

H.M.S. ARK ROYAL



1970—1973

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FOREWARD

by

Captain A. D. CASSIDI, A.D.C., Royal Navy

The story of these three years in the life of H.M.S. *Ark Royal* must be seen against a changing background of political and Service "happenings". The period started as the sixth commission, which soon became "forever" as trickle drafting and the continuous commission were instituted. In a ship of the size of *Ark Royal* this has brought many problems. not the least of which is the additional training load which has fallen in great measure on our Senior Rates. The long refit and modernisation were undertaken in the knowledge of an approved life of the ship until 1972. Now we are going strong until 1978, or is it longer? This has brought its strains and tribulations, but we manage to overcome our many mechanical problems thanks to the hard work on the part of our technical departments and the support of the dock yard.

There have been many peaks over the span of three Captains. four Mediterranean deployments, three trips to the West Indies, and three periods in the Norwegian Sea. The *Kotlin* incident deserves special mention, as does Belize - both entailed the projection of power in somewhat different forms. The visits to Florida will always be high in everyone's esteem, and even New York was survived. Exercises are always with us; perhaps "Strong Express" epitomises N.A.T.O.. whilst "Ruler" was at least unique.

I will not attempt any summary of this time. Our duties have been laid at N.A.T.O.'s door, but some things have. I am sure. been consistent throughout. Firstly. the hard work put in by all on board which is an essential ingredient. Secondly. having good integration in all aspects of the ship's work, which leads. thirdly, to efficient operation. Finally. we have a high reputation for good behaviour which is recognised and has been praised by many in the places we have visited and of which we have good reason to be proud. All this adds up to the spirit of *Ark Royal* - and that spirit is as strong as ever.

H.M.S. ARK ROYAL

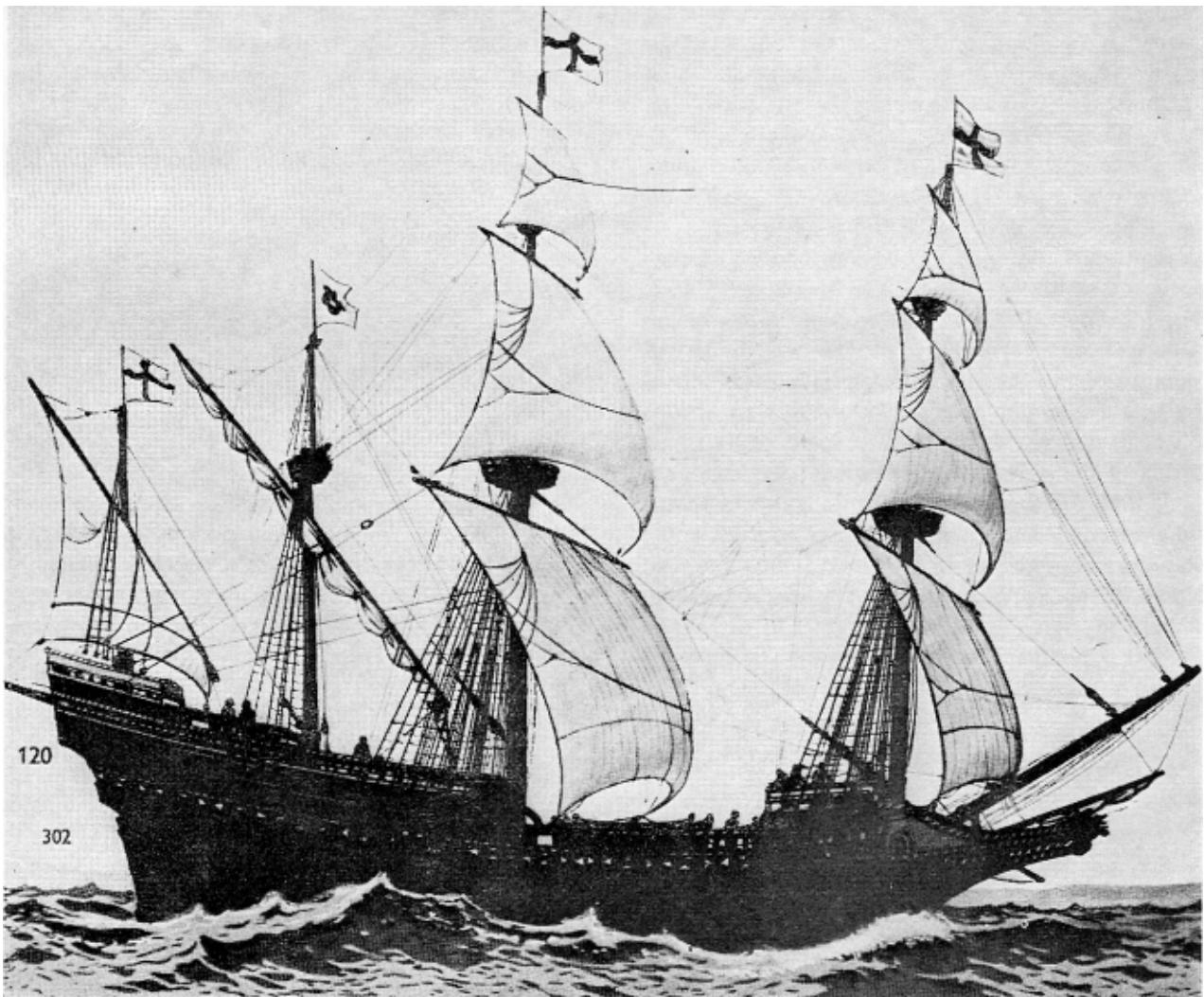
The name *Ark Royal* was first used in 1587 when a capital ship of 38 guns was bought by the crown from Sir Walter Raleigh. She had been ordered by Raleigh in the previous year and, as it was customary to include the owners name in the ship name, was launched as *Ark Raleigh*, the name being changed on purchase by the Queen.

