

# H.M.S. FEARLESS

1965 - 1968

# FOREWORD

By Captain H. A. CORBETT, D.S.O., D.S.C., Royal Navy

The first commission of the first of a new class of ship is a unique experience. One young man remarked three months after we commissioned, 'Every day we do something that's never been done before'. *Fearless* has been lucky: we were always up with, or ahead of our trials programme, and we are grateful to Messrs Harland and Wolff for getting us to sea within two weeks of the planned date, despite delays in supply of equipment. This prompt start was made at a price, in the number of loose ends we had to pick up in the early days, but it paid off. The men who weathered those stormy early months of amphibious trials, testing and tuning will remember that we surprised Portland by arriving there, not in trepidation at the tough prospect of work up, but thanking God that their strong team of experts could help us solve our problems. One solution was an increase of over 50 in our complement, and I am glad of this opportunity to thank all the original ship's company; the senior members who bore the brunt of our shortages by doing the work of two or three men when we were all hard pressed learning our jobs; the young men who shouldered responsibility manfully before they were trained; we came out of the aptly named 'trials period' toughened into a resolute and united team.



H.M.S. *Fearless* is joint as no single H.M. Ship has been since ships were sailed by seamen and fought by soldiers. As the defence forces are brought closer together in aims and organisations, *Fearless* fits the future pattern. Her mobile, instantly ready joint headquarters and communications, her ability to deploy forces at 20 knots by landing craft or helicopter, and in the future perhaps by hovercraft, hydrofoil or VTOL aircraft, all this versatility meets the needs of the next generation. Less obvious, but most important, the specialist men and equipment for beach and port operation, whom we can deploy in marginal conditions, are basic to the safe and timely operational deployment of our forces.

The stream of experts and units who visit or embark in the Assault Ship places a great strain upon her ship's company: we are constantly under inspection, continually 'open to visitors'. We have learnt a great deal from our embarked forces, and take much pride in the many corps, regiments and units now associated with us. Some came to us uncertain, or openly doubtful of our usefulness: their reaction to experience has been surprise at our potential and versatility. Within a year of commissioning, we had a couple of small but significant operations under our belt, operations which could not have been done so swiftly or effectively by any other unit.

A foreword by me must not end without mention of sport: it was a splendid parting present when under the floodlights in Singapore, our Rigger team won and our Soccer team retained the big ships' challenge trophies. Our teams of sailors, Royal Marines and soldiers understandably cause mutterings about 'Combined Service' from ships with bigger but less widely talented complements.

I hope that this book will convey to those who read it some of the excitement, stimulus and pride in achievement that we who have lived its story have enjoyed. It seems almost incredible to me that we came together as strangers so short a while ago as the end of 1965 to an uncompleted ship. To live through a period of such rapid progress is a stirring experience. Rarely can a new concept have proved herself so quickly.

