ON PASSAGE TO GIBRALTAR AND AT GIBRALTAR 20 SEPTEMBER to 2 OCTOBER 1978

As soon as the Royal visit was over 824 were soon back in the HDS role embarking stores, mail and people. Our visitors for the passage to Gibraltar included the Chaplain of the Fleet, the Venerable Basil O'Ferrall, three Members of Parliament, Mr Spencer Le Marchant, Mr Michael Brotherton and Mr John Stanley, plus Mr Alan Bilyard and his recording team from BBC Records.



Recording "The Last Farewell".

The passage from the Moray Firth took us via the north of Scotland, the Islands of the Hebrides, the west coast of Ireland, the Bay of Biscay and on down past the Iberian coast. After RASing fuel from RFA OLMEDA while to the SW of Ireland on Friday 22nd we bade a final farewell to our faithful oilwell as she left us for a refit in Portsmouth.

The highlights of the passage included the Grand Handicraft Exhibition and Competition, a Sods Opera and Flight Deck potted sports. The handicraft competition had been initiated by the Chaplain soon after leaving Norfolk and during the long period at sea many people were busy

preparing their entries. The exhibition and judging took place during the afternoon of Saturday 23rd and over 60 exhibits were shown. They included paintings and sketches, wood, metal, rope and leather work, ceramics, models either from commercial kits or self inspired design, and even a knitted garment. It was obvious that we have a wealth of hidden artistic talent on board and the exhibition gave a lot of pleasure to many.

The highly successful Sods Opera during the evening of the 23rd resulted in the ship's second single record being recorded. After several attempts the BBC men were satisfied with our rendering of "The Last Farewell", as the A side, with "Never Walk Alone" and "Land of Hope and Glory" on the flip side. The acts during the evening were very varied and many had taken a lot of time and effort to perform for our amusement.

Sunday 24th was a pleasant Sunday at Sea with Potted Sports occupying the flight deck during the afternoon. Competitors and spectators were out in force and it was obvious from the start that the PT Staff had thought up many arduous and strenuous events for the occasion. The eventual and worthy winners were the Seaman Department.

Over night we approached Gibraltar and with the Levanter wind persisting at the Rock giving an air of gloom we successfully secured alongside the South Mole during the forenoon of Monday 25th September to start the week's visit. For almost everyone Gibraltar was the first step ashore for over five weeks.

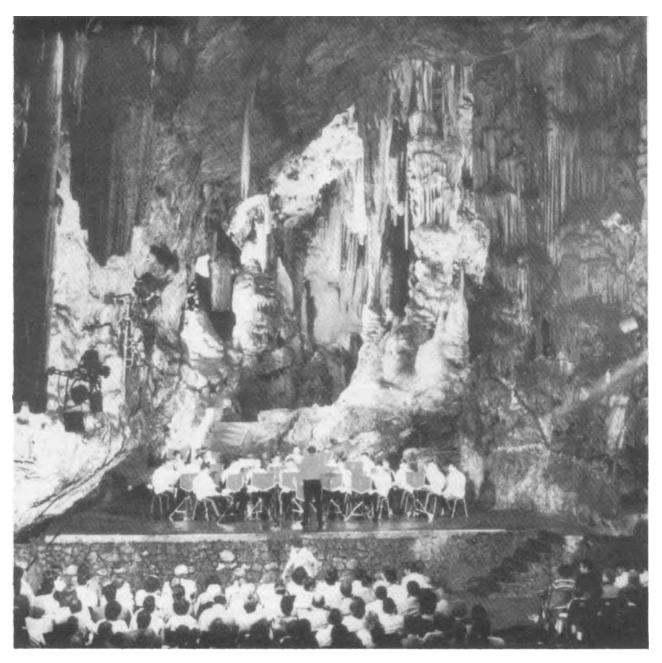
Many departments took the opportunity to carry out maintenance work and also repair any damage that had been sustained in the storm during Northern Wedding. By the end of the week the storm battered scars had disappeared and the ship looked smart with a new coat of grey.

On the rest and recreation side, a number took advantage of a week's leave and spent their time on the tiny peninsula with their families who had flown out from the UK. A very extensive sports programme was held with success and failure fairly evenly distributed. The biggest event of the week was the Top of the Rock race during the forenoon of Saturday 30th September. A gallant 251 completed the uphill course and congratulations to CPO Joe Clare who



The "Top of the Rock Race "start.





