

Chapter XI

Cock of the Fleet

Friday, May 7, 1954

RIDAY MAY 7 SAW THE ENDING of yet another historic chapter in the commission as we watched the departure from Malta of H.M. the Queen and her consort in the *Britannia*. It was also the end of H.M.S. *Glasgow's* reign as she sailed out of harbour with her paying-off pennant streaming behind her and her ship's company lining the upper deck in salute.

During this period we experienced a change of management when both Captain Gretton and Commander Sharp were relieved by Captain Evershed and Commander Lee. Many of us wondered whether this would herald any drastic changes but the new management soon settled in and life continued in the same sweet way.

. As Malta soon became monotonous to us again so May 11 saw us sailing for Bizerta and a change of scenery: a shock being in store for the people who had fondly conjured up visions of endless sands and palm trees, the actual fact being green vegetation in abundance, and grains of sand few and far between.

We settled in a billet alongside the dockyard, and the sporting enthusiasts were soon out in force, making good use of every corner of the waste land near the ship. Some very good sailing races were organised, and in spite of stiff breezes we only had one casualty. The town itself was not very large but provided us with many reminders of our stay in Villefranche with red and white wines in abundance.

Our brief trip over, we arrived back in Malta on May 18 and prepared ourselves for a long and arduous stay. Thursday May 20 heralded the Ship's Sports Day at Marsa Stadium and as usual we were blessed with perfect weather. Preliminary heats were run off during the forenoon and the finals during the afternoon. The amount of talent displayed by the competitors was quite amazing and some very good results were achieved. Rivalry between the Various

divisions was very apparent and the issue was in doubt right to the end when the Officers proved themselves the better team closely followed by the Chief & Petty Officers. Captain Evershed presented the prizes to wind up a very successful event.

De-ammunitioning was soon in full swing and on completion the old lady moved into the dockyard to commence her first full refit of the commission. The management were soon hard at work thinking up new schemes to keep the hands fully occupied and the result was the decision to send practically all of the ship's company for a week's training at Ghain Tuffieha. This was followed by the cheering news that they would also receive 14 days' station leave on completion — once more mutiny was averted.

Athletics came into the news again on May 28 when the Mediterranean Fleet Championships were held and despite stiff opposition in the preliminary heats the *Gambia* competitors were well represented in the finals. The end of the meeting found us tieing with our rivals on the *Bermuda* for the Cruiser Squadron Cup but luckily one of our warriors produced a two-headed penny and the cup became ours, if only for a short time. As a result of this meeting three of our athletes were selected to represent the Royal Navy in the Inter-Service Sports; S.P.O. Bowkett and A.B. Hathaway in the Long Jump and Sub. Lt. (E) Hall in the High Jump.

Meanwhile the refit maintained its steady course only disturbed by vague murmurs about serious trouble in the engine room which gave full scope to the sailor's imaginative brain. The mystery was finally cleared up by the Captain and was followed by intermittent reports in the Daily Orders to the effect; " There is still no news about the ship's future. Regatta practice became the order of the day and the sight of the crews with perfectly groomed hair and appearance was soon explained by the presence of the photographer complete with cine-camera and instruction book in the following cutter.

Friday, July 30, and once more the old lady was back in routine having disposed of most of the Dockyard rust and dust and preparing to coat herself in a nice new grey. Thursday August 5 brought out the fish-like element in us when the ship's Aquatic Sports were held at Ricasoli. This turned out to be a popular affair even though a

lot of people only went for a free swim, but the true talent was formed into a ship's team to represent us in the Fleet Sports. Unfortunately the *Bermuda* proved too strong for us and came out well-deserved winners over everyone.

The annual race for the Barham Trophy was held in Grand Harbour on August 7 and provided us with a thrilling race despite the fact that *Gambia* and *Bermuda* were the only boats in it. After an almost photo-finish *Gambia* were declared the winners, an omen of things to come, we hoped.

