

H.M.A.S. MELBOURNE,
At Singapore.

6th April, 1961.

Flag Officer Commanding,
H.M. AUSTRALIAN FLEET.

H.M.A.S. MELBOURNE - REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS - MARCH, 1961.

Sir,

I have the honour to report the proceedings of
H.M.A. Ship under my command for the month of March, 1961.

EXERCISE JET, 1961.

carrier

2. At 0001F on 1st March, MELBOURNE was steaming northward to rendezvous with the Underway Replenishment Group and the remainder of the Task Group after the final Sea Venom strike on BELFAST, which had been acting as a raider. The rendezvous was made at 0200F and at 0600F the task Group commenced replenishing from R.F.A. WAVE SOVEREIGN. All ships had refuelled by 1345F when the U.R.G. was detached. In the meantime, a report had been received of an enemy/group 900 miles to the northwest. The Task Group was therefore formed in a deceptive disposition in which BELFAST and her screen simulated a carrier group while MELBOURNE was stationed 70 miles on the port bow, ROYALIST ahead and BRAHMAPUTEA on the starboard bow. MELBOURNE and BELFAST exchanged callsigns, and it was hoped in this way that MELBOURNE would be identified as a picket on enemy airborne radar and that the first enemy strikes would be directed against BELFAST, allowing MELBOURNE to close within range of her Sea Venom aircraft. During the day A/S Patrols were flown by Gannet aircraft, and from 0400F on 2nd March, Sea Venoms flew searches to the northwest to a depth of 250 miles. During this phase, HERMES quite clearly had the edge on MELBOURNE owing to the former's radar, the superior performance of the Sea Vixen and Scimitar aircraft and the value of A.E.W. Gannets. When it was considered that the deceptive disposition had no further value, course was altered to the north to rejoin the main body. At 0310F on 3rd March, ships on the northern flank came under fire from the surface forces. Shortly after this MELBOURNE had the most unique experience of being involved in surface, A/S and air attacks, all within a period of 60 minutes. At 0530F three Sea Venoms were launched to search for the enemy carrier and they located H.M.S. HERMES 160 miles to the northwest and carried out simulated rocket attacks.

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A further strike ...

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A further strike was launched at 0710F, and at 1030F a C.A.F. of three Sea Venoms intercepted a raid of three Scimitars - two shot down was the optimistic Venom report. All forces then converged and rendezvoused at 1415F, when the Flag Officer Commanding the Indian Fleet assumed technical command. The force was formed into a Carrier Ready Formation with a circular screen of fourteen ships and course was set towards the Underway Replenishment Group coming from the eastward.

3. At 0830F on 4th March, the force rendezvoused with the Underway Replenishment Group and the full replenishment of the force commenced. At 0910F one of MELBOURNE's helicopters, which was taking officers to HERMES for discussion regarding mutual carrier support during the next phase of the exercise, ditched close to HERMES. The pilot and passengers were picked up uninjured by HERMES' seaboot. The accident has been reported separately. MELBOURNE commenced replenishment at 1145F, going alongside R.F.A. FORT CHARLOTTE for Victualling Stores and R.F.A. TIDE AUSTRAL for F.F.O. and AN 1, and completed refuelling at 1530F. TIDE AUSTRAL appeared to be a clean and efficient R.F.A.. HERMES was detached after she had replenished to proceed ahead to carry out strikes on R.A.A.F. Station, Butterworth. The remainder of the force were subjected to submarine attacks throughout the night.

4. On the morning of 5th March, the Flag Officer Commanding, R.M.A. Fleet resumed tactical command and the force steamed on an easterly course for the Nicobar Islands. No flying was carried out during the day. A landfall was made on Great Nicobar Island at dawn on 6th March. At 0830F the Commander-in-Chief, Far East Station (Admiral Sir David Luce, K.C.B., D.S.O., O.B.E.) was transferred by junketay from BELFAST. During the day the Commander in Chief walked round the ship, met many officers and ratings including all R.N. and ex-R.N. officers and ratings borne. The weather was overcast most of the day and R.A.A.F. Canberra aircraft from Butterworth which had been expected to attack failed to locate the force. A strike was made by eight Sea Venoms on Batti Halv, one of the smallest islands in the Nicobar group, at 1030F. An attack by enemy destroyers was expected during the night so at 2130F four Gannets carried out a search but without success. A further search was made at 0200F on 7th March again with no result but at 0600 Gannets sighted two enemy destroyers. BELFAST and MYSORE with three frigates had been detached at 0430F and sent in the probable direction of attack, and by 0700F BELFAST held the enemy destroyers on radar. After the surface action had been completed all ships closed HERMES which had returned from her sortie against Butterworth, and at 0900F the Commander in Chief was transferred by helicopter to HERMES. The force was formed up in a two-carrier disposition after which the Flag Officer Second in Command, Far East Station, assumed tactical command for the replenishment programme. MELBOURNE did not commence replenishing until after HERMES had finished, by which time it was 2145F. The ship refuelled from WAVE SOVEREIGN and embarked Victualling Stores from FORT CHARLOTTE, completing at 0035F on 6th March.

