



**H.M.S. VICTORIOUS**  
**1963/4**





# Captain's Foreword

by  
Captain P. M. Compston  
ROYAL NAVY



*The Editor has kindly invited me to write the foreword to this Book of the Commission.*

*Normally such remarks are recorded when the ship is on her way home and we are looking forward to a warm welcome from our families and friends on arrival at our Home Port. However, as far as VICTORIOUS is concerned, events have dictated otherwise, and we shall shortly be flying back according to the timing of our reliefs arrival at Singapore. It is a great disappointment to me, and I am certain to many of you that it has to be this way.*

*It is also a great pity that this should happen when VICTORIOUS can be considered, in every sense of the word, a fully operational strike carrier. That she has reached this stage is almost entirely due to your efforts and hard work, and your determination to overcome the handicaps with which we set out from the United Kingdom.*

*The ship has a very good name in the Middle and Far East Stations, both at sea and in harbour, and in spite of the operational requirements I am glad that we have been allowed to enjoy some interesting visits, during all of which you have been a credit to the Service and your Country.*

*In wishing you a most happy homecoming to your families and a well deserved leave, I should like to finish by thanking you most sincerely for your services to me.*

*Peter Compston*

Captain



*The Captain addresses the guests and ship's company at the Commissioning Ceremony.  
F.O.Air(H), Vice Admiral Sir John & Lady Hamilton enjoy the joke.*

## The Story of the Commission

OUR COMMISSION BEGAN, officially, on 12th June, 1964, at the end of a refit lasting through the previous winter - and what a winter - but the Commissioning Ceremony was not held until Saturday 29th June. The weather, still up to its tricks, obliged us to remain below decks, and thwarted FOAC, Rear Admiral D. C. E. F. Gibson, DSC who had made the journey by air from 'East of Suez' to be with us, but could get no nearer than Yeovilton. He spent the remainder of his term in office trying to visit VICTORIOUS, but never quite made it - other villains intervened, as this saga will disclose.

A word about the refit. A glance at the flight deck shows some of the many changes; the Bridle Catcher has gone, and a dainty new wind recorder has appeared on the star-board bow; the landing sights are new, and so on. These external signs are the least of our new blessings; departments will brag about their new spaces elsewhere in this book,

but the change which affects us all is that extensive air conditioning has been fitted and life onboard has been made much more comfortable because of it. Of course, in the nature of things, all these gains have been obtained at a price - a few more major refits and a new specification for mini-crews will be required - and the delays due to the weather, and the fact that pressure of political events sent us charging off to the East so soon after the end of the refit, inevitably meant that there were many snags to be sorted out when we were trying to work-up. We had our frustrations, but this is now all in the past and our successors will have cause to be thankful for the many improvements.

Down in latitude next to nothing, it is hard to believe that the ship could ever be cold, even with the air-conditioning, but those who lived through that winter tell us otherwise. A certain very venerable and well-connected officer was persuaded,

over a pint, to recall the days when ice-flows were to be seen in Pompey harbour.

"Last winter onboard," he said, "yes; the thing I remember best was the snow drifts in the hangar. Eight feet high at least.

"It's a bit hard to believe that out here, but back home in early '63 it was different. I remember the day I joined the Ship. I was wearing my greatcoat and carrying my sword. As I made my way gingerly along my feet left me and I landed on my backside three times on a sheet of ice close by the Ship. Somehow the Quartermaster kept a straight face.

"One of the first things I had to have done was to clear the catapults so that the work could go on. 'Take six men with brooms and sweep it all off into the bottom of the dock,' I said. Half an hour later, the killick was back. 'It can't be done.'

'Rubbish,' I said politely, 'just turn the brooms upside down and push a little harder.' But he was

plumb right; the snow had frozen solid and we only shifted it after two hard days' work with shovels.

