

SECRET

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

Flag Officer Commanding,
H.M. AUSTRALIAN FLEET.

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

Sir,

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

2. At 0001G on 1st April MELBOURNE with QUEENBOROUGH in company was steaming eastward across the northern entrance of the Malacca Strait towards Penang to collect mail which had been forwarded to H.M.S. DAMPIER. MELBOURNE stopped at 1400G five miles off Penang while QUEENBOROUGH proceeded into Georgetown harbour. After QUEENBOROUGH had rejoined, course was set to the south through the Malacca Strait. At 1315G emergency stations were exercised. At 2345G clocks were advanced to Zone -7 $\frac{1}{2}$, the same time of Singapore. On Sunday 2nd April the passage down the Malacca Strait proceeded uneventfully apart from relatively numerous alterations of course to pass through large groups of native craft. During the day the Chaplains were transferred to QUEENBOROUGH for a period of two hours. As the ship was well ahead of time and was committed to disembark the squadrons to R.A.F. Station, Seletar on 4th April, it was decided to steam through Singapore Strait, detaching QUEENBOROUGH off Singapore, and to anchor 25 miles east of Horsburgh Light in the area allocated for flying off the squadrons. QUEENBOROUGH was accordingly detached at 2000GH and MELBOURNE anchored at 0045GH on 3rd April. The ship remained at anchor on 3rd April while the ship's side was cleaned and preparations were made for entering Singapore. The ship weighed at 0615GH on 4th April. At 0630GH eight Garnet aircraft followed an hour later by ten Sea Venoms, were disembarked to Seletar. The aircraft remained at Seletar during the ship's visit to Singapore and took part in the Singapore International Air Show which took place during this period. After flying off the aircraft the ship proceeded towards Singapore and at 1045GH the passage up the Johore Strait commenced. At 1240GH a seventeen gun salute was fired to the flag of the Commander-in-Chief, Far East Station (Admiral Sir David Luke, K.C.B., D.S.O., O.B.E.) A thirteen gun salute was fired in return to the flag of the Flag Officer Commanding, H.M.A. Fleet (Rear Admiral W.H. HARRINGTON, C.B.E., D.S.O.). At 1255 GH MELBOURNE secured alongside No. 7 Berth, Singapore Naval Base.

3. MELBOURNE remained at the Naval Base for eight days during which period self maintenance was carried out. Despite the long hours underway in the previous two months very few defects had developed, but a considerable amount of preventative maintenance was due.

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4. On the evening of 6th April I attended a reception given by the Australian Commissioner, Mr. Gordon Jockel. At 0945GH on 7th April I waited upon the Commander-in-Chief, Far East Station, and later attended luncheon at Admiralty House.
5. The Air Show at the new International Airport of Paya Lebar opened on the afternoon of 8th April, when R.A.F. aircraft and naval aircraft and helicopters from the aircraft carriers MELBOURNE, VICTORIOUS, and BULWARK took part. The display given by the naval aircraft was very favourably commented on in the press and a photograph of four of MELBOURNE's Sea Venoms in class formation appeared on the front page of the Singapore newspaper, albeit misidentified as Sea Vixen aircraft.
6. Full use was made of the clubs, swimming pools and other recreational facilities of the Naval Base and H.M.S. TERROR. The standard of conduct of the ship's company at Singapore was very satisfactory, as indeed it has been since leaving Australia.
7. MELBOURNE sailed from Singapore for Subic Bay in the Philippine Islands at 0915GH on 13th April prior to taking part in "PONY EXPRESS", the 1961 S.S.A.T.O. Naval Exercise. On board was one troop from 45 Royal Marine Commando and two officers and six Thai marines who were taking passage to Subic Bay to join United States Marine forces for the forthcoming exercise. MELBOURNE was joined by VINDICATA, VOYAGER and QUEENBOROUGH off Johore Shoal Buoy at 1200GH. The force steamed eastward through Singapore Strait and carried out A/A tracking and firings with R.A.F. Meteor aircraft. At 1415GH the Sea Vexon aircraft were recovered from Seletar, followed shortly afterwards by the Gannets. At 1600GH replenishment at sea was exercised, each of the small ships carrying out a jackstay transfer and token refuelling. During the afternoon of 14th April a Surface Plotting Exercise was held followed by Officer of the Watch manoeuvres and further replenishment practices. From 1900 to 2100 GH an Electronic Warfare Exercise was held, and the screening ships made a dummy torpedo attack on MELBOURNE. Next morning at 0730GH the force rendezvoused with the R.F.A. WAVE SOVEREIGN and at 0830GH MELBOURNE commenced refuelling with F.F.O. and AVCAT, disengaging at 1115GH. At 1400GH seven Gannets were launched for A/S bombing practice. During the forenoon of 16th April a flying programme for both Gannets and Sea Venoms was carried out. At 1230GH a transfer of personnel from the ships in company was made so that athletics teams from each ship could take part during the afternoon in a keenly contested athletics meeting which was held on the Flight Deck with teams provided by each ship and the Royal Marines. At the finish the MELBOURNE team had taken the honours from VOYAGER with the Royal Marines third. At 2345GH clocks were advanced to Zone -8. At dawn on 17th April the mountains near Subic Bay were visible ahead and at 0630GH MELBOURNE commenced refuelling the other ships of the force. On completion MELBOURNE proceeded independently to Subic Bay. A civilian pilot boarded the ship at 1045H and conducted the ship to her berth at Loyte Wharf at the Naval Air Station, Subic Point.

