

During the leave period in August 1971, ANTRIM was one of the ships taking part in the Navy Days' display at Portsmouth. The ship was moved to lie outboard of HMS LONDON at Pitch House Jetty, and during the three days of display - over the summer holiday weekend - some 15,000 people came on board ANTRIM.

In early September, an event of major importance occurred - on 6th September Captain H W E Hollins, RN, was relieved by Captain D A Loram, MVO, RN. Captain Hollins has since been promoted to the rank of Rear Admiral, and now holds the appointment of Flag Officer, Gibraltar.

And so to Portland for the work up



Captain H W E Hollins,

leaving HMS ANTRIM

The work up began gently - with a formal, Procedure Alpha entry into Portland Harbour, after completing a week at sea in the English Channel with the inspecting staff embarked to carry out their 'sea checks'. ANTRIM lay alongside 'Q' pier for the first few days, until 20th September, for the 'Work Up Harbour Week'. During these few days, the ship's company were utterly on their toes, expecting incidents to occur - and occur they did! ranging from fires in the main machinery spaces to conducting the rescue of a damsel in distress from the upper storey of the FOST office block'

And so on to the first of the sea weeks - the routine now was to sail daily from Portland at about 0730, and go out into the exercise areas to the south of Portland Bill, returning to harbour in the late evening and, usually, anchoring overnight. During this week - and the following 3 also - all aspects of the ship's organisation was tested and critically examined. These checks included the gunnery and missile worlds, the TAS empire, the engineers (both electrical and mechanical), the flight, and, of course, the seamen: The latter were particularly busy, with all their drills, replenishing fuel from the Portland tanker, passing a tow to the RFA Grey Rover, launching boarding parties, and generally being very active.

There were also land oriented evolutions to complete; these included the Internal Security Exercise, the Landing Parties, and the Disaster Control and Relief Exercise.. In this last performance, the whole of ANTRIM's crew was mobilised to deal with an imaginary earthquake and its aftermath at Portland. The game started with the ship carefully feeling its way alongside the erstwhile all too familiar 'Q' pier, then dealing with the hysterical leader of the local civil community, and finally landing all the personnel who could be of use. A field kitchen was put ashore, and the medical department went en masse - although as the exercise progressed it became less and less clear as to what was happening ashore, or whether the 'victims' of the 'disaster' were being helped or hindered, or even appreciated what was being done for them!

All too quickly - or perhaps not quickly enough for some - the last week arrived, and the day of the final inspection and the reports, and the critique by the staff and then back to Portsmouth, arriving there on the 13th October.

The final paragraph of the Work Up Report by the Flag Officer Sea Training read "The ship was clean and her company in good heart on completion of a very satisfactory work up".

In retrospect, 2 things enabled the ship to make the most of the Portland interlude - and they were the formation of the ANTRIM choir from the senior gentry who lived mainly in the 'House of Lords' of 1Q1 Mess, and the introduction of the Codeword CONDOR. If you wish to know the meaning of this last word - ask any helicopter aircrew or any Flight Deck Officer!



Portland - Disaster Control Headquarters



POck Smith, Ld Ck Ames and Ck Pope get the
goodies ready!



Stwd May feeds OS Evans while
SA Price looks on



THE WORK UP -

FINAL INSPECTION DAY

'I asked him if he was an exercise casualty, Sir, and he said, 'No, mate, middlewatchman! "