"Then there was that day when B Lock froze over. That was very gay. Salt water freezing and all that jazz. Then we remembered our fire main. It was! and the pump on the jetty as well. On a Saturday it was quite difficult to get hold of a matey to fix it until we rang up the dockyard Duty Fire Officer. Then quite a lot of things happened in a hurry. But they all agreed later that it had been quite a good exercise.

"What could have been a disaster turned out all right in the end. It was at the New Year week end when the D.L.C. was passing the end of C Lock and observed this figure quietly going white as the water froze on him. He had slipped between the guard rails, an awfully easy thing with such road conditions, and had clewed up in the lock. He had managed to get to the steps but no further and there he was standing, gently freezing. The Officer led him to the Boiler house where he was left for half an hour whilst he thawed out, then the duty Land Rover driver whisked him away to R.N.B. where, two hours later, he recovered.

"Chief had a pretty hectic time trying to pressure test the boilers. Every time they took any water out, or tried to put any more in, the flipping stuff just froze. It made a long job of it.

"You see there was absolutely no heat in the Ship, except in a few living spaces. She was in dry dock, so got no insulation from the sea. There were no doors to speak of, and both lifts were down. The hanger was just like a wind tunnel; an Arctic wind tunnel. We drew twelve black heaters for the duty part who had to sleep in this gigantic refrigerator, to try and keep them from freezing solid as they slept. Inside a week, eight of them had vanished into mateys' grots and the other four were on the blink. I remember one duty night sitting in the Admiral's diningcabin, a temporary Wardroom, watching T.V. after supper in a greatcoat and wearing a scarf, still shivering.

"One friend of mine reckoned that walking around the Ship for half an

hour on those icy decks was as much as the average man's feet would take. After that you simply had to retire to a warm spot to recuperate. Like standing on top of a matey's brazier.

"Still it will be Summer by the time most of you get home, and you will only have to put up with a little Pompey rain. Me, I'm for the sunny West Country."

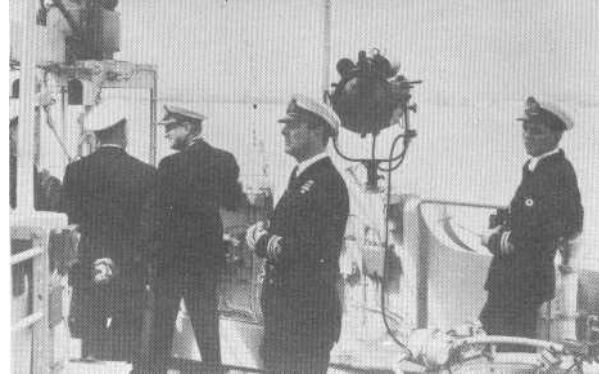
That was the winter that was.

Nevertheless, the Dockyard and the Ship jointly got the job done on time, and the weather, seeing that it had not been able to subdue the good ship VICTORIOUS, gracefully gave in; it is a fact that our year in commission has been remarkable for the absence of bad weather. The Met. Officer likes to think that the change was due to the fact that he joined on July 1st.

The 2nd July found us off to sea for the first time to carry out the trials of the ship's machinery, and, since trials are intended to bring defects to light, ours can be voted a success. Up on deck they played 'launch and recover' without aircraft, and displayed the new red floodlighting to an appreciative audience from 899 and 849 Squadrons. The full power trial turned into an exercise in fog dodging; we won.

Back in Pompey on 11th July, the catapults were hastily torn apart and the bugs were removed, while down below they were far from idle! With a canal date to be met, there was no time to lose; we sailed for the flying trials on 29th July. Apart from the ship's trials, we also had a series of Buccaneer trials with ever higher launching weights by day and night - but it must be said that there is night flying and night flying and these trials were conducted under what must have been the brightest moon and the clearest sky for a couple of centuries or so. A long session of Deck Landing Practice for Scimitar, Vixen and Gannet Operational Flying School pilots was also fitted into the programme, and many visitors came for an airborne view of the red flood-lighting, including all the night crews of 849A and 893 Squadrons who were to join us.

