





HMS EAGLE

1969-1970



**THE FLAG OFFICER, CARRIERS AND
AMPHIBIOUS SHIPS**

**REAR ADMIRAL M. F. FELL,
C.B., D.S.O., D.S.C. and Bar**



**CAPTAIN J. D.
TREACHER, ROYAL
NAVY**

FOREWORD by The Captain

This book is a record of the past 15 months - not a full Commission but a period which has covered a wide variety of tasks, from our main operational role as a strike carrier, to being Flagship for the Commander-in-Chief when Her Majesty the Queen presented a new Colour to the Western Fleet.

Aircraft carrier operations are the most complex and demanding of any undertaken by the armed forces today. Their success depends as much on all those who provide the essential support below decks as it does on the aircrew and the flight deck parties. Each and every one of you has played his vital part in the team effort required to operate our aircraft efficiently and safely.

I have been proud to command such a splendid ship and her ship's company who have responded so well to every call made upon them. I take this opportunity to thank you all for pulling your full weight and to send you and your families best wishes for the future.

John Treacher.

By Sir John Bush, Knight Commander of the Most Honourable Order of the Bath, Distinguished Service Cross and two Bars, Admiral in Her Majesty's Fleet, and Commander-in-Chief of Her Majesty's Ships and Vessels employed and to be employed in the Western Fleet.

H.M.S. EAGLE - Commissioning Order

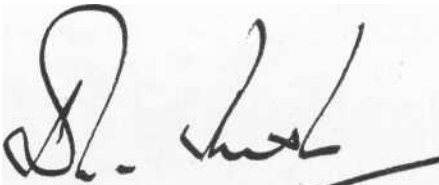
The Admiralty Board on behalf of the Defence Council having directed that Her Majesty's Ship Eagle is to be recommissioned at Devonport on 6th January, 1969 or as soon afterwards as circumstances permit, you are to proceed forthwith to commission her for a General Service Commission.

On commissioning you will be under my full command. During this period you are to bring to my immediate notice, and to the notice of the appropriate local authority, anything which gives cause for dissatisfaction with the ship or any part of her and any other matters of importance, in particular those relating to the Welfare of the Ship's Company.

Given under my hand this 19th day of December, 1968.

To: Captain J. D. Treacher, Royal Navy

Copy to The Ministry of Defence, (Navy)
The Commander-in-Chief, Plymouth



ADMIRAL

With these words, read by the Captain to the ship's company, their families, friends and a host of distinguished guests, H.M.S. *Eagle* was Commissioned on Wednesday, 5th March 1969.

HOW IT BEGAN

Of course, for many of us, it had all started quite a while before. From early October 1968, the biggest and best bird class carrier had been in Devonport for docking and the rectification of a multitude of defects. For a couple of months we had enjoyed the hospitality of H.M.S. *Drake* and had kept ourselves fit by tramping to and from the ship four times a day. In early January we moved back on board and said goodbye to most of those remaining from the last Commission who did not have the good fortune to remain longer, and the new ship's company began to arrive.

For many, particularly all those for whom this was their first ship, *Eagle* must have been a sorry sight. Two months in dry dock, with no-one living on board, had left their mark and with a great deal of work still to do there was little enough time to worry about cleaning her up. But cleaned up she was. Quickly messdecks were transformed from dull and cheerless boxes into places fit for habitation - well almost - and began to acquire all those various touches and individual ornamentations which make all the difference. More slowly the maze of dockyard clutter began to be removed; the flight deck became revealed as a relatively flat and open expanse after looking like a mining construction site for most of the winter; acres of grubby, oily hardboard were found to conceal decks which were quite clean and colourful in places; smoke came from the funnel, machinery began to hum, our own electricity became available (at least from time to time) - in short *Eagle* was getting back into business. And so to -

COMMISSIONING DAY

The Gods clearly knew that it was a great occasion. After weeks of miserable weather, 5th March dawned as bright and clear as any day one could wish for. A trifle cool but the sun shone and wives and sweethearts trooped aboard looking gay and colourful and in festive mood. Distinguished guests were legion. The Lord Mayor of Exeter with his Lady and retainers and no less than 11 admirals including the First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Michael Le Fanu, G.C.B., D.S.C., himself a former *Eagle* commanding officer and joined on this occasion by six other former *Eagle* captains.

