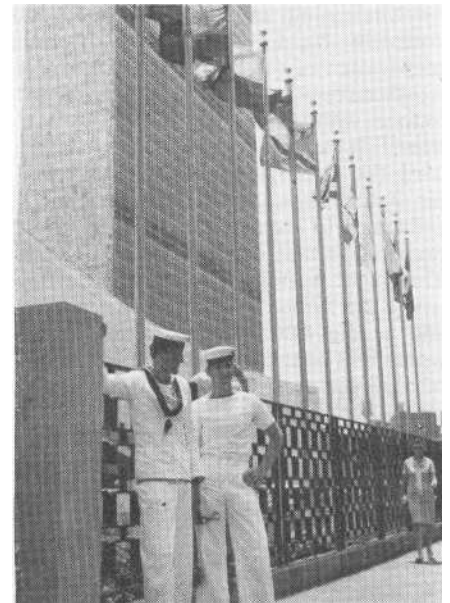


That this was to be no ordinary visit was soon clear, as, threading our way through the islands into Boston Harbour the welcome began. Fire-floats with hose-pipes spraying, floating bands with bag-pipes playing, aeroplanes towing banners of welcome - the Bostonians were obviously out to make it quite clear that they were pleased to see us. And memorable it was. Where everyone went and what everyone did will never be known. Trips here, there and everywhere, unending 'up-homers' hospitality, fishing, swimming, sailing, eating, drinking, dancing, lazing and travelling; five all too short days until early on the morning of Monday, 14th we once again pointed our bows seawards and wound up the clockwork for a fast passage home.

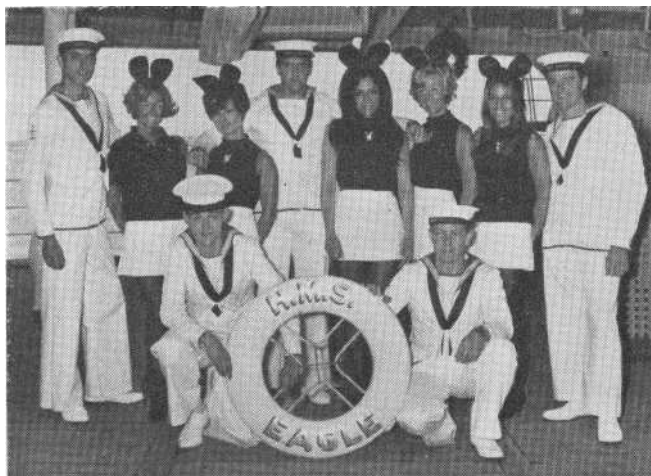
Arrival at Boston



Empire State Building



United Nations



Boston Bunnies



Boston Tea Party

The casual observer of our transatlantic passage from Boston might have wondered that so complex and expensive a ship as *Eagle* was apparently nothing more than a mobile parade ground. An enormous guard drilled repeatedly; small parties of solemn-looking individuals endlessly slow marched up and down the flight deck and performed complex gyrations and evolutions. The band played incessantly and the Commander looked very worried and took to sucking throat lozenges to safeguard his voice. All this was in preparation for the ceremony of the Presentation of a Colour to the Western Fleet by Her Majesty the Queen in Torbay, scheduled for 29th July.

On Sunday, 20th July we arrived in Plymouth Sound and, secured to 'Charlie' Buoy, began to prepare in earnest. Paintwork to be refurbished - two fast Atlantic crossings had taken their toll - a mammoth cleaning of flats and passages, complete flight deck repainting and preparation of the hangar in case of wet weather routine. The BBC came aboard in force with all their equipment for 'live' television broadcasts and on Wednesday, 23rd the Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Sir John Bush, K.C.B., D.S.C., himself embarked to oversee the final stages of preparation and conduct the rehearsals. That night we moved to Weymouth Bay where the Western Fleet was assembling and as the BBC festooned the upper-works and hangars with cameras and bits of wire the ceremonial rehearsals on the flight deck continued. Saturday, 26th dawned bright, clear and calm and soon after sunrise the Fleet was up anchoring

