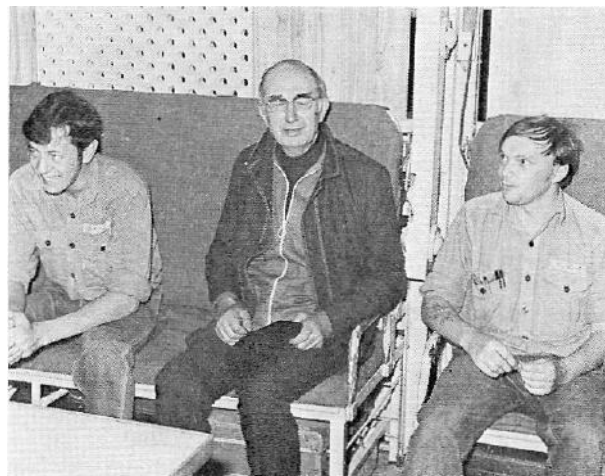
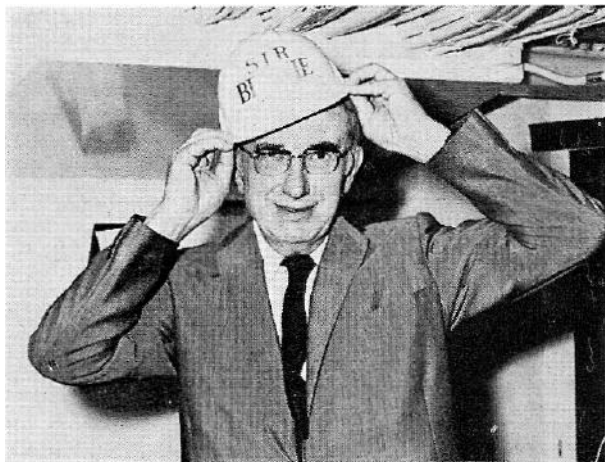


## SUMMER 1972

The ship sailed on 6th June for post-D.E.D. trials, shakedown and work-up. With the continuous commission system now operating and trickle drafting, we set off with some 500 new members of the ship's company and clearly a man-training programme had to be combined with machinery and systems testing. Thimblehunt, Darken Ship, Awkward, Emergency and Life-raft Stations, Action Stations, Full Power Trials, Dummy Deck Drills, Boarding and Towing Exercises, Radar and Radio Calibration, De-gaussing and the rest made up the early programme. But we also exercised Operation Royal Marine Band Concert just to keep the balance.

The flying work-up was split into three blocks, one in the Southwest Approaches, one in the Moray Firth, and the third back in the SW Approaches. In between the first two, we took in the Arran Measured Mile and while it had been rough out at sea, the sheltered waters in the Sound of Bute enabled us to enjoy the scenery at its best and we ensured the maximum numbers enjoyed the fresh air by holding Divisions. The passage around Cape Wrath, past the Old Man of Hoy and through the Pentland Firth was also made in sharp, clear weather.

One of the social highlights of the Moray Firth work-up was the arrival on board of Sir Bernard Miles. He spent four days with us, charmed and amused everyone he met and gave three wonderful shows, each an excellent mixture of wry tales, funny stories and some delightfully human naval histories.



After the work-up, Portsmouth for ten days was programmed. This was as part of a series of ship visits to various ports in U.K. in a "Meet the Navy" show for the public and, especially, for schoolboys. It was also a period for Departmental Inspections, self-maintenance, and Admiral's Divisions, and we had the privilege of a visit from the Prime Minister. The Departmental Inspections were part of an overall ship inspection which was due to culminate in the Operational Readiness Inspection a week after we left Portsmouth. In that week, we participated in two phases of Exercise "West Hoe" off western Ireland. First Blue was the enemy, then Orange but always Fog which limited our flying on a number of occasions. However, St. Swithun's Day was fine over England.

The O.R.I. started at midnight 16th/17th July and was scheduled to continue for up to 24 hours. In fact, we went to N.B.C.D. State One at 1830 on 16th to be prepared for anything from the start. Most evolutions went well and included the disembarkation of the Air Group. The ship then moored in Torbay and a problem arose in unmooring which nearly delayed our arrival in Devonport by a day. Only a full power trial enabled the ship to catch the tide, and, incidentally, to arrive for the Commander-in-Chief's Commanding Officers' meeting which was to be held in *Ark Royal* that day.

