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EXCLUSIVE

Shop Window '92



Above: An 801 Sqn Sea Harrier FRS.1 recovering to Ark Royal's flight deck after completing a Shop Window display.
(Duncan Cubitt)



Left: HMS Ark Royal, flagship of exercise Shop Window '92 sailing in the North Sea off the coast of Humberside, with the mine-hunter HMS Cromer manoeuvring in the background.
(David Oliver)

NORMALLY, WHEN THE ROYAL NAVY 'shows the flag', its ships make courtesy visits to overseas ports such as Mayport, Toulon or Hong Kong.

For a fortnight in June of this year, a Royal Navy task force led by the flagship HMS Ark Royal, with Flag Officer Surface Flotilla, Vice Admiral Sir Nicholas Hill-Norton aboard, embarked on a circumnavigation of the British Isles visiting a number of ports of call en route.

Here the carrier was opened to the general public, and after departure, key members of the local community were invited to join the carrier sailing at five locations – the Bristol Channel, Liverpool Bay, Firth of Fourth, off Newcastle, and off Hull.

After being flown to the Ark Royal by Sea King HC.4s, the guests toured the ship and were briefed on the broad aspects of the Navy's current role and capabilities, as well as the more detailed function of an aircraft carrier.

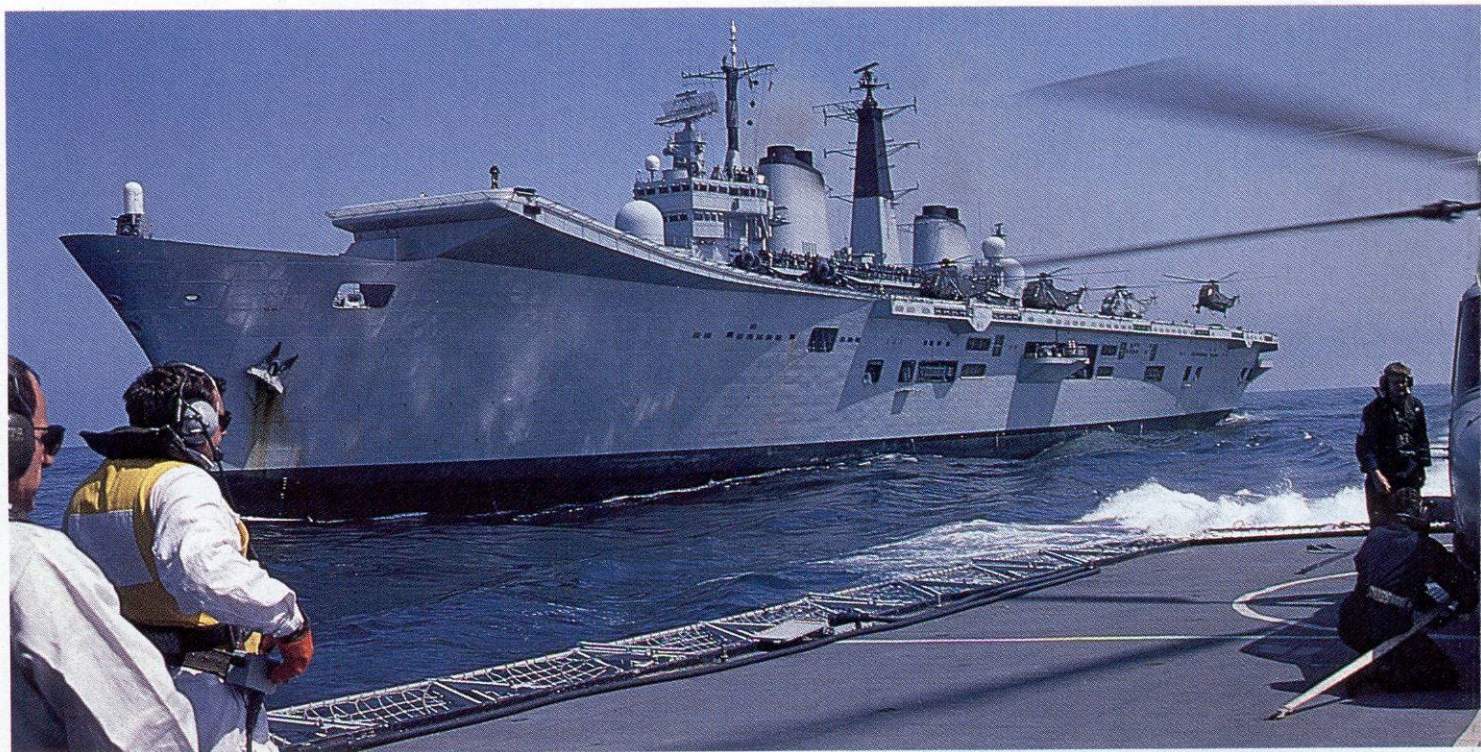
This was followed by a comprehensive action display involving Sea Harriers and Sea King and Lynx helicopters, and other ships of the task force which included the destroyer HMS Gloucester, the auxiliary RFA Olmeda, the submarine HMS Opossum, and the mine-hunter HMS Cromer.