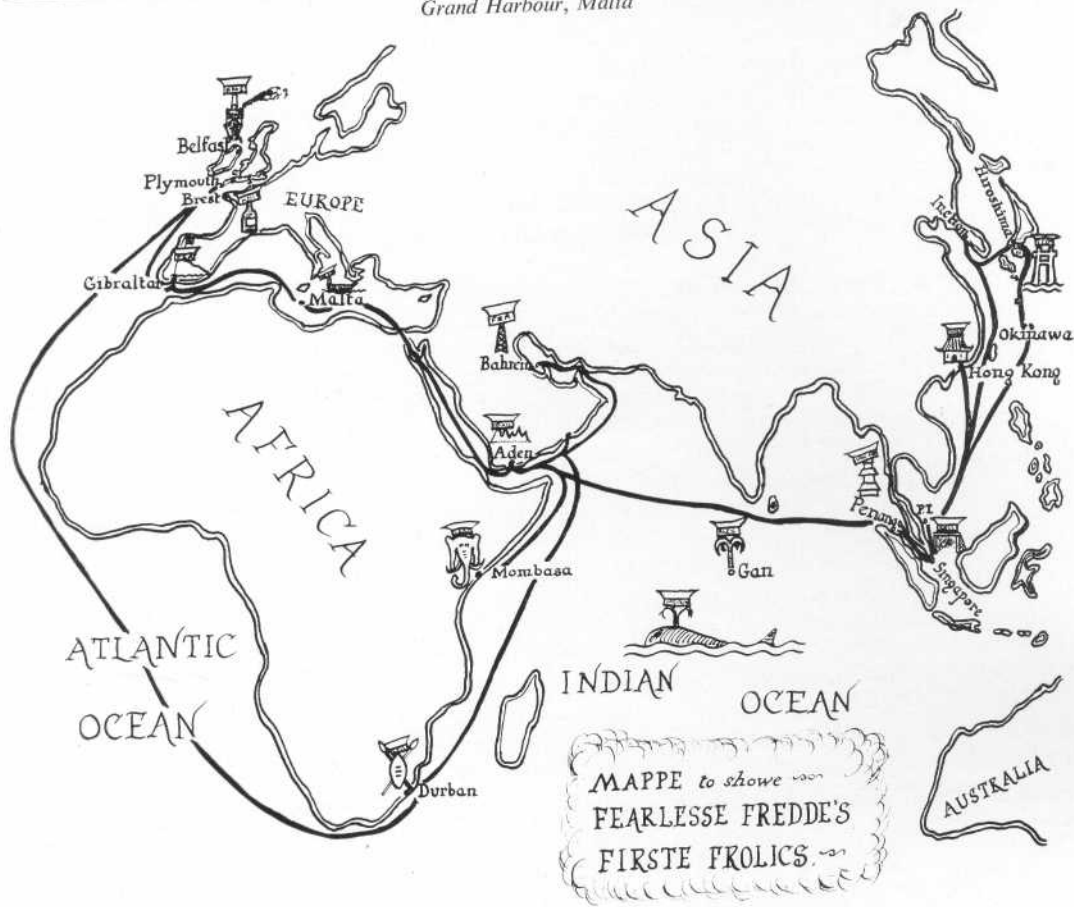
We can now say with confidence the words which we spoke in faith at our commissioning ceremony: 'We are *Fearless*, we fear nothing!'

I should like to repeat what I wrote at the end of my Report of Proceedings after our cruise to Japan and Korea:

'I felt proud, on this my final cruise as their Captain, to command them, the best ship's company I have ever had.'



Grand Harbour, Malta



## H.M.S. FEARLESS 1965-1968



*The Commissioning Warrant*

H.M.S. *Fearless* was commissioned at Belfast in Harland and Wolff's Yard on 25th November 1965. Although most of the ship's company had joined only recently, over 130 had been standing by the ship building, some for as long as 18 months. During this period, the ship's company have no direct responsibility and can only act as advisers. This seemed particularly strange during contractors' sea trials, when the ship sailed under the Red Ensign. It was, all the same, a rewarding experience. Many features of the ship, which now make her more comfortable or efficient were incorporated during this period thanks to the close liaison that was established by those standing by and the shipyard officials, and to sail for Portland two days after commissioning was for many a sad occasion.

The passage from Belfast to Portland was a rough one and the second night was spent sheltering off the north coast of Cornwall. This was necessary because it had not yet been possible to stow all the stores that had been embarked at the last minute and the Tank Deck looked rather like an SNSO transit shed.

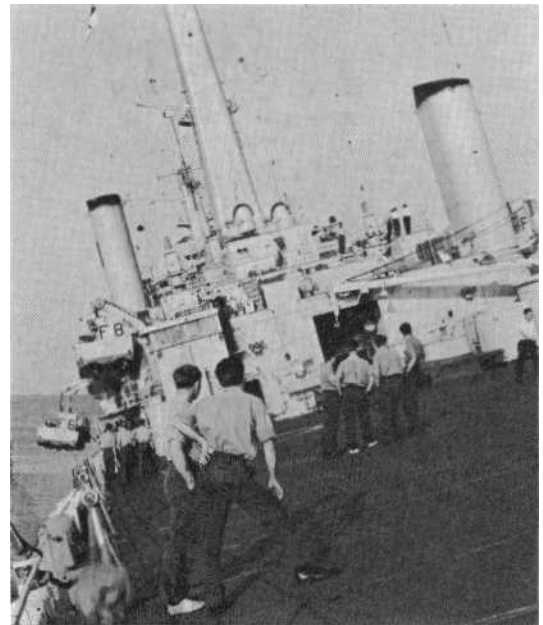
Four days at Portland were spent carrying out Flight Deck trials with various helicopters and the LCMs were embarked off ATURM, Poole. On the 4th December the ship arrived in Devonport to give Christmas leave and start the testing and tuning of the communications and radar.