Few could fail to be moved by the simple ceremony and service held in the hangar. The White Ensign was hoisted as the band played 'God Save the Queen', the ancient acts of Dedication and of Blessing of the Ship were spoken, the Captain addressed us all and the commissioning cake was cut. The seventh Commission of H.M.S. *Eagle* officially began.



Families streamed aboard



Captains of Eagle



... and Admirals



The Captain addresses the Ship's Company



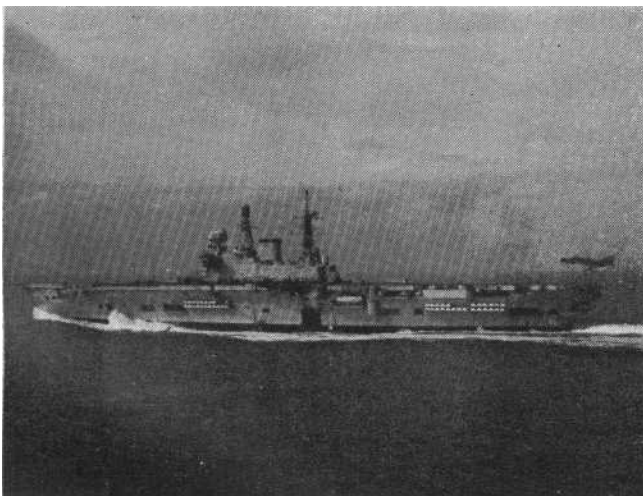
Preparing to cut the cake

Two days later we sailed for sea trials, Friday, 7th March setting the precedent for weekend departures which became the custom of the Commission. Another glorious sunny day imparted just the right sense that all was right with the world and indeed almost everything was right. One by one the various systems and pieces of equipment were checked out and the results of the months of work in the dockyard became apparent. The steamies delightedly found that they could achieve more revolutions and make the ship go faster than at any time since before the

modernisation started in 1959 - a great tribute to the efficiency and skill of both dockyard and ship's company work during the D.E.D. The airey-fairies couldn't wait to get started and soon aircraft were coming and going as if we had been in business for months. Some of our own squadron people came to have a look at us and to get in some deck landing practice and a few embarked and provided the aircraft for the flight deck teams to play with. The weather turned a bit sour but all the essential tasks were achieved. During this period the first

Royal Navy Phantoms appeared in the sky over a British carrier and for the first time a British deck reverberated with the roar of reheat Spey engines as the first touch and go landings were carried out.

After a fortnight or so of this we returned to Devonport and had about 10 days to put right all those things which had been found to need attention before we could get down to the serious business of squadron embarkation and our first work up.



