

Kit Colbeck time-line: 7 July 1975 to 19 September 1977 Age 25 to 27 years

Unlike my trip in 1968-1969 HMS Hermes 4th Commission I chose not to keep a journal. I was to undergo some intensive prolonged study in my spare time to prepare for Professional exams to become a Chief Petty Officer and a trip to 'The Med' did not hold excitement for a married 25 year old Petty Officer as did the 'Far-East for an unmarried 18 year old. Unfortunately it also means my recollections of events and happenings cannot be placed in a strictly chronological order.

1969-June 1971: From my leaving the Hermes in 1969 the ship had continued in the fixed-wing role completing her 4th commission, deployed in the Mediterranean from December 1969 till returning to Portsmouth in June 1970; to await conversion.

Plymouth based: From March 1971 to August 1972 in Devonport, Hermes had been converted from a fixed-wing aircraft carrier and was now operated as an Amphibious Assault vessel; a helicopter landing platform [LPH] or as the Royal Navy called such vessels a Commando Carrier. The angled-deck was redundant and the flight-deck was marked with landing spots for helicopters. The function of the ship was to provide fast deployment of Marines. The ship had a secondary role in Anti-Submarine Warfare [ASW]

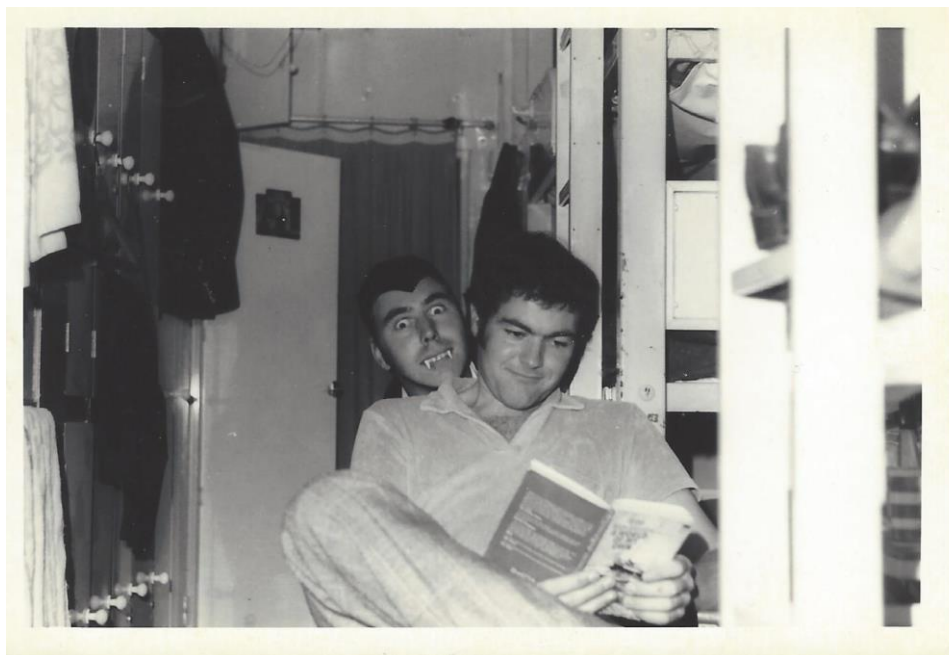
7 July 1975: I Joined HMS Hermes in Plymouth where it had just returned in June, from Quebec. It was to be my other home till being drafted on 19 September 1977.

Commuting: The ship was still under-going a refit in Guzz when I joined. My family were living in Married-Quarters at Ilchester. I worked four and a half days per week and then travelled back on Friday afternoon. Generally I got a lift with Dave Plant another electrical senior-rate working in the same AED Dept. He owned a Ford Cortina E Mk 2 saloon, which by the then standards used to go like a rocket and Dave enjoyed 'booting-it'.

I was given a billet in the Petty Officer's Mess, in a cabin sharing with five others: POME Jock Kyle, another POME Brian [I think] Tranter, who spent much of his spare time producing cartoons, and also POREL(A) Graham Humphrey also Clive ? another General Service PO. This was a considerable change from my last time aboard; in 4N1 mess-deck, where 82 personnel occupied that mess. The previous mess-deck was close to the centre-line in the middle of the ship and below/or close to the water-line which meant it was subjected to the least physical movement in a rough sea. My new accommodation was starboard-side of the centre-line, and far forward on 2-deck [immediately below the Flight-Deck] and very susceptible to 'Roughers' as the bow could rise to a great height above a sea trough before crashing down. The roll of the ship would be greatly felt in rough sea conditions. The cabin was not on the side of the ship and therefore did not have a port-hole, so all lighting was provided by fluorescent tube.

Fresh Fruit: The tot had gone 5 years ago but as a Petty Officer I had a daily allowance of shorts. I did not drink mine and it had been noticed by an old Petty

Officer [Seaman] who approached me with a proposition. He had access to the fresh food store of the ship. I did a deal with him and from then on no one in my cabin ever wanted for fresh fruit.

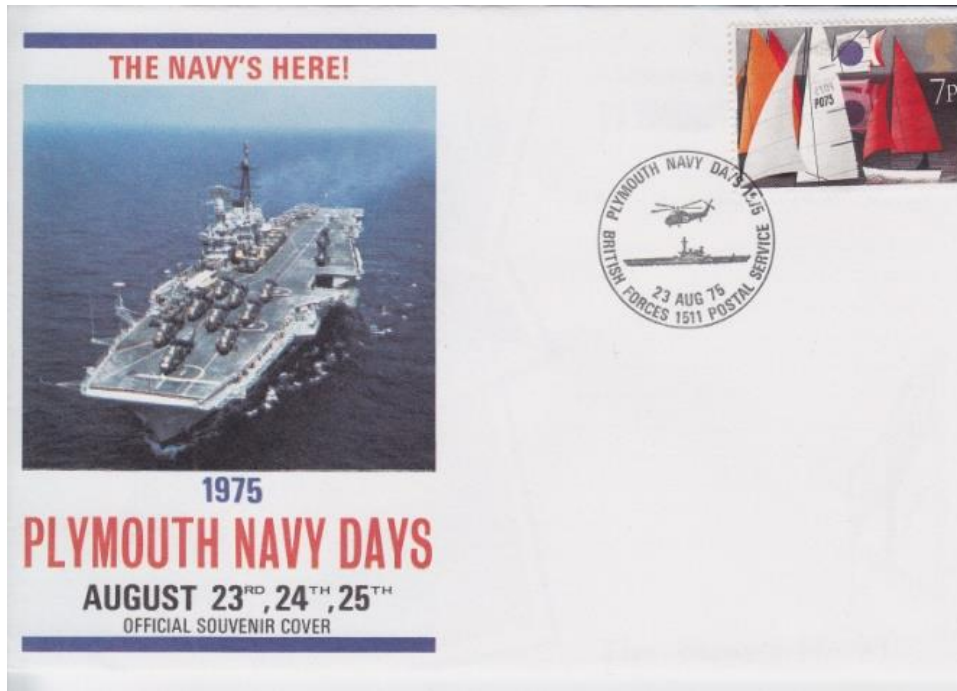


PO's Mess cabin Clive and Kit



1975 Petty Officer Kit Colbeck- HMS Hermes

Note the sideburns: what hair grew level with the bottom of one's ear and above it could be left – and I took full advantage of that discretion. Regulations for facial hair in the RN otherwise consisted of a 'Full-set' whereby nothing should be trimmed or another peculiarity of the Navy known as 'Mutton-chops'



23 -25 August 1975 the ship was open to the public as part of Plymouth Navy Days

Hermes Program:

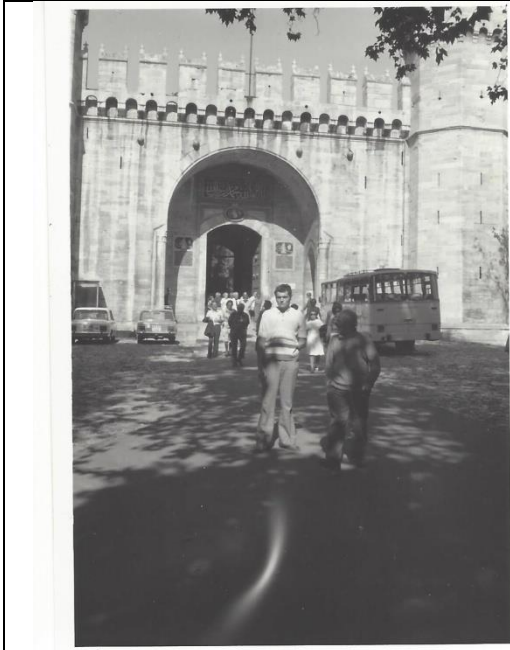
1 Sept 1975: Departed Plymouth and sailed to Malta where we met up with 41 Commando then on to Istanbul. The ship was involved in the NATO amphibious assault exercise: 'Deep Express'. This took place in the Aegean Sea. Istanbul was a fantastic city to visit. We had steamed-up through the Dardanelles and berthed close to the ancient city.

