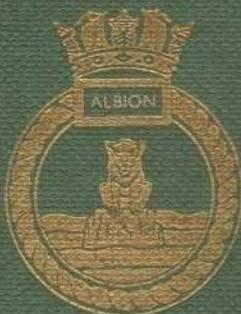
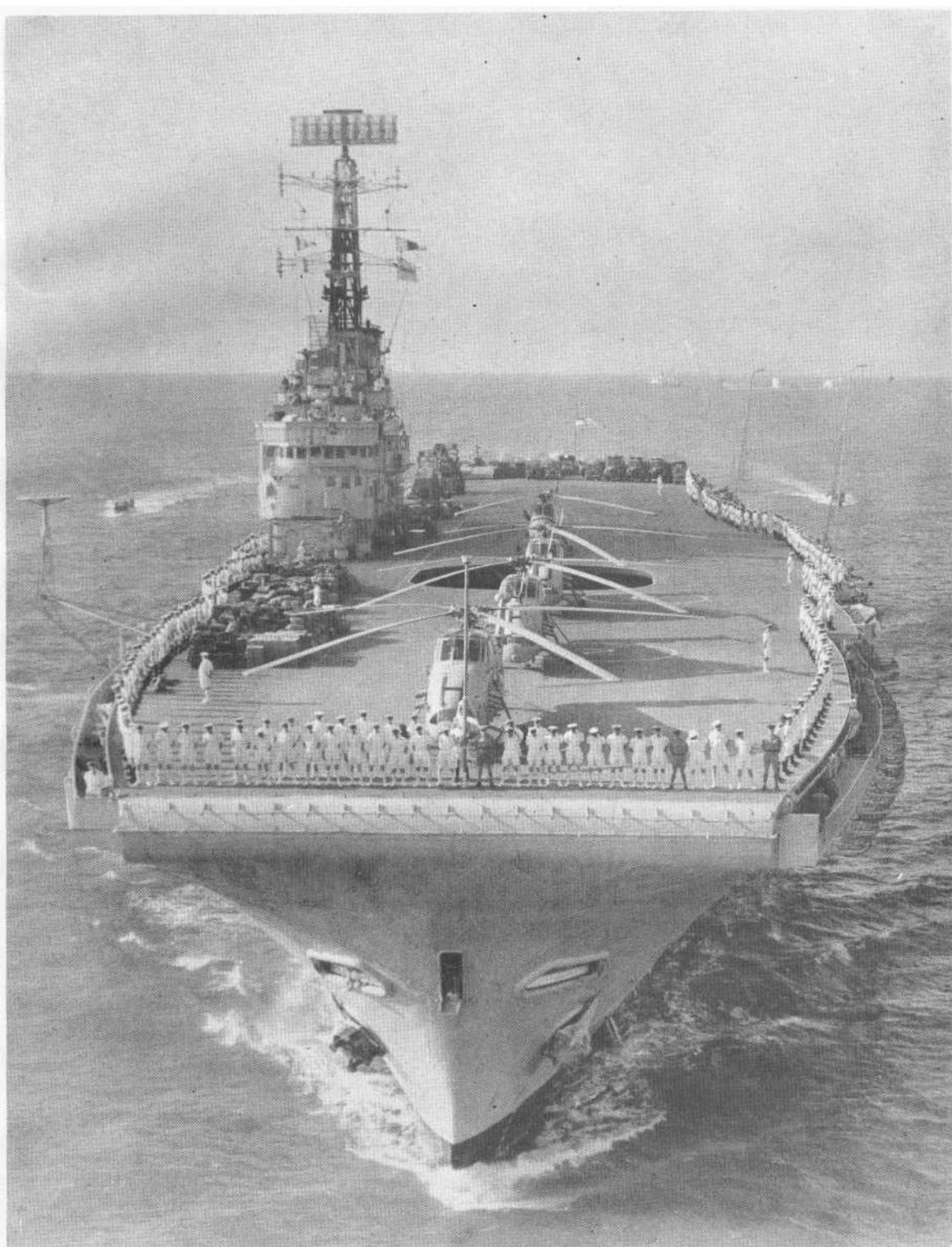


H.M.S. ALBION  
1962-64





I





## FOREWORD

Well, it really has been quite a commission. H.R.H. The Prince Philip honoured us by being at our commissioning ceremony, and this somehow has set the pace and the tone for all that has followed. We sailed on 3rd November - a Saturday - not the most propitious day to start a Foreign Service Commission - and it had me a trifle worried. But I soon realised, despite the inevitable ups and downs, that I had a first class ship's company - and thank God for it; because over the next 2½ months we were to be on the job solidly, as Borneo broke quite suddenly when we were off Gan on 9th December.

