



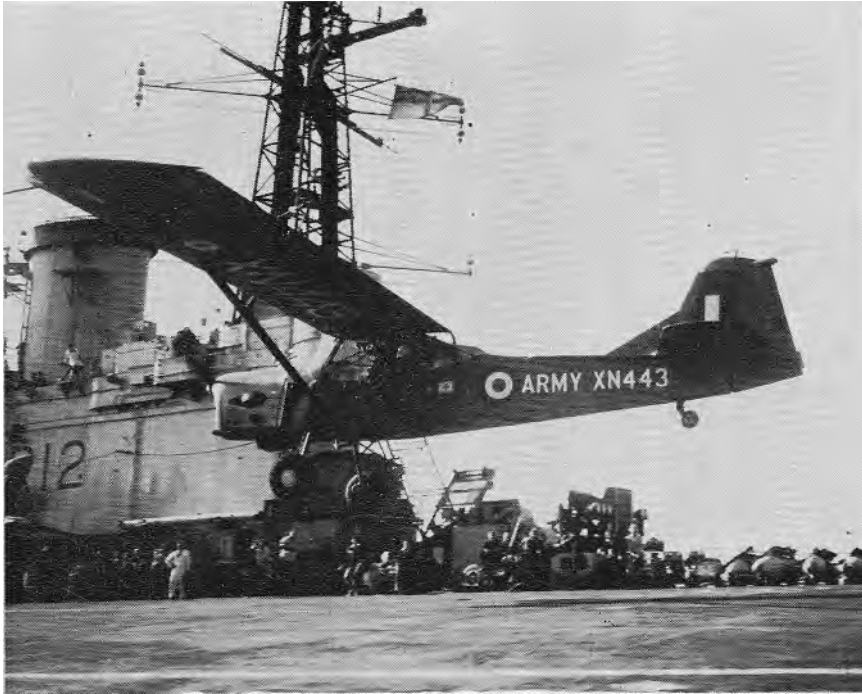
Many visited Baalbek, the site of some very well-preserved Roman Temples about seventy miles inland, and Byblos the oldest harbour in the world. A more venturesome party flew to Jerusalem and fourteen of the Ship's Company were confirmed by the Archbishop in Jerusalem,

Eventually a reluctant *Hermes* was persuaded to leave the Gigne Abri—a little later than intended—and we turned west again.

.. the site of Roman Temples'

'Baalbek .





... the Army used us for deck landing practice'

Snatched back into the realities of life by a solids R.A.S. and the prospect of the Operational Readiness Inspection we began the familiar routine of fly, fly, fly. We flew off Cyprus, Crete and Malta, exercised shelter stations, R.A.S. ed, *Scorpion* astern and had a full power trial. It was during Barbican II off Cyprus that the Army used us for deck landing practice: the Austers had a



... the narrow main street'

...the legendary Apes' den'

technique all their own—the sideways approach, tentative flare-out and startled over-shoot were all good for a laugh! Lieutenant Tristram received the Queen's Commendation for valuable services in the air: his own account is to be found later in the book. A.B.C.D. exercises continued, and several liquid R.A.Ses, more shelter stations and constant flying led us into the O.R.I. This started with an unserviceable 984 and continued throughout with only one catapult, but on the 26th July the Admiral admitted that we'd passed! We went into Gibraltar with a sigh of relief for our next S.M.P.

Gradually the healthy tans returned and eyes cleared. The wise man did his shopping first, fighting a way down the narrow main street and dodging the shiny Opel and Chevrolet cars. The shops were bursting with goods, and everything was cheaper than at home. There was plenty of sport and some old scores were settled with *Centaur*: we beat them at cricket, hockey, water polo, swimming, tennis and squash, while they had the edge on us at soccer, pulling, tug-o-war, volley ball and shooting. Some enthusiasts walked to the top of the Rock and then down the seven hundred steps to the legendary Apes' Den. Trips were arranged in all directions: the 'D's', the Communicators and 814 Squadron each took an M.F.V. to Tangier, others went by bus to Jerez to indulge in sherry tasting, or to Cadiz or Seville, and more still to the 'Fiesta' at Malaga. Ole!

