

GHOST LENSMAN
AIR-TO-AIR WITH MAKANNA

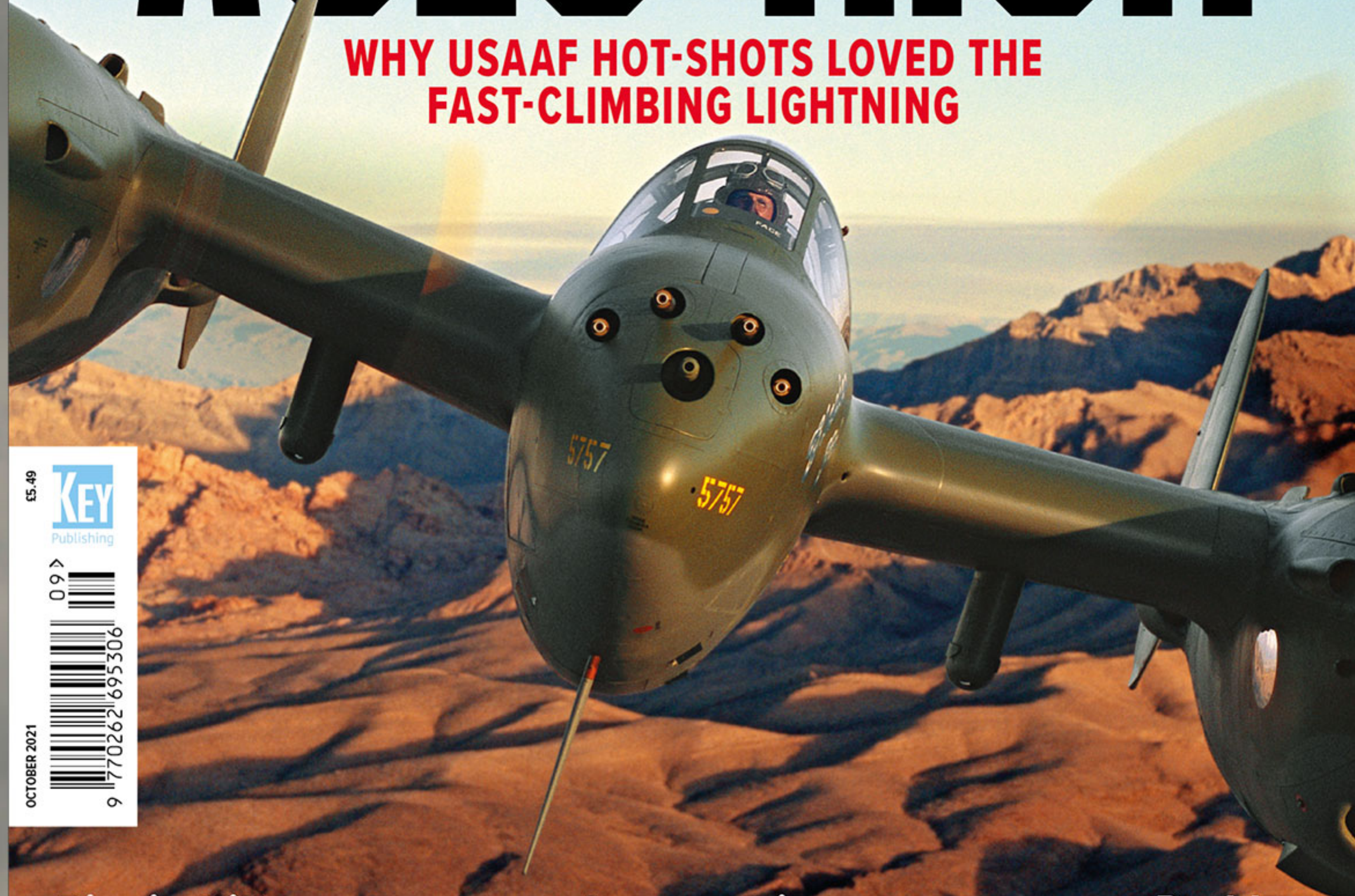


*The Heart Of
Aviation Heritage*

FlyPast

ACES HIGH

**WHY USAAF HOT-SHOTS LOVED THE
FAST-CLIMBING LIGHTNING**



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OCTOBER 2021

**Biggin Hill
Heritage Hangar**
Behind-the-scenes shoot
at Britain's warbird workshop

**Asymmetric
aviation**
The incredible
lopsided BV 141

**Ruthless
Night Witches**
The Soviet Union's fearless
flying femme fatales in WWII

Welcome

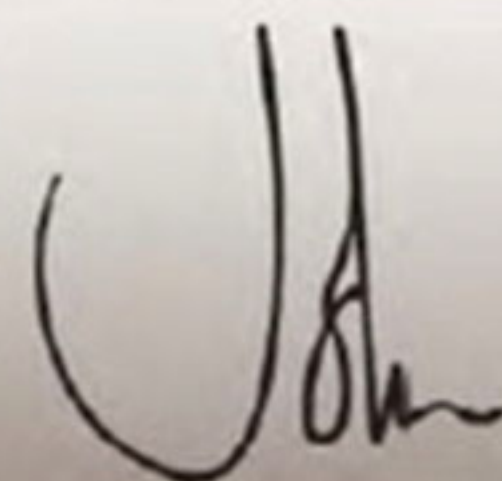
This month we've got all the hot-shots in the magazine. Our cover and an XL gallery feature has been filled by legendary US air-to-air photographer Phil Makanna, who we reckon is the finest airborne lensman ever. Phil is so dedicated to his art that, as you may recall, he once ran back to a crashed and burning T.6 Harvard to rescue his camera bag, having first pulled his pilot to safety. That was at Duxford back in 2001, a place he describes as: "the centre of the world for aviation enthusiasts like myself – a very spiritual place." Read all about Mr Makanna and check out his sensational images from page 98.

Top British A2A shooter Darren Harbar has kept his feet on the ground this month, and visited the amazing Biggin Hill Heritage Hangar to record the excellent work that goes on there. Meanwhile, we've got an enthralling excerpt

from Thomas McKelvey Cleaver's 2021 book *Under the Southern Cross*, which offers a fascinating insight into the aerial battles in the South Pacific during World War Two. Few tell a tale as well as Mr Cleaver and his deep knowledge and meticulous research make his books among the most authoritative available.

But that's just scratching the surface of this issue. If variety really is the spice of life, you'd better have your Gaviscon ready for this eclectic edition, packed as it is with other diverse aircraft, aviators and anecdotes. These include everything from the exploits of Russia's courageous and skilled female 'Night Witch' pilots and the bizarre lop-sided German BV 141 to the classic Hawker Hunter and the ballsy Vietnam pilot, Don Kilgus, whose legend deserves a retelling.

I hope you enjoy it.




John Sootheran
Editor



Boeing B-17G Flying Fortress *Sentimental Journey* was delivered to the USAAF in 1944. A Pacific theatre veteran, it was later used as a fire-bomber, and was eventually donated to the Commemorative Air Force (CAF) Arizona Wing. Following a thorough restoration, the B-17 continues to be operated by volunteer crews at the CAF Airbase in Arizona PHILIP MAKANNA



