The Budget consultation includes proposals for simplifying APD from April 2012 on a broadly revenue-neutral basis, aimed at reducing distortions in the current system and improving the efficiency of the tax. The Government invites comments, views and evidence on a range of questions, one of which specifically covers the impact of APD on regional economies. It states that it hopes the Air League will consider responding to the consultation.

## AIR LEAGUE RESPONSE

The Air League is disappointed with this DfT response and we have responded accordingly. A copy of the Air League reply is on the website.

## Avro Vulcan News

from Robert Fleming, Director

I feel sure that Air League members share with me the same soaring spirits and pride whenever they see the Avro Vulcan in flight. Last year, Vulcan XH558 celebrated the 50th anniversary of her first flight. Next year in 2012, she will celebrate the 60th anniversary of the first-ever flight of a Vulcan, but also hopefully Her Majesty the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee and the 30th anniversary of the South Atlantic conflict. With the retirement of the RAF’s VC10 fleet in 2013, Vulcan XH558 is destined to become the last flying all-British four-engined jet aircraft, and a living testament to one of the greatest eras in British aviation. If you would like to keep informed of the latest Vulcan news including her extensive flying programme this year, please sign up to the Vulcan’s e-newsletter at <http://www.vulcantothesky.org/register.html>



*(Photo credit: Richard Gardner)*

## Costs and Values

**If ever the over-used phrase about knowing the cost of everything and the value of nothing had a particular significance, then in today's political environment that must apply most appropriately in the context of UK defence policy. As the outgoing Financial Secretary to the Treasury so helpfully confirmed in a memo left behind in his office, addressed to his successor in May 2010, there's no money left. Everyone in the land has since been made painfully aware of the extent of the dire financial legacy left behind by the previous government, along with that infamous note.**

This mountain of debt has subsequently become the new Coalition's mantra for the largest swath of defence cuts in living memory – in the name of making good the £36 billion of overspend in the defence budget (now thought to be even more). But these cuts have gone well beyond merely attempting to get out-of-control programmes back in-line, they have eliminated an enormous proportion of our total front line capabilities, in many cases marginalizing the effectiveness of what has been left. Though many voters are aware of the extent of the debt problem, they also know that last year's Strategic Defence and Security Review is little more than an ill-prepared and hopelessly flawed high-risk response to Treasury demands for massive reductions across the whole spectrum of defence spending. That such far-ranging, radical, transformational changes could be signed off after just four months of "study", and against the backdrop of unprecedented levels of political instability across the world, indicate that the political directive came from the top, and that the true value of Britain's well-balanced but seriously over-stretched Services was woefully underestimated.

Britain is still a wealthy country - one of the wealthiest in the developed world. How else could it afford to increase foreign aid to countries investing £billions in their own aviation, space, defence, nuclear and other prestige projects, while allocating more billions for international "green initiatives" and underwriting vast levels of debt support on behalf of even less prudent European nations? Clearly the decision to slash defence (and linked R&D investment) has been taken in the knowledge that it carries with it an enhanced level of political risk. Back in November, when the SDSR was announced, the new Coalition administration felt confident that it had allocated itself only a moderate level of extra risk when, for example it completely, and immediately, eliminated the UK's land-based maritime air capability AND carrier-based organic air power. Incredibly, while it was eliminating the squadrons of Harriers and HMS Ark Royal (and laying off the collective expertise and skills of thousands of personnel), the government was also deciding to press on with the building of two giant aircraft carriers in the full knowledge that only one could be afforded, with continuing concerns over how many Joint Strike Fighters might eventually be bought. The CVP programme was justified ten years ago on the basis that two ships were essential and that in STOVL mode, between 40-50 aircraft could be operated. Now, it seems that with only one of these massive ships to be fitted out for "cat and trap" operations, there might only be a single squadron of F-35s for part of the time that the single ship is available to be deployed at sea! How will the pilots be able to fly safely in this demanding role if their time at sea is so limited, even allowing for increased (and very expensive) training to be carried out with the US Navy's help?