The night life started early but generally the cabarets were disappointing. The Spanish dancers who gravitate to Gib. have obviously been affected by their diet of onions, bread and olive oil. However, a glass of beer was usually enlivened by the raucous sounds of the Pasa Doble and the clatter of castanets.

Such was life at Gibraltar. The never-ending maintenance carried on the while and gradually this period spent working 'Tropical Routine' drew to a close.





'We cross operated.'

Hermes set off in company with *Centaur* and an imposing number of escorts to meet the American and French force comprising the Atlantic Strike Fleet. We looked forward to some cool Atlantic weather and had the lot—fog, low cloud, high winds and rain! The exercise however was a success. Towards the end we cross-operated with the U.S.S. *Forrestal* and *Enterprise* and during one afternoon the deck park had to be seen to be believed it was so full of strange and brightly coloured 'birds'.



... with Forrestal ...

Official U.S. Navy photograph



... and Enterprise'

Official U.S. Navy photograph



up the Tagus'

The end of Riptide meant a 'wash-up' for the Admirals and a bonus visit to Lisbon for us. We anchored in the Roads and then moved up the Tagus to an

anchorage in the Mar da Palha. Maximum leave was given and in the two short days that followed the sights and delights of a dignified capital city were savoured: the

wines of the country were tasted and re-tasted, the local dishes sampled and Lisbon declared a good 'run'—though it played havoc with escudos and digestions.



'a dignified . . .'



' . . . capital city'



Procedure 'Alpha'

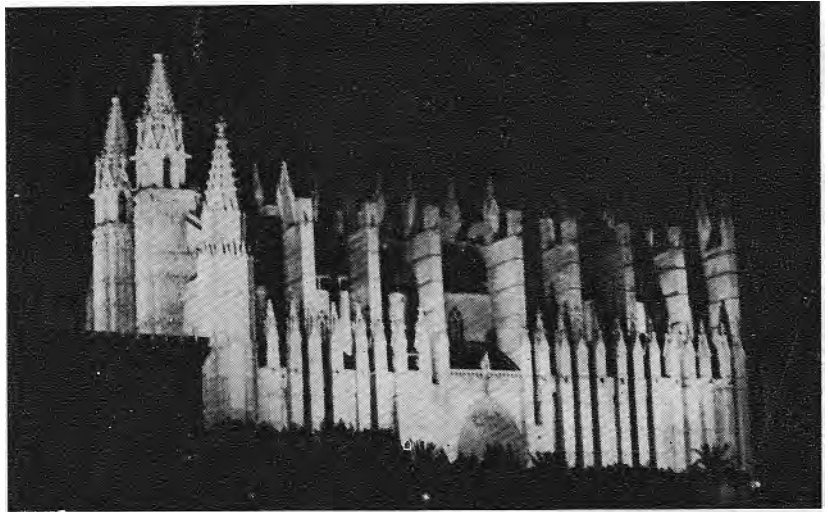


A fairly fast passage back into the Med.
 with a short stop at Gib. in the small
 hours led us into the combined Strike—
 A/S exercise, *Hermes* versus *Centaur* and
Clemenceau. This was carried out in the
 usual fickle wind conditions—a gentle
 zephyr followed by a full Mistral gale.





