



898 Pilots in joining rig
Open to Visitors, Cherbourg, July, 1957

Recovery of runaway Gannet
H.M.S. "Bulwark" at Cherbourg

Bulwark's Second Commission

ON WEDNESDAY, 20TH MARCH, 1957, H.M.S. *Bulwark* recommissioned whilst still in dockyard hands. In his address to the ship's company that afternoon the Captain outlined the future programme of the ship as far as it was known, adding significantly that after December, 1957, our programme was "anybody's guess."

There was still much to be done by the dockyard, but the new arrivals were able to settle in and find their bearings in the ship during the comparatively calm though noisy refit routine, and a five-day week became almost second nature. Easter leave came and went, but it was not until we were out of dockyard hands, and looking more respectable, that the official Recommissioning Service was held. The Chaplain of the Fleet came to officiate at this, which was held on the flight deck on the sunny afternoon of Wednesday, 12th June, and at which the congregation of wives and relatives was one of the largest of such gatherings in the history of Portsmouth Dockyard. After the service there was tea and dancing in the hangar.

Two days later, our scheduled departure for preliminary steaming and shake-down before embarking the squadrons was delayed for twenty-four hours, owing to a blown joint in the superheated steam line. This gave much pleasure to the Pompey natives, who gained an extra night ashore, and much extra work to the engineers to enable us to sail on time the following day, Saturday, 15th June. It was gloriously sunny, and while aviation spirit was embarked in St. Helen's Roads the flight deck was littered with sun-bathers. Others took the opportunity of getting in some sailing.

The following weeks were taken up with full power, steering trials, radar and gunnery calibration, with other technical try-outs. We found time, however, to pay a surprise visit to Bognor Regis, where a humorous remark by an officer resulted in an amusing article and photograph in a Sunday paper alleging that we had mistaken Bognor for Eastbourne, with the title, "Has anyone seen this ship?"

The following week-end found us back in Portsmouth before putting to sea to embark 891 Sea Venom Squadron, 820 Gannet Squadron and 849 Squadron "D" Flight (Skyraiders), which arrived on board on Tuesday, 25th June. Three days later we met *Ark Royal* at sea, returning from her visit to America, and from her embarked our other squadron, 898 (Seahawks), stores equipment and personnel were transferred by helicopter in less than one hour, a move which would have taken about three days from Brawdy (898's parent station) to Portsmouth.

On Saturday, 29th June, we anchored off Milford Haven, which gave us the opportunity of establishing a liaison with R.N.A.S. Brawdy and H.M.S. *Harrier*, who provided a varied sports and social programme for our benefit.

After leaving Milford Haven and about to begin night flying, a large number of cases of unserviceable fuel gauges in our Gannets and jets were discovered, due to water contamination of the Avcat system. All Gannet and jet flying was cancelled to enable the aircraft tanks to be drained and the ship's Avcat system flushed, until it seemed that the menace had been eliminated. Limited flying was resumed, but symptoms again appeared; flying was cancelled and the "Londonderry" Exercise arranged for the following week postponed, while the ship anchored in Bangor Bay, Northern Ireland, to carry out the lengthy task of purging the entire Avcat system.

In Bangor Bay a minor sensation was caused when (the ship still at anchor) a Gannet was catapulted. It broke from the catapult and trundled into the sea, where the three occupants were rescued by excited holiday-makers who had been clustering round the ship in an assortment of small boats, all of which escaped the crash. To the uninformed onlooker our behaviour must have seemed eccentric in the extreme: *Bulwark* arrived at Bangor, anchored, "ditched" a Gannet into the sea, weighed her anchor and sailed off to Belfast.

We arrived in Belfast later that day for our period of self-maintenance. A most enjoyable visit—Belfast regards *Bulwark* as one of its own ships and always welcomes her "home." Here the source of the Avcat contamination was found and eliminated finally and completely, to the relief of all.