In between these visits, the ships and their aircraft carried out their normal programme of training exercises.

AFM joined the Ark when it was alongside Leith docks, Edinburgh, as she prepared to sail to join up with other participants in exercise Shop Window '92. Prior to sailing the carrier's aircraft had to be recovered from nearby RAF Turnhouse.

This is normally done at sea but unfavourable winds had delayed the carrier

Goodwill visits by the Royal Navy are usually confined to foreign ports, but this year a task force led by the carrier *Ark Royal* circumnavigated the UK mainland to project the importance of the Navy's role to members of the local community in pre-selected areas.

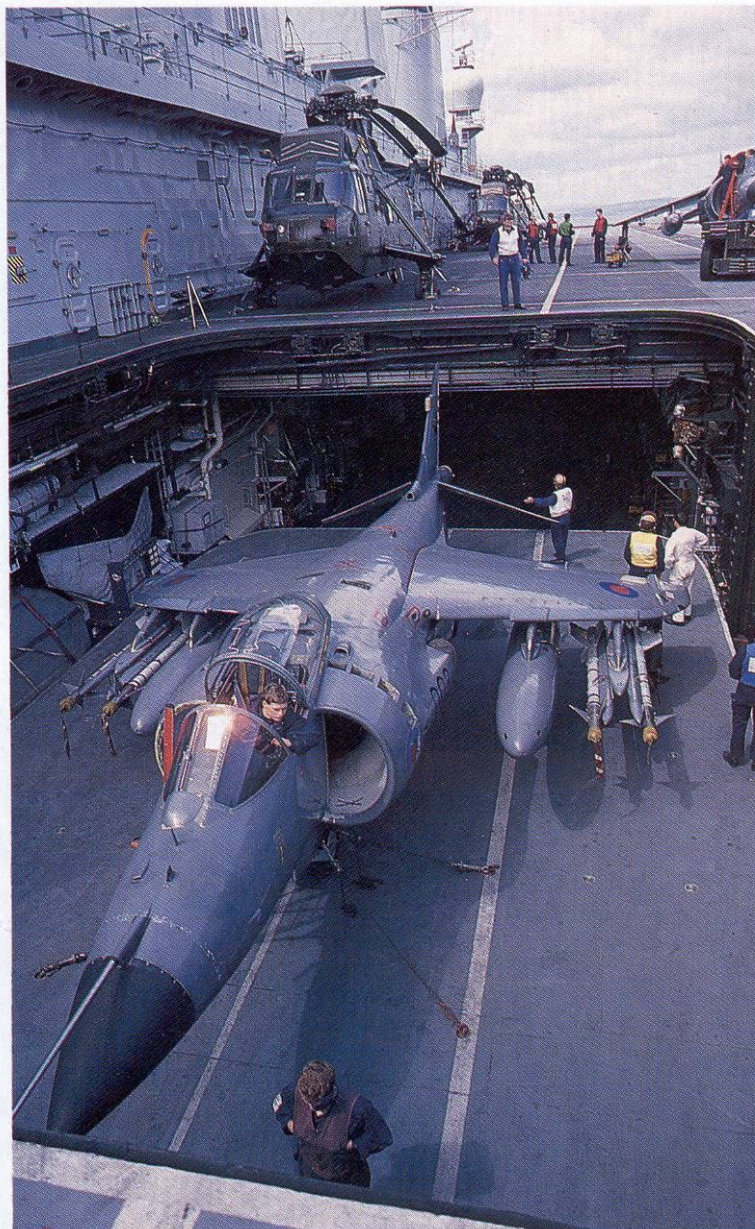


Above: Lynx HAS.35 on HMS Gloucester's flight deck as the destroyer passes the Ark Royal at 30kts with 846 Sqn's Sea King HC.4s recovering to the carrier.