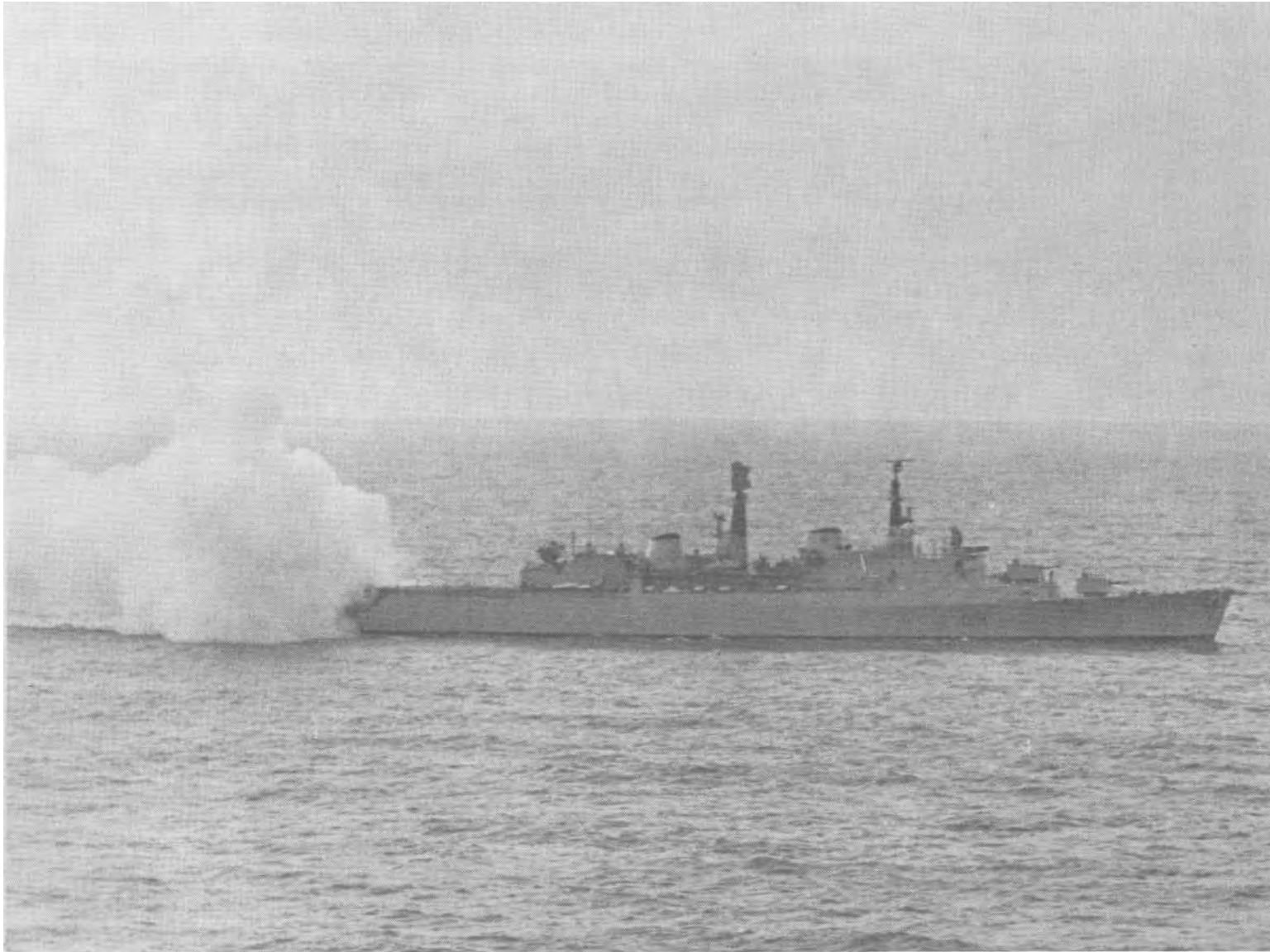
OCTOBER - NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 1971

After a short spell in Portsmouth, ANTRIM sailed again on 25th October. The track this time was to the westward, towards south west Wales, and the missile range off the Pembrokeshire coast at Aberporth. Here the ship was to conduct a major trials and proving firing programme for the Seaslug missile system. Aberporth was an ideal place for this, as the tracking and general back up facilities are good. But thoughts of the weather in the south Irish Sea in late autumn kept many people awake, and it was anticipated that this would be a tense and nerve racking period.

In the end, all went very well. Two separate periods were spent on the Aberporth range, from 26th October to 1st November and from 15th November to 26th November, and all objectives were achieved in spite of continuous bad weather. CinC Fleet sent the following signal, "Whatever the detailed analysis may show, your firing performance has been impressive. Well done all concerned." We even had to leave a large number of libertymen ashore in Fishguard one Saturday evening when a south easterly gale arose! (This was the night when the Officer of the Watch was astonished to discover that the anchor chain had parted under the strain!). The period between the 2 missile firing sessions was spent on exercise in the southern Norwegian Sea, off the north coast of Scotland. The less said about this exercise the better, as the weather was appalling, and everyone was relieved to reach Rosyth at the end of it. The stopover there was only too brief, sufficient only to allow the Flag Officer First Flotilla, Rear Admiral Power, and his staff to disembark, and for brief discussions to occur between the participating ships.