We had our moments. A Vixen observer, suspecting a wing-fold failure, took to his nylon as the air-



*Off to sea at last.*



*The Commander learns his escape drill.*



*C-in-C. Portsmouth inspects the Dining Hall.*

*The Flying Trials. "There I was . . ."*





craft reached the end of the catapult and landed alongside the ship - very spectacular, but no-one was hurt. There was more excitement with a Buccaneer which dropped short of the wires, bounced over them and came very close to the water as it went round again; the canopy was jettisoned by the observer, but fortunately all was well.

Then, before the trials were over, came a signal requiring us to sail a week early for the Middle East. A very hectic four days followed in which squadron personnel were rounded up from far and wide, defects were hastily rectified, and stores were rushed onboard. By the time we sailed on 14th August, very few 'essential' items remained behind. It was a pity, though, that the families day and our farewell parties had to be abandoned - *c'est la guerre* - a very successful ship's company dance had been held at the Savoy Ballroom on the Wednesday before the commissioning ceremony.



J. M. (E) Conroy presents a bouquet to the Commander's wife at the ship's company dance.

Despite the rush, the embarkation of the aircraft as we steamed down Channel went very well, and we left with our full complement of aircraft. The last to arrive, a Buccaneer, had not flown for three months, but arrived fighting fit. Hardly had we got over our surprise when Gibraltar was spotted and soon left astern. Tropical rig appeared and everyone became quite unrecognisable. There were brief glimpses of the African coast and the odd island, but we first paused for breath, and a swim, off Malta on Sunday afternoon. Our temporary plane-guards from 819 Squadron had a busy time flying to and from Hal Far with visitors and mail. We had to land one casualty by boat who was concussed diving in, and we were glad to hear later that he recovered.

Next day saw VICTORIOUS

alongside R.F.A. OLN for the first of many replenishments. And so to the Canal which we transitted on 21st - just one week out from home. HERMES was waiting for us at the southern end and made it clear that she was very glad to see us. Our friends from 819 had been left in Malta to take passage in HERMES when she arrived.

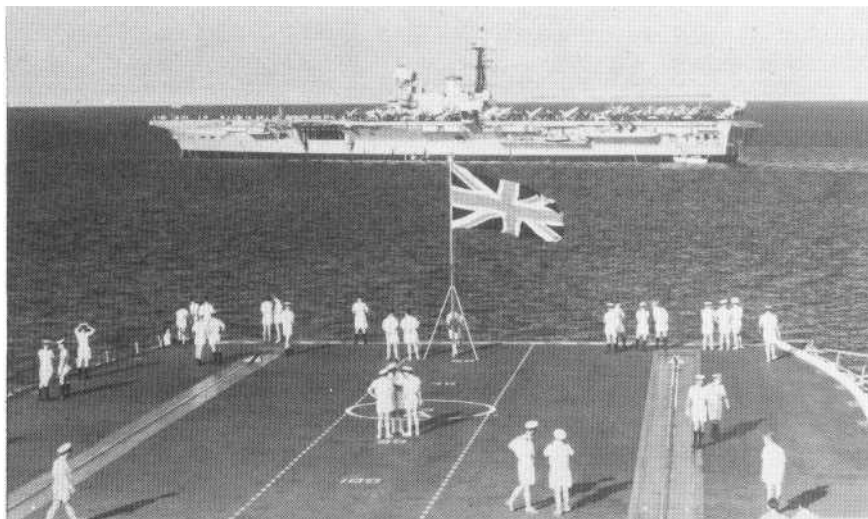
The Red Sea treated us to some excellent sunbathing weather and the temperature rose steadily. The flight deck became increasingly popular, and we were very glad to have that air-conditioning.

