Book Section:
Rayner, J. orcid.org/0000-0002-9422-3453 (2025) The 1970s: Warship versus Sailor. In: Screening the Fleet: The Royal Navy on Television 1973–2023. White Rose University Press , pp. 23-55. ISBN 9781912482405

https://doi.org/10.22599/screeningthefleet.b

CHAPTER 1

The 1970s: *Warship* versus *Sailor*

In relation to the development of British television documentary from the aesthetic, practical and ethical precedents of the documentary film movement, James Chapman has observed:

> A feature of television documentary that has generally been overlooked is that many landmark programmes and series that have been seen as representing particular lineages or taxonomies were often in the first place the outcome of very specific institutional and ideological conditions.[26]

This is especially pertinent to BBC series depicting the Royal Navy during the 1970s, which can be seen to act as focal points for innovation in documentary approach and in dramatisation of real-world scenarios, in addition to their recognised significance as records and representations of the Navy. The 1970s saw the broadcasting of two comparable and yet ultimately competing television series that portrayed the Navy to mass audiences, and which therefore represent an appropriate starting point for consideration of the Royal Navy's televisual presence. *Warship* (BBC, 1973–77) and *Sailor* (BBC, 1976) proved to be benchmarks in their establishment of the parameters and the popularity of the modern Navy as a television subject, in the formats of both serial drama and observational documentary series. Both were also devised and produced within a context in which public relations had become crucially important to the Admiralty, for informing television viewers of the Navy's roles, convincing them of its continued national significance, and fostering recruitment. However, these naval specificities in 'institutional and ideological conditions' were balanced by contextual factors pertaining to the production of both series by the BBC.

---

[26] James Chapman, *A New History of British Documentary* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2015), p.173.

How to cite this book chapter:
Rayner, J. 2025. *Screening the Fleet: The Royal Navy on Television 1973–2023*. Pp. 23–55. York: White Rose University Press. DOI: https://doi.org/10.22599/ScreeningtheFleet.b.

The gradual shrinking of the post-war fleet was accompanied, and in part driven, by the ending of conscription in the armed services, and a slump in recruitment and retention from the 1950s to the 1970s.[27] The Navy's decline exaggerated public perceptions of its increasing irrelevance to the country at large, and its ineffectuality in an era of disappearing empire, proliferating nuclear weapons and unending Cold War. In these circumstances, exploitation of the media to represent the Navy's activities more extensively and positively and heightening its profile to boost public interest and recruitment would appear to be sound institutional initiatives. However, despite the fact that both series received substantial support and required the close collaboration of the service in their production to endow them with authenticity, neither *Warship* nor *Sailor* was an officially instigated project but instead arose from individual initiatives. Their contrasting approaches can be seen to be derived from documentary film practices, and to be equally applicable and beneficial to their naval subjects:

> Television documentary was particularly suited to the adoption of *verité* techniques that gave rise to new documentary modes such as the current-affairs documentary and the observational or 'fly-on-the-wall' documentary. At the same time, however, emergence of the drama-documentary mode demonstrates some continuity with existing practices in documentary film.[28]

Despite their influence and iconic status as indicative representations of the Navy, in significant ways both series can also be considered hybrids. *Warship* bridged the categories of series drama and documentary in its factual depiction and fictional dramatisation of the Navy's varied peacetime activities, and often strayed into James Bond-like territory with tales of covert operations, political intrigue and espionage. *Sailor*'s prominent documentary principles of observation and objectivity were complemented and complicated by moments of deliberate aesthetic inflection, individual interviews and contemplative voice-overs, and both narrative and subjective editing techniques. Arguably it is these aspects of the series' multidimensional approaches and varied tonal expressions that helped to produce their contemporary impact and entertainment value, and contributed to their cultural and institutional influence. Although *Sailor* has been followed by many other observational television documentaries witnessing communities and organisations at work, and despite *Warship*'s dramatic impetus for narrative entertainment, it is the naval settings of both that unite (and distinguish) their institutional portraits of the Royal Navy.

---

[27] Grove, *From Vanguard to Trident*, pp.125–126, 209, 264.
[28] Chapman, *A New History of British Documentary*, p.173.

Figure 1.1: *Leander*-class general-purpose frigate of the 1970s. 1976. HMS *Apollo*, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:HMS_Apollo_1976_SMB-2008.jpg

Warship (1973–77)

The highly successful series *Warship* ran for four series (a total of 45 50-minute episodes). *Warship* was set aboard a *Leander*-class frigate (Figure 1.1), at that time a ubiquitous ship type representing a significant proportion of the total surface fleet. Although the popularity of *Warship* ensured the familiarity of the *Leander*, the class had by the 1970s gained a significant international profile due to its adoption by other navies. In addition to the 26 ships completed for the Royal Navy, additional units were built for the Royal Indian, Royal Australian, Netherlands and Chilean navies, making the *Leander* one of the most successful and numerous post-war designs.[29] The name ship was commissioned in 1963, but some survivors and derivatives of the class were still in service in 2015.

The ships were designed as general-purpose frigates, 'fast and versatile' and capable of independent operations.[30] Their global deployment and the allocation of mythological names (last used in a pre-war generation of cruisers) closely associated the ships with the Royal Navy's international presence in the

[29] G.M. Stephen, *British Warship Design since 1906* (London: Ian Allan, 1985), p.94.

[30] Watson, *The Changing Face of the World's Navies: 1945 to the Present* (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1991), pp.108–109.

post-war years. Their introduction in the 1960s meant that they were employed extensively not only in the northern hemisphere but in support of the 'East of Suez' policy that underpinned the Navy's post-war purpose:

> The Admiralty successfully formulated and 'sold' a case for the Royal Navy based on its role in limited war and peacekeeping tasks in relatively distant areas of the globe. With the Soviet Union increasing its backing of new nationalist regimes in the growing, ex-colonial 'Third World', considerations of both world strategy and economic interest seemed to make it advisable for Britain to continue to play the role of a military world power in the Middle East (especially Arabia), the Indian Ocean, and South East Asia.[31]

The series' fictional HMS *Hero* was played at various points during filming by HMS *Phoebe, Juno, Danae, Dido, Diomede, Achilles, Hermione* and *Jupiter*, and (for scenes shot in Hong Kong and Singapore during 1976) by a near-sister ship belonging to the Royal Australian Navy, HMAS *Derwent*.[32] The career of HMS *Phoebe*, which was first commissioned in 1966 and was used for the filming of the original series, epitomised the myriad peacetime tasks the Royal Navy's escorts performed. The frigate was part of the force covering the British withdrawal from Aden in 1967, provided disaster relief in the Caribbean in 1971 and was involved in the 'Cod War' disputes with Iceland in 1972–73.[33] Ironically, at the time of the series' production, many of the general-purpose *Leander*s had begun to be modified with updated weapons and sensors, in order to perform a variety of increasingly specialised roles within the more narrowly, NATO-defined operations the Navy expected to assume in the 1980s.[34] Therefore, the appearance and employment of HMS *Hero* in the television series was in some ways already anachronistic. The general-purpose frigate (Figure 1.2) harked back to an epoch of presence, gunboat diplomacy and colonial responsibility different in ethos rather than practice from the 'East of Suez' deployments of the post-war era.

The name *Hero*, with its specific and fortuitous mythological association with *Leander*, was chosen by the programme's producer and the originator of the

---

[31] Grove, *From Vanguard to Trident*, p.245.

[32] S.P. Mackenzie, Broadcasting the New Navy: The BBC-TV series *Warship* (1973–1977), *War and Society*, 2006, 25(2), 105–122; Jim Allaway, *Leander Class Frigates* (London: HMSO, 1995), p.15; Anonymous, Memories of HMAS *Derwent* as HMS *Hero*, http://www.navy.gov.au/hmas-derwent [accessed 16 April 2015].

[33] Ben Warlow, *The Royal Navy in Focus 1970–79* (Liskeard: Maritime Books, 1998), p.122.

[34] Leo Marriott, *Royal Navy Frigates since 1945*, 2nd ed. (London: Ian Allan, 1990), pp.86–94; John Moore, *Warships of the Royal Navy* (London: Jane's, 1981), p.45.

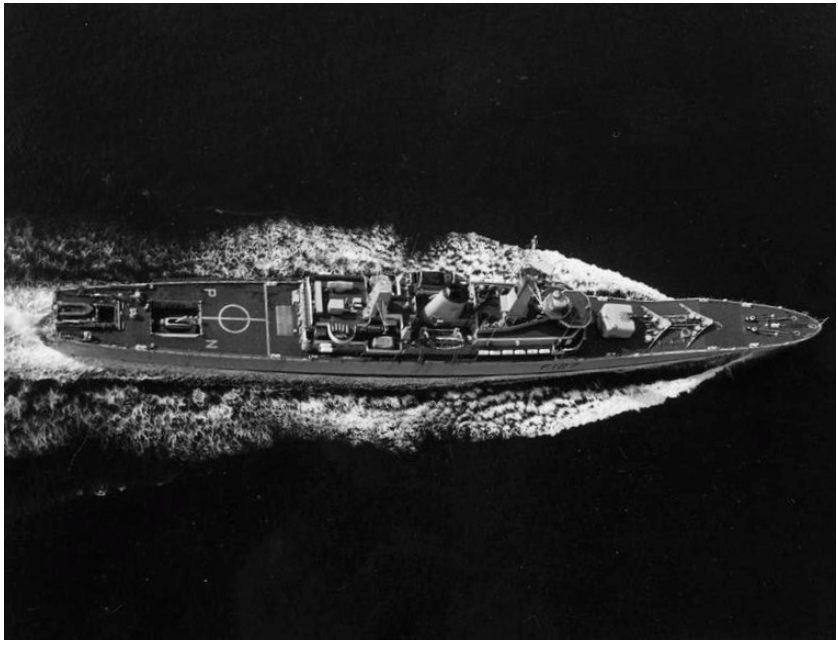

Figure 1.2: *Leander*-class frigate HMS *Penelope*. 1970. Royal Navy official photographer, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:HMS_Penelope,_1970_(IWM).jpg

series Ian MacKintosh, himself at the time a serving naval officer.[35] Following his appointment to the Ministry of Defence's Directorate of Public Relations (Navy), MacKintosh mooted the idea for a television series designed to project 'an upbeat and contemporary image of the RN'.[36] Subsequently MacKintosh himself wrote four episodes for the first two series. In depicting the day-to-day operations of a warship, the series incorporated many varied activities and locations, including Malta, Gibraltar and Norway, as well as familiar UK naval bases such as Portsmouth and Devonport. Despite a perceived over-emphasis upon the characters of the ship's successive commanders and officers, members of the senior non-commissioned ranks and lower decks were also represented. Through its sundry storylines it also represented many other aspects and arms of the naval services, such as Royal Marines on NATO exercises. HMS *Hero* was also shown cooperating with Royal Navy submarines, exercising with aircraft from the Fleet Air Arm, and refuelling at sea from ships of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary.

