

Saturday, 27th March, 1937.—The Open Races.

The first race was the Open Whaler, over a two-mile course. We had two crews entered—the Stokers' whaler and a scratch crew drawn from different parts of the ship. The Stokers pulled a magnificent race, leading the *Apollo* by a length all the way; they had the misfortune to catch a crab about twenty-five yards from the finish, and just lost the race and the cup. This was very bad luck. If there was such a thing in boat-pulling as a Good Loser's Prize it must surely have gone to the Stokers' whaler.

In the Cutters' race our seamen did well, coming in third, and in the Open Gig we had what would have been a winning crew in a decent boat; in spite of the boat they pulled very well and came in third.

A sign of the "New Navy" was apparent in the extra race for Jolly Boats; Lieutenant (E) Kemp had tuned up the engine and great speeds were promised, but he had the misfortune to break a gasket soon after the start and presented a somewhat forlorn spectacle chugging down the course in the wake of his more fortunate rivals.

So ended the Commission's last regatta. It was something to have a really justifiable grouch even if the cups had evaded us.

We sailed from Virgin Gorda on the Saturday afternoon. A full-power trial and throw-off shoot was to have been carried out on Tuesday, 30th, but a rating in the *York* became seriously ill, necessitating the return of *York* to Bermuda as soon as possible. Accordingly, the full-power trial was carried out on Monday afternoon and a throw-off shoot carried out with *Apollo* at 1 knot under full speed. The heavy seas made life in the forward part of the ship quite a damp affair.

We arrived at Bermuda on 30th April and settled down for the first period in those delectable isles.

CHAPTER XXVII

BERMUDA—THE CORONATION—BERMUDA

THE Bermuda period falls into two distinct halves, the first from 30th March to our departure for the Coronation, during which time gunnery and torpedo practices took up most of the time, and the second from the return from Trinidad until our departure for the last cruise. During this second period the combined operations and various fleet competitions were held.

During the first three weeks the squadron spent Monday and Tuesday, and sometimes Wednesday, at sea carrying out a practice programme; there was a large proportion of full calibre shoots, and the general organization was tuned up for the Efficiency Test which took place on 26th and 27th April. We did our run at 0700 on the second day, and everything seemed to go off all right. On completion of the last run the C.-in-C. in *Apollo* was asked to steam past the line to give us the opportunity to cheer him on his last occasion of being with the Fleet at sea.

Throughout April the landing party had been drilling during the latter half of each week, and during the last few days after the Efficiency Test until 6th May, when we left for Trinidad, the ship was painted and polished while the landing party redoubled their efforts on Moresby Plain.

For the greater part of April the weather was bad. Cold North winds and rain prevailed for at least half of each week. In spite of this the Fleet Association Football Competition was played off successfully, and we were glad to see the ship's team secure a hard-earned victory in the final against the *Exeter*. During these weeks training took place for the Fleet Road Race. An interpart trial was held on Wednesday, 21st,

and from the results of this we selected a team for the Fleet Race on Friday, 30th April. We ran the *Tork* to a very close second, having two home in the first three. The tug-of-war competition was also attracting attention, but the actual contest will be dealt with in the second period.

As far as shoregoing was concerned, amusements were distinctly limited. Hamilton, in the height of its season, was full to overflowing with visitors from the States. Prices were at their peak, and the *Monarch* and *Queen* had to be supplemented by the giant *Georgie* and *Britannic* to bring the eager throng south to "Sunny Bermuda." The majority of the Fleet had to be satisfied with the amenities of Ireland Island—the canteen, cinema and various sports. On Saturday, 1st May, the massed bands of the Fleet beat the retreat in Hamilton, putting up a very good performance before a very large crowd.

I think we were all glad to get away from Bermuda on 6th May as we sailed south to Trinidad for the Coronation celebrations. As we passed *Dragon* at Murray's Anchorage we gave her a cheer. She was going straight home to pay off after the Coronation. Our own passage was quiet and uneventful. Fine weather blessed us on our way, and we looked forward with interest to our second visit to Port of Spain.

TRINIDAD FOR THE CORONATION

The Coronation, as far as we were concerned, was a rush job. Of the eleven days we spent away from Bermuda only three were in harbour.

We arrived at Port of Spain at 8 a.m. on Monday, 10th May, and the first parade rehearsal took place that same afternoon. We tried to get acclimatized to the heat, but it made us long for the coolness of Bermuda and even envy the drizzle of London.

Apart from the Captain's official dinner party on Monday, the Officers' "At Home" on Tuesday and a show at the Globe Theatre by the Harmonica Band, there was little prelude to one of our busiest days in 1937—namely, Coronation Day,

May the Twelfth. This began at 0530 and after a hasty breakfast 200 men, including the band, landed at 0615.

