BRUTE FORCE & INNOVATION

FLYING THE BUCCANEER S.1 & S.2

GP CAPT TOM EELES COLLECTION

Wing Commander Tom Eeles climbs down from the cockpit of his Buccaneer S.2B while Officer Commanding No 237 Operational Conversion Unit at RAF Lossiemouth in 1986, having reached the considerable milestone of 2,000 hours on type. By the time of his retirement he had reached a total of 2,185 hours on the Buccaneer.

Former Blackburn Buccaneer pilot **Gp Capt TOM EELES** can claim the rare distinction of having flown the two variants of the brawny strike fighter for both the Fleet Air Arm and the RAF. To celebrate the 60th anniversary of the maiden flight of the Buccaneer in 1958, Tom provides a first-hand account of what the brutish but innovative "Brick" was like to fly

AFTER A YEAR on my first RAF squadron tour flying English Electric Canberra B(I).8s in Germany, I volunteered in 1966 for loan service with the Fleet Air Arm to fly the Blackburn Buccaneer. The aircraft had always intrigued me and I recall being very impressed by its display at the 1964 SBAC Show at Farnborough.

The Buccaneer was originally designed to meet a Royal Navy requirement for a long-range strike aircraft capable of being launched and recovered from the existing fleet of Royal Navy aircraft carriers, to counter the threat of the Soviet Navy's then-new *Sverdlov*-class heavy cruisers. The weapon to be used would be the British tactical nuclear device known as the Target Marker Bomb. Compared to what had been used in the Second World War to mark targets, this weapon, also known as *Red Beard*, would have created an impressive and extremely visible indication of its target! The delivery profile chosen involved a high-speed low-level run-in, culminating in a looping manœuvre, releasing the weapon to fly on towards the target with the aircraft escaping in the opposite direction. An earlier version of this delivery technique, known as the Low Altitude Bombing System (LABS), had been developed by the USA and was used by the RAF's Canberra squadrons.

The Royal Navy selected the Blackburn Aircraft Company's submission, designated NA.39. The company's design concept was for a two-seat swept-wing twin-engined aircraft designed to fly at high transonic speed at very low level. Unlike the work being undertaken concurrently by other aircraft manufacturers to design a Canberra replacement for the RAF, supersonic flight was never intended for the NA.39, as it posed too many difficulties for a carrierborne aircraft.

The NA.39 employed the "area rule" concept to reduce drag in the transonic flight regime, which resulted in the distinctive "Coke bottle" bulge of its rear fuselage. This fortuitously provided ample space for the bulky boxes of

OPPOSITE PAGE ***The author leads a two-aircraft formation in S.2B XZ432 during a photographic sortie over the west coast of Scotland, near Oban, on March 11, 1987. Tom enjoyed three tenures with No 237 OCU, a specialist Buccaneer training unit: as a QFI during 1971–72; CFI 1977–79 and OC 1984–87. Photograph by GEOFFREY LEE.***