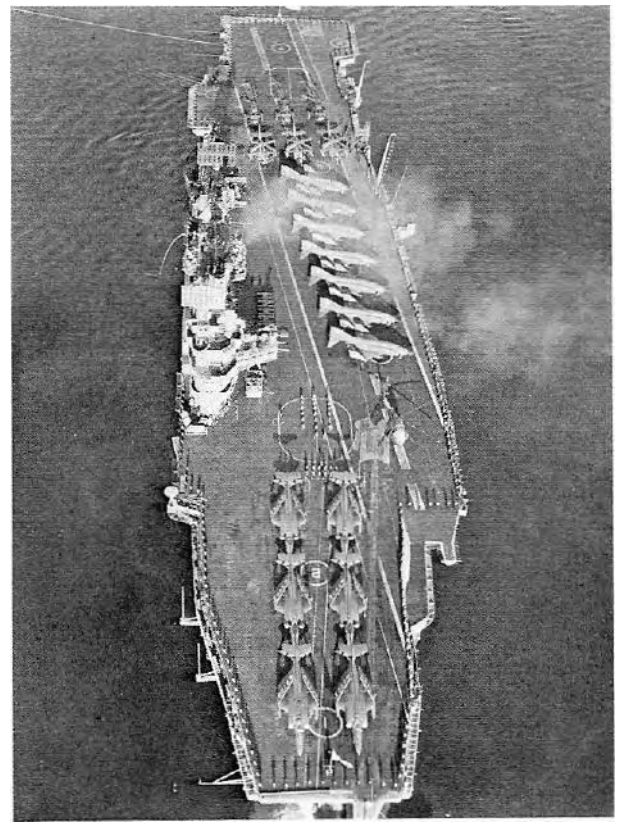
Always prepared—a practice rescue

A tight squeeze in fly 1

If Ops planned it, then Little F turned it all into action from the calm of Flyco as his directives to the Flight Deck turned their world of relative peace into a holocaust of sound and movement time after time. But the biggest and most dramatic part of the department was the Flight Deck Party; led by the Flight Deck Officer they directed the aircraft on to the catapults, launched them into the skies, fought the fires and when all was done parked everything in its place with the utmost precision. In all weathers from Arctic gales to Tropical sunshine they were to be seen in their coloured surcoats moving 20 ton aircraft across often slippery and heeling decks with only inches to spare and where one mistake could have meant injury or death.

To round off, mention must be made of Ark Airways where Leading Airman Lound assisted by one Sub-Lieutenant managed to handle 5,000 passengers in a single year : not one passenger or his baggage lost is a reputation few airlines could equal, but where did those £700 worth of immersion suits belonging to the Pusser get to?

What then of the last three years. We did not venture out to the Far East, that traditional stamping ground of the carrier in years gone by. Now we are involved with N.A.T.O. our runs ashore have changed and we have become used to cross-operating

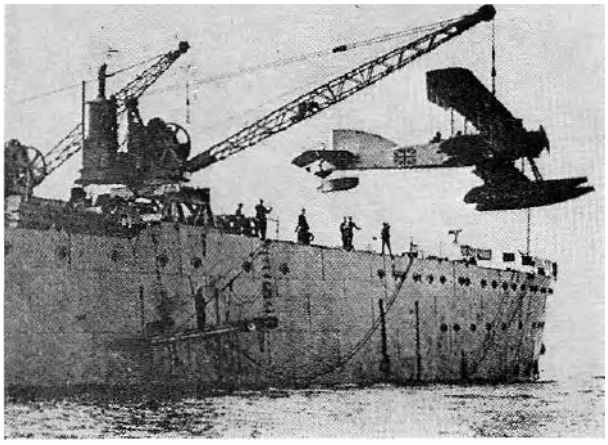


Parked with utmost precision

with the Americans and to accepting helicopters of various European origins. At the beginning the Phantom was new but if since then the aircraft have not changed, the advent of trickle drafting has seen many new faces come and there are very few "old hands" left, notable amongst them Chief Airman Hobgen who moved from the deck to the regulated atmosphere of the Air Office. There have been moments of drama, not to mention the fate of that

tractor off Barcelona, and new names have been found for various parts of the deck such as Kelly's catwalk and Bishop's folly although they have yet to be included in the Flight Deck Drill Manual.