The other government mantra concerns the assumption that things will improve after 2015, when real year-on-year defence spending is supposed to return. Apart from the fact that inflation and equipment cost rises will more than wipe out any modest % increases, there is absolutely no indication that sufficient defence funding will be restored to allow re-generation post 2020. If anything, allowing for the growing exodus of Service personnel and lost skills and knowledge available in industry (as support contracts shrink), it looks far more likely that it will be impossible for the UK to regain what it will have lost through the continuous draw downs over recent years.

The events in North Africa and the Middle East since last November highlight the utter folly of the Coalition's decision to press ahead too fast, and too deep, in reducing our Services to a level closer to that of most other NATO countries, who are largely unwilling, or unable, to contribute significant levels of air power when an emergency arises. If the air commitments over Libya continue through this summer and into the autumn, as Afghanistan enters its "fighting season", the strain on the Royal Air Force in particular may reach breaking point. What if the Falklands are invaded again? As usual, our Services will continue to try to "punch beyond their weight", but the outcome may be inevitable. If governments won't provide the resources needed to carry out the tasks they commit the Services to, then the time will come when Ministers might as well forget about attending peace conferences and grand overseas strategy summits. They soon won't be able to deliver and Britain's place at the top table will become vacant. They won't like that!

# WORRYING TIMES FOR

## The consultation period on the Government's Green Paper on Equipment, Support, document, it represents something of a shopping list of ideas but, in some respe

1. Future policy is in danger of narrowing considerably the criteria for the technology and industrial capability that needs to be retained on-shore. This has direct implications for the future level of Government funding that might be applied to research.
2. Default acquisition policy in the future will be to buy 'off the shelf' in the global market place.
3. There is nowhere any acknowledgment that the lack of stability of intent over acquisition decisions and the associated issue of an equipment programme with a systemic imbalance between aspirations and funding are a core problem.

***Taken together, these aspects represent a real threat to the UK defence industry at a time when the Government is seeking to realign the economy and develop an advanced manufacturing agenda.***

The SDSR requires our armed forces to be able to operate across the spectrum of conflict. The current operation in Libya is, of course, a topical example. This represents a continuum of previous policy in that the UK has had a longstanding need for a robust military capability to protect and promote its wide-ranging interests in an uncertain and unstable world. But we also face a difficult fiscal situation and the SDSR recognises the need to scale-back the size and nature of the combat power that we deploy. Clearly, alongside these developments, the characteristics of the UK's defence industry will have to change. Of course, the armed forces must have access to the equipment and support that they require and the MOD must be able to achieve optimum value-for-money. But, we should not forget the significance of the economic factors at stake. According to a 2011 report by the highly respected Oxford Economics think-tank:

In 2008, defence industry turnover was approximately £23 billion, making it similar in size to that of the air transport sector, the publishing and printing services sector and larger than the pharmaceuticals sector. In total, 174,000 full time equivalent people were employed directly in a variety of jobs, including aircraft, maritime and motor vehicle manufacture, electronics and telecommunications. The manufacturing component of the UK defence industry has a gross output multiplier of 2.3, meaning that for a nominal £100 million invested in the industry, the domestic economy would accrue £230 million of benefits (including the initial £100 million investment).

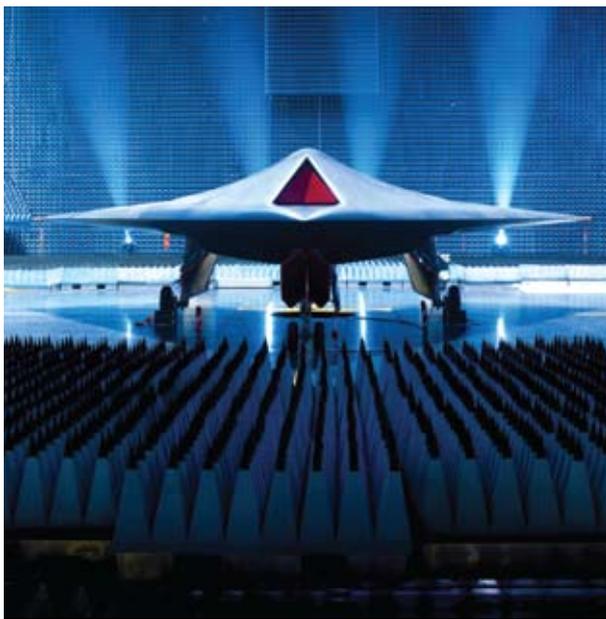
So, in terms of defence capability, history has dealt the nation a strong hand and it makes sense to recognise its value and play it to the advantage of British interests. Our armed forces have consistently displayed an enduring ability to achieve maximum military effectiveness. As I wrote in the last newsletter, this characteristic rests on their ability to extract every ounce of capability from their equipment, as well as from their people, in a way that few nations' armed forces could match. The UK's defence industry has played an integral role in generating this 'edge' by providing unfettered access to the design and technology underlying the platforms, systems and products that together generate military capability. It is a fact, however, that the track-record of some high-profile defence procurement which had its roots in the distant past has clouded the significance of this contribution. Sadly, our national media ignore the successes in favour of hyping-up the problems, not least over Typhoon. Here, they dredge-up history and ignore the reality of the present, let alone the potential for the future. This is a very damaging syndrome, not least when viewed through the eyes of potential export customers.