Over the summer A.M.P., we said good-bye to

## SUMMER 1972



Captain Roberts, who was to hoist his flag at Flag Officer Sea Training, and we welcomed Captain Cassidi who assumed command on 22nd August.

On the last day of August, we sailed and took our standard westabout route to the Moray Firth for a seven day flyex prior to proceeding to the rendezvous for the start of "Strong Express". This was the biggest N.A.T.O. exercise ever to be held and included some 300 ships and over 1,000 aircraft. The area was the standard Norwegian Sea/North Cape



*Focas embarks for "Strong Express"*

and the period 14th/28th September. Amphibious Landings took place in northern Norway, and the carriers of the Striking Fleet Atlantic provided Close Air Support. Our own fighters providing C.A.P. for the Fleet were given excellent training with the large numbers of Russian long range maritime patrol aircraft who maintained a strict surveillance and, at the same time, provided a first class justification for the retention of some fixed wing capability for the fleet.

After the P.X.D. in Rosyth and a short flyex off the Fife coast in the most frustrating weather, we visited Oslo for five days from 12th October. The



*The Royal Marine Band in Oslo*

passage up Oslo Fjord was most spectacular with a beautiful clear morning sun to bring out the autumn colours in the trees. We moored about a mile from the City Hall which makes such a fine architectural head of the fjord. It was rather expensive ashore but one or two purchases were worth making and it was a pleasant relaxing period which enabled us to get off the ship and to see some of the lovely sights of the city, its famous Kon-Tiki and Fram museums, and its picturesque surrounds. We sailed refreshed and took passage to Portsmouth where we were to have an eighteen day S.M.P.

# METEOROLOGY AND EDUCATION

**M**eteorology, Oceanography, Resettlement, Education and very much M.O.R.E. The two operational centres where the core of the ship's grey matter boils and bubbles are as far apart physically as they are functionally.

Away from all the shouting at the for'ard end of the island, there lies a quiet corner at the back end which hides the house of weather wisdom with its charming verandah from which one overlooks the hubbub of life below. Inside the house lies a mass of instruments and equipment, receivers and teleprinters all of which are kept at the ready for departmental inspections and rounds.

The real delicate tools of the art are well hidden. Very few have noticed the fir cone over the door and no one knows the combination of the safe in which the sea-weed resides. The bookcases are closed and one cannot see the volumes of ancient weather lore. One of the tools is evident, but this particular one is not used greatly. This is the scuttle, through which the Other Weather can be seen. Generally this is ignored as it tends to excite the air-crew. Far better is the Real Weather which comes from the books and charts and is always idyllic.

For relaxation the staff playground is used. This lies in a well-sheltered position aft near the house of the Lord of the Manor. Here one is free to play with enormous balloons and to throw bathy-shaped stones into the pond.

The *Ark Royal* College lies in its own quiet cloisters opening out in the sunny space below 6E Mess. Here in gentle, unhurried fashion, the students are free to absorb the spirit and inhale the atmosphere of learning. In the evenings when work is over and the festive spirit reigns, fire and emergency parties are held there. When one's college days are over and one has to face the wide outside world, benign advice is always freely available from the careers resettlement department. The chairman is always sad to see students leave and will try to retain them for a few more years. Now, as we go on vacation—Sunshine, Pleasure and Peace.

Now the commission's over  
And the refit's getting nigh  
Time to make a quick review  
Of all that made one sigh

The schoolroom it was flooded  
Chippies fought in vain  
Classes n'er abandoned  
Just paddled through again

Resettlement's a problem  
They were PVR'd  
No courses to prepare themselves  
For the shock of life so hard

The *Ark* was topped by 2MA  
At quizzes they were bright  
The Wardroom later pipped them  
But were given quite a fight

Schoolies came and schoolies went  
For life at sea to roam  
Some came o'er to Lauderdale  
Whilst others stayed at home

The G.C.E. and Namet  
Are both so very sleek  
So why not come along to school  
Make the future not so bleak

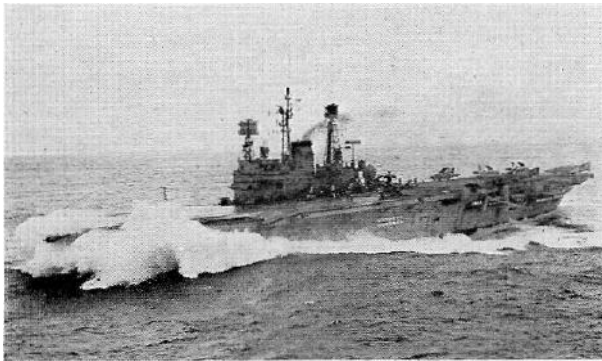
But when Commission's over  
And all's been said and done  
The fliers leave for pastures new  
And dockyard has the run

Remember well, my maties  
Seven Echo is not done  
So come on in to read and learn  
Education can be fun!

