



*Crossing the Line—a suitable ceremony ably conducted by a very convincing team of old hands'*



Soon we were starting our course of paludrine tablets and our jets were carrying out sorties to take a look at Mount Kilimanjaro and their first sight of snow for many months. The last day's night flying was cancelled following an unexpectedly damp day of squalls and showers, and the next morning we wound our way through the narrow channel to



our moorings in Mombasa Harbour. With the deep water so close to the shore it seemed only a stone's throw from the flightdeck to the Kalindini side and not a



great deal further from the Mombasa landing point, so different from the long boat treks necessary at Manila.

Our new executive officer, Commander Bent, joined to relieve Commander McArdle, and last minute touches were added to the arrangements for expeditions and leave parties during the stay. The Kilimanjaro Party, led by the First Lieutenant, departed laden for the foot slopes, perhaps a little apprehensive about the coming lengthy walk and scramble up nearly twenty thousand feet of mountain,



*'One day bus tours visited the Tsavo National Game Park'*

but determined to succeed. Each day a new wave of eager fellows left the ship for leave, some in nearby hotels or rest-houses along the coast which offered us reduced terms, and others as far afield as Nairobi where many were received as guests of private families. One-day bus tours visited the Tsavo National Game Park and many privately organised parties spent their leave watching and photographing the wonderful selection of game in those superb and varied surroundings. Naturally it was impossible to

cover the whole eight thousand square miles of the park, but many of us will carry memories of its wild splendours for the rest of our lives.

With the almost daily arrival and departure of leave parties and sports teams, and the many visits of school-children of every creed and colour, the boats were kept busy; but the locals were only too willing to ferry us in craft of various sizes and standards of cleanliness for a shilling or so, and there was never any need to wait for long.



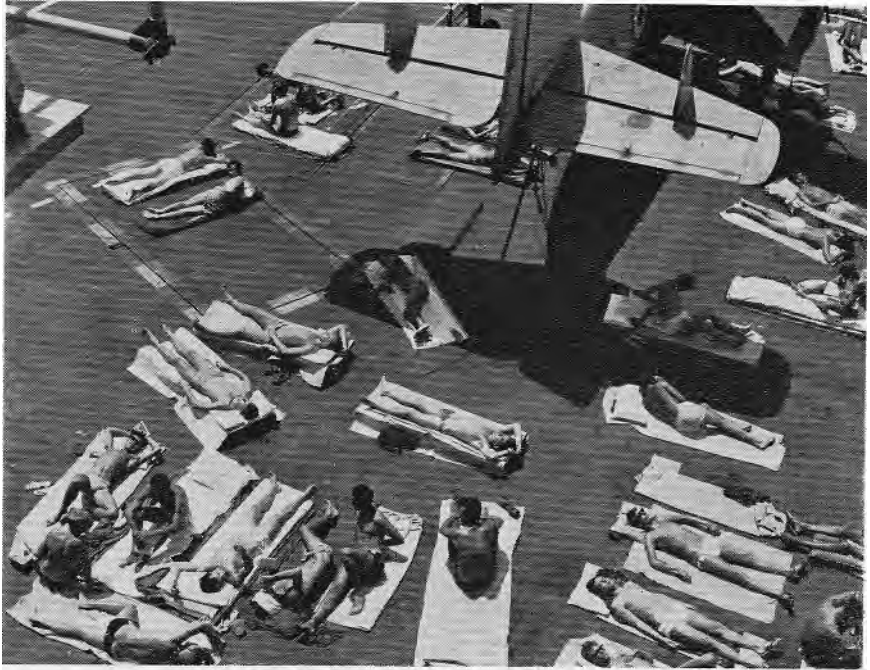
*... visits of school-children'*

There was the usual busy sports programme for our games players and at both hockey and golf, the Mombasa Ladies proved very worthy and pleasant opponents.

A certain intrepid fisherman proved beyond doubt that the inhabitants of the harbour waters were of the unpleasant kind, as he hooked and discarded several wicked looking Moray eels. He eventually landed a 50lb shark, though this too had to be returned to prevent the deck being further sullied by large quantities of blood.

The last days in Mombasa saw the rabbit hunters returning with wood-carvings, bongo drums and other local produce. The Kilimanjaro Party arrived back flushed and triumphant from a successful and enjoyable expedition and indeed, as we headed back out to sea again everyone looked fitter and more rested after this spell in a cooler climate.