### **Research must continue as a high priority**

The defence industry is not seeking to be seen as a 'special case', but there are capabilities and intellectual property that are so important to the nation's defence and to sovereign freedom of action that they need to be identified and preserved. Consequently, the Government should play its hand shrewdly and in full recognition of the fact that there are elements in its defence industrial base that, selectively, should be nurtured. The preservation of research and development in the core technologies of the future should be high on the list. As a minimum, this would embrace sensor technology across the spectrum including radar and thermal imaging, information assurance and cyber security, secure communications and electronic warfare. Equally important is the systems integration expertise to embody these leading-edge technologies into military equipment.

### **The reality of 'off-the-shelf' policy**

The combined efforts of industry and Government have, in the past, been necessary to optimise the UK's military capability in the knowledge that fleet sizes and platform performance have always been constrained by economic pressure. This means that, as a threat develops, the optimum solution is rarely on the shelf or in the locker. Rather, it has to be formulated across a spectrum of options, often adapting legacy systems with appropriate



(BAE Systems photo)

*BAE's Taranis Remotely Piloted Air Vehicle is a UK funded development project. Following last year's Anglo-French agreement to work together on UAV technologies, this may be combined with the very similar French-led European Neuron project.*

**and Technology for UK Defence and Security has just ended. As a consultation ends, the direction of travel is obvious. Three areas are particularly worrying.**

modifications and insertions of both hardware and software. This might include the application of leading-edge technology, which is often an important military discriminator. This level of agility demands a strong domestic industrial base and is a key differentiator when making comparisons with other nations. What is compelling is that the investment to safeguard it on-shore would be minimal. The core of the necessary industrial base already exists, is globally competitive and comprises world-leading technologies with a skilled and experienced work-force, created over many years by domestic customer requirements.

There are distinct limitations to the way in which an 'off-the-shelf' purchase can satisfy the true requirements of the UK's armed forces. It might be effective where equipment of low complexity is involved that can be acquired from existing production lines at competitive prices. However, this is likely to represent value for money only in circumstances where the equipment concerned could be used in the configuration developed for the original customer. This is rarely the case because, traditionally, the UK's armed forces require a significant level of customisation to meet their operational, training and support requirements. In addition, they adapt and re-use their equipment to meet a variety of threats, thereby needing continuous and prompt recourse to industry expertise. In reality, a sufficiently strong indigenous industrial capability is essential to achieve a sustainable and capable British fighting force. The UK's buying pattern of small acquisition runs is geared to quality not quantity and, where off-the-shelf does not meet the bill, unit costs may rise substantially; the value proposition therefore needs to be properly framed. Moreover, as the National Security Strategy points out, there will be occasions when the UK will wish to act independently and to operate autonomously in defence of UK sovereign territory.

There would also be implications for future export success, currently standing at £7 billion a year. To the defence industry, one aspect is compelling: the position of the UK as the domestic customer for its indigenous industry's products and the making of a visible commitment towards them are vital. Once that acquisition commitment is seen to wane, export demise will rapidly follow. ***The kite-mark 'used on operations by UK armed forces' represents a world-class brand.*** I pointed this out in the last newsletter but I will repeat here that there are a number of reasons for this. The UK's armed forces are well-regarded around the world for their exhaustive training and combat performance.



