

INDIA'S NEWEST - AND BEST SHIP

The Royal Indian Navy's newest vessel, H.M.I.S. GODAVARI, one of the latest type sloops, was recently commissioned at the south coast yard where she was built.

The ship's company, consisting exclusively of Indians, have been in this country for some months engaged in training courses ashore. They joined the ship from their depots on the morning of the day of commissioning.

Soon after lunch they cleared lower deck for the simple ceremony. Signalmen hoisted the White Ensign at the peak as attention was piped and officers came to the salute. At the same moment the Yeoman of Signals unfurled the commissioning pendant at the masthead, from which it will not be moved until the ship pays off.

The crew were then addressed by their Captain (Commander J.W. Jefford, O.B.E., R.I.N.) first in Urdu and then in English. He told them they had just commissioned India's "newest and best ship" and that he wanted it to be "a happy and efficient ship". "You cannot have one without the other" he said.

"I want you to realise that this ship has been built for one reason only - to fight", he continued. "She is a well-armed and well equipped ship. For our size there are none better, but none of this will be the slightest use to us until we can use it to the best advantage. We have got to do this quickly, as we are at war and shall not be given much time to settle down. So we have got to work as a team and work damned hard. I want you to make GODAVARI a ship in which anybody would be proud to serve".

Although the ship's company contains a large proportion of Ratnagiris and Punjabis, India's chief seafaring races, there are seamen, stokers and communication ratings from every part of India. Before they enter the Navy they are told that all racial and caste differences must be forgotten at sea, and in all R.I.N. ships this is done successfully and efficiently. Complete freedom for religious observance is given, and the many Mohammedans on board usually spread their prayer mats in the direction of Mecca on the forecastle three times a day.

There are many Indian officers in the R.I.N., but the GODAVARI, having been commissioned in this country, has, at present, a high proportion of European officers. Two, however, are Indians.

The Navigator, Lieut, P.S. Mahindroo, R.I.N.R. is a Sikh from Amritsar in the Punjab and is one of the few officers in the Navy wearing the turban. There is also one Sikh rating in the ship's company.

The other Indian member of the wardroom is the doctor, Lieut. Privthviraj Sondhi, I.M.S., who has recently qualified at Guy's Hospital, London. Although a native of India, he has spent very little time there.

Commander Jefford was formerly Staff Officer, Operations, at R.I.N. Headquarters, Delhi, and before that commander H.M.I.S. INDUS. His home is now at Weymouth, but he has spent most of his service career in India.

The GODAVARI, like all Indian sloops, is named after a native river - one of the longest in India, which rises in the hills north of Bombay and flows right across India entering the Bay of Bengal in the Madras Province.