



803 SQUADRON

"Cave Punctum"

The romantic cannot help but feel the passing of an era and a sense of historical occasion with this probably being the last of the Navy's "single-seaters" (fittingly the largest front line Squadron of recent years yet formed), so perhaps a brief resume of the Squadron's past would not be entirely out of context. 803 originally formed in 1933 and between then and 1945 flew a variety of famous "old timers"; Flycatchers, Ospreys, Skuas, Rocs, Fulmars, Sea Hurricanes and Seafires. In 1951 it reformed with Attackers followed by Sea Hawks, and June 1958 saw the introduction of the Scimitar. During the later period, the Squadron has at one time or another embarked in all our present carriers (except *Bulwark*) but her shore-base loyalties were devoted to R.N.A.S. *Ford*, transferring to R.N.A.S. Lossiemouth on the closing down of that very popular air station.

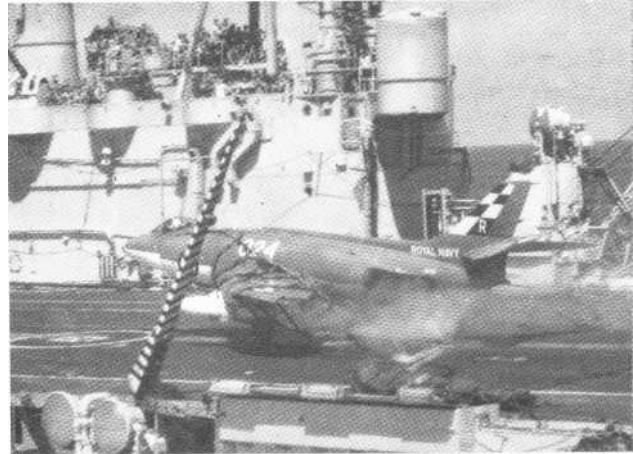
From our point of view, this Commission has been roughly divided into two phases; the first being a most impermanent and uncertain existence prior to *Ark's* sailing for the Far East, during which time a strong Lossie homing instinct was always prevalent. It was during this "work-up" and "shake-down" period that the versatility of the Scimitar (as well as the ingenuity and patience of the maintenance personnel) was ably demonstrated: L.A.B.S., P.R., I.F.R., Strafing, Bombing, Rocketing, Air-to-Air Missilry and Bullpup were all taken in their stride.

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However, as all "clouds have their silver lining", so ours was to be Brest and Bergen, the latter visit being after exercise "Pilot Light". Both runs were noteworthy inasmuch that no grave disasters occurred - much to the chagrin of the Line Book Officer. It was remarkable to view the transition from hesitant "schoolboy" French to fluent intimacy that progressed throughout many an evening - perhaps largely attributive to the *vin du pays*.

Gibraltar and Aden were both pleasant interludes on an otherwise uneventful passage East and as always the Suez Canal provided one with a most impressive spectacle, especially viewed from the vantage point of a Flight Deck. In Gibraltar the absence of several "haunts" on Main Street was lamented by the older hands who promptly found consolation across the Border, while the more reckless were painlessly parted from their money at the new Casino. In Aden the tense political situation and curfew did not appear to affect the Colony's community and, contrary to expectations, the only "sharks" viewed were of the human variety.

Flying activity was stepped up as we neared R.A.A.F. Butterworth and consequently our eventual arrival in Singapore and disembarkation of half the aircraft to R.A.F. *Changi* came as a welcome respite. The Squadron soon settled in at Changi with the sailor's accustomed alacrity and the day when "all good things must come to an end" arrived all too soon when we re-embarked for exercise "Guardrail". The low-level strikes and F.A.C. exercises during this period off North Borneo took on a new operational aspect as it was realized that this was a commitment that could all too easily become "for real". Subic Bay came as a pleasant intermission between the two phases of the exercise and the particularly virulent "delights" of Olongapo were long remembered. The latter half of the "Guardrail" was not without incident, Lieutenant Rankin supplying the "goofers" with a barrier engagement by way of an afternoon's entertainment, and the proximity of U.S.S. *Midway* (on her return from Vietnam) afforded an ideal opportunity to cross-operate that was seized avidly by both sides.