Sailing from Belfast was delayed a day because of high winds, and we eventually got away on Sunday, 15th July, for Exercise "Bullcan," our postponed A.S. work-up. After its completion and some further flying, we arrived at Cherbourg for our first foreign visit on 25th July. It is too small a town happily to absorb so large a ship's company, to say nothing of *Salisbury's* (who was with us), and the people who most enjoyed themselves were the lucky few who managed to make the trip to Paris for the week-end.

On 30th July we sailed from Cherbourg and, in spite of adverse weather conditions, were able to complete some deck-landing trials for the French *Fouga* trainer aircraft. Then, after an unexpected and most pleasant week-end at St. Peter's Port, Guernsey, we arrived back in Portsmouth on Tuesday, 6th August, for summer leave.

On 28th August we were again at sea, taking our families for the day, and afterwards embarked 845 Helicopter Squadron in place of 898's Seahawks. Immediately we sailed north and, after a brief visit to R.N.A.S. Lossiemouth, and further day and night flying, joined the rest of the carrier squadron at Rosyth on 7th September. In company with *Eagle* and *Ark Royal*, intensive day and night flying was carried out until arrival at the Clyde on 13th to join the rest of the N.A.T.O. forces assembling there for Exercise "Strikeback."



Leaving Harbour - Families' Day
 "Touch and go!
 Catapulting a Fouga
 P.T. in "Strikeback"

The singer, David Whitfield, on board
 Tea-time
 Gannet landing while fuelling astern
 Physical jerks dispel Asian 'flu



C.-in-C., Home Fleet, meeting guests
at reception in Rotterdam

"Weather" in the Azores

H.M.S. "Bulwark" in the Forth





Admiralty Bay, Bequia
Home Fleet entering Bequia
Salute to F.O.F.H., St. George, Grenada



Laughing Water, Jamaica
Kingston, Jamaica

This imposing fleet of about eighty warships sailed for the exercise on 17th.

"Strikeback" took us well into the Arctic Circle. The weather was clear and sunny, but we were soon hit by the ravages of Asian 'flu, which took so vast a toll of victims that messes had to be converted into emergency isolation wards. All the ventilation was turned on full power, and P.T. was organised each day on the flight deck in an effort to stave off what came to be known as the "dreaded lurgy."

As the exercise drew to its close the number of victims dwindled, and on 30th September we went back to Belfast, much to the indignation of the Pompey natives. But we made the best of it, a ship's dance was held and there was a full sports programme which included a cross-country race, inter-divisional soccer, hockey and rugby competitions. We were sorry to sail on 11th October.

We now turned south and managed to fit in a very quick and unannounced visit to Penzance whilst *en route* to our rendezvous with ships taking part in Exercise "Rum Tub." At the end of this exercise the ship achieved her biggest roll to date, 27 degrees! The week-end found us anchored off Bangor to give the "natives" a final run ashore.

The most attractive foreign visit of this part of the commission followed when, having disembarked 845 Squadron off Spithead, we steamed to Rotterdam, arriving on 22nd October. Most people found the Dutch excellent hosts and the city welcoming and offering plenty of scope for enjoyment. We left Holland, had a brief exercise in the Channel, disembarked 820 Squadron and returned to Portsmouth for the long-awaited self-maintenance period from 6th to 16th November.

The ten days soon passed, 898 Squadron was re-embarked, and we welcomed 80 I Squadron of Seahawks, which together formed the main part of our air group during the next exercise.

After gathering at Rosyth, we sailed for Exercise "Phoenix II," which lasted five days. Post-exercise discussions took place at Rosyth. We disembarked our squadrons whilst *en route* for Portsmouth, where we arrived on 29th November.

After Christmas leave and a hectic storing programme we sailed from Portsmouth on Friday, 10th January, and embarked 845 Helicopter Squadron. Bad weather postponed the embarkation of 801, 891 and 849 "D" Squadrons until the Sunday. With the air group successfully aboard there followed a week's intensive flying work-up in the Channel. Opportunity was taken during this period to pay a quick visit to Plymouth to give the West Country natives a last run ashore.