First Phantom approach



... and roller



Junior Leaders

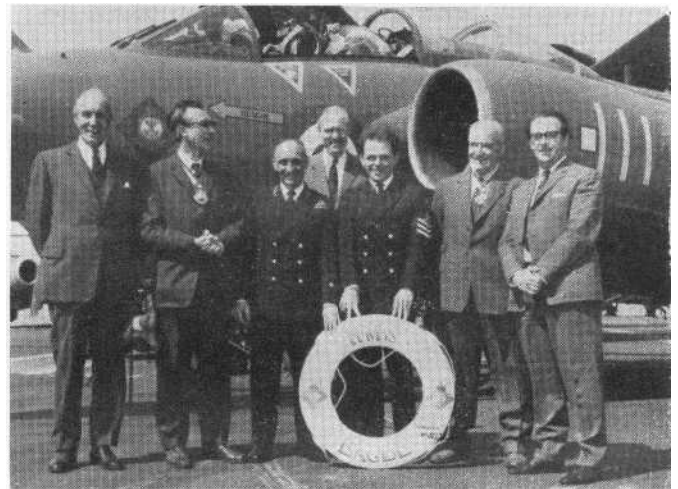


Sir Alec Rose

VISITORS



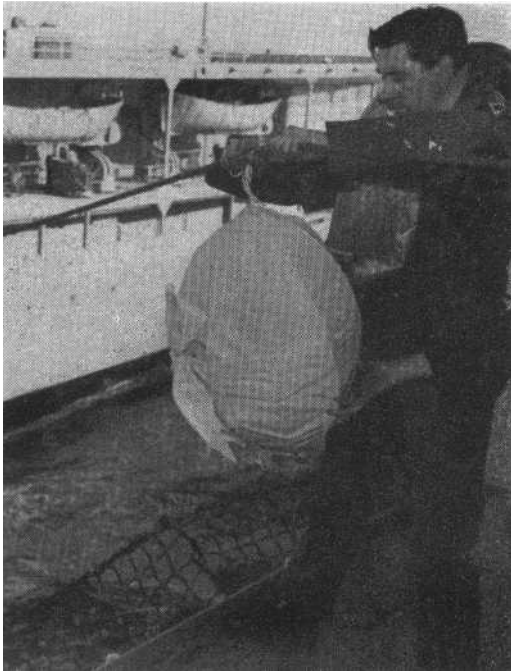
Lifeboatman



Senior leaders, Lord Mayor of Exeter with retainers



W.R.A.C.



Easter egg for Olmeda



Seacats whooshed. Russian trawler in background

WORKING UP

Even *Eagle* couldn't sail on Good Friday so we sailed a couple of days earlier and embarked our Vixens, Wessex's and Gannets on Maundy Thursday, when our Home Air Command friends ought to have been on leave, and made leisurely passage up the Irish Sea and around North Scotland en route for the Moray Firth. Splendid weather, and all over the world people were paying good money for Easter travel of various sorts and we had our own free Easter cruise. Cuning 800 Squadron delayed their embarkation until well after the 'holiday' but soon the skies over N. Scotland were thick with aircraft. Mountain and glen echoed the roar of jet engines, innocent fishermen were surrounded with whirlybirds furiously dipping their whatsits and a not so innocent 'trawler' busily followed in our wake trying hard to appear inconspicuous. Bombs dropped, rockets fired, Seacats whooshed, guns banged and flares glowed.

Some of these even struck their targets and great was the Gunnery Department's joy at a pilotless aircraft and a sleeve target downed in the same afternoon. Perhaps that 'trawler' was not quite so bold after she had witnessed a few Seacat firings.

After two intensive weeks, during which the Flag Officer, Carriers and Amphibious Ships came to have a look at us, we anchored off Lossiemouth for three days' well-earned rest and some exercise ashore. But not for the first time the treachery of these northern waters frustrated the intention. The first wave got ashore all right but it was soon clear that boatwork was to be far from easy. Near swamping of an officer's boat caused cancellation of

further traffic - those ashore were ashore, those on board stayed - and so it was for the weekend. On Sunday evening rising winds made a getaway most desirable so everyone was recalled. On Monday morning one of the greatest heli-lifts in history transported nearly a thousand officers and men back to the ship and we put to sea with almost everyone on board. The next 10 days in the Moray Firth produced hail, snow, gales, rain, fog and high seas but very little serious interruption to the programme was experienced and after finally landing some Scottish natives for leave on 27th April we completed the work up and turned south into the North Sea bound for Portsmouth.

FOCAS came to have a look at us

Wessex 3, wet winching





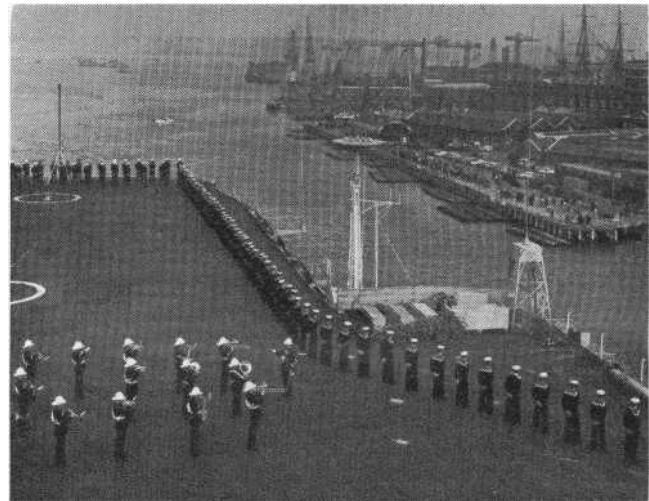
A bit heavy ...



... and not quite straight

PORTSMOUTH

It had been several years since *Eagle* had been in Portsmouth and for the large number of Pompey natives this promised to be the only time during the Commission when they could be 'up-homers' every night. Ten days' leave to everyone went all too quickly and by 19th May we were all back on the job in order to be ready to sail for our final work up period.



Portsmouth - almost there



Families came aboard

We sailed, of course, on Friday, 23rd May, embarked the squadrons in the Channel and this time headed for the south Irish Sea. Our objective was a last burst of effort to bring us to top line efficiency for our ORI by the Flag Officer, Carriers and Amphibious Ships.