The Royal Marine Band in concert.

came in first after a fine run and to 809 Squadron who were the overall team champions.

Gibraltar offered many attractions and despite the fact that the visit was a working one, many found time to see the various sight-seeing points of interest. A goodly number took advantage of the day return tours to the Moroccan town of Tangiers on the north coast of Africa. The Royal Marine Band were once again to the fore with their services in popular demand. The highlight however was a memorable concert given by the band in St Michael's Cave during the evening of 30th September. Their truly professional performance in such a unique and picturesque setting must be one of the memories of the week for those lucky enough to be among the packed audience.

By Monday 2nd October we were ready for sea again and with our 450ft paying off pennant flying we slipped and proceeded from Gibraltar for the last time.



Leaving Gibraltar for the last time.

ON PASSAGE AND EXERCISE DISPLAY DETERMINATION 2-16 OCTOBER 1978

Once the familiar sight of the Rock of Gibraltar was behind us, we headed off towards Sardinia and our part in Exercise Display Determination 1978. This NATO exercise had begun during September and along with forces from the USA, Italy, Portugal, Greece and Turkey we joined the other British warships that were already there. The aims of Display Determination were to exercise various plans for the defence of stratigically important areas of the Mediterranean in a typical scenario of rising tension between the familiar Blue and Orange forces. Besides the ships of the participating countries taking an active role, there was much support from shore based aircraft and a lot of activity on the European land masses bordering the Mediterranean.

When ARK ROYAL joined the exercise on the 4th October to the south west of Sardinia we found ourselves on the Orange side for a change.

Throughout the exercise we moved from one operating area to another spending time off Sardinia, Sicily and Greece, with the aircraft carrying out their usual roles and tasks.

On the 6th we welcomed for the day CINCMARIDI-PART, Admiral Baldini of the Italian Navy plus several NATO VIP's. They came to see how we were faring and were impressed by what they saw.

During the early stages the Buccaneers made strikes against the Blue Convoy and the American carrier, USS FORRESTAL, as they tracked to the north of Corsica and then southwards through the Tyrrehenian Sea and eventually to Taranto in southern Italy. Then at 1600Z on the 8th we changed sides, took on the colour blue, erected darken ship screens for a few days and headed across the



The Xmas Pud. stir.



Admiral Leach at the wheel

Ionian Sea to be off Greece for two days. During this period we were joined by the USS J.F. KENNEDY and our Buccaneers flew sorties to the Aegean Sea to give air support to the amphibious assault landings that were taking place on the Greek coastal area of Strimonikos.

On the 10th, Admiral Sir Henry Leach, GCB, Commander-in-Chief Fleet embarked, and he spent two days seeing and doing as much as he could in the time available and at all hours of the day and night. One of his first tasks was to give a hand to help stir the Christmas Pudding ably assisted by the Captain and the youngest sailor on board at the time, Junior Seaman Neil Jackson of the Side Party. The Admiral toured most departments and managed flights in some of the aircraft. When he left us on the afternoon of the 12th he wished us "good luck on the last lap and beyond it when the team breaks up".

ARK ROYAL's final active role in an exercise took place off the east coast of Sicily and at 1800Z on the 11th October we bowed out of Display Determination. For the following few days we remained in the same area which enabled us to continue with some private flying. During this period the Badgers achieved the 2000th fixed wing launch of this year when Squadron Leader R Joy and Flight Lieutenant P Huett were catapulted off the waist cat in a Buccaneer. By the evening of the 14th all the aircraft were safely on board and we all waited for a Sunday at sea on the 15th October.

This was because we had been promised a scenic route by courtesy of N-tours. The navigator had organised the route to Naples such that it took us through the narrow Straits of Messina which separates Sicily from the toe of Italy and then round the volcanic Aeolin Islands which include Stromboli. Unfortunately on the day the haze prevented us from having clear views of the islands but it made a change

being close to land. For the more energetic, flight deck sports were in full swing until mid afternoon when preparations began to arrange the aircraft for Procedure Alpha.

Our entry into the Bay of Naples in the early forenoon

haze of the 16th was followed by ceremonial gun salutes from the ship and from ashore, and we berthed alongside the Molo Angioino just before 9am to begin our visit to Naples.