Perhaps it is appropriate for us that it all ended on a high note with Exercise "Sally Forth" when aircraft were stacked tightly in Fly 1 and Elephant Tangoed into Fly 2 to enable us to launch and recover more aircraft in one go than at any other time during the Commission.



We haven't seen any new aircraft come into service

MED. PATROL 70

On sailing on 10th October, the catapults and arrestor gear underwent testing and while the latter appeared much better, the bow catapult still gave its familiar trouble. Deadload trials were carried out at "C" buoy on the 13th but with inconclusive results. However we took passage to the Mediterranean and kept radio and radar silence as far as the Straits of Gibraltar. This appeared to succeed and shadowing and detection had been avoided. After a flyex off Sardinia, we entered Malta on 19th for a ten day maintenance period.

A partial disembarkation of the Air Group to R.A.F. Luqa allowed continuation night flying to take place, but man maintenance was also taken care of by a full programme of visits, social, and sporting activities arranged by Flag Officer Malta.

After sailing from Malta, our big stroke of success was the discovery and cure of the fault with the bow catapult. Meanwhile the arrestor gear had been behaving well and so with a greater degree of confidence than hitherto we entered into Exercise " Lime Jug".

Here for the first time, the ship hit its full intensity of flying and a great feeling of accomplishment pervaded the whole ship.

On the evening of 9th November when some 100 miles south of Cape Matapan we . . . (but better, the narrative of the Marine Engineer Officer of the time) . . .

From first light it had been a normal flying day for the fixed wing operations of Phantoms, Buccaneers and Gannets, and regular flights for the Sea King helicopters. At one period, when not required for S.A.R. duties, the Wessex helicopter had done a "milk run" with fresh bread, rolls, mail, and papers to the frigate in company. This frigate would be the planeguard for the evening's night flying.

A spectator to the day's activities had been a SAM *Kotlin,* the uninvited but ever present Russian observer.

SAM Kotlin 365

After a dog watch break, a fresh flight deck crew was ready, the night flying aircrews were briefed and the aircraft manned. All the ship required was the Captain's permission to alter course into wind and to increase speed. The first Phantom was ready to load on the steam catapult. Below decks, the ship's company, some with work finished for the day or off watch for period, was relaxing — perhaps watching closed circuit TV, writing letters, chatting, or sleeping. In the Wardroom, the majority of officers had finished their evening meal, although some late arrivals were about to get their coffee.

Unconsciously each man on board noted the alteration of course and the increased tempo of the main engines as they were adjusted to the higher r.p.m. The reverberations of the first Phantom's engines on re-heat permeated the ship's ventilation systems and faded as the aircraft left the flight deck. The ship shuddered as the catapult pistons were retarded at the end of the launch stroke. Everything was set for some good night flying. There was enough wind, not

too much swell, and sufficient visibility to see the horizon and the clear navigation lights of the plane-guard in station on the port quarter. However, before the night was over the airborne Phantom was to be diverted ashore.

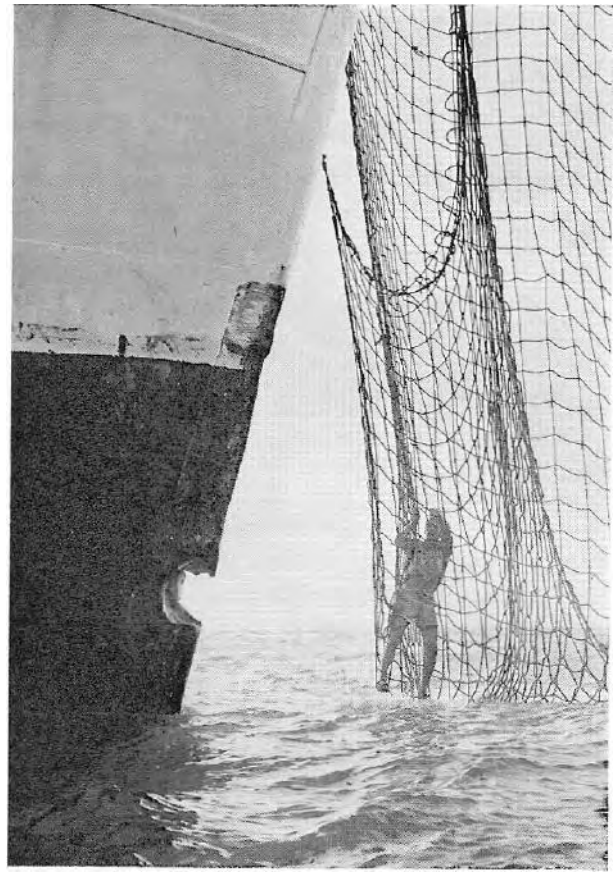
The noise of the second night launch never came. In stead, the vibration aft changed suddenly and it became clear that the ship was no longer steaming ahead but was actually working up to a fast full astern! Had the first Phantom ditched ahead of the ship? No one below could tell. Inquiring glances were answered by the strident call of the alarm rattler for Emergency Stations. Clearly something serious had happened.