Whilst in Istanbul we had some leisure time. We were cautioned by the ships Public Relations Officer that the Turks were, by nature, quick to excite or anger and/or be offended but that on a more positive note they were truly passionate about football and we were advised that if we found ourselves out of our depth and even alone and perplexed as to how to act we should mention the name of our Manchester United player "Bobby Charlton".



You must pay for taking a photo!

One of the coach trips I took was with Graham who was a keen photographer. Whilst in some part of the city in the vicinity of a large coach-park an enterprising local appeared with a bear on a tether. Graham was keen to get a picture of the pair and as we approached with no English being spoken the Turk made it clear he was keen also to have his picture taken. [This was how he made a living] Graham took a few pictures and then the man asked for 'twenty'. At the first indication that we did not intend to give him twenty he became agitated and vocal. Graham who wanted and took the photos [not me] rapidly backed away leaving me with Grizzly Adams. The 'bear man' did not get any money from me and I don't remember getting an apology from Graham but he did give me a photo to remember the day.



September 1975. Kit-Istanbul
Topkapi Palace [now museum]



September 1975. Kit Colbeck-Istanbul
Sultan Ahmed / The Blue Mosque

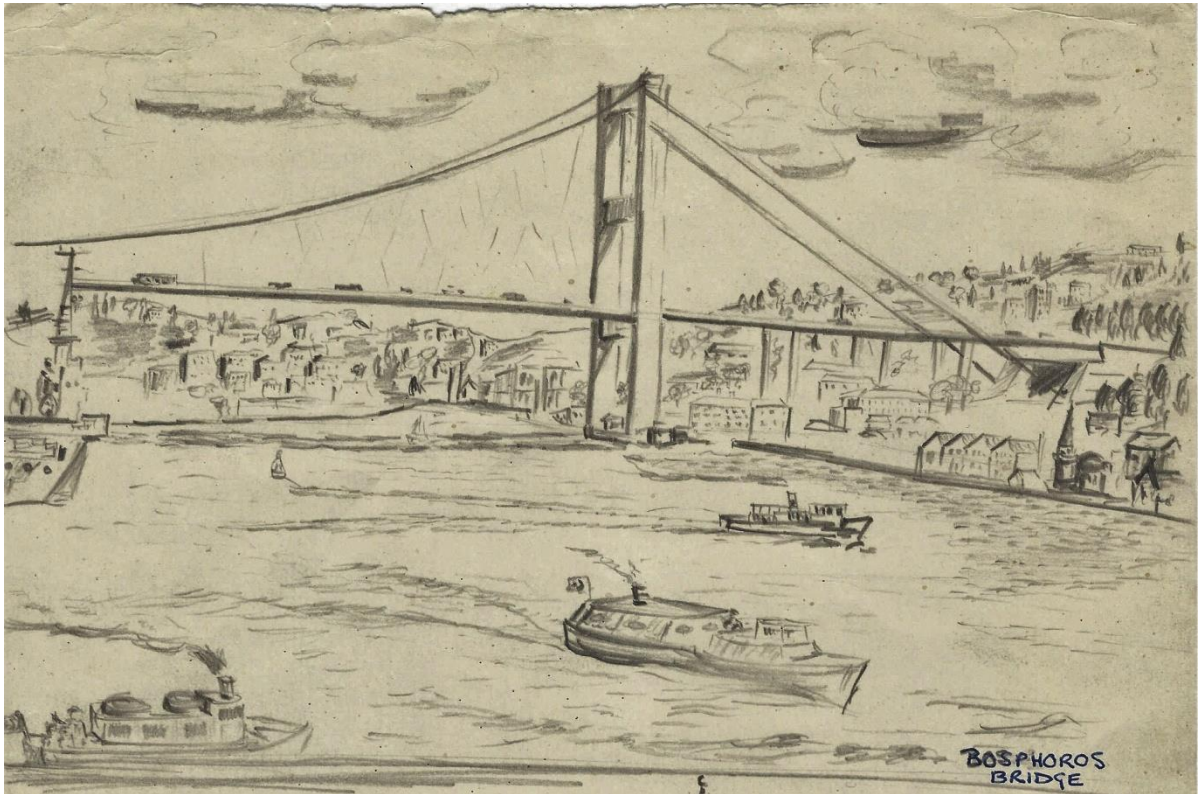
I took advantage of other tourist tours to visit some of the great Mosques and what had been the palace of a sultan. One of the greatest Mosques had in earlier history been an iconic Christian Church.

The city was and still is famous for its Bazaar; a veritable labyrinth where the repetition of same looking stalls and faces meant a visitor had only walk a short way before losing a sense of direction and bearing.

Leather goods were very much on display and I fancied a zip-fronted jacket. I purchased what I thought [in my ignorance] was a good jacket; it fitted well and looked good. I took the garment with me and placed it into a shared coat-locker in our cabin. We had been back at sea for some time before lads in the cabin began to complain of an unpleasant and unexplained stink. On investigating the smell I was to learn that my jacket was made from untreated, what some called, green-leather.



Whilst in Istanbul I had been sitting on the flight-deck looking across to the iconic sky-line of the city; at an image which resonated with much of the city that had existed when it went by the name of Constantinople. I was moved to get paper and pencil and reproduce on paper a view which my camera could do no justice to. And that single act of producing these rough sketches was to make me take up drawing as a hobby which continued throughout the rest of my time in the Navy, and beyond.



Bosphorus Bridge, completed in 1973 connected Europe to Asia

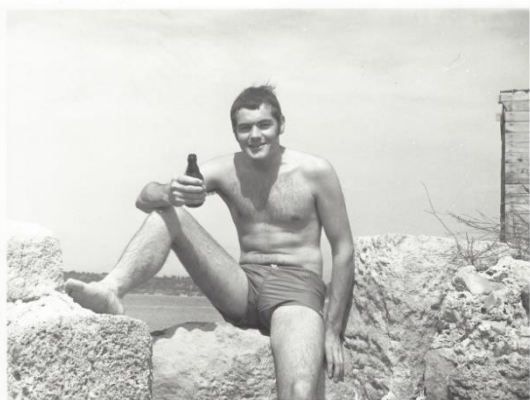


1975. Antalya Bay. HMS Fearless, at anchor. Photo taken from HMS Hermes

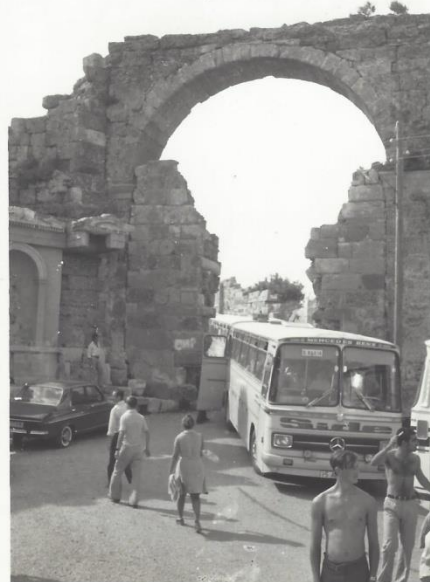
A second visit and respite for the crew was made when Hermes anchored-off Antalya on the Mediterranean coast of Turkey. We went ashore by Liberty-boat and the first native to speak to me asked, "You want Hasheesh? "No", I replied incredulously "I want a

beer". He had no beer and we walked-on.

I was able to go on a coach tour which took us to a village on the coast, about 50 miles away. Its name was Side and in 1975 it was a small ramshackle of buildings and dusty roads. Its claim to fame was that it was home to truly magnificent examples of a Roman amphitheatre and other Greco-Roman remains.



Kit: Side, Turkey. 1975



Vespasian Gate, Side, Turkey. 1975



Coastal view, Side, Turkey 1975



Amphitheatre, Side, Turkey. 1975

Many structures had been built by Rome but much had fallen to ravages of wars and not a little to effects of earthquakes which have shaken Turkey for the following 2000 years. Today [2017] Side boasts some sumptuous hotels and a highly developed tourist resort. In 1975 we were served a simple meal at a beach cafe under a straw/reed roof structure to provide shade from the sun's heat. During the meal I had an unstoppable need to use a toilet. What follows remains one of my worst experiences of public facilities. I rushed to the designated 'toilet' with no time to assess the situation. A hole in the ground was provided with space to place my feet astride the hole. With my first crisis overcome I now had the task of completing what I had started. Cringe.....there were no toilet paper and no washing facilities