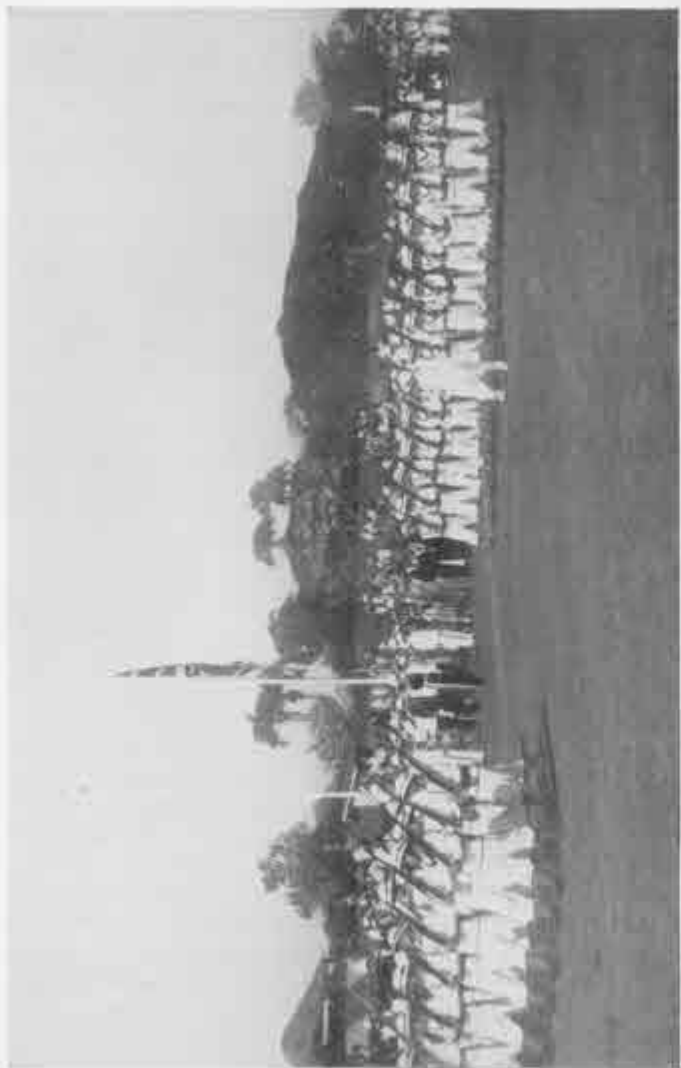
The parade was scheduled for 8 a.m., and though early in the day the sun did its Coronation shine and drenched us in sunlight and sweat, the two long ranks of men were a fine sight, and though the sun was obliquely on the back of the neck there were no casualties.

Trinidad is probably the most tropical-looking of the West Indian Islands, and the Savannah, where the review took place, is a fine open stretch of grass with the main section of the town lying to seawards and with tropical foliage climbing up a jagged range of mountains behind. The setting was impressive and the whole ceremony more effective than any of us dared to hope.

On the extreme right was the *Ajax* Contingent (flanked by 3-pounder guns mounted on oil-drums), and to their left stood the Royal Marine Detachment. Then came an abrupt change of colour and the Trinidad Volunteer Light Infantry filled up the gap between us and the detachment of Colonial Police. On the extreme left was a small troop of Lancers—whose horses behaved unexpectedly well and who naturally looked the most spectacular of everyone. In the centre stood the massed bands, i.e. our own, the Constabulary and the drum and fife band of the Volunteers.

The Governor, preceded by two scarlet-coated equerries and accompanied by the Captain, walked down the front rank and up the rear rank. He did not inspect the horses. During this ceremony the bands played continuously. He then returned to the saluting base and the parade marched past by platoons. The marching was good, and what with the sun, the martial music and the smart drill, patriotic feeling ran high. So high, in fact, that once His Excellency had departed, the crowd broke all bounds and surged across the savannah, being forced back by mounted police with great difficulty.

But perhaps the greatest display of enthusiasm and loyalty burst on us when the Naval Contingent attempted to march back to the jetty. The enormous crowds that thronged the streets left no space to march and the band was repeatedly



CORONATION PARADE

stopped by the surging of the crowd across the street—one old fellow carrying our national flag on a staff walked proudly in front of the band with his flag held on high. The mounted police had a stiff job trying to handle the enthusiastic crowd, but managed to clear a path after several people had experienced some nasty jolts and falls.

At 9.30 a.m. there followed a Coronation Service in the Cathedral, which was remarkable for the high standard of singing by a choir composed variously of dusky West Indian boys, Chinese girls and coal-black mummies. The Te Deum formed the climax to the service and was most effective. The Constabulary Band and the organ worked together well—largely due to the strenuous work put in by Lieutenant Dennison, Bandmaster of the Constabulary Band. It is hoped that this officer will continue to reverse the luck of his two predecessors, who were both shot to death.