Apart from a trials week at sea, the next two months were spent very busily at Devonport. Trials were carried out with the Army for basic working on the vehicle decks. Every conceivable form of military equipment was loaded on board, pushed around and then taken away again. At the same time the ship was inundated with visitors, all of whom were given conducted tours.

On the 10th February we sailed for Belfast to have outstanding items completed by Harland and Wolff. Then Saunton Sands on the north coast of Devon. During the time in Plymouth considerable experience had been gained of dock operating and handling of loads, but it had all been done in calm conditions. We now needed to discover the limiting conditions for working the dock in the open sea. The weather during this period ranged from the ideal to the impossible and a great deal of useful experience was gained.

After these trials the ship sailed for Southampton, to work with the Royal Engineers at Marchwood. A few days were spent at anchor in the Solent where the most important event was the 'National Press Day'. After an unfortunate start this was a great success and the ship has received good coverage in the national press. Trials were also carried out with hovercraft and it was shown that there was no problem handling these vehicles in the dock.

The Portland work up started on the 4th March. It is doubtful whether anyone wishes to be reminded of this period, but there can be no doubt that it was extremely useful to the ship. The facilities and experienced staff provided by the Portland Work up Organisation were able to teach the ship a great deal and although we made many mistakes, we left a far more efficient ship.



*Leaning Tower of Pisa-on purpose*



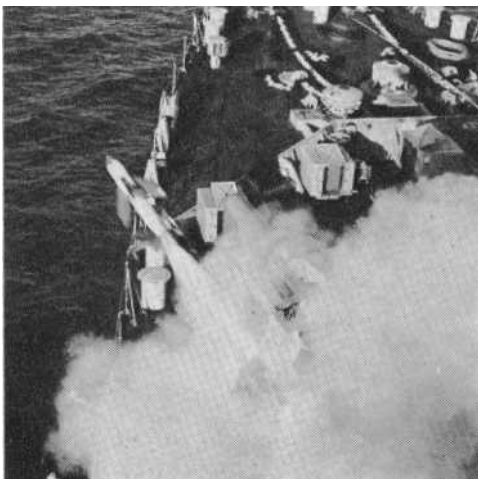
*Earl Mountbatten's visit*

The first half of April was spent giving leave in Portsmouth and the ship then embarked on a series of amphibious exercises. These had been designed to test the ship's varied capabilities. The first took place at Eastney and was a straightforward disembarkation of an infantry battalion and half a squadron of tanks. This was followed by Exercise 'Lifeline', a large exercise involving the Army and Royal Air Force. *Fearless* landed a battalion by helicopter and landing craft at Castlemartin, near Milford Haven. The assault was controlled from the Assault Operations Room by the Commodore Amphibious Forces and the Commander 19 Brigade. It was the first time that the HQ facilities of the ship had been used and the landing was carried out in the worst weather conditions we have met so far.

The final exercise was carried out at Barrybudden in the Firth of Tay. This was a logistic exercise and the ship

carried about half the equipment necessary to build a temporary airfield. The highlight of this exercise was the launching of about 3000 feet of fuel pipe, which despite a high powered team in the dock, took charge of itself half way through the operation.

The 6th of May brought the first visit to a foreign port. The ship arrived in Brest, flying the flag of the Commander-in-Chief, Plymouth. Four days were spent in making contact with the French, Navy and otherwise.



*Missiles too!*



*Who's that up there!*

On return to Plymouth, the ship went into dockyard hands for intermediate docking and leave. It had originally been planned for the ship to sail East of Suez on completion, but the programme was changed owing to delays in the building of Intrepid and the Canal date was postponed to late September.

It was decided to occupy the two months that became available, by carrying out first of class Noise Ranging trials. These trials fell into three parts. First of all a visit to the Mediterranean, where the clear water allowed propeller viewing trials to be carried out. The ship sailed on the 15th July and after three days propeller viewing off the North African coast, entered Gibraltar, where a week was spent in dock having the propeller modified.