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8. In the evening the United States Navy entertained a large number of officers and ratings at their recreational clubs. After the officers' reception, I attended a dinner given by the Commander of the Naval Base, Subic Bay (Rear Admiral C.K. Durcan, U.S.N.), for the Flag Officer Commanding, R.M.A. Fleet and the Captains of H.M.A.

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9. MELBOURNE sailed at 0600H on 18th April and operated aircraft between 0800 and 1500H. At 1530 an A/A shoot was carried out against a sleeve target, one sleeve being destroyed. After the ship returned to harbour, berthing at 1800H. In the evening U.S. Navy Officers and their ladies were entertained onboard.

10. In the short visit to Subic Bay the hospitality shown was almost overwhelming, and the excellent training facilities available would have made a longer stay of considerable value.

11. MELBOURNE sailed at 0600H on 19th April and flying commenced on clearing the bay. Gannet aircraft took part in CASEX's with the other R.A.N. ships against the United States nuclear submarine SARGO, an experience of great value to all concerned. Flying continued until 1500H when further A/A shoot was carried out. All H.M.A. Ships rendezvoused and the sea boats were exercised after which MELBOURNE, with VOYAGER as Rescue Destroyer, operated independently for night flying while the remaining ships proceeded to rendezvous with the R.F.A.'s PORT CHARLOTTE and WAVE SOVEREIGN to store and refuel. Night flying was limited to Gannets because of marginal wind conditions for Sea Venoms and was completed at 2025H. MELBOURNE and VOYAGER then joined the Replenishment Group. Replenishment was completed at 0130H on 20th April when the R.F.A.s were detached, and course was set for Manila Bay. At 0815H a twenty one gun National Salute was fired and returned, and at 0830H MELBOURNE anchored a mile off Manila harbour breakwater.

12. During the two days the ship remained at Manila the United States Navy Ships taking part in PONY EXPRESS entered harbour, and during the forenoon of 21st April the pre-exercise conference was held onboard U.S.S. ESTES, flagship of Rear Admiral B.F. Roeder, U.S.N., who was conducting the exercise.

13. On the evening of 21st April I attended a reception at the United Kingdom Embassy in honour of H.M. the Queen's birthday and later a dinner given for the Flag Officer Commanding, H.M.A. Fleet and the Captains of the Australian ships present by His Excellency the Australian Ambassador to the Philippine Republic (A.T. Sterling, Esq., C.B.E.)

EXERCISE PONY EXPRESS.

14. Exercise Pony Express was designed as an amphibious operation which included escorting an assault force from Manila in the face of a submarine and air threat to a rendezvous with further forces from Singapore, and from the rendezvous to the landing beaches in North Borneo again in the face of both air and submarine threat.

15. MELBOURNE, VENDETTA, VOYAGER and QUEENBROUGH were formed in a anti-submarine Task Group under the command of the Flag Officer Commanding H.M.A. Fleet, to locate and sink any submarines lying in wait ahead of the assault force. MELBOURNE was also responsible for the air defence of the force until the rendezvous with the Singapore group, when VICTORIOUS would assume this duty.

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16. MELBOURNE sailed from Manila on 22nd April. All escort vessels had previously sailed to form a departure screen outside the simulated minefield at the entrance to Manila Bay, while shore-based aircraft from N.A.S. Sangley Point were carrying out searches to a radius of sixty miles. Shortly after weighing four Gannet aircraft were launched to assist in searching the approaches to the bay and these were relieved by a further four aircraft at 0930H. MELBOURNE then led the heavy units down the swept channel through the minefield. At 1035H a periscope was sighted close to the starboard beam. As the ship was still in the half mile wide swept channel little avoiding action could be taken, but a Gannet aircraft was recalled and made two visual attacks on the submarine. At the time of the initial sighting, the submarine was estimated to be one mile inside the minefield. Once clear of the swept channel VENDETTA, VOYAGER and QUEENBOROUGH formed a screen on MELBOURNE while the U.S. escorts screened the main body. At 1120H VENDETTA gained contact with a submarine and with QUEENBOROUGH assisting carried out a series of attacks over the next half hour. At 1230H the opposed sortie phase was completed, and, after all aircraft had been recovered, course was set for the Palawan Passage, MELBOURNE and her screen being stationed 15 miles ahead of the main body.