---

[35] Directorate of Public Relations (Royal Navy), *HMS Phoebe – HMS Hero*. (East Molesey: Kadek Press, 1973), http://homepage.ntlworld.com/r.pavely/Phoebe-Herobooklet.PDF [accessed 21 April 2010].

[36] Mackenzie, Broadcasting the New Navy, p.106.

Through the fictional ship's continually busy schedule of training and deployment, and because of haphazard events at sea and on shore, the series' episodes contrived to illustrate the variety and unpredictability of naval life. The demands of narrative entertainment involved *Hero* in dramatic but far from unlikely scenarios (such as a near-fatal accident on a submarine exercise, a terrorist hijacking and the threatened seizure of the frigate by a hostile power). Such storylines foregrounded technical details (showing the ship's equipment and how it could be utilised) for both narrative and documentary effect. Behind such narrative authenticity also lay some closely related objectives and consequences of the programme's impact: the desire to show what the Navy was capable of, which could also boost recruitment and assert its continued relevance to Britain culturally and militarily, and the conviction that showing what the Navy *could* do would suggest the significance and necessity of what it (and therefore the country) *should* do, and be seen to do, across the world's oceans. The multiplicity of situations HMS *Hero* and her crew encountered asserted the necessity of a visible and capable British presence, armed but crucially as willing to moderate as intervene militarily.

Originally conceived as an affirmative dramatic depiction of the Navy to address a crisis in recruitment, *Warship* became an outstanding example of mutually beneficial cooperation between the Ministry of Defence and the BBC. MacKintosh proposed the project to both parties but their enthusiasm was tempered by practicalities of filming, the need for authenticity, and the preservation of principle on both sides:

> The navy, it became clear, was willing to lend as much technical assistance as it could in return for positive publicity when presented with the dozen episodes sketched out by MacKintosh in collaboration with producer Andrew Coburn. Andrew Osbourne, head of series drama, informed BBC-1 Controller, Paul Fox, in the summer of 1972 that 'we have been promised the exclusive use of whatever ships, helicopters, planes, submarines, merchant ships, harbour facilities [we need]' … The Controller, however, wanted a cast-iron assurance that 'there will be no editorial interference from the Ministry of Defense … even if they don't like a story.' MacKintosh fully grasped the point, and had worked hard behind the scenes to convince both the under-secretary of state for the navy, Peter Kirk, and the vice-chief of the naval staff, Terence Lewin, that in order for the series to work the BBC could not be censored.[37]

Despite the inclusion of some storylines to which the upper echelons of the Navy still objected, and some negative commentary from television critics, the series went on to become enduringly popular with British audiences.[38]

---

[37] Mackenzie, Broadcasting the New Navy, p.107.
[38] Mackenzie, Broadcasting the New Navy, pp.109–111.

The title sequence of *Warship* (accompanied by an original soundtrack march, performed by the band of the Royal Marines) introduces HMS *Hero* in a dynamic montage. The first shot in this sequence presents a rating raising the white ensign, and the second the flag unfurled as a familiar and powerful signifier of national and service identity. Subsequent shots show sailors signalling from the ship's bridge wing using an Aldis lamp, the radar antennae rotating at the masthead, and the ship's weapons (the Limbo anti-submarine mortar and the main gun turret) training and elevating. A cut then introduces a close-up of the ship's bow, and the rising of the martial theme music on the soundtrack accompanies the appearance of the programme's title. The remainder of the opening sequence is composed of aerial views of *Hero* (in reality HMS *Phoebe*) ploughing through rough seas. This title sequence encapsulates the varied constituents and appeals of the series. While the imagery and the title of the series itself emphasise the ship and its hardware, the programme focuses on the human characters associated with the ship and the wider service and nation they represent. The apparent alertness and efficiency of both the crew members and their equipment in the title sequence underline the modernity and readiness of the Navy. At the same time, the perhaps inevitable prominence of the flag (and its raising as a symbolic initiation of the drama) stands as an evocation of history and cultural tradition into which the ship, crew and the viewer are presumed to fit. Similar views of the ship, and of the flag still flying on the quarterdeck, comprise the closing title sequence.

The titles thus underscored the presence of, and sought to inspire pride in, the Navy as a modern force and suggested its status as inheritor of a resilient historical and cultural significance. The militaristic score, with its opening drumbeats and marching tempo, provided a prominent introduction to every episode. Relatedly, the narrative of each episode strove to illustrate the contribution and significance of the ship's crew members, and their roles and relevance within the service and its missions, as part of a nationally representative institution. Considering the series' storylines and evaluating their continuities in theme, setting and resolution demonstrates *Warship*'s successful merging of the demands and benefits of dramatic entertainment, documentary practice and public relations exercise.

Series 1 (1973)

In the light of the perceived need for a positive image of the naval service for recruitment purposes and to assert the Navy's relevance to the viewing public, it is striking how the very first episode of *Warship* (entitled 'Hot Pursuit') introduces HMS *Hero* as a ship and ship's company in crisis. The incoming captain Commander Nialls (played by Donald Burton) is informed by the admiral at Gibraltar that the ship has had no captain for six weeks, and even before that his command was compromised by mental illness, and by a lack of

support from a first lieutenant afflicted by a drink problem caused by 'marital strife'. The admiral's frank admission of these problems appears paradoxical. He appears sympathetic to the individuals, and yet unyielding in the standards he expects of service personnel: his compassion does not alter the obvious conclusion that these men are no longer (or perhaps never were) equal to the tasks of command or demands of service life. Implicitly, it is these psychological and emotional pressures (entirely normal and familiar in civilian circles) outside of and in additional to professional responsibilities that Nialls is presumed, by his appointment, to be able to both correct and support in others and yet not suffer from himself – and which will form the basis of the narratives of several later episodes.

In an echo of the narrative situation of the feature film *Yangtse Incident* (Michael Anderson, 1957), Nialls's assumption of command heralds a return to normal routine and purposeful operation for the troubled ship and conduct according to regulations for the crew. The incoming captain is characterised as both a new broom and a traditional return to standards of duty and responsibility. The admiral reflects that *Hero* will be Nialls's first command 'after small ships' (minesweepers), yet in his day frigates were 'small ships'. He impresses on the young commander the responsibility and expectation his appointment carries: 'They've given you a severe test – it shouldn't be beyond you. I want that ship pulled together, Nialls.' This private interview is succeeded by scenes aboard *Hero* as the disgruntled officers anticipate their new commander's arrival while they attempt to complete the frigate's self-maintenance period. Nialls presses his officers to get the ship ready for sea ahead of schedule. While some speculate that their new first lieutenant, Lieutenant Commander Beaumont (David Savile), will want to impress Nialls since they have served together before, Lieutenant Bill Kiley, the ship's weapons officer, is bitter at being passed over for promotion and finding a younger captain put in over his head: 'a commander who's had nothing bigger than a minesweeper and his tame first lieutenant who's the son of an admiral'. Kiley's sour summary of the characters and relationship of Nialls and Beaumont in fact provides a synopsis of the series' key narratives, themes and institutional observations. Nialls's recognised ability means he is marked for accelerated promotion, but his high profile and individualism risk resentment and failure. Beaumont epitomises naval tradition but his career and personality are hostages to institutional and family history. Both officers appear as likely to succeed (or fail) as much by breaking with tradition as by upholding it.

As well as introducing the high expectations of Nialls, and his exacting demands upon his crew, the opening episode also establishes the series' amalgamation of documentary representation, public relations and drama. Its narrative concerns *Hero*'s cooperation with the police in Gibraltar in detaining Irish arms smugglers. One of the ship's crew members unwittingly uncovers the conspirators when he propositions a woman in a bar. The drunken fracas that ensues results in his appearance before Nialls the next morning, where he lets

slip the name of one of the suspects the police are seeking. The stereotype of the inebriated and libido-driven sailor on shore (to which the series resorts on several occasions) is included here to narratively significant effect. When the smugglers try to escape from port, Nialls's aggressive tactics force them to stop. A montage of the crew launching small boats flying the white ensign to shadow the ship and scrambling the Wasp helicopter provide factual detail and underline Nialls's command: the boats maintaining constant visual contact is crucial to the legality of the pursuit, while also compensating for the unproven capability of the flight crew. These measures mutually vindicate Nialls's decision-making and the ship's crew, when the helicopter launches ahead of time, and the boats' presence upholds the law of 'hot pursuit'. Kiley, who had approached Nialls privately to request reassignment and questioned the captain's unorthodox use of the ship's guns, is impressed enough to elect to stay in *Hero*.

Subsequent episodes develop these thematic threads and characterisations. In 'Nobody Said Frigate', *Hero* is involved in a clandestine operation to extract a defecting Soviet diplomat from a hostile country. Nialls objects strongly to hazarding his ship and risking an international incident, but his plan (refined by suggestions from Beaumont and Kiley) works faultlessly. Instrumental to its success is the expertise of a new sailor working in the signals branch, whose untraditional nature is lamented by his chief petty officer: 'That's the modern Navy for you. They used to come in green and ignorant. Now it's seven O-levels, half a dozen diplomas.' Intercut within the execution of the covert operation are sequences of meetings within Whitehall, acknowledging the danger and consequences of discovery. These scenes of cynical politicians and suited intelligence officers create a palpable but clichéd contrast to the professionalism and improvisation of the uniformed personnel aboard *Hero*, which is reinforced by the dubious reward for their efforts (the successful rescue of the drunken diplomat) and the admission in the epilogue that the frigate should never have been used for such an operation.

