

MARITIME-RECONNAISSANCE VANGUARD

A MISSED OPPORTUNITY?

By the early 1960s the RAF was looking to replace its ageing fleet of Avro Shackleton maritime-reconnaissance aircraft — surely the state-of-the-art Vickers Vanguard turboprop airliner would offer an excellent basis for an MR platform, just as the Lockheed Electra provided the template for the US Navy's P-3 Orion? **TONY FAIRBAIRN** reveals why not



The Breguet Br.1150 Atlantic was designed specifically to a 1958 Nato requirement for a maritime-reconnaissance (MR) aircraft, the prototype making its first flight in October 1961. The type entered service with the French Navy in late 1965, this example, serial 15, being shown at the SBAC show at Farnborough in September 1966. Some 115 examples of the Atlantic, in two variants, were built.



WHEN THE FIRST Hawker Siddeley Nimrod was delivered to the RAF's No 236 Operational Training Unit (OTU) at St Mawgan, Cornwall, in October 1969, it became the world's first four-jet maritime-reconnaissance (MR) aircraft to enter service with any of the world's air forces. Designed to replace the piston-engined Avro Shackleton in the MR role, its journey to eventual selection had been a protracted and convoluted one, and among the runners it faced during the competition was an MR version of the Vickers Vanguard turboprop airliner. While unreservedly acknowledging the many fine qualities of the jet-powered "Mighty Hunter" and its crews, this article suggests that, like the US Navy's venerable turboprop-powered Lockheed P-3 Orion, the Vanguard might have made a cheaper, more exportable — and fully satisfactory — MR platform. To look at why it failed to make first choice it is necessary to look back at the evolution of the selection process.

THE NEW GENERATION

In 1958 the Nato Armaments Committee voted unanimously to proceed with the French-designed and -built Breguet Atlantic, powered by two Rolls-Royce Tyne turboprops, to replace the piston-engined Lockheed Neptune in the MR role. The RAF's Air Staff, however, was unhappy with a twin-engined design in the role and so helped to draft the Air Ministry's Operational Requirement (OR) 350. The tasks listed for the prospective aircraft were:

- (a) the detection and killing of submarines;
- (b) search and rescue;
- (c) the shadowing of enemy forces;
- (d) attacks on lightly armed merchant vessels;
- (e) minelaying

To these were added a specification for a high transit speed and good handling during low-level searches. The UK's Hawker

LEFT Vickers Vanguard G-APEG of British European Airways spools up its Tynes at Heathrow in the early 1960s. The Vanguard was slightly larger than the Lockheed L-188 Electra, which was very successfully developed into the US Navy's P-3 Orion, and also faster, transit time to the operational area being an important factor in the MR role. TAH ARCHIVE