

Blackburn **Buccaneer** S.2C/D



EXCLUSIVE BUILD

Airfix's all-new 1/48 Buccaneer S.2C/D

EARLY BUCCANEERS

Operating with the Royal Navy

WAVE-TOP STRIKE!

Richard Spreckley

examines Airfix's highly anticipated quarter-scale Blackburn Buccaneer S.2C/D in depth



Blackburn's Buccaneer was designed in the 1950s in response to the Royal Navy's requirement for an ultra-low

altitude maritime strike aircraft that could penetrate the defences of a new generation of Soviet warships. An all-weather platform, it could

carry conventional or nuclear weapons, with its form influenced by the need to maintain stable flight at high-subsonic speeds, resulting in a

'banana' shape for the fuselage, plus rotating bomb bay and a boundary layer control system.

It entered service in 1962 as the S.1, but this lacked power, which caused several accidents. This was redressed almost immediately by the introduction of the Rolls-Royce Spey Mk 101 turbofan and a re-designation to S.2. This gave a performance of 670mph at 200ft, a top speed of Mach 0.95, with a service ceiling of 40,000ft and an operational range of up to 2,300 miles. It had four underwing pylons that could carry up to 12,000lbs of bombs, plus an internal bomb bay for an extra 4,000lbs of munitions. Alternatives to the conventional bombs were the



▲ The transparent parts are crystal clear, and Airfix has prepared itself for other variants, with long and short wing tips and alternative windscreens and canopies

▲ MODEL SPEC

Blackburn Buccaneer S.2C/D

By: Airfix

Stock Code: A12012

Scale: 1/48

Price: £72.49

Available from: www.airfix.com





“Airfix has a long-standing love affair with the Buccaneer, first producing a 1/72 version in 1963”

Red Beard or WE177 tactical nuclear bombs or varying configurations of rocket pods and AS-30, Martel or Sea Eagle missiles.

The Buccaneer was well liked by its crews and when it appeared on the brink of retirement with the decommissioning of the Royal Navy's large carriers in 1978, it gained second 'life' with the RAF. The type would remain in service for another 25 years, operating in the maritime strike, reconnaissance, low- and medium-level bombing roles.

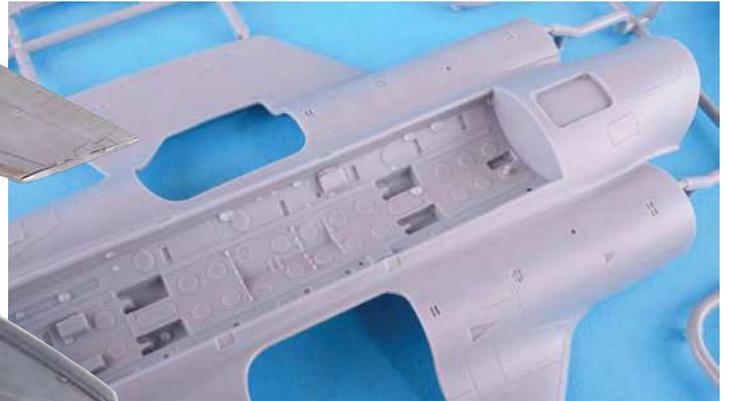
Being in a sweet shop

Airfix has a long-standing love affair with the Buccaneer, first producing a 1/72 version in 1963

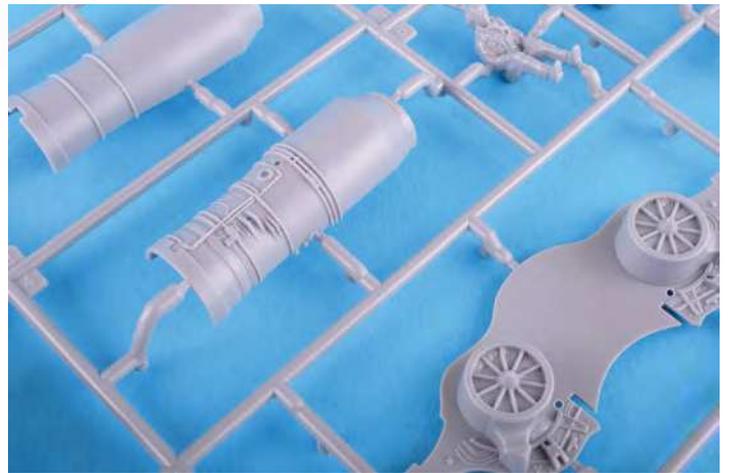
and a 1/48 kit in 1994 – the latter received criticism for its fit, with warping of the large fuselage halves a common occurrence.

Almost as soon as it went out of production the Buccaneer returned to many modellers' wish lists, all wanting a newly tooled version. So it was with great delight and anticipation that, after a 28-year hiatus, Airfix announced: “You asked, we listened. Introducing the NEW MOULD 1:48 Blackburn Buccaneer S.2 RN!” That the firm had already re-tooled its smaller 1/72 kit less than two years previously served to whet modellers' appetites further.

Receiving the unboxed runners, instructions and marking variations was like



▲ Airfix's light grey styrene yields neatly moulded parts on the runners, with the rendered detail excellent in all areas

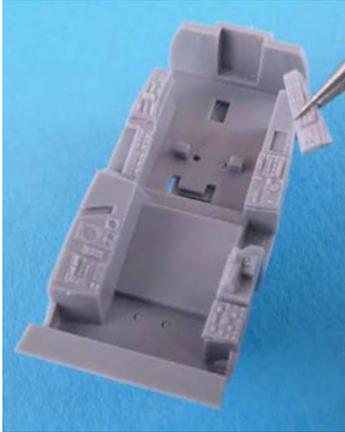


▲▼ The attention to detail is evident in the undercarriage and associated doors (below) and exposed engine section (above)



▼ Before assembly, it's essential to ensure the correct configuration is identified, notably with the wing pylon locations, which must have holes pre-drilled





▲ Airfix supplies separate console sections to maximise the cockpit detail – several pieces have blank spaces for dial decals – and parts fit is superb

being an excited child in a sweet shop. The now instantly recognisable light grey styrene with no excessive flash or imperfections immediately highlighted the crisp panel lines

and detail. The kit comprises seven frames, including one for the clear parts (which supplies two canopy and two windscreen options). Airfix has arguably been very clever here; one windscreen has an integrally moulded wiper, while the other is without – ideal for those preferring any aftermarket resin or photo-etched (PE) brass version.

