

**THIS
IMPERIAL THEME**



H.M.S. Gambia: Commission 1952-1954

THIS IMPERIAL THEME



A Documentary Study of the
"Fighting G"



from ADMIRAL J. REID, C.B., C.V.O.

H.M.S. Gambia's record in the Mediterranean has been a fine one. I am proud to have had her as my flagship, and it is with real regret that I see the end of her commission which has been crowned with such success.

I extend my warmest good wishes to you all.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "J. Reid". The signature is stylized, with a large, looped "R" and a clear "J" and "id" following.

Editorial

At Plymouth

October 15, 1954

LIVING WITHIN AN AGE where the excessive use of adjectives rules the buying and selling of our material needs, simplicity in style and presentation becomes an objective increasingly hard to realise.

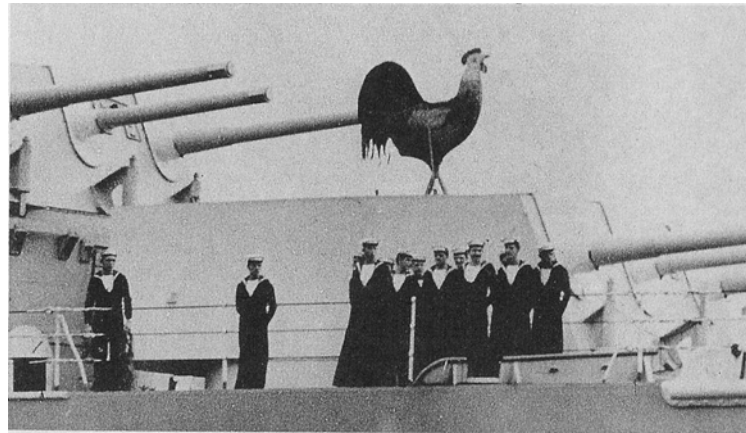
We are not within these pages aiming to glorify or gloss over the events that have formed the pattern of this present commission. Neither are we lightly passing over with tender apologies the failures and headaches of the past two years. Our aim has been a documentary study — a study where by the two dimensional use of pictorial grouping and the *nth* dimension of prose, the thousand and one threads that form this present commission's tapestry have faithfully been recorded.

This book you will find is an act of faith. An act of faith between the publisher, the editorial staff, and you, the reader, for the normal design that end of term, or end of commission, magazines follow, are absent. The time-honoured style of devoting to each sporting activity a page and a half with the classical opening of "During the last season we were lucky enough to play"— such conventions have received the order of the guillotine.

To keep within the meaning of the word documentary, and yet carry an overall sense of continuity, the text was divided into twelve chapters, being equally and deliberately farmed out to three writers. The initials C.B. stand for Charles Bowkett, and J.F. for John Fothergill. The typing of their final copies was executed by Edward Milkins.

Special mention too must be made of Instructor Lieutenant Commander MacMillan upon whose shoulders rested the tricky task of business manager and liaison officer between publishers, editorial staff, and ship's company.

The title, "This Imperial Theme," stands as a simple representation of two years in the history of this country — history in which *Gambia* has played an active part. Of Britain's tradition and heritage little need be said, but of the name *Gambia* and this book



End of Commission

based upon it, one fact should be kept well to the fore. *Gambia* as a ship has no historic tradition; it is a new name linked by friendly ties to the colony of Gambia. Her first claim to fame rests on the dubious honour of firing the last shot in the Pacific at the end of World War II. Her past captains have included the name of Captain M. Mansergh, now Admiral Sir Maurice Mansergh.

Of *Gambia's* more recent history the pages within these covers will tell their own story: the book ends with the ship's arrival at Plymouth carrying once again *The Cock* as proof of the spirit, sweat, and enterprise of her ship's company.

To each of you this book is dedicated, for if in years to come shaking hands turn these pages for the admiration of grandchildren for their grandfathers and through it many forgotten memories spring to light, then the creation of this book will be amply rewarded, and the present act of faith will then become an *act of reality*.