In 1588, as the Armada approached England, Lord Howard of Effingham, the Lord High Admiral of England, hoisted his flag in *Ark Royal* and she was

engaged in the first encounter with the Spanish off Plymouth and continued battle until the decisive action at Gravelines.

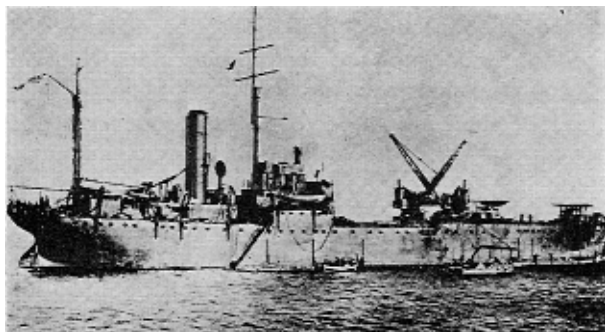
In 1596 she took part in the Army and Navy expedition to Cadiz, a most ill-planned and unsuccessful one.

The second use of the name was made in 1914 when a merchantman under construction was altered to a sea-plane carrier for the Royal Navy. She served at the Dardanelles campaign and the Gallipoli



HISTORY OF "ARK ROYAL"

landings and later helped with the evacuation of refugees from the Russian Revolution. In 1935 she was renamed *Pegasus* and served during the Second World War in experimental aircraft work.



On 13th April 1937, the third *Ark Royal* was launched at Birkenhead. After H.M.S. *Hermes*, completed ten years before, she was the first ship to be designed and built as an aircraft carrier. She was then the longest ship ever to be built on Merseyside with a flight deck 800 feet long. Her career during the Second World War was legendary. At the end of the first month of the war, one of her aircraft shot down the first enemy aircraft to be destroyed by any service. The same day the ship was attacked by a Heinkel which dropped a 2,000 lb. bomb and narrowly missed hitting the ship. On his return to base, the pilot reported that he had scored a direct hit on an aircraft carrier. This led to the German Ministry of Propaganda announcing in the press that *Ark Royal* had been sunk. But not so. The subsequent actions in which she was engaged were some of the most stirring of the war. Between October 1939 and February 1940 together with the battle-cruiser *Renown* and a screen of destroyers, she formed Force K whose function was protection of merchant shipping against raiders in the South Atlantic and whose actions included the search for the *Graf Spee*. In the spring of 1940, after the invasion of Norway, in company

with the carrier *Glorious*, she was engaged in the fierce battle for that country, giving air protection to troops ashore, and convoys at sea, and striking land targets and enemy ships including one heroic attack on the *Scharnhorst* in Trondjem harbour. For most of the remainder of her life, she was part of the famous Force H in the western Mediterranean. One of their notable excursions outside the Mediterranean was the search for, chase, and subsequent crippling and sinking of the battleship *Bismarck*. This took place west of Biscay in appalling weather conditions in May 1941. It was a Swordfish from *Ark Royal* whose torpedo put the enemy's steering gear out of action and slowed him down thus allowing the big guns of our battleships to engage and finally sink him. However, it was convoy protection and land target strike that took up most of the later days of the ship's life. In these roles, she was under repeated attack from the Italian and German land-based aircraft, and from submarines. It was a torpedo from a submarine that finally gave her a death blow on 13th November 1941 within sight of Gibraltar.



The keel of the present *Ark Royal* was laid down in 1943, she was launched in 1950 by Her Majesty the Queen Mother, then Queen, and commissioned in 1955. From then until she started her long refit in 1969, she saw service primarily in the Far East, Mediterranean and North Atlantic.