However, the standout element is the way the company has tackled the fuselage's complex shape: rather than full length halves, it is split into three sections – this does bring its own challenges, but clearly alleviates the potential for warping issues. The cockpit looks fantastic and there are some lovely small additions, such as crew access ladders plus engine intake



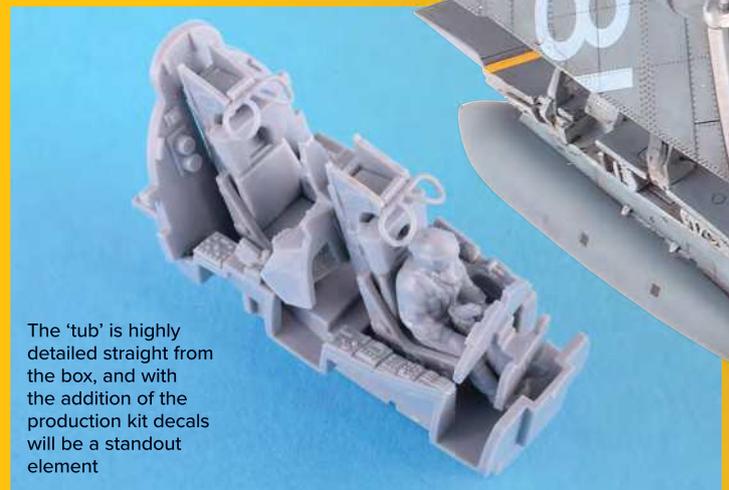
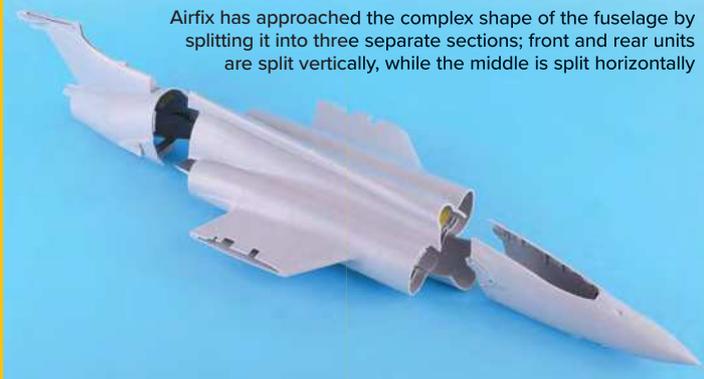
and nozzle Foreign Object Damage (FOD) covers.

Having tackled the original Airfix kit a few years ago and scratch-building one of the engines and bomb bay, it is great to see that the new kit showcases the Spey engine with fully posable access panels straight from the box. The bomb bay's

TEST TWICE, FIT ONCE

There's often comment on how magazine builds can mask faults, so on this occasion the opportunity was taken to dry fit several unpainted sub-assemblies to see just how well the parts came together. While some items, such as the ejection seats were glued, everything else was either clipped into place or held with tape.

Airfix has approached the complex shape of the fuselage by splitting it into three separate sections; front and rear units are split vertically, while the middle is split horizontally



The 'tub' is highly detailed straight from the box, and with the addition of the production kit decals will be a standout element

An initial test-fit indicated these sections, along with the separate outer wings, would come together neatly, which later proved to be the case



► Airfix provides an impressive array of weapons, with much more than can be mounted on a single model – all items here were glued together but show minimal joins



intricate internal structure is represented beautifully, and with several varying load configurations for the aircraft, this can be fully exposed or incorporate a load of 1,000lb bombs. The kit comes with an array of armament including 1,000lb bombs, radar and TV-guided Martel missiles, 2in rocket pods and slipper-style fuel

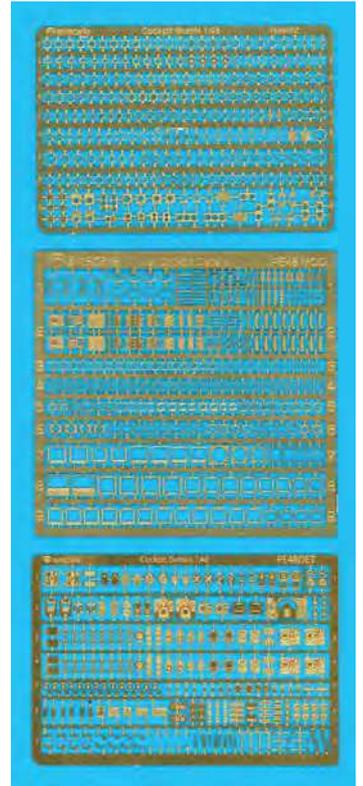
tanks. The instructions are comprehensive and accurately reflect the detail present. In Airfix's standard layout, the step-by-

step approach with the red highlighted parts to indicate position is now a familiar part of the modelling journey.

Test-fitting

As this was a pre-production test-shot offering, there's no box, and the decals arrived mid-way through the project. Work started by carefully washing the parts in soapy water and then letting them dry. Airfix's modular approach certainly helped in planning the build, as it was straightforward to identify the parts that needed pre-painting prior to assembly. As with any kit, test-fitting is essential to prevent any unexpected issues; in the case of this brand-new offering, it's not just essential, but also irresistible to see what it looks like – and there were no disappointments, see *Test twice, fit once*.

Attaching the front cockpit section to the main fuselage looked intriguing and it was difficult to put the three elements together without actually building the whole kit. The only slight frustration was with the rather prominent



▲ Given the lack of decals for the instrument panels, it was the ideal time to try some of Airscale's PE accessories and dial markings

seam lines on the weapons, when assembled, but nothing that careful sanding, polishing and re-scribing would not fix. What was pleasant to see was the occasionally 'soft' styrene was far harder than other Airfix releases when cut from the runners and the excess was removed easily with a hobby knife or sanding stick.

Modular approach

In the current climate of 'waste not, want not', it is easier, more efficient and less wasteful to paint in bulk. In practice, what this amounts to is trying to paint all the relevant parts and sub-assemblies that require priming – or have the same colour – at the same time. For the cockpit this was achieved by assembling several sub-units, starting with the tub and ejection seats. Airfix's approach to the cockpit has taken a step forward to give more detail on the

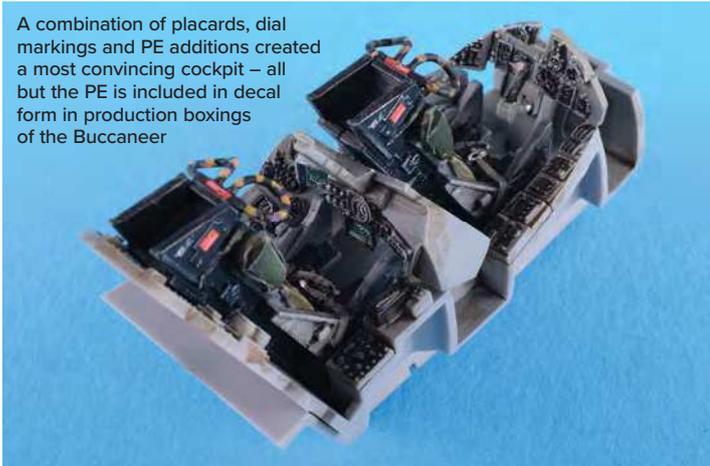


▼ While the production kits will include decals for the ejection seat harnesses, on this build they were replicated via PE items from the spares box and strips of masking tape