NAPLES AND ON PASSAGE 16-27 OCTOBER 1978

The visit to Naples on the 16th October was the first of our four ports of call during our last few weeks of the deployment. Many of us had enjoyed Naples last year and were looking forward to this year's visit. As before, Detours in conjunction with Aloschi Brothers, organised a number of sight seeing tours. Although not as popular as last year the tours to Rome, Capri, Pompei and the Amalfi Coast were well supported. A large number arranged their own visits using local forms of transport to get about and besides those places already mentioned ARK ROYALS visited Herculaneum, the Volcano of Solfatara and the many museums and other places of interest in the Naples areas.

During our stay it was quite warm, and although we experienced rain most days the majority of us were not deterred from going ashore. The bars, cafes, shops and narrow back streets were fascinating places and never seemed to lose their appeal, but were you "ripped off"?

The sporting scene was kept to a minimum after the experience gained from the previous visit. Nevertheless a fair number of competitive games were played during the week and the sports afternoon with the WRNS from NAVSOUTH proved very popular with honours fairly evenly distributed.

The official functions were many and varied, and the number of VIP visitors during the week were numerous. The large contingent of British forces personnel in the Naples area ensured that ARK ROYALS had an enjoyable time during their last visit to Naples.

Before sailing on Saturday 21st October we welcomed Admiral of the Fleet Sir Michael Pollock, GCB, MVO, DSC and the Judge Advocate of the Fleet, Mr W M Howard QC, who were to be with us until Athens. As we bade farewell to Naples at 1100A in company with our faithful companions, RFA's LYNESS, OLWEN and RESOURCE, each of us had our own personal memories of the area and by the comments that were made, these were many and varied.

Once clear of the harbour two Sea Kings of 824 Squadron flew to RFA OLWEN for an "acquaint detachment" but they were to return to mother on the 25th. As the group of ships headed southwards towards the toe of Italy a large RAS took place during the afternoon and we all passed through the Straits of Messina during the night of 21/22 October. Our operating area for several days was to the east and southeast of Sicily and during this period the fixed wing flew many sorties enabling the aircrew to keep in practice. The Sea Kings left on board returned to their popular role of HDS ensuring that we received mail on a regular basis.

On Monday 23rd, FOCAS, Rear Admiral Herbert embarked and flew his flag for the last time in HMS ARK ROYAL. During this short period at sea he managed to get airborne in a Phantom and a Buccaneer and along with the other visitors enjoyed his stay.

During the night of the 25th after re-embarking the two Sea Kings from OLWEN the group set off on passage across the Ionian Sea and by the morning of the 26th were off Kalamata in Southwest Greece where we spent the



At Naples.



Admiral of the Fleet Sir Michael Pollock.

remainder of the day. A number of senior officers of the Hellenic Armed Forces arrived on board during the forenoon by courtesy of 824 Squadron, and along with us they witnessed the air display and fire power demonstration given by the Air Group. As usual we watched a first class air show which included aerobatics and the rocketing and

bombing of targets using live ammunition. This performance by the Squadrons was the last time we would see such a memorable display and on completion our visitors must have left ARK ROYAL with the feeling that the Royal Navy was a force to be reckoned with.

ATHENS AND ON PASSAGE 27 OCTOBER to 6 NOVEMBER 1978

Over night we continued our passage to Athens and by mid forenoon of the 27th October we anchored in Phaleron Bay to the east of Piraeus to begin a six day visit to Athens. For the majority this was the first visit to Greece and they were eagerly looking forward to seeing some of the famous historical sights and ruins within the Athens area. Once again we were subjected to a boats routine but this did not deter those wanting to go ashore.

As usual there were quite a number of official functions and the small British Community in Athens helped to make our stay enjoyable. Many invitations were received by the ship for sightseeing tours and evenings at Tavernas, and all this hospitality was gratefully accepted. Detours also arranged worthwhile tours away from Athens and these too were popular. The tour to the ruins at Delphi and the one to the Temple at Sounion passed through the countryside of rural Greece which left a lot of us with the intention of returning to the country in the future. Some preferred a little more sea time and went on a cruise of some of the Greek Islands including visits to Poros, Hydra and Aegina. No matter which tour one did, on completion one knew more about Greek history and mythology than at the start.