Into the barrier

As a well-known Hindu philosopher was once heard to remark, "the best laid plans of mice and men gang aft a'glee" - so was it to be with us on our return to Singapore. Due to Ship's unserviceabilities, it was decided to leave four aircraft at Changi to carry out I.F.R. trials while the ship proceeded to Hong Kong. That little team bears mention in that not only did they complete the I.F.R. trials and a formidable P.R. commitment for the Ministry of Defence, Kuala Lumpur, but also managed to "cap" the Buccaneers at Lossie by keeping a Scimitar airborne for six hours and ten minutes. During the course of this "epic" (which was not without drama from the logistic side), Lieutenant Wren found personal comfort facilities sadly lacking and the subsequent disaster inspired the Squadron bard to immortalize the occasion:

If you want to stay airborne for more than six hours,
The precautions you take must be these,
A book for the boredom, a cushion for comfort,
And a small plastic bag for your ease.
But remember remember this one vital warning,
A Scimitar flies mighty fast,
If your bag should be full, do not try to eject it,
For 'tis always thrown back by the blast.

It was during this period, on a single engine diversion to Changi, that Lieutenant Waring left his aircraft on "finals" after a total hydraulic failure - the parting between pilot and aircraft being by courtesy of Mr. Martin-Baker. He was next located (unaffected by his "traumatic" experience) reaping his just rewards at the bar.

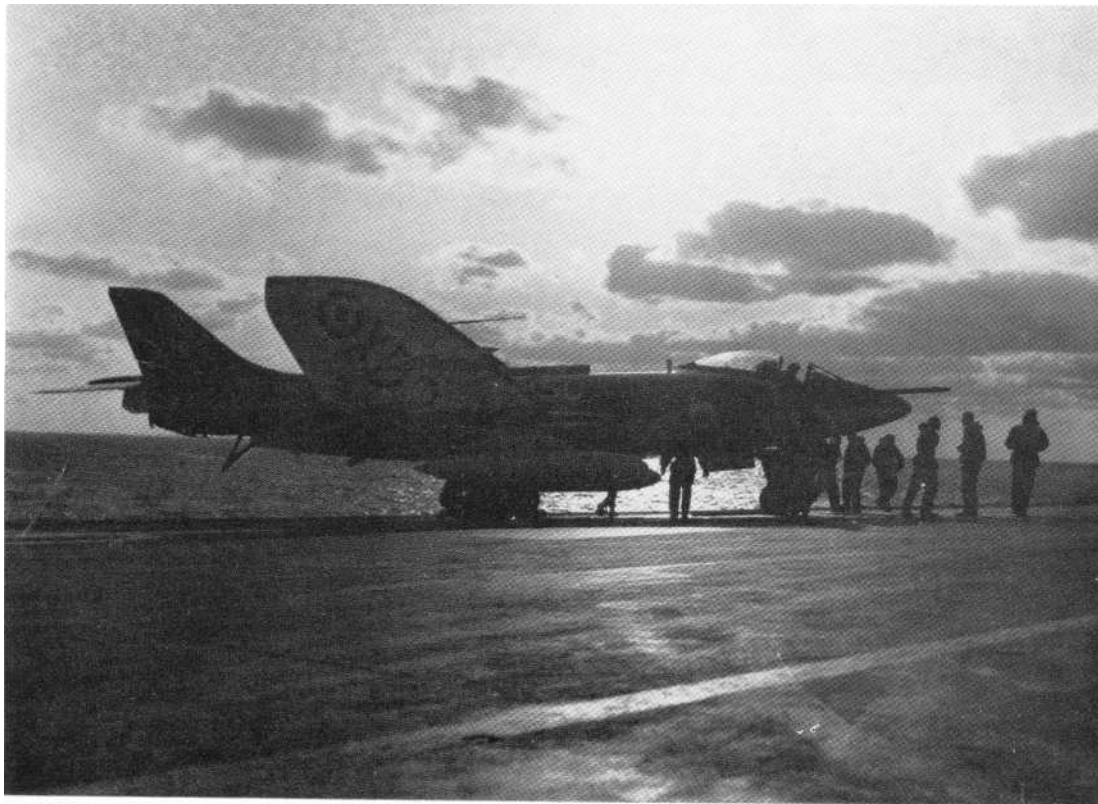
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Hong Kong once again justified its reputation for being the best run East of Suez and once again on the return trip full advantage was taken of the excellent facilities at Cubi Point to practice live Sidewinder firings; although the measure of success was not comparable with our previous Bullpup firings at Tabones. We have always acquitted ourselves well in the field of sport, especially the "potted" variety.