In the evening the R.M. Band, with a number of volunteer buglers and drummers from the Royal Marines, performed the ancient ceremony of "beating the Retreat" in the Botanical Gardens. Although the Band only numbered 19, the ceremony was carried out with exact precision. A large crowd gathered to watch the performance and the generous applause was very gratifying to the Bandmaster and Band, who had worked hard to make the show a success.

After sunset the town's festivities and illuminations were in full swing. In fact the extent and the high standard of decoration was surprising. One painstaking firm floodlit their concrete building with red, white and blue lights; Government House gardens were festooned with coloured lights, and bunting, flags and photographs of Their Majesties adorned every shop and house in the town. *Ajax* could be clearly seen from the shore. Although we lay over 2 miles out, the illumination was effective and local comment on the flood-lighting, searchlight display and fireworks must have given great satisfaction to those on board who were responsible.

It was unfortunate that only midnight leave could be given and a high-pressure run was the only way to survey festivities ashore. The midnight boat was a rare sight. Lavishly

decorated with commandeered bunting, flags and trophies and with everyone singing patriotic songs—many of us found it difficult to part from our friends, which included a troop of goats—who had not, unfortunately, spliced the main brace themselves (not having been on parade that morning) but nevertheless did their best to enter into the spirit of the evening.

At Government House a ball for the officers was held which was probably one of the best official parties in the Commission. A weary *Ajax* sailed at 7 the next morning and the only regret which troubled our make-and-mend sleep was that our stay should have been considerably longer.

BERMUDA—LAST PERIOD

We arrived back in "Sunny Bermuda" on Monday, 17th May. It was raining steadily. With gloomy hearts and dripping oilskins the advance party went out to Warwick Camp, to struggle with tents to make a shelter for their comrades next day. They would have needed it if the rain had persisted. Happily, however, by the time the three seamen and one stokers' platoon were settled in on Tuesday, a week of glorious weather had begun.

Warwick Camp is situated on the southern coast of the parish of Southampton, some 5 miles from Hamilton. Away from the dockyard and Ireland Island it seemed a small heaven on earth. The rifle ranges were built over the low hills between the camp and the shore, with pinewoods and flowering shrubs behind. The bathing was excellent, several beaches being available.

By Friday evening the whole company had completed the standard range course, and the week-end was free for whatever one felt inclined. Bathing was the chief pastime, closely seconded by "caulking." An efficient canteen provided good beer in the evenings, a most important item.

The stokers had to return to the ship on Friday evening, and the remainder followed on Monday morning. Warwick Camp will remain to those who went there as one of the

pleasantest memories of the Commission. Everyone felt that a month would have been more suitable than a week.

In the meantime we had heard that the ship had been awarded the Commander-in-Chief's Torpedo Efficiency Trophy. *Apollo* had cornered the Gunnery Trophy, but . . . it was a very satisfactory wind-up to the hard weeks of practice.

On Monday, 24th, Vice-Admiral S. J. Meyrick, C.B., arrived in the *Monarch of Bermuda* to succeed Admiral the Hon. Sir M. R. Best, K.C.B., D.S.O., M.V.O., as Commander-in-Chief of the Station. After the ceremonial of receiving his successor Admiral Best visited the ship and spoke a few words of farewell to the ship's company.

The remaining two weeks of the Bermuda period hold in store the Combined Operations and the conclusion of various sporting events. The printers' call may not, however, be denied, and we shall not be able to record the results of these competitions. We are due to sail on June 11th for our last cruise in West Indian waters, returning to Portsmouth on 6th August. The proposed programme will be found in the table of distances at the end of the book.

The Commission is drawing to a close, and we must close this record with the following epilogue. . . .

FAREWELL . . .

It seems to be quite an ordinary day. A little grey, perhaps, and the dockyard cobbles are wet with the early morning rain, but the sun still shines through a rift in the clouds. You turn out of your hammock unwillingly, as you always have done, and as you lash it up pick up your thoughts where you left them last night. The tea tastes as hot as it always did, the mess-deck smells much the same, and the loud-speakers make their everyday din. It is, in fact, an ordinary day.

And yet something is different. The whole feeling in the air is different—an uncomfortable restless feeling that hovers round the bags and hammocks piled up all round the ship. The routine, too, seems out of joint. No one worries about

scrubbing the decks and polishing brightwork. There is a listless spirit that creeps round the ship, and, in spite of every effort to be gay, makes everyone muzzy with sadness.

You're not going on leave yourself—it was the other watch. You wish, somehow, that you were. To get away and out of it—that's what you want—the Commission's finished and there's leave ahead and a new job. And yet . . . and yet, somehow it isn't finished, for half the ship's company is still on board, and you feel you mustn't miss anything. You want to be there at the end. But when is the end? The real finish . . . the final farewell . . . ?