'... the Blackpool of the Mediterranean'



The cathedral, Palma

But now Palma, the Blackpool of the Mediterranean, lay in wait for us and we went alongside with the full ceremonial appropriate to a foreign visit. The next few days were spent in the warm climate of a completely unreal but refreshingly different holiday isle. Up from our berth at Porto-Pi and turn left for the succession

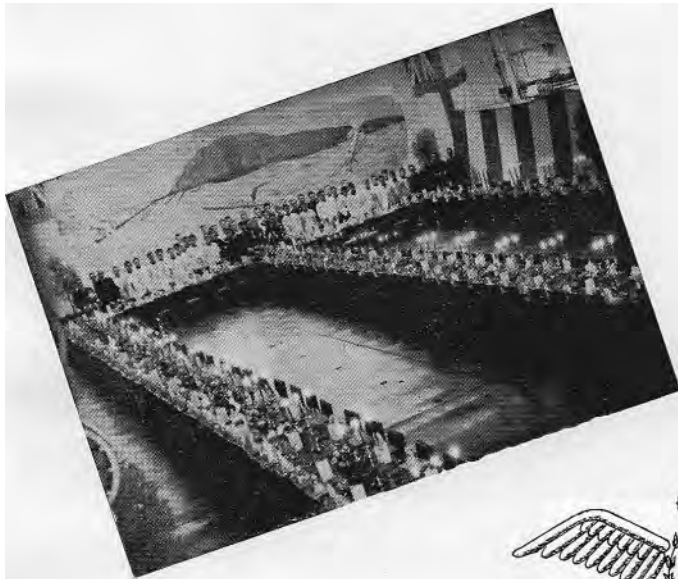
of fine beaches, or turn right and a short taxi ride took one into Palma itself. Further afield were the beaches patronised by royalty, millionaires and film stars alike, the caves at Drachs, the picturesque little town of Soller and the magnificent mountain scenery of the coast roads.

The island of Mallorca produces fruits,

nuts and olives but its mainstay is tourism. Holiday makers throng in from all over Europe, and we did notice an excess of girls who seemed as friendly as the natives. It was our holiday stop of the cruise and the talk of Palma will live on to become legendary. The ship itself shared our reluctance to leave.



... a holiday isle



Taranto Night

1942

On this night Swordfish aircraft manned by pilots and observers of the Fleet Air Arm carried out an attack on the Italian fleet at Taranto with such success that it heralded a turning point of the war in the Mediterranean.

1962

F.O.A.C. presided and the First Sea Lord, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Caspar John, was the principal guest at a commemorative dinner aboard H.M.S. *Hermes*.



Another fast passage to the Malta area and a few days flying preceded our second S.M.P. at Malta. It was during this spell of flying that a fatal Sea Vixen accident occurred. The squadrons disembarked as usual for Hal Far and we tied up quietly alongside Parlitorio Wharf once more. The weather was kinder and cooler this time and we painted ship, aired bedding on the flight-deck and generally tidied as we maintained. There was the usual burst of sport, banyans and relaxation before we were ready to sail once more. This was



. there was the usual relaxation'

delayed by local labour troubles (not, as rumour had it, by the European Cup Match between Ipswich Town and Floriana!), but once back at sea we assisted with the O.R.I.s of the 5th Destroyer Squadron before working our way east for exercise Falltrap in the Aegean. This took place in appalling weather with delayed parachute drops, cancelled strikes and the like, all uncomfortably close to the Iron Curtain. We left the area with relief and sailed swiftly west through the Mediterranean. A moment of near disaster occurred as the after lift stuck down with almost all our aircraft airborne but it was all righted, and we dropped in at the Rock for those last few 'rabbits'. At last we turned for home and after anchoring for the night at Spithead to clear Customs we entered Portsmouth harbour at 1010 on 5th October, the dull day forgotten as we saw wives, families and girl friends waiting to come aboard with welcoming smiles. *Hermes* secured at Middle Slip Jetty and settled down to the quiet of a month's maintenance at home.

Monday 12th November saw everyone back aboard and ready to sail, but a main engine snag had developed and this meant twenty-four hours' delay. That evening half of *Hermes* was roaming the streets of Pompey, a little dazed and disconsolate and the other half was spending an unexpected extra few hours with wives and sweethearts.

The next day however all was well and before we steamed down harbour 814 choppers landed on in fine style and were struck down to make more room for the



'probably the last ...