Athens itself was a sightseeing paradise with much to see and to do for those interested in ruined and historical buildings, and one of the best ways of seeing them was by foot. The number one on most lists was the Acropolis and few were disappointed with what remains of this well known landmark. The ruined temples, gateways and theatres were a constant reminder of the former greatness of the city. Another popular, but not as old, area was the Monastirahi or Flea Market, where many "rabbits" were purchased after sessions of bartering. The small shops selling various articles from pottery to rugs and from brass wares to antiques were often crowded with ARK ROYALS and there must be few people on board who did not barter for a Greek Urn.

Athens, the home of the first modern Olympic Games in 1896, provided the ship with a fairly busy sports programme. Besides many inter-part games, there was quite a lot of local opposition eager to test their skills against the ship's teams in soccer, hockey, golf, basketball, rugby and sailing. However the highlight was probably the Marathon Race on Wednesday 1st November over part of the 1896 course. Eighteen runners from the ship set off from the Official Olympic starting line in the village of Marathon, ran half way towards Athens, turned round and returned to Marathon again. Nine runners successfully completed the 26 miles 385 yards course and as expected CPO Joe Clare came in first in a time of 2 hr 48 min 55 secs. The eighteen must be commended for their effort and the run raised £885 for various charities. All runners completed at least half the course and six of the finishers were from 4Ro, Chief Petty Officers Mess.

By the time it was ready to depart, our visitors, including



FOCAS, had left and in their place we welcomed six members of the Committee of Lloyds led by their ex-Chairman, Sir Havelock Hudson. Over the years the Committee has presented the ship with many gifts and this was their final farewell to ARK ROYAL with whom they have been associated since the beginning.

During the forenoon of Thursday 2nd November, we weighed anchor and proceeded from Phaleron Bay and headed south with our trio of RFA's. A fast passage found the group in our now familiar stomping grounds to the east

and southeast of Sicily by the following morning. For the next three days the air group flew many sorties expending their weaponry, operating against the USS SARATOGA for half a day, and dropping Lepus Flares for the benefit of a visiting QAAT's team, which monitored the flares' performances as they descended within sight of the ship.

Before leaving Sicily our visitors from Lloyds, who had had a very full and active few days, departed for the UK and we prepared for the ship's next and penultimate port of call in the Mediterranean.



The Marathon runners at Marathon.

MALTA AND ON PASSAGE 6 to 20 NOVEMBER 1978

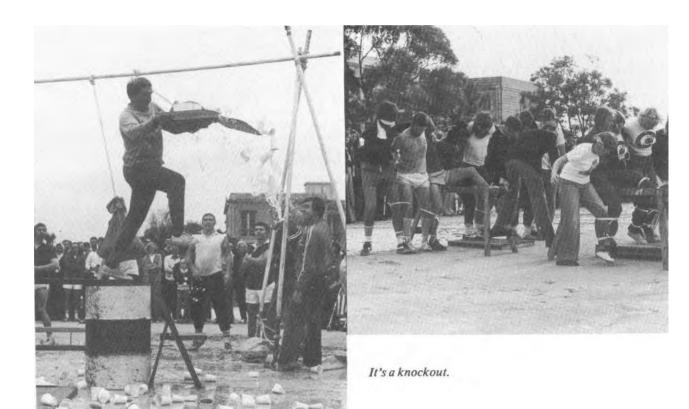
HMS ARK ROYAL's arrival at Malta during the forenoon of Monday 6th November was greatly appreciated by many Maltese who follow the ship's programme with enthusiasm. Once more the ship was ceremoniously backed into Kalkara Creek and secured between two buoys, indicating that a boats routine would be the order of the day for going ashore.

Although the ship's side was painted during the ten day period, and many departments continued with maintenance and repair work, the general atmosphere was quiet and relaxed for the visit. Many took leave and over 300 families joined us for a holiday in the Maltese Islands.

The official receptions and visits by service representatives were greatly outnumbered by the unofficial hospitality offered by the locals and by ourselves. Many Maltese have always had a great respect for the Royal Navy and ARK ROYAL in particular, and they were joined by the large number of British holidaymakers to the Island. Over 4000 people managed to come on board and full marks must go to the duty guides who showed them round with patience and understanding. The extent to which they appreciated



Some of the "Malta Dog Shoot" team.



our effort was illustrated by the many "grippos" that were received and accepted by the ship and by individuals.

As expected, sport played a large part in the ship's programme and a wide variety of events took place either inter-part or against local service and civilian opposition. These included soccer, cricket, hockey, rugby, volleyball, squash, basketball, golf, tennis, shooting and an attempt on St Angelo's Ramp Race. Eight teams took part in "It's a Knockout" against a Combined British Forces team at RAF LUQA and this year the trophy returned to the home team.