Saturday 24th found the flight deck looking more business-like again to launch 2 Gannets to Aden, and on Sunday, when we had our first day's flying, we welcomed 814 Squadron, hot from HERMES and the sands of Khormaksar. This was



*The Gully Gully man fools us all again.*

*'Appy 'Ernes, homeward bound, meets us at Suez.*





a memorable day for another reason; it saw the first edition of VICNEWS, the ship's paper, which was to be published every day at sea, and soon became a vital part of the life of the ship. The Editor, Lieutenant Commander E.M.G. Hewitt tells this story himself.

"So you've got lumbered with it", said the Chief scornfully. These were the first words I wrote for the first edition of VICNEWS of the 1963-4 commission. I chewed them over all through the commission wondering whether I was glad or sorry to be the Editor, without reaching a conclusion. Now, of course, I'm glad - because it's all over - and there are 142 editions behind me.

The purpose of VICNEWS was to provide the ship's company with some daily news when the ship was at sea and out of touch with newspapers. The second need may sound strange to those who may read this and have not served in an aircraft carrier - it was to keep everyone informed of what was going on in their own ship and what it was trying to achieve each day. Carrier life is so compartmented that very few people have a general knowledge of all daily activities.

This second need gave rise to the daily column entitled "Onboard Yesterday", in which the Editor endeavoured to crystallise the main events of the previous day and allowed himself some comment and license to make it more digestible than an official naval history. Inevitably, one couldn't please everyone all the time - nor was it desirable to soft soap every topic. So without I hope abusing either the freedom of the press (kindly allowed me by the Captain) or the power of the press to present news items from any angle it likes, some bite was added to this column. I then developed a thick skin and went my own way.

The other essential ingredient to the paper was undoubtedly sports news. Many people turn straight to the back page of their newspaper for

the sports news at home, and it was always possible to do this in VICNEWS. The football league goings on were never more faithfully followed and recorded.

Everyone likes to look at pictures and because, for reproduction reasons, photography was out, the burden fell on the cartoonists. In a ship's company of 2,200 there is a lot of talent if you can find it. Even so, we were fortunate to find cartoonists of the Calibre of JAN and DIDO, whose work also adorns this book. VICNEWS published at least one cartoon every day with the exception of one day when it was deliberately omitted in the edition which reported the assassination of President Kennedy.

The daily formula was completed by a "feature" which varied between a James Bond type serial entitled "The Adventures of Nick Carton" to a crossword or learned treatise. This was where the casual contributor came into his own. Useful under this heading too, were the "Letters to the Editor", which were on occasions most diverting and gave readers a chance to hit back at the "Onboard Yesterday" column.

The photograph on this page was the daily heading of the newspaper and was designed and drawn by Shipwright Brisco, the ship's painter. Other members of the permanent staff were:-

News Editor:

R.S.(W) D. M. Turley

Sports Editor:

R.O.2(G) T. Bethell

Cartoonists:

O.A.1. G. Heath (Jan)

Captain D. C. Downe (Dido)

The Loyal Regiment  
Fiction

Lieutenant Commander

P. W. Haines

Production Staff:

A.B. C. N. Hales

A.B. J. Preston

P.O.M.E. B. S. Warren

Distribution:

A.B. J. Malcolm

O/SEA C. W. Miller.

On Monday 26th August, we entered Aden for our first Self Maintenance Period (S.M.P.) which in this case was also doubling as our post trials maintenance period. The stream of rabbits started to come onboard and 'Postie' disappeared under a pile of parcels from which he only emerged nearly a year later. The beaches plus glasses, both dark and liquid, were also very popular; a few enthusiasts played games, but for most this was a time to relax when ashore and enjoy that strange phenomenon the sun. The first of the Cocktail parties was held, and the King's Own Scottish Borderers came onboard to Beat Retreat. The Angling Club went in H.M.S.



'Rabbits' . . .