And then at the end of November, it was back up to the north again, this time to participate in Exercise Highwood 1971. This was a major exercise, involving 3 DLGs - ANTRIM, LONDON and NORFOLK - and many smaller ships testing out the Command and control arrangements for RAF shore based aircraft operating in defence of the Fleet; the setting of the exercise being an attempt to

land an amphibious force on the coast of southern Norway. The weather was kinder than it had been in these same waters only a week or so before but it was still very cold, and this was probably one of the few occasions when everyone was glad that access to the upper deck was not permitted! This exercise finished on 9th December, and all the ships which had been taking part steamed back in company to Portsmouth making a brave show; all entered Portsmouth at the same time, one after the other, and Fountain Lake Jetty loomed in sight - it was a welcome vista, with the thought of a busy 3 month period completed with success, and Christmas Leave to come.



HMS ANTRIM firing a
Seaslug missile at Aberporth
November 1971



HMS ANTRIM and her sister
ships LONDON and NORFOLK
returning from Exercise Highwood
December 1971



"DIVISION-OFF —



CAPS!"

1972 - A NEW YEAR - AND A NEW ROLE

The beginning of 1972 saw HMS ANTRIM employed in a new role. The last year of trials and work up was over, and now the ship was to be deployed for the first time, and on this occasion it was to be to the western Mediterranean. So mid January saw the bows coming out of Portsmouth once more and point westwards down Channel but off Ushant came the new feature - this time the ship turned southwards! Gibraltar looming over the town of Algerciras and its neighbour La Linea was a novel and intriguing sight for many of the ship's company, and everyone settled down quickly to the routine of a maintenance period in the quickly - familiar setting of the dockyard.

Early in February, ANTRIM sailed off into the Alboran Channel, and then into the Ligurian Sea, there to rendezvous with the 3 frigates of the Dartmouth Training Squadron. The Commander-in-Chief Fleet, Admiral Sir Edward Ashmore, was transferred to ANTRIM by a jackstay transfer from HMS TENBY, and all 4 ships then visited the small port of Civitavecchia, 40 miles to the north of Rome. This is, in fact, the closest port to Rome which is able to receive warships of a moderate size, and full advantage was taken of the nearness of the capital of Italy. One group had the honour of being received by His Holiness the Pope, and further parties visited shrines at well known places such as Assisi. The time passed quickly, and ANTRIM returned to the exercise areas to the east of Gibraltar, there to conduct anti-submarine exercises for the next 2 weeks.

In March, the ship visited Barcelona - the first visit to that city of a major British warship for nearly 10 years. This call lasted from 9th-13th March, and was very successful and enjoyable. Then, on to Lisbon, remaining there from 17th-21st March, and finally, for this deployment, the ship headed northwards, towards Portsmouth, arriving there on 23rd March.

The months of April and May are perhaps best forgotten; ANTRIM was undergoing a docking period in the hands of the maintainers of Portsmouth. Much of this time was spent in dry dock, with all the consequent difficulties that that situation causes. During this period, also, there was a constant change in the personnel on board, with many new faces, as crew members were relieved; indeed, with the present system of 'trickle drafting' this situation is commonplace. Eventually, the DED period was completed, and now came the time for ANTRIM's second deployment - to the Mediterranean once again, but now, with one of the most challenging of situations possible lying ahead - ANTRIM was to be attached to the United States VI Fleet and was to be fully integrated into one of the 2 carrier task groups.

Early June saw the ship back in Gibraltar, after a fast passage from the United Kingdom. A short stay only this time, and then off into the Gibraltar exercise areas so that a weapon training period could be carried out. After the completion of the 'mini work up' ANTRIM went once again to - Barcelona! This visit was quite unexpected, and the reason for it became clear very quickly - certain US Navy equipment had to be fitted, and a liaison needed to be established with the Operations Staff of the VI Fleet.

The next 6 weeks passed in a blur of activity, and rapid changes of programme and events were the order of the day. ANTRIM was working with the 'Big John' - the US Navy aircraft carrier John F. Kennedy - and her escorting group. This group was made up of one cruiser (Columbus), a DLG (William H Standley) and a number of destroyers. The pressure of activity increased, culminating in a major exercise in the Ionian Sea. The whole force then went to Augusta in Sicily, and there ANTRIM was detached from this large fleet - and 6 weeks of interesting activity were over.