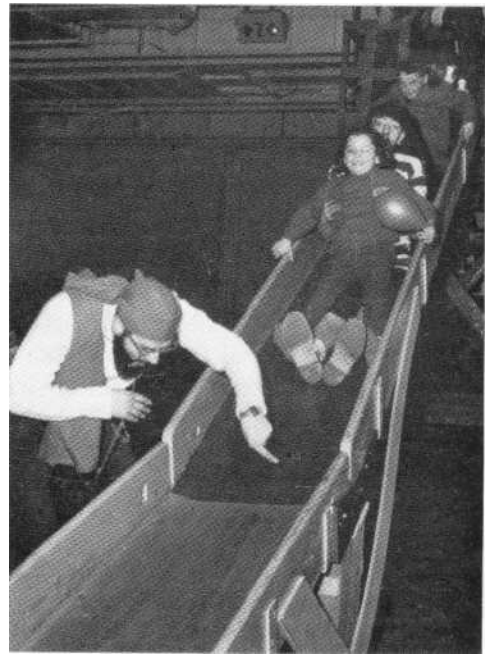
On our return to Singapore, movement order followed upon movement order as we shuttled between the Ship, Changi, Butterworth and the Ship (all in the space of a few weeks). In fact the C.A.A. was so moved as to remark that if it was all changed again he would "tear his hair" (a remarkably incautious remark as will be appreciated by those who have viewed his tonsorial limitations!). If it would appear that our disembarked periods at Changi have been "glossed over", we hasten to affirm that they have proved invaluable for continuation flying and for affording us the opportunity to have a change that has been as good as any rest. We were exceedingly well looked after by the Australians at Butterworth and accustomed ourselves to being called "pommies" for our Down Under visit - this was even after four emergency landings were called on our second day there.

The remaining months of the foreign leg were marked by our flying off the Cocos Islands, off Gan and in the Beira blockade broken by innumerable returns to Changi. In particular, we remember with gratitude the islanders of Cocos who spread a huge "Happy New Year" greeting on the beach for 803. At Beira we contributed largely PR effort with some diplomatic "medium range" shots.

We also spent much of this time reducing the stowage problem by disposing of aircraft into the catwalk, into the barrier and into the sea. This was achieved by Messrs. Skrodski, Notley, Williams and de Souza. On one occasion the pilot ditched so near to Changi that he refused a helicopter rescue and virtually walked ashore.



YOUNG VISITORS



PASSAGE EAST

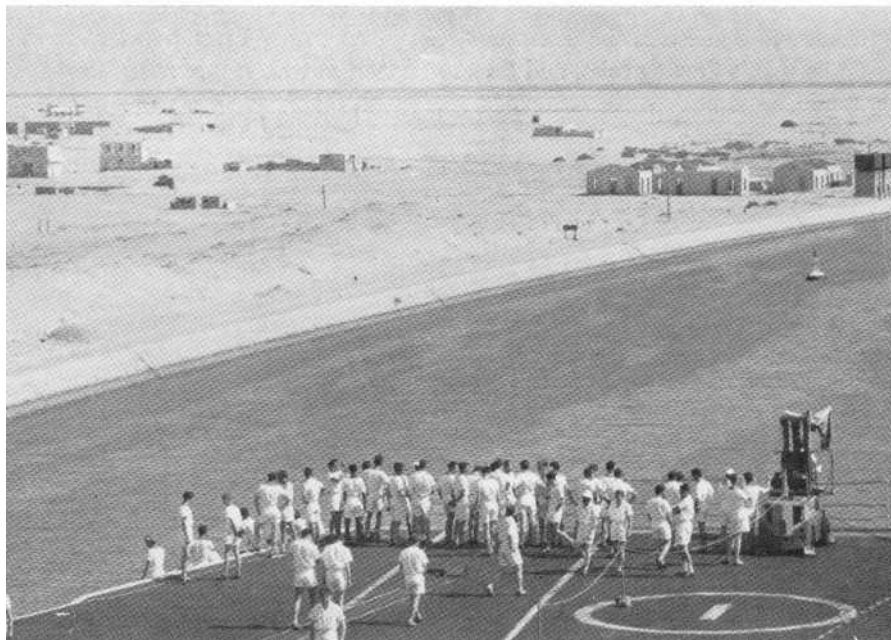


ACROSS THE BAY

The third week of June opened with such dismal West Country weather, that one was almost glad to be leaving for the Sun and the warm South. We sailed from Plymouth at 0745 on June the 17th in temporarily fine conditions, and a few families and friends were there to wave us out of the Sound. A few anxious late comers had just made it over the last brow as it was taken in; others failed even to do that and had to be collected by chopper from the Barrack's parade ground. The Air Group joined during the afternoon but only just made it before the weather clamped. Lieut.-Cdr. P. G. Newman, who was giving up command of 803 Squadron, came on board for a last visit to say good-bye to Captain Griffin and found himself being carried, willy-nilly, to Gibraltar. We struggled across the Bay with one screw trailing due to something known as a "plummer block" - cries of "The Buzz is Guzz!" but the weather steadily improved and we got out our Whites and our sunglasses and we were able to enjoy a profitable day's flying off Gibraltar.