PCWF

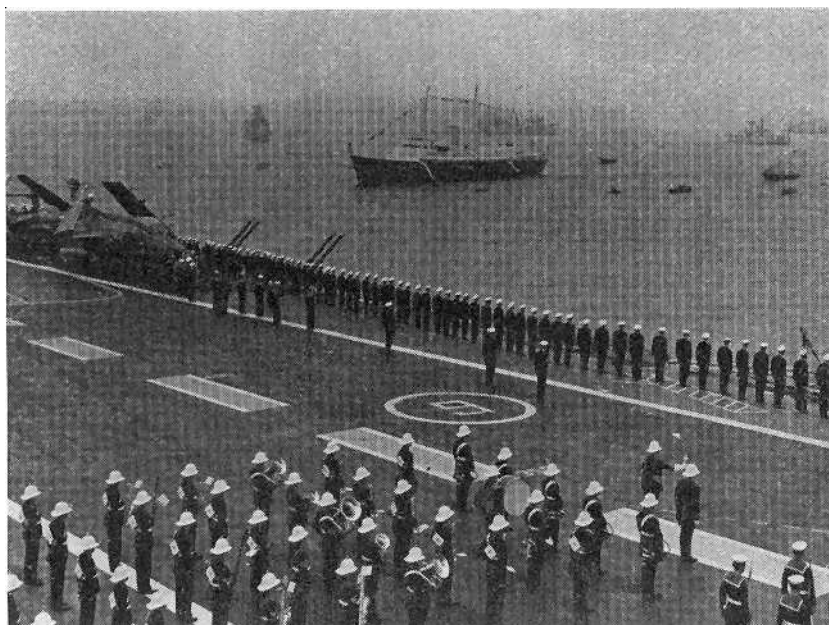
and, with *Eagle* leading, putting to sea in line ahead to rehearse the steam-past on passage to Torbay. Sadly it was too bright and too calm. Before long the whole Fleet was enveloped in fog. A startled leader in the 'Round Britain Powerboat Race' suddenly found himself surrounded by warships of every shape and size and the rest of the competitors were soon whizzing through the Fleet. Fortunately it cleared sufficiently and the rehearsals were successfully completed before we all anchored in our appointed berths in Torbay.

By the morning of Monday 28th the final preparations had been made and

The C-in-C arrived



... to take charge



it all depended on the weather - which was most unkind. Her Majesty and the Royal party arrived in Torquay and embarked in the Royal Yacht *Britannia* which steamed through the lines to take up her berth a cable or two from *Eagle*. Soon after, a miserable downpour set in for the rest of the day but in spite of this the programme went on. Lunch for senior officers in the Royal Yacht, visits round the Fleet by members of the Royal Family, tea for chief petty officers with the Queen and her family in H.M.S. *Blake*, an early evening reception for officers aboard *Britannia* and a dinner in the Wardroom of *Eagle* attended by Her Majesty, the Duke of Edinburgh, Prince Charles and Princess Anne. Last, and by no means least, a presentation to Her Majesty and the entire Royal Party of the *Eagle* concert party revue 'Where Eagles Dare' to finish a long and exhausting day.