*Will the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter lead to the demise of Britain's advanced aerospace design, integration and production capability? (Lockheed Martin photo)*

In terms of the equipment that they use, they are seen as discriminating customers; proving the capability of that equipment on complex operations across the spectrum of conflict; adept at contracting for high performing, value-for-money support solutions; often using novel commercial models to ease affordability.

***There is therefore a great deal at stake, in terms of defence interests and commercial benefits. Both would be put at risk were the government and UK MOD to pursue a policy of disengagement from the industry in favour of arms-length relationships and 'off-the-shelf' procurement. The generation of defence intellectual property does not represent a capability that can be turned on and off like a tap.***

It cannot be reconstituted or adapted from capabilities in other industries, or even reproduced in part without prohibitive cost. If the relationship between the customer and the UK industry were allowed to decay, elements of industrial intellectual property that currently underpin military excellence would drift off-shore never to return. This change in indigenous industrial and technology capacity is already at risk of occurring insidiously. Given the nature of the UK industrial base and its possession of world-leading technologies built-up over many years, the investment to maintain key on-shore intellectual property would be marginal. Conversely, without a strategy that recognises the role of the industry, including cautious UK Government involvement in the preservation of key intellectual property, the UK will gradually lose the critical mass of core industrial capabilities, with inevitable consequences for its military, economic and political interests.

### What should Government do?

- Define, sector-by-sector, those aspects of defence industrial capability that lie at the core of the UK's military capability and work to keep them on-shore.
- Provide a clear Research and Technology strategy that defines the significance of high impact technologies and enables industry and its stakeholders to optimise investments.
- Maintain both a stability and clarity of intent over the future equipment programme so that companies can make realistic investment plans.

# THE LEADING EDGE

*Scott Pendry reports*

**T**he Leading Edge, the youth wing of the Air League, has never been busier and there hasn't been a better time to be a member. This year has been kick started by our parliamentary reception which was a huge success. Held on 28th March, the event saw all of the organisations who form the Air League's Youth in Aviation Panel (Guild Young Members, Air Cadets, Air Scouts, Aerobility etc.) come together to showcase all of their respective activities and convey some of the challenges they face to the people that matter; MPs, Lords and key industry stakeholders.

The purpose of the day was underpinned by the Air League's Position Paper on UK Youth in Aviation; Aviation for Everyone. In it we highlight the many social benefits of youth access to aviation and the vital connection such activities have with the future prosperity of the British aerospace industry. We also argue that the organisations that make up the Youth in Aviation Panel play a vital role in ensuring the UK aerospace industry remains competitive and offer a number of recommendations to government. With Britain's future as a world leader in aerospace by no means guaranteed, it's up to us, the younger generation, to take up the mantle and to present our case to government.

All Leading Edge members present on the day were a credit to the Air League, talking at length to some key decision-makers about how the League has helped them and how they are helping others through their own involvement. Events like these are open to all



*Leading Edge visit to RAF Lyneham with Flt Lt Lucie Martin*

Leading Edge members and if you'd like to help us in this area, we'd love to hear from you.

The surroundings may be glorious (and the cakes the best in London) but as much as we like hanging out in Parliament, we've been doing some pure aviation related activities too. The simulator visit at British Airways' Crane bank facility was a particular highlight and in February, eight Leading Edge members were given the opportunity to fly the Boeing 777. Normally reserved for the exclusive training of BA pilots, Leading Edge members were given a full pre-flight briefing including flight deck instruments, controls and systems before taking the controls to experience what it's like flying the 'heavies'. The day also saw Leading Edge members experience BA's full motion 737 cabin simulator, leading to an emergency landing and full aircraft evacuation from a smoke-filled environment... quite an experience!

## **William Hilton**

I was lucky enough to spend an evening with several Leading Edge Air League members at BAFT Heathrow to go over Flight Safety training and got the chance to fly a Boeing 777 full motion simulator.