▲ The completed cockpit tub and sidewalls were treated with Vallejo's Dark Brown wash to accentuate the moulded and PE detail



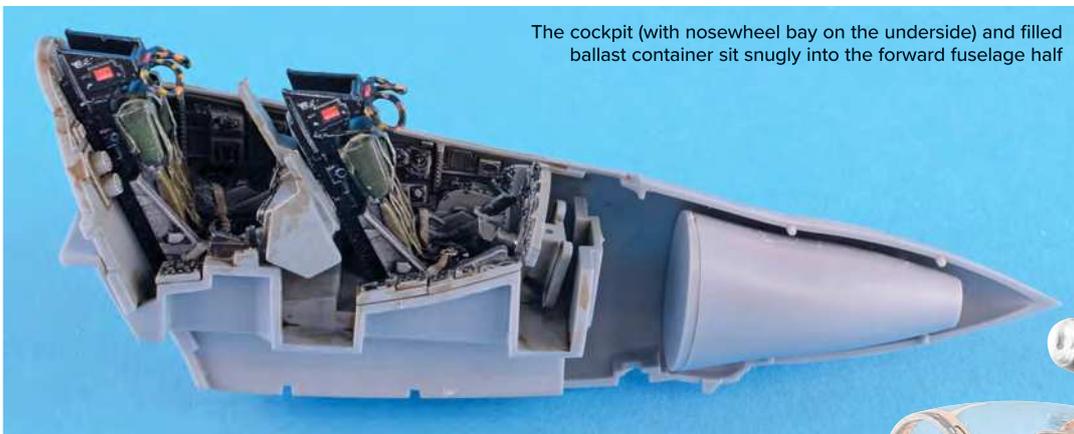
A combination of placards, dial markings and PE additions created a most convincing cockpit – all but the PE is included in decal form in production boxings of the Buccaneer



▲ Airfix 'hit the ball out of the park' by providing a separate container to house 15g of noseweight to prevent the model from being a tail-sitter

Another cleverly designed addition is the way Airfix deals with adding nose weight – the model would be a tail-sitter without it. A three-part container (B13, B14 and B27) is included that takes the weighted medium, in this case Deluxe Materials' BD38 Liquid Gravity (www.deluxematerials.co.uk) was added, with PVA glue used to hold everything in place until the 'cap' (B27) is attached. This can be messy, with the ballast difficult to contain and preventing any seepage, but with this innovative solution, adding the recommended 15g of weight isn't an issue.

The cockpit (with nosewheel bay on the underside) and filled ballast container sit snugly into the forward fuselage half



Seams to be...

Inevitably, there was a join line to deal with for the undercarriage legs and wheels; solved easily by a few swipes of a thin sanding stick.



“The occasionally ‘soft’ styrene was far harder than other Airfix releases”

instrument panels. Ingeniously, it has moulded the perfectly fitting side cockpit panels separately, these feature lovely crisp detailing and are then added to the main tub; once fixed you cannot really notice they were separate from the larger component.

The seats are also multi-part items and, once assembled, a note needs to be made about

which will sit in the front and rear positions as they are configured differently – mainly due to the attachment of a bulkhead to the back of the pilot's seat. With this being a test shot and lacking decals for the seat harnesses, plus time being of the essence, the decision was made to use some old PE from the spares box (funnily enough a set of

harnesses for the old Airfix Buccaneer was unearthed). These were then adapted and fixed to the ejection seats. As already stated, the instrument panel detail was really good, but this was enhanced further by using Airscale's excellent PE48 BEZ Instrument Bezels and PE48 MOD Jet Cockpit Details sets (www.airscale.co.uk).

The weighted wheels are lovely inclusions and will really set the model's final appearance. An issue with seam lines occurred with the assembly of the weapons, notably on the Martel missiles (regardless of variant), although they were slightly more prominent and needed extra work to rectify. Again, Airfix's approach for attaching the fins

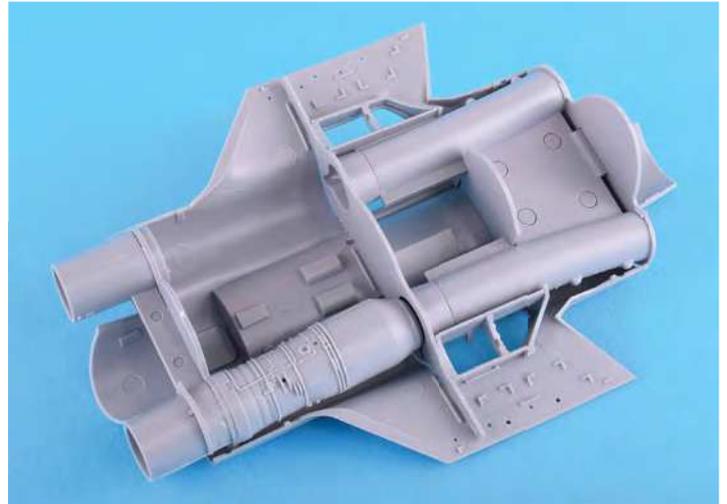
is unconventional, as instead of adding individual fins (with the potential for alignment issues) there is a modular system that worked really well. Each of the four schemes offered by Airfix come have varying weapons loads; these are intended as a guide (although just the S.2D variant could carry Martels) and you can add variations of the unguided bombs and rockets as desired. The four ordnance arrangements mean there is a wide selection of weapons to choose from. This build uses the configuration set for the 809 NAS airframe (Scheme A).

Interior colours

With all the modular components ready for paint, they were sprayed

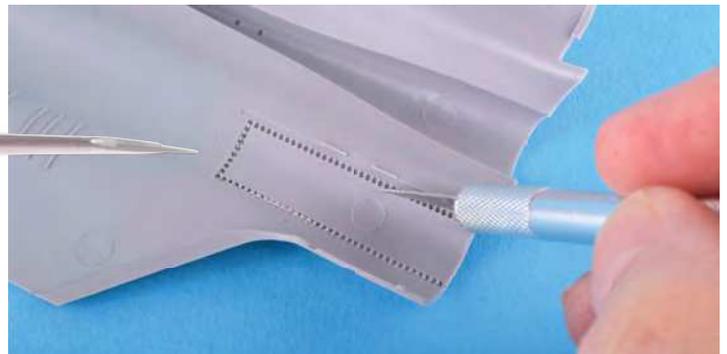
with Mr. Paint's MRP-132 Fine Surface Primer (www.mrpaint.sk). The majority are internal fittings so they then received a coat of MRP-114 Extra Dark Sea Grey, before being post-shaded by adding a hint of MRP-004 White to the base tone. Detailing was then hand-brushed with the required colours as set out in the instructions.

