

**H.M.S.  
ARK ROYAL**



**THIRD COMMISSION  
DECEMBER 1959 - MARCH 1961**

# THE FOURTH ARK ROYAL

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LAUNCHING SCIMITARS - MEDITERRANEAN, NOVEMBER 1960

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|------------------|------|---------------------------|
| First Ark Royal  | 1586 | Armada                    |
| Second Ark Royal | 1914 | Dardanelles               |
| Third Ark Royal  | 1938 | 'Bismarck', Malta Convoys |



CAPTAIN P. J. HILL-NORTON  
ROYAL NAVY

This memento of the third commission of H.M.S. *Ark Royal* will help to remind me and, I hope and believe, all of us, of a happy ship and a rewarding and stimulating commission. Our standards have always been set very high and we have been asked from the very start to pull out all we've got – and sometimes what we thought was a little more. But we have come through with distinction and, as I asked you when we commissioned, can now truthfully say that we have not only upheld the very high reputation of the first two commissions but even enhanced it.

I believe that we have done this, and that it could only have been done, by team-work. It is the biggest single team in the Navy – but, even so, we all know now that there is no room in it for passengers. I am very conscious of the honour it has been to be Captain of it.

Let us remember all we have learned, use our experience, and pass it on. Let us look back on the time we have been shipmates with pride; let us – in the words of our last concert party – 'Look Back in Pleasure' on the *Ark*.

Good luck to you all.

P. J. HILL-NORTON  
Captain, Royal Navy

# THE THIRD COMMISSION OF THE FOURTH ARK ROYAL

by THE COMMANDER



THE COMMISSIONING CEREMONY

When the last commission paid off into refit in the summer of 1958, they said good-bye to an Ark which had maintained a very high standard – much higher than Eagle's they liked to think – against some pretty fierce odds. It had proved impossible to maintain her machinery properly, her accommodation was shockingly overcrowded and uncomfortable, her bathrooms were always flooded, and in many other ways she was terribly old-fashioned and difficult to run. The Admiralty had decided in the autumn

before that, whatever the price, the Ark must have a 'Special Refit' of sixteen months' duration to make her fit to operate the modern generation of naval aircraft and fit for her ship's company to live in, and that this refit should take precedence over Eagle's modernisation. The large jobs that were done were:

- (a) A completely new steam service line, enabling auxiliary machinery to be run on another unit. This has helped maintenance enormously.
- (b) Total volume of accommodation was increased by 18 per cent but the number of men on board was reduced, thus giving everyone more room.



THE CAPTAIN, FLAG OFFICER AIRCRAFT CARRIERS,  
ADMIRAL SUPERINTENDENT AND  
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF, PLYMOUTH

- (c) All senior rates' messdecks were modernised and some junior rates' messes were much improved.
- (d) The side lift and the starboard forward 4.5 battery were removed.
- (e) Many new test-shops and work-shops were fitted for more sophisticated weapon systems.
- (f) Electrical generating power was increased by fitting two large gas-turbine generators.
- (g) A stronger after-lift was built in place of the old one to withstand the landing blow of heavier aircraft.
- (h) Both catapults were fitted for using wet steam, and the port one was given an improved valve, which enables heavier aircraft to be launched than by any other British carrier.
- (i) Many thousands of other alterations and defects were made good.

All this work, which would normally have taken well over two years, was done in sixteen months, under severe pressure from the Admiralty. At the same time the small retard

party of a few hundred men made good many more thousands of defects, and an average of forty-five men a day were employed solely as fire sentries. Even so, a serious fire damaged part of the ship, entailing much rewiring and other extra work.

As we all know, the job was done by Christmas 1959, and we were able to commission and go to sea for trials on the planned date; but the price we had to pay was that we received an uncomfortable and dirty ship, still stuffed with the refuse and trash of a hurried semi-modernisation.

Fortunately, the spirit and determination of earlier *Ark Royals*, with seventy-five officers and men of the previous commission, were still with us, and in five weeks of non-stop sea trials we cleaned the ship up and began to make her tick.

In the meantime, our squadrons were forming and working up ashore. All were bedevilled by serious difficulties, of which not the least was late and 'un-modded' supply of new aircraft. 807 had been formed longest, and had put on a splendid show at Farnborough the previous autumn. 892 were having difficulty with their weapons system, which eventually resulted in their having to leave 'B' Flight behind for four months. 824 and 820 only just got their choppers cleared for flying over water in time to do a high-powered work-up at Portland over Christmas and the New Year. 849 'A' Flight, having done the intensive flying in their Gannets most successfully as 700G Squadron, then became an operational flight, but with two less aircraft than originally planned. 800, the last fixed-wing team to get together, made it in spite of severe shortage of aircraft at Lossie.