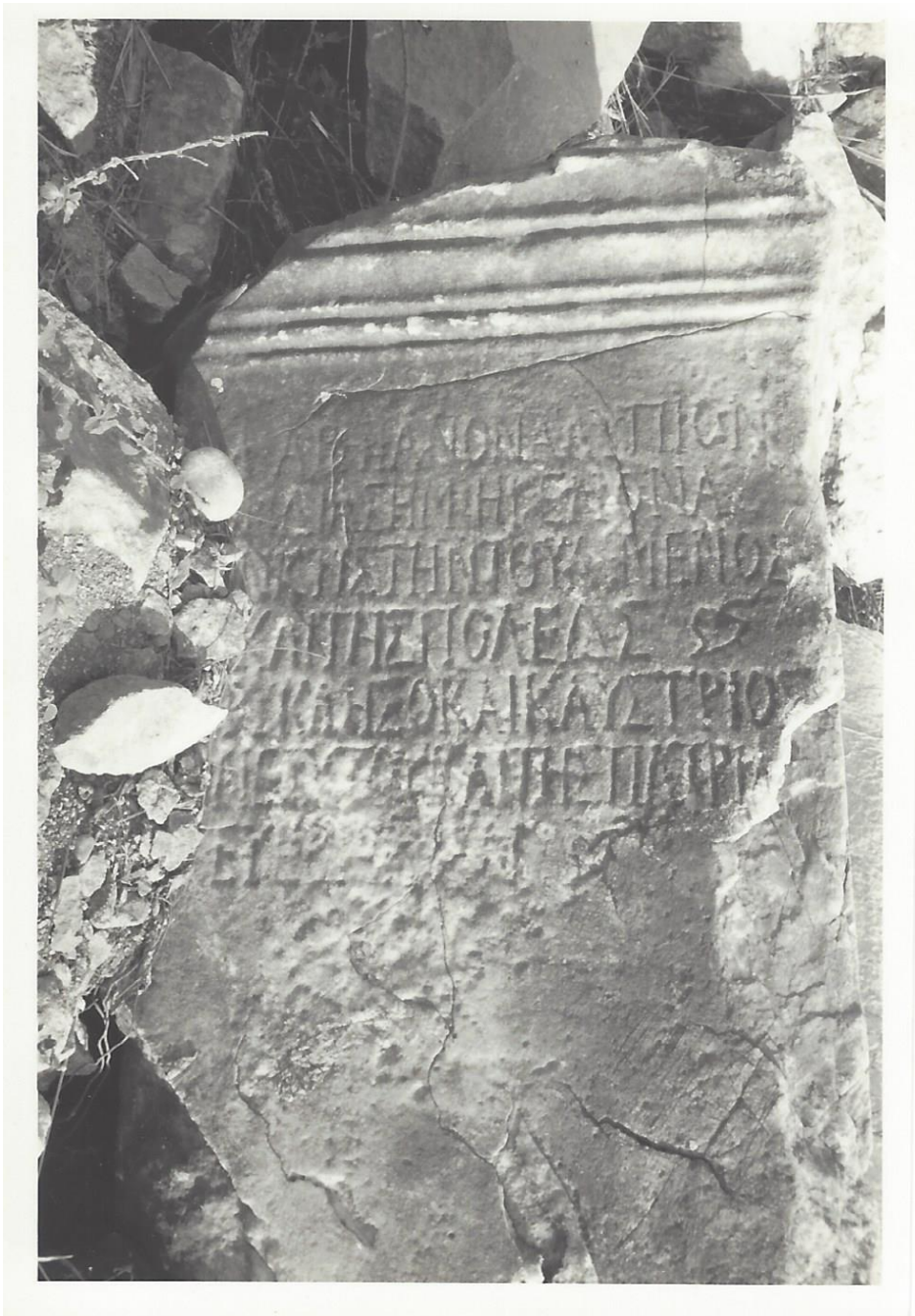
and there was no flush; just the hole. Beside the 'hole' was a small basket into which users of the toilet were expected to place soiled tissue; which I presumed they brought with them. My lunch was unfinished on the table and I could not remain where I was. With a feeling akin to despair I was forced to sort through the basket to find what paper could be used a second time. I felt wretched and dirty but did emerge and going swimming took on a blissful relief to me and I changed into my trunks with a relish. All I had to do now was cross the 100yds or so of sandy beach to reach the clean refreshing water and have a wash. Next obstacle I discovered was that the temperature of the sand was beyond a pain threshold and seasoned visitors wore footwear. There was no going back and so I ran fast as I could, to reach the water. The trip back up the beach was purgatory and with the personal crises over I tried to be logical, even inventive taking a number of skin burning steps before pausing to wriggle my feet into a deeper layer of sand for a short respite. On the return coach ride we were travelling at speed, when ahead, I and the other front seat passengers saw a man driving a cart pulled by a donkey. I expected the driver of the coach to slow down and await an opportunity to overtake when safe to do so. He did not react as we expected; he simply continued at the same speed, on the same side of the road and applied the horn as a continuous note. The event unfolding had my full attention now. The donkey cart driver looked over his shoulder and made a split second decision to force the donkey to turn off the road; not onto hard shoulder just onto sloping scrub as we just roared by. At the age of 18 travelling to the far-East I had learned of not to be quick to judge the actions or attitudes of people of different cultures and upbringing to my own. But I did think to myself;Mean..... Bastard!!!



Amphitheatre, Espendos. Turkey.

In 1975 it was described as the best preserved Roman amphitheatre in the world.

The acoustics were fantastic as you could hear a whisper, delivered as a whisper.



Greco-Roman ruins.

We decided that the inscription found in the amphitheatre read:
“Be patient during the interval and the ice-cream lady will serve you all”

Oct 1975 back to Malta and we anchored in Grand Harbour along with HMS Bulwark



HMS Hermes entering Grand Harbour. HMS Bulwark at anchor.

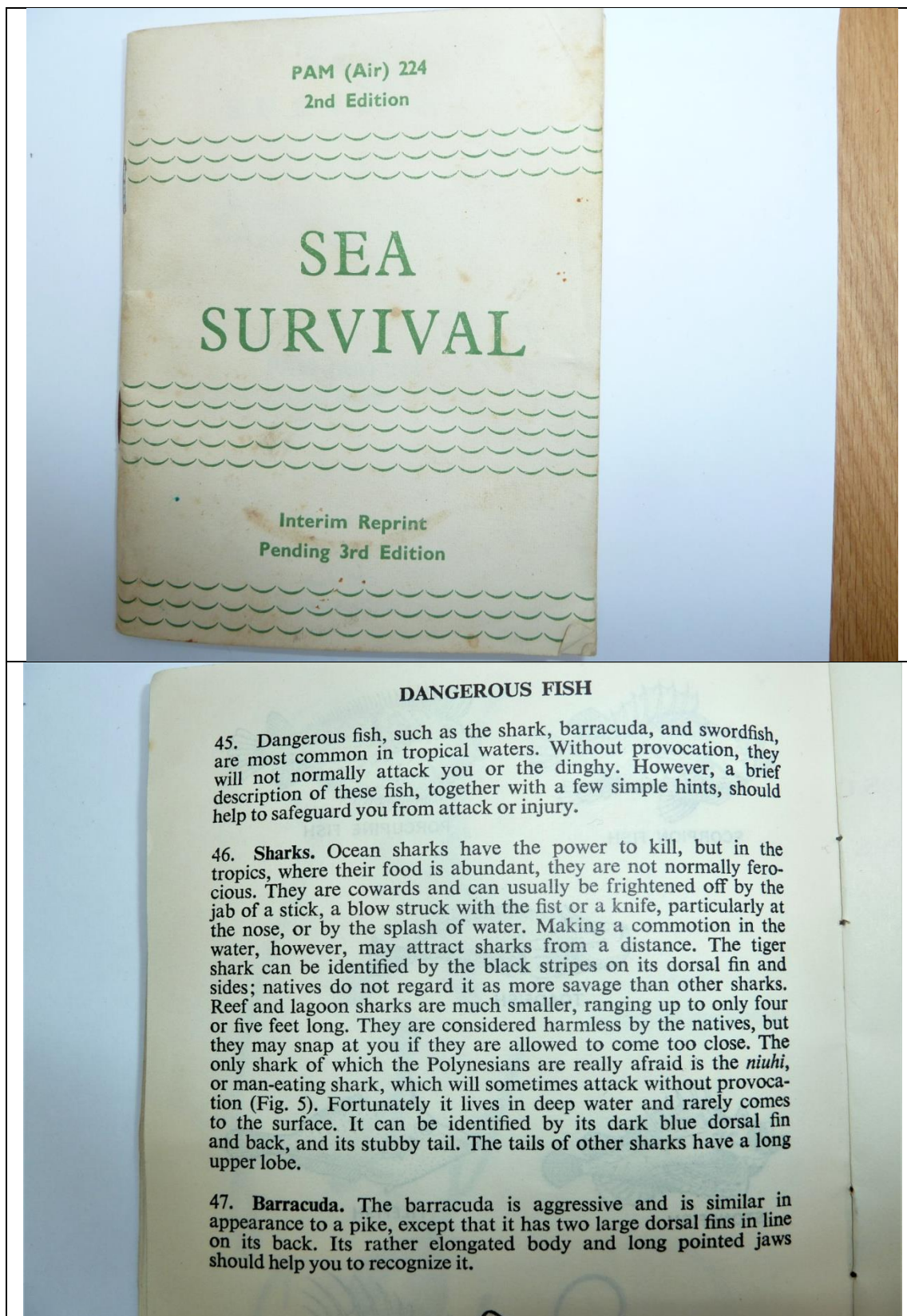
Stoppage of shore-leave: An incident had occurred prior to our visit to Malta. The story I recall being told was that a Royal Marine based on the island making his way home at the end of the day had been assaulted by a group of local Maltese youths. He had been overpowered and given a pasting. Alongside our ship; which was carrying a Commando group was HMS Bulwark also carrying its own Commando group that amounted to a lot of very fit fighting men with an average age of about 18-19 years. On one of the evenings a party of them had gone ashore to 'Put things right'. They entered a bar [presumably used by the perpetrators of the assault]. They closed the door behind them then announced that everything and everyone in the bar had to leave via the windows. They then proceeded to beat-up the customers and then broke the tables and chairs and smashed the stock and put all through the window [as per their plan].