Mess decks emptied and passageways filled as everyone not on watch made his way to his Emergency Station where he would report and remain ready. The two hangars and the flight deck were thronged with Fleet Air Arm officers and ratings, and others with no direct responsibility for Ship Safety and Damage Control.

Quick contact with the controlling engine room showed that the Engineer Officer of the Watch had been informed from the bridge that the Kotlin had been hit—despite the Full Astern. All engines were set to stop and fortunately no power had been lost. The effects of the impact would soon be established by the Damage Control teams and reported to the Damage Control Headquarters, H.Q.1. in turn, H.Q.1 would pass the damage report to the bridge for the Captain.

Every ship has an "Emergency Stations" organisation which ensures that disciplined action can be taken in the shortest possible time in the event of a serious fire, a collision, or a grounding. In this instance, the collision could have caused damage and extensive flooding in the forward section of the ship. The first task of the Damage Control parties was to achieve the highest state of water tight integrity—D.C. State 1—as quickly as possible by closing doors and hatches, and isolating ventilation systems where they penetrated decks and bulkheads below the waterline. Simultaneously a check of every man on board was started to determine if anyone was missing or had become a casualty. The ship's motorboats were also prepared to search for survivors in the water.

As only No. 1 Damage Control Section had reported damage to H.Q.1, numbers 2, 3, and 4 Sections were reverted to normal and were fallen out along with everyone else not concerned with the rescue arrangements.



Damage to the stern

The ship had been holed in the Boatswain's Store, and there was a 3 ft. by 4 ft. hole in the half-inch steel stem contour plate. Fortunately the hole was about 4 ft. above the waterline and very little water had entered. The Shipwright Officer inspected the damage and assessed the repairs required for restoring watertightness and hull strength. Clearly the hole would require some hours of outside repair work in daylight. The immediate action was, therefore, to seal off the damage to the stem as quickly as possible. This would enable the ship to get under way again without risk of flooding from the bow wave. The position of the hole made the construction of a "cement box" possible and, in addition, a small "cofferdam" or watertight bulkhead would be built. The cement box would have forward and after panels, about 30 inches apart, made out of 2 inch tongued and grooved planks. The undamaged shell plating and deck plating — with a convenient steel breast hook—would make up the two sides, the bottom, and the top. While the more jagged edges

of the hole were burned away with oxy-acetylene cutting gear by some shipwright artificers, other artificers and Engineering Mechanics were selecting, marking, and cutting the timber shores which would be wedged into the ship's structure to support the T and G planks. When the forward timber bulkhead was in position, it was "dogged" together with steel clenches to prevent any movement of the timber in a sea way which might crack the cement seal. After the second bulkhead was similarly secured, the cement was handed down in buckets.

Unknown to the Mate Between Decks, the newly painted Ship's Company heads made an admirable mixing area! Tins of hard fast-setting Damage Control Cement were piled in one alcove and two or three hardboard "mixing pads" were elsewhere. Each "mix" was stirred and prodded professionally by a "stoker" with a shovel. (Yes, the R.N. still has a use for shovels !) Granulated cork was added to the mix to give body and in the cement box extra reinforcement was given by adding short lengths of angle iron.

This was to be no normal cement box, since it would have to take the pressure of the ship thrusting its way through the water when operating aircraft and, in a month's time, it would have to withstand the stresses of a Full Power Trial, followed shortly afterwards by a winter crossing of the Bay of Biscay.