The evening started with a tour to the mock up fuselages and escape slides where we had a chance to "evacuate" down an escape slide. Andy Clubb (who manages BAFT) then took us in to into a 737 fuselage and we were seated before an emergency was simulated. Smoke started rising from the front seat of the cabin and filled the cabin very quickly. Andy was briefing us through what was happening and steps to take. We were shown how to adapt the Brace position correctly and how to improve your chances of surviving in a real accident. Apparently the new Airbus A380 which can hold as many as 882 passengers and crew has completed tests where everyone evacuated in 77 seconds.

After this we went back in to the training rooms to meet our pilots for the evening and be briefed on flying the 777 in the Sim. Senior First Officer Chris Ransome covered the information which we would need to know on the Primary Flight Display (PFD) and what we should expect.

Once I was sat in the right hand seat and looking out, it was hard to believe that I wasn't in a real aircraft. Chris sat in the left hand seat and I lined us up at the start of the runway and advanced the thrust levers about an inch until the engines were both settled and then

pressed the TOGA (Take Off Go Around) buttons on the front of the thrust levers at which point they advanced automatically. I kept the aircraft straight with the rudders and Chris called "V1.....Rotate"

Keeping my hand on the throttles I eased back on the elevator to pitch the nose up 15° and held it there as the aircraft continued to accelerate and climb away. Once a positive rate of climb was achieved, Chris retracted the undercarriage and raised the flaps in stages at the appropriate times. I continued to climb to 4000' at which point I lowered the nose and reduced power until the cruise was achieved. Next he pressed a few buttons on the touch screen of the Sim's control computer and set the aircraft 8 miles out on approach to Heathrow's 27L runway. When Chris restarted the Sim I had to fly lining up on the ILS. Initially, I flew level making slight adjustments to stay lined up with the runway and once I intercepted the glide slope I reduced power and Chris deployed the undercarriage and set the flaps for landing. It was quite hard maintaining the ILS but small adjustments seemed the best way to centre it.

I'm pleased to say I gave BA back a serviceable aircraft. Chris was really good and at the end of my last landing said "Brilliant, we could make a BA pilot out of you". It was a really great experience and when you are in the Sim you wouldn't know it wasn't a real airplane - who knows in a few years time I could be doing it for real!

Early April saw another action packed day for Leading Edge members, this time at RAF Lyneham, Wiltshire. Home to the RAF's venerable Hercules fleet, the day was organized by Air League member and Hercules pilot,

Lucie Martin. Individual comments on the visit are below with Leading Edge member Tim Marlow summing up the experience; 'it was a great experience to try and fly such a large aircraft without any training!'

## Sarah Reed

Opening our eyes to a different world outside of University and A levels, RAF Lyneham showed us what the RAF is truly about. Meeting the Leading Edge members and then socialising with the RAF Hercules crew in the mess, was a captivating and informative affair for all. We started off with great talks from Wing Commander Cunningham (OC 47 Sqn) and an Intelligence Officer; each outlining their roles and



their experiences and views. With the Medical Wing enlightening the group to the true horrors of war, we were all shocked at the images shown. Then onto 47 Air Dispatch and what the Hercules actually transports and drops; such as water, fuel and ribs. Exhausted from the mass of interesting information that we received from the Lyneham crew, we retired for lunch. After regaining our energy, the C130-K and the C130-J simulators were just what we needed. Rivalry between who did and didn't crash was great fun as the competition increased; all feeling extremely privileged. The Air Traffic Approach and Tower was a totally different side to the RAF, which without the system would not work. Then onto the great treat at looking around the K and the J Hercules, sitting in the pilot's seat, popping through the hatches and looking at the space to fit the cargo; all eager to fly. Great thanks must go to Flt Lt Lucie Martin who organised this great opportunity and the Air League for this great occasion; and of course the people at RAF Lyneham for putting up with all of our interrogating questions.

