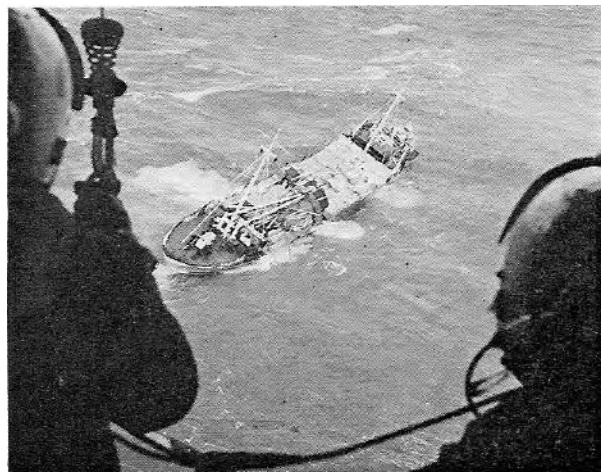


IN THE BEGINNING



Peter Cooke and Dudley Moore performed on 5th May 1970



After sailing on 3rd September and embarking the squadrons, it had been decided to hold a Families' Day, so the ship came back to "C" buoy and on the 5th embarked over 2,000 families and sailed to conduct a full flying programme and armament demonstration before returning to disembark the families in the evening.

Then followed the fourth work-up prior to the N. A.T.O. Striking Fleet exercise "Northern Wedding". The work-up was bedeviled again by bad weather in the Irish Sea and Bristol Channel. On the night of 8th to 9th September we stood by the burning coaster *St. Brenden* until she was towed into Milford Haven by H.M.S. *Cavalier*.



The last tot—August 1970

IN THE BEGINNING

Exercise "Northern Wedding" involved the Strike Fleet transit from the Atlantic, through the Faeroes—Shetland gap to the operating area in the North Sea. It was followed by a N.A.T.O. visit to Oslo for four days from 28th September, primarily for the exercise P.X.D. at Kolsas, the N.A.T.O. H.Q. On return passage through the North Sea on our way to Devonport, we experienced a force nine northeasterly wind which created a lot of problems for a number of small

ships. A distress call was intercepted from the German M.V. *Leda*, and a Sea King of 824 Squadron was despatched to see what assistance could be offered. The helicopter crew succeeded in rescuing the Captain and two crew members under the most hazardous conditions and the squadron got a citation and an award from the German government. On 4th October the ship entered Devonport for urgent defect repairs to the arrestor gear and catapults.

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On 14th June 1970 809 Naval Air Squadron embarked in H.M.S. *Ark Royal*. That flat statement gives little clue to the immense effort on all sides that made it possible. After two years ashore the Squadron of the Phoenix began a new era in a new ship. Before unfolding the saga ahead, let us have a look at the Strike role and 809 in particular.

Strike aircraft provide the fleet with its primary defence against the surface threat and also the ability to conduct offensive or retaliatory operations.

809 Squadron is equipped with Buccaneer S MkII low level strike aircraft. Originally designed to deal with the Russian Sverdlov class cruisers the aircraft, in its Mk II form, was re-equipped with Rolls Royce Spey turbo-fans and has been developed to enable it to deliver several different weapons in various modes of attack. Long range maritime attack strike is the Squadron's prime task. Its secondary roles are photo-reconnaissance, close air support of ground forces, and air to air refuelling. Obviously these roles necessitate a high degree of co-ordination not only between squadron and ship, but also between other squadrons and surface units. To this end regular exercises both large and small are conducted throughout the year.

Returning to 1970 once more, the first contact with *Ark Royal* came in March when two aircraft flew to the ship for wire pulling and launch trials, and a



On the approach for recovery

further four returned in April. Meanwhile at Lossiemouth, 809 prepared for their Operational Readiness Inspection (O.R.I.) due at the end of May. Having achieved a high standard, and after an intense session of M.A.D.D.L.S. (Mirror Assisted Dummy Deck Landings), all was set for embarkation.

Once on board the Squadron settled down quickly to the work-up programme in preparation for the ship's O.R.I. at the end of July. On the appointed day 809 tossed bombs, rocketted, searched for ships and threw lepus flares at night.