When we secured to the Mole at Gib. it was to find the diminutive *Centaur* immediately ahead of us. There was to be a Sportex between the two ships which was intended to embrace practically every activity, it was evident that *Centaur* had been enjoying the benefits of an old-fashioned Mediterranean cruise and we hastily resolved to catch up on some of these remembered pleasures - hot sun, warm sea, all that is summed up by the words "Mediterranean climate". Political tension over the Border with Spain meant that it was only possible to cross with a valid Passport and on foot. In comparison with the usual conditions, the locals found these restrictions very tedious and soon after our visit Flag Officer Gibraltar himself was involved in an incident on returning from a polo match. Some of the old hands reckoned that La Linea was not what it had been but many of the young 'uns thought that it lived up to its reputation. With the markets of Aden, Singapore and Hong Kong ahead, we were cagey shoppers, prepared to examine the range of luxury goods, to ask prices and to haggle, but not to buy. Some hardy souls climbed the hilly streets to see the Apes - confident that so long as they were on the Rock the British would hold Gibraltar. Only a week after we had sailed from Devonport we sailed again from Gib. for Suez, feeling already like seasoned travellers.

PASSAGE EAST



THE CANAL

The sunny Southern sea turned out to be the misty Mediterranean as we worked our way along the coast of Africa to Malta and again as we crossed towards Port Said. So the Suez Canal became not only the symbolic point at which one passed from "West of" to "East of" but also very obviously the beginning of the Heat. For a long evening we lay outside Port Said, waiting as the South-bound convoy formed up, and we missed the cheerful bustle of the bumboats and their "interesting" wares. Towards midnight we passed through the harbour, past where the statue of the architect of the Canal, Ferdinand de Lesseps, had previously stood. Morning found us moving very slowly and steadily, with the utmost caution on the part of the Captain and Pilot, down the narrow channel. It was a day of rest on board - not even the roar of a ground run to disturb the quiet. A few traders had been hoisted inboard with their small craft and their stock of goods; they were exhibiting these by the Island, leather handbags and writing-cases with exotic views of the Pyramids and Sphinx, pouffes and camel saddles at inflated prices, the same style of tourist attractions that they had been offering to unwary travellers for about a hundred years. The rush for the soft linen sunhat seemed to have become less - in other years these have formed an indispensable part of the "modified 10's" and the Mess Deck Joker who bought a fez or tarboosh and gave his impression of King Farouk was missing, a sign that the exotic monarch was now fading fast from the public memory.

The desert wastes are a sight that will hold one fascinated for an hour or so, and then, suddenly, one feels that one has seen it all and turns away. This is partly due to the very slow rate at which the ship progresses so that it is possible to study every detail of the panorama, the unworking adults and the children waving, the modern installations from the West and the essentially primitive huts and dwellings of the East. "How strange of them to wear their pyjamas during the day," someone said, but is it they who are strange or are we the ones, we who have borrowed their baggy cotton trousers to become our night attire?

At whatever age or however often one makes the transit of the Canal there is one memory that is abiding - the skill and simplicity of the Gully-Gully man, and the downy charm of his day-old chicks. For all the highly professional patter, the luring of a stooge (he still calls him MacGregor or MacPheerson as he used to in the 20's and 30's when tourists went out East in the cool season and only Scottish engineers would risk any other