About six hours after the collision, the cofferdam plate was welded into position and a temporary plate had been secured over the hole used for filling the cement box. The ship was then ready to get under way again at speeds up to 12 knots. To finish the job, the Shipwrights fitted 4 inch by 4 inch vertical and breast shores to stiffen the cofferdam and the area above the cement box. These shores would make certain that seagoing stresses would be transferred to the stronger ship's hull. Around 0400 all temporary repairs were complete and all Damage Control parties had been fallen out. The combined searches by boats from the R.N. ships and the Kotlin had recovered five of the seven Russians lost overboard in the collision some 8 hours earlier. At first light, helicopter searches were resumed and these continued until the next day without any further survivors being recovered.

The actual damage to the Kotlin may never be known, but the study of photographs and inspection of Ark Royal's scars indicated that there were many points of contact. The SAM missile launcher seemed a likely reason for a small split at for'castle level. Undoubtedly Ark Royal's starboard anchor must have been embedded deep in the deckhouse below the missile launcher and there were other signs of heavy contact between the Kotlin's port quarter and our starboard bow. Before Ark Royal stopped, the Kotlin must have been heeled over heavily to star• board and later must have pivoted to port beneath the overhang of the flight deck. The Kotlin's propeller guard—normally close to the water—must have been higher, due to the angle of heel and, being a substantial piece of metal, had a "tin opener" effect on the stem of Ark Royal.

Providentially, the collision was more of a glancing blow due to the avoiding action taken by Ark Royal, otherwise the damage to both ships would have been very severe and greater loss of life in the Kotlin almost certain.

The entanglement with SAM Kotlin will be long remembered by the Royal Navy and by people everywhere as it was an International Incident. The Shipwrights of Ark Royal will no doubt remember it with very special feeling. They met the situation as a professional team and, with no fuss, they devised a very strong and highly successful repair from baulks of timber, nails, steel plate, and cement. In fact they took their eight hours of work through the night as "All in a day's work". Too bad that no present day Kipling was on the scene to write a graphic account of the incident, to record the characters of the men involved and to note how the men and the materials were combined by "Chippy" to ensure that Ark Royal was quickly made seaworthy and again a fully operational fighting unit. . . .

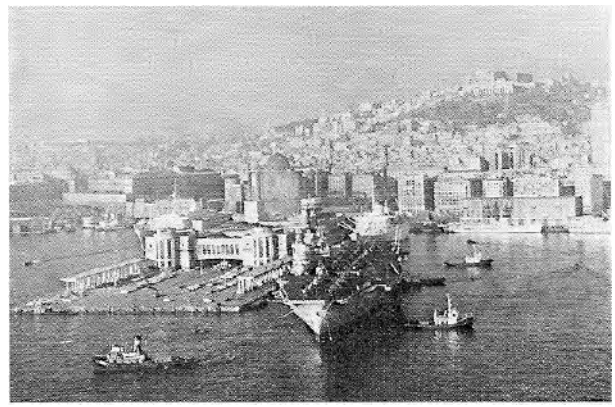
After "Lime Jug", the ship commenced passage to Malta, but on the afternoon of the 14th, stood by H.M.S. Fife off Crete when she had a major fire in the gas turbine room. The Sea Kings airlifted foam and firefighting equipment.

After a nine day S.M.P. in Malta, the ship sailed on 25th November for a five day flyex in the Malta areas and this included two notable events. The first was the Malta Sea Day on 28th when a most successful display was arranged for a number of local dignataries who had been invited on board. Then the next day was Hot Air Balloon Day. This magnificent spectacle of a red and white stripped balloon rising off the flight deck took place just south of and upwind of Malta. The initial course taken by the balloon seemed to indicate a doubtful landfall so a judicious application of more heat took it up to about two thousand feet where the winds took the balloon inshore allowing the crew to avoid landing in the sea. In fact, they

landed in the field of a very surprised farmer. The crew then took into the Post Office a pile of letters which had been franked specially for the occasion.

From 3rd to 8th December, the ship visited Naples for her only real foreign visit of the first leg of the commission and an undoubted success it was. The ship was alongside and the town is big enough to cater for a large ship's company. It is an excellent centre for touring and bus trips went to Rome, Pompeii, Amalfi and other places and allowed a large number to see something of the attractive coast and hinterland with their wealth of historical interest.

After a short flyex off Sardinia, a one day rabbit run in Gibraltar, the run home and the disembarkation of the Air Group, the ship then entered Devonport on 18th December for her three month Docking and Essential Defects period and, of course, Christmas leave.