Due to not having the decals for the main instrument panels, it was a perfect opportunity to use Airscale's excellent early jet instrument dials (AS48 JET); these come as beautifully printed individual decals. At this scale, they can be fiddly, but they are certainly worth the effort. Before adding these items, the front and rear instrument panels



▲ The complex shapes for the air intake trunking and Rolls-Royce Spey powerplants are well engineered, joining with three sturdy bulkheads – a test-fit shows the model's busy interior

▼ Airfix supplies an optional open engine maintenance panel, with pre-drilled perforations a clever way of easing removal of this section

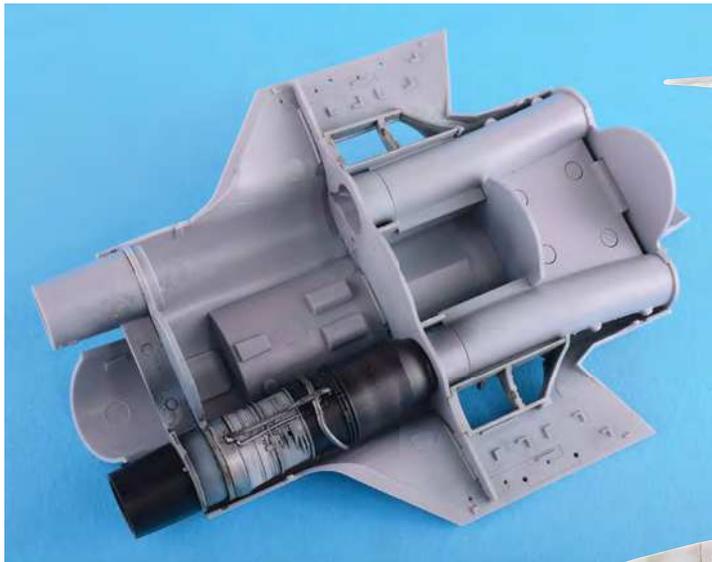


received MRP-279 Super Clear Gloss varnish, which was left to harden. The decals went on without issue, along with the data plates for the ejection seats, which had been painted MRP-005 Black and detailed accordingly; pads were hand-painted with Hataka's HTK-A065 Olive Drab (www.hataka-hobby.com), the harnesses with Vallejo's 71.119 White Grey (www.creativemodels.co.uk). ▶

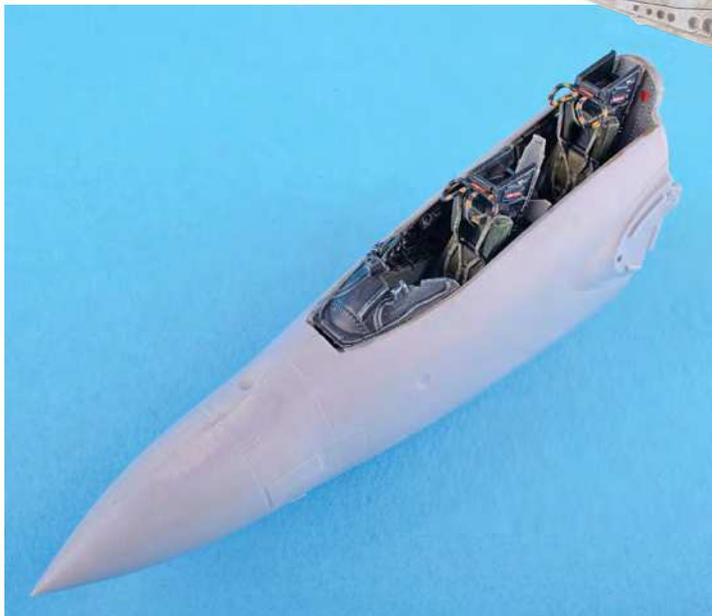


▲ The finely moulded detail was evident from the outset, but can be accentuated easily by a combination of post-shading, dry-brushing and pin washes

▼ As with all other parts that would later receive metallic tones, the engine and intakes received gloss black primer, being masked later for the interior colour



▲ The engine is weathered and sealed with a matt varnish before being fixed into the lower fuselage half; the clever engineering lends itself well for further detailing, if desired



▲ The nose and cockpit fully assembled, and sandwiched between the forward fuselage halves; as can be seen, the fit is exquisite, with minimal tidying required for the join



The three subsystems are straightforward to attach together and, as evinced during the dry-fitting tests, mated without issue, needing very little filler and/or sanding



On the real aircraft, the cockpit and working areas are used in an unforgiving environment, and this needs to be reflected in the weathering process. One of the most effective techniques is dry brushing. Using HTK-A036 Light Blue Grey as the dry-brushing element, this was used sparingly; high wear areas were then treated with 77.701 Aluminium to simulate exposed metal surfaces. The interior then received more

gloss varnish to seal everything, before 76.514 Dark Brown Wash was applied to accentuate the detail – any excess was removed with a cotton bud prior to it fully drying. All sub-assemblies were then given a coat of MRP-127 Super Clear Matt varnish to mute the shades.

A matter of munitions

There could be some debate about the colour callouts for the weapon systems. Like any other type, over the long service of this aircraft the tones and versions of weapons and equipment changed so, in the great scheme of things, what the modeller chooses to put on their build is arguably up to them as it is their project. The suggested weapons for Scheme A comprise a mix of radar and TV-guided Martels plus a datalink pod for the latter variant, and the colours suggested by the instructions were used.