This created a P.R. crisis which immediately changed the courtesy visit. Initially all shore-leave was stopped then as things were easing we were told we could go ashore but not go into Valletta. As a result of that I got to visit a sea-side resort called Sliema on the North-East coast of the island.

Shore Patrol: One of the evenings I was put in-charge of the Shore Patrol [distinctly different from a USA patrol]. We saw our job to calm situations and endeavour to get matelots back on board safely. I was down by the quay after dusk and as I was aware that a Navy Pinnace was operating between ship and shore and I told the patrol to advise returning crew to use the Navy boat. This had caused dissent with the Dhaiso drivers who operated the slim, open craft with a Suzuki outboard motor, also between ship and shore. At midnight when the Pinnace ceased work a spokesman for the boatmen came to see me. *"Hey'a you. You'a take'a work away from us so'a we make'a no money. Now you'a ships boat no running and we not going to take'a sailors back to their ships"*. As the time ran on more and more matelots were making their way back to the harbour, happy, mellow, drunk, rowdy, to find no transport running. The numbers increased and as dissent arose among a few the voices rose. Years ago in the cold waters of the Moray Firth I knew of drunks fancying their chances to swim back to the ship. Now I was blessed with a Royal Marine on my patrol who was about 6ft 8ins. whose voice came out like a deep-bass from his boots and as one particular group were getting past rowdy. I said to him, *"Royal go over to that group and tell I want them to keep the noise level down"*. He loomed over them and growled softly, *"The PO wants you to keep the noise level down"*. It worked perfectly and others took their cue from it. Finally the boatmen had got a solid bit continuous work ahead and relented and the crews got back on board without further incident.

Maltese wine: The locally produced wine was called 'Marsovin'. I'm sure that some very good vintages will have been produced over the years but the stuff that found its way into bars we used and down our throats needed to be served-up with lemonade to make it palatable. Even so the wine was safer to drink than Maltese water. We all came to learn and/or experience the 'Malta Dog' the matelots name for serious cases of diarrhoea brought on by drinking water ashore.

RN life-rafts: in addition to survival equipment a booklet was included; giving advice to would be survivors. There was Jungle, Arctic and Sea, survival booklets. I acquired some and include here a snippet from one. Worthy of note is this one was printed in 1957 and by 1975 when most of us had watched the movie 'Jaws' we had a different understanding about sharks.



November 1975: We were in the Atlantic involved in a large-scale NATO, war-at-sea; exercise, Ocean Safari.

Rosyth: We visited the home of one of the Royal Navy's, Scottish dockyards but anchored-off and used liberty boats to get ashore. I have no memories of the time spent there.

December 1975: Sailed back in to Devonport for the crew to take Xmas leave and I spent Xmas with my family at Ilchester.



Early 1976-Kit Colbeck-25yrs- Cabin in the Petty Officers Mess

Cartoon characters on the wall behind me was the work of PO Brian Tranter

January 1976:

The Hermes sailed to the Arctic in support of 42 Commando. NATO exercise Atlas Express.

We carried a Royal Marine group; 45 Commando [I think] which was served by a Sqdn of Wessex V helos; 845 Sqdn [I think]. The Marines could be deployed ashore at short notice to take or hold a given position. A major function of the Marines was to take part in the annual exercise, Operation Clockwork whereby Marines and the supporting Wessex V 's were deployed ashore in the north of Norway in company with Norwegian armed forces to demonstrate NATO's ability to deal with the threat of a Russian, overland, invasion via the Arctic. The troops wore white camouflage clothing. The helos were painted in a black and white camo'. This exercise took place in mid-winter and the troops had to spend some time living in 'Bashas' this was a hole/den set in the snow complete with roof. Not an igloo; inside the hole the occupant had to create a shelf on which to sleep, leaving a lower level for the coldest of the freezing air to lie. Amongst the protective clothing were multi-layered nylon insoles for boots designed to ensure a dry air layer between the foot and the very cold surface of the boot in contact with the frozen snow. Though the ships company did not have to endure the life ashore ownership of a pair of the insoles was regarded a must-have for us. Additionally for those ashore in the ice-world specially designed boot-linings were provided. It was a double layered thick wool sock which was turned into itself to be worn. These were called 'Mutlocks' [or Mukluks].

If the aircraft mechanics working ashore had to remove their gloves in order complete a task and left their hand for just a few seconds in contact with the aluminium skin of the helo they would become frozen stuck with a risk of frost-bite. The Norwegian armed forces would work till Friday and then go home for the week-end. We liked to think that if a real conflict arose that they would stay and work on through Saturday and Sunday. We were absolutely sure that if Russians Forces attempted an invasion of the North Cape, Leonid Brezhnev; General Secretary of the Communist Party would insist their own forces work through the week-ends. Watch-On Stop-On.



18 Jan 1976-HMS Hermes – Narvic, Norway

Narvic: The ship 'threaded its way up through the fiord to arrive in Narvic. Mid-winter was passed but even so sunlight hours were limited to between about 10.30 till 13.30. We were granted shore-leave. Some of the younger lads prepared for a walk around the town in their smart casual clothes [the better to impress any young ladies who they may chance upon]. I and my colleagues who chose to venture ashore dressed according to the weather conditions: vest, shirt, sweater, overalls, and top-coat. We didn't look as smart but looking smart was not the objective. We took a walk around the settlement and saw that at these temperatures it did not warrant trying to remove snow and ice; just learn to contend with it. A woman passed by with a pram on steel runners; set as blades, which extended to the rear of the pram, and on which she stood and going downhill required her to lean her weight on the left or right to effect a turn. She made manoeuvring look quite easy. Above our heads hanging from the edge of a roof were icicles 5 – 6 feet long and as thick as a man's arm. They would have impaled any passer-by if they had snapped and fallen. The price of alcohol was prohibitive on our meagre pay scales and so we settled for just a cup of coffee whilst ashore. Finally we chose to return to the ship shortly after lunchtime. Darkness was complete and we had to walk along the main road which was lined with 2ft-3ft high snow-walls, watching with a heightened alertness for oncoming vehicles. We felt relatively safe as headlights appeared and we pressed ourselves onto the snow wall. All went well until a vehicle approached and the set of it's lights did not seem right to us and we were still speculating what it might be

when at the last moment we realized it was a snow-plough [scraping the snow wall]. We each vaulted over and into the snow as the device rumbled and scraped past us. We laughed about it but were a bit shaken; Hi-viz vests were not around in those days. Dark blue legs and a black Burberry coat; we must have been near invisible to a driver.

Arctic storm: Whilst we operated in the north we passed through an area of sea where Arctic waters met North Sea water and the differences in temperature and salinity caused the sea surface to have great turbulence; some called it a Maelstrom. That phenomenon was interesting to watch. What was not 'interesting' was waking-up in the middle of the night in a full-on Arctic storm with the ship pitching in a huge gyratory cycle of the bow rising followed by a sickening sense of going down too deeply in the next trough. After several cycles our bodies, whilst not enjoying it, did adjust to it. One night we hit a large, double wave; the bow came up and just when we expected it to fall it was felt to rise again, higher still, followed by a steep nose-dive from which there was a sense of, "This is not going to come back up" The ship did wrench and struggle and came to what felt like an abrupt halt. I was told later that we had been steaming into the waves at about 12 knots and when 26,000 tons at that speed was suddenly arrested it had the dramatic effect of bringing all the lads in the cabin to full wakefulness and start thinking of survival matters. What exacerbated the emotions was the knowledge that if we were compelled to enter the sea wearing a life jacket, that the temperature of the water alone could extinguish life within two minutes i.e. far less time than it would take to man and launch sea-boats from davits from the boat-decks.

Wind Chill Factor: Another task of mine was to go on the flight-deck to be in attendance when recently serviced jet-engines were tested by fixing them into a frame [Engine Test Rig] with an array of instruments, which was in turn lashed to ring-bolts welded into the Flight-deck. I nipped up from the Electrical Repair Shop LRS [a nice warm compartment] wearing just my overalls. On one occasion all was going well when we were suddenly notified of a helo returning as a matter of urgency and we could not vacate the position. The helo came over and while hovering it created a downwash which carried with it a chill factor of enormous proportions. I felt the chilling and numbing effect taking hold. Only when the emergency was over could we vacate the position. I made my way back to LRS. I wanted a hot drink and planned to say, "It's f****ing cold up there" but all that my staff saw was my mouth moving; not forming words and no sound coming out. They were laughing too much to ask how I was. [And to think 'they' say, "Rank has its privileges" RHIP].