On the following Monday the old lady nosed her way past the breakwater once more and commenced vet another working up period which was broken abruptly by the news that we were required for another errand of mercy. Friday August 13, an ominous date, found us on our way to Port Said to evacuate The 40th Brigade of the R.M. Commando from the Canal Zone. We arrived on August 16 in company with H.M.S. Glasgow and secured in the Canal whilst she went alongside Navy House and embarked her passengers. On Tuesday we took her place and before long the upper deck resembled a cross-channel car ferry as a long succession of lorries, jeeps, water trucks, and utilicons were hoisted inboard and secured in unbelievable places. At 1600 we embarked the brigade and at 1700 we sailed once more for Malta. We arrived safely in Malta on August 20 and disembarked our strange cargo, before securing to our billet once more. Our cruise programme was altered with the news of the anti-British riots in Greece, and the regatta was transferred to Palmas

Bay in Sardinia. On Monday September 6 the Fleet set out once more for the Second Summer Cruise and after the usual succession of exercises we arrived at Palmas Bay and moored in our allotted positions.

Thursday September 9 dawned on a blustery day giving us anything but perfect conditions for the Cruiser Regatta but nothing daunted we sallied forth into the fray determined to settle the cruiser rivalry for good. The races throughout the day provided thrill after thrill as first one and then the other drew ahead and at the close of the day we were faced with a four point deficit from Bermuda. The effect of this setback was alleviated by the Captain who broadcast a "pep" talk over the S.R.E. in the evening, and on the day of the Fleet Regatta our determination was even stronger than before. The first three races found Gambia first over the line and then the fight started as Bermuda realised that it wasn't such a sure thing after all. As the afternoon wore on hoarse and almost hysterical members of the ship's company urged their tattered larynxes to greater efforts and with the final result resting on the finish of the last race many preferred to hide their faces rather than suffer. The race over, the winners safely home, everyone went wild with joy with the announcement that Gambia and Bermuda had tied for the Cruiser Cock and Gambia had won the Fleet Cock outright. After 20 months of striving and planning the pinnacle had been achieved and as darkness swiftly set in, the huge and almost lifelike illuminated Cock on " B " Turret announced to all that H.M.S. Gambia was at last, well and truly " COCK OF THE FLEET "!

























Chapter _XII

"Full Circle ... "

Tuesday, September 14, 1954

ITH A BRIEF VISIT TO ST. FLORENTE and an even briefer call at Malta the last phase of the commission began. Crawling out of Grand Harbour at 1800 on Tuesday, September 14, after a few hours' leave for the local land lovers, the old lady sedately set course for Starigrad, arriving at 0900 the following Thursday.

On first viewing from the port and starboard waists Starigrad Bay seemed almost a replica of the Scottish coast-line. Thoughts of Scapa Flow and phrases of Rabby Burns filled the minds of those experienced in Scottish highland *flings*; though unlike Scapa the hills boasted of many red-roofed cottages, and most unlike Rabby Burns quite a few of the local inhabitants spoke English.

In the world of soccer a match was requested by the island team with the sad anti-climax of not enough local talent to attend; disappointment being dispelled by the island's open and generous hospitality. Open in so far that hands were freely invited to visit any person's home, and generous in so far that hands were allowed to freely sample the local wine direct from the traditional winter-store casks.

Two days later the old lady was on her way; her last call a landmark off the coast of Italy. A setting in which film stars, film directors, and writers oF second-rate guide books nostalgically call "Fabulous Venice."

For most, allowing for the smell of the canals and weary feet from the Ducal Palace visits, Venice became the last possible place where presents for those at home could be bought. Bargain hunters buying presents ranging from model gondolas to table sets of Venetian glass. (Not forgetting the enterprising firm of photographers who were selling, the same morning as we arrived, enlarged framed "photos" of the ship entering harbour.)