17. No incidents occurred on Sunday 23rd April and the force continued to proceed to the south west. During the morning the R.C. Chaplain held Mass aboard the U.S.S. THERESIA BAY. The forenoon had been designated "Administrative Time" in the exercise orders. The first of several Canned ADEK (Synthetic Air Defence Exercise) took place in the evening.

18. At 0600H on 24th April the Group altered course to the west towards the rendezvous with the R.N. Force from Singapore. All the screening ships were refuelled from MELBOURNE, commencing at the first light, and during the forenoon A/S patrols and C.A.P. were flown. At 1430H MELBOURNE refuelled from R.F.A. WAVE SOVEREIGN, completing at 1645H. An A/S patrol of two Gannets was launched at 1730H in the hope of locating any submarines as they came to periscope depth for evening star sights. At 1920H one aircraft sighted a snorting submarine and made two successful attacks. Further A/S patrols were flown at two hourly intervals from 0001 to 0600 on 25th April. At 0140H VENDETTA gained submarine contact and made a series of attacks. At 1415H the Singapore component of the force had been sighted and the Task Group altered course to the east in order to be in station ahead of the main body when the latter reversed course to proceed towards the rehearsal landing area on Balambangan Island. At 1600H VENDETTA was detached to join VICTORIOUS and an hour later H.M.S. YARMOUTH joined the A/S Task Group. At 2100H YARMOUTH located a submarine and carried out nine attacks before losing contact. Gannet aircraft flew A/S patrols between 2000 and 0400H on 26th April, and at 2255H one aircraft sighted a submarine snort but was unable to carry out an attack. Ten minutes later the submarine made her attack and as she was withdrawing the aircraft gained contact by sonobuoy. At first light VOYAGER and QUEENBOROUGH were refuelled by MELBOURNE. During the day the force was attacked by aircraft from the U.S.S. CORAL SEA who was withdrawn from the exercise on the next day, consequently any further air defence exercises became unrealistic as they had to be arranged between VICTORIOUS and MELBOURNE beforehand. A/S patrols were flown between 0900 and 1530H and from 2200 to 0430H on 27th April. YARMOUTH was refuelled from MELBOURNE at 0940H on 27th April, and Gannet and Sea Venom aircraft were operated from 1200 to 1800H. MELBOURNE operated independently of, but astern of the screen, an arrangement which possesses several important advantages.

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19. At 0530H on 28th April, the assault force commenced the rehearsal landing at Balambangan. During the day live surface and aerial bombardment was carried out by the cruisers and destroyers and aircraft from VICTORIOUS. MELBOURNE's Sea Venoms were unable to take part as all communications in the landing area were on U.H.F. MELBOURNE therefore took no active part in the rehearsal landing and spent the day patrolling thirty miles off shore whilst screening ships detached and rejoined as necessary to take part in the bombardment. During the afternoon a Scimitar aircraft from VICTORIOUS ditched near Balambangan, the pilot having successfully ejected. At 0300H on 29th April MELBOURNE headed inshore to the anchorage off Balambangan, anchoring at 0500H. Arrangements had been made for two R.A.N. Sea Venom aircraft to operate from VICTORIOUS for the remainder of the exercise and four of VICTORIOUS's Whirlwind A/S helicopters to operate from MELBOURNE, so the opportunity was taken to transfer the necessary stores and personnel. At 1010H MELBOURNE weighed and with a screen of YARMOUTH, VOYAGER and QUEENBOROUGH proceeded to the west to rendezvous with the Commonwealth Replenishment Group. Ships replenished during the afternoon. A/S helicopters were operated from 1200H to sunset and A/S patrols were flown by Gannet aircraft from 1930 to 2300H, MELBOURNE operating in the box astern of the replenishment group. At 1835H the force was attacked by a submarine: CAVALIER and VOYAGER gained contact and carried out eight attacks. At 2330H VICTORIOUS with three escorts joined for replenishment. At 0800H on 30th April MELBOURNE and her task group were detached and opened to the north west prior to an air defence exercise with VICTORIOUS in the afternoon and evening. Sea Venom strikes were flown between 1345 and 1645H and 1800 and 2100H. Unfortunately VICTORIOUS was not maintaining a standing C.A.P. and as the two carriers' flying programmes were not synchronised most of the value of the exercise was lost. After flying was completed the task group proceeded to the north west to patrol to seaward of Emerald Shoals, while the assault force made its way towards the landing beaches on the coast of North Borneo.

20. The Condition of the Ship.

The appearance of the ship is quite good taking the amount of sea time in recent months into consideration. Both engine room and electrical equipment have operated satisfactorily throughout the month.

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

The health and morale of the ship's company has been very good. Mail facilities during Pony Express have been excellent.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient servant.

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

The Captain,
H.M.A.S. MELBOURNE.