Leisure-time: in my spare-time I studied intensely for my Professional Exam which comprised three written papers of about 2 hours writing for each. The subject matter was Electrical theory, Aircraft Systems, and Instrumentation. I did my study with Ron Knight using the workshop and working from past exam papers. I still found time to do pencil drawing, using Girlie magazines as a source of material to copy from. And regular letter writing was an essential part of receiving mail.

Copenhagen: The ship sailed south and entered Copenhagen for a courtesy visit and we were well received by very friendly welcoming people. The city was spotless and looked so obviously, publicly cared for. The ship was berthed at a point which required us to walk past the famous 'Little Mermaid' to reach the city centre. There were art galleries, Tivoli Gardens and because of the liberal laws in Denmark many pornography shops selling a range of material which had us awe-struck and amazed that people would wish to look at and/or buy some of the more extreme subject matter on open display. In English cities sex-shops were to be found in seedy backstreets with blacked out windows and plastic-strip door screens. Here in Copenhagen the shops were well lit and full of tourists, men, women, European and Japanese; it was like walking into Woolworths. There were small cinemas catering for sex tourists. We went into one, [as you do] one afternoon. Throughout the show English voices could be heard making comments and cracking jokes about what was on the screen. When the lights came back on we were able to look around to see and recognise what seemed like a muster of HMS Hermes officers and men which produced much laughter again. There was one older man in an overcoat on his own looking very disgruntled; because I guessed; the influx and joviality of matelots had destroyed the dark, smutty, moment he had paid for.

Whilst in Copenhagen We visited some art shops where I purchased a fine print mounted on wood by Danish artist, 'Sikker Hansen' it was a gift for my wife and today 40 years later it still graces the wall above the living-room fireplace.



Print by: Aage Sikker HANSEN 1897-1955 purchased Copenhagen 1976

The Weirdo: Another day I was returning from the city on my own, walking in daylight through the park/paths which led down to the quay where the ship was tied-up. As I passed some bushes I heard a rustle which I could not put down to birds. I looked around but saw nothing. I walked-on then more faintly the same noise followed by footsteps. Not alarmed but now with a seriously heightened awareness. I opened my pace, the steps behind, followed suit. Mind racing now for a new tack; I didn't want to be breathless if it came to a fight. I increased my walking to an unnatural pace and suddenly the steps behind began to run. I came to a halt and spun ready to give whatever was there a pasting. In an instance the figure; a bloke, came to a halt and in an awful effeminate voice called out to me, "Ooh can I walk with you"? What! What! Flight or Fight mode dissolved and anger and disgust kicked in; but I did feel safe so I was a bit relieved too. I was gruff and dismissive. "You're not with me, walk where you fucking like, it's your country not mine" I walked on, but now back to a normal pace. 'It' walked along at my pace; not giving-up. What followed was a one sided conversation. "Would you like come home with me to a party and meet some of my friends.....men and women will be there.....it will be fun.....and we have interesting games.....with chickens and stuff....."

What!....."We're getting closer to my ship and I don't want to be seen walking with youso you can go"

He stopped walking but called after me, "Do you have any friends who might like....." But I was gone and the Hermes was not so far away. On the gangway I did advise the staff to tell those going ashore to watch-out for 'The Weirdo'. And I repeated the story as a funny incident to anyone who wanted to hear it. Later, much later questions and answers arose about 'chickens'. Don't ask!"

We sailed from there and notwithstanding the strange behaviour of the weirdo I felt that Copenhagen was a destination I would like to have re-visited with my wife; a lovely place, friendly people and beautiful places and art to see.

Cherbourg: I don't recall the date but it coincided with the result of the Chiefs exam papers. Now, Bogey and I had studied together; reading and quizzing each other till we were as best prepared for the exams as we could be. The results arrived. I had passed, but he had failed. We went ashore to celebrate and commiserate together. The effect of the alcohol took much greater hold of Bogey than me. He was unsteady and talking gibberish as we returned. Before we got to the gangway I stopped and drilled him with what he was to do to avoid a charge of 'Returning aboard drunk'. "Take measured steps on the gangway, use the hand rails and at the top, salute and say, "PO Knight, permission to come aboard"....."Stop talking then and await the staff giving you your Watch-card then we will make our way for'ard together". All was going well: the gangway, the salute, and the few words he had to say, but the Duty Officer spoke to him. Bogey had used up all his good words and what came out was, PO'owoohh.....shur...slu wuh....bbb aehhhh. To which the Duty Officer said to his

staff, "Take him away" He had failed his exams, he had failed to hold his drink and now he was in the shit [naval expression].

Job change: The lads in the section; Taff and Kev were very able trained staff now and with Bogy still in post I was expecting an easy cruise till getting home. However it was felt by my boss I needed a new challenge. My new rank got me a job to 'sort-out' the Ground Equipment Section.

There was a large chalk board in the office which anybody and everybody wrote on, covered with snippets of info regarding times/dates/places test requirements and info about the state of the many items: from the mobile crane, AWD tow-trucks, hydraulic jacks and lifting equipment. Everything had legal requirements to be proof-tested whilst in port. Each item had to be located and assessed for serviceability, and painted. And I needed the information at my finger-tips. I ordered a data board to carry red and green T-Cards on for every item of stock to record serviceability, location and test dates due. If only someone could develop a computer!

The chalk board which made my head spin; I took a cloth and wiped it clean. I then wrote the following words and made clear that no one else was to write on it.

*Every Day Find a New
Problem and the Solution*

The job kept me busy on our way home; with a new crew to shape-up. We did take full control the stock and prepare it for despatch to various test establishments. I was able to leave it as a going concern for the next boss.

May 1976: We arrived back at our home port and some of the crew went on draft and new crew arrived.

Ships Company [Air Dept.]: What followed was, the squadrons disembarked and their staff returned to RNAS Yeovilton or RNAS Culdrose or RNAS Portland; to home and families. Ships Company staff were then already at their place of work in Plymouth. General Service crew tended to live at the home port of Portsmouth or Plymouth and try to get sea-postings from the same port for their career. For Fleet Air Arm ratings however who generally spend shore time at an air base it was not practical to bring their families to a port to live. I was to learn to commute at week-ends again. It was about 90 miles from Plymouth to Ilchester.

May 1976 to 10 December 1976: The ship had a large refit in Devonport [Guzz] converting it to an Anti-Submarine-Warfare [ASW] role. Carrier Vessel anti-Submarine [CVS].



3 Dec 1975 promoted to Chief Petty Officer

1976 I had passed the exams to be promoted to CPO Electrical Mechanician (Air) 1st Class (ELMN 1 (A)). Six months seniority advanced carried over from my years before meant that my rate to Chief was valid from my being just 25yrs old. That would have been good going even for an Artificer who would have joined the Navy as an apprentice age 15 ½ to 17 ½ years old.

When I joined the Navy at just 15 years I had been told I could, at 15½ years, be allowed to take the Artificer exams and transfer to HMS Fisguard. At 15 years and 6 months I did go and ask and I was told then, with a no uncertain expletive to, "Go away". I did as told but never let go of a wish.

	<p>U.S. forces wore metal dog-tags to identify their bodily remains but in the RN in 1976 I was issued with the standard 'red-fibre' dog-tag with my new rate/rank.</p> <p>Rate-Rank Name and initials Service Number Blood group</p>
	<p>CPO insignia badge.</p> <p>This could be worn as a tie-pin and also on a tropical 'whites' shirt.</p> <p>Anchor Queens Crown Wreath</p>



**1976-HMS Hermes-Electrical Repair Shop [LRS].
Leading Hands Taff 'Foxy' Fowler, Dave Janes
CPO Kit Colbeck, PO Al 'Jock' Liddle'**

Second function of the ship:

In addition to the Commando role of the ship during the time I was aboard the ship was converted, May 1976 to Dec 1976 to accommodate Mk 2 Seaking helicopters whose prime role was to search for and as necessary sink enemy submarines. If that sounds dramatic consider that this was at the height of the 'Cold-War' with tension still existing between the USSR and the 'West'.

Perestroika and Glasnost and the changes to be brought about by President Gorbachov was still ten years away. The fall of the Berlin Wall was still 13 years hence. Using a sophisticated SONAR device which could be lowered from the belly of the helo to listen passively or go active to determine the range, direction and speed of a submarine. The armament of the Seaking was impressive too, apart from a variation of a WW2 depth-charge which was more suited to the old classes of single skinned submarines rather than the high-tech, high-speed double-skinned submarines. For such vessels two additional weapons were available: Firstly a light-weight, very fast torpedo with sophisticated search patterns and a warhead capable of puncturing through the newer submarines. The second weapon that the Seaking could deliver was a 600lb Tactical nuclear depth-bomb. Such a weapon would not even require a direct hit, just proximity. That neither side ever launched such a device may have been a testimony to the long period of peace achieved by the M.A.D. policy [Mutually Assured Destruction].