'Off Caps' features the first concerted characterisation of the lower decks, with the portrayal of clashes over discipline between Cutler (a marine engineering mechanic or 'stoker') and Slater, a chief petty officer, and domestic worries affecting a young stores attendant, 'Bunny' Rabbitts. During an exercise at sea, the conflict among the engineering crew escalates into violence and Rabbitts becomes depressed at the postponement of anticipated shore leave. When the ship's engines are sabotaged, Cutler is accused but the culprit is revealed to be Rabbitts, when his messmates discover incriminating evidence. Despite lengthy investigation, Cutler is cleared of all charges (both justified and unjustified ones), while Rabbitts is sent ashore for punishment. Family troubles also precipitate the drama of 'Funny They All Say That' (written by Ian MacKintosh), in which Petty Officer Writer Willows is tempted to copy classified documents for a blackmailer (and probable foreign agent) in return for the money he needs to clear debts incurred by his oniomaniac wife. Willows handles the ship's confidential information, and his blackmailer knows he has previously engaged in

smuggling to cope with his wife's spending sprees. On board *Hero*, evidence of Willows' debts alarms Beaumont, who immediately sees his financial difficulties as a potential security risk. Although the first lieutenant is reassured after speaking with Willows, Nialls is furious when Beaumont reveals the matter to him, asserting that they would all share the blame if Willows leaked secrets. Espionage also convolutes the cloak-and-dagger plot of the next episode in the series, 'The Drop', in which *Hero*'s crew (Nialls, Beaumont and Master-at-Arms Heron) encounter MI5 and KGB agents in Malta, when Chief Petty Officer Donovan is blackmailed into stealing secret equipment. Nialls's resentment of military intelligence ('MI5 exists because the KGB exists') is chastised by the British agent Flynn, who claims to be a Navy veteran ('the Royal Navy exists because the Soviet Navy exists!').

The dangers encountered by the *Hero*'s crew in the remainder of the series represent an intriguing balance of heightened drama and everyday duty. In 'The Prize', a boarding party investigating an abandoned cargo ship discovers a time-bomb set to sink the vessel as part of a fraudulent insurance claim. Heron and Beaumont attempt to disarm the explosives themselves because Lieutenant Parry (a junior officer on a short service commission who is trained in diving and bomb disposal) has confided to Beaumont that he intends to leave the service to get married. Parry is unable to instruct Beaumont properly via radio, so despite Parry's personal circumstances (and obvious fear) Nialls orders him to defuse the bomb. Although Parry succeeds, his experience causes him to reflect on the responsibilities of his service: 'When you sign on in peacetime you don't think of getting yourself killed, do you? At least I didn't.' When Beaumont tells Nialls of Parry's intention to leave the navy, he reveals that he would have recommended Parry for a permanent commission, yet when Beaumont says he will try to persuade Parry to stay Nialls insists he must be 'left to make his own decision'.

In 'Subsmash', two of the frigate's junior crew members who aspire to become submariners transfer temporarily to HMS *Omega*, a submarine exercising with *Hero*. Before the operation begins, Nialls meets with the sub's captain, Lieutenant Commander Aubrey: Aubrey bears a grudge for the death of his brother, a junior officer who committed suicide following Nialls's negative reports on his performance. Nialls reacts angrily, insisting his professional evaluation of Aubrey's brother was correct, and that it was 'family tradition' that killed him:

> [Nialls] You knew the only reason Patrick joined the Navy was because it was expected of him. Ten generations, a father killed in submarines, and a brother determined to carry on the tradition. He wanted to be a lawyer. He'd broken the line, ruined the proud boast. That's what killed him, wasn't it?
>
> [Aubrey] No. He was killed by a piece of paper: a quarterly report by a lieutenant who wasn't all much older than he was.

As in the case of Kiley's resentment in the series opening, Nialls's exceptionalism (particularly his rapid promotion based on leadership and perfectionism) is perceived as both a challenge to and corroboration of the naval community and its sense of tradition. Nialls's navy is therefore explicitly a meritocracy in which institutional (rather than simply familial) tradition is upheld and preserved, but not preferentially. When the submarine dives to evade the frigate, it sinks to the bottom after striking a World War II mine: Aubrey's navigator had failed to pass on the information that the area was a minefield because officially it had been swept clear. *Hero* has to initiate a rescue, with Parry as the frigate's diver effecting an underwater repair that allows the submarine to resurface.

In the penultimate episode ('A Standing and Jumping War'), Parry again takes a leading role, when *Hero* becomes embroiled in an international dispute. The frigate is held hostage in harbour in 'Hafsidia', a fictional Middle Eastern country, because of rumours of Britain supplying warships to Israel.[39] Governmental efforts to resolve the situation are unavailing, and with the threatened arrival of Soviet warships to blockade the port a British intelligence agent helps free the crew, while Parry leads divers in sabotaging the harbour boom to allow the ship to escape. This dramatic episode unites several of the first series' threads: emphasising Nialls's boldness and impatience with political circumstances (when the British consul observes that the Hafsidians 'think we're up to something devious to upset the balance of power', Nialls asks angrily, 'Are we?'); indulging plotlines incorporating daring and covert operations; and recalling the resemblance to the *Yangtse Incident* displayed by the opening episode. Crucially, however, another extended plot line is brought to a tragic conclusion, when Parry is killed by gunfire from the shore as the ship completes its escape. Parry's increasing integration in (and importance to) the ship's operations seems to suggest his conversion to a full naval career and abandonment of his stated intention to leave the service. Instead, his fateful observation of the perils of even peacetime service is confirmed in his last-minute death.

In the series' final episode, 'Shoresides and Home', personal and institutional memory are emphasised in tandem with a muted reprise of the theme, established by Parry's characterisation, of the uncomfortable possibility of leaving the Navy. Master-at-Arms Heron applies to have his service extended, and with few doubts he will be accepted he remains evasive towards his long-term partner ashore in Gibraltar, who wants him to retire and marry her. However, Heron's record is unjustly tarnished by reports from Captain Murton, an ineffectual and conniving commanding officer. Drinking with Nialls, Murton challenges *Hero* to a race back to port in England against his ship HMS *Boadicea*. Murton cheats by arranging to delay *Hero*'s departure, but Nialls counters by persuading Murton's neglected girlfriend to pull strings to have *Boadicea* given a new

[39] Controversially, German-designed submarines built in British yards were supplied to Israel in the 1970s. Watson, *The Changing Face of the World's Navies*, p.160; John Moore (ed.), *Jane's Fighting Ships 1976–77* (London: Jane's, 1976), p.249.

assignment, ensuring *Hero* arrives first. While this humorous and anodyne episode defuses the tragic tone established by 'A Standing and Jumping War', it provides a parallel to Parry's circumstances in Heron's emotional equivocation, which is itself mirrored negatively in Murton's ego-centrism. The race home ends the first series with a comic wager, rather than with the ambiguous politics and downbeat ending of the previous episode.

Series 2 (1974)

Despite some storylines (in negative portrayals of officers, lower-deck characters, and lapses in discipline) potentially problematic for the Navy, the audience response to the first series was sufficiently positive to encourage the BBC to produce another.[40] The second series begins with a two-part story ('The Raid'/'Without Just Cause') detailing a fatal incident during a NATO exercise in Norway. Royal Marine Commandos led by the inexperienced Lieutenant Palfrey are landed from *Hero* on an enemy shoreline to destroy a radar station. Palfrey's leadership is shown to be inadequate, and his group is captured. Under gruelling interrogation, Palfrey strikes and kills the enemy officer, before escaping into the open country. Only at this point in the narrative is the mission revealed to be an exercise and not part of a genuine conflict. In the second episode, Palfrey is apprehended but requests a British court martial rather than a trial on Norwegian soil. The intricacies of the court martial procedure are explained: the orientation of Palfrey's sword on the judges' table indicates their verdict (the hilt facing him means he is innocent, while the tip of blade turned towards him signifies his guilt). Flashbacks from the previous episode, including the interrogation scene are replayed to portray Palfrey's fear of failure under the psychological pressure of both command and family tradition (his father was a decorated hero in World War II). The court martial, like the enemy interrogation, probes his naivety, bad judgement and glory-seeking, which are shown to lead inevitably to violence. However, the difference between exercise and combat – the distinction that the conduct of the operation and the narrative treatment of the first episode had deliberately blurred to dramatic effect – is central to Palfrey's case. The defence attorney calls Nialls as character witness, and his sympathetic testimony is crucial in mitigating the sentence despite a guilty verdict.

In 'Who Run Across The Sea' (an episode written by Ian MacKintosh), Nialls's idealistic qualities again alloy the commander's rigid professionalism when *Hero* is involved in a terrorist hijacking. An auxiliary ship, the RFA *Reliant*, rescues a life raft of passengers from an airliner apparently destroyed in mid-air by a bomb. Once on board, the 'survivors' reveal themselves to be members

[40] Mackenzie, Broadcasting the New Navy, pp.109–111.

of a Middle Eastern terrorist group intent on seizing the ship's cargo of Polaris nuclear warheads. Suspicions are raised when *Reliant* fails to supply correct code words in radio communications. *Hero*, having been diverted to search for the airliner, is ordered to intercept *Reliant*. Nialls tries to negotiate for the safety of the missiles and the ship's civilian crew, but the terrorists' leader, Zardi, refuses to stop the ship for Nialls to transfer by boat, suspecting correctly that Nialls will have divers attempt to place explosive charges to immobilise the *Reliant*. Zardi is British university-educated (his quotation from the Roman poet Horace provides the episode's title), and Nialls expresses admiration for his courage and commitment. When a struggle on board *Reliant* leads to the fatal shooting of Zardi and *Reliant*'s second officer, a zealous female terrorist takes over and plans to drive *Reliant* into Lisbon harbour before blowing the ship up. The Portuguese government insists it will sink *Reliant* if the UK government does not act. Nialls is therefore ordered to sink *Reliant* by gunfire but delays as long as possible to give the terrorists a chance to surrender, and instead uses *Hero*'s Limbo mortar to scare them into surrender. While expressing admiration for Zardi (but notably exhibiting no sympathy for his fanatical female follower), Nialls displays his determination to follow orders and sink *Reliant* if there is no alternative, and explains his actions (and his ultimate responsibility) to *Hero*'s crew.