There was a fair swell running during the next R.A.S. but all went well and as we moved northward again the fresh monsoon winds kept us cool. The rounding of the corner into the Gulf of Aden gave us a spectacular change of weather. Within a matter of minutes the



*.. everyone welcomed the make-and-mend'*



*Rabbit-hunters*

sea became calm, the wind vanished and the temperature rose so fast it was almost like stepping into an oven. This day also saw the recommencement of flying and with the fickle wind we made practically no progress westward, but the mail got through, brought across 300 miles of sea by an intrepid Gannet crew. The following day the white horses reappeared and the sun continued to shine on more cheerful faces as we enjoyed near perfect conditions.

Two more days of flying off Aden were each followed by anchoring off for a final 'Shop-Ex'. It was surprising how many seemed undeterred by thoughts of Customs as they were again assailed by the persistent vendors of cameras, radios and the like. But most it seemed were content with the feel of solid ground underfoot and a sampling of the available beer.

We had grown more or less accustomed to the temperature round Aden by the time we sailed, but not long after entering the Red Sea there was again the feeling of being confined in a Turkish bath, and everyone welcomed the make-and-mend which enabled us to counter the heat with fresh, albeit hot, air. The Film Unit which had joined us at Mombasa to make a 'Safety First' film of flightdeck activities, chose this afternoon to shoot the spectacular scene of a Vixen firing rockets from the flightdeck, and this was watched and cheered by the sunbathing parties.

That evening there was an unexpected 'clomp' as we steamed through the edge of a dying dust storm which successfully coated everything with a thin layer of



going home, and all in all everyone was remarkably cheerful about the situation.

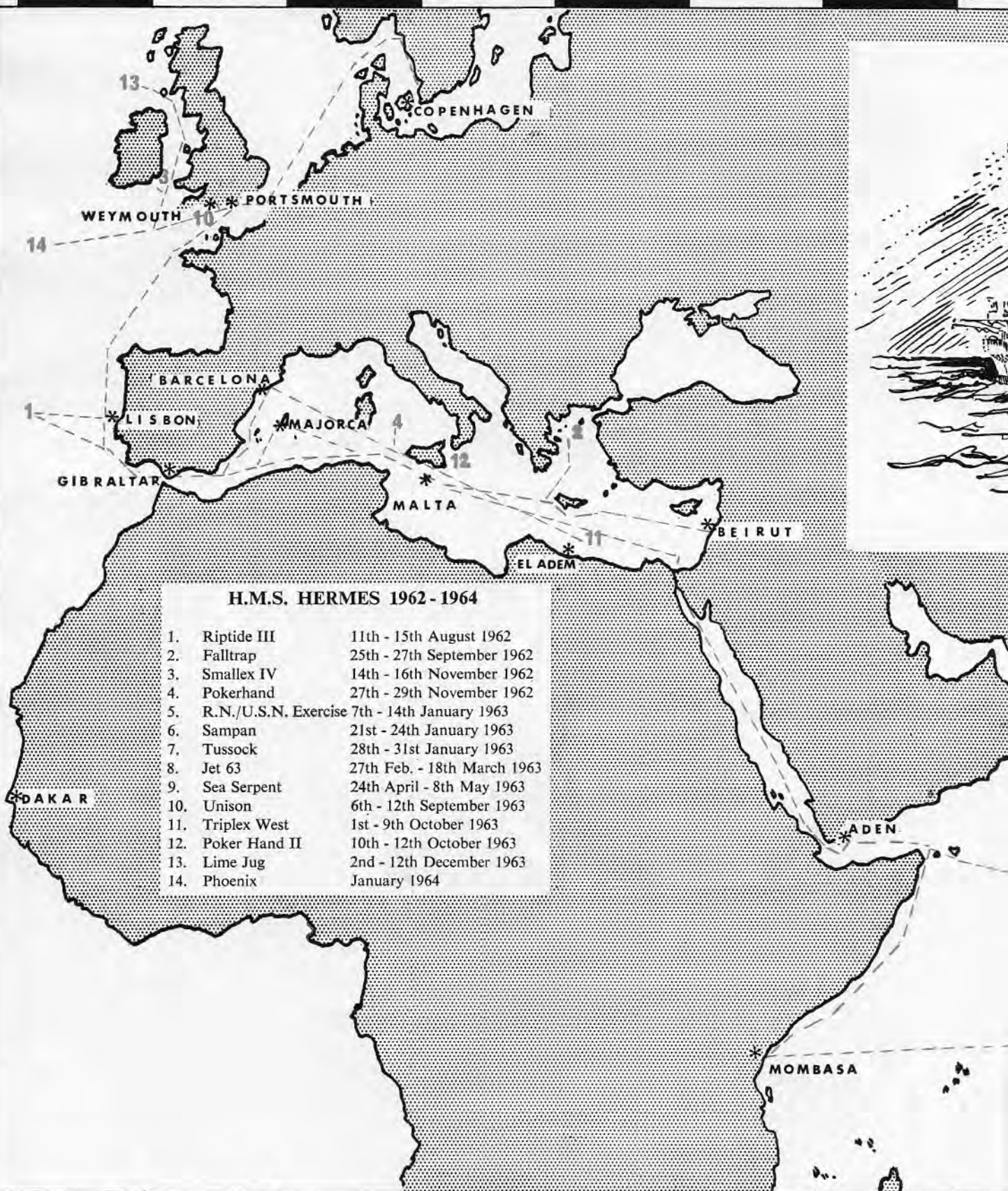
Having survived our second transit of the hottest part of the Red Sea, made more bearable by the copious use of fire hoses to cool the flightdeck and ourselves, we woke once more to the blissful cool of the air off Aden. Back to flying routines again, and that evening a vast quantity of mail arrived. The pleasure of reading this was naturally tempered by the thoughts that the writers still hadn't realised we wouldn't be with them at the advertised time, but it was still good to have news from home again.