Hewett Minor



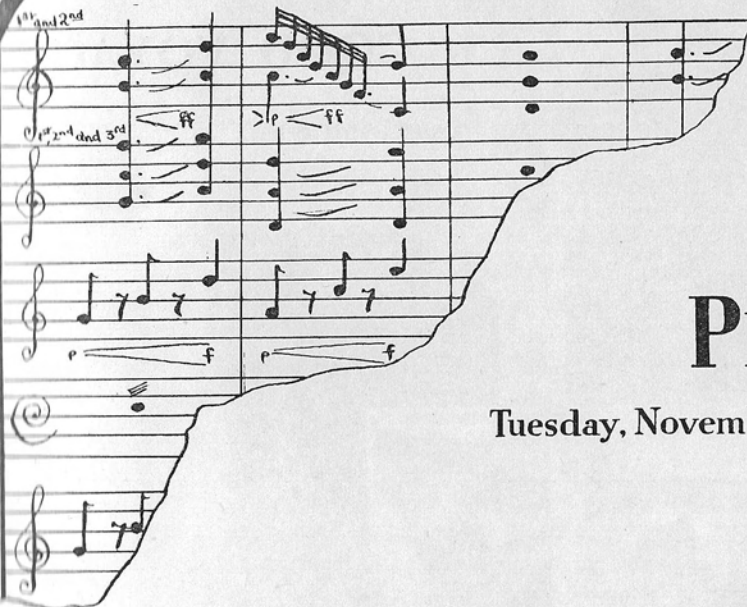
*from CAPTAIN W. EVERSHED, D.S.O.,
R.N.*

It has been a privilege to command H.M.S. Gambia for the latter part of her 1952-1954 commission.

From the moment I joined—during the time of Her Majesty's visit to Malta—I formed the impression that H.M.S. Gambia was an efficient ship, and a happy ship. That impression has been fully confirmed by all that has happened since then. Good luck to you all, and may you have equal success in your next ship.

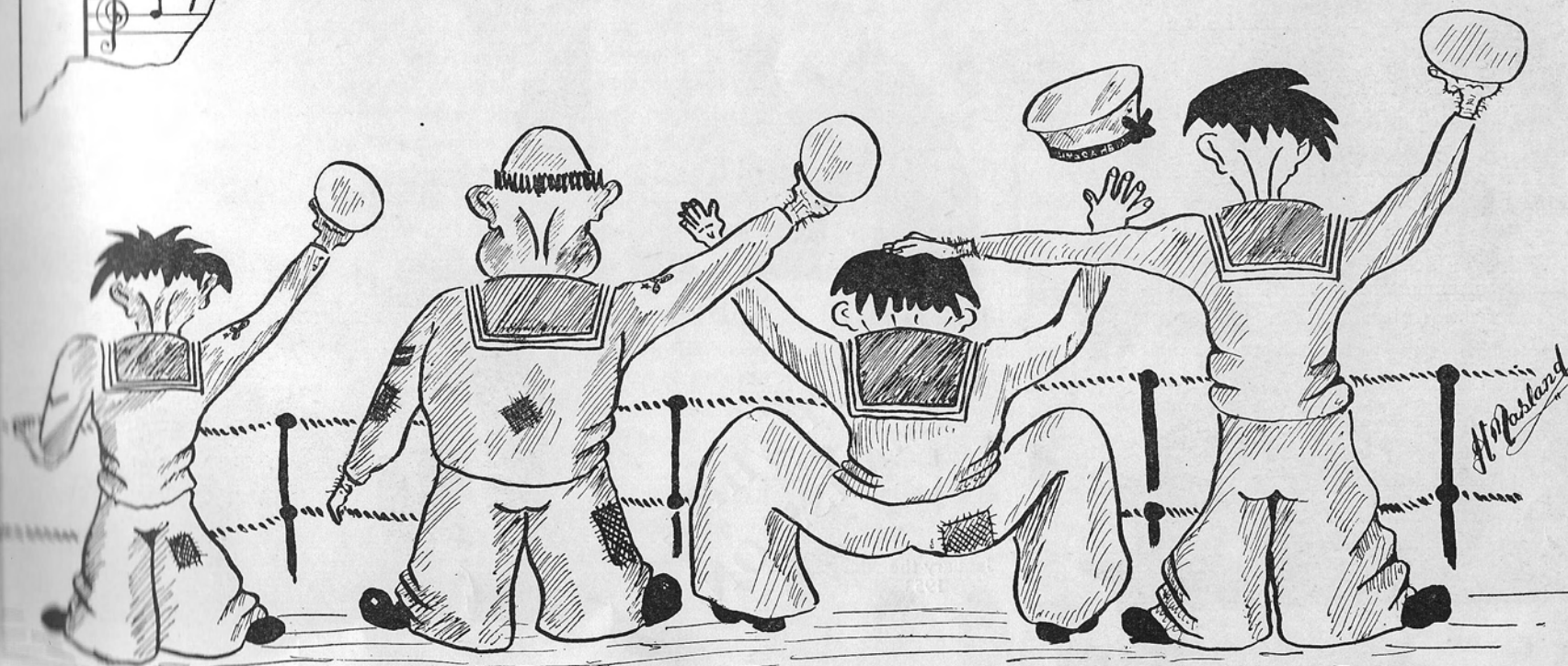
A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "W. Evershed." The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