So when March 3rd came, and we sailed from Devonport flying Rear-Admiral R. M. Smeeton's flag as Flag Officer Aircraft Carriers, to embark our squadrons, we had some right to be a little smug. For, for a year and a half, Jimmy-know-alls, senior officers, wise birds in the Admiralty, and every single man in Devonport Dockyard had sworn, advised and bet that we wouldn't make it, particularly after the fire.

The weather was fine, everyone who could have come with us did (except for two deserters, who were immediately hustled out of the Navy), and we set off for warmer climes, no cigarette ration, and a strenuous work-up.



HEADS OF DEPARTMENTS AND SENIOR SPECIALIST OFFICERS

And here I must dip back into the past again, for there is another aspect of this commission which is unusual and needs explanation. By August 1958 all the different naval specialisations had made their bids for the number of officers and men they thought the *Ark Royal* would need this time. That was fine but, unfortunately, when all the bids were added together (and they had been heavily pruned already) the total was still 10 officers, 50 senior rates, and 200 junior rates more than there was room for on board. Two work study teams had been active on board for a year, trying to help thrash out this little conundrum. However, by November little progress had been made in the Admiralty, so it was decided that every department in the ship and squadrons should be reduced by five per cent, and that there would be no allowance for communal duties whatever. That solved the problem nicely outside the ship and left us to find out how to solve it inside. To a very large extent we have solved it by using some very simple old-fashioned naval principles, principles which are often forgotten today.

The first was that we made Divisions much smaller than usual, so that there was more chance of more officers getting to know the men who worked for them, and vice versa. Thus, amongst other advantages this has, suggestions from men on the job for cutting out unnecessary and time-wasting work would have a better chance of getting to the officer who could do something about it.

The second thing we did, and this is most difficult and is still not fully achieved, was to try very hard to produce an organisation and a combination of routines which permit an officer or rating to get on with his job without continually being fallen-in or mustered or taken away for some other unexpected job. Essentially this meant that work had to be preplanned much more than it normally is in a warship and that officers and senior rates couldn't just be told 'carry on'. Planned maintenance, job cards, complicated departmental and sub-departmental orders, masses of ARTEMs about everything under the sun, daily orders of all different sorts, the minimum of piping, doing all replenishments at sea, insistence on having regular periods for self-maintenance (and this includes maintaining oneself) in harbour, payment while going in to dinner, and so on, are all part of the plan – the plan which has enabled us to run this ship and her aircraft far better, and with far less men, and in spite of a terrible start, than anyone expected. As Commander Air says, 'Aeroplanes are just aeroplanes, and they fly if you try'.



COMMUNAL 'A' AND 'B' DIVISIONS ('TWEENDECKS PARTY')



HIS EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR OF MALTA  
SPENDS A DAY AT SEA

And so – back to our work-up. This had been planned before Christmas, so that as soon as we left Gibraltar, after our first blow through, we were able to get straight on with serious flying, A/S, and ship drills. The weather went calm for good, which was pleasant, but no wind meant much high speed, and this was soon to have a repercussion. The intensive flying programmes associated with working-up quickly showed up the weak points in our organisation, and ABCD, Gunnery, and other exercises all helped to teach us how much there was to learn about our jobs on board. Two days at Palermo gave us a slight breather after the first work-up period, and ten days' self-maintenance in Grand Harbour after the second came as a wonderful change.

Spring had broken out over Malta, and in the *Ark* and everyone was more than ready for the several days of rest which Easter fortunately forced us to take. Swimming, sailing, Marsovin sampling and banyans all went on apace, while final plans were made for the third and last work-up period and our Operational Readiness inspection, which was to be combined with an Army support exercise off Cyprus. We were due to make a four-day visit to Naples thereafter, so children's party

