QUO VADIS?

agreed that to multiply a force some 35 times during the course of a major war is a feat that surpasses even the many major industrial achievements. It was a period of fret, moil and "angst," and the rising tide of successes which finally rounded-off the air war at sea was something of which the Navy personally and the nation as a whole could be proud with every justification.

Ending of Lend-Lease at once brought about for the Naval Air Arm a Lean-Peace. In one swoop more than 30 of the Navy's aircraft carriers were scheduled for return to U.S.A., and although the 14 new light fleets (*Colossus*-type) were coming into being and partly in service before the war ended, the hard core of British sea-air power was reduced to the *Illustrious, Victorious, Formidable, Indomitable, Implacable* and *Indefatigable*. The *Furious*, after decades of faithful service, was sent to the dog-house in the spring of 1945, and the *Illustrious*, after a superb war record, is believed to be earmarked for training duties.

The Lend-Lease arrangements also required the return of numbers of American aircraft, and although (*vide* advertisement!) "eight out of every nine British-made operational aircraft that were delivered to the Navy from all sources were Fairey types," it is plain from a little elementary arithmetic that the return to America made a considerable gap on the Navy's air front.

New Types for the Navy

This gap arrived almost fortuitously in that the end of the war coincided with the emergence of several new types. These have been described in this journal: the Seafang, Sea Fury, Firefly Mk. IV, Spearfish, Sea Hornet and Sea Mosquito. Furthermore, the Vampire was shown to be able to be flown on and off a carrier deck—a point of some interest since the last of the standard strike aircraft of the first war days (the Swordfish) had recently left that very same deck of H.M.S. *Ocean*, although the Vampire was some five times faster than the famous "Stringbag."

The picture emerging is of a trimming of what might be termed war wood in order to introduce a highly specialised and very air-minded Naval Air Arm equipped with aircraft that can match any from shore-based squadrons. In this connection it may be well to direct a spotlight to the fact that every Acting Executive Sub-Lieutenant of the regular service is now required to undertake a six-weeks' air course at Gosport, where the Navy has taken over the old R.A.F. base of Fort Grange.

This 1946 innovation shows all too patently that the need for air-mindedness in naval affairs is appreciated in the highest quarters of the Admiralty. Long ago, midshipmen and sub-lieutenants were required to do a three-weeks' course afloat in a carrier—but this was generally a bit of a picnic party compared with the show now being run at Gosport by Lt. Commander Kirke, R.N.

"*Flight*" photograph.

Lt. Cdr. Kirke, R.N., O.B.E., who is in charge of the new air course at Gosport, getting into a Fairey Spearfish.

The significance of the present air course is that it is included in the curriculum for the "subs" courses, and therefore affects the date of promotion of the sub-lieutenants now entering the Navy as regular officers. The air can no longer be regarded by these officers as a "relief" subject (in the same way as a boy on the classical side of his public school regards that stinkingly absorbing subject called chemistry), but is something to which he must apply himself, albeit setting out on the steps of the great English admirals.

Incidentally, a small but vitally significant fact is that midshipmen are now appointed for sea service to aircraft carriers on exactly the same basis as to other warships; whereas formerly they were restricted to the larger warships and only went, for short periods, to carriers as convenient.

The personnel side will obviously be sorted out far more quickly than the material, and it is on this that the famous phrase "Quo Vadis?" most applies.

The problems which confront those charged with the destiny of the Naval Air Arm are formidable, and patently twice as involved as those which confront the R.A.F. chiefs. This is apparent in the simple consideration of the fact that every technical improvement in naval aircraft requires a complementary adjustment in the ships, which, in effect, are an integral part of the aircraft.

Blowlamps and "Matlows"

Consider, for example, the Vampire. With polished ease it has landed and flown off the deck of a carrier. One Vampire—off one aircraft carrier. But, without in any way depreciating the success of the effort, this feat could easily have been simulated on a runway. In fact, it is common practice to do take-off tests of a new type on a runway, experts being able to calculate with very close accuracy exactly how much deck space will be required for deck landings and take-offs . . . without going near the sea or the ship.

What is much more to the point is how to operate the Vampire from the deck. That hot posterior seems to present an interesting point for Able Seaman Snooks of the deck party. One cannot readily envisage a number of matelots moving freely about the deck with the hot breath of a mechanical inferno sweeping where once the sea breeze blew.

The Spearfish presents almost equally puzzling