## METEOROLOGY AND EDUCATION

### "ARE WE ALL MET?"

A hackneyed phrase which is no longer true in the Met Office today. Of observations, during the last 11 years we have made over 7,000. Over 6,000 have been logged in the Met Log, and the others remain unprintable. We've drawn over 2,000 charts from the Tropics to the Arctic and we've drawn over 20 Thermometers from Naval Stores. We've recorded extremes of temperature from 31°C (90°F for our non-metric readers) off St. Thomas, to 4°C (39°F) in the Arctic, to - 12°C (10°F) in New York. New York ! The only place where we had 4 inches of snow on the Flight Deck and ice floes in the river.



*Swell off Cape Hatteras*

And do you remember the swell off Cape Hatteras?

Although our team finished only 33rd in the 1972 Top of the Rock Race, at least we were aware that the pressure at the top was 38.2mbs lower than that at the start. The Boss forecast (correctly) a drying out of the atmosphere at these levels and provided a case of the antidote.

During "Strong Express" an overzealous Electronic Warfare Team disconnected our aerals. This caused a temporary loss of efficiency. Twelve months earlier, the office kettle blew a fuse. This caused a temporary loss of efficiency. Memorable events included the day when we had an office run to Birmingham for L.A. Price's wedding, and the day when a certain nameless Flight Deck P.O. sold the Boss a barometer.

We have sounded the atmosphere, using those balloons which are so popular for Senior Rates Mess Socials, on 85 occasions, and have sounded the depths with our new expendable bathythermograph on 86 occasions. This is indicative of the future with the increasing importance of oceanography in A.S. warfare. So if you put your head round the office door and ask "Are we all Met?", you will be greeted no longer in stony silence—you see we're half oceanographic these days.

# 892 SQUADRON

## THE SQUADRON

Although we are chiefly concerned with events occurring since the commissioning of *Ark Royal*, a brief history of the Squadron may be of interest to readers.

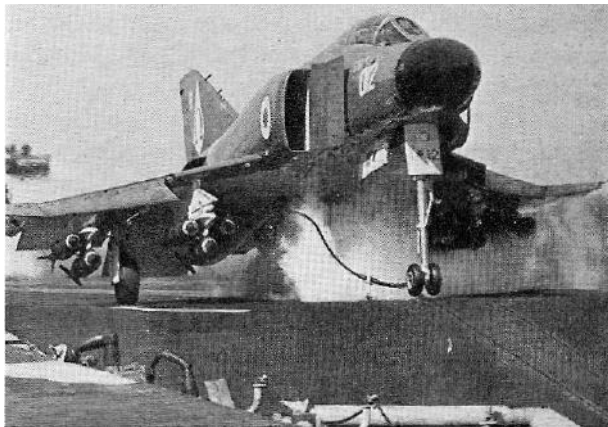
First forming in July 1942 with Grumman Wildcat aircraft, the Squadron operated in defence of the Atlantic convoys, reforming in 1945 with Hellcats until disbanding in 1946.

Nine years later, Their Lordships saw fit to reform 892 with Sea Venom all weather jet fighters and the squadron saw action during the Suez crisis whilst embarked in H.M.S. *Eagle*.

After disbanding in 1957, the Sea Vixen entered naval service and it was with this aircraft that 892 Naval Air Squadron reformed in July 1959 and for the first time served in H.M.S. *Ark Royal*.

After embarkations in H.M.S. *Victorious*, H.M.S. *Hermes* and H.M.S. *Centaur*, 892 returned to the United Kingdom in February 1968 and formed the Royal Naval Air Display team, taking part in nationwide flying displays until again disbanding in October of 1968. With the arrival of the Phantom into naval service, the Squadron reformed yet again at Yeovilton in March 1969 and showed its paces by winning the Trans-Atlantic Air Race in May 1969.