Sailors, like actors, are always forming together into new groups, breaking up old unities and creating fresh ones. It is this change, which comes on you so quickly and so unexpectedly, which is such a wrench. It is like the strangeness which an ordinary city worker feels when he goes away for a holiday—only with us it's a thousand times worse because we never come back. Once a ship's commission is broken and leave has begun, then that ship has ceased to be something alive, something we were proud of—it has ceased to be home and has become merely a place where we eat, sleep and work. . . .

And the ship has been home to the very great majority of us. Of course we longed for Pompey and looked eagerly forward to seeing the missus and father and mother. We've been abroad two years and that's a long time for human affections. We're certainly glad to be back in England with our friends and relations. And yet . . . and yet we most of us realize at some time or other that the Navy—and by the Navy we mean a sea-going ship—is the only real home we know. In essence we belong to the blue sea and the ocean sunlight, and, complain as we will, we are only really happy when we are on or near the sea. That is to say those of us who are real sailors.

In any ship that has been abroad for two years—and especially in a happy ship such as we have been—mere routine and the same familiar faces alone make us oddly sentimental about our ship. We are *Ajax* and no one could take our

place—that is, and do things in our way, with our individuality and with the same success or failure. That is why each ship in the Navy is so vitally different, and only those who have lived in the ship day in and day out over a long period of time can belong to the spirit of that ship. The spirit that vanishes when we reach Pompey and the ship breaks up.

It seems to me very fitting that *Ajax* after this first brilliant and spectacular commission should be turned over to Chatham. Anything which follows must be rather in the nature of an anticlimax—and Chatham will know nothing of what we have done. And though a Chatham crew may rise to greater heights and achieve more resounding fame than we . . . they will do it in a very different way. The whole ship will be different—the personalities that run it, the routine, the outlook of each mess in the ship will be radically changed. *Ajax*, like the phoenix which rises out of its own ashes, will once more start all over again and Chapter Two will have begun.

This saying good-bye is a sorry business. All partings are inevitably sad. Whether it is on a railway platform, on the stage of a theatre as the farewell curtain falls, by an open grave or merely by a ship's gangway . . . whenever an end has come it seems very sad. And the deeper you feel, the more restless and miserable it will make you. Everything, for a space of time, seems impermanent. The rain, trickling down the paintwork, seems a symbol of dissatisfaction and a reminder of all the bright-coloured life and the variety of experience that we and the ship have seen. Well—the cockroaches can have the place to themselves now! What do we care? We have gone. And Jack and Bill and Nobby and all our shipmates whom we loved or loathed—they, too, have gone.

You take a quiet glance round the mess-deck and you are struck by how much it has altered and yet stayed the same. You remember how it looked at Christmas-time, firstly in Egypt and then at Magallanes, and you remember your many reactions to it, how it has been a background to all your feelings and thoughts in many countries and many

climes; how eager you were to get ashore for a run and how glad you were to get back after several hours on a foreign soil. You look at Pompey dockyard through the scuttle and remember the number and variety of other sights seen through that same scuttle, how palm trees and desert sand have alternated with icebergs and snow-covered mountains. You remember how the deck, now steady, was heaving only such a short time ago, and you remember the night watches and the strenuous exercises that so nearly ended in war. And then you turn. You shut your locker doors for the last time, take a final look round the mess-deck and say good-bye.

"Poor old *Ajax*," we think as we take our last look from the jetty, "we had a good time in her. There were ups and downs and it wasn't an easy commission by any means—but she was a crack new ship, she was our ship and we lived up to her." And with a sad emotion at heart we shoulder our bags and our hammocks, crack jokes in suspiciously louder voices and march away into the future, to leave, to friends, to lovers and to different commissions in other ships.



THE SHIP'S COMPANY

PART VI MISCELLANEOUS

- I THE CONCERT PARTY
- II THE HARMONICA BAND
- III "TOMES"
- IV TABLE OF DISTANCES STEAMED
- V CROSSING THE LINE CEREMONY
- VI UNSOLICITED TESTIMONIALS

I. THE CONCERT PARTY

IN writing of the Concert Party and its vigorous life through the Commission, one set of people must immediately have the limelight thrown upon them. Unaccustomed to the glare of the footlights, never seen by the audience and unnoticed in the rush of a production—I have great pleasure in ringing up the curtain on :

THE WORKING PARTY

None realize more than the Concert Party themselves how much successive shows put on throughout the Commission owe to the willing co-operation of Messrs. Cowdy, Redfern, Ambridge, Laurenson, Talbot, Banham, Smith, Sanders, Lamport, Howell, Jacobs, Bosomworth, Willis, Moody, the Warrant and Chief Shipwrights and staff, and later in the Commission, Inst.-Lt. Dykes, our stage manager. They have never complained at the large amount of work imposed on them nor raised a single objection against the little extra touches which are always demanded nor shown anything but equanimity at that most thankless task of all—namely, unrigging a stage the morning after. Without them none of the settings which were such a feature of Lt. Roberts's productions could have materialized, nor could any of the more startling effects have been achieved (the most arresting effect of all—namely, a gratuitous black-out by a blown main fuse at Iquique—had nothing to do with them).