The engine was prepared for metallic paints by airbrushed MRP-172 Super Gloss Black over the grey primer; followed by



“The standout element is the way the company has tackled the fuselage’s complex shape”

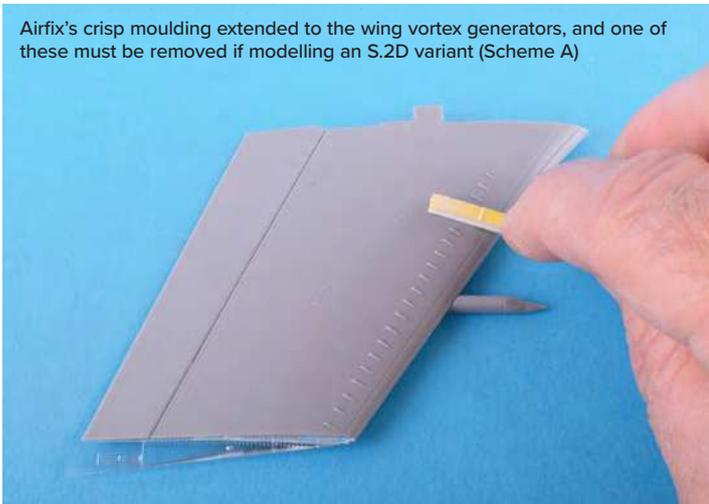
MRP-146 Dark Aluminium and MRP-009 White Aluminium, with a sheen imparted by a misted coat of highly diluted MRP-183 Oxford Blue. These tones were then sealed under gloss varnish; once dry, 76.517 Dark Grey Wash then accentuated the moulded detail, followed by a further gloss varnish coat. It was decided not to paint the engine blades or intakes due to them being covered later by the FOD guards.

The cockpit was then placed into the front fuselage, before the central and rear airframe sections were brought together and assembled.

Wave eater

The crest of 809 NAS has a striking motif with a phoenix rising from flames and the motto ‘Immortal’. This particular variant of Buccaneer was deployed on HMS *Ark Royal* in 1978. ▶

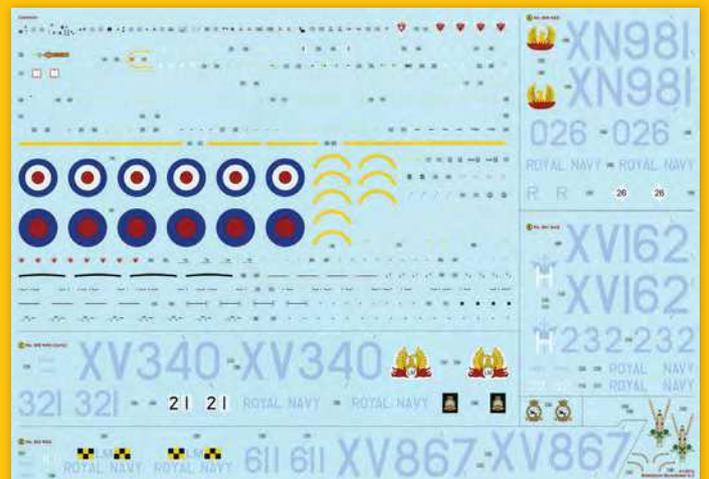
Airfix’s crisp moulding extended to the wing vortex generators, and one of these must be removed if modelling an S.2D variant (Scheme A)



BUCCANEER QUARTET

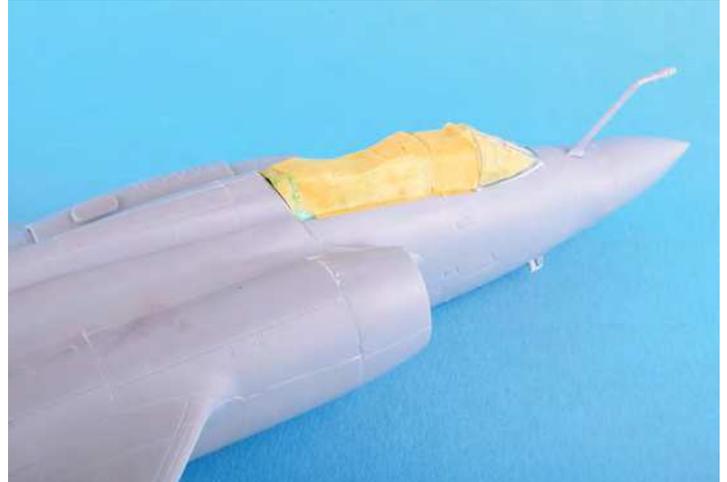
Airfix’s decals are printed beautifully, with four schemes to choose from. These range from an 801 Naval Air Squadron (NAS) machine in 1969 to a 1978 airframe operated by 809 NAS on HMS *Ark Royal*. Each version has an interesting history, but care is needed during construction to ensure the correct configuration and weapons are used for the chosen Buccaneer. What is often missed is the abundant number of stencils that are on an aircraft – but not here, as Airfix provides a comprehensive selection of airframe markings, along with a separate sheet in the instructions for them. The choices are:

- S.2D, XN981/026/R, 809 NAS, HMS *Ark Royal*, August 1978
- S.2C, XV162/232/H, 801 NAS, HMS *Hermes*, 1969
- S.2C, XV340/321 809 NAS, RNAS Lossiemouth, Scotland, 1970
- S.2C, XV867/611, 803 NAS, RNAS Lossiemouth, Scotland, 1969





▲ It was decided to display the model with one wing folded and the other extended to showcase the model's quality

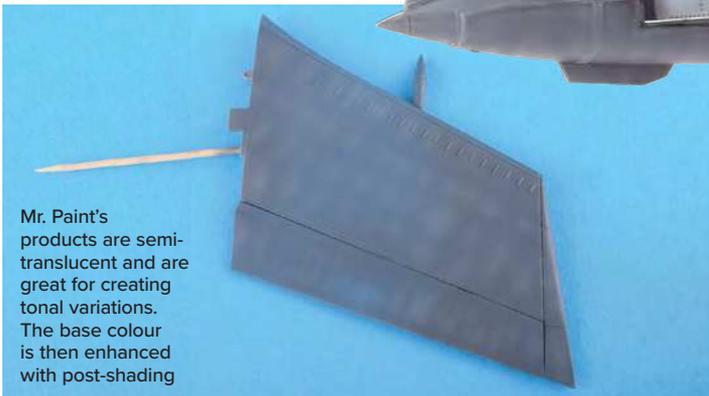


▲ Masking the cockpit is challenging with the ejection seats installed, although in hindsight it would have been easier using the spare canopy as a 'blank'



▲ Pre-shading with lightly applied black makes a noticeable difference in the depth of colour for the final presentation

▼ Perhaps surprisingly, the Buccaneer airframe has many bare metal sections, notably on the wing leading edges, intake rings and pitot, all of which require careful masking



Mr. Paint's products are semi-translucent and are great for creating tonal variations. The base colour is then enhanced with post-shading

With the fuselage masked and prepared for painting, thin coats of MRP-132 Fine Surface Primer Grey were applied and left to cure, before it was given a light wet-and-dry sand using 8,000-grade abrasive paper. Any imperfections were filled and rectified before a final coat of primer was added, then sanded in readiness for the pre-shading. Although the model would be airbrushed overall with MRP-114

Extra Dark Sea Grey, this brand's products are semi-translucent, so are ideal for building up depth of tone. The first stage is applying a pre-shade of MRP-005 Black along the panel lines. Light coats of Extra Dark Sea Grey are then sprayed over the aircraft until the desired level of tonal variation was achieved. The same process was also applied to the airbrakes (noting that the internal sides of the airbrakes should be the same





▲ While the moulded detail in the bomb is superb, once the interior hoses and pipework are added the area is enlivened considerably



▲ There are numerous tiny airframe stencils – while time-consuming to apply, they make a huge difference to the model's final appearance

colour, although research shows that they were heavily faded and weathered with hydraulic fluid/oil and landing gear doors.