One of the series' primary motivations, the exploration of the relevance of the modern Navy, is confronted in 'The Immortal Memory' (also written by MacKintosh). Timothy Penn, *Hero*'s new electronics officer, starts his service following a Navy-funded university degree. He immediately provokes Beaumont with his refusal to conform to regulations in dress and conduct. He questions all aspects of ship's routine, particularly those (such as Procedure Alpha, with the crew on deck in Number 1 dress uniform for leaving harbour) that are leftovers from history. Beaumont complains to Nialls: he suspects that Penn is trying deliberately to get himself dismissed as unfit for service, as if he resigns willingly he will be forced to repay the full costs of his Navy bursary. Nialls tells Beaumont to try to reach Penn, to show him what the Navy is, because the modern fleet will increasingly need university-educated personnel. When the ship is sent to Gibraltar, Beaumont plans to delay arrival by one day in order to hold the Trafalgar mess dinner on the spot of the battle ('169 years to the day'). Penn asks Heron how men in his division might complain about the loss of leave. Heron advises him not to incite complaints, pointing out that the men will not object since they will get an extra 'make and mend' day of half-duties (another tradition of which Penn is contemptuous). At the mess dinner, Beaumont asks Penn to speak about what Trafalgar means to him. He is eloquently and viciously dismissive of its relevance and that of the Navy as an institution. He claims that the men around the table live on a glorious past because they inhabit an empty and futile present; that they hunger for war when it would be preferable to change the world for the better. Nialls conciliates, comparing Penn's alternative view to Nelson's own impatience with convention, while

preserving principles of patriotism, duty and service. However, Penn repeatedly interrupts Nialls until Beaumont angrily dismisses him from the wardroom. Afterwards Beaumont and Nialls argue in the captain's cabin: Nialls alleges Beaumont set Penn up, but Beaumont maintains Penn will not change. Nialls has a meeting with the flag officer at Gibraltar, where he insists that there are two sides: the Navy needs men like Penn and must change to find common ground with them, as much as induct and instruct them in the needs and benefits of the service. Nialls has one last interview with Penn, who asserts that his university-educated generation will change the world from the top down, leaving Nialls no option but to deem him unfit for service.

In contrast to this acute engagement with the Navy's contemporary image, the next episode ('One of Those Days', also written by MacKintosh) assumes a tone of arch comedy. When *Hero* is delayed in her departure for exercises, Heron's assistant, Leading Regulator Fuller, is discovered to have not returned from leave. Heron covers up for him, and when Fuller rejoins the ship he claims he is being pursued by a dockyard policeman after being caught with the man's wife. The woman is a local barmaid, apparently known to several members of *Hero*'s crew, but the husband is unaware of her previous infidelities. During the same night ashore, the ship's navigator, Lieutenant Last (calling himself 'First Lieutenant Beaumont'), invites a dubious female acquaintance to lunch aboard ship, assuming that with *Hero* departing in the morning his invitation could not be taken up. Simultaneously, the commander of the frigate flotilla, a gourmet and stickler for procedure, comes to inspect *Hero* and invites himself to lunch. All the cooks have to hand is frozen pheasant of uncertain quality. While Heron and Last try to decoy the constable, a party of young sea cadets arrives for a noisy tour of the ship. The constable loiters on the jetty, unsatisfied by Heron's and Last's excuses and threatening to tell the commander about the conduct of *Hero*'s crew. Last's guest arrives: fortunately, not the mature stripper he invited but her attractive daughter, who is welcomed to the wardroom dinner, where the pheasant gains approval. Seeing the constable still in evidence, Last cancels the commander's car and offers to send him back to his ship by *Hero*'s launch but commits a final gaff by asking him if wishes to be piped off the ship. Nialls admonishes Last, then finally hears about Fuller's predicament, and decides to see the constable with Fuller present to defuse the situation. The constable is satisfied with Nialls's sentimental (and fictional) exculpatory account but still punches Fuller to the deck.

The remainder of series two's episodes continue to explore established narrative and thematic territories. Nialls's attitudes to terrorism are tested again in 'The Man from the Sea', in which *Hero* picks up survivors from a downed airliner including a severely injured stewardess.[41] *Hero* receives a doctor by helicopter to assist with the injured. The ship proceeds to Stornoway at top speed

[41] This episode shares aspects of its plot with Ian MacKintosh's first *Warship*-inspired novel.

with the survivors but is delayed as the Foreign Office demands information on a South American revolutionary believed to have been the target of the bomb. 'The Man' is identified among the survivors, and Nialls converses with him. The doctor is forced to perform an emergency operation on the stewardess. Nialls is instructed to stop to allow two Foreign Office representatives aboard but orders the ship back to full speed when they arrive so the survivors can receive medical attention. The representatives direct him to stop again, so that they can take the man ashore. Nialls tries to protect him when he realises the representatives are intelligence officers, and one is actually a CIA agent who knows the revolutionary personally. Nialls is told the stewardess has died of her injuries. Privately, Nialls reminds the man of his promise that no harm would come to him aboard *Hero*. As a test of the man's morals, he asks that, though Nialls will not force him, if he will leave the ship willingly, he will allow Nialls to return to top speed to save the stewardess. The man refuses, so Nialls angrily tells the agents to 'get him off my ship!'.

The pressure of family history and naval tradition upon Beaumont's future in the Navy is explored in 'Nothing to Starboard'. While the first lieutenant is tempted by employment and romantic life beyond the navy, in the same episode Nialls is disappointed when the divorcee he is attracted to tells him she can no longer put up with the unpredictability of his shore leave. This episode begins with Nialls embarrassing Beaumont by relieving him of control of the ship on entering harbour, but ends with Beaumont's judgement, and therefore his suitability for command and commitment to his career, being reaffirmed when Nialls falls ill during a replenishment at sea. Tensions on the lower deck reminiscent of 'Off Caps' flare in 'Away Seaboat's Crew', and while on fishery protection duty a boarding party from *Hero* intervene compassionately in a mutiny aboard a trawler in 'Distant Waters'. The second series ends on a peculiar note with 'Echoes of Battle', in which Nialls is forced to accept a West German diplomat aboard as a guest during an exercise that pits *Hero* against a Bundesmarine submarine. The politician is afflicted by nightmares (marking his traumatic recollection of wartime U-boat service, rendered in flashbacks via black-and-white documentary footage). He insists on addressing German and British officers (transformed in his mind's eye into his Kriegsmarine comrades) at a briefing, assuring them of the importance of their duty, of belief in their service and of the need for preparedness to prevent war. Nialls receives a message explaining that the politician was the commander of *U-98*. The submarine attempted to surrender to a Royal Navy destroyer that had depth-charged him to the surface, but the British commander claimed not to have seen the signals and opened fire, meaning that the commander was the sole survivor. During the exercise *Hero* defeats the German submarine; appearing to relive the loss of his own boat, the diplomat collapses and is taken to Nialls's cabin. He explains how men of his generation suffer from recollections of war experiences and apologises for attempting to use his time on *Hero* as a form of exorcism. This

story's exploration of trauma revives the psychological themes of the series' opening, with all three episodes being written by screenwriter Allan Prior (best known for his work on the police drama series *Z-Cars* and *Softly, Softly* during the 1960s and 1970s).

Warship's first two series blend disparate materials in their combination of documentary, observation, realist narrative and dramatic entertainment. While most emphasis in characterisation remains fixed upon officers with authority and agency, examples of junior officers, senior ratings and ordinary sailors appear across the series as examples (or stereotypes) of classes, regions and service experience. The environment and contemporary male attitudes are illustrated by nude pinups seen in the radio room and crews' mess, and officers' wardroom conversations about sexual conquests (the intense grudge between Cutler and Slater in 'Off Caps' is sparked by sexual rivalry). By comparison, the officers' apparent fixation with female company is treated to ironic effect when the revealingly dressed guest they pursue in 'The Drop' is discovered to be a Soviet scientist. Lust and infidelity during shore leave receive a comedy treatment comparable to radio series *The Navy Lark* (BBC 1959–77), *Up the Creek* (Val Guest, 1958) or the *Carry On* film cycle in 'One of Those Days', while conventional domesticity and marriage (as seen in 'Off Caps', 'Funny They All Say That', 'Shoresides and Home' and 'Nothing to Starboard') are always associated with distraction, disappointment and difficulty. Family, defined as inescapable inheritance and imprisoning expectation, afflicts officers from higher class backgrounds (Beaumont, Aubrey and Palfrey) in 'The Raid', 'Without Just Cause', 'Nothing to Starboard' and 'Subsmash'.

Service routine and jargon are integrated with varying effect. In asserting the Navy's preparedness and the cutting-edge nature of its hardware, *Hero* is shown to be engaged in readiness exercises involving high-technology equipment. Anti-submarine techniques involving sonar detection beneath bathy-thermal layers are explained for the viewers' benefit in 'Funny They All Say That': by comparison, the reference to stringing a 'light from the bedstead' (i.e. the Type 965 radar antenna) in 'Nobody Said Frigate', to hide the ship's identity, appears quite opaque. The series' convergence with recruitment and public information films is seen in 'Funny They All Say That', where *Hero*'s replenishment at sea and exercise with F-4 jets are represented by footage from the COI public information film *Frigate* (1974), which starred another *Leander*, HMS *Sirius*. The most dramatic or even hyperbolic episodes ('Hot Pursuit', 'The Prize', 'A Standing and Jumping War', 'Nobody Said Frigate', 'The Drop' and 'Who Run Across the Sea'), while outstripping the mundanity of the majority of naval service, satisfy the demands of narrative entertainment and provide an exciting and realistic spectacle. The frequent inclusion of storylines featuring espionage, and the conscientious distinction drawn between principled naval service (incarnated by Nialls) and pragmatic political machinations (embodied in shady intelligence officers and equivocating Whitehall functionaries) is notable

in its assertion of an ethical, institutional Royal Navy identity.[42] Paradoxically the Navy is seen as a preserve of traditionally lauded national qualities and yet as being frequently at odds with the contemporary political establishment it serves. *Warship*'s negotiation of its dramatic, representational and recruitment-driven agendas is reflected in the varying emphases of its episodes, which balance, or perhaps veer between, realism and escapist entertainment. While its portrayal of personnel (both officers and ratings) is often highly conventional and conservative, the series not only acknowledges but often champions qualities of tolerance, open-mindedness and the necessity of change. This is evinced by Nialls's explicit admiration for the principles of terrorists and recognition of the shifting background, qualifications and expectations of recruits (such as Parry and Penn). The principles and actions of *Hero*'s later captains extended this complex characterisation, which, while serving dramatic purposes and devoted to the sympathetic treatment of the series' starring role, also created a multifaceted portrait of naval, and British, identity. Such crafting of a national and institutional portrait within a dramatic format distinguished *Warship* from its observational documentary peer, *Sailor*.