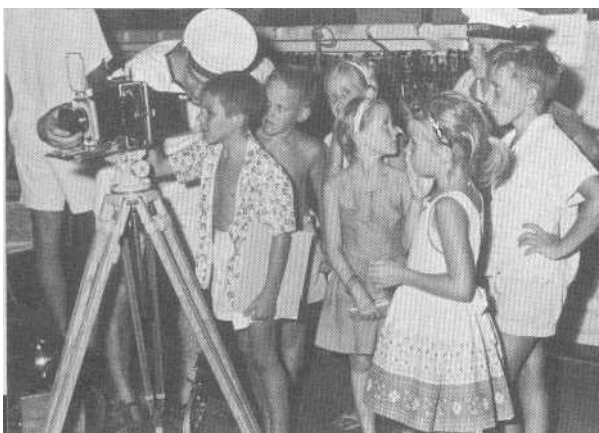
. . . from Aden.



YEAH - A FISHING ROD -  
FOR ME MUM.



*The King's own Scottish Borderers 'Beat-Retreat' on the flight-deck at Aden.*



*Young visitors.*



*The Parliamentary Delegation watches the flying . . .*

*and finds it hot down below.*



ESKIMO for a weekend to Perim Island, and on Sunday 2nd September the ship was open to visitors for the first time - some 900 came off by boat.

We sailed on 4th September, carried out a RAS with TIDEREACH, and then got down to work. During this first work-up, a lot of lessons were learned and some relearned; by the end of it, we were beginning to see the wood for the trees. At halftime on 8th, we were alongside TIDEREACH again for another drink of F.F.O. and AVCAT, after which we transferred stores and provisions by jackstay from RELIANT - this proved to be a hot job, and 100 gallons of limers were consumed by the storing parties. As if to prove that this was all good fish-head stuff, a salmon

during night-flying on 10th September picked up the crew of a Wessex which decided to stay in the Gulf of Aden; this was to be the only aircraft lost in the whole year.

While we were at Aden, Surgeon Lt. (D) Grant and Sub. Lt. Taylor joined forces with the ship's Army Liaison team for a trip into the desert. Here is Lt. Grant's account.

#### STRANGERS ON THE SHORE

I'd been warned about Tiger Beer.

"Where are you going during the first workup?" I said to Seaballs, over the fourth pint.

"Into the desert."

"Marvellous," I said, "I'd love to do something like that."

"Why not?" said Seaballs.



*Ah! That's better!*

coloured figure was much in evidence on the flight deck throughout the evolution; he will have his say on a later page. SALISBURY kept us company during much of the work-up; we towed her as an exercise, and the Padre made the first of his Jackstay Transfers to her. On 10th we welcomed a Parliamentary Delegation onboard for a strenuous day's tour of the ship, and they departed leaving a message of thanks to the ship's company for an enjoyable day.

ESKIMO also worked with us and, while acting as plane-guard

"Glad to see you go," said my boss, just before we embarked in the R.A.F. Belvedere. I was still thinking this one out as we landed at Khormaksar, where we were met by Seaballs and Driver O'Brien with the Landrover.

We? Yes. It seemed that I wasn't the only man in VICTORIOUS with a hankering after the wide open spaces. My colleague had talked himself into a ride on the back of one of the Ferret Scout Cars, of the Royal Scots Greys Recce Troop, who were to be our convoy escort.



"We leave at 0430."  
"Why?" I said, not unreasonably.  
"To catch the Tide."  
"In the desert?"

Surely enough we missed the tide and, instead of driving the first thirty miles along the flat beach, soon had to turn into the hot, dusty coastal desert, and, after a number of boggings down, arrived at Shukra six hours later.

Our convoy consisted of three Ferrets, two Royal Signals Landrovers an R.M. Forward Air Controller in a Landrover, three or four three-ton trucks with petrol and stores, and ourselves in the Landrovers; and we were here joined by another three-tonner with a platoon of the Federal Regular Army.

From Shukra we climbed up through an incredibly desolate pass of black lava and volcanic dust, emerging at last on to the Lodar Plain, a vast expanse of sand and scrub dotted with hills (Jebels) and backed by an impressive 4,000 ft. escarpment, the plain itself being about 3,500 ft. above sea level. The journey across the plain to Lodar took us through several 'dust bowls' and we were choked and blinded and covered from head to foot, along with all our equipment, in the thick, fine dust of which we were never free again, until our return to Aden.

