

Tobruk. This lasted two days, the ALBION joined us from the Canal, and the three carriers took part in "Decex", which took us back to the westward past Malta and Cape Bon. It was during Decex that a Scimitar went berserk as it left the catapult, and the pilot, who successfully ejected, was splendidly picked up in double quick time by the S.A.R. chopper unhurt. The exercise ended on the night of 10th December and we headed confidently for Gibraltar and a two-day rabbit run. However, the weather deteriorated and by dawn we were hove-to to save the aircraft parked forward from heavy damage. The wind stayed at force eight all day with gusts reaching 51 knots, and boats and catwalks were damaged. This in itself was bad enough, but the delay would not have been too bad had the rudder not chosen this inopportune moment to jam five degrees to starboard. It was a struggle to keep the ship head-to-wind in the gale using the main engines and we gave thanks that this had not happened during the previous night's high speed exercise, when we passed within three miles of Cape Bon at 27 knots! The gale began to moderate during the night and next morning we started making our way as best we could towards the lee of Majorca. Our course was anything but straight, and at one time we did a complete circle unintentionally. Eventually we got there and anchored, and the divers set to with underwater cutting gear flown by one of ALBION'S Sky Raiders from Gibraltar. After twelve hours of diving in very cold water the rudder was cleared and at 0400 on the 14th we rang on 26 knots for Gibraltar. These divers had done a magnificent job and the full story of the Rudder Incident is told in another part of this book.

Arriving off Gibraltar at 0700 on 15th, we embarked the First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Caspar John, and Captain Troup (late Executive Officer of VICTORIOUS), and carried out an air defence exercise against ARK ROYAL, before anchoring in Gibraltar Bay at noon.

Four hours leave were granted to each watch to collect the Christmas rabbits, and at midnight we sailed for Portsmouth which was as planned before the rudder incident. Having disembarked all the aircraft to shore we arrived in Portsmouth on 19th to give seven days leave to each watch and to prepare for our spell in the Far East.

On 21st December Captain H. R. B. Janvrin, D.S.C., was relieved by Captain J. M. D. Gray, O.B.E.

By collecting all our unwanted foreign coins, and some English ones also, and with the help of a donation from the Welfare Fund and Wardroom we were able to bring a happier Christmas to three Children's Homes in Portsmouth. We gave them TV sets, VHF radios, record players, new beds and sandpits to the total value of £100 to each home.

Up to 31st December we had steamed 19,268 miles and been at sea for 62 days.



Captain Janvrin leaves



A New T.V.



Firestreak Firings



Happy Hour



*Top: R.A.S. F.F.O. Old Style (the third Victorious)
Centre: R.A.S. F.F.O. New Style (The Old Vic Touring Company)
Below: Vixen in Flames*

January to February 1961—Portsmouth to Cape Town

All leave expired on the 5th January and another hectic storing, ammunitioning and painting programme got under way to meet our sailing date of 17th January. During this period the officers had a New Year dance in 'C' hangar, and the following day a mammoth children's party was held in the same place.

Our departure was delayed until the 20th by an engine-room defect, but on that day we steamed past little groups of—we like to think—sad wives, waving handkerchiefs (damp) at the entrance to Portsmouth and we were on our way. The next day the Vixens and Scimitars embarked in Lyme Bay. The Gannets and Choppers were left ashore while the ship proceeded to Cardigan Bay to carry out Firestreak firings. The firings were completed in spite of typical January weather. One 892 pilot achieved undying fame by destroying two targets in the air, and damaging not only his own aircraft but also two parked Scimitars on landing! At the end of this period the Gannets embarked and we made for Plymouth Sound to collect ground crews and disembark the damaged aircraft. The weather intervened and prevented us from entering the Sound in the morning so we pressed on up Channel, embarked the Choppers from Portland and returned to Plymouth p.m. on 27th, by which time it had moderated.

This delayed our final departure from United Kingdom nearly 24 hours, and by the time we had battered our way through heavy weather in the Bay of Biscay we were 24 hours late in arriving in Gibraltar. Unfortunately our passage time to Cape Town did not allow us to delay our departure from Gibraltar, so we only had 24 hours there, during which F.O.A.C. rejoined from a visit to the U.S.A.