Co-partners in back-stage fame (only they happen to be front-of-house) are :

THE BAND

Under the able leadership of Bandmaster C. H. Brown, who has orchestrated some seven complete scores, the Royal

Marine Band has played its part loyally and given its time up freely to rehearsals and to learning long and at times complicated parts. In many Concert Parties the Band is taken much "as a matter of course." It turns out its quota of music in the style of an animated hurdy-gurdy. Such has never been the case in *Ajax*, where co-operation has been easy, pleasant and effective. Band, take a bow!

And so we come to the main body of the party—to the actors, good, bad and indifferent, who have each contributed something to the record of success which the *Ajax* Pack of Cards is able to turn in at the end of the Commission.

That record started in a humble way—its first and smallest show was on the ship's quarter-deck at Haifa; its largest show was at Valparaiso, where the theatre held 1,800; its most successful show was at Lima, where in one night it took over £110; its biggest flop at Iquique in Chile, where out of an audience over 1,000 strong scarcely 200 spoke or understood English.

Here are the shows given by *Ajax* Concert Party in chronological order:

"*AJAX*' WHITE COONS"

At Haifa on 11th October 1935. This admittedly amateurish effort nevertheless went with spirit and one number—"A Musical Commander's Defaulters"—will long be remembered as the best laugh-raiser in the show.

"*CHRISTMAS CRACKERS*"

This was a Christmas show also staged on the quarter-deck. Lt. Roberts had intended to work up a Musical Comedy for Christmas but early in December got appendicitis and Pay-Sub.-Lt. Tute took over production. This show was handicapped by lack of space, but it was in this that individual talent began to distinguish itself—Titheradge as Father Christmas, handing out presents and wisecracks, Cowdy with his skilful cartooning, Parratt as Madame No-Nix, the robust fortune-teller who gazed pensively into a balloon and answered

the audience's somewhat awkward questions, Hobbs pounding magic into his piano and Pitt drawing it out of his violin, and Messrs. Fryer, Ames, Buckett, Hare, Chadwick and Woods in various sketches, of which *Old Moore's Almanac* probably stands longest in memory.

"*CARRY ON LONDON*"

This revue was a big advance. First staged on board on 26th and 27th March 1936, these were the last productions we did on the quarter-deck. This revue was later repeated for a run of three nights at the Bellevue Cinema at Alexandria, and its farewell performance took place at Talara in Peru.

Before leaving the Mediterranean, rumours of our performances had penetrated to Haifa, to the Western Desert, where we were invited to brave the sand, give two concerts for the Army and sleep in tents—and to Malta, which expressed great disappointment that lack of time made a show at Corradino impossible.

By the time we arrived on the West Coast of South America we had another almost ready, but at Guayaquil, Ecuador, it was insufficiently polished, so members of the party put on a floor show of individual turns which was accounted a success. At Talara, again, where we had only four days, it was decided to stay our effort until reaching Lima—so that once again we "Carried On London" and, playing to a capacity of £25, successfully buried the show.

Then came Lima.

"*TURN ON THE MUSIC*"

This had its première at the Lima High School. The show was, I think, good, but the reception was nothing short of marvellous. It took us by surprise.

There is an old theatrical dictum that "a bad dress-rehearsal means a good first night." Perhaps that was the reason. Certainly the dress-rehearsal was shriekingly bad. Everything went wrong. Cues were missed, scenery didn't

fit, the jokes were painfully unfunny and the producer was observed to be sitting in a corner weeping salt tears and, moreover, bald—having torn out all his hair. "Nothing," we agreed dolefully, "could possibly be worse than this show." And nothing, as it turned out to be, was such a success. I have said elsewhere that it took over £110. After the show H. B. M. Minister and Mrs. Forbes asked the party along to the Legation and congratulations were universal.

Then came Iquique. And, as the Americans say, was that a flop or was it? As explained elsewhere, the British population of Iquique is rapidly dwindling. This was brought out in no place more clearly than in the Teatro Municipal. Jokes, which in Lima had brought tears to the eyes through laughter, now brought them for another reason. You could hear those quips give their death-rattle before they ever left the throat. However, the Mayor thought otherwise (the elections being only a month ahead) and sent us a flowery letter of thanks containing in one sentence, just 170 words long, statements such as: "The worthy sailors showed a singular enthusiasm for the humanitarian aim in view (presumably the Children's Hospital) and revealed also that their artistic culture reached a professional perfection which . . ." ". . . did honour to the British Nation (pew!) whose sons wherever they go know how to leave 'recuerdos' of their gentility and nobility . . ." "'recuerdos' made imperishable and unruddable-out when they carry the stamp of generosity and humanitarianism towards misfortune, etc., etc., etc." All right so what? Despite this literary effort, no explanation was vouchsafed for the curiously small size of the recorded receipts. But elections, as we all realize, cost money. . . .