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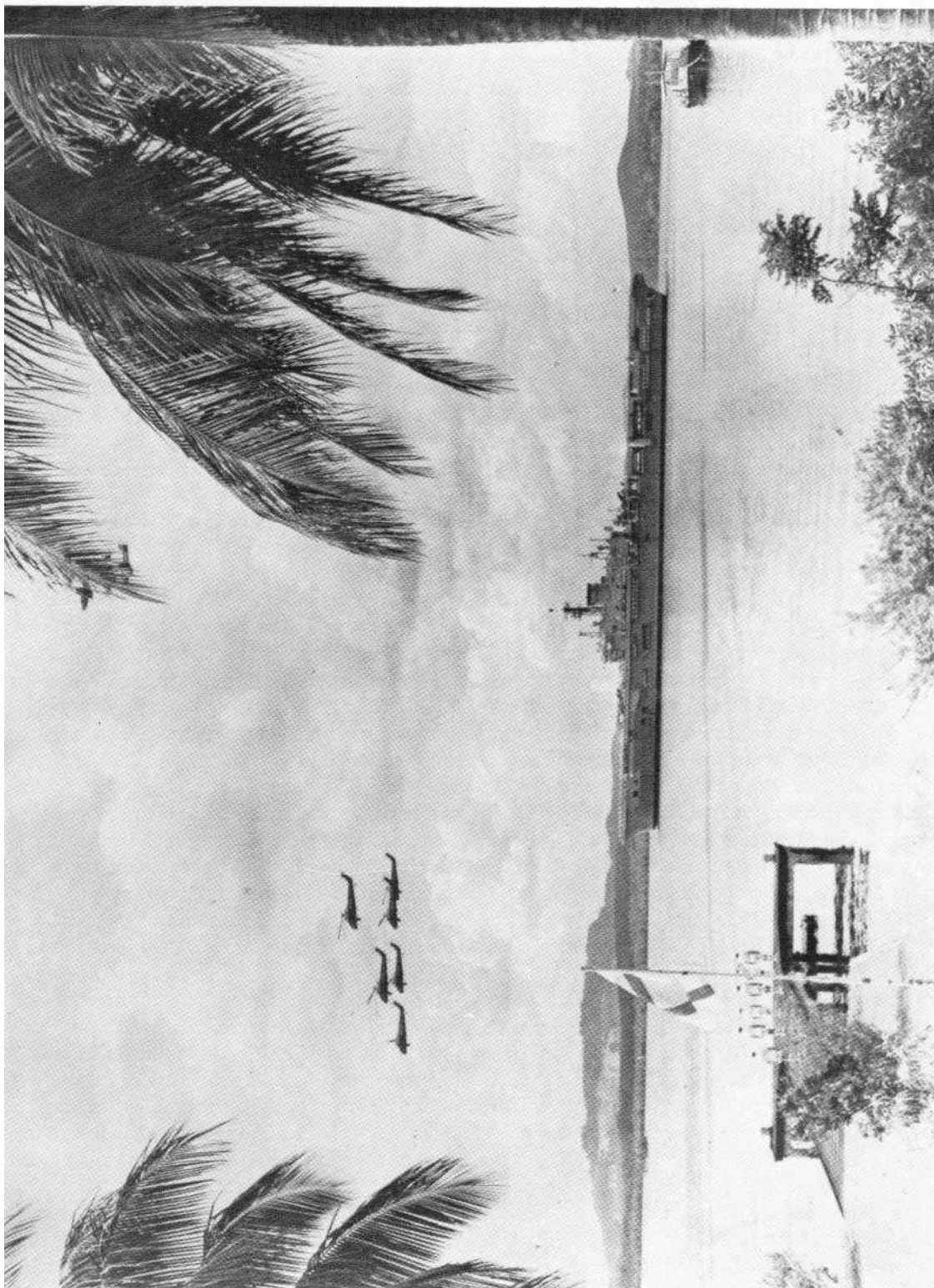
time!) to assist in the card and coin acts, the expertise with the rings and with the cups, it is still the legerdemain with these little live creatures that holds the attention. They seem happy to nestle silent in the deep, cavernous pocket of the Gully-Gully man's flowing robe, and then to appear, at will, from under the cups or out of ears and pockets. One helper stood awed and amazed as chicken after chicken was taken cheeping from inside his shirt, and after the show was over he could be seen feeling carefully round his chest in case one was still there and he had not noticed it. With exact timing as he completed his half hour the Gully-Gully man ended his show, and conjured up a small collection.

ADEN

The news from Aden as we approached was of political tension which was accentuated, from time to time, by bombs being lobbed into cinemas or at children's parties or at groups of soldiers in the street. It was therefore decided by the authorities ashore that the advent of one thousand *Ark Royal* libertymen each day of our stay would prove too much of a temptation for the keen bomb thrower and that the local defence forces would be hard put to it to provide adequate protection for our men. So, reluctantly, only one Part of one Watch were allowed to