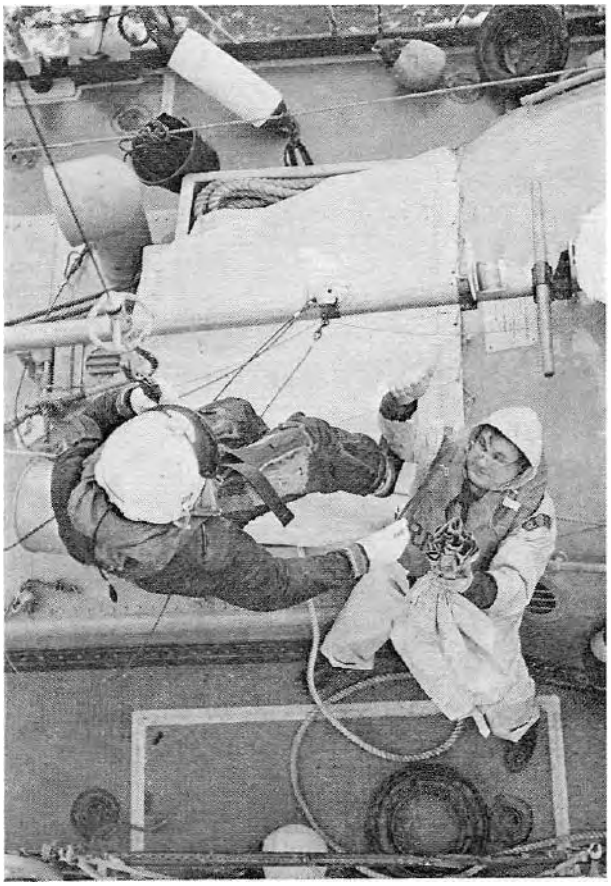
At Naples

SEARCH AND RESCUE FLIGHT

In keeping with the majority of life-saving organisations, the whole is divided into smaller, compact, self-supporting units and one such as this exists and operates (helicopters don't fly—they just operate) within the confines of the mighty Ark. Yes folks, your friendly Search and Rescue flight has the dubious distinction of being the last in a long line of fixed wing carrier ship's flights and until such time as someone, without a sense of humour, decides we are superfluous and allows the dark blue, hump-backed peril lurking in Number Three Ready Room to stick its radar-guided feet in the door, we shall happily continue to ensure, with assurance, that the lives of those whose machines decide to take an unscheduled make and mend are, to the best of our ability, prevented from getting too soggy : "The sea shall not have them" and all that jazz.

Added to that, which is our main task, we have in the past maintained and will continue to maintain a merciful, if somewhat biased and bent, angelic watch over those who venture too close to the edge and attempt to obtain an unofficial sea temperature check despite the already efficient methods employed.

Since the formation of the flight on 6th January 1970 at R.N.A.S. Culdrose we have managed to get through (?) no less than four commanding officers, namely Les. Brian Clarke, "Iggy" Davison, John Tookey, and our current weight-holder Chris Johnson