For those that had bought their presents elsewhere, Venice provided a hundred and one side-lines, the only disagreeable custom being the fee of three shillings and sixpence per cup of coffee; though visits to the glass factory, St. Mark's church, the square, and the many palaces along the Grand Canal's edge provided enough distraction from the costs of living.

At 1945, Tuesday September 28, the old lady once more made her way hack to Malta, entering Grand Harbour for the last time at 1100 on Friday, October 1. As prelude to the closing moments of the commission the management decreed a spring clean from top to bottom, giving little attention to the fact that autumn leaves were falling, and spring was far behind.

Ashore the final goodbyes were being said, with those few exceptions of wistful " au revoirs," where cries of " See you in England ", and " Be back in March! " stood as pointer signs of people's plans for the forthcoming year.

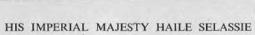
Six days later and the leading figure of *Gambia's* final phase touched down on Malta. His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie with his son the Duke of Harar, found for their approval a closely packed programme of official engagements, ranging from presentations in the state drawing-room of the Governor's Palace to a sight-seeing visit to St. Paul's Bay.

On Friday at exactly 0930 His Imperial Majesty embarked. Eight minutes later, wearing the Emperor's standard, and escorted by H.M.S. *Surprise*, the old lady stately steamed out of Grand Harbour: the shore batteries booming out a farewell Royal Salute. From that precise moment "Operations C.R.E.E." began, with the Mediterranean Fleet as the courtiers, and the old lady promoted to the rank of dowager duchess.

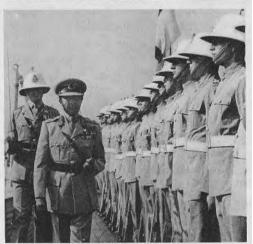
Following the dull thudding roar of shore batteries, jet aircraft of the Fleet Air Arm and Royal Australian Air Force flew past in formation as fanfare to the exercises that were to follow.

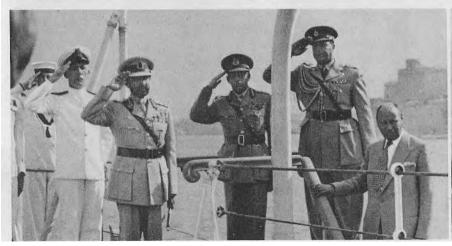
In quick succession six-inch throw-off firings, eight hundred yards ahead of *Gambia* were carried out by *Bermuda* and *Glasgow* — the eight hundred yards in the case of H.M.S. *Bermuda* reading eight hundred inches.













The *Duchess, Diana, Diamond,* and *Decoy* followed with demonstrations of squid firing and dummy torpedo attacks, while a little later on the port side, H.M. Submarines displayed the art and craft of diving in rough weather.

Not satisfied with the Daring Division using the old lady as a sitting target, the Board of Directors sent in H.M.S. *Chevron* firing dummy tinfish at an imaginary target a little ahead of the ship.

So by design each exercise cunningly out-classed its previous companion with *Centaur's* demonstration of catapult take-offs and landings by jet aircraft comparing favourably with the impressive ceremonial steam past. Yet of all the morning's programme, " The Gridiron " took pride of place.

The sight of eighteen ships in line ahead turning as one unit, and exchanging relative positions by a full speed dash, stood head and shoulders above the accompanying exercises. Like a pack of cards taken and shuffled with breath-taking precision, "The Gridiron" became accepted as the master's touch, the cadenza in the morning's orchestration of movements and manoeuvres.

At twelve-thirty His Excellency the Governor of Malta and the Commander-in-Chief were transferred to *Gambia* to take leave of His Imperial Majesty. A quarter of an hour later, with goodbyes said, and three cheers given to the C. in C., *Gambia* and *Glasgow* parted. At that very moment the hands. mustered on the fo'c's'le broke into song, and as the words of " How Happy Us Will Be" swelled up to its climax as *Glasgow* turned back to Malta, and *Gambia* pulled away, homeward bound with forty-two days' leave just hovering on the horizon: near, but not quite within working grasp.