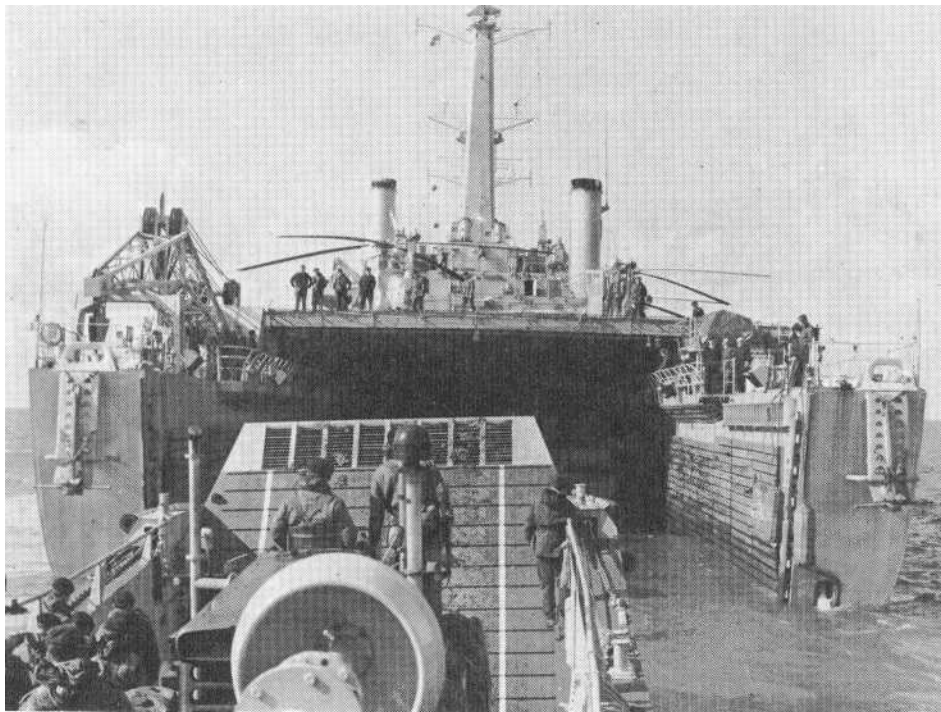
The second stage was carried out in Loch Fyne, where a special range exists to record machinery noises. A pleasant six days were spent in this beautiful highland loch, although some inconvenience was caused as all machinery had to be stopped at various stages of the trial. The ship sailed from Loch Fyne on 9th August.

The final stage was carried out at Portland, where the ship arrived on 15th August. The ship spent three days running over the range, testing the effectiveness of the quietening arrangements.

On completion the ship sailed for Portsmouth for ten days' leave to each watch. During this period the ship took part in the Portsmouth Navy Days. She was able to provide an interesting show to the public and about 42,000 people visited her in three days. We were also able to welcome families onboard for a day in the Solent.



*'Waterproofing is always required'*



*The way in*

The ship sailed from Portsmouth on 13th September. An afternoon in Gibraltar, three days in Malta and the Suez Canal on 25th September. She arrived at Aden on the 29th, having averaged 18 knots from the United Kingdom.

The first fortnight in Aden was spent showing the Army the ship. A large number of visitors was shown around and two small exercises carried out. On the 11th October, the ship carried out its first operational task. A troop of scout cars was landed about seventy miles west of Aden to carry out a patrol into the interior. It was hoped that this unusual method of entry would surprise the rebel tribesmen.

The last half of October was spent self maintaining. On the 25th October the ship sailed for an exercise with the Commander 24 Brigade, the Irish Guards and 78 Squadron R.A.F. At least this is what everyone was told was going to happen. In fact she sailed to carry out Operation 'Fate', a surprise 'cordon and search' operation on a small village 500 miles east of Aden. The enemy were members of an organisation called the Dhofar Liberation Front, who were using this area as a recreation and training base, from which they carried out terrorist



*South Arabian operations*

activities against the forces of the Sultan of Muscat and Oman. The operation, which in its small way was a classic of inter-service co-operation, was a complete success and 22 rebels were captured.



*Operations in South Arabia - a haul*



*His Majesty's Court*

The ship returned to Aden on the 30th October to land the embarked force and sailed the same day for Mombasa. The Equator was crossed on 2nd November by kind permission of King Neptune, and the next day the ship arrived at Mombasa for six days of visits to Kilindini Road, game parks, Nairobi and the beaches.

On returning to Aden the ship was due to take an embarked force for an exercise in the Persian Gulf. However it soon became obvious that there were other plans in the air, when the ship sailed empty, although still officially for Bahrain. The next day suspicions were confirmed when the ship turned south. Before suspense became unbearable it was announced that we were going to Durban to collect the Royal Irish Fusiliers from Swaziland.