Sailor

Although perceived at the time and retrospectively as a realistic corrective to the conventional characterisation and dramatic implausibilities of *Warship, Sailor* arose from a similar cooperative arrangement between the BBC and the Admiralty but also inflected its observational approach with dramatic technique. The 10-part series (followed in 1984 by a one-off programme, *8 Years On*, which tracked down former members of the crew and filmed the remains of the scrapped *Ark Royal* herself) offered a penetrating but empathetic record of the lives of a large and varied ship's company on a lengthy overseas deployment:

> It was this series which helped secure *Ark Royal*'s place in the hearts of the British public and generate the climate for serious consideration to be given to her preservation when she was finally decommissioned … The most immediate effect of the series was that at the Navy Days held in Devonport that year *Ark Royal* was unquestionably the star attraction.[43]

---

[42] This feature is more remarkable given MacKintosh's creation and authorship of the Cold War spy series *The Sandbaggers* (Yorkshire Television, 1978–80), and his own alleged connections to espionage: Robert G. Folsom, *The Life and Mysterious Death of Ian MacKintosh* (Washington: Potomac Books, 2012).

[43] Johnstone-Bryden, *Britain's Greatest Warship: HMS Ark Royal IV* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1999), pp.179, 190.

Figure 1.3: HMS *Ark Royal* in the late 1970s. 1976. Isaac Newton, CC BY-SA 2.5, via Wikimedia Commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:17_HMS_Ark_Royal_North_Atlantic_July_76.jpg

Where the entity of HMS *Hero* offered a hybridised representation of the contemporary Navy, in which fictional characters constituted the focuses of audience identification and ideological articulation, HMS *Ark Royal* (Figure 1.3) acquired a character of equal or even predominant importance in comparison to the documented crew (whose everyman status was encapsulated by the specific but anonymous identity of the series title).

After making a documentary series following the day-to-day life of the American ambassador in London, producer John Purdie was inspired to make a documentary series based on an aircraft carrier following a visit to HMS *Bulwark*. Purdie recalled:

> Prior to that documentary everything was set up and it was almost prescripted [sic]. You told everyone what you were trying to do and they re-enacted their lifestyles. However, this was the start of a new era when you tried to do it first take for real. You asked people to ignore the camera … [*Bulwark*'s commander] said, 'You've got to make a film about how the Navy really is' … 'The "Rusty B" is a miracle. If the guys back at Whitehall knew how we kept this going, we'd all get medals.' After lunch he took me on a guided tour of the ship and it gradually began to sink in that this is a major job to keep one of these things going. It had been

> impressed upon me that it was a way of life and that each of these carriers is a small town.[44]

Unfortunately, the deteriorating state of the 'Rusty B' and the candour of her crew that Purdie wished to portray did not meet with the Ministry of Defence's approval as documentary subjects, who offered instead an opportunity to film aboard HMS *Hermes* during NATO exercises in Norway. However, when Purdie visited *Hermes* 'everything I had seen in the Mediterranean on board the *Bulwark* had vaporised. Everyone was being very proper and terribly polite, etc.' A compromise was reached in the decision to film aboard *Ark Royal* instead, which coincidently had recently been the subject of a short documentary, *The Iron Village* (Richard Marquand, 1973).[45] Purdie sought Captain Wilfred Graham's permission to document 'everything within reason [and] to film first and discuss later': while Graham's consent was given, that of Commander David Cowling, responsible for the operation of the ship, proved harder to gain. Therefore, though the series' primary motivation was to create an unexpurgated record, its approach would be to represent a community and chronology creatively and selectively in line with contemporary Corporation practice:

> A BBC training manual from the early 1970s states that 'even the purest piece of "ciné vérite" can never be – and indeed should never be – totally free of the day-to-day business of directing.' The director's role was to interpret the raw material – yet another variation of [John Grierson's documentary creed] 'the creative treatment of actuality.'[46]

What Purdie had felt was 'missing' from *The Iron Village* was 'the people': an emphasis upon the ship and its operations, though suitable for public information films, failed in his estimation to fully document the shipboard community.[47] Instead, *Sailor* would contextualise and accentuate the stories of typical but selected groups on board.

Opening with drunken scenes of the night before departure (in 'Last Run Ashore') and ending with the return of *Ark Royal* and crew to Devonport (in 'Back Home'), the half-hour episodes encompassed the experiences and observations of an entire cross-section of the ship's crew, including senior and junior officers, flight crews, younger and older ratings, engineers and pilots. The filming style of the programme was markedly analytical and dispassionate: while some episodes were introduced by a brief informative voice-over, filmed

---

[44] Johnstone-Bryden, *Britain's Greatest Warship*, p.179.

[45] Johnstone-Bryden, *Britain's Greatest Warship*, p.180.

[46] Chapman, *A New History of British Documentary*, p.181.

[47] HMS *Ark Royal* was also depicted operating aircraft and helicopters in company with other vessels in *Med Patrol* (COI, 1971), which placed similar stress on observing ships and operational activities rather than individual crew members.

sequences were shown without any accompanying gloss or explanation. However, voice-over commentaries drawn from interviews with participants were added to numerous scenes. Divergences from this format, such as isolated subjective sequences and the addition of musical accompaniment to some scenes, were thus even more prominent within the flow of the series. However, its unadulterated observational stance was its predominant characteristic and key selling point. As such, all the series' incidents and their positive and negative aspects (relaxation and drunkenness ashore, disciplinary hearings on board, aerial training exercises, a comical concert party and a dramatic sea rescue) were allowed to stand in their own right.

The first instalment of the series is introduced by a voice-over:

> This is a story of an old ship and the young men who sail in her. Their life together is recorded frankly during a voyage that will start on the morning tide, taking them to ports and across seas which navies have known since the days of Raleigh.

The poetic and traditional evocation of life at sea (in 'the morning tide' and 'the days of Raleigh') accompanies rather than contradicts the 'frank' footage of the *Ark*'s sailors singing 'Land of Hope and Glory' in a Plymouth strip club. Scenes from the club are intercut with the officers' briefing for the departure: events that are unlikely to be simultaneous but whose visual juxtaposition establishes the series' most pervasive editing technique in creating both contrast and balance between disparities. The series' first moments, then, recognise the accommodation of differences (and the need for understanding of difference) in perspective, opinion and behaviour (between ranks, between duty at sea and freedom on shore, and implicitly between 'sailors' and non-service viewers). The sounds of drunken singing bridge these scenes and images of men in civilian clothes returning to the ship in varying states of inebriation. The conclusion of the last indulgences before sailing is intercut with the officers' concerns for the safety with young and inexperienced crew members (the commander reminds them they are 'opening a new box of baby sailors'). The possibility of leniency for behaviour transpiring from the presence of the cameras is acknowledged as, after being questioned by officers and sent down to their mess, the last sailors remark, 'We love the BBC!'

These initial binaries of responsibility and dissipation, freedom and duty are followed by a balancing of the mechanical and the human. The captain endures endless problems with the ship's engines and telegraphs as the *Ark* proceeds to sea, and the commander and Fleet Master-At-Arms Tom Wilkinson check reports from each mess to ascertain whether all the men have returned. These paralleled anxieties are resolved, in the captain's words, by the simple expedient of taking the ship and crew back out: 'The only way to get these things working is to go to sea, and to get them working once you're at sea. If you sit in harbour waiting for them, you can wait for ages.' The necessity and consequence of this

return is marked by a montage of daily chores, followed by Wilkinson's interview with a young steward. Wilkinson informs him he will be charged with returning to the ship drunk: his remark 'if you could've seen the state of yourself this morning, son' prompts a flashback that enforces another juxtaposition, between the present contrite sailor in uniform and the earlier semi-dressed drunk youth. Within the pattern of contrasts, Wilkinson is quickly established as a constant, not only in his position between crew and officers but between shore and ship, family and service, and in his resemblance to and evocation of parental authority:

> I don't know what Mum would say to you, my old flower. I've got a good idea. And I know what Dad would say. Well, it's one of the facts of life, my son. You drink a man's drink and you act like a man. It's as simple as that.

Wilkinson and the officer of the day, and eventually the commander himself, are shown dealing with the absentees and defaulters of the previous night. The sound of singing from the club returns evocatively on the soundtrack to accompany a moving-camera shot along a line of sailors waiting for their interviews, exhibiting the series' subjectivised enhancements to its observational stance. This wistful, self-reflexive trace of the previous night is the last reminder of shore as the routine of sea duty takes over.

The second programme, 'The Squadrons Are Coming', maintains the first's guiding principles of balance and opposition, in detailing the arrival of the carrier's air group (Figure 1.4), which coincides with a visit to the ship by the Second Sea Lord, whose area of responsibility is naval personnel. After a similarly brief opening statement in voice-over, the first third of the episode documents the arrival of jet aircraft. In some cases, the pilots are new to deck landings: some are Royal Air Force pilots seconded to *Ark Royal*'s squadrons because of personnel shortages due to the gradual decommissioning of the Navy's carriers.