Leisure time: During the refit there was leisure time to be had and I was able to attend a full-time sailing course which was conducted in Plymouth harbour.

There was about seven or eight of us on the course, which included theory ashore and lots of time in a Bosun dinghy. Time on the water included racing a RN sailing Whaler which in place of the multi-weave man-made fibre ropes of dinghies, used stiff, hemp or manila cordage which, when wet, passed through our hands like rough sandpaper.

I came away with a Royal Yachting Association [RYA] Intermediate Day-boat Skipper's certificate.



14 ft GRP dinghy – Bosuns Call emblem on sail

Additionally I spent much time during the week to keep-fit and during the refit time I took part in the Plymouth Command Sports championships representing HMS Hermes in the field-event, Pole-Vault. I won an award with a rigid aluminium pole but was outclassed by some contestants who competed with the new flexible fibreglass poles, now entering use.



1976 2nd place for clearing just less than 11 feet height [rigid pole]

21 Sept 76: New skipper: Captain R C A Fitch

Squadrons embarked 845 Wessex V [Commando] and 814 Seaking Mk 2 [ASW] to commence Post-refit sea-trials.

Jan 1977: Sea trials at, Plymouth, Moray Firth and the North-East coast.

22 Feb 1977: Portland, for full Staff Sea Check and Two weeks of Basic Operational Sea Trials [BOST]. Anti-Submarine Warfare [ASW] work-up in the South-Western Approaches.

Ships Volunteer Band: The ship carried a Royal Marine Band Sergeant [Bandie] who formed a 'Brass-Band' and as I had played in a school and town band at Loftus, I volunteered. We supported social events, public relation activities and formal ceremonial business on the ship as well as providing musical backing to the Padre's, Sunday morning bash. "Abide with Me", "Eternal Father Strong to Save" [the sailors hymn], etc.

One evening whilst having a practice session the Padre joined us to have a chat. He asked us what else we did to relax aboard. I replied, that I spent a few hours each week drawing. His response was to say that Whisky was his choice of relaxant. That produced a few laughs and some wry smiles.



Band led parade. Portland



Ships Volunteer Band [Kit Colbeck on Baritone] Portland



CPO Colbeck meeting the visiting admiral

16 March 1977: Departed Devonport bound for the Mediterranean Sea. The first port of call was Gibraltar. Once the link was established [even by a helo landing to collect mail] all the crew qualified for a Local Overseas Allowance [LOA] which provided a small amount of extra spending power. In Gibraltar we discovered a steak-bar, up the hill called 'Jim's Den'. Jim [from Nottingham] and his wife ran the bar. It was a friendly place and not subject to the more boisterous activity found down on the Main St. There was a Moroccan barman who kept a 'Connect 4' game on the bar to amuse customers. I never saw him lose.

During the visits to 'Gib' a road race was organised for the ship's company to run up to the 'Top of the Rock'; probably in competition with any other ships in harbour at the time. I kept myself fit but decided that my run up, The Peak in Hong Kong in 1968 was sufficient to have 'ticked that box' already.



Aerial view of Gibraltar: Zoom mode shows the aircraft carrier alongside the quay.

Spanish border: At the time we visited, the border with Spain was closed; it had been ordered closed by the Spanish Dictator, Francisco Franco, in 1969 and didn't open fully till 1985. Lurid tales were told by older matelots who happily recalled visits to La Linea and the entertainment provided on the Spanish side of the border. I visited the Rock Apes [bad tempered thieving animals], went to the top of The Rock, walked to Europa Point, watched the changing of the guard; saw some exotic looking

headstones dating from Nelson's days. I saw some graffiti which related to some political elections, I remember to this day

Don't vote it only encourages them Loved it.



The Spanish Frontier 1977

Toulon:

Toulon is the French Navy's military port and when we arrived the ship was invited to take part in a sailing race against the French. The prize at stake was a piece of silverware called; [I think, The Ark Royal Cup]. I was given to understand it had been won from the named ship some years before and never regained since. A call was made for the crew with sailing experience to come forward and make up several teams to take up the challenge. Three crews of six were gathered and I joined one of them. The sail craft provided were 31 ft long, sloop-rigged keelboats called a, Requin. The translation means 'Shark'.



Photo courtesy of Google/youtube public site

We gathered for the event and an organiser arrived speaking no English [we should have suspected something then] and with verbal nonsense to our ears and hand gestures the course was described. We had some skilled sailors but no linguists. How the race signals to commence were to be made were not learned but someone did determine 'a yellow buoy somewhere across the vast harbour' was a marker to make for. We climbed aboard and discovered a mass of cordage and it seemed in keeping with dedicated race craft; ropes to control the essentials and as many again to fine tune the settings. Also seating was minimalist; the boat was built for speed, not comfort. Ropes we could work without were gathered-up and laid aside and whilst we were each accorded tasks the race suddenly started with the French well placed to make a good start. We could only follow as we did not know the course. On we sailed as best we could and following the turn point there was no advantage to be had by trying to get ahead. At this moment a very enterprising CPO on the boat produced a slab of cans of beer and proceeded to hand them out to each of us. We could not win nor make a decent challenge but we could enjoy the event. Eventually still following the French over the 'Finishing-Line it became clear that 'The Cup' would remain with the host. Then and only then we were to discover that the same hosts could suddenly speak in quite passable English and were happy to talk to us socially. It is commonplace for each nation to hold a certain regard for other nationalities [notwithstanding taking each individual as you find them] I was to confirm an opinion I would describe the French as, 'duplicitous'.

A couple of coach tours were arranged; one to Avignon and another to St Tropez. Many of the younger crew were attracted by the lure of topless beaches of St Tropez but failed to consider the fact that it was now March; when the beautiful people are elsewhere waiting for the sunshine to return. I took the trip to Avignon. En-route we stopped a while at a bar. I was ready for a beer and though I spoke no French I attempted to be friendly as I gestured, with my hands a large vessel and asked, "a large beer si vous plaise" The barman looked at me with disdain and incredulity as to what I might want from a bar that sold beer [and beer/bier is international]. I tried again with bigger gesture "glass of beer please". "Non comprenez-vous". The cretin wanted to hear me ask for a "Grande Bier" I was to confirm an opinion [haven't I already made this point]? No this would be another opinion, that I would describe the French as, 'Bloody minded'. He was an only an individual and I'm sure I could find many a Brit to match his bad attitude.....! I got to stand on the unfinished bridge famed in the song "Sur le pont de Avignon". The highlight [in retrospect] of the day was for me to visit the vineyard of Chateau Neuf Du Pape, and to try some of their amazing wine. I tasted it and I felt warm as it went down. We were then invited to buy a bottle for £2."Two pounds!.....got to be joking; you can get a bottle of wine for 50p by the harbour". Sometime later at sea whilst reading a Men Only magazine I read an article about the world's finest wines andthere it was, Chateau Neuf Du Pape. It read 'a bottle of this could set you back as much as £8 in the UK' in 1977. In 2017 the bottles cost £13-£25 and I drink it only when it is

bought as a gift for me.

Last memory for me was a cable car trip to the top of a mountain at Toulon.

Sunday 3 April 1977: Intership Sports Day at sea.

Malta Dog Shoot: With Malta ahead, the Royal Marines aboard collaborated to train and prepare young, [naive, first time at sea sailors] crew who volunteered to help the Maltese people who had found themselves suffering from packs of feral dogs making a nuisance of them self upon the local populace and who had requested that members of HMS Hermes may help rid the island of the problem. The hand-picked volunteers were dressed in camouflage clothing and introduced to rifle practice and learned to respond at speed from a crouched position to instructions such as: “Dog left.....dog right”
The training was filmed and made available to be watched by the ship’s company. All before the hapless victims learned that “The Maltese Dog” was a term and euphemism for a person suffering from “the screaming abdabs” or “Shits”, commonly believed to be brought on by drinking, Maltese water.

April 1977: Self Maintenance Period [SMP] in Malta. We anchored-off in Grand Harbour, Valetta.