• Right: Sea King recovery. Two 820 Sqn anti-submarine Sea King HAS.6s face an 846 Sqn 'Jungle' on Ark Royal's flight deck alongside Leith Dock in Edinburgh.





Left: 801 Sqn Sea Harrier FRS.1, carrying inert AIM-9L Sidewinders, rides Ark Royal's forward aircraft lift with an 846 Sqn Sea King HC.4 on the flight deck.

Left: A pair of 801 Sqn Sea Harrier FRS.1s with their distinctive chequered rudders, hover alongside Ark Royal prior to recovery.

SHAR's restrained on Ark Royal's aft flight deck at the end of a hectic day during exercise Shop Window. (Photos Duncan Cubitt)





Above: The spectacular finale of the Shop Window '92 display — HMS Ark Royal with HMS Gloucester alongside at 30kts as its Lynx touches down, while HMS Cromer passed in the opposite direction. (David Oliver)

Right: A SHAR makes a cross-deck landing on Ark Royal alongside Leith docks, Edinburgh. (Duncan Cubitt)

Right: Taxi rank! Four 846 Sqn Cabs — Sea King HC.4s turning and burning on the carrier. (David Oliver)

leaving port by some twelve hours and the next high tide was after dark.

However, the sight of Sidewinder-armed Sea Harriers of 801 Sqn making cross deck landings on the carrier in port close to the city centre, drew secretaries and executives to the windows of their high rise offices.

The following morning the four ships making up the Shop Window task force, rendezvoused off Newcastle awaiting the first wave of guests being collected from Newcastle airport by the Sea Kings.

Operating aboard the 20,000 ton Ark Royal, the third and largest Invincible class light aircraft carrier, were five Sea Harrier (SHAR) FRS.1s of 801 Sqn, which is in the process of reducing its complement as the FRS.1s are rotated through an upgrade programme to FRS.2 standard. Five Sea King HC.4s from 846 Sqn, one of which operated from RFA Olmeda, three Sea King HAS.6s from 820 Sqn and a Sea King AEW.2A from D Flight 849 Sqn made up the carrier's rotary wing element.

In addition, there was the 815 Sqn Lynx HAS.3S belonging to HMS Gloucester.

The 4,775 ton Type 42 guided missile destroyer, and her Lynx Flight, played a major role in the Gulf War. Her primary role is to provide air defence of task group operations, normally in deep water but during Gulf War operations she was obliged to operate off shore in shallow waters.

Throughout Desert Storm, Gloucester was consistently forward of all Allied warships, remaining in Defence Watch for 53 days. During this time she provided anti-air missile defence to the US carriers, controlled Allied air defence aircraft, launched numerous successful Lynx/Sea Skua attacks on Iraqi patrol craft, and destroyed a Silkworm missile in flight which was targetted on Allied ships attacking the enemy held Kuwaiti coast with her own Sea Dart missiles.

During the period of Shop Window, Gloucester's Lynx Flight, along with 820 Sqn's Sea King HAS.6s, took the opportunity of taking part in a number of anti-submarine Casex working with HMS Opossum, an Oberon Class diesel-electric patrol submarine.

The Shop Window display brought all the surface and airborne elements of the task force together in an extremely well orchestrated display of naval action which was co-ordinated and commented by

Mildenhall's Roger Hoefling. The guests were able to follow the action by wearing special receiver headphones.

The proceedings comprised STOL take-offs, high speed flypasts, live firing at a towed target, a solo demonstration, and vertical recoveries by the SHARs, a mass flypast of helicopters, and solo displays by a Sea King HAS.6 with dipping sonar, and Gloucester's Lynx.

At the same time, Cromer, Opossum, Olmeda and Gloucester were put through their paces by manoeuvring in close proximity to the carrier. This included the submarine surfacing at high speed with the bow well out of the water, a refuelling at sea (RAS) between Gloucester and Ark Royal, the officer at the destroyer's helm during his first RAS was an ex-Sea King pilot who equated it to keeping a mini in close formation with a juggernaut at high speed on the M1, and the mine-hunter showing its manoeuvrability by turning in its own length.

The spectacular finale consisted of Gloucester overtaking the carrier at 30kts as her Lynx landed on her flight deck while Sea Kings simultaneously recovered to Ark Royal.

The overall effect was one of polished professionalism and those lucky enough to be invited to watch it were flown back to Newcastle Airport suitably impressed. The only regret was that there was no practical way for this impressive display to be seen by the general public.