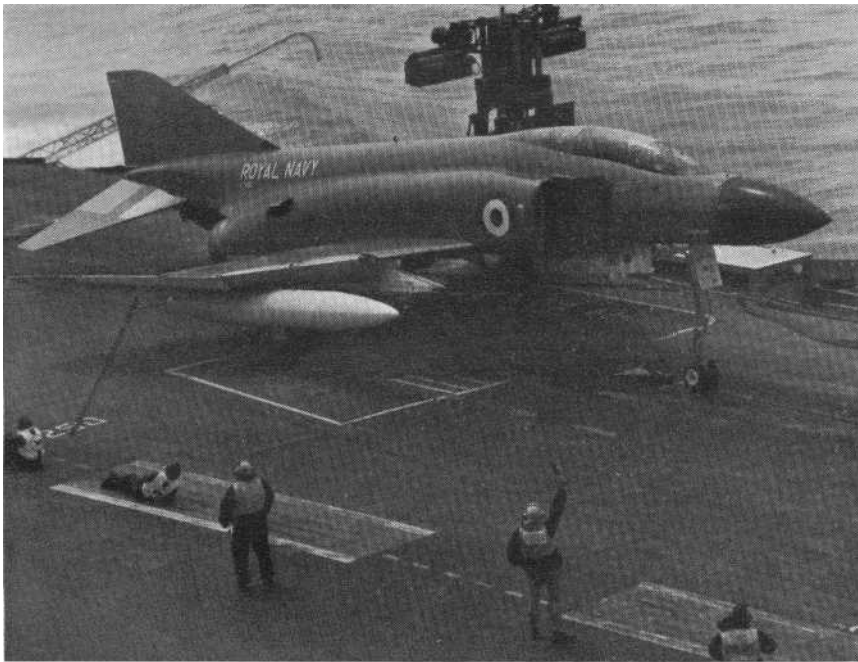
We were at sea with a job to do but someone had forgotten that it was Whit weekend and the Great British Public were on holiday. Some hundreds of these had converged on that blissfully peaceful and scenic spot in western Pembrokeshire known as Nolton Haven in St. Brides Bay - to lie and dream in the sun, to sail, to fish, to bathe and to enjoy the quiet serenity of that favoured backwater. But at 0730 on Sunday morning the air was filled with screaming jets and bombs and rockets - or so we were led to believe - and within a couple of hours we really were National News. The Battle of

St. Brides Bay was on. It was nobly fought on both sides - the weighty sophistication of Britain's greatest warship against a handful of unarmed warriors in rowing boats. No battle honour recording this encounter will hang proudly on *Eagle's* quarterdeck, for the enemy had a powerful ally - the British Press - and the mighty *Eagle* was defeated - retired to lick her wounds and peace again descended on St. Brides Bay.



Evening calm

THIRD WORK UP AND OPERATIONAL READINESS INSPECTION

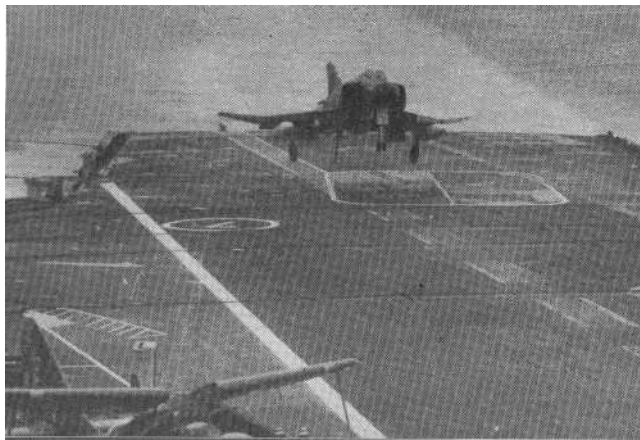


First Phantom launch

And so to the ORI. A great effort by everyone and somehow (nearly) everything went right. The staff seemed pleased and FOCAS said we had passed, so once again the *Eagle* was fully fledged.

Not that we were allowed to relax. Back to the Channel we went to embark the Imperial Defence College for a short visit and the Phantom Trials team. The next two weeks were to be spent in providing the deck for the series of landings and launches necessary to find out if it had been worth spending all that money on *Ark Royal* after all. The first arrested landing of a Phantom in an R.N. ship occurred on Monday, 2nd June and the following morning the first launch was successfully accomplished.