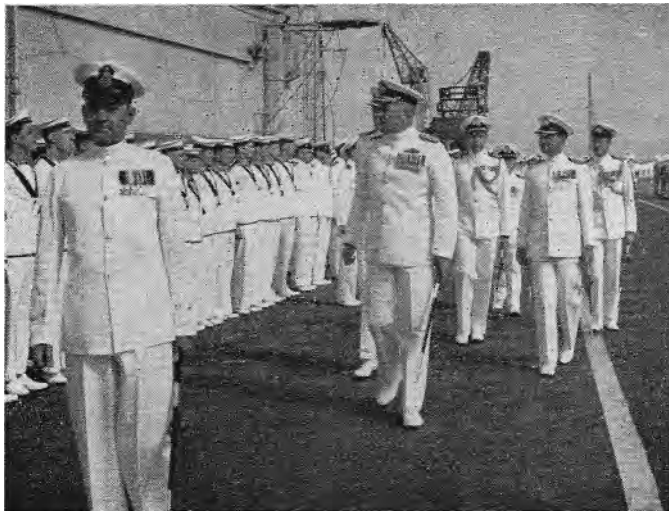
gear, trips to Rome, and all the normal arrangements, had been made for an important visit. Then, half-way through the self-maintenance period troubles began to hit us and they went on hitting us until the middle of the next month. A routine inspection by our divers revealed a cracked propeller-blade and erosion on a rudder, to start with. Then, when we got out, we had our first barrier incident, a Scimitar with a No. 1 hydraulic failure. Feed-water problems followed, resulting in two days on two shafts only. Then a second chopper ditched in the sea for no accountable reason and, to end it, a change of plan, no visit to Naples and docking at Gibraltar instead. And all the while we were finishing off our work-up, doing whole days of complex ABCD exercises and, in fact, kicking ourselves finally into shape. The Admiral declared himself satisfied at the end of April, and off we went to dock at Gibraltar, leaving half our aircraft at Malta on the way.

We were in dock for a fortnight. During this time the weather was perfect and not as unbearably hot on board as we had expected. Two propellers were changed, both rudders mended, the ship was painted externally, and a great deal of maintenance was done, to ourselves and the ship. The border had been opened just before we arrived, which caused a big rush for passports, and the Padre, Commander (E) and I went over to Tangier one memorable Sunday with four hundred of the ship's company. All in all, we decided that Gib was for us, and we were very sad to leave.

There followed normal flying exercises, a rehearsal of Barcelona Shopwindow, an Air Defence exercise with the U.S. 6th Fleet, and a four-day visit to Toulon. Being alongside



C.-IN-C. HOME FLEET CONFERS  
ON THE BRIDGE



REAR-ADMIRAL R. M. SMEETON, FLAG OFFICER  
AIRCRAFT CARRIERS, INSPECTS DIVISIONS

and secured firmly to French soil is a good start to four days' holiday, and when we left we decided Toulon was for us too. While there we had finalised arrangements to embark a squadron of French naval Venoms for a few days' embarked training later on, in exchange for a few days' A/S practice for our helicopters with the French Navy. As President De Gaulle has withdrawn his naval forces from NATO in the Mediterranean, this was well worth while, as opportunities to work with the French are fleeting.

From Toulon we joined up with F.O.F. Med, Tiger and half the Mediterranean Fleet destroyers and frigates, for a pair of air defence exercises, one with the French at Bizerta, and another with U.S.S. Saratoga. Both were useful and successful exercises, showing that NATO Naval Forces really can work together whenever the need arises. Then on Friday, June 3rd, we arrived off Barcelona, and gave an outstanding Shopwindow to a hundred and thirty Spanish Service VIPs. I know it was outstanding because a friend of mine has just

been in Barcelona, and they are still talking about it. The piece de resistance, without a doubt, was the rocketing and straffing by the Scimitars.

We were at Barcelona for five days, and while everyone else was secured alongside in the harbour we remained at anchor outside, and as the weather was not too good, boatwork took some of the gilt off a run ashore. Nevertheless, for a short visit it was good value, and the Spaniards are much greater friends of ours as a result. They see very little of us and a great deal of the U.S. Navy, and commented continually on the difference, to our credit.

Thence back to Hyeres, close to Toulon, where we disembarked our helicopters and embarked eight Aquilons, with spares and maintenance crews. Within three days we deck-qualified them all, and they all took part in intercept exercises with our own aircraft: they were clearly an efficient and determined squadron, and impressed us all on board. It was therefore particularly sad that one of them crashed into the sea, killing the pilot upon disembarkation. You'll remember how that night an appeal on the TV for the pilot's wife (he was a CPO) produced £376, for which she and the French Navy were extremely grateful. This is the sort of thing which people who go to sea and live at sea always do for each other, and transcends political and international boundaries.

After we had re-embarked 824 and 820 from Hyeres, we spent a day 'banyanning' in the Bay while the formal enquiry into the crash was held, and then set off for yet another air defence exercise with the U.S. 6th Fleet. On Monday, June 20th, at 1430, we once more steamed into harbour at Gibraltar, most of us licking our lips for one reason or another. For the first of our Passion Planes was due in the next day bringing seventy wives, and due to take home a plane-load of our own officers and men, either to get married or for compassionate leave. And many more of us were just looking forward to simpler things like swimming, meeting friends again, a sing-song in Main Street, or even a little adventure in La Linea or deeper into Spain. Fourteen days later it all came to an end, the Passion Plane did its return journeys, and we set off for what turned out to be a very hot month of intensive flying in the Eastern Mediterranean.