. historic launch of a Swordfish'

next operation. Out to sea again and hands to goofing stations to witness probably the last historic launch of a Swordfish from a carrier. Press and television representatives filmed this event, which went off without a hitch, and also the successful land-on of the squadrons, so that those at home were able to see us on the national network that evening. Then we moved round to the Irish Sea to operate off Brawdy and for our jets to practise their weaponry. They were almost too successful, shooting down targets faster than they could be replaced, but launching and landing became increasingly hazardous as we were treated to a full scale gale, and even snow showers. So we moved into the lee of Southern Ireland to continue a modified programme. While flying our guests back to Brawdy, the S.A.R. chopper ditched and both Lord

Windlesham and Squadron Leader Stott lost their lives, but Mr Cronin and the crew were safely rescued by the combined efforts of our own and Brawdy's choppers.



. we were treated to a full scale gale'

As we started south for Gibraltar, there was a R.A.S. carried out in very difficult conditions. The sea was rough but we acquitted ourselves well and settled down to wait for the sunshine. The weather steadily improved and the queues for cholera injections grew shorter. A day's flying off Gibraltar gave us a reminder that that was what we were for, and then there were two days' well earned rest and last minute Christmas shopping in Gib.

Off again, rapidly eastwards to take part in exercise Poker Hand during which we saw little of the enemy, but according to the 'wash-up' we did at least as well as the Yanks. Before moving eastward again there was a short period at anchor off Malta to receive a lame duck 'Ginger' Wessex, left behind by *Albion*. Meanwhile we had the first of many 'foreign' exchanges as all Scottish notes were replaced by English.

We anchored off Port Said amid a great array of ships of all shapes and sizes which grew steadily as we waited for a northbound blockage to be cleared. After twenty-four hours' delay, all the ships converged on the Canal entrance and somehow sorted themselves out into an orderly queue. After receiving the expected visitation by an Egyptian M.I.G. and making a very fast run across the Bitter Lakes to make up time, we anchored



'the expected visitation by an Egyptian

in darkness at Suez. F.O.A.C. (Admiral Hopkins) and his staff were rapidly transferred to *Ark Royal* so that they could catch the next northbound convoy and then we were off again, at considerable speed down the Red Sea to Aden.

Another day's flying off Aden gave us a grandstand view of a ditching as the duty S.A.R. chopper went in close to the



In Aden

ship. We watched the crew bobbing about in their circle of shark repellent as they waited for the seaboat to pick them up, and then back to routine and more flying for a few hours before entering harbour.

During our two days 'shop-Ex' and S.M.P. in Aden we became involved in another drama as the Commander led a fire-fighting party aboard the grain ship *Cornish City*. The fire had gained a good hold and smoke could be seen for miles but the combined Naval and Dockyard teams eventually succeeded in putting it out, though not before extensive damage had been done.

The fast passage across the Indian Ocean was broken by a brief stop off Ceylon for a memorial service for the last *Hermes*, sunk in these waters by the Japanese during World War II. This stop also gave time for a Wessex mail run to Colombo. The almost daily routine of advancing clocks and dog-watch flight-deck recreation was broken when we reached the Malacca Straits. Here we spent a few days day and night flying, and some unrehearsed liaison work with R.A.A.F. Butterworth was carried out by the aircrew who succeeded in diverting there. As we moved away towards Singapore, the fixed wing aircraft were flown off and then followed a pre-wetting trial. This provided us with the entertaining spectacle of an engineer officer prancing fairylike amongst the fountains on the flightdeck as he checked blockages. At Singapore the Wessex flew off to Sembawang and then, in torrential rain, we moved alongside. Everyone was prepared to enjoy all that was offered, even the rain, after thirty-eight of the last forty-two days at sea.

The tropical routine and the eventual ceasing of the unusually persistent rain allowed us to enjoy banyans and the swimming in Terror pools. The anglers made up fishing parties and took away the motor whalers and the photographers joined the Padre's bus tours.



'Stir it up, lad!'