13. On completion of the ...

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On completion of the replenishment MELBOURNE with MYSONE and ROYALIST and seven screening ships withdrew to the southward of the U.R.C.. The disposition then steamed westward towards Trincomalee. At 1045 on 8th March a nuclear explosion was simulated, and all ships in the group took the necessary action to avoid initial blast and subsequent fall-out. A C.A.P. was flown from 0700F on 9th March when attack by aircraft of the Royal Ceylon Air Force was likely, but no hostile aircraft were detected. At 1000F the group commenced the final replenishment of the exercise and at 1200F the exercise ended. HERMES unfortunately lost an A.E.W. Gannet and pilot during the forenoon. In the afternoon a number of ships carried out A.A. firing at the P.T.A.'s carried by BELFAST for this exercise, after which ships formed in divisions. Manoeuvres were exercised by divisions independently during the dog watches.

5. During the exercise MELBOURNE's aircraft flew 160 sorties. The average daily aircraft serviceability was 10 Sea Venoms and 9 Gannets. Venom aircrews averaged 9 hours 45 minutes and Gannet aircrews 17 hours 20 minutes for the 8 days on which aircraft were required to operate. In general, the exercise was extremely interesting and participation in it well worthwhile.

6. On completion of exercising at manoeuvres, the entire force under the Flag Officer Commanding, R.N.A. Fleet formed in five columns and steamed towards Trincomalee. At 1815H clocks were retarded half an hour to Zone -5 $\frac{1}{2}$. The Fleet was led into Trincomalee by BELFAST wearing the flag of the Commander-in-Chief, Far East Station, followed by MELBOURNE. MELBOURNE secured to No. 4 Buoy, Trincomalee, at 0820EF on 10th March.

7. The four days at Trincomalee was the longest period the ship had spent at rest since 11th January, 1961. The period in Trincomalee was planned perhaps principally for rest and recreation, but the large number of luncheons, dinners and cocktail parties made the former hard to cope by. Facilities for recreation ashore were limited and were barely able to cater for the large number of libertymen landing each afternoon. Unfortunately the current monsoon conditions made the ocean beaches unsafe for bathing, but members of the ship's company were able to swim in the harbour off the ship.

8. On 13th March the post-exercise discussion was held, presided over by the Flag Officer, Second in Command, Far East Station, and summed up by the Commander-in-Chief. Officers of the Indian Navy had been very interested in MELBOURNE's performance in Jet 61, in view of the aircraft carrier VIKRANT joining the Indian Navy in September, 1961.

9. MELBOURNE with QUEENBOROUGH in company sailed from Trincomalee at 0800EF on 14th March. Rear Admiral B.S. Soman, Flag Officer Commanding the Indian Fleet, came to sea to witness flying operations and was flown ashore by Gannet aircraft during the early afternoon.

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15th March a programme of day flying was carried out while crossing the Gulf of Manar and by 1900EF MELBOURNE was off Cape Comorin. The passage to Bombay continued during the next two days in fine weather.

10. There was considerable land mist at dawn on 18th March and large numbers of dhows were fishing in the approaches to Bombay. The pilot boarded the ship at 0815EF and conducted the ship to her anchor berth, letting go an anchor underfoot at 0900EF and then dragging the anchor until he considered the ship was in position. During the forenoon, I accompanied the Flag Officer Commanding H.M.A. Fleet on official calls.