## THE AIRCRAFT



The Phantom F4K, with which the squadron is equipped, is a two seat (pilot and observer) all weather fighter capable of speeds of greater than Mach two. In its air defence role it can carry up to eight guided missiles (4 sidewinder and 4 sparrow) or, in a strike role, a variety of air to ground weapons including 2 inch rockets and 540 lb. bombs. The two Rolls Royce Spey engines which power the aircraft can deliver 12,250 lb. thrust each in military power or 20,515 lb. thrust each with reheat engaged giving the aircraft its high rate of climb and top speed. The peacetime complement of the squadron is twelve aircraft.

## THE COMMISSION

While *Ark Royal* was in dockyard hands prior to commissioning, her fighter squadron was not far away (at Yeovilton) working up to be operational as soon as the call to embark came. Trials had been carried out on board U.S.S. *Sarratoga* and other crews boosted from the catapult at R.A.E. *Bedford*. To check our progress an O.R.I. was held on 23rd March 1970, and having completed this with distinction we felt ready for any eventuality. A small detachment of three Phantoms embarked for the first time in April 1970 and stayed for two weeks to prepare the "deck" and ourselves for Phantom operations. One aircraft was lost during this period while operating some twenty miles from the carrier; sadly the crew was not saved. The short stay produced 72 sorties and with everyone becoming more familiar with noisy, firespitting Phantoms, things were shaping up well for the first full embarkation. This event took place on the 14th June 1970, the ground crew and equipment having preceded the aircraft by three days. The flying task during the first two weeks' work-up was one of 2 inch rocketting and bombing of *Ark Royal's* splash target and some very basic interceptions (to get the "D"s up to standard). The programme went well and the reward was a two day visit to the popular sea port of Liverpool.

We soon saw the shape of things to come when in July the first Phantom night flying took place (and it has gone on and on ever since), also the first of many live missile shoots, this time at Aberporth,

## 892 SQUADRON

where seven Sidewinder and five Sparrow missiles were successfully launched. All these events were working up to the ship's O.R.I. which took place on the 28th and 29th July and after providing strikes, probes and escorts during this evolution, 892 disembarked to Yeovilton after an encouraging six weeks.

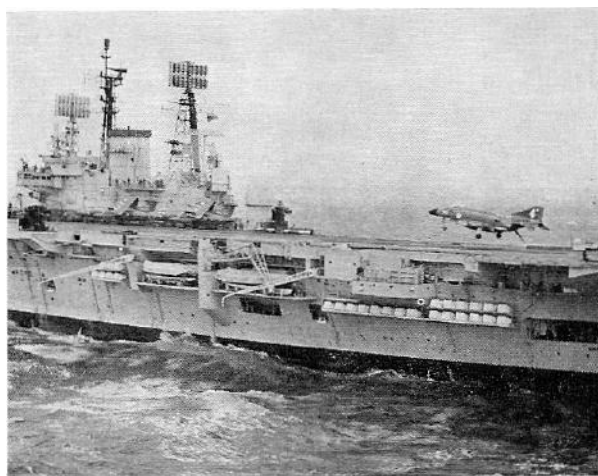
Now some may think that on leaving *Ark Royal* the squadrons proceed on leave whence they return only when the ship sails, but no, misguided reader, it is not so; for in the month following the first disembarkation much work was done in renewing instrument ratings (these are a pilot qualification not greenies fixing the altimeter) flying Hunter aircraft and continuation night flying.

September brought a return to the *Ark*, initially five aircraft to night fly and also provide the Phantom contribution to the open day during which 2 inch rockets were fired by the pod-ful to duly impress the visitors. With the remainder of our aircraft aboard, the ship sailed for a short work-up preceding the first exercise, "Northern Wedding", which started on the 19th September. Although a number of sorties were flown, the ship began to suffer from arrestor wire problems and our participation was, as a result, reduced. The problems persisted and 892 disembarked for a two week period while repairs were carried out.

The first change in command occurred on the 24th September when Lt.-Cdr. Kerr replaced Lt.-Cdr. Davis as Squadron Commanding Officer. (It was nothing to do with broken arrestor wires, just a routine change!). The wire problems solved, it was off to the sunny Mediterranean and Malta where weaponry was practised and bodies bronzed. Three aircraft were sent to R.A.F. Luqa to provide continuation and night flying during the ship's visit to Grand Harbour. Needless to say all enjoyed the nine day stay and though there was some flying there was also plenty of time to enjoy the various attractions of the island. On sailing, the ship participated in Exercise "Lime Jug" in which the squadron aircraft were involved in strikes and missile profiles. In the third phase of the exercise we flew 157 sorties, clocking up some 233 hours. With another exercise tucked away it was back to Malta for nine days before sailing for a visit to Naples. By way of entertainment *en route* a "sea day" was held during which the Phantoms showed some of their teeth by firing air bursts of 2 inch rockets, dropping live

540 lb. bombs and hitting a flare with a Sidewinder launched from a supersonic aircraft.