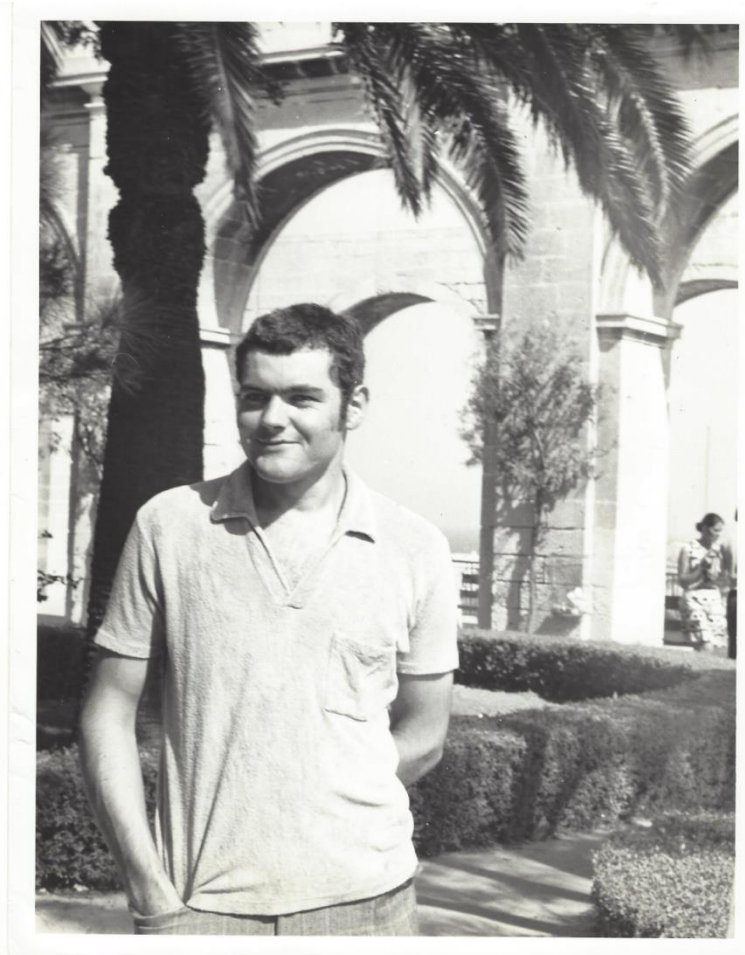
In harbour a Cocktail Party [Cockers P] was put on in the hangar to which Maltese dignitaries were in attendance. The ship’s Silver band provided the musical backdrop for the event. By some measure of fortune the band was arrayed immediately in front of the bar. The Commander came across to the ‘Bandie’ to advise him that the members of the band were welcome to have gratis drinks served from the bar. After a quick discussion there was an agreement to all drink ‘Horses Necks’ [brandy served with dry ginger in a highball glass]. Well..... as one glass was emptied it became filled again and the band players in the back row were so busy transferring drinks forward from the barman that they reduced their time of playing. At some point after a guest had been over asking if anyone could play Zorba the Greek; and one of the players felt he could busk it, the Commander returned to thank us for our contribution and told the Bandie that we could be dispensed with and could all leave the hangar. We had not been admonished but we did recall the occasion with happy memories.

Leisure time: One of the military bases on the island had some Bosun dinghies and we were able to take the boats out to sail for pleasure around the harbour.

Malta was famed for the number of green English-made buses in use on the island. Each was kept immaculately clean and polished. The interiors of them were like a

religious shrine. The same level of care and attention did not however extend to the condition of tyres and brakes etc; I never saw an accident though.

20-22 April 1977: During exercises off Malta the ship was visited by First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Terence Lewin [skipper of the Hermes on a previous [3rd] commission.



Kit Colbeck above Grand Harbour, Valletta, Malta GC

Malta nice: On Sundays the families of Malta come out in their thousands and promenade along the broad footpaths. On some of the boulevards there were public toilets unlike any I had seen around the world. They had a man or woman sitting inside looking after the place, who greeted everyone with a smile and a hello. The walls and floors were spotless as were the toilet facilities and had flowers in vases and a number of religious icons and other images or statuettes placed around the building. Public toilets that looked like shrines!

Malta not so nice - The Gut: In Valletta Town was a long narrow continuous street, [Strait Street]. It was an unbroken row of bars and known throughout the Fleets as, The Gut. No one ventured down that street looking for culture. Girls worked the bars helping to attract customers in to buy beer; some helped sell the beer and some sold

themselves. For decades The Gut had been a recreation zone for marines and sailors. It was a place to find female company and/or to drink. For so many years that the girls had learned much of the dialogue, very particular to life aboard ships; that is, 'jack-speak'.

I walked down the street one evening with a ship-mate and we were quite predictably accosted by a buxom girl of indeterminate age. "Come in here, buy me a drink." I looked disinterested as I gave her a negative reply. She was quick on the uptake to make her reply to me. "OK Jack you go shit in your dhobi bucket" I smiled and moved on. I reflected on the thought that WAFUs don't use dhobi buckets but Stokers do.

Dom Mintoff, the then Prime Minister of Malta was courting Russia and encouraging an anti-British atmosphere.

20 – 22 Apr 1977: exercises off Malta. Kite-flying competition

41 Commando embarked when we left Malta and the ship went through second role of Amphibious Assault exercises.



Combined bands [Malta]

The ships band was invited to perform for a Special Needs home run by nuns for children with physical disabilities. We set-up and played through a medley of tunes and the joy on their faces was palpable. Even those who could not physically clap expressed

a body language that told us how well the performance had been appreciated. We were shown to rest area where we were offered refreshments. First this nun asked if we would like some lemonade or Coca-Cola. We declined with a smile and a shrug as if to say we are OK. Her face then lit up as she asked, “Would any of you like a beer?” We must have looked surprised. What was a nun doing with access to beer? And this came by the crate! Cheers!

1 May 1977: Visit to Naples. May-Day celebrations for Communists led to a high presence of police and vehicles in the city. Unlike Britain which primarily had policemen to deal with civil issues it seemed that in Europe there is a two tier force, the secondary force being something like a National Guard.

Like so many cities and in particular maritime ones, Naples had a thriving prostitution industry. The girls plying their trade used to work on the streets and kept a small fire burning on the side of the road. We referred to them as Bonfire-girls. In the nondescript bars near to the harbour we were charged only a few pence for a bottle of vino tinto and we still felt were swindled; it was atrocious and stung our mouth and throat, but still we drank the stuff; [we’d paid for it hadn’t we?] On a street market stall I found and purchased a Flying Fid. I had heard matelots use the term but never seen one. It is an erect penis attached to the spread wings of a bird.



The Flying Fid on a chain

Naples novelty pendant



Novelty rude key-ring. A pivot pin in the man's ankle and hip allows the rotating of the foot to animate the mechanism

We visited the National Museo, of artefacts; where hundreds of marble statues and items of daily use, used by Romans but the many adult theme artwork and statues were only to be accessed by genuine students of history with written proof of intention. I missed an organised trip to Pompeii and Vesuvius.

Wandering away from the tourist areas in the back-streets we came across what we took to be a butchers shop, green/grey meat; [internal organs] hanging in the shop window. I recognised what looked like lungs. Back home lungs known as 'lites' could be purchased as pet food for dogs. It made us realise that ships food was not so bad. Making our way back to the more popular districts our attention was caught by the shouting of a woman standing 30-40 yards up a side street. 40-50 years old and once she had our full attention she hauled-up the front of her black dress to waist level and shouted in good English, "Hey you want some of this?"

May 1977: Exercise Dawn Patrol 77. On completion we embarked HQ 3 Command Brigade from Sardinia.

The ship returned to Gibraltar to embark more equipment then continued onward to Devonport for an Assisted Maintenance Period [AMP] and Easter leave for the crew.

17 June 1977: Sailed to Torbay to conduct PR visits from Torquay and Tiverton. Sons of crew members were brought aboard to experience a couple of days at sea.

24 June 1977: Anchored off Spithead for the Fleet Review on the occasion of the Queens Silver Jubilee. With Rear Admiral Staveley: Flag Officer Carriers and Amphibious Ships [FOCAS], Hermes took up second in line [second to HMS Ark Royal] in an assembly of over 175 ships, made up of:

46 Royal Navy ships of frigate size or bigger, plus 15 submarines.

Made up of: 1 Aircraft Carrier, 2 Helicopter Landing Platforms, 2 Cruisers, 7 Destroyers, 32 Frigates, 14 Submarines, 24 Mine Countermeasure vessels. Additional vessels from 18 other NATO, foreign and Commonwealth countries made up rest of the assembled fleet.

Compare this fleet of 1977 with that of earlier Reviews.

16 July 1916

[just 61 years earlier-but Britain at war]. The fleet consisted of more than 200 ships of the Royal Navy, when were present:

50 Battleships, 4 Battle Cruisers, 55 Cruisers, 46 Destroyers,

There were 40 miles of ships drawn up in 12 long lines.

26 July 1924

[53 years earlier-but Britain no longer at war]. The fleet still consisted of about 200 ships of the RN. See how the numbers and class of vessels changed.