One Buccaneer pilot is recorded making numerous approaches before a successful landing. In preparation for the sea lord's visit, the commander is shown briefing the ship's officers, telling them (ironically in view of the camera's presence) to ensure that 'warts are kept to a minimum'. Captain Graham's comments on the visit (used as a voice-over to accompany the admiral's arrival by helicopter) underline that he is visiting *Ark Royal* (like the makers of *Sailor*) not just to look 'at all of us' but also to 'sound out what's going on in the Navy today'. This serious statement of intent is immediately followed by the awkward spectacle of Graham helping the admiral out of his skin-tight immersion suit (a cutaway shows a young steward looking on with amusement) and then juxtaposed with Wilkinson and the commander discussing the case of a sailor absent without leave. As in the first episode, Wilkinson's estimation of the sailor balances and acknowledges the differences between sea- and shore-based

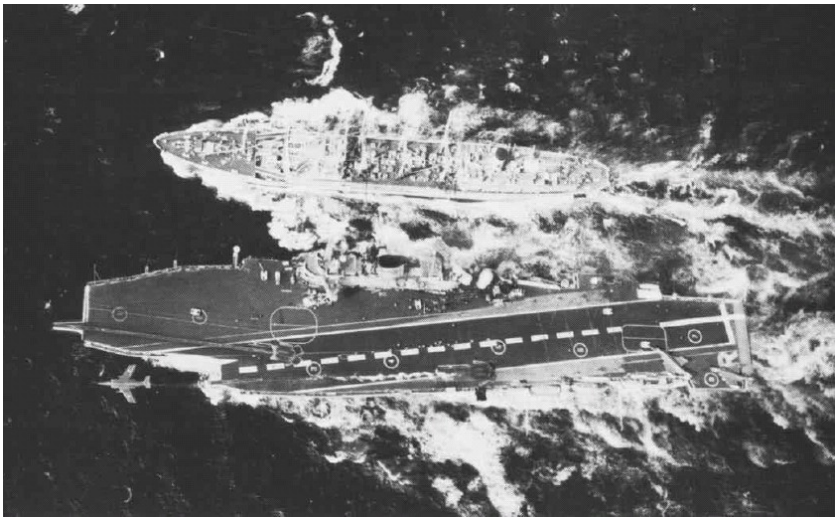

Figure 1.4: HMS *Ark Royal* launching aircraft. 1970. U.S. Navy Naval Aviation News January 1971 [1], Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ark_Royal_R09_from_top_lauch_Buc_NAN1-71.jpg

lives, while the commander's response (and subsequent footage of Captain Graham interviewing the man) emphasises shipboard discipline. The master-at-arms' holistic view is that one can benefit the other: supporting the sailor to advance and fulfil his potential on board ship will counteract his tendency for irresponsibility on shore.

In further echoes of the first episode, subsequent juxtapositions continue the (ironic) exploration of the shipboard community. Scenes of the noise of mass catering in the galley and ship's cafeteria are contrasted with images of the supply officer and his assistants counting the sterling and dollars carried for the deployment. The currency for anticipated runs ashore is as much a necessity as the day-to-day food. Members of the Marine band are shown practising: a handheld pan reveals a trumpeter to be practising in the (occupied) ship's head (toilet). The band's rendition of the Light Cavalry Overture bridges from scenes of their performance to an aerial shot of helicopters overflying the ship but is then interrupted by Wilkinson's voice reprimanding sailors assembling in the hangar for their pay. A solitary sailor is shown creating artwork in a deserted workspace, while officers in the communal wardroom enjoy board games, travel brochures and pornographic magazines.

The officers' relaxation is immediately contrasted to scenes in the engine room, accompanied by an unseen supervisor's voice-over, who notes the unglamorous and unacknowledged nature of their work:

> We've got a great many young fellas on board: 16–17 years old. Just left school, a bit starry-eyed, expecting to see a sort of *Warship* situation. They see, for a great deal of the time, hot bilges, compartments where they are stuck down, relatively inexperienced.

Not only is the junior engineering watch-keepers' experience visually contrasted with that the ship's officers; it is explicitly compared with portrayal of the *Warship* series that may have inspired their enlistment. This elucidation through marked contrast and juxtapositioning via editing structures the episode, with informal scenes of a junior mess deck (with discussions of venereal disease and appraisal of the young sailor's artwork seen earlier) standing alongside the introduction of the ship's officers to the Second Sea Lord. Their formal dinner is contrasted again with final scenes of the captain eating quietly alone.

The third episode, 'Happy Birthday', represents a high point in the series for its unscripted observational approach leading to the documenting of entirely unanticipated action. Instead of merely recording the marking of the ship's 21st year since commissioning (including telegrams received from the Admiralty and Buckingham Palace), the film crew become participants in the ship's involvement in a dramatic rescue at sea, when the *Ark* is called upon to airlift a sailor with appendicitis from an American nuclear submarine to the Azores for treatment. The preparations for the flight and consideration of the medical emergency are caught in a series of brief, tight close-ups of the officers planning the mission. By accompanying the *Ark*'s helicopters, the BBC cameras are present when the sailor on a stretcher and the helicopter winchman are both washed over the side of the submarine, USS *Bergall*. The detached chronicling of this dangerous moment and the subsequent heroic rescue provide a dramatic and authentic event to stand (again) in juxtaposition to the series' otherwise wry observation of the ship's community.[48] In fact, the extraordinary capturing of the US submarine on film led to the Royal Navy personnel having to assist Purdie in avoiding American attempts to seize the footage when the helicopters landed in the Azores.[49] The episode subsequently received a BAFTA award in 1977 for best factual programme.

The fourth episode's title, 'Thoughts of Home', re-establishes the emphasis upon shipboard life yet diverges from the tone of homesickness discernible in episodes one and two. Instead, the paradoxical title recognises the varying perception and status of the ship as 'home'. The first part of the episode centres on a search-and-rescue helicopter pilot engaged in airlifting stores from RFA *Lyness*, an accompanying auxiliary ship. His voice-over accompanies

---

[48] Although Purdie had placed cameras aboard both helicopters, in the final edit he used footage from only one since he felt that cutting between two perspectives 'would have looked like it was faked for a feature film': Johnstone-Bryden, *Britain's Greatest Warship*, p.183.

[49] Johnstone-Bryden, *Britain's Greatest Warship*, p.183.

a five-minute sequence detailing his work. With berths free on board *Lyness* the pilot has arranged an 'indulgence passage' for his wife during the deployment. One other pilot's wife is also aboard *Lyness* but he acknowledges that there are 250 other officers in *Ark*'s wardroom at sea without their wives. The second half of the episode introduces 'Little Wilf', a ventriloquist's dummy who stars in a bawdy show broadcast on the ship's television service. Named in (dis) honour of 'Big Wilf' Captain Graham, Wilf acts as conduit and surrogate for the crew's voice, viewpoint and grievances, as one interviewed officer explains: 'He personifies, possibly the lower echelon of thought processes on board, and I don't mean that in a class-conscious way at all.' On camera the commander remarks, 'Put it this way: they'll believe Wilf before they'll believe me.' In interview, Wilf's assistant and creator of 'The Wilf Show', John Pooley, is conscious of the puppet's role for the crew:

> Most of the material I use is what the lads generally think of life on board the ship, and what they'd like to say themselves but obviously they'd get in trouble if they did … the Captain definitely must be a good sport to put up with what we push out, to see his officers slandered.[50]

Wilf is shown conversing with the captain on the bridge (and even occupying his chair), before the broadcasting of his scurrilous Saturday-night show. (Another interlude in a junior mess captured in this episode shows a sailor pretending to be an officer wearing a shirt 'borrowed' from the laundry.) The understanding of the sailors' 'home' granted by the forbearance shown to Wilf stands (again) in stark contrast to the earlier, cumulative scenes of disciplinary action, and emphasises the licence as well as law aboard ship.

A more conventional form of liberty is seen in the next episode ('Puerto Rican Banyan'), when permission is granted for a beach party. This public display of release from regulations is paralleled by Bernard Marshall, the ship's chaplain (known as 'The Bish'), offering individual counselling to seamen with personal problems. Interviewed after having been filmed laughing at the vulgar 'Wilf Show' in episode four, the *Ark*'s chaplain offers a revealing insight into his understanding of his role in the ship's heterogeneous community. His comments (in voice-over over scenes of a communion service on board) characterise rather than castigate the sailors' social milieu and the peculiarity of their way of life:

> I think that saying that the clergy ashore often come across as being very professional and almost pious and constrained, and that the naval chaplain is less pious, more extrovert, ebullient, a sort of drinking,

[50] Wilf apparently continues to serve 30 years after his appearances in *Sailor*: Anonymous, TV Dummy makes comeback to star on *Daring, Navy News*, 1 February 2013, https://navynews.co.uk/archive/news/item/6955 [accessed 22 February 2018].

> rooting, tooting, swearing Christian, if there is such a thing, has a grain of truth in it, for two reasons. The priest ashore is in a set environment and tends to project the image which his parishioners expect of him, and the constraint that shore side parishioners place upon their clergy is pretty considerable. A chaplain who is ministering to sailors as they really are, and making no bones about it, could find himself in a difficult situation, because the captain, then, rather than expecting him to be a sailors' chaplain, which is what he's really come on for, could want him to be the preacher of establishment type standards and conventional morality. Jesus Christ consorted with sinners and was friends with prostitutes. I am the one person on the ship who is rank-less, and I am situated amidships.

Marshall insists that neither he nor anyone else should restrict sailors' 'idiomatic language' since without it their 'true emotional state will never properly register'. He distinguishes forcefully between 'bad language', which he views as intrinsic, meaningless and therefore inoffensive, and blasphemy, which he roundly condemns, but defends the stereotypical sailor's immorality as simply a greater 'honesty' than that of the civilian:

> I don't think the Navy is any more immoral than people living in England. I think the opportunities are greater when we're ashore but bear in mind *we* are deprived for much longer periods of time than the average male in the UK.