Returning from summer leave for the start of the operational flying, the Squadron began their first major exercise, "Northern Wedding", in mid-September. Undertaking numerous long range ship searches the Buccaneers were ready to attack with a vengeance when "war" was finally declared. Eventually having vanquished the surface forces, attacking several ships at least four times, the exercise finished with dummy strikes into Germany, Denmark and Holland.

After a short break *Ark* arrived in the Mediterranean in mid-October. The ten days in Malta were great fun with some of the more daring members of the Squadron managing to frighten even the Maltese drivers.

Next exercise on the agenda was "Lime Jug" a joint R.A.F. /R.N. effort involving us in flying simulated missile profiles against ship targets. The maintainers worked very hard to enable the Squadron to accomplish its heavy task. After the completion of



Launch off the bow catapult

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"Lime Jug" *Ark* returned to Malta for a repeat performance of the last visit.

For a couple of night fliers there were a few anxious moments when the fog rolled in at Linda. Lieutenant Craig diverting to Sicily and found himself cleared to land, but only to discover that the runway was blocked by a back-tracking 707—obviously too much spaghetti in the tower that night!

Leaving Grand Harbour on 26th November *Ark* headed north to Naples, where 809's new Senior Pilot Lieutenant-Commander Walkinshaw joined. On completion of the five day visit the ship returned home via Gibraltar.

Nineteen seventy-one started with a three month period ashore, the first weeks of which were rather cramped with the Squadron sharing the hangar with 800 Squadron. Once 800 had departed everyone began to breathe again. An intensive Bullpup (an air to ground pilot guided missile) programme involved 809 in hammering Gralis Sgeir off North-West Scotland. This and visits to Tain Range and Close Air Support kept us busy until Easter when the Squadron bade farewell to the "Boss", Lieutenant-Commander Mears.

With his relief Lieutenant-Commander C. C. N. Davis now at the helm 809 prepared for embarkation on 19th April. All, that is, except for Sub.-Lt Worsley who had fallen off a Hot Air balloon three days prior to embarkation and joined Dr. Gray's hospital in Elgin instead.

June 2, and *Ark* departed for points west, flying beginning again on passing the Azores. Once in the Puerto Rico area 809 began bombing Fuggy Bowl and Vieques ranges. Exercises "Rimex" and "Opredex" 1971, part of U.S.S. *America's* work-up, gave the Buccaneers the opportunity to mount an eight aircraft strike on Bermuda during which Lieutenant Craig claimed he "sank" a submarine.

The exercise over, *Ark* departed for a week in Fort Lauderdale followed by a visit to Mayport, near Jacksonville, Florida. Meanwhile the Squadron took three aircraft to N.A.S. Cecil Field for continuation flying. For all, this was an outstanding visit. The American hospitality exceeded all expectations and it was our luck to be present for the July 4 celebrations. Full of intentions to return, the ship left Florida for the Puerto Rico areas and a planned heavy bombing session. Unfortunately at this stage serious problems with the Spey engines, particularly in 800 Squadron, placed heavy restrictions on Squadron operations.

Returning to the U.K. *Ark* starred in "Lymelight", a 50 minute live B.B.C. TV programme for which 809 provided five suitably armed aircraft. Lieutenant-Commander Pearce departed at this stage and the new Senior Observer, Lieutenant Park, took his place.

At sea once more in September the Squadron took part in another N.A.T.O. "war", "Royal Knight", carrying out strikes against a mythical enemy on the Norwegian mainland. The "Boss" and Senior Observer managed to spot a submarine which earned them a bottle of champagne from Commander (Air).

A short break ashore in October provided the Buccaneers with some rather unusual companions in the Hangar, in the form of F-104's from Germany's Naval Air Wing 2. The Starfighters were enjoying the Scottish air (and their pilots, the whisky) whilst their own runway was being re-surfaced.

November and *Ark* arrived in the Mediterranean for six weeks giving 809 a chance to bomb Pachino range, Sicily and fly "Navexs" in Italy. Returning via Gibraltar for some quick Christmas shopping the Squadron flew home for leave.

Returning on 2nd January, unseasonably early bearing in mind the normal duration of Hogmanay celebrations. 809 was immediately confronted with an important defect requiring the removal of several undercarriage legs. This and extremely strong winds, curtailed flying but the embarkation on the 19th went as smoothly as ever.