stay ashore after dark, while the other Part returned on board, clutching their tape-recorders, single-lens automatic cameras, mechanical toys and the most astounding bargains in cheap watches and fountain pens. The experts disagreed violently about what was cheaper in Aden than anywhere else and what was not - one expert will still be travelling hopefully towards Guzz at the end of the foreign leg, confident that the tape-recorder of his choice will be cheaper at the next port than it was at the last. N.A.A.F.I. brought samples of some of these luxury goods on board; these were handed round, admired and some orders were placed but, when the time came to pack up, the samples had disappeared into the unknown depths. Ashore, we mixed with the visitors from the luxury liners and tried to pass for rich Americans. Self-preservation was uppermost in one's mind and very few risked the picturesque but dangerous back-streets. The inland town of Crater was strictly Out of Bounds. Our oppos in the Army and the R.A.F. were lavish with invitations and in particular a group of those with fond memories of Shotley visited the Royal Anglian Regiment for a hearty lunch. The beaches were popular, but for the first time the ominous word "Shark" was mentioned and some contented themselves with the briefest of dips. It was fortunate, on the whole, that the visit was short because caution was necessary but tedious. As the N.P.M. said in his introductory broadcast, "Don't go ashore on your own and don't go ashore in a group. I hope you enjoy your visit."



(By courtesy of the Fleet Photography Unit, Singapore)

815 SQUADRON

"Strike Deep"

The Squadron consisting of six Wessex H.A.S. 1 aircraft joined H.M.S. *Ark Royal* from R.N.A.S. *Culdrose* on 15th June 1965. It had been disembarked there since the previous Christmas after a twelve-month commission in H.M.S. *Centaur*

During the weeks prior to embarkation we had undergone our Operational Readiness Inspection by Flag Officer Flying Training, taken pre-embarkation leave, and made a multitude of other preparations. It was a busy time for all.

Finally embarked then, we soon fell into a steady programme of day and night flying, working up both air and ground crews as well as aircraft Flight Control Systems. After a six-month disembarked period it quite naturally takes some little time to reaccustom the Squadron to carrier operating. Not only that, but also under completely different weather conditions to those experienced in U.K., which require rather different operating techniques.

July 4th, two days out of Aden, marked the fourth anniversary of the Squadron recommissioning with Wessex helicopters. During these four years the Squadron served for eighteen and twelve months respectively in *Ark Royal* and *Centaur*, seeing action in the Radfan and assisting in maintaining law and order in Dar-es-Salaam. A dinner was held in the Wardroom to mark the occasion.

Between Aden and Singapore we continued a steady programme of Screenex flying with a particularly intensive period during Exercise *Malarky* off Butterworth. As *Ark* steamed through the Johore Straits on July 19th we disembarked six aircraft to R.N.A.S. Sembawang, after taking part in the Air Group flypast. H.M.S. *Simbang* is familiar ground to most of the Squadron, and we quickly settled in there.

These disembarked periods not only permit aircraft maintenance in very much more agreeable conditions than those onboard, but also a tropical routine to be operated when commitment and work allow. Accommodation and surroundings are pleasant, the station has a fine swimming pool, and the Squadron has a fairly busy programme of sporting fixtures. Particularly successful have been the Squadron barbeques at the swimming pool.

While ashore the flying has been varied and interesting. In addition to the General and Instrument Flying practice, we have carried out numerous jungle navexes, operated in confined areas and clearings up country, carried out load lifting and troop drills with the Army and taken part in demonstrations at the Jungle Warfare School. During the extended October S.M.P. in particular we did a considerable amount of this sort of work, having converted two aircraft to the Commando role, that is, removing Sonar and F.C.S. equipment and fitting troop seats.

While preparing to re-embark in *Ark Royal* on August 3rd, the flotation equipment on one aircraft inadvertently inflated when the fuses were fitted. Unfortunate though this incident was, it served the double purpose of reassuring all those concerned that not only does the system operate extremely efficiently but also that it is potentially dangerous. Fortunately no one was injured although one or two were somewhat shaken!

The next ten-day flying period was, from the Squadron point of view, a work-up period for the forthcoming Exercise *Guardrail*. Throughout this exercise we flew a fairly intensive anti-submarine programme, operating with ships in company and also units of the United States Navy. For our contribution to the weapon training phase of the exercise we carried out a torpedo drop of six weapons in the Subic Exercise Areas.

On August 30th the Squadron detached four aircraft to H.M.S. *Albion* for two days. She was working in company with *Ark* off the coast of North Borneo. Those who operated from her were much impressed by the ship itself - cool, clean and, above all, quiet. A welcome change from the noise and pressure of a fixed wing carrier.

It was with great pleasure that the Squadron received news of the promotion on 1st September of our Senior Pilot George Barras and Senior Observer Brian Hortin to Lieutenant-Commander. Not surprisingly, this auspicious event gave rise to a grand celebration.

