

Leading Airman Ernest Laking, Fleet Air Arm



Ernest Laking was the oldest of four brothers, three of whom saw active service in WW2. He enlisted on the 15th of April 1941 and was discharged on the 29th of January 1946, serving as a Navigator/Air Gunner in the Fleet Air Arm from 12/12/41 to 4/12/45 attached at various times to 713, 758, 770, 766, 785, and 825 Squadrons.

In April 1943, Ernest was made a member of the Goldfish Club (*The Goldfish Club is a worldwide association of people who have escaped an aircraft by parachuting into the water, or whose aircraft crashed in the water, and whose lives were saved by a life jacket, inflatable dinghy, or similar device.*)



Fairy Swordfish Torpedo Bomber

Ships/Shore Bases:

Served on the Aircraft Carrier **HMS Furious**, 11/3/43 to 14/6/43, and 6/7/43 to 15/7/43. On the 28th of April 1943, when the Swordfish he was flying in crashed on landing and 'went over the side' of HMS Furious and he spent one and a half hours in the North Atlantic before being picked up by HMS Troubridge.



HMS Furious

Served at **HMS Blackcap** 17/7/43 to 10/8/43, Royal Naval Air Station, Stretton (HMS *Blackcap*), was an airfield in the village of Appleton Thorn, south of Warrington. The airbase was commissioned on 1 June 1942 and forty-one Fleet Air Arm Squadrons were based there for varying periods, some aircraft being flown directly to and from aircraft carriers operating in the Irish Sea and other nearby waters.

Served at **HMS Daedalus**, 10/8/43 to 7/9/43, A former Royal Navy Air Service military airfield, used in both World Wars and post-war until 1996. It was established in 1917 as a seaplane training school, initially as satellite of Calshot. During the Battle of Britain Royal Navy fighter aircraft used the base to protect Southampton and Portsmouth, but it was also sometimes used by fighters of Royal Air Force 11 Group, who were heavily engaged in the battle. By the end of World War Two HMS Daedalus was arguably the most important Royal Naval Air Station in the world.

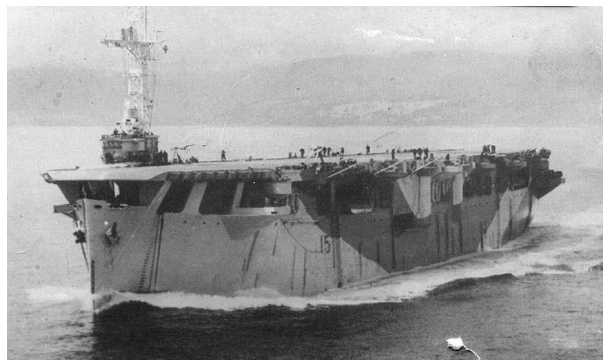
Served at **HMS Landrail**, 8/9/43 to 10/10/43, was the former RAF Machrihanish station located on the western side of the Kintyre peninsula. Air Operations at HMS Landrail were focussed on training, and the airfield made use of all the various firing and bombing ranges located around the coast of the Kintyre peninsula, such as the Skipness Bombing Range, used for practice runs, and the Balure Range, which was used for live firing and bombing. The airfield also served as a base for convoy escort squadrons, and anti-submarine squadrons.

Served on **HMS Pretoria Castle** 26/10/43 to 4/11/43, HMS Pretoria Castle was a Union-Castle ocean liner converted into a Royal Navy armed merchant cruiser, and then converted again into an escort carrier. After the war she was converted back into a passenger liner and renamed Warwick Castle.



HMS Pretoria Castle

Served on Escort Carrier **HMS Vindex** 18/12/43 to 14/3/44. HMS Vindex (D15) was a Nairana-class escort carrier of the Royal Navy that saw service during the Second World War. She was nominated for support of anti-submarine operations in NW Approaches, and embarked to sea with 825 Squadron operating Sea Hurricane and Swordfish aircraft.



HMS Vindex

On January the 14th 1944, while serving on HMS Vindex, the Swordfish he was flying in 'went over the side'. On the 26th of February 1944 this happened again when his Aircraft's engine cut out at 300ft while attempting to land, (again a Swordfish), and the pilot made a forced landing in the sea both occasions Ernest and the Pilot were picked up by the Motor launch from HMS Vindex soon after the crashes.

Whilst at sea Ernest served mainly in the North Atlantic on convoy escort duties. The entry in his logbook refers to the first time he 'went over the side':

825 SQUADRON				HMS FURIOUS		Time carried forward - 233.50		
Date	Hour	Aircraft Type and No.	Pilot	Duty	REMARKS (including results of bombing, gunnery, exercises, etc.)	Flying Times		
						Day	Night	
28.4.43	0515	S/K511M	Sgt NICHOLS	P/S PAROL	Hit island picked up by HMS TROUBRIDGE after 13hrs	3.30	1.00	
Total for month <i>1/4/43</i>						3.30	1.00	
S.P. <i>1/4/43</i> Commanding Officer No. 825 SQUADRON								
TOTAL TIME ...						215.00	22.50	

Additional information researched by E. J. Mullins
 Harthill Memories and History Society
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