It was dark by the time we arrived in the F.R.A. Compound at Lodar and, having drawn water from the bowser, which was to be a welcome, if infrequent, visitor for the next few days, rapidly demolished a splendid 'compo' stew and turned in under a tarpaulin slung between two vehicles.

Our camp was surrounded by a rock wall and barbed wire, and at night was patrolled by F.R.A. sentries. These 'fortifications' were intended to discourage the somewhat light-fingered and trigger-happy tribesmen!

To the East was the mud-built town of Lodar and to the South a jebel crowned by a picturesque blue and white fort, looking for all the world like a delicately iced cake.

A frequent sight on the plain in the heat of the day, were the 'dust devils' - whirlwinds of dust, both large and small, caused by 'thermals' moving across the desert.



*In the desert, Camels and Ferrets.*

Flocks of Kite Hawks, (sometimes called by a less flattering name) wheeled and hovered over the camp. Out on the plain the women of Lodar tended their crops and herds of goats and drew water from the occasional well, and the wandering Bedouin followed their camel herds through the dust and scrub.

On the third day, Seaball was occupied with a communications exercise with VICTORIOUS, so we hitched a ride with the Greys, riding on the backs of the Ferrets, up the escarpment to Mukeiras, through what must be some of the most thrilling and fascinating scenery in the world.

After a short journey across the plain we reached the foot of the escarpment and set off up the Thirra pass, a cleverly engineered, but rough, track zig-zagging for 4,000 ft. up the sheer face of the cliff.

The Royal Engineers were working on part of the pass where, tragically, two of their men had been killed by a rock fall a couple of days previously. We all turned to with picks, shovels, crowbars and bare hands, and in about half an hour, had the way sufficiently cleared. I wonder if any other 'working party' including R.N. personnel has ever operated at 7,000 ft. and this far inland.

Reaching the top at 7,500 ft., we looked out over the plain below as if at a relief map, the hills and ridges rising out of the blue heat haze of the desert. The air was now fresher and cooler and we found ourselves passing through a 'Land of Milk and Honey'. Water was plentiful, and women and children worked in the lush green millet fields, and at

the wells, carrying water jars on their heads to feed a maze of irrigation channels, while camels and humped cattle moved endlessly back and forth along sunken paths, pulling ropes which drew the water.

During the next two days we carried out our F.A.C. exercises with 801 and 893 Squadrons, laying out our target markers and trying to talk the aircraft on to the targets, the moving Ferrets (not, 893 please note, the large herd of camels last seen travelling due South from Lodar in a cloud of dust).

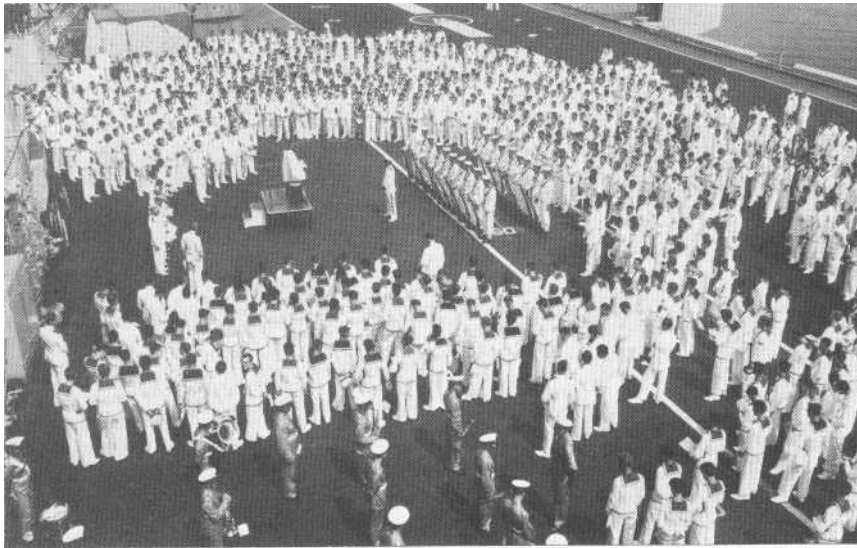
The King's Own Scottish Borderers dug themselves in at the foot of a Gebel, and following a photo recce by a Vixen, several air strikes were launched against them. Late on the last day the photographs, and some very welcome mail, were dropped to us by a Gannet, and we returned to Lodar to strike camp.