We arrived at Durban on the 25th November. Because of the Rhodesian situation, there was some doubt as to the reception we would receive, but actually a very happy four days were spent in South Africa. Both the authorities and the people of Durban could not have been more friendly and helpful, especially as the visit went on. There had been no advance notice of the visit but a large crowd waved good-bye when we sailed in a drizzle on the evening of the 29th.

The RIF were disembarked at Aden on 7th December, after a passage which included a memorable floodlit 'Beat the Retreat' on the flight deck and we sailed again for Singapore on 11th December.

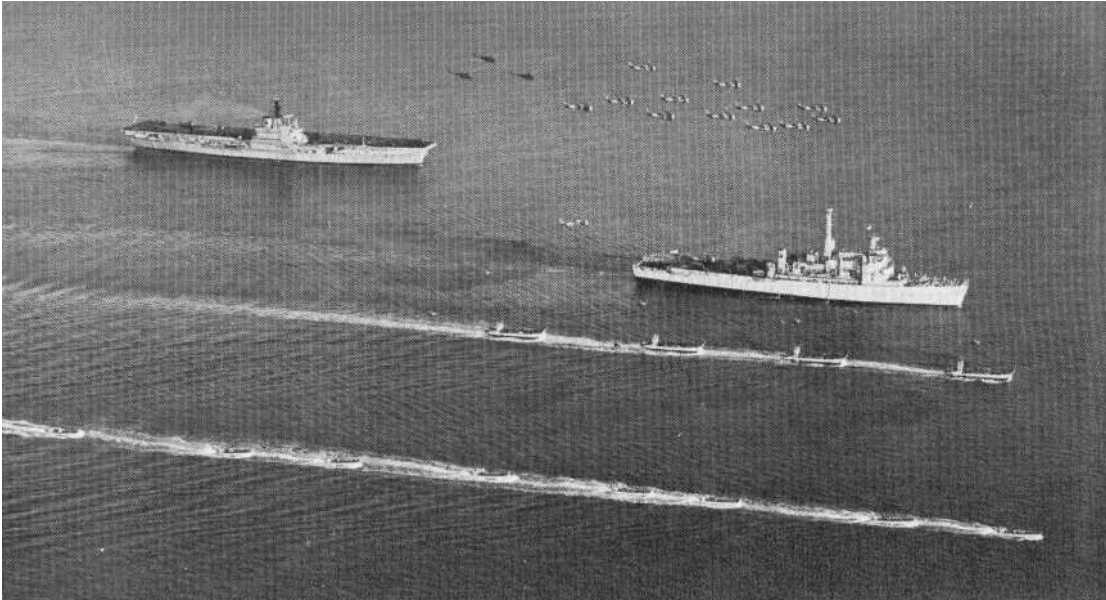


*Christmas pud for 600*



*The Royal Irish Fusiliers beat Retreat at sea*





*Far East Amphibious Force*

After the Christmas festivities in Singapore, the first half of January was spent self maintaining. During this period there were the inevitable visitors finding out what we were about. On the 15th the ship sailed for the western anchorage off Singapore town. A week was spent there, giving demonstrations to senior officers of all three services.

On the 22nd the ship sailed for Penang, to collect the 2nd Greenjackets for an exercise at Terendak. The exercise completed, the ship returned to Penang for a four-

day visit to this pleasant green island.

On returning to Singapore, we spent the next week preparing for the ship's first amphibious group exercise, planned to take place at Hong Kong. On the 7th February we sailed in company with H.M.S. *Bulwark*, L.S.L. *Sir Lancelot* and several escorts, with 3 Commando Brigade embarked in the force.

After a rehearsal in Jason's Bay, the group arrived in Hong Kong on the 13th. Unfortunately the original plan of the exercise had to be cancelled, and a series of ship/



*Jenny's side party, Hong Kong*



*'Full up inside - plenty of room on top'*

*'Full up on top, too'*



*Visitors' Day, Okinawa*

unit exercises was carried out instead. After a gay week of 'rest' in Hong Kong, we returned to Singapore, arriving on the 4th March.

The next event was FOTEX, a fleet exercise. H.M.S. Fearless and H.M.S. Bulwark loaded and sailed again on the 9th. The first half of the exercise was a passage to Langkawi, north of Penang, followed by a landing on the mainland. This was an interesting exercise, because for the first time both the naval and military aspects of an amphibious operation were combined and it was our first 'go' with the Fleet. The following week was spent at the Naval Base fully occupied by FOSPORT, the fleet sporting meeting. We acquitted ourselves reasonably well, considering the lack of chances to get fit.