Six days at 27 knots - and we were there. And we've been off Borneo virtually ever since, putting our choppers in, putting troops in. Moving and supporting them here, there and everywhere. Transporting troops and also stores, and though some of it wasn't what we were actually designed for, it was all vitally necessary, and we've been operational all the time.

As a "special", we did the Tobruk run - and even this made quite a story since, for instance, we were at sea and/or entering or leaving harbour on nine consecutive weekends. And now we are poised for yet another "special" with a big question mark, since we have 845 in three separate detachments, two of them in Sarawak and one on board, and 846 once more in tents in Sabah; while we in the ship are going to somewhere quite different and - sadly - a long long way away from them.

We've had very few runs ashore, but those we've had have been good, and wherever there's been a chance of sports we've played them hard both ashore and afloat. Our First XI soccer team has been, of course, our highlight, and we've been proud of them and grateful to them - at least most of the time!

We've had a very small ship's company for the size of ship, and I know most of us have been fully stretched. This has in fact helped, since everyone has been absolutely necessary and we've all had a sense of purpose. We have also been lucky in two other aspects - we have undoubtedly had extremely good food and the air-conditioning has been quite excellent. Both have helped us enormously to compete happily with long periods on our own.

Though the ship has been on the job, our choppers



have been even more so. They've been our teeth. Both 845 and 846 have done a magnificent job and we have been, and are, really proud of them. I don't think they've ever turned down a task; indeed, if anything, they've tended to overplay their hands to meet their commitments, and this, of course is the way to play it. Some of them have had long periods ashore under appalling conditions, as often as not putting in fantastic hours to keep their aircraft flying; their record is second to none both in the air and on the ground.

And so we come to the end of a real operational commission with few dull moments. I have heard it said that without "ALBION" and her squadrons, the story of Brunei and Borneo might well have been different. This means that as a weapon we have justified our existence, and this is quite a thought.

As a bunch of chaps, we have been all of one company and undoubtedly a happy ship. We've always had a sense of humour, and a sense of fun, and been good for a laugh. All of which we've needed.

Thank you all for the support you have always given me; and if you ever see me in the future, please come and have a chat.

Goodbye and the best of luck to you all.

Captain Colin Madden

CAPTAIN

## DIARY OF THE COMMISSION

On 1st August 1962 H.M.S. Albion commissioned at Portsmouth. The Chaplain of the Fleet, assisted by the Ships' Chaplains conducted the Commissioning Service. Captain Madden read the Commissioning Warrant, the Ensign was hoisted, the Commissioning Pendant broken, the National Anthem played. This was a great occasion, and we were honoured by the presence of H.R.H. The Duke of Edinburgh, who spoke to us and met some of us afterwards. Our families had arrived in strength to watch and listen, and help us celebrate our beginning as a ship's company. "Play up the 'ups', play down the 'Downs,'" the Captain advised them and they, like us hoped for good news and good luck.

Our first job was to help with Navy Days. Thanks to a good "Press" and our enormous Dagenham-type canteen - visitors came in thousands to look at the nation's latest version of a gunboat. It rained too, and the tea and buns sales in the hangar were a big draw. Finally, they went and we now had to make the ship - and ourselves - actually go.

