

From Maurice Ayling (at the time Eng. Lt., RN)

In 1964/65 I was at Boscombe Down in the capacity of T and Armament Officer of No.13 JSTU, the Red Top outfit, in the Air Ordnance specialisation'. We had two Lightnings flown and maintained by 'A' Squadron the fighter test squadron, and a Sea Vixen flown and maintained by 'C' Squadron., the Naval test squadron.

I watched some of the pre flight runs on the runway of the first TSR2, one of which came to a premature halt, the pilot having had a mouthful of LOX (liquid oxygen). I also watched the first flight take off. Having had a 'walk round' the first one, we were very impressed with the accessibility of the servicing bays.

However, the most impressive sight of the TSR2 was the arrival of the second one at Boscombe Down before my very eyes. It was the fuselage, in a box, on a Queen Mary which the driver was reversing up to the hangar door, when he positioned his prime mover at right angles to his load, turning the latter on its side as I watched. I ran over to this scene of devastation to see if any one had been hurt, but all were safe and sound, including the driver who made a remark I shall never forget. Rubbing the back of his head with his hand, he said "Well, they can't stop that bastard out of my pay".

If I remember correctly, that aeroplane was eventually almost ready to fly when that nice Mr Wilson decided that people's jobs at Warton were not so safe with him after all. A few years later, he had me flung out of the RN also, but that is another story.

There was, of course, much conversation about the TSR.2 and its capabilities. My CO was Wing Commander Freddie Barter who, being a Navigator, was very interested in the navigation system of the TSR2 which, he told us, enabled it to be programmed for an offensive mission for which the aircrew had to do little more than take it off and land it, the auto pilot system depending on six recognition points, any two of which it could miss and still mount the attack. I believe that Terrain Following Radar (TFR) was also incorporated. Reports we had of the first flights, were generally favourable, and the general impression at Boscombe Down was that we had a world beater, far in advance of any other nation. It was also said that the prototypes, like Short's rejected Sperrin to the V bomber specification, had been built on production jigs.

I have always considered the cancellation of the project to have been bordering on treason apart from being a betrayal of trust to the detriment of the defence of the nation.

I also recall the Wilson election campaign in which one of the main slogans was "Your jobs are safe with us". You may well imagine the utter dismay throughout, not only Warton, but the whole military aircraft world, when one of Wilson's first actions on being elected was to cancel the TSR2. I recall speaking to one of the Boscombe Down TSR2 team in the mess who had been to Warton a week or so after the cancellation announcement, who told me that aircraft in various stages of construction had been taken off the jigs which were then dismantled, and were lying around the perimeter of the airfield awaiting scrap break up. This chap was so angry that tears were on his cheeks.