... and recovery



1000th deck landing. Lt. Cullen with Mid. Tybjerg cutting the cake



ATLANTIC CROSSING

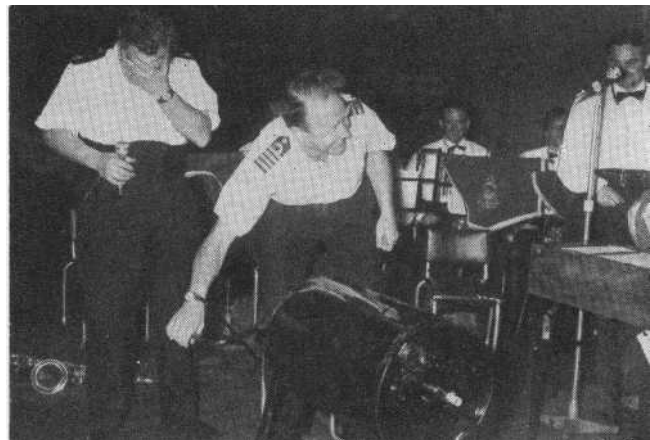
After three months of hard work in home waters the prospect of relaxation in a foreign port was eagerly looked forward to. On Monday, 16th June, after a welcome weekend in Plymouth Sound, the 'Grey Ghost of Lyme Bay' at last pointed her bows purposefully westwards, and as the leader of a somewhat scattered force commenced the westbound Atlantic crossing. For many this would be a first foreign visit; for many more the first sight of the mighty United States of America - and for quite a few the first taste of open ocean and venture into waters unsheltered by nearby land. But after a couple of days of strong winds and ocean swell sea legs were rapidly acquired and the doctor's administrations to the very few were no longer required. The quarterly full power trial helped to push us well on our way and we settled down to a comparatively quiet passage with no flying to disturb us. It began to warm up and very soon 'bronzy-bronzy' was the order of the day as pale white skins concentrated on



Purposefully westwards

getting the maximum exposure before meeting the expected fierce glare off the Virginian coast. Perhaps too, the prospect of all those suntanned Venuses to be encountered (some thought) on the great wide beaches, prompted not a few to ensure that they could rival the equally bronzed local Adonises.

A balmy, but breezy Saturday evening on the flight deck under the stars provided the setting for the Commission's first SODZOPRA. As usual, talent emerged from all sorts of unexpected places, a good time was had by all and the fine traditions of this noble form of culture were well maintained. The first 'Ship's Grand Draw' provided prize money of nearly £1000 and the Captain drew the tickets and made sure that it was well distributed. First prize of £300 went to the NAAFI barber - but even so the price of haircuts went up a few weeks later



The Captain drew the tickets

THE UNITED STATES



Norfolk Va. Committee of welcome



Protection

And so to the balmy waters of the western Atlantic off the coasts of Virginia and North Carolina and to four days of intensive flying before entering the great naval base of Norfolk, Virginia.

On Friday, 27th June we passed Cape Henry and in sweltering heat, nosed our way round to Norfolk for a seven-day run ashore. The advance publicity for Norfolk had been by no means good - 'Too big, too far to town, too much U.S. Navy, too expensive, too difficult to buy a drink, etc., etc.', but to most of this the lie was very soon given, the far-famed American hospitality conquering all. It was soon apparent that there was plenty to do to suit all tastes - from just lying in the sun watching the world go by to a trip to Washington D.C. or to the fleshpots of New York City. 'Halo Tours' under the energetic, if not financially profitable

management of Padre John Davies, did a roaring trade and sold a total of some 3000 coach seats for the various sight-seeing tours. Williamsburg can hardly have seen so many Englishmen since the days when it was the capital of the North American colonies. And all the time the kindness of our hosts with their uncounted, individual and personal acts of hospitality, was creating and cementing new friendships and much goodwill. On 4th July, as all over town Britons and Americans celebrated Independence Day, who would have believed that not 200 years before British warships had bombarded Norfolk, leaving, still to be seen, a cannon ball embedded in the wall of the old church.