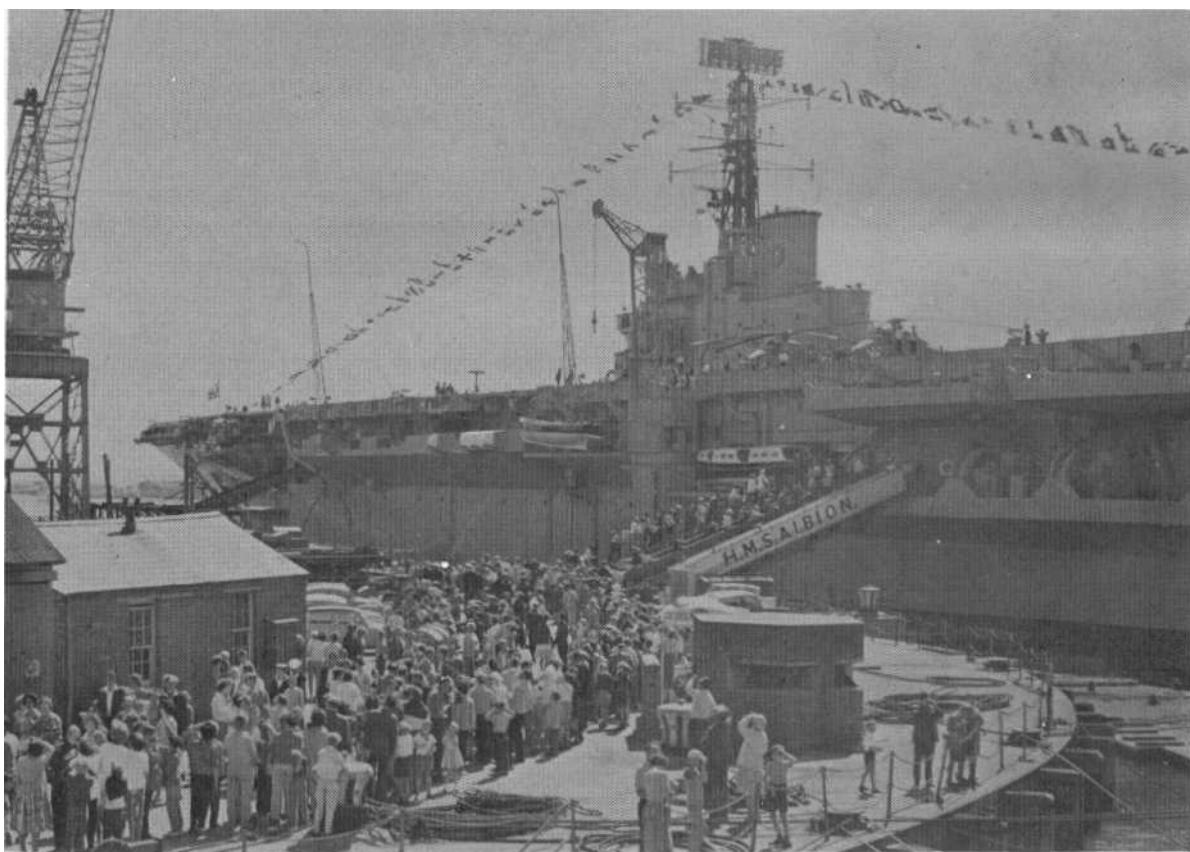
The success of our trials was due to the hard work of all those - about 300 of them - who had stood by during the conversion. For fifteen months the Dockyard with ingenuity and a sense of humour had

done a major job on the ship. They'd cut bits off, glued other chunks on, until our appearance at sea must have seemed an unlikely event to the long-suffering refit crew. Anyway, the ship behaved like a perfect lady during the trials and - at full power - quite a fast one, too.

After the main trials, we went to Portland for a 'Ship' work up. We fired all the guns at aircraft sleeves; replenished at sea with oilers and frigates; were taken in tow, helped to hunt submarines; practised Damage Control; greeted "Oriental Potentates" (in pusser's sheets) ceremonially and did "Pre-wetting" trials. Then we went down west-side to meet our other half - the Helicopter Squadrons - off the Lizard Head. There, we were briefly visited by helicopters painted in the latest all-season shade of Desert Mud. Their pilots spent all day "deck qualifying". We would see them again very soon.

The Ship work-up finished, we entered Portsmouth Harbour for a quick weekend before starting the Military Work-up.