The visit to Naples proved a great success with many tours organised in the Rome and Naples area, hospitality in plenty, delicious meals, and the vino, the wonderful vino. Having all but exhausted the possibilities of Naples we were off again for a short flyex and passage before entering Gibraltar for the Christmas shopping and a little sport. By now disembarkation was drawing near and as always one's thoughts turn more and more to the folks at home and so with glad heart disembarkation took place on the 15th December with the prospect of an enjoyable leave ahead.



*Hook on*

A year completed and with more to come the squadron reassembled after leave. As is the case after all long leaves, it was necessary for all aircrew to carry out refamiliarisation sorties before going on to the more operational flying which, in this instance, was A.C.M. (Air Combat Manoeuvres, fighter tactics to Vixen men or dog fights if you're over forty). Our enemies during these sorties varied, F8s and Hunters, and we naturally claim an outright victory in both cases. The F8s were French navy and their visit provided ample excuse to return the courtesy which we duly did by visiting Landivisiau in late January. Lt.-Cdr. Ellis took over the Senior Observer job and with him peering into his radar we sallied forth for a fresh round of A.C.M. this time against 43 Squadron (R.A.F.) who were stationed at R.A.F. Leuchars, our prospective home for two years hence. It could be described as a feast of phantom fighting v. forty-three (but do not say it aloud or you may

## 892 SQUADRON

get your commission book wet!) and in the twelve sorties we again claim total victory. In our spare time we took on more Hunters and F8s while practising ship defence and "splashing" the odd Buccaneer "lest they forget".

March brought Easter leave and preparation for re-embarkation in April. The happy reunion took place in the Moray Firth and for one pilot, Lt. Auld, it was his first ever arrival on the deck. The Harriers came to visit *Ark Royal* in May to carry out sea trials—who knows, when 892 disbands a successor of this aircraft might be re-equipping the Squadron in 1980! After a brief few weeks on board the squadron disembarked for an even shorter stay at Yeovilton before re-embarking as the ship sailed for the Azores and then the United States. One "lame duck" was stranded at Yeovilton but flew a record non stop 1,700 miles to join the ship and take part in the weaponry which was our task at the time.

With a full complement of aircraft the journey west continued and all looked forward to the visits in store and operations in one of the best weapons ranges in the world. It was in this range complex (Atlantic Fleet Weapons Range) that the first "Rimex" took place in which aircraft armed with live missiles provided a C.A.P. against incoming drone targets. In one twelve hour period the aircraft flew a total of 351 hours and destroyed one target. On completion of "Rimex" and an "Opredux" five aircraft were despatched to N.A.S. Cecil Field for hot weather trials and *Ark* proceeded to Fort Lauderdale for a visit which even now is talked of as one of the best ever. During the disembarked flying one aircraft entered a region of the flight envelope from which recovery was impossible; the sortie terminating with a water strike (the aircraft span into the sea). The aircrew finding they had nothing further in common with their aircraft, jettisoned it, and landed from a perfect Martin Baker let down to nylon approach. The ship at this stage made the short journey to Mayport before sailing towards Puerto Rico for more missile firings and air to ground work on the realistic targets which make up the Vieques range. With a successful flyex completed it was banyan time to which end the ship made for St. Thomas (Virgin Islands) in late July 1971.

Banyans are curious affairs where one takes good food into the open to allow insects to get at it, flavour it to taste with sand and seawater, and cook it to perfection while drinking warm beer. A cricket match was also played between the aircrew and maintainers

the result being deemed a draw when it was discovered that no one was keeping the score (it's drinking salt water what does it, me hearties). Alas banyans like pints of beer don't last for ever and we started the journey home, the numbers playing sport on the flight deck dropped in proportion to the thermometer and on 30th July we found ourselves at Charlie buoy at Plymouth.