On 1st February we sailed from Gibraltar with R.F.A. TIDEREACH as our tanker and H.M.S. BLACKPOOL as our planeguard for the long, non-stop passage to Cape Town. This team of three ships remained together until the end of March and became known as "The Old Vic Touring Company".

Our passage south consisted of daily flying exercises and fast overnight passages to catch up TIDEREACH. The C.O.D. aircraft collected mail from Freetown and fortunately as it happened, landed on just before the last Vixen of a detail had its undercarriage collapse on landing. The aircraft burst into flames and was a write-off, but the crew jumped out unhurt.

As we made our way southwards and the temperature increased, "Happy Hour" was instituted, and between 1615 and 1730 flying stopped and the flight deck was declared open to one and all for every conceivable sort of sport from Deck Hockey to Judo, and Uckers to Pistol shooting!

We crossed the line on 9th February and F.O.A.C., the Captain and all the Commanders had to endure the time-honoured initiation ceremony with several hundred novices.



King Neptune and his Queen



Crossing the Line --- the Captain goes in!



Drum Majorettes



The Minstrel Show



Some Model Visitors



Open to Visitors



Table Mountain. Cableway



Our Last View of CapeTown



As we neared the Cape we met H.M.S. LYNX and S.A.S. VRYSTAAT who were to assist us in a "Shopwindow" demonstration before entering Cape Town. All our thoughts were now devoted to the Cape Town visit. The ship was spring-cleaned, while the squadrons and ships in company rehearsed the demonstration.

On 16th February we anchored in Table Bay for a final paint-ship effort and the next day operation "Shopwindow" took place. Many prominent South African citizens and Service personnel were embarked for the day, including Her Worship the Mayor of Cape Town.

Many aspects of surface, underwater and aerial warfare were demonstrated. In spite of low cloud, and the claims for broken windows from locals ashore when aircraft broke the sound barrier, the demonstration

was a huge success. We entered Cape Town harbour at sunset to receive a very enthusiastic welcome. The scale of hospitality offered to the ship was overwhelming, and we had to set up a special bureau in the ship to cope with all the invitations.

The next ten days passed in a whirlwind of entertainment, parties in private homes and on board, barbecues and every kind of sporting fixture. The ship was only open to the general public on three days, but that did not seem to make any difference to the number of private guests who visited the ship daily. At a conservative estimate it was reckoned that about 25,000 visitors must have been on board at some time or another.

On Sunday, 19th February, a new Queen's Colour was presented to the South American and South Atlantic Station by His Excellency the United Kingdom High Commissioner, Sir John Maud, and dedicated by the Assistant Bishop of Cape Town, the Rt. Revd. Roy Cowdrey, on VICTORIOUS'S flight deck. This was the first time that a Queen's Colour has been presented on board a ship and special dispensation had to be obtained from Her Majesty to do so. Normally a Colour is presented on sovereign territory and the absence of this in Cape Town made it necessary to use the expanse of VICTORIOUS'S flight deck.

On Tuesday, 28th February, we sailed from Cape Town and were seen off by a huge crowd on the jetty and the breakwater. It was the end of a most memorable visit.



Sir John Maud



The Queen's Colour and Guard



Crater City, Aden

March 1961—Cape Town to Singapore

Our next stop was Aden. Unfortunately time did not allow us to stop at any of the other desirable places in South Africa, but the aircraft carried our flypasts at Hermanus, Port Elizabeth, East London and Durban, and the ship steamed past the first three close in.

In the Mozambique Channel F.O.A.C. carried out his Operational Readiness Inspection with the assistance of Canberras of the Royal Rhodesian Air Force, "paper" submarines and lonely islands which turned into "enemy cruisers" for the day. BLACKPOOL paid a fleeting visit to Mombasa to collect mail and stores while we carried on flying and exercised towing TIDEREACH.

