

FIXET EXERCISES IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

The Home and Mediterranean Fleets combine in the first post-war exercises, as Task Force 59 leaves Gibraltar Harbour lead by "Vanguard" to test the "Rock's" defences. Labelled "Operation Two-step," the exercise charges the Home Fleet with the protection of Gibraltar from combined air, surface and underwater raiders. As Hornets prepare to take off from the carrier "Implacable," as senior American exchange-pilot is among official observers of the manoeuvres. Mediterranean Commander-in-Chief Admiral Sir Rhoderick McGrigor is one of the umpires with the west-bound attackers, a force from a mythical state ambiguously named "Redland." Though most of the fireworks happen by night, aircraft make non-stop sorties throughout the two-day offensive.

Hearing the Rock from a starting-point 200 miles east. "Implacable's" Firebrands take-off as the carrier comes under attack from Gibraltar-based aircraft.

"Operation Two-Step," placing the emphasis on sea-borne airpower, underlines the new shape of naval strategy. The day of the capital ship, except as an aircraft-carrier escort, is over. Wings rule the waves. By the time Admiral McGrigor is ready to transfer, by beam's chair, to the destroyer "Corunna," the lesson of the manoeuvres is already learnt. Gib., the cornerstone of our Middle East power, is defensible against anything short of the Atom Bomb, and what the Navy has up its sleeve for that emergency, the Navy isn't saying. The Mediterranean Commander leaves "Implacable," later to receive the comforting news that, from Gibraltar's underground battle-centre, the defenders claim the total destruction of the raiding forces. A link-up between attackers from the Atlantic and Mediterranean through the Straits, was completely frustrated. Gib. remains impregnable.