PRELUDE in G MAJOR OPUS 463 $\frac{10}{34}$



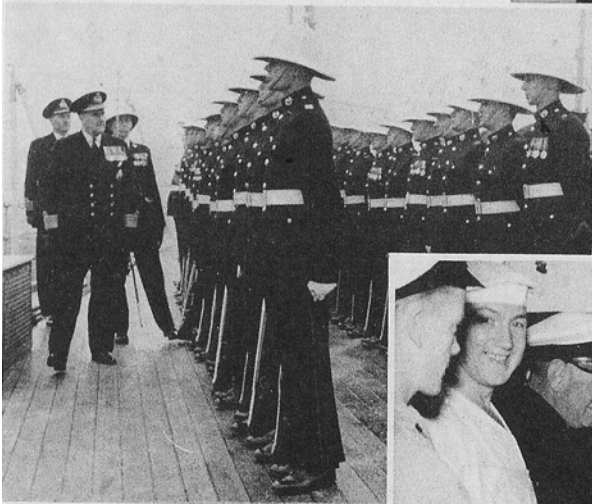
PHASE ONE

Tuesday, November 4th 1952 Tuesday, June 6th 1953



GOD SPEED

GOOD VOYAGE



Monday

WORTHWHILE
COMMISSION

January the 5th
1953



Chapter I

"The Bitter Bread"

Tuesday, November 4, 1952

RESTING AT HER MOORINGS alongside the jetty of No. 4 Basin, a steel town patiently awaited the arrival of her new inhabitants. For the past three months, in threes and fours, the advance party had arrived, settled, made their mark, and begun seriously to realise that the floating hulk was to be their home for two and a half years.

On the Tuesday evening, a five page memo of closely-printed hieroglyphics informed the ship's company of the routine that had been devised to ensure absolute chaos for the following day.

On Wednesday morning, with typical wintry weather, the stampede known as Commissioning Day began. From Barracks, to the sound of martial music (dominated by the beating of a Salvation Army bass drum) the ship's company trudged to the dockside.

A few of the old hands gloomily viewed her silhouette, and were heard to say that small ships were better than big ones, whilst most of the young hands, faced by four massive sign cards pointing three different ways to the sharp end of the ship, found themselves agreeing with the large cartoon they had seen hanging on B turret : a cartoon of a herd of elephants, with one confiding to her mate that this was the worst organised stampede she had ever been on.

Thursday's Daily Orders announced the start of A.B.C. courses, as well as special painting parties required to decorate the ship's store-rooms. Again older hands came to the fore with the pronouncement that many miles of painting would be done before they saw the last of her bulkheads, little dreaming that before the commission had ended over 17,500 gallons were to be used to satisfy the old lady's thirst for good quality paint.

It was at this time that ratings were detailed for fire-fighting and D/C courses in Royal Naval Barracks, as well as a small group of volunteers to take the Barracks three weeks laundry course, in



Commander P. G. Sharp, D.S.C.

preparation for the time when their successful passing-out diploma would be rewarded by a few square feet opposite the ship's galley, where they could put into practice the ancient art of shrinking and the sadistic habit of gleefully returning unmarked gear unwashed.