Wednesday, 15th January, saw us at Portland where we joined the Home Fleet. It is sad to reflect that the gathering at Portland may well be the last occasion the Fleet will assemble in that form.

Two days later the Home Fleet sailed for the West Indies. At last the cruise had really begun! Immediately the inevitable passage exercises began,

with the faithful Skyraiders doing the honours, bringing last-minute mail.

By Tuesday, 21st January, we had reached the Azores and warmer weather. The Fleet passed quite close to the undersea volcano from which dense clouds of steam poured. This was caused by the sea breaking through the cone of the volcano. Of course the "choppers" were able to get an even closer view.

The Azores interlude was soon shattered by four days' bad weather which made flying impossible for long periods, although the choppers did manage to continue to make their daily bread delivery.

By Sunday, however, the sea had moderated and the weather was hot and sunny. It was not long before the flight deck began to look like a Butlin's holiday camp, with rows of sun-worshippers; groups of deck-games fanatics, playing different games in opposite directions, even the circuit training enthusiasts managed to find their way to the "sun-deck" from their usual secluded haunt on the Quarterdeck.

Two days later the Home Fleet dispersed, each ship or group making its way independently to its first port of call. *En route* to Trinidad, we called at Admiralty Bay, Bequia, where we took the opportunity to repair the ravages of the Atlantic crossing. After taking the usual anti-shark precautions, hands were piped to bathe in glorious blue water where the temperature was 80° F.

When our fly-past of nine Seahawks, eight Sea Venoms and eight choppers had been re-embarked we anchored at Port of Spain on Friday, 31st January. The display was well received, although one testy gentleman wrote to a local paper complaining about this display of might by the Americans!

Unfortunately, we were anchored about three miles off shore, and although extra boats were provided, the thirty-minute boat trip in the broiling sun was quite an ordeal. However, it did not seem to deter many people from landing, although some hesitated about the return trip!

Ashore the recreational facilities were very good; dances and visits were arranged, as well as a full sporting programme which included cricket, soccer, rugby, shooting and swimming. To cap it all the West Indies v. Pakistan Test Match opened and, due to kindness of local cricket enthusiasts, many of the ship's company were able to enjoy the first two impressive days. The Americans at the U.S. naval base at Chaguaramas invited groups of men to spend forty-eight hours at the base and also arranged boat trips to the lovely Scotland Bay, where the bathers were provided with soft drinks from their P.X.

While we were here, the Bishop of Trinidad, the Right Rev. F. N. Chamberlain, C.B., O.B.E., F.K.C., M.A., formerly Chaplain of the Fleet, made his first renewed contact with the Royal Navy since his elevation to the episcopate when he confirmed several candidates on board and cele-



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Canadian Banshee cross-operating
First Lord and Governor of Bermuda arriving on board

H.M.S. "Bulwark" berthing at "Shearwater" jetty
"Tracker" doing "touch and go"

brated the Holy Eucharist at which they made their first communion.

Among the many visitors to the ship during our stay was the renowned politician Sir Alexander Bustamante.

The ship soon caught the limbo and calypso fever, and one or two stalwart members of the ship's company are reputed to have "limboed" under a bar only nine inches above the ground. Calypsos were also the order of the day, and the M.S.O. produced an excellent one for ship's use, and we also sent a farewell calypso signal.

Reluctantly we sailed from Trinidad on Thursday, 6th February, having thoroughly enjoyed our stay at the "calypso isle."

A period of intensive day and night flying was inevitable, and after four days of this we anchored off Cannouan Island, Windward Isles, for a well-deserved respite.

The island has some excellent beaches and tropical routine was worked to enable each watch to spend an afternoon and evening ashore. The island's total population was something about seven hundred, which meant that with the daily bathing parties of around the eight hundred mark, we were more than doubling it.