After Iquique, Antofagasta. Here we were only allotted the built-out stage of the Railway Rancho (a small hall seating about 300) and selected numbers were put on. This too seemed to be a success.

Then after a short break came Valparaiso. Here we had reserved for us the Teatro Velarde, seating capacity 1,800. Profits from this show were nevertheless small—as we afterwards found out that we had paid double the right charge

for the theatre and that through the good offices of a local resident who might have known better. The show was greeted enthusiastically though certain jokes were missed through the size of the hall (this theatre actually holds 420 more than the Palace, Shaftesbury Avenue, and 300 more than the Adelphi where C. B. Cochran stages his revues).

By the time we reached Magallanes a new show was ready. This was:

"OKAY SHOOT"

This was the first *Ajax* show with any real story. It was an experiment and was later modified and cut and produced at Barbados under the title of "Inn of Adventure." The story was simple. It dealt with an Inn (Innkeeper Parratt) to which Charles K. Miller (Cowdy), an American, comes. Miller thinks this is the Inn that his forefathers once owned and after reading a book on the subject falls asleep. The Second Act is a throw-back 150 years with the setting of the same Inn at that period, and in the Third Act Miller returns to the present day.

Around this bare-looking plot were built various other themes such as the arrival of a company of travelling players (led by Pitt) and of two unsteady revellers (Lt.-Cdr. Lambert and Pay.-Lt. Tute). This show, though not perhaps as funny as a straight variety show, was the most ambitious we have attempted and contained more colour and music than any other.

At the Falkland Islands, where Buckett's "Parson" was thought "blasphemous," we put on a variety show. The Town Hall in Port Stanley has a fair stage with a very good curtain, reputed to have cost £80. Further inquiries concerning this curtain elicited a story about a previous Governor, himself a keen producer, and the old type roller curtain then in use. At the end of one of his introductory speeches his tails unfortunately got caught in the roller and he was seen to ascend to the ceiling for all the world like some gigantic flying beetle. Hence the present blue velvet curtain.

At Montevideo we were specially asked for and gave another

variety show, which turned out to be one of the most successful both theatrically and financially (capacity £45) of our career. Everyone was pleased at this result, as it was Lt. Roberts's last night in the ship, and without his initiative it is safe to say that the Concert Party would have grown along more conventional lines with a good chance that the talent available in the party would not have been so successfully developed. At 8 the next morning we said good-bye to our producer (now perhaps running a show in *Rodney*—his new appointment) and set to work preparing for the next show, which was at Barbados.

This appreciation had perforce to be written before our last shows were given, so its record is necessarily incomplete. It is hoped, however, that some idea of our many activities has been given.

LIST OF THE PLAYERS

A. L. Ames	M. W. Jennings	H. M. Smith
D. J. Buckett	L. A. Lambert	F. A. Talbot
G. J. Chadwick	J. A. Parratt	R. Titheradge
H. E. Chappell	L. T. Pitt	W. S. Tute
R. J. Clarke	E. H. Rampling	S. H. Warn
E. R. Cowdy	N. S. Roberts	W. J. White
L. E. Hare	F. Reed	C. J. Witts
H. Hobbs	A. Rogers	F. G. Woods
R. Hook	H. Saunders	

STAGE STAFF

J. W. Redfern	J. A. Laurenson	D. Bosomworth
W. J. Carleton	G. Deadman	H. Jacobs
W. H. Lever	S. Smith	F. A. Talbot
W. C. Ambridge	E. G. Bennett	W. J. Banham
F. J. James	R. N. Sanders	F. Willis
W. J. Francis	C. J. Lamport	J. G. Moody
V. T. Wilks		

Producers : N. S. Roberts
W. S. Tute

Stage Managers : E. R. Cowdy
H. E. Dykes

Band under the leadership of Bandmaster G. H. Brown.

II. THE HARMONICA BAND

EVER since its formation in October 1935 the *Ajax Mouth-Organ* or "Harmonica" Band has been one of the features of the ship.

In Musician Summers we have had a most indefatigable and popular leader whose personality and skill as a conductor was largely responsible for the extraordinary success which has been achieved by the Band wherever it has been.

The number of instruments constituting the Band have been about 30 mouth-organs, 2 banjos, 2 mandolines, 1 guitar, 3 hummers, 2 piano accordions, 1 violin, jazz drums and piano.

In Hobbs we have been fortunate to possess a first-class pianist whose solos have delighted every audience. Rogers and Shields have consistently "brought the house down" with their female impersonations, song and dance, and Bucket has been no less successful in his clerical rôle. Mr. Jane has frequently provided a variation by polished displays of cutlass swinging. Warren has rendered valuable assistance in arranging the Band's performances ashore and has proved himself a capable radio announcer.