Harsh environment

Naval aircraft spend most of their time on the flight decks of aircraft carriers; this level of exposure does cause significant weathering. From research on this area, further shading was created by applying a post-shade of the Extra Dark Grey that was lightened with a hint of MRP-004 White added. This was sprayed randomly over the panels and surface areas; further white was then added to reflect high wear and exposed areas, but this was applied sparingly with the

assistance of mottling masks to reduce the effect into scale. The next stage was to mask the leading edges, air intake and engine exhaust areas. These were then primed for metallic paint using MRP-172 Super Gloss Black, which was left to fully cure. Care must be taken not to spray this (or the subsequent metallic tones) too heavily as this will create a ridge against the masking tape that will then need to be smoothed.

Exhausts were then given a coat of MRP-146 Dark Aluminium, while the air intake and wing leading edges received MRP-008 Duraluminium. Vallejo's 71.074 Beige acrylic was then hand-painted to detail the electronic

countermeasures fairings on the tail. The 'ends' of the folding wings, rotating bomb bay interior and deployed airbrakes were also painted (after being masked) using MRP-112 Medium Sea Grey. At this stage, the crew ladders plus the air intake and exhaust FOD covers were treated with MRP-184 Signal Red; this was later dry-brushed with MRP-009 White Aluminium, after which chipping effects were created via 77.701 Aluminium and a very fine brush.

All elements were then treated with MRP-125 Super Clear Semigloss varnish, which was then left for 24 hours to cure fully. Not leaving enough time for the varnish to harden can

cause issues further down the line when applying decals and weathering. Airfix's decals performed really well, requiring just minimal applications of Microscale's Micro Sol to ensure they conformed to the model's surface. The real challenge was the amount of stencils provided – many modellers find this quite a tedious process (and it is certainly not easy or quick), but with patience the effect is far more effective than if they were to be omitted.

Once dried, they were sealed with gloss varnish ready for a panel wash, which was a mixture of 76.514 Dark Brown and 76.517 Dark Grey. Any excess was removed using a damp cotton ▶



“It was decided to pose the Buccaneer with just a single wing folded”

bud, and – where appropriate – it was ‘streaked’ to replicate weathering that occurred on deck. A further very light layer of gloss varnish was then airbrushed and everything set aside to cure.

Leaky panels

Naval aircraft (and especially older subjects) can be a real challenge to weather – not only are there the effects of the maritime environment, but also the staining caused by leaks from hydraulics and lubricant junctions. This means the undersides also receive quite a battering. Consequently, naval Buccaneers are considered fairly dirty airframes, reflected in the many stains evident on reference photos, despite the best efforts of the deck crews to keep them clean. Achieving the right level of weathering has always been one of the modeller’s biggest challenges; less is more is most definitely a rule to stick with. It’s best to build the effects slowly and let the different elements dry, so the full effect can be assessed before proceeding with any more layers. Also, try to use ‘dry’ (powders and pigments)

Airfix’s markings, which are printed by Cartograf, were excellent, needing little decal solution to conform to the Buccaneer’s sinuous curves



techniques before applying any ‘wet’ (oils), as this will prevent unwanted smudging. Using a sponge applicator and a damp cotton bud, Tamiya’s Weathering Sets A (87079) and D (87088) were added to the lower surfaces as appropriate. AMMO MIG’s Oilbrushers, A.MIG-3515 Ochre and A.MIG-1259 Starship Grime were used sparingly around

the lower engine and fuselage centreline. When the desired effect was attained, the whole model was given a final coat of MRP-125 Super Clear Semigloss.

Bang for your buck

With all the painting and weathering completed, the final assembly of this Cold War icon began.

Although not realistic, it was decided to pose the Buccaneer with just a single wing folded, as this showcased just how good this new release is, along with the optionally exposed engine section, open bomb bay and airbrakes. Airfix’s solution for the folded wing and

“This new release does the so-called ‘flying brick’ more than justice”



airbrakes allowed for solid connections between the parts and the main fuselage, and caused very few issues when bonding them together. The crew access ladders went on without any problems as did the FOD guards.

This new release does the so-called ‘flying brick’ more than justice, while providing scope for further detail, either with aftermarket kits or scratch-building. It certainly gives plenty of bang for your buck and is a must for any collection.

The only wish now is for further releases of this aircraft in its RAF guise.





FLYING 'BUCCCS' WITH THE 'DARK BLUE'

Former navigator **Graham Pitchfork** describes his experience as one half of the first RAF exchange crew on Royal Navy Buccaneers

Early in 1965, I was approaching the end of a three-year tour on a Germany-based Canberra photographic reconnaissance squadron, when my boss called me into his office to tell me of my next posting: "The Royal Navy have offered a slot for an RAF crew on their new Buccaneer aircraft – you are to be the navigator and you report to Lossiemouth in April."

I had been angling for an exchange posting, but this was

not exactly what I had in mind. Nevertheless, the prospect of flying the latest generation of strike/attack aircraft was exciting. Little did I know it, but a life-changing experience had just started and the Buccaneer was about to play a major role in my life, a role that continues to this day.

Scotland bound

In late April 1965, I arrived at HMS *Fulmar* at Lossiemouth, Moray, and joined up with an RAF pilot, Graham Smart. We were the first

RAF crew to fly the Buccaneer. Within days, we completed the simulator phase, which alerted us to the myriad malfunctions the Buccaneer S.1 might throw at us – most of which I was to experience over the next three



▲ 800 NAS's RAF exchange crew, Fit Lt Graham Pitchfork (left) and Fit Lt Graham Smart on board HMS *Eagle* in the Mediterranean
(All images: Graham Peacock Collection)



XN951/101 is tensioned on the waist catapult of *Eagle* ready for take-off. The aircraft is carrying 1,000lb bombs on the four wing stations. An airburst fuze is fitted to the starboard inboard bomb

years. It was then time for the 'Fam 1'. On the pre-flight walk round, I was surprised at the size and bulk of the aircraft, not least the amazing undercarriage that looked as if it had been cast in an iron foundry and ought to be in a ship's boiler room. The limited thrust of the Gyron Junior engines led to a long take-off run but, once airborne, the flight was exhilarating. After the sedate Canberra, everything seemed to happen very quickly, and the ride at 420kts was very smooth. The most impressive feature was the stunning view from the back seat (Buccaneer ejection seats were staggered to aid this).