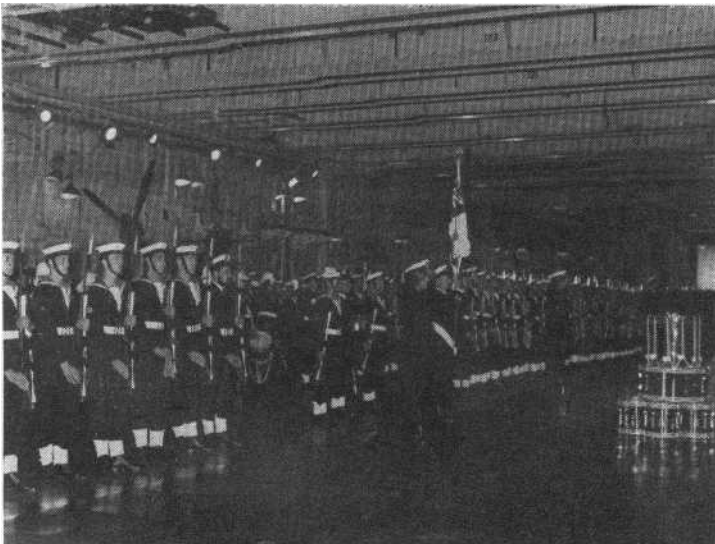
Britannia arrived



... and the Queen came to dinner



Command performance

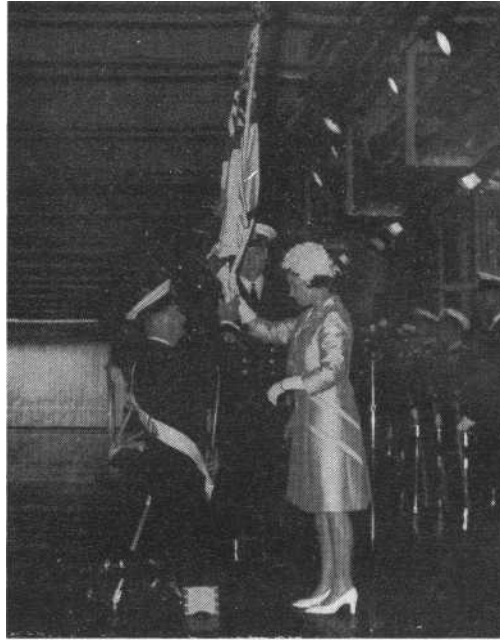


By the time Her Majesty returned to the Royal Yacht it was not only raining but beginning to blow and the prospects for the ceremony were looking bleak. Fortunately the met. men's long-awaited clearance arrived in the middle of the night and the wind swung to the north. The big day dawned fine, sunny and dry-but blowing a gale. Foul weather routine had to be followed and thus the ceremony in the upper hangar was very much an *Eagle* affair - and perhaps the more impressive as a consequence. Afterwards the Royal Party just reached the flight deck in time to witness a magnificent massed fly-past by Fleet Air Arm aircraft in what were very difficult and turbulent conditions. And the ship's photographers failed to get a photograph!

The afternoon brought the final stage of the two very hectic and memorable days as Her Majesty, in the Royal Yacht, led the Fleet to sea with the sun shining brilliantly on the sparkling white-flecked water. *Britannia* turned back along the line, the Commander-in-Chief in *Eagle* stood at the salute and one by one, as *Britannia* passed, the ships of the Fleet cheered their Queen. And to bring the day to a fitting conclusion the order was given 'Splice the Mainbrace'.