Reinstein, who joined the ship late in the Commission, has greatly enhanced our reputation by his fine singing. Harmonica solos by Curtis and Ashford were always popular, the former in particular reaching a very high standard.

Space does not permit of a detailed account of the Band's exploits. After a preliminary practice period at the end of 1935, our first appearance was at a Ship's Company entertainment on board on 31st January 1936. This was followed by a performance at the Fleet Club, Alexandria, where a great reception was given us. Our reputation established,

engagements followed thick and fast all over Alexandria, at the General Hospital, St. James' Café, the Y.M.C.A., Ras-el-Tin Camp and Mustapha Barracks, to mention only a few. Such was the Band's popularity by the time we left Alexandria that many invitations to play had to be refused.

During our brief visits to Malta, we played at Bighi Hospital, Vernon Club and the John Bull Cabaret, and also for the Ship's Company dance at Queen's Hall. Our last engagement in the Mediterranean was a six-hour performance at the Eastern Exchange Hotel, Port Said, where we achieved a striking success as a dance band.

During our brief stay at Bermuda we played on board S.S. *Pranconia* for the entertainment of the crew and a large number of American passengers.

The Band rose to new heights of popularity at Colon in August. Starting by performing at the Y.M.C.A., we changed to different surroundings by appearing at the fashionable all-night cabarets Moulin Rouge and Atlantic. The cosmopolitan audiences at these places were delighted by the novel entertainment which we provided. It was at Colon that we were "put on the air" for the first time.

Our cruise down the west coast and up the east coast of South America is a long recital of successes for the Harmonica Band, before all types and conditions of audience, from the society throng at Valparaiso Casino to the dusky crew of a Columbian destroyer at Buenaventura.

At almost every port we visited in Columbia, Ecuador, Peru, Chile, the Falklands, Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil, we played to enthusiastic crowds, to whom the mouth-organ as a band instrument was a complete novelty.

We broadcast from Iquique, Valparaiso, Buenos Aires, Montevideo and Rio de Janeiro, and our popularity with radio fans was proved by the volume of appreciative telephone calls received at the studios where we were playing, and by the fan mail to which some of our soloists were subjected! The Band rendered official service on many occasions by playing on the quarter-deck during At Homes, broadcasting a suitable programme on Armistice Day at Valparaiso, playing for

receptions and entertainments organized by the British Consul or other local authority, and in numerous other ways.

Perhaps our most memorable show in South America was on Boxing Day at an Anglo-Chilean dance at Magallanes, when on conclusion of the show the entire crowd, headed by the Colonel commanding the local forces, marched singing through the town to the music of the Band. Other outstanding occasions were the New Year's Eve dance at the Falklands, a broadcast from the magnificent Radio Excelsior studios at Buenos Aires, and a taste of the South American Carnival spirit at the Rambla Hotel, Montevideo.

On joining the Fleet at Barbados we lost no time in making ourselves known and performances at the Y.M.C.A., Randal's Club, Girls' Friendly Hostel and the Aquatic Club followed in quick succession.

At Bermuda we started by playing in the Dockyard at the R.N. Chief and Petty Officers' Club and at the Casemates, then travelled farther afield to Somerset, where we played to packed houses of chiefly coloured people at the Oddfellows' and Masonic Halls, and later in our stay crossed over to Hamilton, where we achieved further successes at the Colonial Opera House and Hamilton Hotel.

At Trinidad, on Coronation Eve, we performed at the Globe Theatre for charity at a few hours' notice.

At the time of writing we have a full list of engagements and look forward to a busy time at Bermuda and during our last cruise, culminating with a farewell dinner and performance at Portsmouth before our final parting.

We shall all be sorry when "Paying-off" brings the inevitable close to a wonderful record and a farewell to all the good times we have had together.

III. "TOMES"

FROM the title of this little work you might think that it had something to do with libraries. You would be quite wrong. A Naval "Tome" is a cross between a Bloomsbury sherry party and a tour of the Zoo. Perhaps it should be translated for the uninitiated. "Tome" is a derivation of "At Home"—the only practical way we have of returning mass hospitality. The game starts when two or more already hard-worked midshipmen go ashore to the British Consulate. One of the consular officers bears down upon them and the following conversation will take place:

C.O. Oh yes, you must have come about the invitations (*brightly*).

Mid. That's right.

C.O. Well, we've made out some lists here of the more important people. There are only 600. How many will you want altogether?

Mid. 250.

C.O. Oh dear, that makes it very awkward.

He retires and there follows a very difficult two hours. Punch's author of the "As Others Hear Us" series would do well—"Oh, but we couldn't leave Major Freeman out." "But Don Carlos *must* come," etc., etc. In the end a list of 500 names is presented and the midshipmen write an invitation to every other one. Care is taken to ensure that the recipient understands quite clearly that *only he* (or she) is asked. Not that it will make any difference. In fact there is very little use for invitations at all—they have no further bearing on the matter.