Publicity time was here again in August, when Operation Lymelight was staged. The squadron contribution to this live television show was the firing of Sidewinder missiles and 2 inch rockets, also dropping 540 lb. bombs; we also launched Lt. Froggatt on his first Phantom boost and, when all was over, disembarked once again for leave, marriages and more car breaking — a habitual squadron pastime. Ashore, flying continued with A.C.M. against 234 Squadron's Hunters whom we destroyed *in toto* in the air on several successful days. Night flying was also high on the list of priorities as was preparation of aircraft for the embarkation which took place in mid September. Day and night air defence was our primary task during the work-up period and on one night sortie a pilot attempted to land on by engaging the rounddown with his hook, the outcome of this novel, if unsuccessful, approach was a badly damaged aircraft diverting to Lossiemouth where it remained for repairs. A replacement was provided and, once more up to full strength, we sailed for exercise "Royal Knight" which involved many units of the Striking Fleet Atlantic and F4s of the R.A.F. One of the more interesting aspects of the exercise was the interception of Soviet aircraft and by the time the "war" ended 23 such aircraft had been identified. In all we flew 146 hours, intercepted 181 bogeys and maintained a non stop alert "5" aircraft for 155 hours. During the subsequent "hot wash-up" our squadron "D" Lt. O'Grady, learnt of his promotion to Lt.-Cdr. and the news gave all the aircrew renewed hope for the future (with apologies to Lt.-Cdr. O'Grady). A further short exercise, "Magic Sword", involved low level operations over Germany and Holland as well as cross deck operating with U.S.S. *Independence*, on completion of which yet another disembarkation took place.

The stay ashore was short and uneventful and October found us once more with *Ark Royal* intent on a pleasant and constructive deployment in the Mediterranean. Palma, that well-known holiday spot, was visited with great joy and with the taste of local wines still wetting our lips we moved on to an area



## 892 SQUADRON

near Malta where more cross decking took place with U.S.S. *independence* and various weapon trials were carried out. The dreaded night landing spirit claimed another ramp strike but with no major injury to the crew, although the same could not be said of the aircraft. Malta was revisited where a squadron run took place and the whole island was available for walkabout 24 hours a day. But what's this? December already—it must be time for Christmas shopping in Gibraltar. And so it was. After abortive attempts by R.A.F. Hunters to strike the ship were rebuffed by the world's premier air defence squadron; the ship sailed majestically into Gibraltar for a pleasant shopping spree and a race to the top of the rock. Our solitary team came a good 75th (out of 78) but take heart reader, help, in the healthy form of Lt. Parker, was soon to be with us. Sailing from the Rock with happy thoughts of leave, the aircraft disembarked on the 6th December and took delight in decimating R.A.F. Chivenor's Hunters in A.C.M. before starting a more than welcome Christmas leave.

Two years down now and even more to go, the squadron returned from leave ready for whatever tasks lay in store. The efforts of the previous year were rewarded when at divisions held at Yeovilton on the 14th January, 1972, 892 Naval Air Squadron was presented with the Australia Shield (for operational readiness) by Rear-Admiral Treacher. Not long after this memorable event we were reunited with *Ark* intent on showing that we were worthy of the award. During a rough passage across the Atlantic the ship was diverted towards British Honduras which appeared to be under some duress from a bigger neighbour. However, the situation resolved itself without blows being struck and, after a few days' private flying in range of Key West, the ship headed North for the planned visit to New York. After the initial reluctance of *Ark Royal* to stay in one place in the Hudson River, libertymen found themselves having to brave biting winds and sub zero temperatures in order to go ashore. As is our way however, all made the best they could from the visit in less than ideal conditions. It was therefore not without some relief that on sailing we headed once more for the warmer climate in the Puerto Rico area, and, flying sorties of bombing and rocketing, we prepared ourselves for the forthcoming exercises. There was time for a banyan visit to Virgin Gorda; more details would be printed if only anyone could remember the occasion (what is planters' punch any-

way?)! Recreation complete we entered into another "Rimex" of the type carried out last year claiming one hit on an American A3 which was offered as target. Following the air to air work, hands were turned to the strike role at which we proved ourselves adept by sinking the hulk of an American destroyer by a combination of level and dive bombing attacks. At home industrial unrest necessitated our early departure from American waters and after a very rough passage home, the squadron disembarked to leave.

Having taken aircraft and aircrew out of suspension, preparations were made for our detachment to F.G.N.S. Schleswig where, along with other members of *Ark Royal's* air group, we were to take part in Anti F.P.B. exercises in the Kattegat and Skagerak areas. With half the squadron away on detachment, those remaining at Yeovilton were invited to assist in F.O.N.A.C.s inspection of that station. Divisions, flying, and evolutions were part of our effort, and all who witnessed it will no doubt remember Lt.-Cdr.