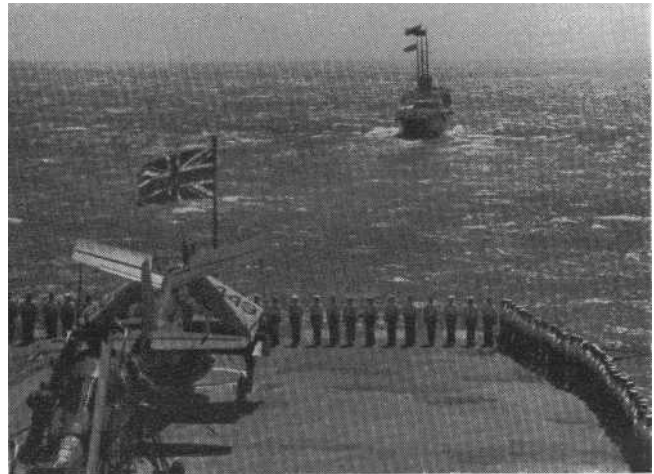
The old colour



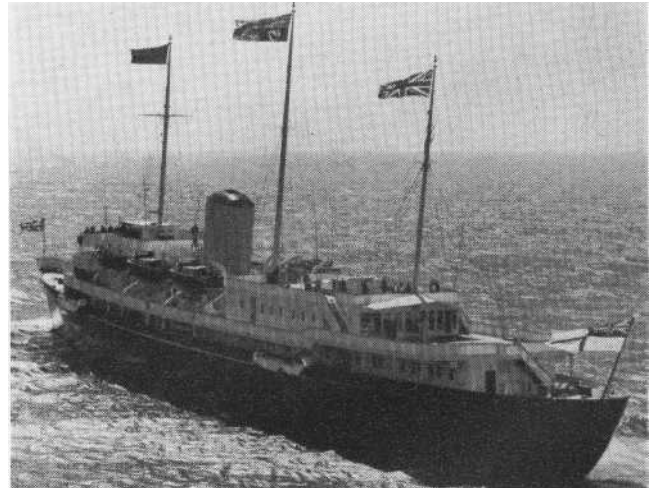
... and the new



After the ceremony



Britannia leads the Fleet to sea



The exertions of PCWF behind us, the last day of our 'Summer Cruise' was most enjoyably spent in taking our families to sea to witness at least a sample of what a carrier at work is really like. This may well have been the only occasion on which fixed-wing flying from the deck has been undertaken with several hundred families embarked. The weather was very kind and, from the embarkation early in the forenoon from the tugs which brought the visitors out to 'Charlie' Buoy, until we finally secured alongside late in the evening, the sun shone and warm breezes must have made our guests believe that carrier life is all something of a pleasure cruise.

Careful organisation allowed everyone in turn to see aircraft being launched and recovered; noisy and spectacular excitement was offered by bombs and rockets and flares and the visitors were able to see something of the multitude of activities which occupy their husbands/sweethearts/fathers. Film shows provided relaxation for those who tired of more energetic activities and in the evening everyone had a chance to watch a repeat performance of the concert party which had been presented two days before to the Queen.

And late in the evening we all came up harbour together for five weeks alongside and some summer leave.

FAMILIES DAY



On Thursday, 4th September we slipped once again from Devonport, down Channel and turned right to renew our acquaintance with that highly familiar stretch of sea which lies to the southwest of Brawdy. The squadrons all rejoined and we got down to serious work in preparation for the autumn exercise programme. Everything soon settled into the old grooves except for the engineers who found mysterious losses of power impeding our progress - which apparently had something to do with large quantities of mackerel which were foolhardy enough to 'come aboard'.

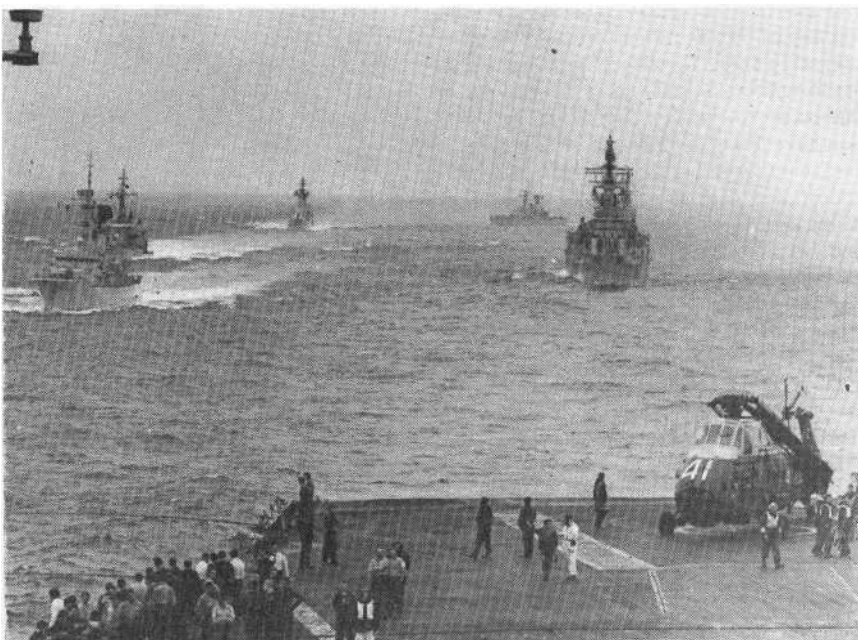
The first engagement was in Exercise 'Peacekeeper' which began with *Eagle* rendezvousing with the ships of the NATO Standing Naval Force Atlantic which were to form our personal screen during the



The new Commander joins



View from the top



Exercise 'Peacekeeper'

AUTUMN CRUISE



Arrival Gibraltar

exercise. FOCAS, who was to be 'boss man' in this show, joined us and the force turned westwards into the Atlantic to the west of Ireland where we were to meet up with the rest of the exercise fleet which had crossed from N. America. After a drop of 'roughers' on the way we made our rendezvous on time to find that those to the west had been delayed by the weather. Nevertheless soon all was sorted out and we came back to familiar waters

in the entrance to the Bristol Channel where most of the play took place. Round and round, up and down, to and fro, launch and recover - then someone discovered a leak and we had to spend a couple of nights at anchor plugging the hole. An unpleasant and dangerous job for ship's divers, working in the dark on the outside of the hull, but they managed to stick on a patch, the leak was stopped and back we went to the fray.