On 27th March the ship sailed for Okinawa on the first leg of her Japanese and Korean cruise. Four days were spent on this island, where we were most generously entertained by the American services. The next port of



*All right for some*

call was Hiroshima. The ship arrived at this city on the 6th April after an attractive journey through the Inland Sea. The main interest here was to see the aftermath of the first atom bomb. On the 11th the ship sailed for Inchon in Korea, arriving on the 13th. Once again everyone received tremendous hospitality from the U.S. and Korean services, though it is still regarded as a land at war. On the 17th the ship sailed for Singapore, arriving on the 24th April.

The next six weeks were spent in dockyard hands and the ship's company moved ashore to H.M.S. *Terror*, while Army detachments joined units of their own in the area. Many took the opportunity to bring their wives out for a holiday, and local leave was available for those who wanted to get away a little.

We sailed again on the 10th June for a short work up in the Singapore exercise areas and on the 21st took 42 Commando to sea for a short exercise. The programme then became very uncertain. Because of riots in Hong Kong, H.M.S. *Fearless* was ordered to sail with a squadron of the R.A.F. Regiment on the 23rd, but was recalled within 24 hours, and the next five days consisted of order and counter order. However, the ship finally sailed for Hong Kong on the 30th June, and this time she got there. This unexpected spree lasted from the 4th to 10th July, arriving back in Singapore on the 13th.