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A close-up, low-angle shot of a Sopwith Camel biplane in flight. The aircraft is white with red struts. The pilot is visible in the cockpit, wearing goggles. The engine cowling is prominent in the foreground, showing the propeller and the Vickers machine gun housings. The background is a clear blue sky.

A Sopwith Camel from Javier Arango's The Aeroplane Collection, photographed over Paso Robles, California. This Camel – which gets its name from the shape of the Vickers machine gun housings behind the cowling – features an original 110hp Clerget engine, with a top speed of 113mph, and is among the finest still in existence. It was sent to 10 Squadron of the Royal Naval Air Service, stationed at Droghda, France, and saw service as a trainer. After the war it was used for 'barnstorming' shows. Subsequently, it had several owners and was part of the Shuttleworth Collection before Arango bought it in 2005

ALL IMAGES COURTESY OF PHILIP MAKANNA UNLESS STATED

Lord of The Skies

For more than 45 years, Phil Makanna has been capturing incredible images of aircraft in flight. It's a passion that has seen him photograph an unrivalled range of rare, exotic and historic models spanning the entire history of flight

Words Dan Lezano



A New Zealand-built Royal Aircraft Factory FE2 reproduction flies a simulated World War One dogfight for the camera

Photography

PHILIP MAKANNA

Having grown up on Long Island, New York, not too far from

the Grumman factory, and now living on a ranch in San Francisco, California, 80-year-old Phil 'Ghost' Makanna is a legend in the world of aviation photography. He is the go-to guy for every owner of rare and historic aircraft looking to have their prized possessions captured in flight.

He first shot aircraft from the ground at the Reno Air Races in 1974 and three years later did his first air-to-air shoot at the Confederate Air Force (now called the Commemorative Air Force) in Texas. Since then he's photographed thousands of aircraft around the world – in recent years, he's shot collections for the Texas Flying Legends Museum as well as for movie director Peter Jackson in New

Zealand. Over a career spanning five decades, Makanna has created an unrivalled portfolio of stunning aviation photography and shared them with enthusiasts through his best-selling *GHOSTS* calendars and books.

He is particularly well known for photographing military craft, most notably from World War One and Two, as he explained: "Warplanes carry with them a huge story – so much personal history. Their age means that pilots flying them today risk their lives every time they take to the air. I've been at air shows and met with pilots in the morning who later while performing a display have inexplicably crashed and lost their lives in front of the crowds."