The course on 736 Naval Air Squadron (NAS) could best be described as brief – we had both been classed as 'experienced'. After a few familiarisation sorties, it was time to use the weapon system, practising bombing and rocketing attacks on the ranges at nearby Tain and Rosehearty. The main bombing modes, using 25lb practice weapons, were the toss manoeuvre and 20° dive bombing. The 2in rocket, in a pod of 36, was delivered in a 10° dive. After two low-level navigation exercises in the glorious Scottish Highlands, and night flying, we were considered competent and sent across the airfield to join 800 Squadron, due to embark on HMS *Eagle* in a few weeks' time. More weapons sorties and an



▲ A primary mode for the delivery of 1,000lb bombs – and a nuclear store – was a toss manoeuvre. This all-white S.1, XN965 of 700 Z Flight, tosses a thousand-pounder from its large rotary bomb bay

▼ An 800 NAS S.1 (XN956) in the Extra Dark Sea Grey and white markings that became standard. Note that '956 sports a pale roundel and serials, while the jet behind has a more richly coloured version



Crews man 800 NAS Buccaneers. The wheeled Palouste low-pressure air starters are connected and the aircraft remain shackled to the deck until ready to taxi. The air-to-air refuelling probe is prominent



introduction to in-flight-refuelling from a Supermarine Scimitar led to the day to fly to the carrier for deck-landing practice (DLP).

Deck debut

It was an exhilarating experience to make the first approach and touch-and-go, and to be able to monitor it so closely from the back. A few days later, it was time to return for real and after a couple of good arrivals in the wires, Flying Control (Flyco) gave us the 'hook down' call. *Eagle* suddenly looked smaller, but the airflow direction detector told me the speed was perfect on final approach, and I had a clear view of the standby sight on the starboard side. As we came over the carrier's round-down, full power was applied as



800 Squadron's XN958 overshoots after receiving the order from Flyco, who has fired the flares to back up his radio call

the airbrakes were closed, ready to overshoot if we missed the wires, but we arrived – and what a jolt that gave me.

As we taxied out of the wires, I was immediately struck by the precision and skill of the deck party as they marshalled us to within inches. Having landed first, and thus marshalled to the extreme starboard corner of the bow, it was disconcerting to see nothing but sea, and we were still moving forward. For the next 12 months, I marvelled at their professionalism and never tired of watching a launch or recovery.

A year at sea on a Buccaneer S.1 squadron was bound to provide a wide range of experiences, not least the opportunity to make regular forays into the emergency drills section of the flight reference card. Engine malfunctions and electrical snags cropped up in most of the debriefs. Off Malta, I did my first night launch and landing after a bombing exercise on Filfla Rock. With minimal lighting on the deck, pilots had to concentrate on line-up, not difficult since the ship always steamed into wind, speed accurate to within 2kts, and the correct glide slope

indicated by the mirror landing sight on the port side.

Mistaken identity

There were long-range photo-reconnaissance sorties over Aden and along the Yemen border, as we watched the fuel disappear at a disconcerting rate over 'bandit country'. Having already completed a tour in the photo-recce role, I picked up these two-hour sorties on a regular basis and soon became familiar with Nisab, Beihan and Rawdah among others. Illuminating a supertanker with Gloworm flares, having been

told previously by the Fairey Gannet crew that it was a high-speed RAF launch, required some explanation – particularly as some of the temperamental flares had caddled due to a failed parachute and were heading at terminal velocity for the superstructure of the innocent victim.

We carried out weapons training on a splash target towed behind the carrier. This proved a popular spectacle for the ship's company, as Buccaneers and Sea Vixens dived on the target, dropping 25lb practice bombs and firing rockets.

Variety came thick and fast. A night sortie trying to find our Scimitar tanker somewhere off China Rock near Singapore, and succeeding, to complete night in-flight refuelling was one to remember. Off Gan, in the Maldives, my pilot and I were launched to take on fuel before heading 400 miles south to photograph Diego Garcia. Little did we realise that such a profile would become the norm just a couple of weeks later when the Beira Patrol was established.

After Ian Smith, the Prime Minister of Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) declared

Buccaneers of 800 NAS at Lossiemouth with an extensive display of weapons. These include underwing fuel tanks, AGM-12 Bullpup missiles, 1,000lb bombs, Gloworm flare rockets and 2in rocket pods





Buccaneer S.1 XN953, of 800 NAS, on approach to land on *Eagle* with everything hanging. The undercarriage, hook, flaps, aileron and tailplane droop, tail skid and with airbrakes fully extended. A practice bomb carrier is on the outer starboard pylon

independence, the United Nations (UN) placed an oil embargo on the country. *Eagle* was tasked to implement the embargo by 'policing' the Mozambique Channel, hence the Beira Patrol. We spent 71 days at sea operating at long range, and with no diversion airfield, so careful fuel management was crucial. The highlights for me were photographing the rogue tanker *Joanna V*, which was heading for Beira and, another sortie, to find and photograph the oil tanker *Manuella*, which was sailing north near Durban and was also trying to reach Beira in contravention of the UN oil embargo. Royal Navy frigates were able to turn it away.

After a return to Singapore, and a visit to Hong Kong, I flew a sortie to photograph the release of eight 1,000lb bombs tossed against the wreck of a merchant vessel off Scarborough Shoals, off the Philippines. During the few days leading up to the trial, the Blue Parrot radar had always locked on to the bow section of the wreck. For this live run, the bomber's radar had locked on to the stern, some 400 yards away – the first time any of us remember this happening. The bombs were accurate, and as we swept down to assess the damage, we were horrified to discover a local fishing boat alongside the bow, presumably gathering scrap.



▲ S.1 XN968 inspects the *Joanna V* south of Beira. The photograph was taken by an accompanying Buccaneer, fitted with F.95 cameras in a photo pack installed in the bomb bay

▼ Buccaneer S.1 XK534 in the anti-flash white livery that lasted until 1965. The markings are of 809 NAS before the training squadron was renumbered 736 NAS



Back to 'Lossie'

Finally, it was time for my 154th and final boost, as we steamed past Majorca. Four hours later, and after a refuelling stop at Yeovilton, Somerset an eight-aircraft formation of the second, and last, operational Buccaneer S.1 squadron arrived over Lossiemouth on a quiet Sunday, summer afternoon almost a year to the day after our departure.

Having spent much of my time as the only RAF officer on board, I had a great taste for the Fleet Air Arm way of operating, so I looked forward to the next couple of years as an instructor on 736 Squadron – albeit, still equipped with the S.1. Within weeks, there was an engine failure on short finals with a US Navy pilot, plenty of low flying in the glens, and sitting in the back during

a young pilot's first attempt at landing on a carrier.