The longest running spoof came to an end on Tuesday 7th when the "Malta Dog Shoot" did not take place!!! The planning and arrangements had begun while the ship was at Athens and about 20 members of ARK ROYAL had managed to come through a vigorous and searching selection routine in order to participate in this special event.

For their last involvement as the ship's travel agent, Detours organised several shopping and sight seeing tours. The former included the Marsovin Winery, Farsons Brewery, a sheepskin factory and the Ta'Quati Crafts Village, while the tours of Malta and Gozo ensured that some managed to see the historical buildings, ruins and other tourist sights. The cheap local buses were used by many and there were few places on the islands that were not visited by ARK ROYALS.

Towards the end of the visit, the ship's next group of visitors arrived on board. They included television crews from the BBC and ITN who were to film as much as they could during the next phase at sea. They were joined by Mr David Shepherd, the well known wild life artist, conservationist and steam engine enthusiast. He came to photograph, sketch and to get the feel of ARK ROYAL as he is to paint the Ark for the Fleet Air Arm Museum.

Sadly, on Thursday 16th November, an era came to an end as Britain's last conventional aircraft carrier slipped and proceeded from Kalkara Creek. The warm welcome which we had received and experienced during our visit was confirmed when over 10,000 Maltese and British people lined the various vantage points to say farewell to HMS

ARK ROYAL as we sailed with the paying off pennant streaming behind in the breeze.

Soon after leaving the safety of Grand Harbour, the First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Terence Lewin, GCB, MVO, DSC embarked for a short visit. As the ship and her escorts, RFA's LYNESS, OLWEN and RESOURCE headed towards Sardinia, the last full scale four ship RAS of the deployment took place.

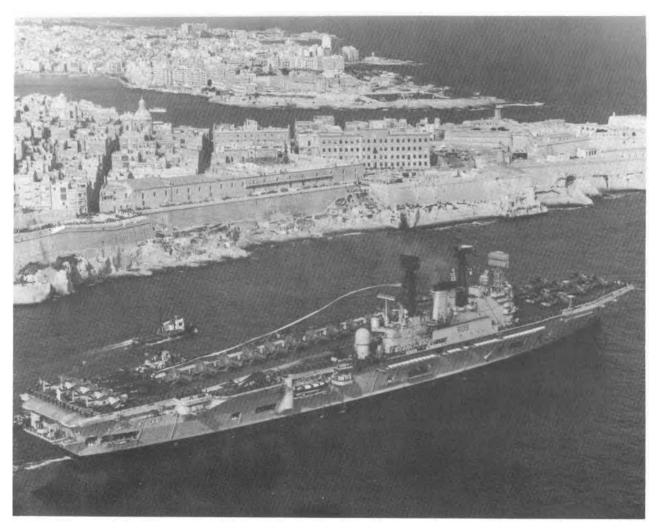
By the morning of Friday 17th, we were in our new operating area to the south of Sardinia where we remained for two days. During the forenoon Admiral Lewin left after a full and comprehensive twenty hours on board, and no doubt he felt some of the nostalgia associated with the ship. The following message was received from the First Sea Lord on his return to the UK:-

"I thank you for an uplifting 24 hours. I have never seen the Ark looking smarter and for everything from Flying Operations through to the Evaps to be at such a high pitch at this stage is a tribute to you all. Good luck to each one of you for the next few weeks and for the future, whatever it may hold."

During the afternoon there was a sad farewell, when the faithful Wardroom Piano was ceremoniously launched from the bow catapult and buried at sea. Many gathered on the flight deck and island to mourn the passing of this friend and the Captain commended it to the waters of the Mediterranean as he lowered the FDO's green flag.

Throughout this two day period, the Air Group were quite active flying final sorties or assisting in a Saturday War with HMS GALATEA. Two Buccaneers and two Phantoms launched during the forenoon of the 18th, never to recover on board again as they flew off to St Athan near Cardiff. However some of the aircrew rejoined us in Palma to help fly off the remaining aircraft.