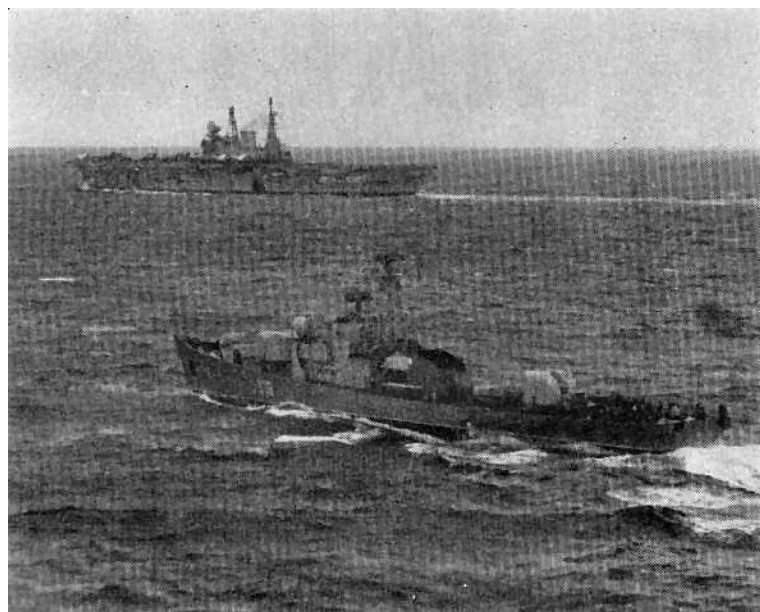
A successful exercise completed, a quick call into Plymouth Sound enabled the fortunate natives to enjoy a night at home before we sailed for Gibraltar on the afternoon of Thursday, 25th September. A fast passage brought us into the lee of the Rock less than 48 hours later and soon we were snug alongside the mole for 14 days' 'Self Maintenance'.

Some people maintained themselves better than others but Gibraltar these days is not the most exciting run ashore. Nevertheless, for very many, this visit was another 'first' and although the old hands may still look back to the days when 'La Lin' provided delights now forbidden to us, Gibraltar is still the gateway to the

Mediterranean and manages to retain a good deal of its old fascination. Wednesday, 1st October was the day on which the United Nations resolution calling on Britain to vacate the Rock expired and there was much speculation as to what new measures the Spaniards would take to intimidate the population. The fleeting presence of a Spanish Fleet in Algeciras Bay raised the hopes of the Press that mischief was afoot but nothing happened. Perhaps it was the presence of *Eagle* that ensured that all was quiet. There was no doubt that the natives were pleased to see us at this time and when we opened the ship to visitors about a third of the population turned up to come aboard.

The Sports Officer took the opportunity to arrange contests in every conceivable sport with every conceivable opponent and the games players had a great time. Others occupied themselves with the production of another edition of *EAGLE SODZOPRA* but by the end of the second week most of us were ready to get back to sea. So on Saturday, 11th October we began yet another fast passage (when did we ever go anywhere slowly), for the Malta area. The water was a little warmer and the sun shone a little more often but after a couple of days with that island just over the horizon we again pushed eastwards to Crete, the Aegean and . . .