FOD



## 892 SQUADRON

O'Grady's demonstration of putting to four junior ratings.

It was a busy period, when both parts of a divided squadron worked hard, sometimes in frustrating conditions, to ensure our commitment was fulfilled wherever they were. When all had returned to Yeovilton we witnessed "the day of the helicopter" when droves of these aerodynamically impossible monsters descended on Yeovilton to take up residence; they filled the air with the beating of blades spreading F. O.D. on our clean line and putting dread in the hearts of all fixed wing men. Only when the sound of after burners once again filled our ears did we breath freely again, but they were here to stay and we, alas, were destined to move on. After further exchange visits between Landvisiau and Yeovilton, it was again time to take to the sea and by 12th June we were installed in *Ark*. A brief work-up was conducted before transit North to the Moray Firth for weaponry and air defence exercises. A small exercise "Trial Strength" involved 892 in providing air cover, but we were soon heading South again for a missile shoot and preparation for an O.R.I. Four aircraft were sent to Yeovilton for their Air Day practices, the rest remaining on board for the ship's short stay in Portsmouth. By the 10th of July we were back at sea, taking with us a few new faces, Lt.-Cdr. Hunneyball taking over as our new Commanding Officer, Lt.-Cdr. Howard our new A.E.O. and Lt. Farrell, U.S.N., our first all-American pilot who arrived to give comfort to his compatriot Lt. Lortscher, U.S.N., who had joined somewhat earlier.

After successfully participating in the ship's O.R.I. all aircraft were disembarked to Yeovilton only to witness the end of 767 Squadron and the disposal of its aircraft to Leuchars or Belfast. With the last of the courses complete we gained a few more air and ground crew and plunged into a concentrated A.C.M. phase which went very smoothly. Lt.-Cdr. Drake replaced Lt.-Cdr. Ellis as Senior Observer shortly before summer leave.

It did not take long to "get back in the saddle" and soon preparations were under way for our final departure from Yeovilton. It was a hard break to make after an association of so many years but the inevitable happened on 4th September 1972 when after a farewell fly past of twenty Yeovilton aircraft, aircrew manned aircraft and departed without hitch for the last time. We record our thanks for all that that station did for us and the fine farewell they gave us when the time came. There was much to do once

back on board for a massive exercise was looming in the form of "Strong Express", which was to involve over 300 ships and 1,000 aircraft, the biggest N. A.T.O. turnout for some years.

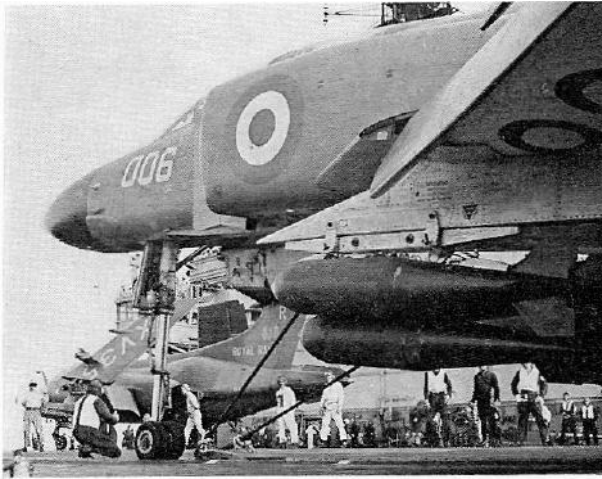
*Ark Royal* was soon in her operating area inside the Arctic Circle and with trade hungry phantoms on deck raring to go, the exercise began. If the "Orange" forces were slow to venture into the inhospitable sky surrounding our force, the same could not be said of the Reds who provided ample trade for our C.A.P. aircraft and posed for yards of interesting film including shots of their hitherto mysterious air to air refuelling. Fog prevented much flying in the latter half of the first week but alert aircraft were scrambled to intercept intruders in weather approaching absolute minima. The clear weather brought frequent Orange strikes by day and night and with continued Russian surveillance our job was formidable indeed.

The exercise over, the ship brought us to Rosyth for the "wash up" and very welcome shore time in the Edinburgh area. It was at this time that further contact was made with R.A.F. Leuchars and we were glad to extend some hospitality to our future neighbours.