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We operated once again from Simbang during the September S.M.P. and from here the Squadron detached two aircraft and crews to Kuala Lumpur where they were to spend a week operating with No. 3 Squadron Royal Malaysian Air Force, gaining jungle and high altitude experience. This detachment proved to be excellent value, giving those who took part a greater confidence and better knowledge of operating the aircraft in unaccustomed conditions. Incidentally, there were no complaints from either the officers or ratings about the hotel accommodation or the Kuala Lumpur rates of L.O.A.! Those remaining in Singapore continued a programme of general flying from Simbang.

Re-embarking, this time bound for Hong Kong, the Squadron had on passage its first opportunity since leaving U.K. of working with a fast submarine. With H.M.S. *Oberon* for three days we had a taste of realistic submarine evasive tactics. We were fortunate also in being able to embark an observer in her for two days, and at the subsequent debrief he was able to pass on much interesting information from a submarine's eye view.

Whilst in Hong Kong, we achieved a limited amount of flying, mainly stores and ferry trips. Aircraft were flown ashore two by two over the stay for cleaning and polishing by the Hong Kong Aircraft Engineering Company at Kai Tak. The actual visit was much enjoyed by all, although the extended stay inevitably put a considerable strain on the pocket. Many Squadron ratings took advantage of the two days ship's leave and by all accounts had an excellent time. Of particular mention is the kindness and hospitality extended to officers by Mr. and Mrs. Ng, parents of Lieutenant Archie Ng, who served in the Squadron for some time. We had two extremely enjoyable outings with them, and were pleased to reciprocate in some small measure by taking them as guests of honour to a Squadron dinner in the Hong Kong Club.

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On sailing from Hong Kong, two aircraft were detached to R.F.A. *Tidespring* for a ten-day period during Exercise *Guidex*. Two full crews and some fifteen maintenance personnel made up the detachment. While onboard both aircraft were stowed in the hangar overnight, unlikely though it may appear on first inspection. Indeed, stowing the aircraft did prove an interesting manoeuvre and fortunately no heavy weather was encountered which might have made handling very tricky indeed. This was a particularly worthwhile experience, both from the Squadron and ship's point of view. It has shown the feasibility of operating two Wessex from a Tide class vessel, and in future it should be even more practicable from the experience gained and recommendations made.

Again we used *Simbang* during the extended October/November S.M.P., and occupied ourselves with a variety of flying concentrating mainly on "Commando" work as mentioned previously. Many new faces have appeared in the Squadron, occasioned by a one-third relief in ratings. Several new aircrew have also joined in the past weeks, both to complement our two new aircraft, and replace those with recent appointments.

The visit to Mombasa was marked by an interesting request to assist with the setting up of a wireless station in a remote location. This could be speeded up by a chopper lift. In the end, technical difficulties and the rising cost of the venture discouraged the inquirers. In the next weeks, off Beira, our principal contribution was anti-submarine patrolling but we took a further step forward in operating a Wessex as a night planeguard thus releasing the escorts for more extensive duties. We had a dummy run at night winching with some guinea pigs from 803. And for our final fling we indulged in a two-day Casex in the salubrious waters of Jason's Bay before our minds and course set firmly for home.



