



## WHERE'S THAT TIGER?

**'We'll have a helicopter!' says Airfix Director**

**'YOU** can't leave that scooter there!'

It was a little after 5.30 on a November morning. It was dark, dismal and damp, and the porter at East Croydon station was obviously in no mood for arguing. Nevertheless, Reg Croad, chief draughtsman of Airfix, tried to tell the porter that he was on most urgent business and had to catch a train straight away. The porter was still unimpressed.

'You can't leave it there,' he said again, and then turned and disappeared into the station.

Reg Croad stood and looked after him for a moment and thought one or two unkind thoughts about porters in general and this one in particular (although he realised he was only doing his job). As a brief concession to the demands of British Railways, Croad wheeled his motor scooter a few yards further along, locked it and left it.

A few minutes later he was seated in a train speeding down to Portsmouth. Croad was nearing the climax of twenty-four hours of crises. The previous day had been one of continual activity with plans always frustrated at the last minute. He had got home late, had a few hours sleep and then was up again at 4.30 a.m. to make his dash to East Croydon station to catch the train for Portsmouth.

The three hours enforced idleness in the train did not come easy to the draughtsman. He thought back over the series of panics which had landed him in the train—and he cast his thoughts ahead and wondered

whether he would get to Portsmouth in time, and what would await him there.

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It had begun, as so many panics do, quietly. Towards the end of 1959 Airfix had decided to add the model of H.M.S. *Tiger*, the guided missile ship, to their range of 1/600-scale ships. They approached the Admiralty, found them willing to co-operate and were promised plans of the ship on which to base their model. H.M.S. *Tiger* was then allotted a place in Airfix's tight and complex production rota.

Most people would think that official plans would be sufficient guidance to Airfix for their model. But the company think differently. Perfection is their aim and they know, especially with new aircraft and ships, that minor modifications can be made which do not appear on the plans. If it is humanly possible they like to see and photograph the original of every model they manufacture.

And so it was with this fact in mind that Mr. E. J. Gray, Director of Airfix, telephoned the Admiralty late one afternoon. He asked whether it would be possible to go down to Portsmouth to see and photograph H.M.S. *Tiger*.

The officer at the Admiralty was affable and obliging.

'Of course you can see her, old boy', he said. 'But there's one snag: she leaves for the Mediterranean the day after tomorrow so you won't be able to get near her tomorrow while she's preparing to sail. You'd best come down the morning she



sails and watch her go out.'

Gray could see trouble looming ahead already. 'What time is she leaving?' he asked.

'Nine o'clock in the morning!' was the breezy reply.

It was then too late to do anything immediately, but Gray ran over the possibilities in his mind. They could delay the model of *Tiger* until the ship returned—but this would upset the whole production schedule. They could also go ahead without seeing the ship—and hope that there were no discrepancies in the plans—but this was equally unthinkable. Gray knew that somehow they would have to get down to Portsmouth and photograph *Tiger* as she was leaving. He decided to sleep on the problem.

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'A helicopter—that's it!' Gray had the idea as he was driving to work the next morning. A helicopter would be able to hover over and around the ship as she was leaving and they could get all the photographs they wanted. He called in Reg Croad, a keen amateur photographer, whose job it would be to get the pictures. He found Croad enthusiastic about hiring a helicopter.

Wasting no time Gray telephoned Battersea Heliport and inquired whether they could do the job. The first thing he learned was that the cost would be £70 an hour. Gray was undaunted. 'We want the helicopter', he said.

Then came the first setback. No helicopter was available when Airfix wanted one. The heliport was quite happy to provide one later in the day, but Gray knew that this would be too late.

He had another idea and telephoned the aircraft firm of Saunders-Roe on the Isle of Wight. Could they provide a helicopter? Again the same answer. 'Yes, but not when you want it.'

Next Airfix tried Croydon Airport in the hopes that a light aeroplane would be a good substitute for a helicopter. Croydon told them they had better get in touch with the local airfield at Portsmouth. Portsmouth thought that they might be able to help.

Then came the doubts—doubts about the November weather. Would it keep the aircraft on the ground? If they could get airborne, would the visibility be sufficient to take photographs of the ship. Anyway, was an aeroplane the best medium to use to take the photographs?

The problem was thoroughly ventilated at a small meeting in Gray's office at the Airfix works. Reluctantly the conclusion was reached that the weather risk was too

great with an aircraft. Croad would have to go down to Portsmouth by train and use his own initiative from then on.

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Croad arrived in Portsmouth at 8.40 a.m. precisely—just twenty minutes to spare before the ship sailed. He had never been to Portsmouth before and decided that his best ally would be a taxi-driver. He found one, told the driver his mission and asked to be driven to the best vantage point. It was a little before 9 a.m. when Croad found himself deposited at Virginia Pier, a small jetty just outside the harbour walls.

Croad saw from his watch that he still had a few minutes to spare and decided to chance leaving his first vantage place in search of something better. Further up towards the sea, at a place where the channel narrowed, he could see what looked like an old gun emplacement. He decided to try it.

He was a little breathless when he arrived—and found it shut up. But there were signs of habitation in a house nearby and Croad decided to knock up the people who lived there. He was lucky. The owner was a caretaker and a retired seaman who was full of enthusiasm when he heard Croad's story.

'You come through here', he said, and led Croad through to an excellent vantage point, right at the narrowest part of the channel. There was hardly time for the draughtsman to set up his camera before *Tiger* came into sight steaming majestically round a bend in the river.

There followed another hectic period for Croad as he took one photograph after another and, at the same time, made mental notes on the shape of the ship. One small snag was that the deck was crowded with officers and sailors who were obscuring some of the detail. But his newly-found caretaker friend put his mind at rest about this.

'They'll all disappear below after they've saluted the Fort over there', he said. Sure enough the decks cleared after the ceremony of saluting the Fort, and Croad was able to get more detail into his photographs.

By lunch-time he was back at the Airfix works and later the same day the fifty or so photographs he had taken had been printed and the long task of comparing them with the official plans had started. H.M.S. *Tiger* was taking shape at Haldane Place.

'Guess it was all a bit hectic while it lasted', Reg Croad said recently, as the first models came off the mould. 'But at least we can be certain that we have an exact replica of H.M.S. *Tiger*.'