We arrived in Aden on the 7th March where we found BULWARK with her Choppers and Commando. On the 14th we were on our way again to meet HERMES from the East and carry out a three-day exercise known as "Sea Sheikh" with her. This included both air defence and Army support in the Aden Protectorate. On conclusion of the exercise F.O.A.C. and his staff transferred to HERMES by Chopper, and we set off eastward for Singapore.

It was at this stage that we heard something of our future programme. It was not terribly inspiring, but the main cause for concern was that after our spell in the Far East and leave in Portsmouth in November, it was planned for us to spend Christmas in the Mediterranean! However, "the best laid schemes o' mice and men gang aft agley," and this was not to be.

On passage we met RESURGENT for the first of many solid replenishments at sea and carried out flying exercises whenever opportunity presented itself. BLACKPOOL kindly collected the mail from Colombo.

Having disembarked the majority of the fixed-wing aircraft to R.A.F. Tengah and Seletar, and the helicopters to R.N.A.S. Sembawang, the ship arrived at Singapore Naval Base on 29th March and saluted the flag of C.-in-C. Far East, Admiral Sir David Luce. We had arrived just in time for the Easter week-end, and ended our longest period at sea so far—27 days out of 30. Little did we know that later on we were to look upon this as chicken feed!

At this point, since leaving U.K., we had steamed 21,375 miles and spent 55 days at sea, the total since commissioning being 40,643 miles in 117 days at sea.

Solid Replenishment



Singapore Naval Base

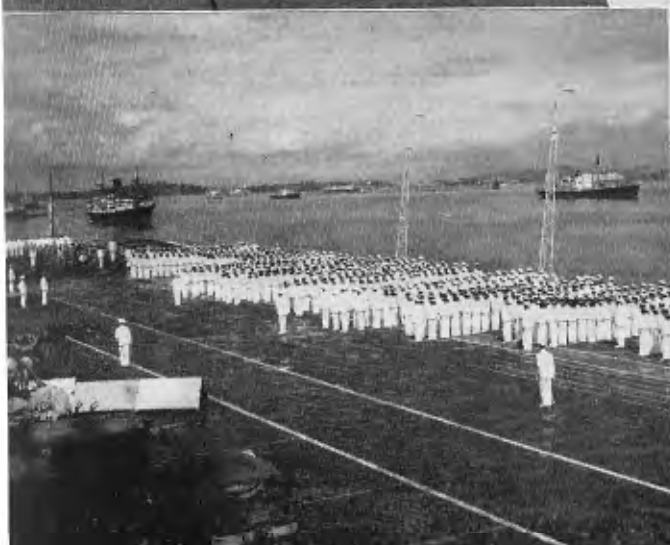
Paya Lebar Air Show



A Scimitar shows its paces at Paya Lebar



825's Witch at the Air Show



Divisions in Singapore Roads



F.O.2 Transfers at Sea



Banyan on Pulau Tioman

April to May 1961—Singapore area and "Pony Express"

After all the sea time of the previous months it was a pleasant change to have an appreciable period in harbour for self-maintenance, to cover a very full sports programme and to organise a major run on the shops.

The Easter week-end saw the biggest concentration of ships in Singapore for a long time. It included three carriers, H.M.A.S. MELBOURNE, BULWARK and ourselves, and a host of destroyers and frigates, all preparing for the big S.E.A.T.O. exercise, "Pony Express", to be held later in the month.

During this period ashore all the Air Squadrons, including the R.A.N. took part with the R.A.F. in the Singapore Air Show at the civil airport at Paya Lebar. This was held to celebrate the opening of the new control tower. It was a sort of Far East Farnborough and although it lacked the polish of the real thing it was certainly a great success as far as Singapore was concerned.

On 12th April we sailed to embark the squadrons. The week-end of the 15th-17th was spent at anchor in Singapore Roads which was as close to the city as we were ever likely to get. Sharks inspecting the gash became a major attraction for the amateur fishermen, but it is believed that no kills were made on either side.

The following week we joined up with the Far East Fleet for a work-up before Pony Express, and 825 Squadron operated from BULWARK for a few days while we concentrated on the fixed-wing flying. The Flag Officer, 2nd in Command, Rear Admiral Le Fanu, transferred from BELFAST at sea and hoisted his flag in VICTORIOUS on 19th April.