The Military Work-up started in Plymouth Sound, where on the 18th September we embarked 41 Commando Group and some of its vehicles, baggage and stores. Then our friends 845 (Wessex)



*All the fun of the fair Portsmouth Navy Days 1962.*



*Sheik Asgo Bin Fosti comes on board*

and 846 (Whirlwind) Squadrons arrived from Culdrose. We spent the next two days in the English Channel practising assault drills and deck landings so that we might safely go ahead with our first assault landing.

We were very new to it all, but - drawing a deep early morning breath - we assaulted the Purbeck Hills in Dorset. The Commando fought the enemy all day, advancing resolutely, and were rewarded with hot "haybox" suppers that night. We withdrew next day burying one of our quarter-tonners at sea from a very great height, and disembarked 41 Commando, muddy but cheerful, at Plymouth. We returned to Portsmouth that night with some joy riders from 43 Commando. So ended our Military Work-up - at least that's what the programme said.

After giving leave to all hands, H.M.S. *Albion*, with 41 Commando and 145 Commando Battery R.A. embarked, sailed for the Far East Station on 3rd November 1962. Many of our families gave us a last wave from the Dockyard, the "Still and West" and the Sally Port. It was a beautiful fine day, and we set course for Ushant.

### PASSAGE

After a bumpy ride we made our first "foreign" harbour - Gibraltar. It's a good place for outward bounders, exotic enough to whet the appetite, but with plenty of familiar enjoyments to cheer up the homesick. The old place has slipped a bit for numbers of warships, but the beer and vino are still good, the shopping pretty fair, and the castanets are still audible to those with musical ears. For us, it rained and rained. Never mind, Gib brollies were cheap and we would see the sun soon enough.

Two days later we set off across the Western Mediterranean for a stretch of North Africa called Horns. Here, we and 41 Commando were going to have a go at some sand. Exercise Sand Fly - prophetically named - was planned to encircle and destroy a "roving rebel band". It went well enough, but there was one snag. Rather an expensive one in



*Pre-wetting Trials*

the shape of Windmill Mike which had got all tired and upset and wouldn't start back from the desert.

Night fell; there wasn't a quick cure; we had a convoy to catch. So the Senior Pilot of 845 Squadron and a small team were left behind to lead the reluctant Mike back to us, which they did after many adventures.

When we got to Port Said, we found that the night convoy was delayed due to fog in the Canal. Our south bound journey was slow and frustrating and we took two days to reach the open sea at Suez. The Red Sea, despite our new air-conditioning, seemed about as hot as usual. Some 350 valves had been put in the wrong way round, we found, and it took a lot of sweat and hard work to put it right. Off Aden, we said goodbye to 41 Commando and sent them ashore in our L.C.A's and choppers.

As we entered harbour and approached our berth, we noticed another ship just like us, berthed nearby. The crowd on her flight deck seemed pleased to see us - at least, they were waving and cheering. This was *Bulwark*, waiting to turn over to us before going home. Must have been a good moment for them. We spent the next five days exchanging 41 Commando for 40 and taking over from *Bulwark*. But there was also time for runs ashore. The shops were plentiful and well stocked, and for many of us it was our first real taste of the Mysterious Orient. Going ashore was a thirsty business and the Service club bars did well. Swimming was the main activity and there were pools and shark-netted beaches for our use. The water was lukewarm but it felt different and it was quite free.

At last, the turn over was complete, and *Bulwark* gave us three cheers (out of sheer relief, we think) as we steamed out for Malindi in East Africa.

Malindi is a lovely spot just south of the equator on the palm fringed coast of East Africa. Most of us never got within five miles of it, but 40 Commando with 845 and 846 Squadrons racketted and tramped round the bundu to the north of the town.