It was the first occasion that one of H.M. ships had visited the island, and when the ship was opened to visitors more than one-third of the local inhabitants came on board. To a people who had only seen cars in picture magazines, our advent with helicopters caused quite a sensation. In fact, one of our helicopters was able to take the local postmaster, who was seriously ill, to hospital in the near-by island of St. Vincent.

Quite large "banyan" parties spent the night ashore. One of the large squadron banyans even managed to get a dance organised in their honour (at the cost of a few towels, which had a high market value here). For some, the visit was not so happy, for the sick bay soon became overwhelmed by the large number of cases of heat-exhaustion and severe sun-burn—aggravated, no doubt, by the fact that the local rum was practically dark-coloured methylated spirits!

On the afternoon of the 13th we sailed from Cannouan, and on the following Saturday staged a fly-past and demonstration off St. George, Grenada. After taking the Governor and Lady Deverell to sea to watch some flying, we joined up with the Home Fleet and anchored at Bequia that same evening, where life was quite peaceful after our rather hectic programme. A sailing regatta was held and swimming and banyan-parties were landed, although again difficulties were experienced with boats and it rapidly became a question of first come, first served. Those ashore even experienced difficulty in getting back to the ship. A large beer bar was established on one of the beaches, and 845 Squadron organised a splendid banyan complete with calypso band!

On the evening of Monday, 17th February, we left the Home Fleet to make our way independently

to Jamaica. Preceded by a fly-past of all squadrons, we anchored off Kingston closer inshore than at Trinidad, and the boat trip only took about fifteen minutes. There were, moreover, two very good covered landing-places at our disposal, both near the centre of the town.

The ship was overwhelmed with hospitality, and every day large numbers landed to go on visits and tours, play games or go swimming. The ship's soccer team did very well against a team composed of the pick of the island, for although we lost 2-0, we had an excellent write-up in the local papers.

Federation Day was celebrated rather quietly; the ship dressed overall and a gun salute was fired. Although we were all very sorry to leave "the Island in the Sun" whose hospitality had been widespread, unstinted and more than generous, at the same time we were glad of the opportunity to catch up on lost sleep when we sailed on Friday, 28th February.

The following day we launched a fly-past over Grand Turk Island and a small visiting party led by the Commander was landed. In the meantime, flying training continued until we joined company with the Canadian Atlantic Fleet and our old friend H.M.C.S. *Bonaventure*. Before we anchored at Bermuda on Thursday, 6th March, we were able to rehearse some cross-operating, R.C.N. Tracker aircraft landing on board, while Banshees did touch and go landings.

Our berth at Bermuda was in the Great Sound — as usual, thirty minutes' boat trip inshore. Here, however, our boats were supplemented by what looked rather like retired Mississippi paddle steamers, two-tiered and with wooden balconies. The visit proved to be a quiet one for most people for, apart from the boat trip, the prices ashore were beyond most pockets. However, we were successful in the sporting line, winning the King's Cup for soccer and also the hockey cup in the Home Fleet competitions.

The Home and Canadian Fleets sailed from Bermuda on 10th March for the first large combined exercise between the two navies since the war. This exercise was given the title "Mayroy I." Although only lasting for four days, it included every type of exercise possible and interest was further enlivened by reports of unidentified submarines in the area — a concerted effort was made against the latter, but there were no sightings by our own aircraft.

On Friday, 14th March, with the two fleets in formation, we steamed into the historic port of Halifax. While the rest of the fleet went alongside the Canadian dockyard close to the centre of the town, we went alongside the \$1,000,000 jetty at *Shearwater*, the first carrier to do so. As we entered harbour, a humorous announcer on the local radio programme advised the locals against swimming in the harbour "because of the large number of naval ships entering"; this warning was followed by the weather news, which warned that the "snow flurries" were likely to continue!



