

SWORDFISH AND WILDCATS

SWORDFISH



(Left) Simon Wilson seated in the cockpit of a Wildcat helicopter (Photo: Neil Wilson)

(Main) The day job! Simon is based at RNAS Yeovilton with 825 Squadron and instructs on the AgustaWestland (AW) Wildcat HMA.2.

(Photo Lee Howard)

(Top right) Simon is the lead pilot on the Royal Navy Historic Flight's Swordfish and has over 65 hours on type (Photo Lee Howard)

and WILDCATS



Neil Wilson visits LAA member Lieutenant Simon Wilson, Royal Navy, a Qualified Helicopter Instructor, The Royal Navy Historic Flight's lead Fairey Swordfish pilot and an LAA Pilot Coaching Scheme Coach

Your first memory of flight can be one of those precious experiences that you never forget. For Simon Wilson, it happened when he was just six years old, flying from Ballykelly Airfield in Northern Ireland in a Noble Hardman Snowbird with his father. In fact, it was his father, a microlight pilot and instructor, who taught Simon how to fly, sewing those early seeds for an aviation career that now tallies over 85 different types of aircraft flown, with 2,600 hours

military (including 30 hours on the Hawk jet trainer) and another 1,000 or so in general aviation types.

Following a stint in the ATC, a CCF RAF Section and the position of Staff Cadet at 664 VGS in Belfast, Simon joined the Navy in 2002, initially at Dartmouth for Officer training before moving on to RAF Barkston Heath for Elementary Flying Training on the Slingsby Firefly, and RAF Shawbury for Rotary Wing training. It was a role that gave him the opportunity of flying with various Naval Air Squadrons in several Marks of the Lynx helicopter, before moving on to be a QHI in March 2012 and his current position with 825 Naval Air Squadron (NAS) instructing ab-initio pilots and Lynx to Wildcat convert pilot for front line service.

The Wildcat is being brought into service to replace the Lynx which has been in service for many years, and is a huge leap forward in capability, with advanced avionics (multi-function displays) and new weapons systems. Its main role is in Anti Surface Unit Warfare (ASuW), although it is also capable of Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) and ISTAR (intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition, and reconnaissance). Among its noteworthy attributes, the twin-engined machine has both exhaust systems pointing upwards to give it a lower infrared signature for thermal imaging

systems and seeker heads on IR missiles. There's also a twin tail fin to provide better directional stability, plus a much stronger airframe than the Lynx, manufactured as a monolithic structure.

825 NAS undertook many daring and vital roles in the Second World War, most famously The Channel Dash on 12 February 1942 when six Fairey Swordfish aircraft, led by Commanding Officer Lieutenant Commander Eugene Esmonde, attacked the German battleships Gneisenau and Scharnhorst, and the cruiser Prinz Eugen which were trying to make a break from Brest, in Northern France, to Germany. All six aircraft were lost in the attack and Esmonde was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross.

COMBAT HISTORY

The Squadron also had an illustrious combat record with the Fairey Firefly during the Korean War and was reformed briefly during the Falklands War when it flew Westland Sea King HAS.2 helicopters and was instrumental in rescuing survivors from the RFA *Sir Galahad* and RFA *Sir Tristram* air attacks.

The Royal Navy Historic Flight (RNHF) was formed in 1972 to act as a living memorial to all those who have served in the Royal Naval Air Service and Fleet Air Arm since 1909, and it was his interest in aviation and history as