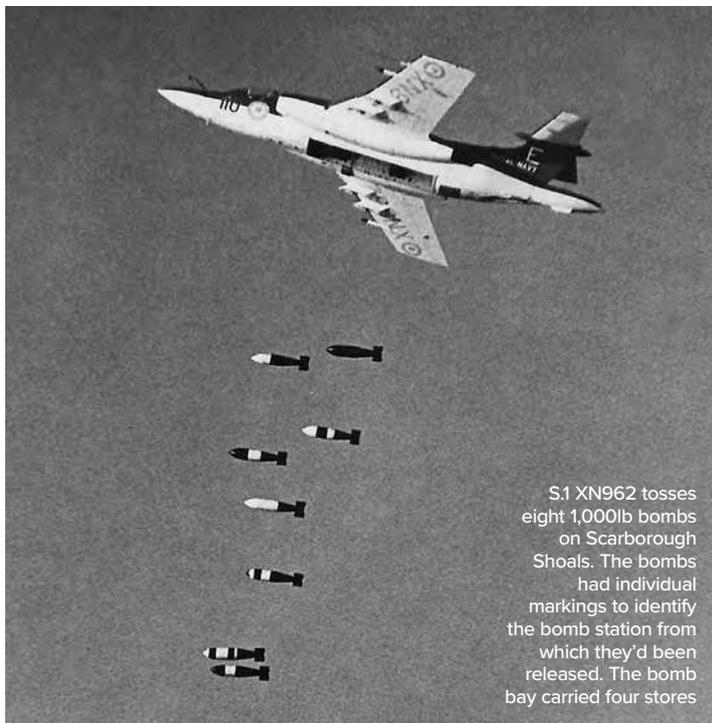
There were two visits to the *Torrey Canyon*. This supertanker was heading for the oil terminal at Milford Haven in South Wales with 117,000 tons of crude oil for British Petroleum. Just after 0900hrs on March 18, 1967, the tanker hit Pollard's Rock on the Seven Stones reef between Land's End and the Isles of Scilly, while making 17kts – and so began an emergency that held the nation's attention over the next two weeks.

Attempts to re-float the tanker had failed and worsening weather and heavy seas led to the vessel starting to break up on March 28, and discharge some of the 40,000 tons of oil still in its undamaged tanks. With the threat of a catastrophe around the Cornish coast, the decision was taken to resort to burning the retained oil by bombing.

The joint headquarters' staff had already decided that, in the event of a decision to bomb, the Navy's Buccaneers were the most suitable aircraft. They were to be flown by instructors of 736 NAS and the operational crews of 800 NAS, all experienced in dive-bombing with inert 1,000lb bombs. Initial planning and preparations had already begun at Lossiemouth in the event that the Buccaneers would be needed.

On the morning of March 28, eight crews were briefed for a sortie to bomb the tanker and I noted my name was on the

One of 736 NAS's first S.2 aircraft, XT285, fires two full pods of 2in rockets at Tain range in Scotland



S.1 XN962 tosses eight 1,000lb bombs on Scarborough Shoals. The bombs had individual markings to identify the bomb station from which they'd been released. The bomb bay carried four stores

operations board to fly in the eighth and final Buccaneer. During the briefing, we were given precise aiming points to break open the intact oil tanks and release the oil.

736 NAS was tasked to provide four aircraft each, armed with six or four 1,000lb bombs. Three of us were allocated a Buccaneer S.1. After take-off, we refuelled over the Wallasey Tacan (Tactical Air Navigation) beacon and continued south. As the only non-RN aircrew involved on this first strike, I was desperate to make sure I found the target. As we turned over Bristol, a huge column of dense black smoke was on the nose – navigation problem solved!

Cross-wind attacks

The control ship cleared us into the area but warned us to keep a sharp lookout for civilian aircraft trying to get photographs and the like – they were a nuisance and remained so. The mass of smoke and flames restricted our line of attack, and we were forced to make our dives across wind. We had been tasked to aim just for'ard of the funnel.

With dusk closing in, we carried out just one dummy attack before making three live attempts, dropping one bomb per dive. Looking in my rear-view mirror, I saw a massive explosion and more flame. A final look at the huge, and impressive conflagration and we headed for Brawdy in Wales for a refuel, refreshments



▲ With everything folded, XN959 is ready to be lowered to the hangar on the for'ard lift. It is fitted with a twin-store practice bomb carrier on the inboard pylon, while a Gloworm flare rocket rail unit is fixed to the outboard pylon

and a night take-off back to Lossiemouth. We landed at 2200hrs. It had been a long and interesting day. After 50 years, the event is still clear in my memory. At the time, there were few opportunities for us to drop live ordnance for real and the operation generated much excitement. Mistakes were made, but no-one had previous experience of such a task. There was a considerable amount of mis-reporting in the media and a high degree of ignorance on the precise nature of our aims, but for the air and groundcrews directly involved, we knew we had done what was asked of us, and done it well.

'School' beckons

After this exhilaration, it was back to the instructing job and lots more flying and fun. Since all the frontline squadrons were now equipped with the Buccaneer S.2, a couple were allocated to 736 NAS and each student flew five sorties before joining their squadron. There were few opportunities for the instructors to get their hands on one, but it was sufficient to realise that we were dealing with a new animal. The Rolls-Royce Spey engines generated far more thrust and were considerably more fuel efficient, so long-range navigation trips to Norway



A glorious colour study of 800 NAS S.1 XN970 as it overshoots, with the airbrakes closing, while disembarked at Changi, Singapore



▲ A Buccaneer S.2 (right) and an S.1 – note the engine air intake sizes – of 736 NAS being loaded with live 1,000lb bombs at Brawdy, Wales, before a further sortie against Torrey Canyon

Plateau were included in the syllabus. I used my position as the low-level navigation instructor as an excuse to get a bit more than my fair share of flying in the S.2.

With almost 600 hours on the S.1 and 200 on the S.2, it was back to the RAF after three truly thrilling and rewarding years. My overriding memory of my time with the Fleet Air Arm will always be the variety of flying, the 'can do' attitude of the people and the excitement and privilege of working with outstanding pilots, not least the new young breed who went on to achieve great things in the S.2 and later the Sea Harrier.



Buccaneer XN963 thumps down and grabs No.1 wire aboard *Eagle*





This pair of 208 Squadron Buccaneer S.2Bs is configured for full-on maritime attack, each toting four BAe Sea Eagle anti-ship missiles. The weapon is fitted with a radio altimeter, which enables it to skim over the waves at 10ft (Key Collection)