During the day our visitors departed. The television crews had filmed launches, recoveries and many other events throughout the ship. David Shepherd gave three presentations whilst on board and is probably the most interesting civilian visitor we have had. The film about



Leaving Malta for the last time.

himself "The Man Who Loves Giants", and the informal chat show were extremely entertaining and many were impressed by his sincerity in his beliefs. Saturday 18th was the last operational day as far as the air group were concerned and in the late afternoon, the last ever fixed wing recoveries on board Ark took place. The type of aircraft to have the honour of being the last to recover was, as usual, the Gannet, and on this occasion it was 044 piloted by Lt Slade with Lt Cdr Rotherham and Lt Cass in the rear. So ended an era of naval aviation at sea.

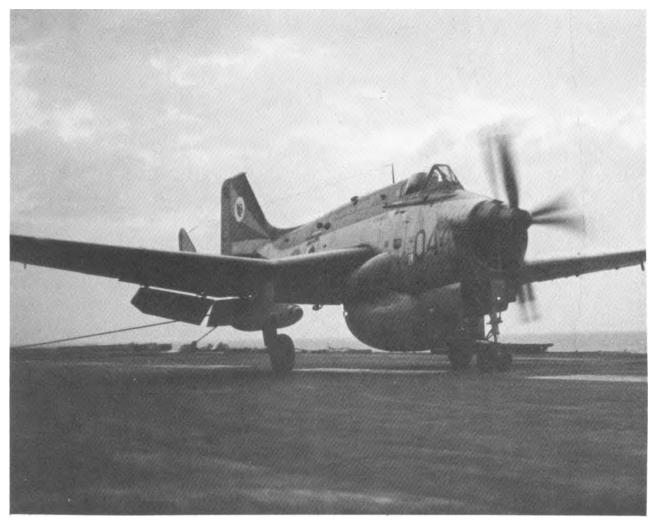


First Sea Lord relaxing.



David Shepherd at work.





The last fixed wing recovery.

Overnight and on Sunday the 19th we were on passage towards the Balearic Islands and to Mallorca in particular. The high light of the Sunday at Sea was the Car Raffle Draw in the evening. Most of us either watched ARK TV or listened to Radio 433 to see if we had won any of the prizes. The Captain drew the first three prizes and the winner was PO Caterer I Ritchie who decided to take the money

instead of the car, whilst the smaller second car was won by LMEM Barnes. Despite many unhappy faces at not winning a prize the Raffle had been quite successful.

As the ship's company settled down for the night, thoughts were probably on what lay ahead at our final port of call in the Mediterranean.

MALLORCA AND CAG DISEMBARKATION 20 - 27 NOVEMBER 1978

As HMS ARK ROYAL approached Palma, in the holiday island of Mallorca, on the 20th November, our 21 Gun National Salute was followed by the reply ashore, and by mid forenoon we were secured alongside the Dique Del Oeste to begin our final visit of the deployment. During the ship's stay in Palma, make and mend routine was worked giving everyone ample opportunity of going ashore and of taking advantage of the warm and sunny weather.

For those who liked organised tours, our new travel agents Revtours, with their motto of "It's quicker by Vicar", provided a selection of day tours round the island. However by far the most popular and most successful were the splendid evenings at a Medieval Banquet or a Spanish Fiesta Barbecue.

Although junior ratings were required to wear uniform ashore, they found it a suitable "grippo catching" rig, and it was this that led many to say that Palma was the "best run" since America. In fact the attitude of the British locals and holiday makers seemed to be "get an Ark Royal sailor", and consequently the shops, beaches, cafes, night clubs and hotels were popular places with ARK ROYALS. While most of us were ashore there were many people waiting to visit Ark, and several thousands toured the ship either in organised parties or as guests of the ship's company.

Sports was kept to a relatively low key with golf, soccer and sailing being the main representative sports during the visit. The highlight was the Ark Royal v Combined



Looking for rabbits.

Squadrons football match which was thinly disguised as a General Service v Fleet Air Arm match, and honours were evenly shared at 2 goals each.

As the last "rabbits" were purchased and the "ickies" ran out, we were joined by yet another BBC TV team before sailing. Unfortunately our departure at 1000 on Saturday 25th November was marred by a shower and so few of us actually witnessed our Last Farewell to a foreign port of call.

The main thoughts once we were at sea was the disembarkation of the fixed wing aircraft, and RFA OLWEN with two Sea Kings of 824 Squadron departed for Gibraltar to collect HM Customs Officials. Once more the weather was to play an important part in our lives as the MISTRAL wind established itself over our proposed disembarkation area giving high seas and gale force winds. Consequently on Sunday, 26th November we remained close to the Spanish coast. During the evening, on a cold and windy Quarter

Deck, many assembled for a mini Band Concert, the real purpose of which was for the TV team to film us singing "The Last Farewell" for use on Top of the Pops whenever our record is played.