Leaving the freezing North, *Ark Royal* pointed West for Norfolk, Virginia. Something happened en route that made 1972 the year 809 saved the Empire, well almost. A signal arrived on 26th January required *Ark* to head for British Honduras immediately. Neighbouring Guatemala was about to vanquish the British Imperialists, a not irregular threat reserved for occasions when a political red herring is necessary to divert attention from the domestic situation.

Clear sunny and hot, the morning of the 29th was just the day for an adventure. The C.O. and S.O.B. S.. the Senior Pilot and Lieutenant Lucas launched at mid-day to overfly Belize, the capital of British Honduras. Equipped with underwing and bomb-bay tanks our latter day gunboats refuelled in the air from Buccaneer tankers and maintained their southerly track past the Bahamas, Fort Lauderdale and finally Key West. At last the Yucatan peninsula became visible and at 75 miles from Belize International the pair began their descent.

Aldous Huxley once wrote, If the world has ends, Honduras would be one of them. Not quite fair, may-

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be but with time for only two orbits there was little chance to judge. The return was uneventful until just south of Key West when Miami centre requested the flight plan be refiled as they hadn't got the original. Too late, a big roar and two F-106 Interceptors flashed past. Fortunately matters cooled and the flight continued with a successful rendezvous with a further two tankers. A safe land-on ensued some 5 hours 55 minutes from launch and 2,600 miles later. A fine demonstration of Naval Air power that subsequently lead to the award of the Boyd Trophy to the two crews.

M.O.D. cancelled further operations and the ship resumed private flying in the Key West area prior to leaving for New York on 2nd February. After an abortive attempt up river, the ship anchored near the Verrazano Narrows suspension bridge. Bitterly cold



Orbiting Belize, Capital of British Honduras weather plus the 45 minute ferry ride to Manhattan took the edge off the visit, but despite the amazing crime statistics, fewer incidents occurred ashore than in Malta.

After leaving New York the ship sailed south toward Puerto Rico enabling the Squadron to bomb Fungy Bowl before joining "Lantreadex " 2/72. The exercise provided Lieutenant-Commander Davis, "The Boss", and Lieutenant Sharp with an opportunity to cross-operate with the U.S.S. *Franklin D. Roosevelt*. Both aircraft in-flight refuelled from an Intruder tanker before landing on, Lieutenant Sharp remaining onboard overnight. The signal that followed praised both Ship and Air Crews for performing in a highly professional manner and recommended continuation of Buccaneer Cross Deck operations. 809's

big moment in the exercise came on the 25th when 8 aircraft successfully sank the U.S.S. *Conolly*, a patched up hulk towed into the area for all and sundry to "have a go at". Having allowed the British on first the Americans were somewhat upset at the result. Learning fast, the roles were to be reversed at the repeat performance later in 1973 !



Cross operating with U.S.S. F. D. Roosevelt



Cross operating with U.S.S. F. D. Roosevelt

Before returning to the U.K. the new Senior Pilot Lieutenant-Commander E. K. Somerville-Jones arrived. During the months following at Lossiemouth, 809 attacked Fast Patrol Boats off the Norwegian Coast and took part in a reconnaissance exercise whilst detached to Schleswig. Germanv.

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Re-embarking in *Ark* again in June 809 prepared for the Operational Readiness Inspection due in mid-July. At this stage the new Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Commander A. M. D. de Labillière took over. With the inspection complete the Squadron returned for the last time to Lossiemouth for summer leave.

The sad day that we all knew was coming had finally arrived, when on 4th September 809 bade farewell to "Lossie" soon to become R.A.F. Lossiemouth. Mr. Bush also left us and Mr. Martin took his place as Squadron S.M.R.

Back onboard the Squadron worked up for "Strong Express", another exercise requiring Ship Strikes, Photo Recce and Tanker Support. During this period one Buccaneer swapped with an A-6 to cross operate from the U.S.S. *J. F. Kennedy*. With the North Atlantic war over for another year, 7 aircraft departed for 809's new home, R.A.F. Honington, in Suffolk, returning again on 6th November.

Next stop Barcelona and after a very enjoyable few days chasing *senoritas*, it was back to work off Sardinia. December arrived and the chance to strike and cross-operate with the U.S.S. *Forrestal*. They sent an A7 and an A6 to *Ark*, 809 one Buccaneer to them, each taking part in the others strikes. After the familiar Christmas shopping in Gibraltar, the Squadron returned to Honington.