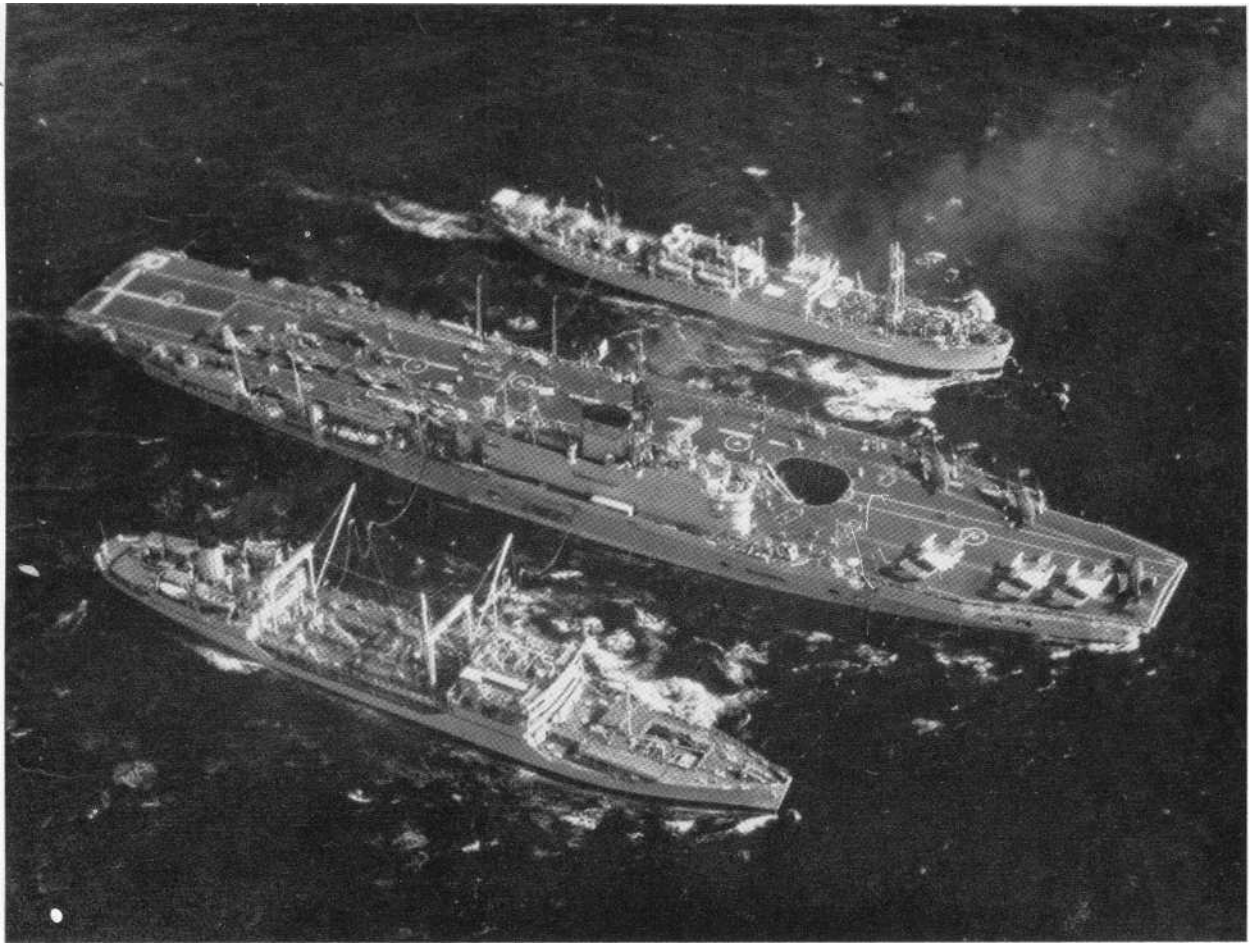
Neatly stowed in Tidespring



Inadvertently inflated



Emergency fuelling party



THREE SHIP R.A.S.

Replenishment At Sea with a warship on each side of the R.F.A. has long been established in the Fleet, but the reverse evolution of one R.F.A. on each side of a Strike Carrier had been only a theoretical study and a rehearsed manoeuvre, without any transfer of stores, until *Ark Royal* finally completed the entire operation on Sunday, 11th July, 1965. As she approached the northern tip of Sumatra she came into company with the R.F.A.'s *Fort Langley*, *Fort Duquesne* and *Wave Sovereign*.

The first move was the transfer of the First Lieutenant and the Deputy Supply Officer to the R.F.A. to discuss the details. When Number One was nicely suspended beneath the helicopter it was discovered that the winch was defective and the unfortunate officer had a somewhat hair-raising journey.

Wave Sovereign came alongside first on the Starboard side and began to pump across the liquid load. It is of interest to note that *Wave Sovereign* had been the very first ship to replenish *Ark Royal*, ten years before, in June 1955. *Fort Duquesne* next came alongside on the Port side and passed across a great quantity of food and stores to the two newly designed stump mast positions. To the dismay of many the light jackstay stump was a little short and three casks of Rum were damaged against the ship's side and spilled their precious contents on the deck. Later, *Fort Langley* connected on the Starboard side in place of *Wave Sovereign* and passed over a large consignment of Beer, while flying an unconventional ensign of a Golden Cockerel emblazoned on a blue ground. It stood for Courage - the ale, not the virtue.

The handling of stores was swift and efficient and a storing task which would have taken days in harbour, with the utmost inconvenience to all, was accomplished in a matter of hours by the hard work and the co-operation of all departments. As a result of this the Three Ship R.A.S. has become an established routine in our lives. The Captain and Bridge staff are relieved of many hours of wearing station-keeping since, in this arrangement, it is the Carrier which is the Guide. The storing rates have been maintained throughout the commission and all the stores are brought inboard and despatched below decks within a few hours.

**HERE
COMES
THE
BEER**