Twenty four hours later we were back in Aden, sorry to finish what had proved to be an incredibly interesting trip, but hot, dusty, tired, and with a monumental six day thirst.

I really should have listened when they told me about Tiger.

MAL GESTE.

After a final couple of days in Aden, we sailed again on 16th, this time for a fast passage to Singapore - having failed to prevent the establishment of Malaysia, Indonesia was becoming increasingly hostile. During the passage, there was a truce to flying and the flight deck became regularly available for 'happy hours' of deck hockey, volley ball etc. The rugby enthusiasts trained strenuously and the P.T.I.s did a roaring trade;



*Prayers after Divisions in the Indian Ocean.*

those less inclined to violent exercise made the most of the fine weather to add a further shade to their Aden tans. SALISBURY kept us company, and we met TIDEREACH again near the Maldives for another RAS - accompanied by the band playing on deck. So that she shouldn't feel left out, we shopped again from RELIANT next day. Off the Nicobar Islands, we went to Divisions on the flight-deck (to try out our long whites and admire the assorted shades) and later that day the finals of the deck-hockey and volley ball competitions were held. The deck-hockey was a very close



*F.O.2: meets the Heads of Departments and the Squadron C.O.s.*

contest between the A.E.D. (Armourers) team and the 'S and S' team who were the victors after five (or was it six) periods of extra time.

An elderly and crafty team representing the Air Department, three Ops Officers, C.B.G.L.O., F.D.O., and Lt. Cdr. (F), won the volley ball contest.

When we arrived at the northern entrance to the Malacca Straits, we flew the aircraft again, and followed this with a RAS under a tropical downpour. ARK ROYAL, when we met her heading West, said some gloomy things about the weather they had suffered in the Singapore area, and we began to recall the Gulf of Aden with nostalgia. Finally, before disembarking our squadrons to the airfields on Singapore island so that they could continue flying during the ship's S.M.P. in the Dockyard, we were again visited by a Parliamentary Delegation - the Far East one this time.

Our first visit to Singapore, even though it was in October, was just in time for 'the last sea mail before Christmas', so the shops in Sembawang and further afield did a brisk trade, and Postie became the victim of an avalanche of parcels.

Meanwhile, we welcomed Vice Admiral J. P. Scatchard, C.B., D.S.C. on board; as Flag Officer Second in Command, Far East Fleet, he was to fly his flag in VICTORIOUS for much of our time

on the Station, and we were to come to know his insatiable, genial curiosity and his deep concern with all that affected the efficiency of the ship and the lives of those who sailed in her.

We were honoured too by a visit from the First (and last?) Lord of the Admiralty, Lord Carrington. He made a lightning tour of the ship, and also visited the squadrons ashore.

A strike in the Dockyard now came along to hamper the work below. It proved to be a very peaceful strike, but brought another odd job our way. Over 40 volunteer drivers from the ship took over the running of the Dockyard Garage and provided a steady stream of vehicles from Landrovers to 10 ton articulated lorries to help keep the Base running. The drivers came from all departments, from the Chief Baker to Seamen, and enjoyed the change. They earned the grateful thanks of the families on the base - Naval transport copes with the garbage!

Flag Officer Commanding in



*Admiral Sir Desmond Dreyer, K.C.B., O.B.E., D.C., Flag Officer Commanding, Far East Fleet.*



*VICTORIOUS takes over the Dockyard garage.*