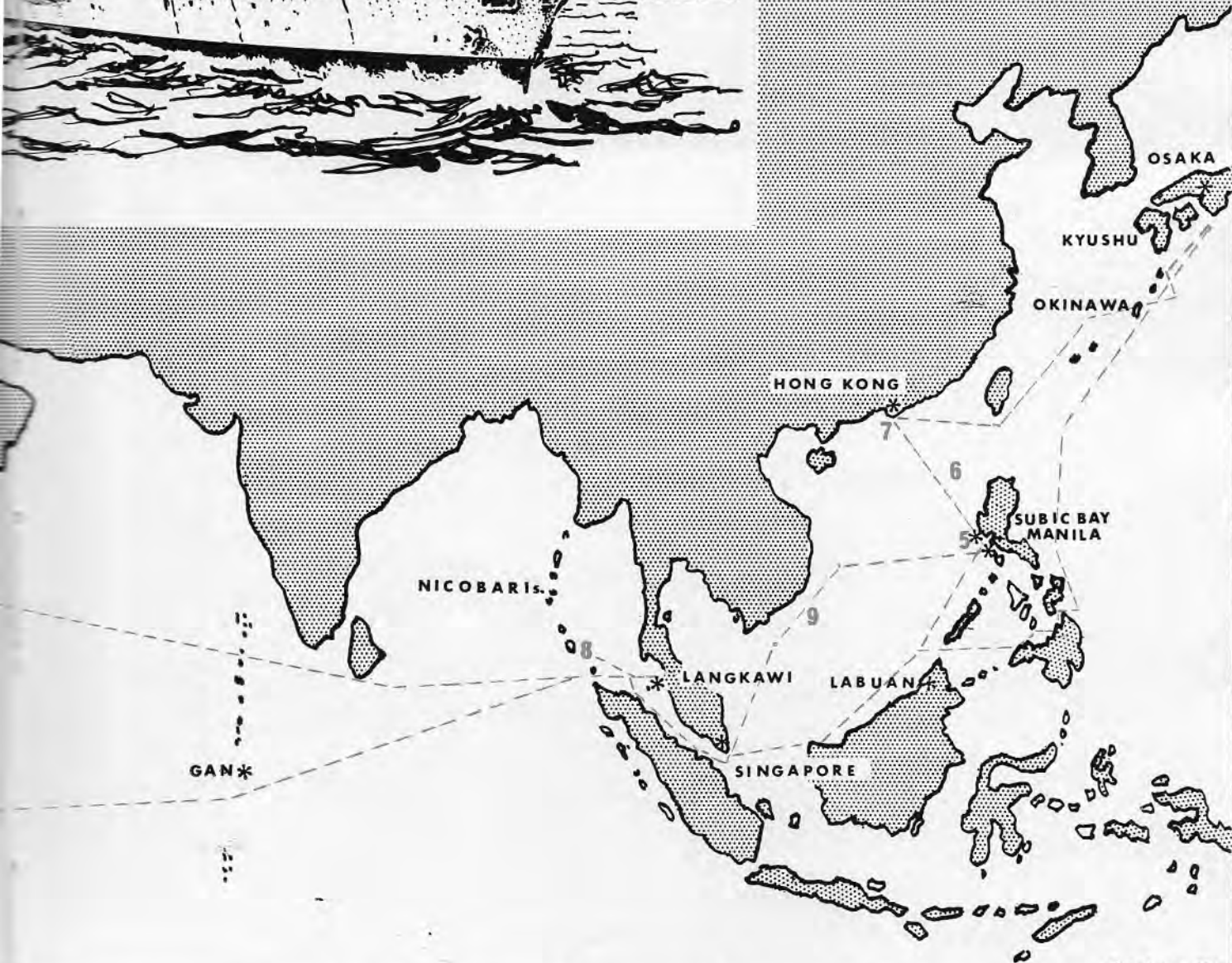
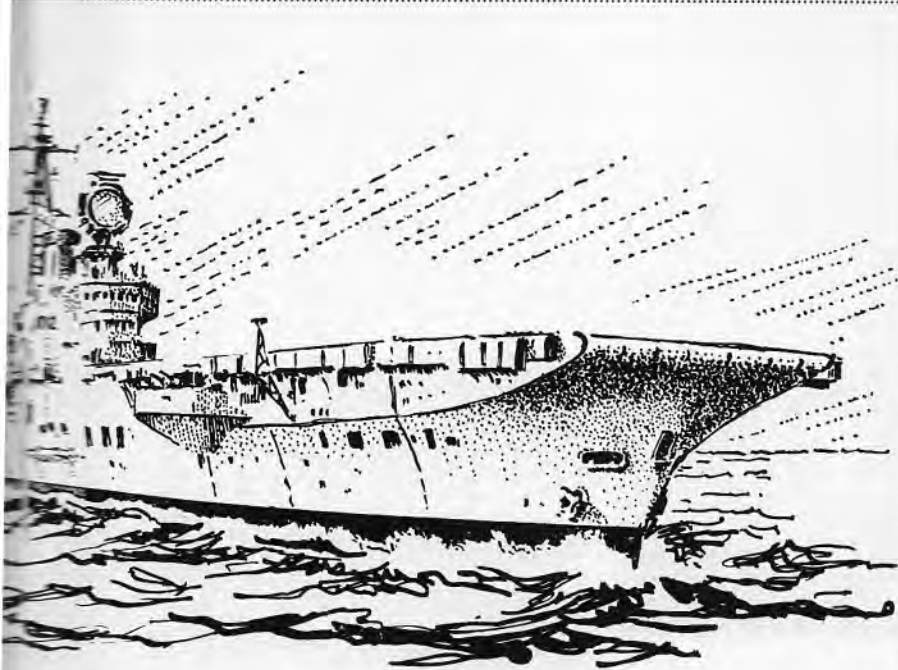
The next few days of flying were not entirely free from incidents. A Wessex, which had temporarily taken over the S.A.R. role, ditched before our very eyes, bringing their ditching scores even with the Whirlwinds. The S.A.R. Whirlwind was spread and scrambled in record time to rescue one of the crew and the remainder were picked up by the sea boat which was also quick off the mark. The