EXERCISE DEEP FURROW

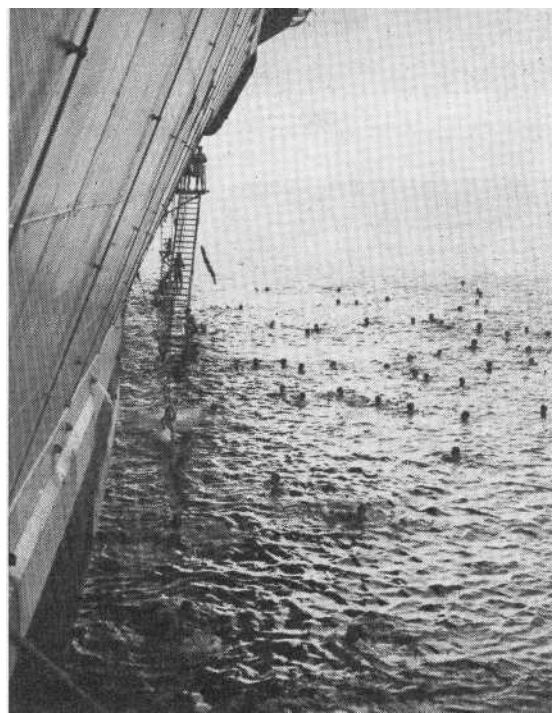


Russian follower

On Friday, 17th we entered the Aegean from the south-east and for the next two days steamed northwards through the Greek Islands. Our role was to provide support for the transit and landings of an amphibious support force on the coast of Turkish Thrace. As usual we spent our time gyrating in endless circles as aircraft sorties were launched and recovered. The monks on Mount Athos, who had a grand view of the proceedings most of the week, must have thought it all very crazy but the exercise was a great success. Except perhaps for the American destroyer who got lost and then homed on us one

night thinking we were the *John F. Kennedy*! As usual the Russians joined in and we had the pleasure of the close company of first a *Petya* and then a *Kotlin* which stayed with us for a week or two and seemed pleased to receive a present of a bottle of whisky as a token of our appreciation for her faithful attendance.

Having successfully ploughed our furrow in the Aegean, we immediately moved to the eastern Mediterranean and the Cyprus area for Exercise 'Ranular' - an air defence exercise with the RAF based in Cyprus. Not that Cyprus was ever more



Hands to bathe

than a dim smudge on the horizon for most of us - but being an RAF exercise the pace was leisurely, the water was warm and for several days we enjoyed the rare luxury of 'Hands to Bathe', an evolution which appeared to puzzle our Russian escort more than somewhat.

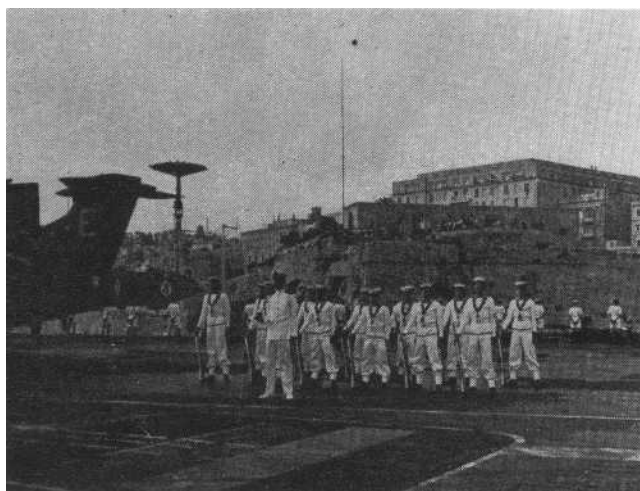
This exercise completed, the engineers again wound up the revs and back we creamed westwards for Malta. On Friday, 31st October, after an absence of many years, *Eagle* again entered Grand Harbour and secured to buoys for two weeks' self-maintenance.



Approachin Malta

For most of us, this period was a very welcome and pleasant change. Quite a number of wives managed to join us to enjoy the amenities of what has now become very much a holiday island. After a very wet early autumn, Malta was unusually green, and for us the sun shone almost continuously. Some of the more enterprising went on exped. to Gozo, many enjoyed a few days' rest and relaxation at Ghain Tuffieha, there was swimming and sailing, lazing and sightseeing, the more athletic played their usual games by day and many played it pretty hard at night.

During this period the Air Group landed a number of aircraft ashore where they enjoyed the hospitality of the RAF at Luqa airfield. Some valuable flying was achieved and for those who had served at Halfar in the past it was a welcome and warming sight to see naval aircraft once again in the skies over Malta.



Guard ...

MALTA



. . . and Band



In Grand Harbour



*Commander-in-Chief NATO
Naval Forces Southern Europe*

It was at this time that somehow the planners must have got our programme mixed with some other ship. On Thursday, 13th we sailed into a calm and blue Mediterranean, did a quick RAS off the coast of Sicily with Mount Etna towering in the background, and next morning there we were entering harbour at Naples, Italy (as the Americans would say), for yet more relaxation.

