

Record breaking 'Eagle'

DURING 1971, HMS *Eagle* in her 20th year was still playing a vital role with the Royal Navy. In the last 12 months the ship has steamed over 74,000 miles and spent over 190 days at sea—further and longer than any other year in her busy life. In July, the ship's average speed was over 20 knots, which equalled that of any other month since she commissioned in 1951, a tribute to her builders and the men who man her.

Eagle's air squadrons have been just as busy. No 800 Squadron in November achieved more deck landings and more night deck landings than in any other month since forming with Hawker Siddeley Buccaneers. In the same month No 899 Squadron flew more sorties than ever before since forming with the Hawker Siddeley Sea Vixen ten years ago. No 826 Squadron, equipped with Sea Kings, flew one-third more hours than any other previous month.

The present *Eagle*, the 15th, was laid down as part of the war construction programme in Harland and Wolff's Belfast shipyard, where she was launched by the Queen (then Princess Elizabeth) on March 19, 1946, being accepted into the Royal Navy on March 1, 1951. After seven years continuous service in the Home and Mediterranean fleets, including action at Port Said in 1956, she was extensively modernised in Devonport dockyard from 1959 to 1964. This included the incorporation of many new features such as the angled deck, steam catapults, a computer based action information system (ADA) and a powerful new long-range communications system. Since 1964 the ship has spent most of her time East of Suez where her aircraft made a vital contribution to the commonwealth defence of Malaysia during the years of 'confrontation' with Indonesia. *Eagle* also took part in the Beira patrol and operations covering the withdrawal from Aden.



This superb photograph of HMS Eagle shows the aircraft at present in service on board the carrier. The Buccaneers belong to No 800 Squadron, Sea Vixens come from No 899 Squadron and the Sea King helicopters belong to No 826 Squadron.

The pictures shown below were all taken aboard HMS Eagle during the closing weeks of her last commission before she paid off for the last time. Left, top to bottom: Sea Kings of 826 Sqn return from an anti-submarine patrol sortie, Gannet AEW 3s of 849D Flight, the ship's airborne early warning unit, Buccaneer Mk 2 of 800 Sqn on the catapult about to give the signal for take off. Below: Vixen Mk 2 pictured at the moment of firing a rocket cluster during a target exercise (MoD pictures).