10 Battleships, 1 Battle Cruiser, 9 Cruisers, 88 Destroyers. And an Aircraft Carrier appeared for the first time.

15 June 1953

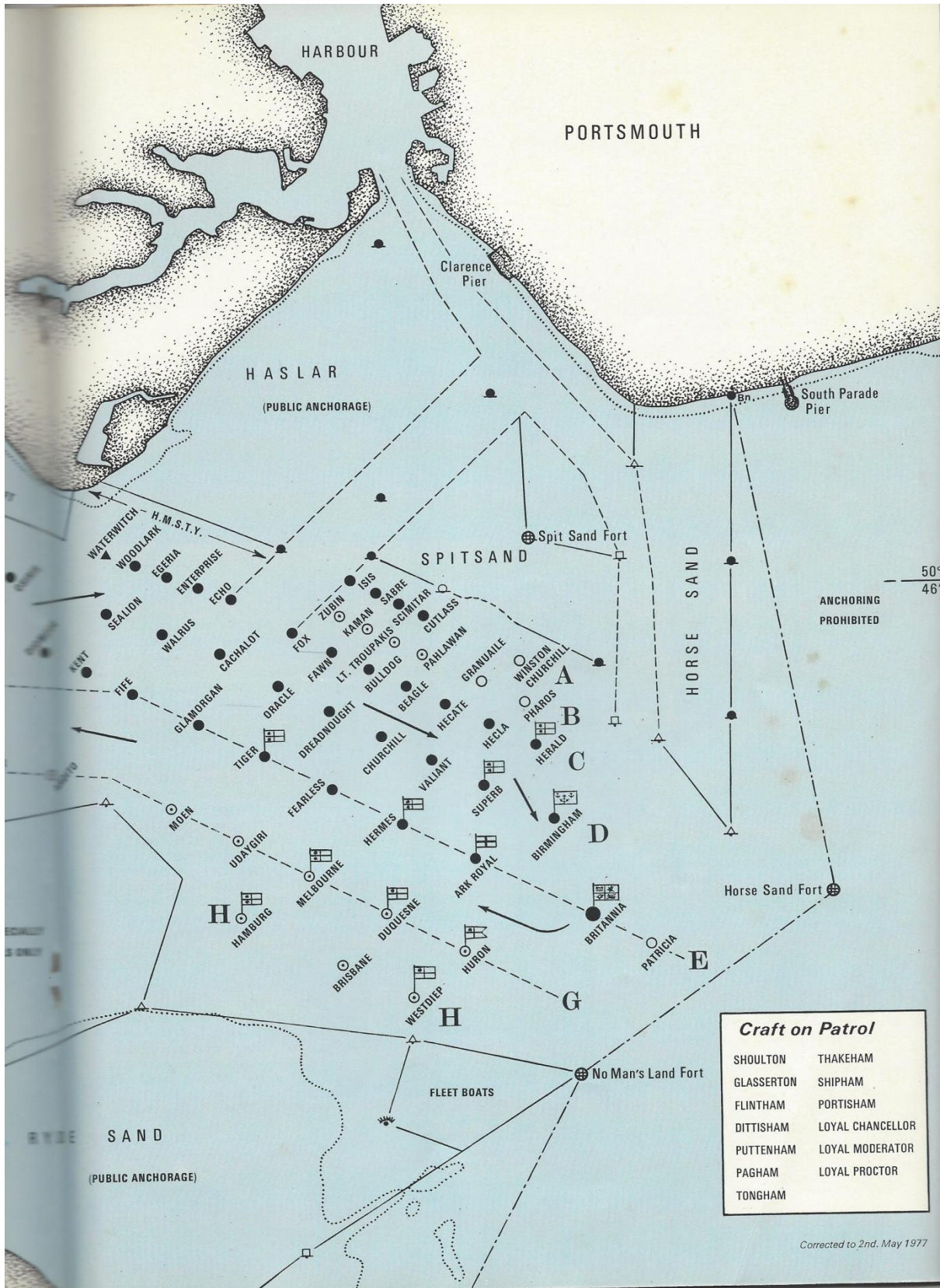
[The Queen's Coronation Review].

1 Battleship, HMS Vanguard 51,000 tons; the last Battleship in the world to be launched. 8 Aircraft Carriers, 8 Cruisers.

2017

The Royal Navy has no Aircraft Carrier in service use. No Battleships, no Battle Cruisers, no Cruisers.

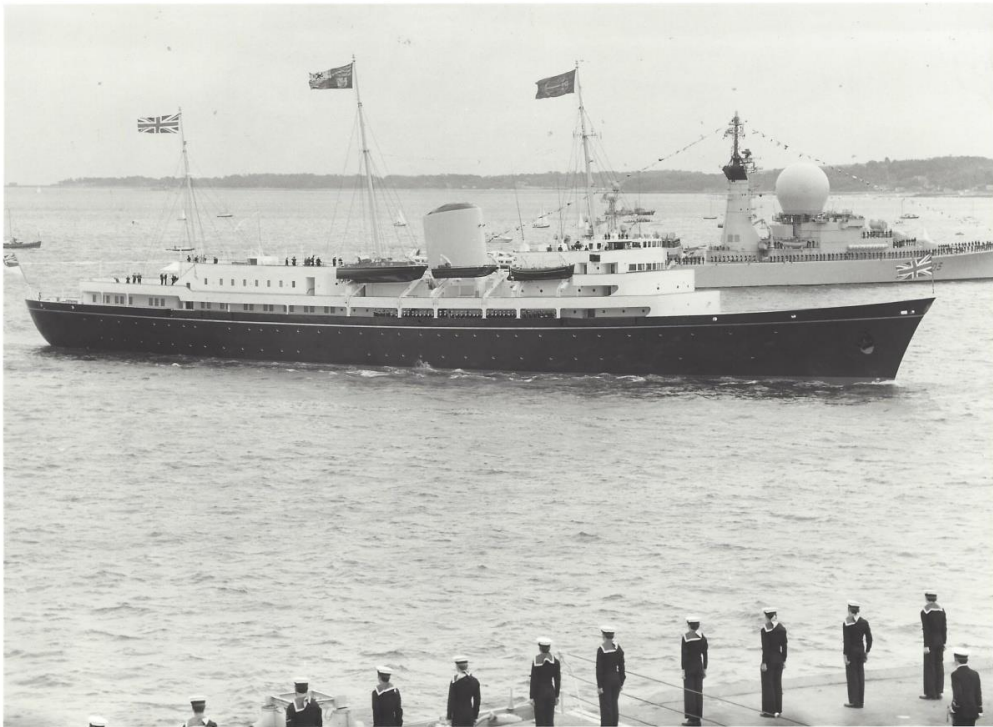
It does have 6 Destroyers, 13 Frigates, 11 Submarines and a number of Patrol boats.



**1977 Page one of four pages to accommodate the layout of anchorage.
HMS Hermes is in the centre of the page.**

Tuesday 28 June: The weather was poor, which interrupted the planned fly-past of a scheduled 150 Fleet Air Arm aircraft. Along with crew stationed all around the ship I took my post by the side lift and as HM Queen Elizabeth II passed-by in HM Yacht

Britannia we raised our caps and with a synchronised circular flourish called out, three times, “Hip-Hip Huzzah” [not Hurray].



Britannia photographed from HMS Hermes



Spithead Review CPO's Mess cabin 2F11

Danny Baxter, John Taylor

Micky Donovan, Bill Hurford, Kit Colbeck



Spithead Review 'Splice the Main Brace.' Kit and Bill Hurford

The last 'rum ration' [daily tot] was issued on 30 July 1970 on Royal Navy ships and shore establishments. However on the occasion of the Silver Jubilee Fleet Review we were given a measure in the same glassware [a tumbler] as used in days of old. The looks on our faces suggests the tot was well received. We probably toasted the Queens health. In the background is Graham Humphrey.

Wed 29 June: sailed for Guzz to embark 42 Commando. A fast passage was made through the Irish Sea for, in Jul 77 an assault on Kyle of Lochalsh in Exercise Forest Venture. We also took part in Anti-Submarine warfare action in Exercise Highwood in the North-East Atlantic. On completion of the exercises the ship returned to Plymouth to give the crew time-off for their summer leave and yet more maintenance.

Staff on board:

This is from a faded memory and could always be added to as names resurface.

Captain Reffell, the skipper replaced by Captain Fitch

Air Engineering Department [AED]

Commander Nutt, The ships Air Engineering Officer

Lt Moore, my Divisional Officer

Chief Electrical (Air) Mechanician, Bungy Williams, the senior Chief of electrical trade replaced by another senior chief, Ron [surname forgotten]

Instrument Repair Shop [IRS]

Taff Watts, Alan Ridley, Dave Plant, electrical senior rates

Hydraulic Bay and Blade Bay

Phil Aitken, Tony Hashmi, mechanical senior rates

Radio/Radar/Sonar workshops

CREA? senior Chief of electrical trade.

REA 1.....?

REA/RELMN ...John.....?

CPO Graham Humphrey, Radio workshop. Acted as the barber for the section, listened to classical music and made an electronic piano whilst aboard.

Weapons/torpedo

CPO John?...Weapons Specialist

PO John Doyle, Radio. He used to work at Culdrose at the Underwater trials section.

Electrical Repair Shop [LRS]

Ron [Bogey]Knight, and myself, Electrical Repair Shop [LRS] senior rates

Foxy Fowler Leading Hand [LRS] Taff and Kevin; mechanics [LRS]

Later Dave Blackwood, Leading Hand, LRS [ex Field-Gun crew]

Alan [Jock] Liddle, Petty Officer LRS

.....? Leading Hand in the Battery Shop [made a kite for the ships competition]

Section Regulator PO? [Reggie] was in the process to be considered for wardroom [CW]

Ground Equipment Section

PO? Ground Equipment Section

2 X Leading Hands on GES? One Grubber: who could fix anything AWD

One Greenie: Graham [or Ian] Hicks whom I carried, down a huge flight of steps; from Valletta town, down to the quay to save him from a drunken injury?

19 Sept 1977: I left the ship having completed another stint of Front-Line service.