Using 'we' to include himself in the sailors' conduct is his clearest indication of broad-mindedness. This sequence is succeeded by the chaplain's own television show being used to discuss venereal disease, not just in advance of the shore leave in Puerto Rico but also as a follow-on to his previous programme's debate on marital fidelity. Seen watching the show in a lower-deck mess, sailors joke that the chaplain obviously needs to know more about VD for his own benefit. As the carrier enters harbour, the camera focuses in on a female American sailor on the dockside: intercutting between her and the sailors lining *Ark*'s deck constructs a candid, communal point-of-view shot redolent of the unspoken desire to which the chaplain referred. Marshall's appearances in the series and in *Sailor: 8 Years On* initiated the televisual presence of the eccentric naval chaplain, which has been a recurrent feature of later series such as *Shipmates* (2005) (see Chapter 6).[51]

---

[51] The navy's chaplains, as commissioned officers who are nevertheless rankless and outside of the service hierarchy and command structure, embody a unique role and history which television documentary series have importantly brought to light. See Mike Farquharson-Roberts, *Royal Naval Officers from War to War, 1918–1939* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p.36.

The beach party is represented in a lengthy sequence, mostly covered by non-diegetic music, during which Leading Airman Powell gets to know a local woman. Powell has been seen previously, describing his parental role towards younger sailors within his mess in episode four. Powell's commentary previews the chaplain's frankness and acceptance in episode five, in relation to needing to know about venereal infections in the shared living space: 'Everybody's got secrets, but personal secrets are nothing in this man's navy.' After scenes of a formal evening event hosting US Navy officers and their spouses, a montage of night-time streets and neon signs introduces the return of drunken sailors (accompanied on the soundtrack by a rendition of 'Spanish Ladies') to the ship, the brig or the sick bay. When Wilkinson again assembles the defaulters before the commander, Powell is seen in the line, and a subjective cross-fade reintroduces a shot of him on the beach with the woman. After Powell's punishment, the episode ends with another sailor's voice-over as he writes a letter home from the sickbay.

Episode six, 'Officer Territory', opens with the 'furore' attending a report of a man overboard in rough seas. Although it proves to be a false alarm, the incident serves as a reminder of the hazardous environment (the handheld camera accompanies sailors with safety lines rigged as they traverse the pitching and flooded quarterdeck).[52] The ship's junior officers under training are interviewed in their shared cabin, where they provide a common view that they lack responsibility and a clearly defined role and, as university graduates, they bridle at being unable to challenge criticisms levelled at them. This is followed immediately by scenes of Captain Graham on the bridge, issuing instructions and reading classified documents, while his comments in voice-over largely concur: 'No young officer who's any good at all ever feels he's got enough responsibility … I think that's a rather healthy sign.' One of the trainees, Chris Parry, is seen handing in essays in his journal, to be passed to the captain for review and signature. He sees this as 'superfluous' since, as an arts graduate himself, he wrote 'about 200 essays' while at Oxford. When we next see him being instructed in the operation of the ship's main electrical switchboard, his retrospective voice-over confesses it 'nearly sent me to sleep'. This shot cross-fades to his introduction to another engineering space, and then to a Martel missile in the ship's magazine, where his re-enthused voice-over returns. This is followed by a cut back to Graham on the bridge, still handling paperwork, but his voice-over asserts the interest and importance of this aspect of his work: on this occasion reviewing the records of ratings aspiring to become officers. While Chris is seen helping ordinary sailors with their O level English, Graham is seen changing into overalls to visit the same engineering spaces that bored the young lieutenant. After examining repairs to a sea boat, Graham descends to the engine room to meet members of his crew

[52] Johnstone-Bryden, *Britain's Greatest Warship*, pp.183–184.

at work, where his voice-over confesses: 'I have come across one or two people who didn't recognise me at all.'

Intercut with Graham's rounds, Chris is seen talking with Tom Wilkinson, who counsels him on the benefit of locking up the drunk liberty men on their return and offering advice when they are sober to avoid the need for later charges. Chris's voice-over crystallises his respect for the fleet master-at-arms: 'I feel very humbled when he tells me things, the experiences, and the authority with which he says it as well, he's so confident. He calls me "sir" and it seems very odd … he knows so much.' Chris is then seen on the bridge in a rapidly edited sequence as a Russian intelligence-gathering ship manoeuvres close by and is warded off by a US Navy destroyer. While he acknowledges that being able to take (brief) command of the ship is more than his contemporaries could do, he still regrets having his actions overseen by senior officers. 'Officer territory', then, in this episode is not demarcated spatially in terms of accommodation or command areas: Graham's rounds of the ship to meet the crew and Wilkinson's experience define it in areas of responsibility and knowledge that are not limited by space or rank. This is summarised at the episode's end with scenes of officers' mess dinner, served by ship's stewards who are coached beforehand to 'prove to the officers' how well they know their jobs.

Graham's commitment to connecting with the crew is reiterated in episode seven ('A Theatre Workshop') when a concert to raise morale is staged before the ship reaches Florida. Marines and sailors practising with musical instruments are intercut with scenes of everyday maintenance and repairs continuing. Soundtrack piano music plays over bomb fusing and arming, and shots of flight deck preparation for bombing practice at the Vieques Range in Puerto Rico. This juxtaposition establishes the episode's thread of contrasts, as scenes of the concert (spoofs of the children's programme *The Magic Roundabout* [BBC, 1965–77] and World War II comedy series *It Ain't Half Hot Mum* [BBC 1974–81] and a closing chorus of *The Wombles*'s [BBC, 1973–75] signature tune) are intercut with shots of sailors on watch in deafening engineering spaces, including one up to his waist in the bilges working on a leaking joint.[53]

Scenes of the ship docking in Fort Lauderdale featuring a marching band in 1776 costumes for the American bicentennial are not accompanied by a voice-over but, as with the arrival in Puerto Rico in episode five, the camera appears to mimic the sailors' gaze on the majorettes. The latter half of the episode concentrates on Steward Lesley Vernon's marriage and honeymoon taking place within the ship's three-week visit. He plans to emigrate to America after leaving the Navy. The next episode ('Florida USA') records the wedding ceremony (presided over by Bernard Marshall). Before the wedding the episode is introduced

[53] See Anonymous, Ark, it sounds like the Navy!, *Navy News*, 1977, 272, 40, announcing the release of BBC Records single of HMS *Ark Royal*'s crew singing *Sailor*'s title song 'Sailing', with the B-side being a rendition of 'The Wombling Song', and posters of *Ark Royal* advertising the release in record shops.

by a series of voice-overs (from the groom, his bride, Susie, and their mothers) accompanying scenes of them relaxing by a swimming pool. The idyllic vision of the present is contrasted with Lesley's speculation about his future and Susie's frank acknowledgement of the likelihood her husband will have a 'fling' while away from her at sea. This recognition of sailors' behaviour is compared to an interview with a local policeman patrolling the surfing beaches, who, while admitting that sailors of any nation (including his own) can cause problems ashore, claims that 'the British sailor is the best ambassador for his country, bar none'. Juxtapositions of officer and lower-deck activities (similar to episode five) record the crew's run ashore and an official reception in the *Ark*'s hangar, including a performance by the Marine band in dress uniform. Poignantly, the episode ends with Vernon back in uniform and on duty, after a recording of his and Susie's vows from the wedding service is heard over a long shot of the ship leaving harbour.

The series' final two episodes record the crew's anticipation of home, the reunion of families when the ship returns to Plymouth, and the difficult readjustment to life ashore. In 'Homeward Bound', one sailor is flown home early in order to be present for the birth of his first child, while another who deserts in America to get home to his family sooner is sentenced to prison without pay when the ship reaches home port. Shots of his incarceration are juxtaposed immediately with scenes of the captain awarding long service and good conduct medals. Graham comments that service is 'pretty unfashionable today', yet remarks that, in his estimation, 'one of the finest things that man can do to man is to render him good service'. This reward of merit is in turn followed by a sequence detailing a last night of noisy, heavy drinking in the wardroom.

In a telling alteration of perspective, the ship's appearance in harbour is viewed from the shore, where a hotel receptionist briefly describes the 'floating town' and her five-month voyage to guests. While this change privileges the shoreside view of the ship that the waiting families occupy, the superficiality of the receptionist's statistical commentary underlines the truthful intimacy of the shipboard perspective the series has given its viewers. The final episode, 'Back Home', is, unlike previous ones, permeated by an expository voice-over that reprises the tone of the series' opening, in exalting the return of the historically named ship to 'Drake's country'. The narration assumes a deterministic stance towards the images it accompanies (for example, articulating the frustrations of the undifferentiated relatives awaiting the crew). The uncomfortably hierarchic nature of this perspective, which appears remarkably inconsistent with the balanced and unmediated perspective of the preceding episodes, is epitomised by the filming of the captain's wife and son (whom the narrator reveals has ambitions to join the Navy) being given preferential treatment, boarding the ship immediately to be reunited with Wilfred Graham.

After passing through customs inspection, the narrator marks the crew's release: 'Moments ago, *Ark* was a single family encased in a steel hull. Now, as the ship empties, 2,600 separate lives begin.' The narrator notes Wilfred

Graham's promotion to rear admiral and a command position at Portsmouth, whereas with 'appropriate symbolism' Tom Wilkinson is due to retire and the carrier herself will be decommissioned and scrapped by 1979. Their parallel retirement is described as 'the end of an era. In a navy where technology reigns, there's little room for ships and characters that are larger than life.' This sentimental tone (extended by Leading Seaman Powell's parting observation that being a sailor is all about 'goodbyes') looks forward to the series' epilogue in *8 Years On*. Notably, the final episode's last images (presented without additional commentary), showing one sailor reunited with his family and the son born in his absence, are reused as the opening scenes of *8 Years On*.