*Miss Hiroshima comes aboard*



*'Do you speak English?'*



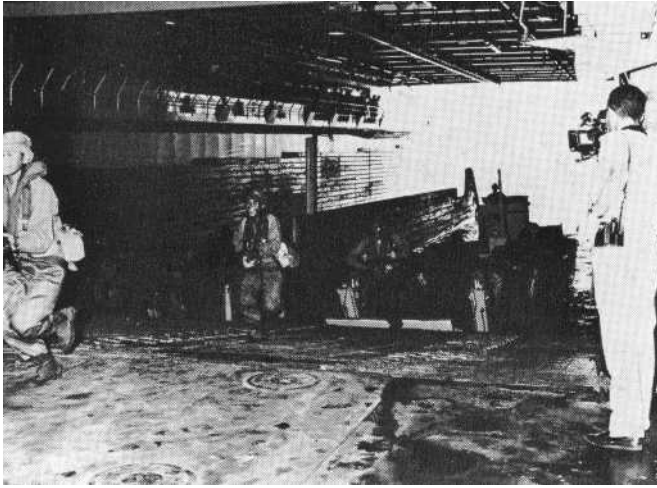
*'They're quite nice really'*



*The Law*



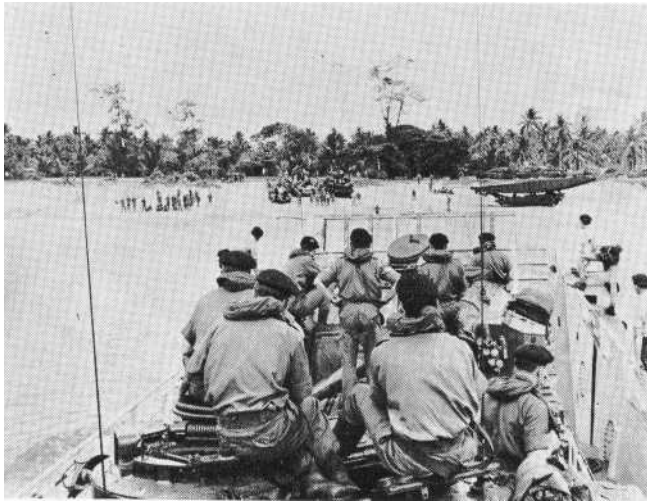
*Tae Kwan Do demonstration, Korea*



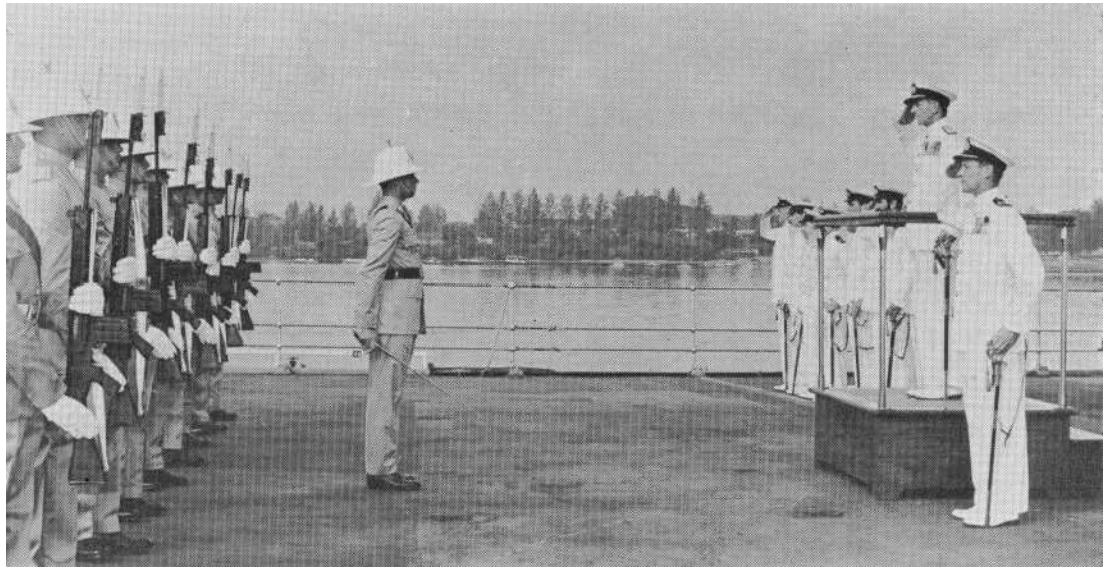
*The Gurkhas attack*



*Another Demonstration!*



*13/18 Hussars go ashore*



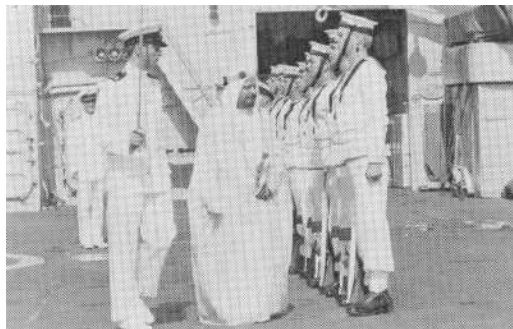
*Rear Admiral E. B. Ashmore's inspection*

The next engagement was Exercise 'Firm Stride', an amphibious landing at Kuantan on the east coast of Malaya, in which H.M.S. *Bulwark* and 3 Commando Brigade took part. From *Fearless'* point of view it was largely an HQ exercise, although her landing craft were kept busy unloading a couple of Army LSTs.

Once the Brigade HQ had gone ashore, the naval element of the exercise left and *Fearless* steamed straight to Singapore to embark a squadron of tanks. On the 25th July we landed these at Marang, in N.E. Malaya, watched by the Commander-in-Chief, Far East. On returning to Singapore the ship called at Kuantan, picked up a Commando and returned to Singapore.

The next fortnight was spent preparing for the annual inspection; part of the time peacefully at Paulo Tioman and the remainder at the Naval Base. Rear Admiral Ashmore's verdict after the inspection, carried out on the 14th and 15th August, speaks for itself:

'The ship is well run and in very good heart. *Fearless* can be relied on to produce a sound solution to any problem posed and I am confident that she would acquit herself creditably in any emergency.'



*The Ruler of Bahrain visits*



*The Ruler congratulates ...*

Immediately after the inspection we returned to Marang, to collect the 13th/18th Hussars and their tanks and then entered Singapore Naval Base for a period of maintenance.

Before long, however, there was another change of programme. After a hectic week of preparations and farewells, we left Singapore for the last time on 9th September, this time bound westward for Aden. The task was to help with the move of Army equipment to Bahrain, and after three trips up and down the Gulf we felt rather like H.M.S. *Carter Paterson*. Bahrain gave us the usual hot welcome, but at least it was a chance to stretch the legs. Visitors included the Ruler of Bahrain, complete with royal falconer.

Now, at the time of writing, we are standing by off Aden for whatever may happen there. Eyes firmly fixed on the run home, we are looking forward none the less to another visit of a few days to Durban. But the big day will be 20th December, and Plymouth Sound. Roll on *Intrepid*.