The work-up culminated at the week-end in a well organised Fleet Banyan at Pulau Tioman, an island off the east coast of Malaya. VICTORIOUS'S supply branch provided a jumbo-size beach barbecue, washed down with ample beer from one of the R.F.A.'s. Expedition parties took advantage of the opportunity to explore the island, and when the time came to leave on Sunday night one of our parties had not returned. CASSANDRA was left behind to find them and bring them on, which she did the following morning. The story of their hazardous experience appears elsewhere in this book.

On passage north we carried out fleet exercises and met the U.S. Fleet on 25th April. The whole area was a mass of ships of every sort, size and description, and it took a little while for all to get into formation. We operated independently with an escort of two U.S. destroyers, EDWARDS and HANSON, in support of the amphibious landing force. The exercise consisted of landing this force on the beaches of North Borneo, and the troops involved included 42 R.M. Cdo. in BULWARK, U.S. Marines in U.S.S. THETIS BAY (a helicopter carrier) and Australians. The "opposition" consisted of submarines, aircraft from U.S.S. CORAL SEA and R.A.F. Canberras from Singapore. 984 Squadron. the 'D's'. with help from the

Vixens and Scimitars, coped with this lot happily on the first day despite the ship being "torpedoed" at least once! It was unfortunate that CORAL SEA had to leave the exercise for "urgent business", and MELBOURNE had to take on as opposition party at very short range. The air defence phase was followed by Ground Support while the cruisers and destroyers bombarded the northern tip of Borneo. During this phase a Scimitar pilot ejected after getting a fire warning. He was picked up by one of BULWARK'S Choppers and flown to Singapore, but most regrettably died of his injuries in Changi hospital on 5th May.

During the landings 825 Squadron operated from MELBOURNE while we carried on supporting the landing in rather poor weather conditions. The Commander of the U.S. 7th Fleet, Admiral Griffin, visited F02 in VICTORIOUS by helicopter on 2nd, and the exercise came to an end on 3rd when all ships anchored off the beaches for the "wash-up".

Rear Admiral Le Fanu transferred his flag back to BELFAST and in the evening of the 4th all ships sailed. The majority of the Far East Fleet went north for their Japanese cruise, but we, unfortunately, had to return to Singapore for an interim docking.

On 8th May we disembarked 803 to Butterworth, 892 to Tengah, 849 to Seletar and 825 to Sembawang, and the following day we arrived in the Naval Base to prepare for docking.



Admiral Griffin, U.S.N., visits Vic.



In K.G. VI Dock

May to June 1961 - Singapore Docking

Before putting the ship into dock, shore billets had to be found for all personnel and it was a major task to find space for them. The squadrons all retired to their adopted airfields, leaving the ship's company taking up every available billet in **TERROR** and the **D.S.A.** (Dockside accommodation).

Exped parties into the jungle and to sea got into full swing; leave was granted to everyone who could take it; and very soon it became apparent that wherever you went in Malaya you were bound to see a "Victorian". Even the jungle patrols of the Ghurkas had their representatives from the ship.

On the 16th the ship docked down in King George VI dock, and at the same time we heard the welcome news that we would have Christmas at home after all.

As the remainder of the fleet was away in Japan, the dockyard was able to direct nearly all its effort to **VICTORIOUS** and a vast amount of work was carried out, including the repairing of the rudder which had behaved so badly in December.

On 8th June the ship undocked and on 10th we returned to live onboard. This gave us two working days before sailing on the 15th June to embark the squadrons and fly in the local area. Then we had another week-end at Pulau Tioman (on our own this time) and a full week flying and exercising before returning on 24th to the Naval Base to hoist the flag of the new **F02**, Rear Admiral Frewen.

It was during this week that a Vixen doing night Deck Landing Practice stalled and crashed into the sea, and in spite of an all-night search by ships and aircraft no trace of the crew was found.

Admiral Frewen, the new F.O.2





Exercise Landing Parties-



—and the opposition!

