

# Rotorcraft of the Navy: past, present, future

To combat increasing threat from submarines in the waters around India, the Navy had first acquired a version of the Alouette III for the ASW role to be embarked on board frigate-sized craft. For the MATCH (Medium-Range Anti-Submarine Torpedo-Carrying Helicopter) role, the HAL-built Alouette III carried two depth charges or two anti-submarine torpedoes, or one of each, and were fitted with a Harpoon attachment for secure-landing on a frigate-deck. However, the MATCH helicopter had no submarine-detection sensors, being guided to the target by its parent ship.



HAL Chetak: photo by Captain Navtej Singh



The first Westland Sea King Mk.42s for the Indian Navy were handed over in November 1970

The Alouette III still proved to be a most versatile and reliable helicopter, acquired in its HAL Chetak guise in increasing numbers by the Indian Navy, which utilised it

for SAR duties, communication, light stores transfer at sea, staff transport as well as in the MATCH role. The Navy's fleet tankers, survey ships, *Leander*-class Indian-built frigates (INS *Nilgiri*, *Himgiri*,

*Udaigiri* and *Dunagiri*) each carried an Alouette III, requiring the Navy to form INAS 321 ('Angels'), the squadron being commissioned on 15 March 1969 at Goa. In time, INAS 321 was transferred to INS *Kunjali*, on the sea-front in Colaba in the heart of the southern Bombay naval area. With over 20 helicopters on this unit's charge, the MATCH-role Alouette IIIs were then transferred to a newly-raised squadron, INAS 331, one of the helicopters being embarked on each of the first four *Nilgiri*-class frigates. In later years, Alouette IIIs were to also serve with the annual Indian scientific expeditions to the Antarctica.

Over the past half century and more, the Alouette III (HAL Chetak) has given yeoman service to the Indian Navy, which received nearly 80 of this light rotorcraft from HAL's Bangalore Division. The ASW limitations of the MATCH Alouette, however, were apparent and the Indian Navy sent a team to the UK in April 1969 to evaluate the much larger and highly equipped Westland Sea King dedicated for the ASW role with dunking sonar, doppler nay-systems, search radar and range of other specialist equipment. The Sea King also carried sonobuoys and four Mk.46 homing torpedoes, or four Mk.II depth charges. The