

### **CAPTAIN ALAN JOHN LEAHY, CBE, DSC ROYAL NAVY**

Captain Alan John 'Spiv' Leahy, CBE, DSC RN died peacefully in his sleep on 26th December 2019 at the age of 94.



Cdr Alan 'Spiv' Leahy at 700Z / 809 Handover Event 1963 he always did his "Pre Flight Check" with his black silver ended walking stick

Alan joined the Royal Navy as a Naval Airman at HMS St VINCENT in 1943 and quickly transferred, via the 'Y' Scheme to Officer Rank, and trained as a Fleet Air Arm Pilot in the UK and USA in 1944 and 1945 at US Naval Air Stations Grosse Isle and Pensacola -travelling 'across the pond' in the RMS QUEEN MARY.

He qualified on a variety of American piston-engined aircraft of the era including the Vultee 'Valiant', North American 'Harvard' & the Vought 'Corsair'.

Immediately post war he was a Ferry Pool pilot based at HMS Nuthatch, Anthorn, Cumbria before serving with various FAA Squadrons both ashore and afloat and equipped with a wide range of aircraft including the Fairey 'Barracuda' and 'Firebrand', the Grumman 'Avenger and the Supermarine 'Seafire'.

He saw active service with the Hawker 'Sea Fury' equipped 801 Squadron embarked in HMS GLORY in 1952 & 1953 during the Korean War. Two incidents whilst flying from HMS GLORY included a RATOG (Rocket Assisted Take Off Gear) failure which saw him ditch over the bows of the ship and also, an ammunition explosion in his port gun pod which resulted in a damaged wing and a forced

landing on an emergency strip in Korea. For his service in Korea he was awarded the DSC – announced in the London Gazette of 6th November 1953.

Post Korea he qualified as a fast jet pilot and flew most of the jet powered aircraft operated by the Royal Navy until the end of Fast Jet operations by the RN with the phasing out of old HMS ARK ROYAL.



In 1957 the Seahawk Aerobatic display team at the SBAC Farnborough Air Show were using name 'The Red Devils', The team were Drawn from 738 NAS whose CO was Alan Leahy and they were the first display team to generate coloured smoke by fitting a rig which injected oil and dye into Seahawk's jet efflux. This is now standard worldwide. He was made MBE in 1958.

He got in a few scrapes in Fast Jets – on one occasion his engine 'flamed out' whilst flying inverted at low level but managed to land safely! 'Spiv' Leahy commanded several Fleet Air Arm Squadrons and Naval Establishments and, also held several important MoD posts.

On the 7th of March 1961, Cmdr. Leahy was asked to form up 700Z squadron at RNAS Lossiemouth; this would be the Buccaneer Intensive Flying Trials Unit equipped with the Buccaneer NA39 and Mark S1 aircraft. On the 15 Jan 1963 Cmdr. Leahy disbanded 700Z and reformed it as 809 Squadron, he eventually handed over to Lt/Cdr F. D. Stanley on 18th April 1963. During his time on 700Z he

made sure that he knew all his engineers and aircrew and this came over when he talked to them.

He was Director of the Naval Air Warfare Division of the Naval Staff when the Royal Navy got approval for the procurement and introduction of the Sea Harrier for Fleet Air Arm Service.

Although not a Submariner the name of Captain Alan John (Spiv) Leahy will be well known to many of our more senior Submariners from his time as Commodore Clyde from October 1975 to 1978. He was appointed ADC in 1977 and promoted to CBE in 1978.

Even in retirement he kept busy as he volunteered at the FAA Museum in Records and Research until recently.

He was also complicit with Admirals Ray Lygo and Terry Lewin in changing the name of the third Invincible class carrier to Ark Royal, much to the fury of the Ship Naming Committee.