Ploughing her way through sea that at times proved upsetting to the land-lover's stomachs, the old lady reached Portsmouth early on the morning of the fourteenth, entering harbour at 0722. At noon, after a fly past by three flights of Shackletons from Coastal Command R.A.F., His Royal Highness the Duke of Gloucester embarked as the Queen's deputy, offering England's first words of welcome for the

Emperor's state visit. A few minutes later *Gambia's* part in the historic occasion was at an end, as the Emperor and the Duke of Harar disembarked with their suite.

Spending the rest of the day in the hands of the Customs officials the old lady managed finally to escape their clutches early in the evening, steaming out of the Spithead area at 1730, almost with a sigh of relief: the Customs having been fair, and in their own peculiar way *generous!*

With only one night left the last hours slowly dragged themselves into the past tense, as minds dreamt their dreams of home, and all the moments of pleasure a long-awaited reunion can give.

Of the ship, little thought was given, except that curious desire to see the back of it as quick as feet could carry their owners across the wooden gangway that led to Devon's solid soil.

Eighteen hours later the dreams became fact as at 1308, with her paying-off pennant flapping and her decks fully manned, *Gambia* entered harbour, securing alongside *Vanguard*.

By 1400 below decks were packed with wives and sweethearts, parents and children. Lines of resignation became lines of welcome, for although life on board had become a web of mingled yarn, good and ill together, the fact of being finally home sliced the last strands of unity that two years had built.

The sad truth that after the greetings must come the goodbyes, that other ships were waiting for their proportionate share of human cargo, such realities stayed in the hearts of the families that had waited two years for the old lady's present commission to end.

"The wheel is come full circle"

The prelude, toccata, and fugue of two years were finally orchestrated, leaving only the final chords of a refit to bind the ship ready for future service. The wheel must go on. Two years are but two notes in the theme and history of the British Navy. Nelson is gone, but " This Imperial Theme " lives on for ever.

H.M.



Officers and Ratings who served in H.M.S. Gambia during the Commission 1952-1954

Officers

Captain P. W. Gretton, O.B.E., D.S.O., ** D.S.C. Captain W. Evershed, D.S.O., Commander P. G. Sharp, D.S.C.

Commander J. Lee, D.S.C.**

Commander (E) J. K. Mc.A. Tod Commander (S) W. R. Tinniswood

Commander (S) H. J. Trythall Surg. Commander G. H. Critien

Commander (L) T. B. D. Penfold Lieut. Cdr. N. D. Cornwall

Lieut, Cdr. D. K. L. Learmount, D.S.C.*

Lieut. Cdr. H. G. Grace

Lieut. Cdr. The Hon. David Seely

Lieut, Cdr. A. G. Johnson

Lieut, Cdr. R. Panter Lieut. Cdr. (E) W. Tolfree

Lieut. Cdr. (L) G. Bridle, M.B.E.

Lieut. Cdr. (S) D. S. Wyatt

Lieut. Cdr. (S) J. S. Anderson

The Rev. B. A. O'Ferrall

Captain G. C. Clemson, R.M.

Inst. Lt. Cdr. J. Lynas-Gray

Inst. Lt. Cdr. A. J. McMillan

Inst. Lt. P. D. G. Miller

Lt. J. G. de B. Colpoys

Lt. K. B. Barton

Lt. P. Dallasso

Lt. B. Maitland Lt. Mc Glashan

Lt. (S) T. Roberts

Lt. (S) J. Williams

Lt. (E) D. H. Lang

Lt. (E) D. B. M. Mathews

Lt. (E) Ashmole

Lt. (E) J. E. Cox Lt. (E) W. Rumsey

Lt. A. W. Hoyle, R.N.V.R.

Surg. Lt. (D) C. J. Hall

Surg. Lt. (D) A. A. Davies

Mr. R. J. Mullins, S.C.E.O.

Mr. E. E. Sims, S.C.E.O.