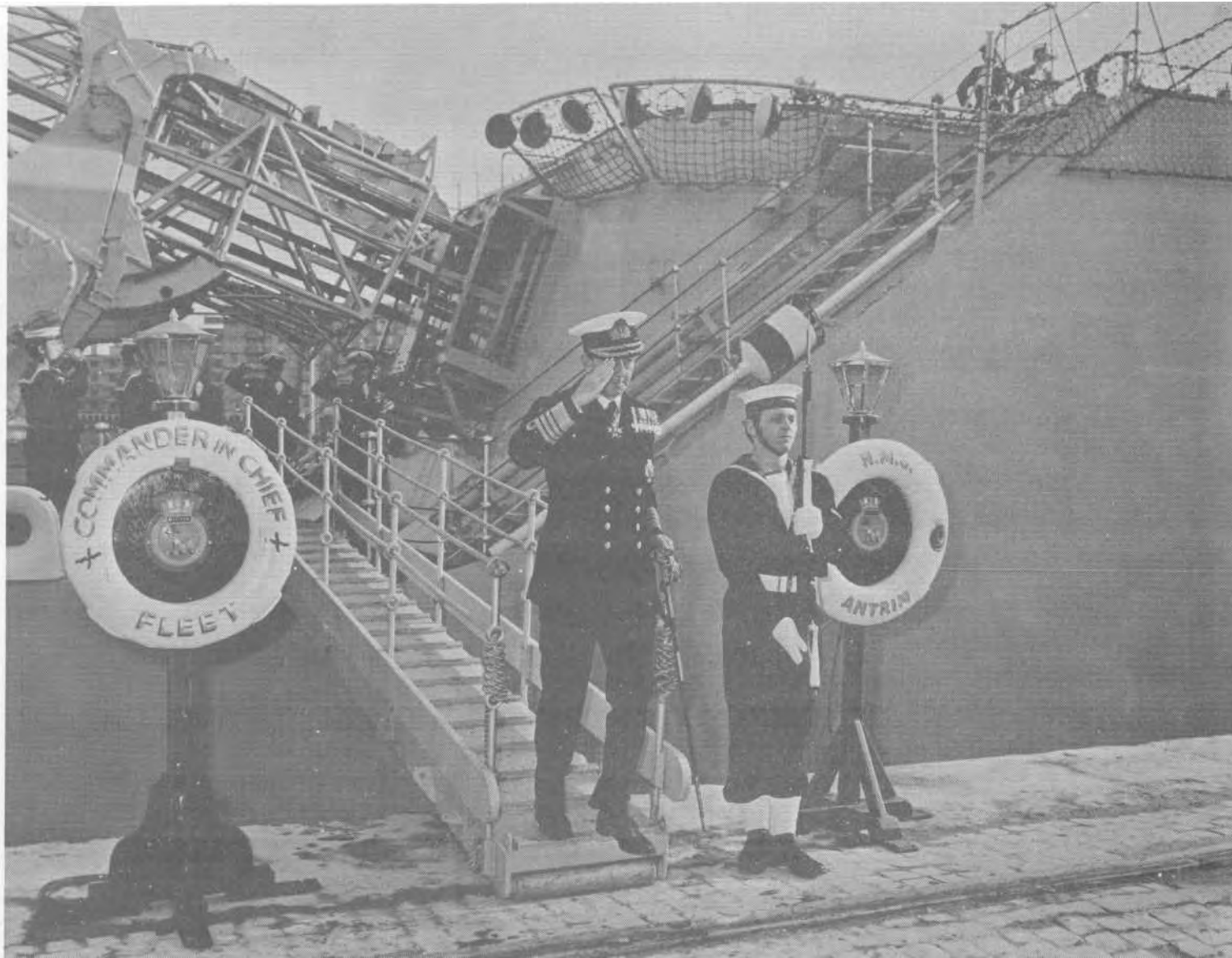
At the end of July, ANTRIM was carrying out missile firings on the NATO range at Soudha Bay, in north west Crete, and, these completed, the ship headed towards Toulon, there to spend 2 weeks in the great French Naval Base, catching up on the maintenance necessary to keep the vessel in trim condition, On then, in mid August, to Malta, for a short week-end - long visit, and then on again, further east,

towards the Aegean Sea. Here, once again the Commander in Chief, Admiral Sir Edward Ashmore., embarked, off Izmir, and he used ANTRIM as his flagship during a formal visit to Istanbul. From the sticky heat of the near east, the visit over, ANTRIM started the long voyage westwards towards Gibraltar and Portsmouth - arriving there in mid September.

Looking back, the last 2 years have been very busy and productive for everyone. It has been a team effort of the greatest magnitude, with everyone working for the same objective - to make ANTRIM 'tick'.



The Commander-in-Chief, Fleet,
Admiral Sir Edward Ashmore,
embarks in HMS ANTRIM by
jackstay transfer from
HMS TENBY
February 1972



Admiral Sir Edward Ashmore

calls from HMS ANTRIM

Civitavecchia, Italy

February 1972