Formation fly past over U.S.S. Forrestal

Nineteen seventy-three began much the way the old year had gone out, i.e. with soul destroying East Anglian gloom. Many moans were heard each morn

ing at Met Brief when Lossiemouth and Kinloss were yet again loud and clear. With Exercise "Sunny Seas" beckoning, the Squadron rejoined *Ark* on 25th January and set sail for the Portuguese coast. On completion the Squadron departed to spend the next month flying in the Western Mediterranean, including a disembarked programme from Malta, Exercise "Ruler" (protecting the inhabitants of the Azores) and then the Squadron departed for Honington and Easter Leave.

April arrived and the Squadron prepared for the Gilroy Trophy. The chance also to officially recognise L.A.M. (A /E) Grace's thoroughness in twice detecting important aircraft defects, when Rear-Admiral Mungo presented him with a Certificate of Merit.

On the 12th the Commanding Officer encountered problems in the circuit necessitating an ejection.

Unfortunately the Observer, Flight Lieutenant Mann, died when the ensuing fireball destroyed his parachute. Lieutenant-Commander de Labillière, injured his back and departed temporarily for hospital. At the last minute the Gilroy Trophy was postponed and 809 re-embarked on 2nd May with the new Senior Observer, Lieutenant-Command R. Paterson, as temporary "Boss".

After a quick work up in the channel *Ark* set course for Puerto Rico. En route we exchanged strikes with the French Carrier *Foch* off the Azores, eventually reaching the Atlantic Fleet Weapons Range on the 15th. A concentrated programme of Toss and dive bombing followed, interrupted by two days on the island of St. Thomas. Back at sea for *F. D. Roosevelt's* work-up, Exercise "Lantreadex", 809 provided ship probes and strikes plus tanker support for the ever thirsty F-4's. The Squadron was also to have a chance at sinking a decommissioned destroyer. Unfortunately at the appointed time, all that greeted the Squadron was bubbles, the Americans having done their job too thoroughly and the incident of 1972 was avenged.

A few more days back on Fungy Bowl and Vieques before we arrived at Fort Lauderdale on 8th June. It was another very pleasant visit with the Squadron sun gods clocking up overtime at the Sheraton pool. Leaving "Downtown Florida" on the 14th, *Ark* made its way north to Mayport and 809 indulged in some private flying, before disembarking eight aircraft to N.A.S. Cecil.

The eleven days ashore were spent adjusting to the American Air Traffic Control environment and

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exploring the land with low-level "Navexes". Lest real air conditioning and swimming pools would soften the chaps, the short stay had to end, so on the 30th the Squadron returned to the ship. Homeward bound the *Ark Royal* steamed for Scottish Waters and the rehearsals for "Sally Forth". the N.A.T.O. ship window due at the end of July. A weekend in Rosyth added a lighter note to the month before finally the 24th arrived and 809 bade farewell to the ship. disembarking to Honington.

Three trips "Stateside". several N.A.T.O. wars and visits to the Med later. 809 can honestly be said to have worked and played hard. After countless embarkations and disembarkations the Squadron is looking forward to a few months stability and the chance to show the Air Force. yet again, how to operate the *Buccaneer*. Until we see the rejuvenated ship once more--thank you *Ark Royal* for the past three years.

THE WEAPONS ELECTRICAL DEPARTMENT

To call it the Weapons Electrical Department is rather a misnomer as we started the commission with less of the "W" and more of the "E" having been denuded of the 4.5 inch turrets and bofors during the refit and gained 4 megawatts of AC generating capacity together with some new gyros, conversion machinery and improvements to the communications and radar. Luckily no one thought to change the sign on the office door since the ship was built so it still reads, simply, the Electrical Office.

Through the Department have come about 500 ratings since we last left refit for, although our numbers average about 200, the junior rates that join straight from course at *Collingwood* pass through at just under 100 a year. One feels that they must be deriving benefit from their training for when they leave they certainly look older and wiser. The senior rates, on the other hand, just leave looking older, especially those of El division. If you see a man pulling on sea boots and sou' wester do not be deluded into thinking that he is a rugged seaman going up on deck, the members of "A" unit could tell you differently.

Features of the commission have been the freezing up of the cranes, sights and radar aerials on the

visit to New York, the repairs to the Tacan aerial during "Strong Express", changing a steering motor armature at sea and changing at least one of each of the most awkward armatures during the last deployment. The highlight was undoubtedly the demonstration of unity shown when the Department mustered at dawn in best suits to wait for the sun to come up over the Rock of Gibraltar.