Mr. G. Potter, S.C.Gnr.

Mr. T. Brown, S.C.Gnr. Mr. R. Cawley, S.C.Gnr.

Mr. M. Searle, S.C.Gnr.

Mr. A. E. C. Best, S.C.C.O.

Mr. D. M. Mills, C.C.O.

Mr. W. H. Yates, Cd. Mech.

- Mr. F. G. Stoker, Cd. Mech ENG -

Mr. R. West, Cd. Mech ENG.

Mr. R. Burton, S.Cd.O.E.

Mr. N. A. C. Hughes, Cd.O.E.

Mr. F. C. Wilson, Shipt.

Lt. P. Johnson, R.M.

S/Lt. Gillard, R.N.V.R.

S/Lt. (E) Fernando, R.Cv.N.

S/Lt. (E) MacIntosh, R.N.V.R.

S/Lt. (E) Hussain, R.P.N.

S/Lt. (E) Furrokh, R.P.N.

The Gunroom

S/Lt. Thomas

S/Lt. Cole

S/Lt. Spraggue

S/Lt. Hazelton

S/Lt. Crutchley

S/Lt. Green

S/Lt. Shaw

S/Lt. (E) Cryer

S/Lt. (E) Mellow

S/Lt. (L) Hall

Mid. Brennand

Mid. Everard

Mid. Hilken

Mid Forsey Mid. Grattan Mid. Lea
Mid. Grenier
Mid. Launder
Mid. Read
Mid. Jackson
Mid. Mohindra
Mid. Bhandari
Mid. Durrant
Mid. Fitzroy
Mid. Wray
Mid. Courtis
Mid. Drinkwater
Mid. Prakash
Mid. Satija
Mid. Singh

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Ltdg Ck. Hayward
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Cook Thomas
Wtr. Eagin
Cook Willott
Cook Latham
S.A. Fogarty
S.A. Hancock
S.A. Hinde
S.A. Waites
S.A. Fitz
Wtr. Milkins
S.A. Lowther

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| A4(44) | L.S.M. Marsland | S.M. Williamson | S.M. Crute |
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| | L.S.M. Howells | S.M. Curry | S.M. McIntyre |
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| C.P.O.S.M. Perks | L.S.M. Ogley | S.M. Lee | S.M. Fowler |
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| | L.S.M. Leaper | S.M. McFadyean | Cpl. Cooper |
| P.O.S.M. Brown | L.S.M. Johnson | S.M. Hutchinson | Cpl. Ketley |
| P.O.S.M. Jack | L.S.M. Cresswell | S.M. Newman | Cpl. Figgins |
| P.O.S.M. Jarvie | L.S.M. Upton | S.M. Hocking | Cpl. Marsh |
| P.O.S.M. Wheddon | L.S.M. Rawlings | S.M. Sidaway | Cpl. Toms |
| P.O.S.M. Gilbert | Diomi. Rammbo | | 200 |

| Cpl. Wheway | Mne. Constable | | Mne. Lovett | Mne. Smith |
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| Mne. Bartley | Mne. Crittenden | | Mne. Martin | Mne. Thomas |
| Mne. Boud | Mne. Darlison | + 1 | Mne. Middleton | Mne. Thompson |
| Mne. Boulstridge | Mne. Grieve | 3.0 | Mne. Palmer | Mne. Towell |
| Mne. Brewster | Mne. Griffiths | | Mne. Parsons | Mne. Taylor |
| Mne. Bryce | Mne. Gunstone | | Mne. Ringer | Mne. Waters |
| Mne. Burnell | Mne. Hayter | | Mne. Ronayne | Mne. Widdowson |
| Mne. Callow | Mne. Henly | | Mne. Rowson | Mne. Whitehead |
| Mne. Calvert | Mne. Hough | | Mne. Savage | Bug. Walton |
| Mne. Campbell | Mne. Howard | | Mne. Silver | Bug. Henderson |
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