Our hosts had gone to a great deal of trouble to provide us with a berth convenient to the dockyard gate and the town centre and by early afternoon, what was to be a memorable long weekend was well under way. Our tourist agency, of North American fame, was under new management and now trading under the name of 'Rosary Tours'. Thousands of pounds changed hands and thousands of bus and boat miles were covered - Rome, Pompeii, Vesuvius, Herculaneum, Capri, Ischia, Caserta, Solfatara, Sorrento, Amalfi - anywhere else you care to name within a day's run. Of course there were unkind people who said it was all a fiddle - what with Father John charging a shilling over the odds for every tour. But it all came back to the Welfare Fund in due course and never did so many sailors soak up so much sightseeing in so short a time. Most of Naples seemed to come and look at us, and thousands of them came aboard - free, in spite of the enterprising youngsters who sized up the situation on the first day and were selling tickets outside the gates on the second. The children's party was a great success (language never seems to matter on these occasions), the Marine Band performed in the Palazzo Municipio and by the end there was a general feeling of rather lethargic bonhomie - 'It's been a great visit!'. But somehow everyone was a little tired.



Alongside Naples

NAPLES



Official Reception



The Neapolitans came to see us



... and some stayed to tea



In the Palazzo

But now it was time to turn back towards home, so with the odour of regret at leaving, mingled with the first scent of Christmas leave in our nostrils, we departed on Tuesday, 18th November for the western Med.



Sightseeing

EXERCISE

DECAMP

The usual quick passage was followed by a few days' private flying in the Gibraltar area after which, together with our faithful URG, we passed through the Straits for the final exercise of 1969.

Hermes, Britain's only mini-carrier, had departed from U.K. and sailed south-west into the Atlantic towards an area some 500 miles north of *Eagle*. The idea was for each to use her aircraft to seek out and strike the other using the maximum resource and low cunning. It was all good fun but no-one ever knew who won. The battle extended to witty repartee in the respective ships' newspapers and finally FOCAS had to diplomatically declare the result a draw, but at least we were sure that *Eagle* didn't lose.

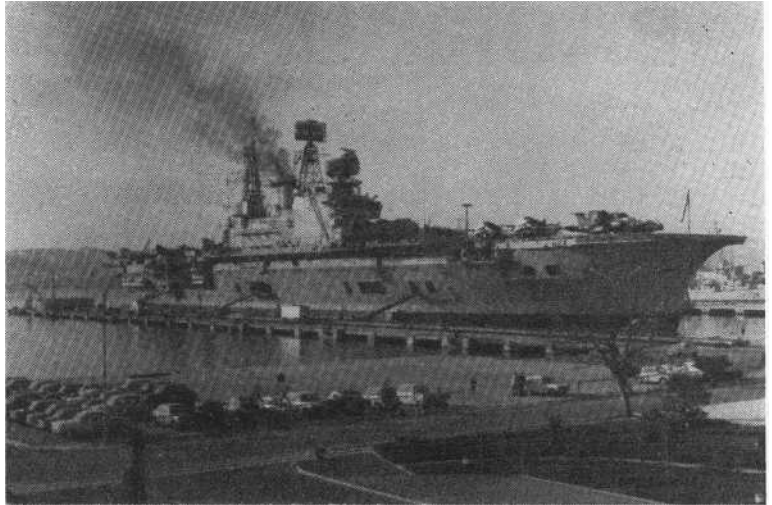
In due course we all joined up together and after a gap of some years we once again had two British carriers operating a synchronised programme in company. FOCAS transferred to *Eagle* (it's more comfortable), and we all went back to Gibraltar for a long weekend and some Christmas shopping. Two days of this and we were off for a fairly leisurely passage home. In spite of some filthy weather in the Bay, the squadrons all managed to depart to their various air stations and by Friday, 5th December we were alongside in Devonport for Christmas leave.