*LEFT - Leading Edge members Harry, Rachel and Joe in Parliament with the Chief of Air Staff*

**With so many events on the calendar, the next few months are set to be busier than ever for members of the Leading Edge. To name but a few, the annual flying day will be on 4th June and a Red Arrows visit is in the offing for 23rd June. There's never been a better time to be a member of the Air League's Leading Edge**

# BETWEEN THE LINES

## HEATHROW'S PUNCTUALITY IMPROVES

Heathrow Airport had its best ever day for punctual departures on Tuesday 22 March when 94 per cent of all departures were on time. As well as this, 93.9 per cent of arrivals were also on time - no later than 15 min after the scheduled time, the measurement used across the world for all modes of transport. March was also Heathrow's second best ever on record for departures punctuality at 85.1 per cent, coming a close second to October 2009 at 85.7 per cent. Due to the capacity constraints at Heathrow, the slightest thing can affect the operation - such as strong winds or fog. These things cannot be controlled by operators BAA, or the airlines flying the planes or separate ground handling companies who deal with them on the ground. Two days in the month were significantly impacted by strong winds, along with the T5 bomb scare evacuation and a 35 min runway closure due to a disabled aircraft. Heathrow's operation is very sensitive because it operates pretty much at capacity with no head room.

## RAF'S BIGGEST EVER AIRCRAFT ARRIVES IN THE UK

The RAF's largest ever aircraft with a 60 metre wingspan and nearly 60 metres long arrived in the UK for the first time on 18 April. The new future strategic tanker aircraft (FSTA) has been named publicly by the RAF as Voyager.

Voyager, a dual role air to air tanker and transport aircraft, will replace the long serving VC-10 and Tristar. It is a considerable capability boost, able to carry 291 troops over 6,000 miles and to air to air refuel other aircraft with 100,000 litres of fuel - greater than two large petrol tankers.

The MOD's airfield at Boscombe Down in Wiltshire will play host to two of the Voyager aircraft during an intensive

programme of testing and trials that will continue into next year. On the ground and in the air, the aircraft will be tested in the refuelling role, with Tornado, Sentry, Typhoon and Hercules aircraft. Voyager can refuel aircraft at a rate of 5,000 litres per minute - a garage forecourt petrol pump delivers fuel at 40 litres per minute.

Fourteen Voyager aircraft and a complete support package are being provided to the RAF under a 27 year £10.5Bn Private Finance Initiative contract signed with the AirTanker consortium in 2008. In addition to the aircraft, the service will provide training and maintenance, and brand new purpose-built buildings at RAF Brize Norton, the RAF's air transport hub.

## RAF EYE IN THE SKY HITS 20,000 HOURS OVER AFGHANISTAN

Reaper, the RAF's Remotely Piloted Aircraft has reached a landmark 20,000 operational flying hours over Afghanistan, the MOD announced recently. The 39 Squadron aircraft have proven themselves as the eyes in the sky for front line troops. Reaper was introduced in October 2007 and with its array of high tech sensors and precision guided weapons, it can carry out a wide range of missions to support forces in Afghanistan. It can gather pre-raid intelligence on target compounds, assist in countering IEDs (improvised explosive devices) and provide surveillance for routine patrols and supply convoys. Reaper can use its sensors day and night to spy on insurgent activity for hours at a time and at a range where they are undetected from the ground. The images are complemented by radar, mounted in the nose of the aircraft, gathering another dimension of detailed imagery that is analysed by a team of highly trained intelligence specialists in military bases around the world. If necessary, Reaper can also strike at insurgents with a range of precision guided weapons.

# MEMBERS' NEWS

## AGM and Annual Accounts

The AGM will take place in the RAF Club at 4pm on Thursday 16 June 2011. To save expenditure and the planet, hard copies will no longer be posted to members. The Annual Accounts will be posted on the Air League website ([www.airleague.co.uk](http://www.airleague.co.uk)) during May.

## An Opportunity Not To Be Missed - Helme Harrison

My enthusiasm for flying was fired from my lessons in Physics when I was 14 years old. I was taken to Wycombe Air Park to examine a Cessna 152 and learn more about the Bernoulli Principle. I caught the flying bug. This was the beginning of an interest in which I would never have believed would shape my life- a qualified Private Pilot, studying a Master's Degree in Aeronautical Engineering.