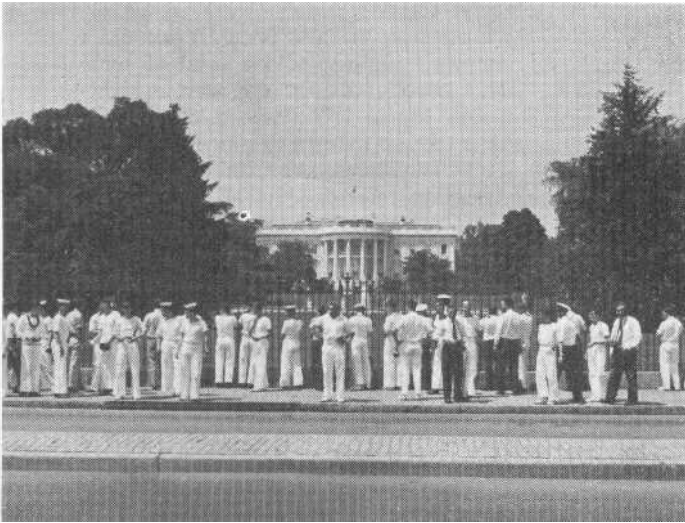


Canada Day

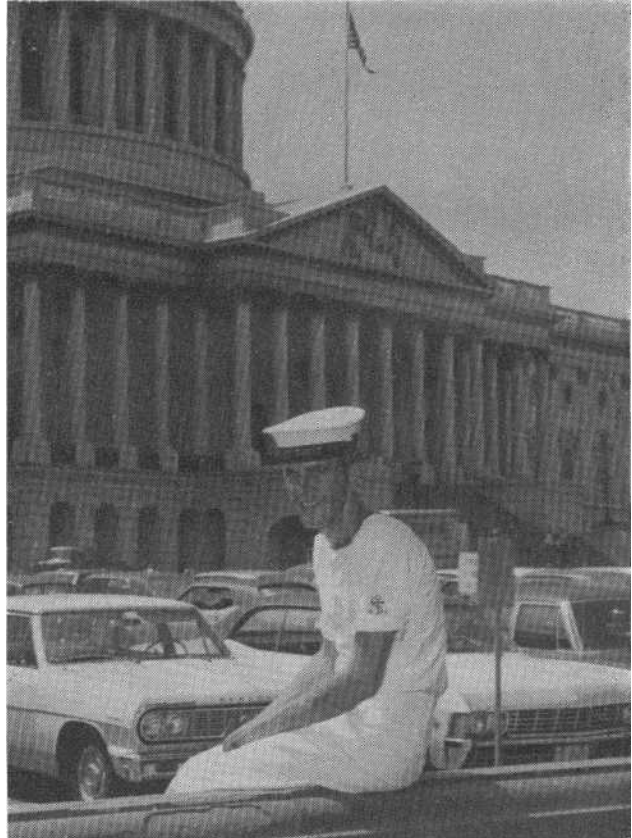


SIGHTSEEING

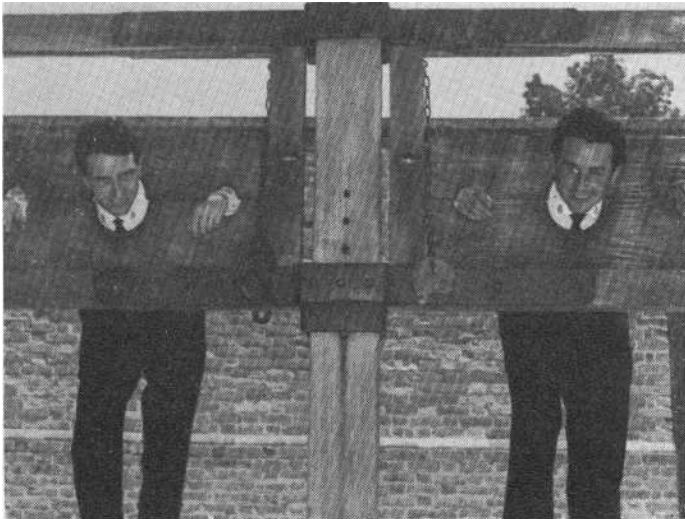
The well-dressed Englishman goes ashore



The White House



The Capitol



Williamsburg

Saturday, 5th July saw us regretfully on our way; tired but happy, and with a few days' respite as we sailed northwards to our second port of call. A day or two's flying enabled the aviators to keep their hand in and by dawn on Wednesday 9th we had rounded Cape Cod and were heading for Boston, Massachusetts.