Exercise FIRST CALL - was our first one with 40



*Millbay Docks, Plymouth - The Commando join*

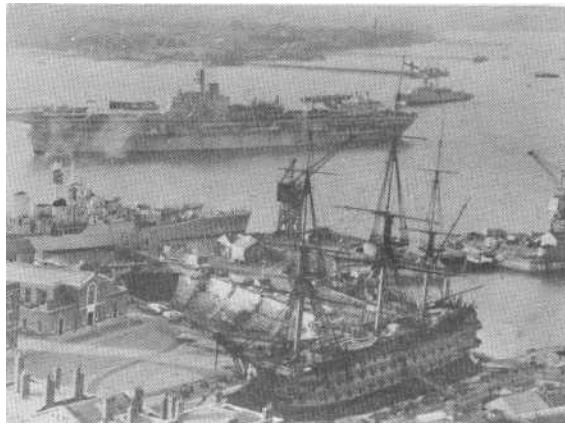
Commando and we showed them what the big new Wessex could do. The ship steamed south after the exercise for an all too brief visit to Mombasa. We came through the hectic sporting programme quite well and took our first look at Africa.

We sailed from Mombasa on 5th December for Singapore. On 9th December, a signal was received telling us to "proceed with all despatch" to Singapore to pick up reinforcements and, with those and 40 Commando still on board, go on to Borneo where it seemed that there had been a rebellion. New names kept appearing in the news. Brunei and Kuching, Miri and Sarawak, and we began to get an inkling of what was in store.

As events turned out, our commission was largely centred on Borneo, although as we go to press there are matters afoot elsewhere.

We still enjoyed the visit of King Neptune and his Court at the Equator on 10th December. They commanded us to accept and withstand "The full and due initiation into the Rites of Our Ancient Aquatic Court", and there was a little accepting and a lot of withholding from those Singled Out For Special Favours.

We kept up twenty-six knots, nearly all the way to Singapore.

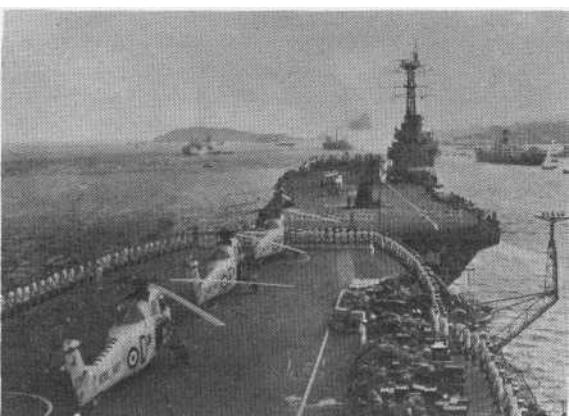


*Starting*

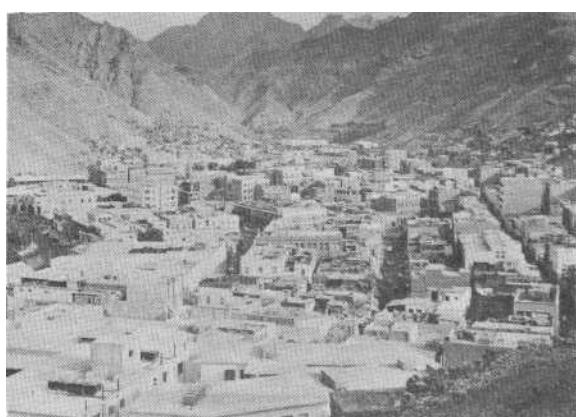
We reduced speed briefly for a main steam line defect, but some heroic work by the engineers put it right. Before arriving at Singapore we replenished at high speed from Fort Dunvegan using our helicopters. At 1700 on 13th December, *Albion* secured in Singapore just eight days after leaving Mombasa. We adjusted our load slightly, then set off for Borneo.

We arrived off Kuching, Sarawak and landed the H.Q. 3rd Commando Brigade and 40 Commando group. After much signalling, the Marines were flown in to Kuching Race Course. An armada of odd launches and lighters helped unload the transport, but a heavy swell hampered operations. "A" Company, 40 Commando stayed on board "in reserve". They were to have the busiest time of all. From Kuching we rattled up to Brunei where 846 squadron disembarked to the airport, and set up in the mud and rain. The four L.C.A.'s went to Brunei Town. During the next twenty-six days, *Albion* helicopters flew nearly 1,200 sorties directly supporting "A" Company 40 Commando (at Danau) and helping many other units. Christmas 1962 and the New Year were spent steaming up and down at Assault Stations ever preparing for the "next lift".

