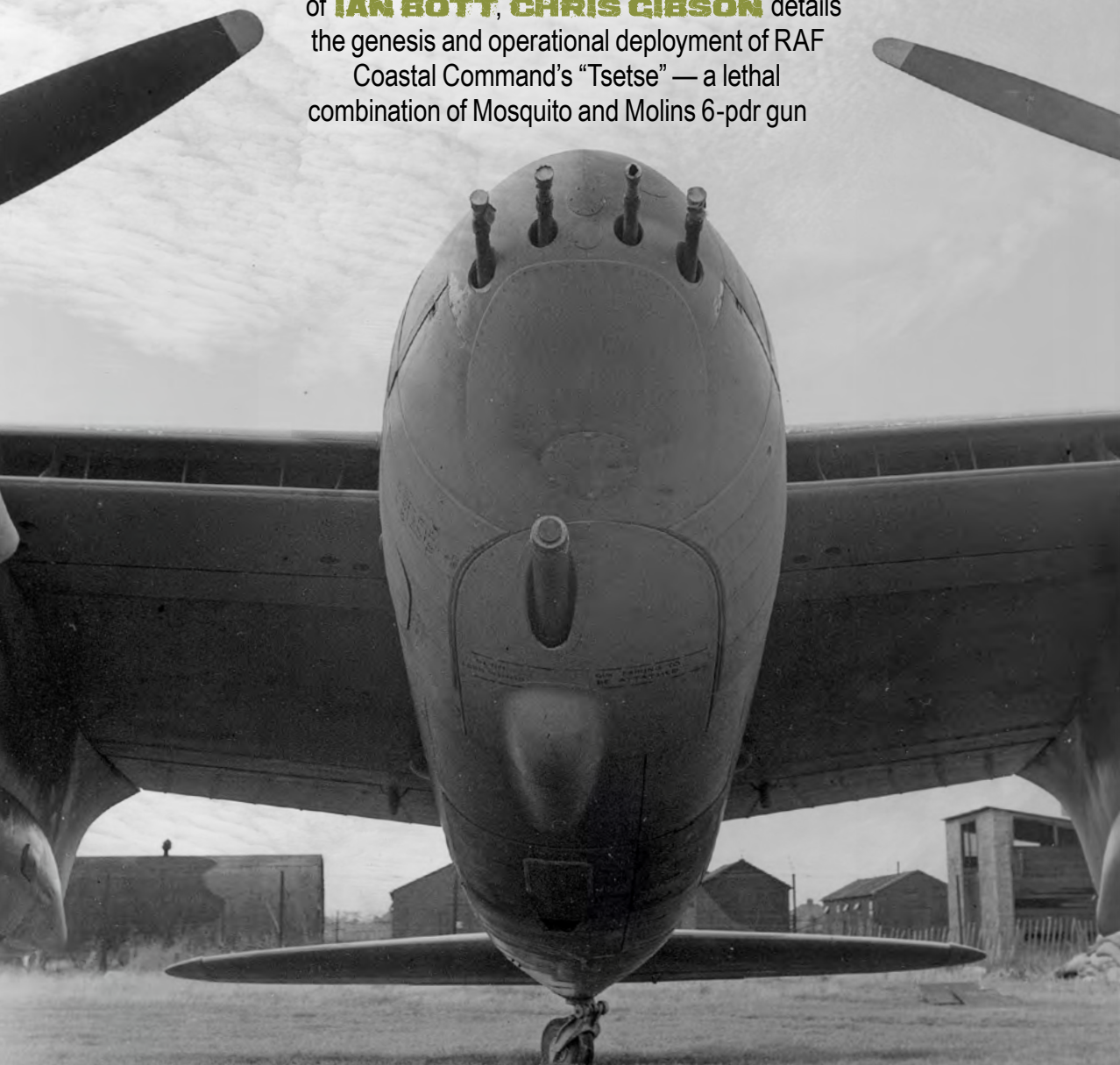




TSETSE!

THE MOSQUITO & THE MOLINS GUN

Continuing our series on the history and technical development of Britain's aerial weapons using the stunning illustrations of **IAN BOTT**, **CHRIS GIBSON** details the genesis and operational deployment of RAF Coastal Command's "Tsetse" — a lethal combination of Mosquito and Molins 6-pdr gun



BAE SYSTEMS X.2

THE BATTLE OF the Atlantic, like RAF Bomber Command's campaign against Germany, employed the most advanced technology of the Second World

War. Cryptography, radar, ASDIC (sonar) and sonobuoys became essential to locating U-boats and severely restricted their operations, but the route to victory lay in their destruction.

RAF Coastal Command's long-range aircraft initially attacked U-boats with bombs and depth-charges; and, towards the end of the war, with the Mk 24 Mine (actually a homing torpedo) and the 3in rocket projectile (RP). [See the article in this series — Hell's Teeth! — on the RP-3 in TAH41 — Ed.] There was, however, another aspect to Coastal Command's war on the U-boat, conducted by its Strike Wings using fast, heavily armed fighter-bombers against coastal vessels — perhaps most famously the Banff Strike Wing in north-east Scotland, plying its trade up and down the Norwegian coast.

Meanwhile, operating out of RAF Predannack and Portreath in Cornwall and roaming across the Bay of Biscay, the Bristol Beaufighters and Torbeaus (torpedo-carrying Beaufighters) of No 248 Sqn took on *Kriegsmarine* shipping and Luftwaffe Junkers Ju 88s and Focke-Wulf Fw 200s. The squadron's Operations Record Book, now held in The National Archives at Kew, shows that in the third week of October 1943 the Beaufighters were joined by a detachment from No 618 Sqn comprising de Havilland Mosquitoes fitted with a "Special Weapon".

Stood up in April 1943, No 618 Sqn was a specialist unit intended to use the *Highball* bouncing-bomb against the remaining German capital ships, but delays with *Highball* prompted

ABOVE In the spring of 1943 de Havilland Mosquito FB.VI HJ732 was modified to carry a single Molins 57mm-calibre gun firing 6lb shells, the barrel of which is seen here protruding from the underside of the nose. The installation of the Molins plus the four Browning 0.303in machine-guns retained from the Mosquito fighter variants is seen **OPPOSITE**.

Coastal Command into a change of tack and put this elite unit to work. Aircraft and their crews were "released for other duties" and these No 618 Sqn aircraft and crew found themselves on special detachment to No 248 Sqn at RAF Predannack.

These Mosquitoes operated alongside the Beaufighters in what were listed as "Special Reconnaissance" and "Anti-U-boat" operations. The mixed formation would head south into the Bay of Biscay looking for targets — surface ships for the Torbeau's torpedoes and Luftwaffe long-range aircraft for the guns of the Beaufighters, which also acted in the flak-suppression role. These detached Mosquitoes would come to be known as Tsetse, after the biting African fly which caused sleeping-sickness, and were used as a specialist variant of the fighter-bomber carrying a modified six-pounder anti-tank gun.

THE BIG STUFF

Big guns on RAF aircraft have a history longer than the RAF itself, dating back to the middle years of the Great War and the Davis Gun, a recoilless rifle mounted on Royal Naval Air Service flying-boats and airships for use against submarines. This was followed by the Coventry Ordnance Works (COW) Gun, a 37mm cannon mounted in flying-boats, also for use against U-boats. [See Mark Russell's Bring Out The Big Guns in TAH28 — Ed.] Neither of these big guns prospered, but the RAF's next examination of a