We indirectly caused the first Ford Lauderdale to Mayport exped when the port crane refused to hoist a boat on the last day in Fort Lauderdale in 1971. It was on that leg that the first visit was made to St. Thomas and the senior rates developed a flair for bartending.

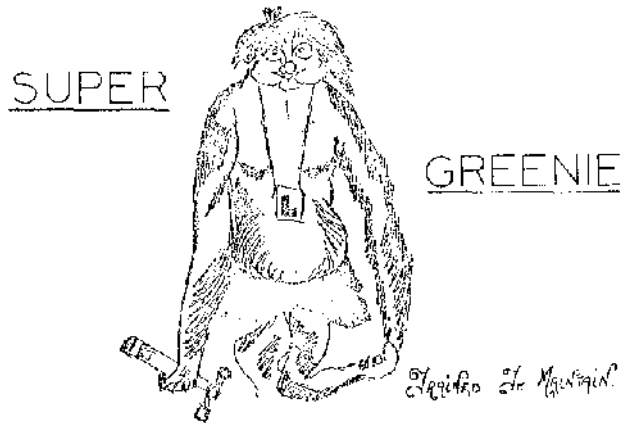


THE WEAPONS ELECTRICAL DEPARTMENT

With our involvement in almost every aspect of the ship, it is not surprising that we have our checks to do for almost every evolution and whether it is a R.A.S. entering or leaving harbour, flying or even switching the lights on or off for beating the retreat ceremony, the W.E. routine slips smoothly into gear. The one thing that we do particularly well however, is to darken ship. Long before sunset members of the ship's company can be seen fighting their way through

canvas screens on to the weather decks rubbing their damaged shins, blinking in the sunlight and singing the praises of the greenies.

The quote of the commission came from a visitor in Fort Lauderdale who was most complimentary about *Ark's* appearance "considering she had been salvaged from the Mediterranean". We had wondered!



AIR DEPARTMENT

What is the Air Department? Or more appropriately who are the Air Department, for more than anything else the Air Department consists of people; 71 Naval Airmen, 33 Leading Airmen, half a dozen Petty Officers a few Chiefs and of course the occasional Officer. I hesitate to guess at the average age for it changes day by day when the "old men" like Fleet Chief Sawyer (uncle Tom to his friends) are



In all weathers

included, the figures are somewhat distorted. Suffice it to say that there are one or two 16 year olds and many more who are not much older who after a season on the Flight Deck have developed a bearing and maturity beyond their years.

There are many facets to the operation of the air-



Nearer the coalface than most

craft and it would be impossible for them to keep going without any of the departments, but the Air Department is nearer the coalface than most. We are a Ship's department and unlike the Squadrons with whom we are often confused we stay on board with the rest when they disembark.

At our head is Commander Air. Commanders Derek Monsell, John Ford and Lyn Middleton have all taken their turn at leading us, as well as being responsible for the Air Group whenever it is embarked. However, the Air Group has its own pages elsewhere and it is the Air Department I am trying to describe.

The "Sea Balls" or Carrier Borne Ground Liaison Section as they prefer to be called are sent to us from the Army and are never so happy as when ashore in their little tents waiting to call the wrath of the Squadrons upon an unsuspecting "enemy". Of course in the middle of the Ocean they are slightly lost but will not be forgotten for their many editions of Noah's News and the bumper version of Families' Day.

The Photographic Section has taken more photographs than we knew what to do with for they fulfilled many roles with records for posterity, invaluable evidence whenever anything went wrong (including the last Phantom to ditch) and innumerable "mug shots", quite apart from the contribution they made in publicising both the Ship and the Navy as a whole with photographs reproduced in many newspapers.

The Landing Safety Officer sat on his little throne and guided many an unsteady aviator to the deck, as did the Carrier Control Approach Team whenever the clouds appeared or the sky darkened, not spectacular but full of mystique.

Those master planners the Operations team managed to convert the wishes of the Command into plans on paper and it was they who organised the R. F.A.s to appear over the horizon with their loads of fuel and food, programmed the flying to fit in with the flight deck sports and arranged the aircrew briefings down to the last detail. It is no wonder that they were to be seen at any time of the day or night with furrowed brows and bundles of incomprehensible signals.