FIRING A SALUTE ▶  
AT TOULON





In the ten days after leaving Gibraltar we really showed how today's new aircraft could and should be operated, flying over six hundred day and seventy-odd night sorties. Another exercise with the Army in Cyprus hammered home the same air support lessons as before, but this time we were able to land our Royal Marines by helicopter to take part as well.

For the first time our AEW Gannets ran into trouble, and two, one of them by night, ended up in the nylon barrier very sorry for themselves but equally glad to be safely back with us. Their nose-wheel problem was not solved quickly, and so for a while they stopped flying; the two broken ones were later joined by one of Hermes' which had the same embarrassing Cinderella experience.

Two days at Limassol were dull for most people, but not for me, as I discovered a cousin there whom I only vaguely knew about who turned out to be unquestionably the most beautiful girl in Cyprus. She turned up—to my surprise and one or two younger officers' delight — at Palma, and still owes me five pounds for her hotel bill!

Athens, after some independent flying, was really too hot and too expensive to enjoy, but, even so, large numbers toiled their way round the Parthenon and some of the other beautiful and impressive remains of Greek power. On the whole, Athens was not for us.

And so back to Malta at the end of July, stopping to swim and sunbathe whenever flying exercises permitted. Although it was midsummer in the Mediterranean, our thoughts were by now turning more strongly towards one pleasant and two rather daunting events in the future. Leave at Home in October was the one, Exercise 'Swordthrust' and an Arctic trial after Christmas were the others. We were well worked up by August; we had more or less undone the havoc wrought by the Dockyard, and we were getting towards feeling that

maybe we could sit back a little and pat ourselves on the back. But 'Swordthrust' put a firm stop to all that, and for ever people were saying to each other, 'It won't be like this in —' or 'You wait until — "Swordthrust" '.

It was a surprise, too, to find that there was another carrier, albeit a small one, around. For Hermes had at last been able to embark her squadrons

SPANISH  
DANCING  
ON BOARD  
AT GIBRALTAR ▶



◀ CHILDREN'S  
PARTY —  
ATHENS



JUNIORS' 'A' AND 'B' DIVISIONS TAKEN, 15th JANUARY, 1961

throw the Contractors away, and had arrived to work-up and join us for 'Swordthrust'! She came into Grand Harbour the day after us for self-maintenance and immediately we became embroiled in challenges for Carrier Squadron Trophies. All good clean fun, except that we had all the advantages and therefore won nearly all the cups. As a matter of fact, they seemed an excellent ship, and the more we saw of them the more we liked them. On August 9th we set off again for a week of private flying while *Hermes* finished her work-up. Then together we had another combined exercise with the U.S. 6th Fleet, where *Hermes'* modern air defence and control equipment enabled us both to achieve intercepts at three times the rate of the Americans. All very satisfying and encouraging with 'Swordthrust' in the offing.

After a final fling ashore at Palma, Majorca, we met up with *Hermes*, who had been to Algiers, and went off together at high speed for home. In the Channel we disembarked 824 so that they could have some leave before taking part in a large A/S exercise, embarked four Scimitars of 803 Squadron, and did a really miserable solids replenishment with the Navy's latest and best, but very unworked-up RFA, *Resurgent*. It was trying to have to go past Devonport twice in one day, but at least we were in home waters and soon enough we would be at home. In the meanwhile, round to Lossie so that 803 could be deck-qualified, and then on the 5th September into Rosyth for ten days' self-maintenance. Quite a few Home Fleet ships were there preparing for 'Swordthrust', so although we had to stay below the Bridge (as we can't get under it), and they were all alongside, we met many friends. 260 were lucky and went home on long leave – they were to form the retard party for the main leave in October. For the first time we were able to play quite a lot of interpart and inter-ship sport. A cricket team went

down to Pompey to take the Carrier Cricket Trophy off *Victorious* – we won by one run. We took away the following Home Fleet trophies, although we had concentrated more on competitions with *Hermes* and inter-part games:

- Curzon-Howe Trophy – Water-Polo
- Britannic Cup Golf Singles
- Golf Cup – Golf Foursomes
- Individual Golf – Lt.-Cdr. Nightingale
- Rawson Bowl – Ratings' Dinghies
- Strathcona Cup – Team Sailing, Whalers and Dinghies.



AIRCRAFT READY TO FLY OFF AFTER EXERCISE 'SWORDTHRUST'

The final preparations for the major NATO autumn exercise were being made all over Europe. At the same time politicians and statesmen were gathering at UNO, and at one moment it seemed as if our side might get cold feet and call the exercise off. For essentially it was an exercise which assumed