11. A Tea Party was held on the Flight Deck at 1700EF for Government and Service Officials. Among the guests were the Governor of Maharashtra State (H.E. Shri Prakesh) and the Flag Officer, Bombay (Rear Admiral G.G. Karmarkar, M.B.E.) On 19th March, the Chief Minister of Bombay (Y.B. Chavan) and sixteen relatives were shown over the ship. Also many members of the Indian Navy and their families visited the ship. At 1800EF a reception was held on the Flight Deck and was very well attended despite the official policy regarding alcohol in the State of Bombay.

12. The visit to Bombay was most successful despite its briefness. Approximately 1400 libertymen landed during the two days and there was not a single case of misbehaviour. A very pleasing note was the relatively large number of ratings who were entertained in private homes.

13. MELBOURNE and QUEENBOROUGH sailed from Bombay at 0900EF on 20th March for Karachi. Day flying was carried out on 21st March, and a 1815EF clocks were retarded to Zone -5.

14. MELBOURNE arrived off Karachi on the morning of 22nd March in poor visibility and anchored about 2 miles off the breakwater at 0700E. I proceeded inshore to accompany the Flag Officer Commanding H.M.A. Fleet, who had arrived the previous evening from New Delhi, on his official calls. The ship refuelled during the day. As no pontoons were available, it was not possible for the small tanker to come alongside so she was secured astern and the ship was refuelled through the after Flight Deck connection. A full social and recreational programme had been arranged by the Pakistan Navy.

15. On 23rd March, the ship was dressed overall in honour of Pakistan Day. On this day the wind had increased to Force 5 and a moderate swell was running and boat traffic was perforce kept to a minimum. No leave was granted and a large number of sporting fixtures against the Pakistan Navy had to be cancelled. A limited number of officers were able to proceed ashore to attend the reception which was held in QUEENBOROUGH which was berthed alongside; this entailed their spending the night in QUEENBOROUGH.

/5 MELBOURNE weighed at....

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16. MELBOURNE weighed at 0845E on 24th March and made a lœe to hoist boats which had remained inshore overnight. The Flag Officer Commanding, H.M.A. Fleet returned on at 0940E by jackstay from QUEENBOROUGH, and, after personnel and stores had been transferred, course was set direct for Cape Comorin. In the afternoon a three hour flying programme was carried out after which two boilers were closed down and the ship proceeded on economical steaming with QUEENBOROUGH stationed one mile astern.

17. QUEENBOROUGH was refuelled on 25th and 27th March and the ship operated aircraft between 1000E and 1500E on 27th March. At 1830E when the ship was 100 miles north of Cape Comorin two Gannets were sent to Colombo with a rating for compassionate air passage to Australia. These aircraft were recovered at 0900E next morning when the ship was 50 miles off Colombo. At 1730E the ship passed south of Bondra Head and course was set across the Indian Ocean to pass between the Nicobar Islands and Sumatra.

18. On 29th March flying was carried out in the afternoon after which QUEENBOROUGH was refuelled. It had been intended to carry out night flying but at sunset heavy Cu-Nim cloud caused the programme to be cancelled. Clocks were advanced one hour at 2330E to Zone -6. Day and night flying took place on 30th March. A radar landfall on Great Nicobar was made at 0145F on 31st March. This being Good Friday, Sunday routine was worked, and both Chaplains were transferred to QUEENBOROUGH for service during the day. Clocks were advanced one hour at 2330F to Zone -7.

19. Condition of the Ship.

The internal condition of the ship has continued to improve, although little work has been possible on the ship's side because of the large time under way during the month. The main engines and associated machinery have functioned satisfactorily. The Engine Room department have minimised steam leaks and this together with being able to reduce feed water consumption to 50 tons per day enabled the rationing of fresh water in berths to be abolished between Karachi and Singapore. Furthermore, the ship has been successful in reducing steam pressure to 350 lbs. when steaming economically, also, closing down two boilers in the one machinery space, as opportunity offers, enables eight watchkeepers to be rested. The operation of electrical equipment has been satisfactory.

20. Health and Morale of the Ship's Company.

The health and morale of the ship's company is very good. The standard of behaviour at both Bombay and Karachi was excellent. The Jet '61 exercise and the passage from Karachi has welded the different branches into a homogeneous Ship's Company. A slight re-arrangement of the allocation of messdecks and certain other adjustments has resulted in the morale and behaviour of the Engine Room department, from being the lowest in the ship to being equal that of any other branch.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient servant.

V.A.T. Smith
(V.A.T. SMITH)
CAPTAIN.