The stay was short, however, and we were soon engaged in flying exercises some 40 miles East of our yet unvisited new home. A foreign visit now seemed a good idea and since Oslo was close at hand we soon found ourselves admiring the views that greet the sea-borne visitor to that fair capital. Expense, so everyone agrees, provided the biggest drawback to the visit but, for the culture minded or for those who wanted a nostalgic ride in a tramcar it was a pleasant visit made better by a frequent boat service over a short distance. On the 17th October 1972 we sailed once more for home and our first disembarkation to R.A.F. Leuchars. Only six aircraft flew ashore (we did not want to frighten them) and ground crews followed a few days later after an airlift from Thorney Island.

Having been officially welcomed by the Station Commander and been suitably briefed on all aspects of flying from Leuchars, there was a minimum delay before the Omega became a familiar feature in the sky around St. Andrews. On the ground the doubts and worries over accommodation proved largely groundless and the brief stay proved to be very fruitful giving reason in plenty for hope that R.A.F. Leuchars would be a first class station from which to operate. Too soon for some, however, the familiar

## 892 SQUADRON



*Armed and ready*

call of "down wind M.A.D.D.L." heralded the return to sea going life. Test flights were completed and the chacons packed after which the journey South began for an embarkation which was to include a variety of tasks including weaponry, night flying (as ever) and interceptions on E.C.M. Canberras. We were not long on board before the passage to our operating area was under way, everyone being happy to trade the dreary weather that haunts the Channel in Autumn for the more salubrious environment of the Mediterranean. When the brief flyex was over it was time for the long awaited trip to Barcelona where everyone who wanted to could have an excellent time. Bus tours were organised and exotic foods including squid and octopus provided a change in diet for the less squeamish diner, washed down of course, by glasses of fine and inexpensive local wine. The long boat ride to and from the landing proved tedious and the occasionally choppy water made the journey home after a good run somewhat of an ordeal. More flying lay ahead after this splendid visit and we were soon steaming along the coast of France to an operating area near Sardinia where efforts to qualify more night flyers had some success and continuation training in our other roles kept standards high.

There followed a confrontation between *Ark Royal* and *Forrestal* which provided many and varied targets for our C.A.P.s and further experience in cross deck operating which is always good value. December was by now upon us and we were not surprised to find ourselves steaming for Gibraltar for the usual

present run and another top of the rock race. Fortunes changed this year and Lt. Parker had little difficulty in leading our "A" team to victory and the squadron aircrew team was the first all-officer team home—even clocking a reasonable time considering their state of health. The shopping and sport complete, everyone was now looking forward to an enjoyable Christmas leave and a longish stay with their families.

Once leave was over and we were into the New Year, the last of the present commission, it did not take long to get the first aircraft airborne to re-fam the crews prior to an intensive and enjoyable period of A.C.M. We welcomed the first R.A.F. exchange crews to be initiated into the art of carrier flying, they having completed the post O.C.U. course at Leuchars. Night flying took its usual toll of the social life but with so many crews needing hours it was only to be expected. The A.C.M. continued and among our adversaries were Hunters from Yeovilton, Lightnings from Leuchars and the F8s, our old enemy, from Landivisiau.

Visitors to our quiet Scottish retreat included Captain Cassidi, Rear-Admiral Treacher and Captain Leppard of Yeovilton who presented the squadron with a model Heron to commemorate our long association with H.M.S. *Heron* (R.N.A.S. Yeovilton).

Once again embarkation loomed (the reader will appreciate that 892 Naval Air Squadron is probably the most portable squadron in the world and thoroughly proficient in the art of packing chacons, moving ground crew and ferrying aircraft) and by 25th January 1973 all our aircraft were once more on board. The task that lay ahead consisted of a week of A.I. practice before the twelve aircraft took on the might of the combined forces of the Portuguese air force aided by 360 Squadron Canberras and F.R.A.D.U. Hunters.

It was at this critical moment that flying was curtailed by lack of wind and an unserviceable propeller shaft, this sad situation eventually resolved itself and *Ark* steamed for Gibraltar (post-Christmas shopping?) where our sportsmen once again ran to victory up the rock. Again at sea the ship moved West towards Sardinia where the flyex included a prolonged exchange of aircraft between U.S.S. *Forrestal* and ourselves. The Americans sent us two Navy F4s and their Marines did likewise, one of the latter's aircraft defied all attempts to launch it when the time came to go home and it spent a two week period banished to the labyrinth that is the lower hangar,