"A" Company were our own weapon and we



*Aden. November 1962 - take-over bid*



*Crater*



*"Accept and withstand our favour ....."*

tried to fix them up well with stores and goodies. We broadcast Christmas programmes to the troops ashore, and sent them the ship's newspaper - "The Albion Advertiser".

We left for Singapore on 8th January 1963, looking forward to a spell of self-maintenance. 845 Squadron, who we had landed at Labuan airfield then had a busy month providing lifts for the big flood relief operation to help the thousands of homeless, starving victims of the great rains.

After introducing ourselves to Singapore, repairing ourselves and generally re-charging batteries, the ship then started trooping on 5th February. We



*Major Davies (PUGFORCE) and Friend*

were to do this with little variety for the rest of the year. Our first customers, naturally, we will remember especially. The 1st Battalion 7th Gurkha Rifles and the 1st Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry were fitted in - about 1,000 of them - and carried to Brunei Bay. The Gurkha pipes were unforgettable, and played to us each evening of our journey, endearing them even more to us. We brought back the 1st/2nd Gurkhas and the Queen's Own Highlanders - with even more piping. Thus began the trooping.

The next highlight of our commission was a very successful visit to that great bustling seaport, city of the Orient - Hong Kong. It would take many books to describe Hong Kong. Briefly, it is one of the most exciting places in the world, and easily one of the best runs ashore. You name it - Hong Kong has it - and we were lucky and saw a lot of the colony.

We entered "Fragrant Harbour" on 23rd February and stayed for three weeks, walking and sporting, sampling the delicious food and treacherous "San Mig" - the local bottled plonk. The shopping was unique, the prices still low, if one was prepared to bargain. We had many visits from the children of the Colony - one of the most successful was The Party. We invited 260, but nearer 360 came. We also gave 200 pints of blood to the Red Cross. 846 Squadron, who had come up with us for a break, flew the Army's first paradrop practice in the colony since the war. They also got involved with a friendly American warship who gave them a palm tree. Our visit ended, and off we set for Borneo.

Our fifth Borneo run carried 42 Commando and the 1st Battalion, The Green Jackets back from Labuan to Singapore, together with some fixed wing aircraft. The operation of light aircraft (Army Austers, Beavers and R.A.F. Single Pioneers) from our deck was watched at first with interest and caution - as we have no arrester wires and no barrier. This trip saw the 21st fixed wing deck landing. We and many of the visiting pilots - are now "old hands" at it, but it's still a thoroughly goof-worthy spectacle. For a change, we tried three days of nautical type exercises off the East Coast of Malaya with Blackpool, Brighton and Cavendish of the 25th



*Whirlwinds over Brunei Mosque*



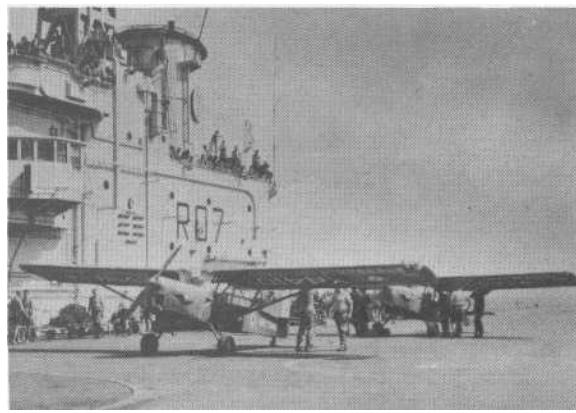
Gurkhas



Blood letting



ME. RIDLEY and tottie



Austers of Teeny Weeny Airways



Pipes and Drums of The 1st. Battalion, Queens Own Highlanders

E.S., Damage Control, Anti-Submarine and Pre-wetting were all exercised; and, sending our escorts on their way and feeling slightly less out of touch, we anchored off Pulau Tioman Island for General Drills and a Banyan. P.T. is a Tropical Island Mark 1. You can swim there, drink beer, or just lie under the palm trees and think about absolutely nothing.