"Everyone in this circle has stories like this – we've all lost dear friends to this life that we love. I have total respect for the people in this field – the mechanics, the pilots, everyone."



ABOVE: Philip Makanna IAN BRODIE

BELOW: Air-to-air – Makanna photographs a Martin Marauder



He continued: "To get these airplanes up is very difficult. It's very expensive and they have to dedicate a great deal of time, as well as money, to be able to do it. And, of course, they always have to live with the risks involved."

Makanna himself has been involved in his fair share of close calls, or "good crashes" as he calls them.

This included one at Duxford, Cambridgeshire, when the vintage Harvard he was flying in crashed and burst into flames. Makanna climbed from the wreckage and rescued the unconscious pilot, before running back to the aircraft and retrieving the bag containing his trusty Nikon outfit from the flames!

In praise of Duxford

Makanna's career has seen him travel all over the globe, but one place holds a special place in his heart. He said: "Duxford is the centre of the world for aviation enthusiasts like myself – it's a very spiritual place. I first came to Duxford in 1990 and visited every year until 2018.

"In aviation terms, it is holy ground, because of its history and because it has been maintained as an 'ancient' airfield. I miss Duxford and England, it's a place that holds special memories."

RIGHT: This Lockheed P-38L Lightning (44-53254) is the late Marvin Lee 'Lefty' Gardner's famous *White Lightning* and was photographed over Possum Kingdom Lake near Breckenridge, Texas. Lefty Gardner, who served as a bomber pilot in the war, began flying aerobatic demonstrations with *White Lightning* in 1970 at the Reno National Air Races, where he regularly raced both his P-38L and P-51 Mustang. Following a crash in 2001, it was sold to the Flying Bulls of Austria group, which completely restored it and gave it a striking and distinctive finish

BELOW: Three Royal Aircraft Factory S.E.5as from Sir Peter Jackson's 1914-18 Aviation Heritage Trust, photographed near Masterton, New Zealand. The acclaimed movie director is a World War One expert – some of his collection is on display at the Omas Aviation Heritage Centre at Omas Air Field close to Blenheim, New Zealand. With a top speed of 120mph and both a Vickers and Lewis gun, pilots lauded this British biplane's agility and found it relatively simple to fly

BELOW RIGHT: The Royal Navy Historic Flight's Fairey Swordfish Mk.II LS326 photographed over the cliffs of Dover near RAF Manston. This is one of only two Swordfish flying today and, following the standing down of the RNHF in 2019, it is now maintained by the charity Navy Wings. LS326 was built in 1943 at Sherburn in Elmet, North Yorkshire, and was repainted in 1959 for use in the movie *Sink the Bismarck!* In 1987, the charismatic biplane was returned to its original wartime colour scheme representing 'L' Flight of 836 Squadron



A North American P-51D-25-NA Mustang flies ahead of a Boeing B-17G Flying Fortress in the skies above Midland, Texas. Both are operated by the Commemorative Air Force (CAF), which has more than 170 aircraft and 900 members. *Gunfighter* (44-73264) is modified with a second seat to allow a passenger the ride of their life. B-17 *Sentimental Journey* originally flew missions in the Pacific and was purchased by CAF in 1978. It was beautifully restored and maintained by CAF Airbase Arizona





LEFT: North American P-51B-10NA Mustang 42-106638 is part of the Historic Flight Foundation's collection, and is seen here flying near the Cascade Mountains in Washington. Named *Impatient Virgin?*, this high-altitude fighter flew more than 700 hours for the 376th Fighter Squadron in England. After a crash in 1945 near Downham Market, it lay undisturbed until being discovered some 50 years later. It has now been restored to its former glory

BELOW LEFT: This Grumman J2F-6 Duck is part of the Fantasy of Flight collection and is photographed near Polk City, Florida. Built between 1942 to 1945, this former US Navy machine, also known as *Candy Clipper*, was seriously damaged by Hurricane Andrew in 1992, but following extensive work it began flying again in 1997

BELOW: Four Polikarpov I-16s fly in tight formation over Roy's Peak near Wanaka, New Zealand. All four were part of the Alpine Fighter Collection based at Wanaka's New Zealand Fighter Pilots Museum. The designations from top to bottom are ZK-JIN (2421319), ZK-JIO (2421234), ZK-JIP (2421645) and ZK-JIQ (2421014)

Phil Makanna's top tips for aviation photography

With air-to-air shoots, preparation and planning is key. To ensure the best chance of success – and for safety reasons – it's vital all pilots know what to do. Once up, use hand directions to guide them (wearing white gloves helps!).