I secured my first scholarship at school (The Sir Adrian Swire Flying Scholarship), which gave me 15 lessons to enable me to fly solo. On Saturday 31st January 2009, (my tenth lesson), was to be my solo flight and I endured the most nerve-racking experience of my life. The weather had been appalling for the few weeks running up to this flight, which meant that numerous lessons had been cancelled, thus prolonging my adventures into the sky alone. It was my lucky day when I woke up to find perfect weather for flying – a clear blue, still day. Driving towards Wycombe Air Park, my nerves were oscillating. I arrived and performed my checks on the aircraft before my flight, not knowing what I was about to experience. I completed the first circuit of my journey with an instructor, then she said to me, "OK

Helme, are you ready for this?" The only questions I asked myself were the "what ifs". However, confidently, I replied, "Let's Go". I landed the plane, took my instructor back to the apron and this was the moment I had been waiting for- all alone, no help and the most exhilarating event one could possibly imagine. It felt as if I was in a dream. I taxied down the runway to my take-off position, gained clearance from the Air Traffic Control to lift that marvellous machine into the sky. As I was increasing speed down the runway I just could not help thinking to myself, "What an achievement, all is in my hands, no-one is here to help, think positive!" I was coming near the end of my circuit. I had made all my calls, completed all my checks and now, ahead, stood the long stretch of tarmac, known as the runway. My approach was perfect but I was getting closer to the ground. Will I land without a hitch? Fortunately, I did so and through the radio I could hear congratulations from fellow pilots/instructors and Air Traffic Control. It was a truly memorable moment.

I finally received my licence on the 7th September 2009 after two weeks of frustration and nerves due to cancellation of my skills test five times because of poor weather conditions. The more I look back on that time, the more self pride and immense achievement I feel as I realise what I have accomplished. I continued to convert my licence to cover a 4-seater aircraft, in addition to securing a cross channel check, allowing me to fly to France and countries outside the UK.

I attended the British Women Pilots' Association Dinner in November '09 and, was lucky to receive the Hilda Hewlett Trophy for a younger member who had shown initiative and

## Aviation Paintings of the Year

The Annual Aviation Paintings of the Year Exhibition, organized by the Guild of Aviation Artists, will be held as usual at the Mall Galleries, London SW1. Open to the public from the evening of 18 July until 24 July.

Details at [www.gava.org.uk](http://www.gava.org.uk)

commitment. In June 2010, I headed to St James' Palace with my family to receive my Engineering Scholarship and the prestigious Evelyn Saunders Memorial Cup from the Air League, which was presented to me by the Duke of Edinburgh himself. What an emotional evening! It was one of the most special days of my life. The silver cup sits in pride of place at home.

I wish to share my experience with other young people and my attendance at a stand at The Farnborough Air show gave me the opportunity to do this. I would certainly encourage anyone with a drop of interest in flying to pursue the thrill and exhilaration of taking command of the controls of a machine which operates against the laws of gravity. I hope you will join me above the clouds one day.

What a lucky girl I am!

## Mike Gatfield, 2010 NPPL (6 Hrs)

**Gliding Scholarship:** I am writing to express my greatest thanks to The Air League for enabling me to work towards the award of a NPPL by providing me with a 6- hour scholarship. The staff at Bicester were incredibly helpful and enthusiastic despite the weather meaning I flew seven hours including a first solo on their Falke motorglider. The intensive course and previous gliding experience meant I was able to complete much more of the syllabus than expected and learnt important transferable skills for both disciplines.

This and the exams taken before means I am now well placed to complete the course in the new year and would like to thank The Air League again for this great opportunity.

## New Members

**Full Members:** Jennifer Dodman, Linda Hamblyn, Michael Lett, Alexander Vickery, Amanda Wootton

**Student Members:** Jonathan Coates, Dylan Davies, Benjamin Dews, George Johnson, Matthew McSoley, Adam Watson, Thomas Wheeler, Ross Yule

## Diary Reminders

- 4 June: Leading Edge Air Day, Bicester
- 16 June: Council Meeting and AGM
- 21 June: Annual Reception, St James's Palace
- 23 June: Leading Edge Visit, RAF Scampton

For up-to-date information on all our activities please visit our website at [www.airleague.co.uk](http://www.airleague.co.uk) where you can register for changes to be sent to you by email as they are announced.

  
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