The more visible signs of work during this period were mainly concerned with making good the damage sustained by the front end during the Irish Sea gale, and the general 'tiddlying' up of our paintwork after the long passage. The now familiar 'Ginger Wessex' was hoisted over the side to be towed to Tengah for repair and eventual return to *Albion*.

Christmas was very quiet as most of us were thinking of our families at home, opening the assortment of sea-mail and hoping our parcels had reached their destination in time. The Carol Service held in the hangar was attended by what seemed a vast congregation who managed, in spite of the temperature, to sing lustily. An unexpected reversal of procedure came in the form of a Customs' gift of fifty cigarettes to everyone, and for a while the usual smoke haze aboard had a distinctly oriental odour.



Christmas fare

We were very glad to be able to lay on a party for a hundred orphans from the Salvation Army Home, and those who helped were rewarded with the obvious delight and pleasure this gave. The New Year came and went, and soon the next few days had passed as well and we were back at sea again watching the squadrons land on after their fortnight's separation.

We had a couple of days' flying practice in the area before anchoring for a short while in Subic Bay to carry out a quick liaison visit while F.O.2 (Admiral Scat-chard) and his staff transferred from *Tiger*.

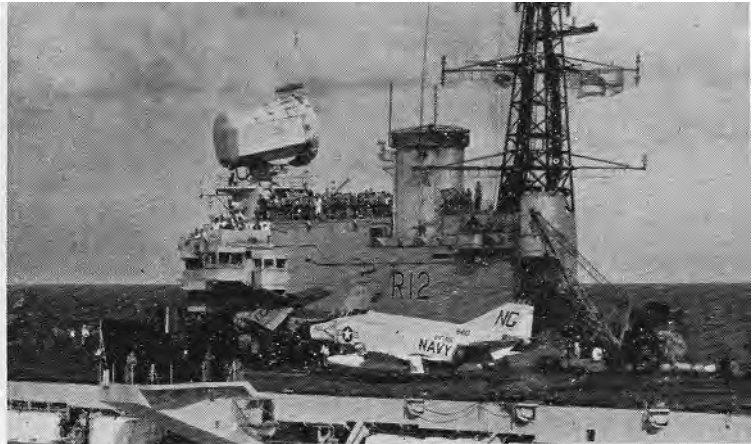
The exercise was soon in full swing and the squadrons were kept busy with weaponry and interception exercises as well as cross-operating with American

mainly for the benefit of the submarine phase of the exercise in which our 814 Wessex were playing a vital part, and we had a taste of the heat in which we would have to work in wartime conditions.

During the first evening in fact, one of the Wessex lost power and ditched, but the crew was soon picked up and returned onboard, damp but happy.



'A party for a hundred orphans'



'grandstand views of their practice roller-landings'

The next few days of flying were all in the Singapore area and mainly consisted of practice in close air support, with the friendly pongos ashore directing our aircraft. The Christmas liaison period paid dividends and the exercise proved successful.

The passage to Subic Bay brought fresh activities to the quarter-deck where the Cycling Club erected their newly acquired rollers and pedalled feverishly every evening, determined to be fit for Hong Kong.

aircraft from *Ranger*. We had grandstand views of their practice roller landings on our deck, which to them was terrifyingly small. There were liaison visits both ways for the aviators. These included for us two American Admirals who arrived in their colourful choppers to be entertained by F.O.2. Our Direction team gave us a splendid piece of 'one-upmanship' when they were able to assist *Ranger* in controlling aircraft she had lost in her own circuit, and all in all we held our own pretty well. Each night the ship was darkened,

Then followed two days alongside in Subic Naval Base during which we enjoyed wonderful American hospitality and all the facilities of the base which contrasted so noticeably with the nearby village of Olongapo. This period was of course mainly designed for discussion of the exercise and for the large Press conference held onboard, but there was also the opportunity to visit *Ranger* and view her enormous flightdeck, and to compare notes with our opposite numbers.



• Cross operating with *Ranger*'



... wonderful American hospitality'