



"Flight" photograph

Buccaneering on the Moor

Developing Blackburn's Strike Aircraft

By HUMPHREY WYNN

IN the chief test pilot's office at Holme-on-Spalding Moor, the Blackburn Aircraft development airfield, a softly chiming clock melodiously tells the hours. Adjoining the office is a room armed with desks and telephones, its facilities shared by the pilots and flight test observers. Above these offices is the control tower, its flat roof decorated by UHF aerials (looking, said one visitor, "like upturned ashtrays"; or according to another, "like leftover Festival of Britain decorations"). From this roof the whole of the airfield is visible: three runways which came into use for Bomber Command operations in 1941 and from which (between then and 1945) Wellingtons, Lancasters and Halifaxes flew for attacks on enemy territory. Behind the control tower are two hangars, with the space between tower and hangars just wide enough to low-fly a Buccaneer with sensational aplomb, when the test pilots wish to display the aircraft's low-flying characteristics at really close quarters. Inside the hangars are Buccaneers in different states of readiness, variously equipped according to the type of development flying each has to undergo. Most of the technicians working on them are civilian employees of Blackburn Aircraft, but there is also a fair admixture of Naval personnel. Around the airfield stretch the long acres of flat East Riding countryside, sprinkled with names like Bunny Hill, Snake Hall, Ladies Parlour, Cleaving Grange, and the Land of Nod Inn.

Blackburn Aircraft moved their development flying activities out to Holme with the advent of the de Havilland Gyron Junior-powered NA.39 (Buccaneer-to-be) in 1958, for there was insufficient runway length on the factory airfield at Brough to handle the new type of aircraft. The Buccaneers are built at Brough, then taken out by road to Holme—a distance of 16 to 18 miles—on their own wheels with wings folded (an advantage accruing from the Naval design), and almost ready to fly.

Flying operations at Holme-on-Spalding Moor under its Blackburn ownership are controlled by the flight test manager, Mr J. T. Stamper, the programme being determined by two factors: results of tests at the airfield, involving manufacturers of ancillary equipment as well as Blackburn and de Havilland, and requirements emanating from the factory at Brough. To carry out the development work, there is a flying staff of five pilots and seven flight test observers. The former are headed by the chief test pilot, D. J. Whitehead, who took the NA.39 on its maiden flight in April 1958. He is assisted by G. R. I. ("Sailor") Parker, J. G. ("Bobby") Burns, Lt Cdr E. R. Anson (on loan from the Royal Navy, and shortly leaving to join the Buccaneer intensive flying trials unit at RNAS Lossiemouth) and R. J. Chandler. Chandler and D. Lockspeiser (the latter on loan from Hawker

Aircraft) both converted to Buccaneers last year, at Boscombe Down. The flight test observers are E. J. Solman, M. R. Bailey, G. R. C. Copeman, T. D. Dunn, J. B. Pearson, T. Jackson, E. J. D. Nightingale and N. Graham.

Although Holme-on-Spalding Moor, with its black hangars and three runways, presents superficially much the same sort of appearance it must have had as a wartime airfield, there are several differences in its present set-up. One is that the main 6,000ft runway (the only one used by the Buccaneers) has had two arrester gear installations, which can be used either on landing or to prevent overshooting. One of these worked on the "nylon pack" principle; once it had been used, and the nylon cable unwound, it took a considerable time to set up again for further employment. The latest gear, a product of John Curran Ltd of Cardiff (who aptly carry on their advertising brochure a Buccaneer silhouette), works on the "water squeeze" principle and is the first installation of its kind in this country. Retarding effect is produced by pulling two pistons through water-loaded arrester tubes on either side of the runway. This equipment, it is stated, can take aircraft "at engaging velocities up to 130kt." An arrester cable is stretched across the runway, 4½ in above its surface, supported at intervals by rubber bobbins which allow the aircraft wheels to run over the cable but hold it high enough to engage the hook. The equipment allows a maximum run of 960ft in either direction.

Another feature which marks Holme-on-Spalding Moor out as an airfield where Naval aircraft are being tested is its mirror landing aid. This is not automatic, like those now used on carriers, but has to be set up manually; it is not aligned for landing into the arrester gear but is used to keep the pilots in practice only.

Like other aircraft manufacturers' test airfields, Holme has Cossor 21 surveillance radar with facilities for talk-down, giving the controller (Mr H. N. Smith) and his assistants the range and azimuth of a homing aircraft but not its elevation. In addition to this aid, and UHF, the Blackburn pilots have a useful topographical "homer." This is a canal which runs from the Humber almost up to the airfield, leaving the north bank of the river at a point almost opposite where the Trent enters it from the south.

Normally, test-flying of Buccaneers is done towards the north or north-east; but low-level tests are carried out southwards, in the designated low-flying areas of Lincolnshire, which are joined by link-routes specifically for the use of military aircraft. Higher flying imposes the greater problems, because of RAF and civil traffic in the vicinity of Holme. Some eight miles to the south is the northern edge of Green Two Airway, which extends eastwards and westwards from 3,000 up to 11,000ft. To the north-

Siney pirate: in the heading picture, J. G. ("Bobby") Burns inverts a Blackburn Buccaneer for the benefit of "Flight's" photographer. Below, a Buccaneer preparing to refuel from a Canberra during trials from the Tarrant Rushton, Dorset, airfield of Flight Refuelling Ltd