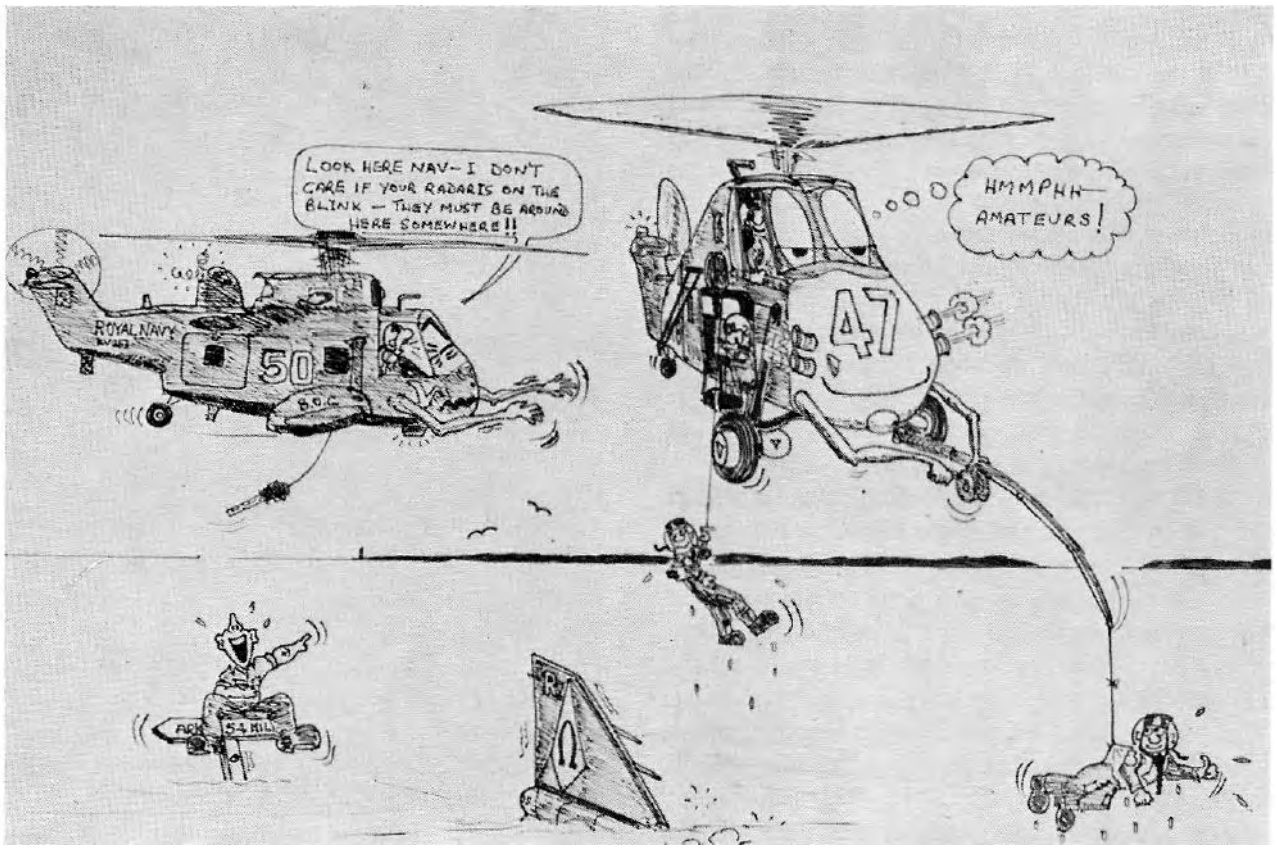
Lifeboat co-operation

(unless they come to take him away ha, ha!) fresh from an Australian Temporary Loan Book.

It is always difficult to account for an itinerant flight's movements and activities ashore and afloat in retrospect as in three years it is unlikely that any of the original members will still be around to remember what happened, however, we still find evidence of those who have gone before sculling in the most unlikely places including, on one occasion, a three thonged, leather whip and a pair of ladies stockings tucked cosily behind a locker in 5R2 Mess on one of our returns from Portland! We believe that Naval Airman de Sade left us some time ago leaving behind our resident rubber lovers whose activities behind the locked door of 1 J shower and heads, ostensibly to remove the last vestiges of salt water from their personages, has left some of us considerably perturbed!

Despite our continuous and arduous attempts, both open and subversive, to persuade the "Alloominum Death Toobs" to become submarine they have resisted pretty well so far with three exceptions, and so it is with what we consider to be a high degree of magnanimity, as we get so terribly bored just stooging around waiting for the ten per cent stark terror element of the job to occur, that we have been resigned to the fact that glory has escaped us so far and may continue to do so.

To ensure that, our popularity with our General Service counterparts on board does not wane below an acceptable level, the flight runs, on an opportunity basis, a sort of "Mac-Fisheries" delivery service of fresh fish to the ship's galley's and, with business in mind, to K.P.Lau. The crew's expertise at recovering the "treasure of the sea" is not based on experience in the art of angling, rather on the five loaves and two fishes act perfected some time ago by the Padre's HOD, only now we lower the five (or thereabouts) loaves to a local fishing boat and lo! and behold! up comes the fish—a few more than two perhaps. We once landed two Marlin and a Tuna fish weighing collectively about 200 lb.! Exotic fare indeed only to be equalled by an earlier crew who spotted a turtle on the surface caught up in the remains of a fishing



SEARCH AND RESCUE FLIGHT

net. However, humanity prevailed and the luckless beast was returned to the deep minus fishing net and not destined to grace the Great Tureen in the Sky.