Tomes are usually held on the last-but-one day in each port. By this time the situation has had time to work up

into a diplomatic revolution. Any officer or man is descended on at the slightest pretext and an invitation demanded; the consulate staff imitate their gallant confrères in Addis Ababa and refuse all callers; but all in vain. If we are clever the ship is at anchor and the torrent has to come in ship's boats which are nautically incapable of carrying more than about a hundred each trip. (Official capacities are far below this.) If alongside they simply walk over the brow.

For the occasion the quarter-deck has been artistically draped with bunting. The faint but pleasant aroma of the said bunting, as caused by damping in the last shower, adds charm to the scene. In the starboard waist the long tables have been set up to bear the refreshments for the guests—all looking cool and inviting. The Captain, Commander, Officer of the Watch and other important officials stand ready at the top of the gangway. The first guests step up from the boat. They are received by several officers and are passed on down the quarter-deck. Occasionally this smooth working is interrupted by a foreign Naval officer having a prolonged saluting-cum-bowing match with the sideboy. With pleasure writ on every face the happy throng swells. Officers saddled with the more impossible loads endeavour to relieve the situation by suggesting a walk round the ship. Just a minute, they must fetch their friends. Soon he sets off, followed by a crocodile formation of gaping mouths. I believe that any of us could do that famous round with our eyes shut now. The route is mastered to such an extent that when necessary it can be completed in 3-22 minutes. This, of course, with a party who can't ask questions in English and merely allows for ladder-climbing, etc.

Dancing will have commenced on the quarter-deck so we hastily plant our collection at the bar and go in search of that little girl from the Bristol Hotel who said she was coming. This sounds very easy, but it is not until one tries to get from one end of a space, in which 400 thirsty South Americans are trying to drink Scotch whisky at once, to the other that one realizes that it is almost impossible. However, a good barge will go a long way, and eventually we reach fresh

air again. At that moment Sunset is sounded off. You stand to attention and salute. You hear a gradual tailing off of the babel in waist as it sinks into the fuddled brains that something else is going on. A titter passes round and the "Carry on" is sounded and we can go in peace.

If one has a moment to spare it is well worth while to have a look round at the assembled revellers. One wonders how many of them are really glad they came. There are the self-important uniformed types, obviously enjoying all the saluting that goes on, raising the hand to anything in uniform in the hopes of exacting a return. Then the coldly material whisky-swiller, firmly ensconced in a strategic position at the bar. Again the harassed mother of several daughters frantically organizing in her few words of English to get all her offspring a dance with an officer. But there are many who merely stand and look lost, so we get them a drink, and no, they don't want a sandwich. We must also not forget that gallant race—the Englishman-abroad-who-doesn't-mind-coming-to "At Homes." He indeed is a friend in need. A sure refuge after wearying Spanish-speaking bouts. They are so very easy to entertain.

However, time draws on, and we see signs of the approaching end. Punctually at the hour mentioned on the invitation cards the band plays the National anthems. The second one, that of the country we are visiting, is always a bit of a trial. The guests start talking half-way through, as most of these tunes are of great duration, and they seem entirely unimpressed by the great steadiness and poise of the ship's officers during the performance. However, it is over. The mob moves from the bar to the top of the gangway, and with their loaves of ship's bread tucked under their arms they surge down into the overloaded boats, and soon they are gone. Complaints are few and usually of no importance. Yet we have watched hundreds of people come on board during our cruises and endure this most dreadful form of entertainment—and they will make the same fuss over invitations when the next ship comes.

IV. TABLE OF DISTANCES STEAMED

<i>Places Visited</i>	<i>Arrive</i>	<i>Depart</i>	<i>Distance Steamed Monthly</i>
	1935	1935	
Portsmouth	—	11th June	June—2,857
Malta	16th June	16th July	
Gibraltar	19th July	22nd July	July—3,764
Trinidad	3rd August	12th August	
La Guaira	13th August	20th August	
Grenada	21st August	25th August	
St. Lucia	26th August	30th August	August—1,614
Barbados	30th August	6th September	
Bermuda	9th September	9th September	
Gibraltar	16th September	20th September	
Malta	24th September	24th September	
Alexandria	26th September	26th September	
Haifa	27th September	2nd November	September—6,280 October—918 (Exercises)
Port Said	2nd November	18th November	November—717
Alexandria	19th November	4th January (1936)	December—862 (Exercises)
	1936	1936	
Malta	6th January	14th January	January—2,460
Alexandria	16th January	11th April	February—1,325
Malta	13th April	28th April	March — 940 (Exercises) April—1,894
Marseilles	1st May	2nd May	
Malta	3rd May	3rd May	May—2,393
Alexandria	6th May	8th June	
Haifa	9th June	27th June	June—569
Port Said	28th June	4th July	
Alexandria	5th July	14th July	
Malta	17th July	28th July	July—2,180
Gibraltar	31st July	3rd August	