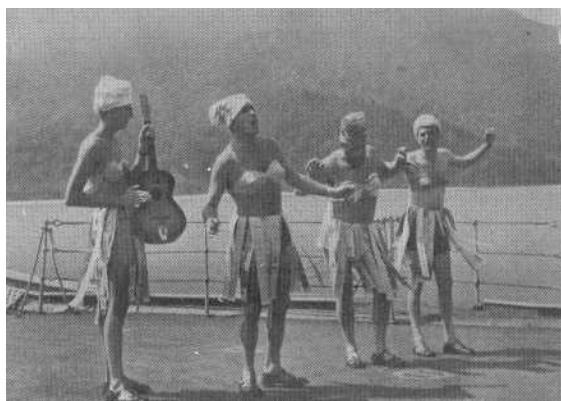
View from Victoria Peak, Hong Kong, Albion (centre) tucked in

On 18th April, we arrived off Borneo for the sixth time, at the Sarawak end. We were looking forward to a docking period, but things had gone sour on the Indonesian frontier and Tebedu Police Station had been raided. So once again, the programme changed. We flew some of the Gurkhas into Sarikei, Sibu and Binatang, and sent the rest up-

river by C.M.S. 846 Squadron had by now moved to Kuching Airfield. "A" Company 40 Commando was on board again in reserve, to be lifted in, if needed, by 845 Squadron - now also back with us. Wessex Foxtrot had to force land on the football pitch at Kampong Bunau Gega. The match was interrupted, but the locals forgave Lieut. Hudson



*Tioman beachcombers*



*Pulau Tioman Birds*

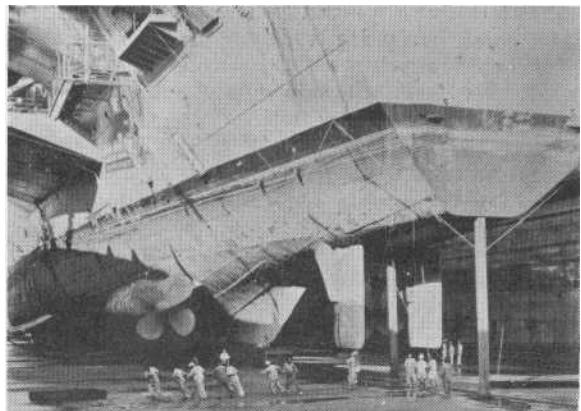


*Pulau Tioman - Desert Island Mark One*

and his crew who then passed the night dancing in a Long House.

Before leaving Borneo this time, 845 Squadron detached to Kuching to keep 846 company, and the ship called at Brunei Bay to collect the Yorkshires before returning to Singapore.

While we were there, the C.S.E. had organised a



*Singapore for a scrub*



*Two to Tango*



*Stan Stennet (left) and The Riding High team and Postillions: Richardson and Power*

concert party in the shape of Stan Stennet and full supporting cast in "Riding High". It was our first "live" show and we and - obviously - the performers had a wonderful evening. We also had a chance to go banyaning on two of the little islands, Pappan and Enoe before sailing.

We did one more trip - our seventh - before going into dock in Singapore. This time our destination was Brunei Bay - the Queen's Own Highlanders "Out" and the 1st/7th Gurkhas "Back".

We threw ourselves enthusiastically into the DED period. Why? Well the ship would be motionless for six weeks, and we'd - most of us - get a week's Station Leave. The prospect of leaving our air-conditioning and good food was sad perhaps, but it didn't take us long to settle down into the Terror routine....

We thoroughly enjoyed our Athletics meeting which was won by a Communications / Royal Marines combination who then went on to win the Aquatics and the Water Polo. There were no great stars but we admired very much the seven who ran the three-mile race in a temperature of 93°F. All the ship's teams were playing well and we had an impres-



*"You and your fizzy-haired chum can shove off, Mate! I spent all morning producing fried eggs on the Bridge for General Drill but I'm not giving up my ruddy Banyan beer to you as well!"*



*The Commander-in-Chief and The Captain with the 'Everybody Out' team.*