The daily round, the common task for us is for others their bread and butter and sometimes their beer as well in the shape of the ever-recurrent Vertrep and Air Delivery Service which we share with the R.F.A. flights and any other helicopter operating agency in whichever area we are serving. To this end we have lifted, humped, transferred, dropped down, moved around, and picked up more pounds, numbers, dozens, boxes, nets-full, winch-loads, and pieces of just about everything and everybody that you can wave a large log at in exercises from Lauderdale to Lisbon and Portland to Puerto Rico. Despite the fact that our ancient Wessii clock-up a phenomenal amount of trouble-free flying hours—all hail to the Super-Grubbers—we continue to flog our spare parts around the fleet dripping bread and mail hither and thither despite the clearly printed notices on the sides of D.L.G.s and Leanders "Do Not Feed the Fishheads" in attempt to win over the "other side" and prove to their Lordships that our existence, lowly though it may seem in the presence of the mighty Toom and Sea Cow with the all-seeing eye, is justified.

SAILING

The Sailing Club was formed early in the Commission with Lt. Hillier as Secretary, and Lt.-Cdr. Lee took over in January 1972. Records of the earlier period are sparse, and hardly within living memory, but it is believed that the Club enjoyed nearly as much success then as it did at the end. The emphasis was perhaps more slanted towards recreational sailing in the early days, but then Drafty decided to send us the greater part of the Navy's Sailing Team, and thoughts turned more to Competition. We even imported an R.A.F. officer at whose hands Navy helmsmen have suffered not a few defeats !

No sports club can survive without support—in Ark's case this has increased over the last nine months or so, and it was particularly gratifying to see our Bosuns put to good use after the Boat party had spent so much effort looking after them. During the Refit the boats will again be kept near to the ship in the Dockyard, and anyone with a helmsman's certificate can take them out.

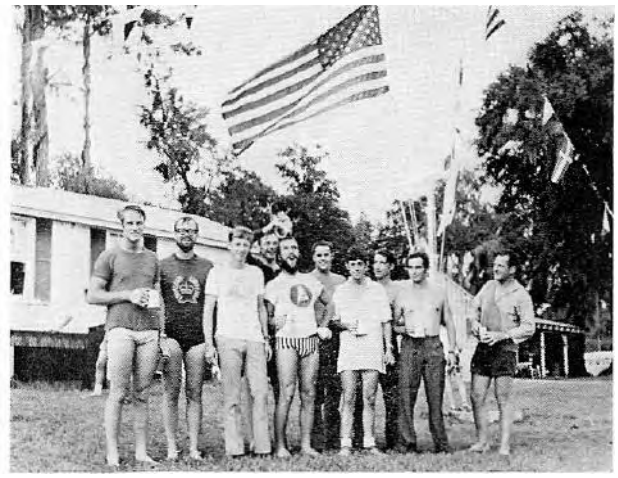
The racing side of life has risen to a crescendo in the last few months, culminating with the Fleet Regatta at Rosyth when we relinquished the individual winners cup to a local man, but came first and second in the team event. This was not quite up to performances in Plymouth and Gibraltar where we took the individual prizes as well.- Racing has taken place in a variety of boats at practically every port of call, except New York where Ice Axes would have been required. Every fixture has been a notable social success, whilst we have also managed to win most of them. Our thanks are due to our many hosts; not only did we enjoy ourselves but apparently they did too : three clubs who have never met the Navy before all expressed a wish to repeat the performance, if not against Ark then against any RN. ship.

We also made our mark in larger craft. At the end of June 1972, three of our offshore men—Lt.-Cdr. Martin, R. Mech. Bennett and P.O. Nunn transferred to the Salisbury in the middle of the night to head into the Bay of Biscay to give Sir Francis Chichester in Gipsy Moth some help. They eventually sailed Gipsy Moth back to Plymouth on her final tragic voyage. Later this year Lt.-Cdr. Brown and Lt. Caesley will be sailing in Adventure round the World, the former as a Chief Mate and the latter as crew member. We wish them luck.

At the end of this article there is a list of our results. Since it would be invidious to single out any particular helmsman or crew, the following members all contributed to a fine season :

Lieutenants Bob Turner, Rick Pharoah, Iggy

The start of the Read Cup Ark Royal *1,2,3, N.A.S. MX 4, 5, 6*



The winning Read Cup team (1. to r.) *Rick Pharoah, Roger Caesley, Bob Turner, Wiggy Bennett, Iggy Milne, Simon Hambrook, Andy Holland, Tony Mead, Chippy Scott, and Tim Lee (Team Manager)*