'... picked up by the Seaboat'







C.H. KNOLLYS





*'VIC' — with us at last*

intended last night sortie ended in a diversion to Khormaksar of all the Vixens airborne, and the consequent 'Flying Stations' for everyone at an unmentionable hour the following morning to get them back. But then we moved straight into harbour for three days rest and wait. 814 Squadron left us during this period and went to wait at Khormaksar for the arrival of *Victorious* and their return to the Far East. Somehow or other there were still things to buy, but few of us really appreciated this last visit to Aden, we were all itching to start on the way home again.

At last we were off and giving the squadrons a little last minute practice before moving into the Red Sea; then came another R.A.S. before we set off to get through the hot spot as fast as possible. Entering the Gulf of Suez it became noticeably cooler and then, as we anchored in the late afternoon there was great excitement as the '*Vic*' could be seen nearing the last bend in the canal. How slowly she seemed to be going though, it seemed an age before she finally anchored abeam. We gave her three, no four rousing cheers and tried our best not to feel too smug.

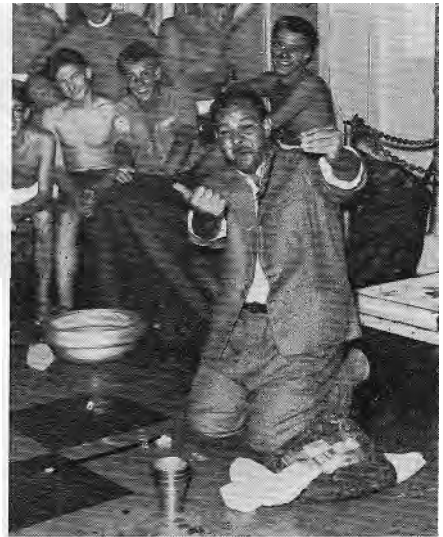
The passage through the Canal was broken by a lunch-time 'Hands to Bathe' in the Bitter Lakes, and during the afternoon everyone had the opportunity to witness the Gully-Gully Man's magic. So the day passed quickly and happily.

That evening we watched the lights of Port Said rapidly disappearing and then settled down to enjoy the, to us, pleasantly cool Mediterranean. Very soon it seemed, we were passing Malta. Here we slowed down for a couple of hours while embarking some of 819 Wessex, and a number of new faces suddenly appeared among us. A vast assortment of mail, which arrived during our refuelling from



*through the canal'*

*Olna*, was ready for collection as we started pounding our way westwards again, and with this to read and Customs forms to fill in, the next two days passed very quickly. At Gibraltar our last mail was landed, F.O.A.C. and some of his staff left us to fly home for talks on the coming exercise, and then we were through the Straits and out of the Mediterranean.



*Gully-Gully Man's magic ...*

*...More magic*



The weather, which slowed us a little off Portugal, gradually improved so that we anchored at Spithead on time and then in bright sunshine steamed past the Isle of Wight ferry and waving crowds to move alongside, back in Pompey at last.

Customs were kind and soon we were re-united with our families on the jetty, rushing over the side with parrots in cages or a few portable rabbits, or feverishly changing and packing to catch that train home. Leave was short as there was much to do in the few days alongside: hurried finishing touches for 'Unison', stores to collect and new arrivals to instal and set to work. After a week of preparation, we sailed for Lyme Bay and embarked the squadrons who went straight into the practice routines for the exercise. Between decks there was more scrubbing and painting, and in the hangar practice erections of the static display. This continued, with occasional periods at anchor off Weymouth or Brixham during an evening for a quick run ashore, and then on the last practice day there was an 'incident'.

The Mirror Control Officer was blown over the side by the jet from a taxiing Vixen. He survived the impact with the water and was chagrined to hear coming from his radio as he struggled to remain afloat, a voice saying 'He must be alright, he's swimming'!



*'Customs were kind'*



*'Re-united with our families ...*



*... on the jetty'*



Perhaps it is as well his transmitter wasn't working! He was hauled out by the S.A.R. chopper team and deposited on deck, somewhat dazed and full of seawater, but otherwise unhurt.

The day of the exercise arrived with weather just good enough and some 120 very senior officers and V.I.P. civilians were flown aboard in monstrous choppers. All of them except the very famous became anonymous on donning foul weather clothing and were shown to their windy vantage points to view ships and aircraft being put through their paces. Things went smoothly after all the preparations, with the displays, both live and static, being duly admired.

The following day, having completed the flying off of the squadrons, we entered Portsmouth again, heaving quiet sighs of relief that we had passed another test.



*... except the very famous ...'*



*.. became anonymous'*



*An expensive K.O.*

The next fourteen days seemed to go in a flash, all except the last that is, when we were prevented from sailing by high winds.

A fast passage as usual led straight to the exercise area off Tobruk, where we pounded along still at high speed but without getting very far for practically the whole of the exercise. Flying was almost continuous so that everyone was exceedingly busy. 819 Wessex Squadron who had joined us to replace 814, showed that they too were quite capable of ditching and emerging from the sea unscathed. We made one excursion away from the exercise so that 'Toothy' could exercise his skill on an agonised submariner, and entertained on board as observers just about every senior officer of all the services engaged in the exercise.

Then followed a short break in the proceedings as we moved west to exercise with the Americans again. We saw little of their ships but exchanged visits by air. It was during this period that a Scimitar of 803 reared up over its chocks, charged across the flightdeck and fiercely attacked



*Thirsty?*

an 892 Vixen. This resulted in a double K.O., and an expensive one at that!

After such an energetic period we were



*Barcelona*