After the battle

SPRING CRUISE

And so into 1970 and the final fling of the 'First Leg' of the Commission. With memories of leave and the seasonal festivities rapidly fading we were lucky that Monday, 12th January enabled the scheduled leaving harbour to be accomplished according to programme. Three good days' flying enabled everyone to settle back into the familiar routine and by the evening of the 15th we were again pointing our bows southwards towards Gibraltar. The weather allowed us to get in a solids RAS next morning but rapidly got worse as we went south to give what many voted the roughest passage so far, but by the time we reached Gib., on Sunday morning, it began to look like spring. Four hours' leave to two watches gave some a chance to stretch their legs ashore before we headed for the Gulf of Lions and flying exercises to the south of Toulon. There, 10 days' private flying were accomplished in conditions considerably more comfortable than were being experienced in a wet and windy January in Britain. H.M.S. Minerva joined us for a week to act as plane-guard and R.F.A.s *Lyness*, *Resource* and *Olna* were on hand to supply our wants. The rare luxury of a weekend at anchor in the shelter of the Iles de Hyeres, east of Toulon, gave all five ships the chance to get together for flight deck sports and for social and recreational relaxation.



By day



... and night



Battle of the Flowers

TOULON

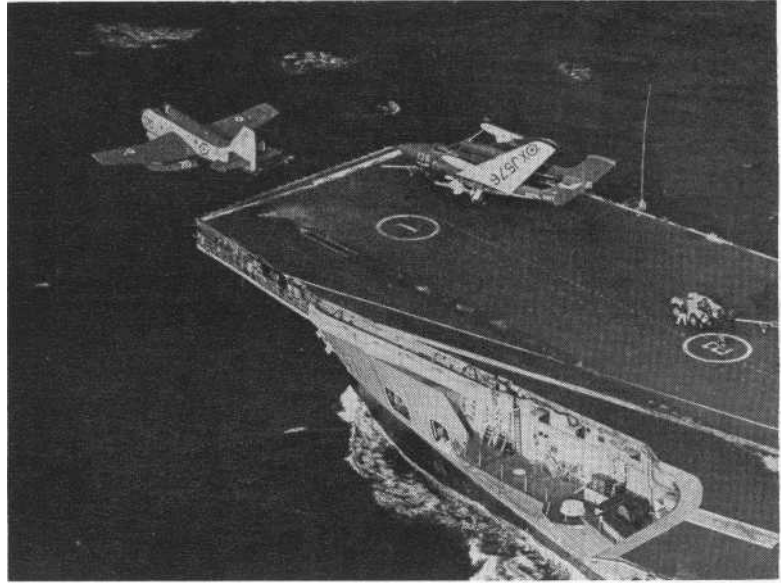
On Friday, 30th we entered the French naval port of Toulon for our final foreign visit.

Toulon is not the most exciting place in the world but, for those who took the trouble, there were plenty of things to do which are 'different' and for very many this was the first opportunity to sample French wine and food by the native hearth. Our presence coincided with the annual 'Battle of Flowers' festival in Nice - where sailors are a greater rarity than in Toulon, as many discovered who took advantage of the Padre's tours. A fortunate few, including 15 junior ratings, took to the mountains for ski-ing, and various other enterprising parties went on exped. and explored the hills of Provence.

BACK to UK

Back to sea for a further uneventful spell of flying and another weekend at anchor (the French don't believe in providing diversion facilities on Saturdays and Sundays). But this was rudely interrupted by rising winds - the local 'mistral', which forced us to put to sea and for most of the next four days we rode out the gale with very little flying possible. By Thursday, 19th it was time to turn towards home again so back we went to Gibraltar with a full power trial on the way and a quick rendezvous with R.F.A. *Regent* to transfer an aircraft or two. Those who had not had leave on our previous call at Gibraltar had a quick run ashore but by Sunday evening it was goodbye to the warmth and sunshine as we headed into the Atlantic and back to chilly U.K.

But already the prospect of our next port of call was beginning to seize the collective imagination. LIVERPOOL. What strange visions of delight were conjured up as proud Merseysiders, with a proprietary air, wrote letters to *EAGLE EXPRESS* full of conflicting advice on where to go, what to do and how to have a ball. Old hands nodded wisely and predicted the finest run of the Commission so, after a couple of days in familiar waters off Brawdy, it was with a certain air of expectation that we moved up river on Friday, 27th February to arrive in mid-afternoon at the splendid berth at Princes Pier, a stone's throw from the City Centre.



and LIVERPOOL



Approaching Liverpool



. . . impressive entertainment