At last, Monday 27th, Disembarkation Day arrived and despite the MISTRAL with its very rough seas and winds in excess of 40 knots, and a number of aircraft faults, two Sea Kings and the remainder of the fixed wing group, (four Gannets, twelve Buccaneers and ten Phantoms) all managed to disembark throughout the day and head for home. All eventually reached the safety of the UK. The final fixed wing launch took place at 1511 when Phantom 012 crewed by Flt Lt M Macleod and Lt D McCallum was sent down the waist catapult and that was it. For the very last time we were without our fixed wing aircraft, but all the final launches had been recorded for posterity by the TV cameras.



Leaving Palma in the rain.



The missing Thimble!!



Top of the Pops, here we come.



The final fixed wing launch.

THE HOMEWARD LEG 28 NOVEMBER to 4 DECEMBER 1978



The back RAS of ammunition.

Although all the fixed wing aircraft had left, there was one final evolution to be completed before we too could head for home. This was the back RAS of ammunition to RFA REGENT and, no sooner had the aircraft gone, than ammunition began to appear on the flight deck in readiness for the RAS. This took place on the 28th and 29th in cold and windy conditions and full marks must go to everyone who took part in ensuring that the whole operation was successfully completed on time.

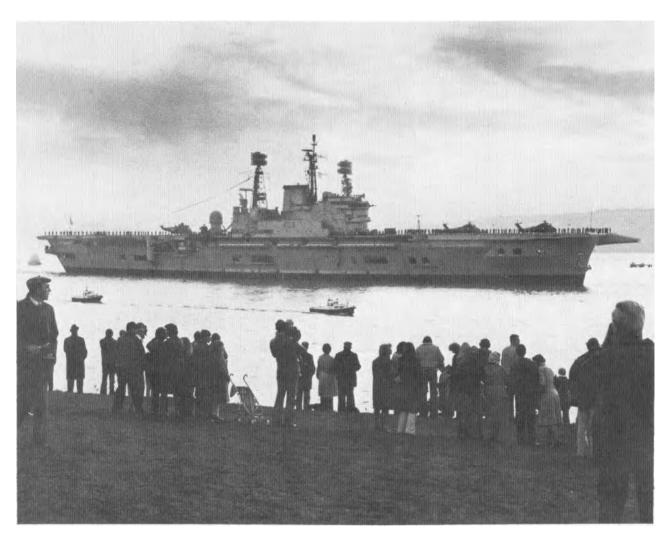
RFA OLWEN rejoined us on the 29th and when the Sea Kings of 824 Squadron re-embarked they brought the Customs Officials with them, who began their long and searching task immediately, and finally finished clearing us all while we were off the coast of Cornwall.

As ARK ROYAL approached Gibraltar on the 30th November, the BBC TV team disembarked with their films of various events which will be used by different TV programmes, and by the afternoon we had passed through the Straits and once more were in the Atlantic Ocean. The swell dominated route home had its high lights with the final MAXI Band Concert in the Upper Hangar starting the ball rolling!! This concert was probably one of the best ever and the Royal Marine Band deserved all the praise and appreciation they received. The Band under Warrant

Officer A K Whittall had certainly "done us proud" during the last eight months.

Earlier in the day it was learnt that the ship's name would live on, when it was announced that the third CAH, Through Deck Cruiser (an aircraft carrier by any other name smells just as sweet!) would take the name ARK ROYAL. Although our ARK ROYAL sees the end of an era, the new ARK ROYAL will play an important role in the next era of naval aviation, as stated by the Admiralty Board:

"The return to rest of another Great and Royal Ark marks the end of a glorious period in our naval history, during which we have led the world in naval aviation techniques and efficiency. It also marks the beginning of a new and exciting epoch in which we can continue to demonstrate our determination and ability to remain in the forefront in maritime aviation matters. The Admiralty Board stand dedicated to the provision of organic air power at sea, in our ASW carriers and cruisers and in our destroyers and frigates. The aircraft in the Fleet in the future, fixed and rotary wing, will play a vital part in our National and Alliance capability. It is particularly important therefore that the traditions, professionalism



Familiar ground again - nearly home.



Home at last...



... to our waiting families.