On the lighter side, arrangements were being made for a ship's farewell dance to be held at the Exmouth Hall. Originally intended for the day previous to the first Christmas leave, arrangements were cancelled due to the powers-to-be's decision to put to sea for a series of engine trials; confusion being added by the Saturday Daily Orders, November 23, when the Commander announced under the brief head-

ing " Dance " that The ship's dance would be held on Wednesday *September 3*; concluding with an appended note that he hoped every-one could make it.

Saturday the 23rd also saw the arrival of the American Fleet, U.S.S. *Samuel B. Roberts* and U.S.S. *Hank* securing opposite *Gambia* alongside the East wall. It was during this period that the numbers on the canteen liberty boat reached an all-time low, most of the hands preferring to catch up on the latest American films aboard U.S.S.S. *Hank* and *Roberts*.

Wednesday, December the third, with Admiral Sir Maurice Mansergh, Lady Mansergh and their daughter Ann as guests of honour, *Gambia's* first major social event took its official bow.

To those that danced, and to those that bought the bar but still could stand, the general feeling seems. in looking back, that the dance was a great success. From the enjoyment point of view feelings are blurred; some have said mainly because the ship was still in the process of getting to know its fellow companions, though the bar and its fabulous takings that night belie this logical point of view, as do the number that were carried back in a happy state of fume fatigue, or just plain alcoholic collapse.

Allowing one day for any possible after-effects to wear off, the management announced that on Friday the ship would move into centre stream for ammunitioning. With typical naval efficiency orders were also issued to test the derricks, and it was after a two-ton weight had been applied on each, after the derrick on " B " gundeck had split in two and pulled the deck fittings with it (including part of the deck), that further orders were issued to postpone ammunitioning until the following Tuesday.

On Saturday afternoon, with due respect to the magic word overtime, the Naval Stores Office, upon whose deckhead the remains of the derricks rested, found itself raided by seventeen dockyard workers, a strike being nearly caused by one stores rating for painting over two square inches the dockyard had left. The official complaint stating that the ship's staff were stealing dockyard work. The villains !

By Wednesday evening, exactly a week after the dance, routine ammunitioning was completed. Once out of the frying pan the old lady slipped into the fire, with action stations, engine room trials, damage control, and efficiency tests all waiting to burn her fingers.

The fact that the ship was following the latest Admiralty policy of reduced complement had not been fully taken into account. Not that those taking part in the exercises were displeased, for it brought to many the happy situation of being able to pick and choose their own positions; for in the words of our frustrated authorities : All the ingenuity and wisdom of Solomon couldn't defeat the simple fact that *no* man can be in two places at once.

Returning alongside coaling jetty on a bleak and bitter Friday morning, the first leave party enthusiastically collected its pay and prepared for the following day.

Commander's Saturday Daily Orders wished every good soul a happy Christmas and concluded with the rather ambiguous statement, " If we continue to work as well as we have done recently, I feel certain that 1953 will be a good year for *Gambia*".

This prophecy proved only too true, for 1953 saw not only places like Tangiers, Algiers, and Port Said, but also Zante, Gozo, and Rhodes —each hitting the headlines in more senses than one.

Soon the precious seven days leave were gone with nothing left but memories; memories that were easily explainable in terms of feeling but difficult in terms of words. So the last few hours by England's shores were coming to a close; the old year, with its dying moments spent in painting; the new year, with its flurry of last minute changes, spent in inspections. At ten forty-five on Monday the fifth, the Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Sir Maurice Mansergh, K.C.B., C. B.E., stepped aboard to wish the ship " God Speed, Good Voyage, and a Worthwhile Commission ".

At 1420, in a murky setting of fog, Tugs *Freebooter* and *Recovery* secured on port bow and quarter deck. An hour later and *Gambia* was passing the breakwater. Her course 220 degrees, her destination Gibraltar; and as England slowly drifted into her distant shelter of seasonal fog,

" Two truths are told as happy prologue to

The swelling act of this imperial theme."

A ship is a happy ship if she is an efficient one. A ship is a happy ship if *she wants to be*.

So with the cry of " efficiency " the new commission began, and with the days came dim visions of a future yet unknown. *Gambia* had tasted her first taste of a bitter bread--the bitter bread of banishment.

H.M.