Backgrounds are vital with air-to-air shots – use the sky as a backdrop if the clouds are dramatic and the ground when landscapes are particularly beautiful or relevant to the aircraft's history.

Use shutter-priority mode and never set a shutter speed faster than 1/250sec, as this freezes the motion of the props giving unrealistic results.

With smooth flights, I'll often shoot at 1/125sec or even 1/60sec, but old planes vibrate a lot so I don't risk going slower.

With air-to-air, the Nikkor 70-300mm telezoom is my go-to lens, my other lens is a 24-120mm that I use when pilots are confident enough to get real close!

If you're shooting ground-to-air, use the most powerful zoom you can, such as an 80-400mm.

Few if any have the wealth of experience shooting vintage aircraft as Makanna, so it's little surprise none can match his talent: "Trust is the bottom line. I've been doing this for over 40 years. I know the planes; I know the pilots and the pilots know me. My life is in their hands.

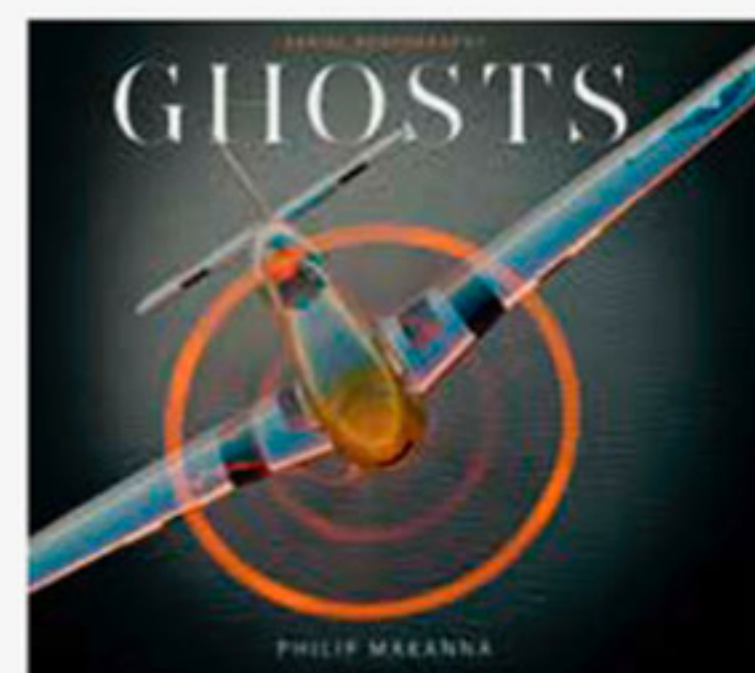
"We always 'brief' a flight, face to face and look at the sky when making plans. The camera plane leads the flight to a sunny place (if a sunny place exists) and we prepare for a simple orbit.

"The subject aircraft pulls up alongside and flies with us in tight formation. If the plane I'm shooting is on the outside, we'll have the sky in the background. If they're on the inside they're flying slower and then we see the ground. I prefer this latter option, which has become my signature image."



Makanna continued: "I'm usually in a Harvard T-6 or high wing Cessna with the door off. I wrap myself in a rope and hang outside, but not too far – I have to stay out of the slipstream to keep my Nikon outfit steady – or have it ripped from my grasp! I direct with hand signals; I wear white gloves so directions I give are clearly visible. Shooting a formation of two airplanes is ten times harder than shooting one airplane; three or more require plenty of luck!"

With his flying career that began in the '70s coming to a close, his latest and last book, *GHOSTS – Aerial Photography*, features his favourite images with historical context. It's a fitting sign-off to arguably aviation's best photographer. **FP**



GHOSTS

Beautifully produced, *Ghosts – Aerial Photography* is a limited-edition hardbound book printed on premium paper and measuring 11½x11½in. Limited to 1,000 copies, each is autographed by Philip Makanna and available exclusively from GHOSTS.com. Also available on his website are calendars and other books in the *GHOSTS* series, including *The VanDersarl Blériot* – the story of the oldest flying American-built aeroplane, first flown in 1911 and then again for the first time 101 years later, in 2012!

TOP: Lockheed Mk.IVA Hudson 42-23182 flies near Temora, Australia. It was bought by the Temora Aviation Museum in May 2004 from Malcolm J Long and was donated to the Air Force Heritage Collection in July 2019. Hudson A16-112 was built in 1939 and served with the Royal Australian Air Force from 1941 until 1947

ABOVE: Consolidated B-24J Liberator 44-44052 belongs to the Collings Foundation and was photographed near Stockton, California. It was assigned to the RAF in October 1944 and operated in the Pacific Theatre, flying combat missions until late 1945, after which it was abandoned in India. It was acquired by the Collings Foundation in 1986 and following restoration flew again in 1989. In 2005, it was repainted as *Witchcraft* and is the world's only flying B-24J