F.O.A.C. visits the ship off Malta
Leaving The Rock

Dockyard again at Gibraltar
Helicopters in formation
Suez, 1958—all the way this time

Although Halifax was covered with a blanket of melting snow, this reception was more than made up for by the hospitality of the Canadian people, and especially the members of R.C.N.A.S. *Shearwater*, who threw open their establishment for us for the whole of our stay. A large sporting programme including some rather unusual competitive games was organised, and everyone had a thoroughly good time.

We sailed on Tuesday, 18th March, for Exercise "Mayroy II," and after three days' exercises we were detached from the combined fleets on 21st March, the signals staff being kept very busy receiving and sending farewell messages of good will from the Home Fleet.

An uneventful passage ended with Gibraltar breakwater at 0800 on 26th March and fifteen minutes later had entered No. I dock for a ten-day period of self-maintenance. Some of the more fortunate of the ship's company were able to have their wives with them during the stay. There being a great deal of work to be done in a short time, a strenuous period of store ship followed. In six days about 340 tons of stores, representing two months' expenditure of naval and air stores, victuals, wardroom wines and minerals, beer and N.A.A.F.I. stores, were embarked and stowed.

A sports programme was also arranged, but due to the tight programme, it was not possible to hold many games. M.F.V. trips to Tangier were organised, and those with passes or passports were able to see a bullfight over the border.

As our visit covered Holy Week and Easter, a number of officers and ratings attended the Holy Week services each evening in the Cathedral, and on Easter morning the Cathedral overflowed with its resident congregation together with large numbers from *Bulwark* and their families. The Bishop of Gibraltar preached, and afterwards he and the Dean lunched on board.

On the afternoon of Easter Monday we sailed for our long passage to the Far East. Two days later, the flag officer aircraft-carriers, Vice-Admiral A. N. C. Bingley, C.B., O.B.E., arrived on board for a short visit, staying overnight. Flying continued with A.S. exercises for the choppers, and air-to-air firing and live bombing practice off Malta. After disembarking F.O.A.C. on the 10th April we continued east, arriving off Port Said at 1600 on Saturday, 12th April.

Soon a collection of seedy-looking individuals in ill-fitting uniforms of all descriptions came on board. These were followed by Jim Cairo, and in a very short time the flight deck looked like a bazaar, and the gully - gully man was performing his incredible tricks to a delighted audience.

We led the convoy and entered the Canal at 0100 on Sunday, 13th April. The passage was not entirely uneventful, for a small jar was felt in the early hours of the morning and investigation by divers, when we were anchored in the Great Bitter Lake, showed that we had slightly bent the tip of a blade on each screw on some obstruction during



**"Do you know what's worrying the hands,
Commander"**

our passage. While at anchor we were entertained to a small flying display by Egyptian MiG 7's. We finally cleared the Canal at 1930 and made for Aden.

At 0330 the following day, many of the ship's company were woken by a crash and a scraping noise — we were in collision with an Egyptian ship, the S.S. *Talodi*. She had struck us a glancing blow on the starboard quarter, piercing the hull in one or two places. *Talodi* had her bows flattened about 15 feet, lost her anchors and her foremast, and the fact that she was carrying about 120 Mecca pilgrims added to the confusion! After ensuring that the *Talodi* was still seaworthy we went on our way, our own damage being superficial and well above the waterline. One officer was reputed to have been found still asleep in his bunk just a few inches away from where the bulkhead of his cabin was pierced, and was most indignant when woken by the damage control parties!

We arrived at Aden on 16th April, and immediately work began to repair the damage. While this was going on, those members of the ship's company who had their vaccinations in date were able to get a quick "rabbit run" ashore before we sailed at 1730 on the following day for Singapore. The independent flying was interrupted for a mail trip to Ceylon and again by the intensive deck sports programme held on the flight deck. Recreational training — "R.T. Games" — were organised for the whole ship's company, and once again the appearance of the flight deck resembled a large gym! Although these periods were compulsory and held in working hours, once they had made the effort to get up to the flight