Despite the historical detail with which *Ark Royal*'s deployment is represented, *Sailor* endures as a record and has influenced subsequent naval documentaries because of its emphasis upon human observation. As the ship's commander, Captain Wilfred Graham, remarks, the majority of his time is spent on the crew rather than the ship: 'People are always interesting. Human relations is the most important part of the job: happiness and well-being – is really my major requirement.' In this regard, one of the key figures of the series (besides the captain himself, and the pervasive, patriarchal figure of Tom Wilkinson) is Bernard Marshall. While stating his objection to profane language disrespectful of his faith, his acceptance of the crew's day-to-day swearing as a normal function of this community and environment represented a key example of explicit shipboard tolerance, as the balance to depictions of naval discipline. (In editing out expletives from his material for the BBC but arguing strongly for the retention of Marshall's 'profound statement' on the validity of the sailors' language, Purdie noted the resulting irony that 'the only swearing within the whole series came from the Padre'.)[54] This focus on the (eccentric) naval chaplain has been repeated in more recent documentaries (e.g. Channel 5's *Warship*, the BBC's *Shipmates* and Quest's *Devonport: Inside the Royal Navy*). The presence and activities of naval chaplains (as both religious and non-denominational counsellors aboard ship, as morale leaders and givers of spiritual support in disaster relief operations ashore) appear to bridge or confound distinctions between the traditional nature and contemporaneity of the Navy's tasks and culture.

While reiterating the view that *Ark Royal* as a sentimental symbol of the post-war Navy reached her 'apotheosis as the subject' of *Sailor*, Jim Allaway also emphasises the series' true merit in its forthright, non-conformist and yet affirmative recording:

> Though scenes of sailors letting off steam during a last night ashore raised eyebrows among the Naval Establishment, the fact that they were set alongside episodes of solid professionalism – as in a dramatic rescue of an American sailor suffering from appendicitis who was washed off a

[54] Johnstone-Bryden, *Britain's Greatest Warship*, p.189.

> submarine by a large wave while waiting to be lifted off by helicopter – only served to concentrate public interest in what was obviously not just another run-of-the-mill propaganda exercise.[55]

The relevance of *Sailor* was also reflected in the production of the retrospective addendum to the series, *8 Years On*. In addition to tracing the later lives and experiences of some of the series' most conspicuous participants (Leslie Conway's marriage lasted less than three years; Wilfred Graham became director of the RNLI; John Pooley and Little Wilf joined the Coast Guard after receiving the British Empire Medal for 'services to morale'; Chris Parry, still serving in the Navy, saw action in the Falklands War, and would eventually retire as a rear admiral), this film also reflected directly on the resonance of the original series itself. Several incidents are referred to and reinterpreted directly, in recognition of their impact. Alan Gibson, the pilot shown experiencing difficulties with his first carrier landing in the second programme, reveals that the 'patronising debrief' by squadron commander Keith Somerville-Jones with the cameras present was followed by 'the real debrief [which] bore not much resemblance to the nice, pleasant avuncular chat' included in the programme. In interview, Somerville-Jones defends this economy with the truth in asserting the programme's overall authenticity. His remark – 'The series was remarkably honest, but then it was almost "an everyday story of country folk." It was life as 2500 men aboard a ship happen to live' – ironically compares *Sailor* to the BBC serial radio drama *The Archers* as an equally convincing depiction of contemporary Britishness. The ship's doctor, Philip Jones, and helicopter crewman Roy Rothwell recall their involvement in the submarine rescue. Jones (shown reviewing the footage of the rescue in a hospital staff room) affirms the importance of this event because the rescue was not just dramatic but '*seen* to be dramatic, as an insight to what actually occurs very often'. Rothwell (filmed on the day he leaves the Navy) remembers the incident with modest understatement as not a rescue, 'just a transfer that went wrong'.

The controversial aspects of the series are also confronted in *8 Years On*. The interviews with former crew members consist of voice-overs or comments to character without the interviewer's prompts or questions being heard: this suggests both the spontaneity of their views and the unstated recognition of the criticisms the series received. In his interview Philip Jones responds to the controversies the series provoked within the MoD by upholding its authenticity:

> My argument to that is, well, the secret of that particular series' success was the naturalness of the people. And there was no way should we have altered our behaviour or our way of life to make it look better, because that would be wrong.

---

[55] Jim Allaway, *The Navy in the News 1954–1991* (London: HMSO, 1993), p.50.

Bernard Marshall, now chaplain of HMS *Drake* ashore, reflects on the negative reception of his comments on naval language and culture. Despite what he sees as the essential veracity of the representation and the honesty of his own comments, he believes there was 'perhaps regret that so much was committed to celluloid … a slight feeling of singed fingers'. However, most evocatively, the film begins and ends with Tom Wilkinson's emotional return to the *Ark* in the breakers' yard. The former fleet master-at-arms is reduced to tears by the sight of the unrecognisable remains of the carrier after scrapping. His untrammelled emotion (at the ship's ignominious end as an injustice to the memory of her and her sailors' service to the nation) deflects or revalues the criticisms of *Sailor*'s unexpurgated coverage by providing the series' epilogue with a final, authentic portrait of personal and national sentiment. Notably, *8 Years On* assumes a structure and style akin to that of the series in simply observing its subject and not privileging the atypical and dominating voice-over of the series' final episode. In this way, though the integration of footage from the series functions as 'flashback' for both the interviewees and the audience, the narrational principle of the series (in enforcing acknowledgement and accommodation of difference in perspective and experience via often drastic juxtaposition and contrast) is maintained to contemplative and evaluative effect. This impression is sustained to the very end as, unlike the scrapyard worker who accompanies Tom Wilkinson, we are affected by his unreserved expression of emotion for the memories the ship inspires.

Conclusion

This chapter's title suggests an antagonistic difference between these two crucial contributions to naval representation in the 1970s. However, given the documentary filming and recruitment emphasis underpinning *Warship* and the dramatic, narrativising techniques distinguishing key moments of *Sailor*, the two series should be seen as more complementary than competitive in their relationship to their naval subjects. Although the audience perceptions and tastes of the time certainly appeared to privilege *Sailor* over *Warship*, it might be argued that the long-term presence and popularity of *Warship* created the media environment in which *Sailor* could be conceived and produced, and generated the audience for naval representation upon which *Sailor* was able to capitalise. Above all, the drama series was also deemed to have fulfilled its key role and vindicated its conception by raising the Navy's profile:

> Even before the first series aired in the spring of 1973, the Department of Naval Recruiting was planning to use stills from *Warship* in recruiting office window displays … Whatever the truth about recruiting, the perception among senior figures in the MoD was that the series had been a 'good thing' for the Royal Navy. *Warship* seems to have provided

> thereby the basic precedent for how the MoD in general and the Royal Navy in particular handled subsequent forays into the world of TV series drama.[56]

Warship retained its popularity during its first three years (and even spawned three novels), but eventually fell victim to the popularity and apparent veracity of *Sailor*, a public relations event of an entirely different ilk.[57] Subsequently, the fourth season of *Warship* suffered in comparison with *Sailor*'s observational immediacy. While the Navy's own publication *Navy News* heralded the broadcasting of the fourth series (and filming in the Far East with HMS *Danae* and HMS *Diomede*), its letters pages also printed complaints from serving sailors about factual inaccuracies which spoiled the series for informed viewers.[58] Although navy recruitment had appeared to improve during the series' lifetime, the programme was not recommissioned, and the format of the naval drama languished until the new millennium and the appearance of Granada Television's *Making Waves* in 2004 (see Chapter 3). Ironically, the cooperation of the Royal Australian Navy in the filming of *Warship*, and the popularity of the BBC series when broadcast by the ABC, led to a comparable Australian series, *Patrol Boat* (ABC, 1979–83). *Squadron*, a BBC series based on a fictional unit in the modern Royal Air Force, which sought to represent the different

---

[56] Mackenzie, Broadcasting the New Navy, p.108, 121.

[57] Ian MacKintosh wrote three novels to accompany the series. *Warship* (Arrow, 1973) reuses motifs of the series in its story of *Hero*'s rescue of survivors from an air liner brought down by terrorists, and forceful intervention in a fictional, newly independent Caribbean country's tumultuous political climate. *HMS Hero* (Futura, 1976) portrays Nialls's successor Commander Glenn courting controversy in his handling of a Soviet submarine's intrusion into British territorial waters. *Holt RN* (Arthur Barker Ltd., 1977) features *Hero*'s last commander Captain Holt, in a story adapted from the first episode of the fourth series, 'Wind Song'. This narrative featured environmental protest against French nuclear testing in the Pacific Ocean, in a fictionalised treatment of the life of David McTaggart, one of the founders of Greenpeace. The sympathetic attitude towards anti-nuclear protest attributed to Holt (who ironically is described as a former Polaris submarine officer) reflects a shift in tone as well as content across the novels (from latter-day colonial intervention in *Warship*, to an impromptu 'League of Nations' mid-ocean when Glenn meets his Russian counterpart in *HMS Hero*, to deliberate contravention of orders in the vicinity of French nuclear testing in *Holt RN*). MacKintosh acknowledged the change in his own views, in the light of his own departure from the Navy in *Holt RN* ('Author's Note', p.8). Ironically HMNZS *Otago* and HMNZS *Canterbury* (sister ships to the Royal Navy's *Leanders*) were sent by the New Zealand government to disrupt French nuclear testing in 'probably the first ever use of modern military hardware for peaceful protest': Michael Brown and John May, *The Greenpeace Story* (London: Dorling Kindersley, 1989), p.26.

[58] Anonymous, *Hero* returns – with some new stars, *Navy News*, 1977, 271, 40; Letters, 'Who are they trying to fool?' *Navy News*, 1977, 272, 6.

roles undertaken and aircraft types operated by the RAF (such as the Harrier jet and Puma helicopter), lasted only one season in 1982. However, the outstanding success of *Soldier Soldier* (produced by Central Television for ITV between 1991 and 1997), which lasted for seven series and over 80 episodes, eventually provided both a model and the impetus for the reincarnation of the naval drama series, with the short-lived *Making Waves*. The failure of this series to find a prime-time British audience is all the more noteworthy given the success of another long-running Australian equivalent, *Sea Patrol* (Nine Network, 2007–11). While the concept of the naval drama series seems no longer viable (in the UK at least), despite controversies comparable to those of the 1970s about the Navy's role, relevance and recruitment needs in the 21st century, the benchmark of the embedded, observational documentary established by *Sailor* remains both pertinent and popular, as recent examples (such as the series created by Chris Terrill) have substantiated.