

FLEET REVIEW 1953 & A STORY ABOUT UNIFORMS

By Geoffery Dunster OW 51-53

Added info by me (Colin) in italics

In the summer of 1953 - my last term on the "Worcester" - it was announced that the whole ship's company would be joining one of HM Ships for a week or so for the duration of the Coronation Fleet review. One of the ships concerned were commanded by an OW.

In parties of 30 or 50 we joined ships at either Chatham or Portsmouth. Each party was in charge of a Worcester staff member - mine was under "Bags" Mulhall...most knew him as a member of the teaching staff but he appeared resplendent in a brand new uniform as a Commander RNR; quite a change from his normal "relaxed" mode of dress!



Our party was due to join HMS "Conquest" - a wartime-built destroyer - in Portsmouth. We travelled by train from Greenhithe to Waterloo East station then proceeded across the station to the main line section each clasping our hammock & suitcase...what a strange sight we must have been! I recall two RN ratings on the platform wondering whether they should salute

us - we were all wearing our Burberrys so no rank badge was visible. Happily Commander Mulhall acknowledged their greeting as his brass hat left no room for confusion!

On reaching our ship we found she had just emerged from a lengthy refit and to say the least was filthy & scruffy. Cadet power was employed to rectify the situation and we set to with scrubber and paintbrush which soon brought her up to "Worcester" standards but there were no wooden decks just rather rusty steel.

We had been allocated one messdeck for our accommodation and it had apparently been assumed we were familiar with the "Broadside" system of catering - this entailed two members of each mess preparing our meals with supplies from the Canteen which were then cooked by the professionals in the galley. Clearly this would have produced alarming results using "cadet power" so two elderly (by our standards!) ABs were allocated to us acting as catering "Seadaddies". They clearly knew how to work the system to best advantage - we had a cash allowance per man per diem for stores - which sometimes produced a cash divi. In the event, the system worked well with us though perhaps



Ships Crew on board HMS Conquest



the two Pakistani cadets in our party found the prevalent of bacon and pork not to their taste.

After a day or two of cleaning and painting we were moved to the northern part of the harbour to "ammunition ship" from the lighters in the Danger Area. We formed a human chain passing 4.5" shells from hand to hand along the deck to the magazine. I can recall the words of the ship's gunner to this day "These things are not dangerous unless you forget that they can be!"

We tried to keep this fact in mind as we passed the endless batch of projectiles along a human chain with each one seeming to get heavier and heavier.

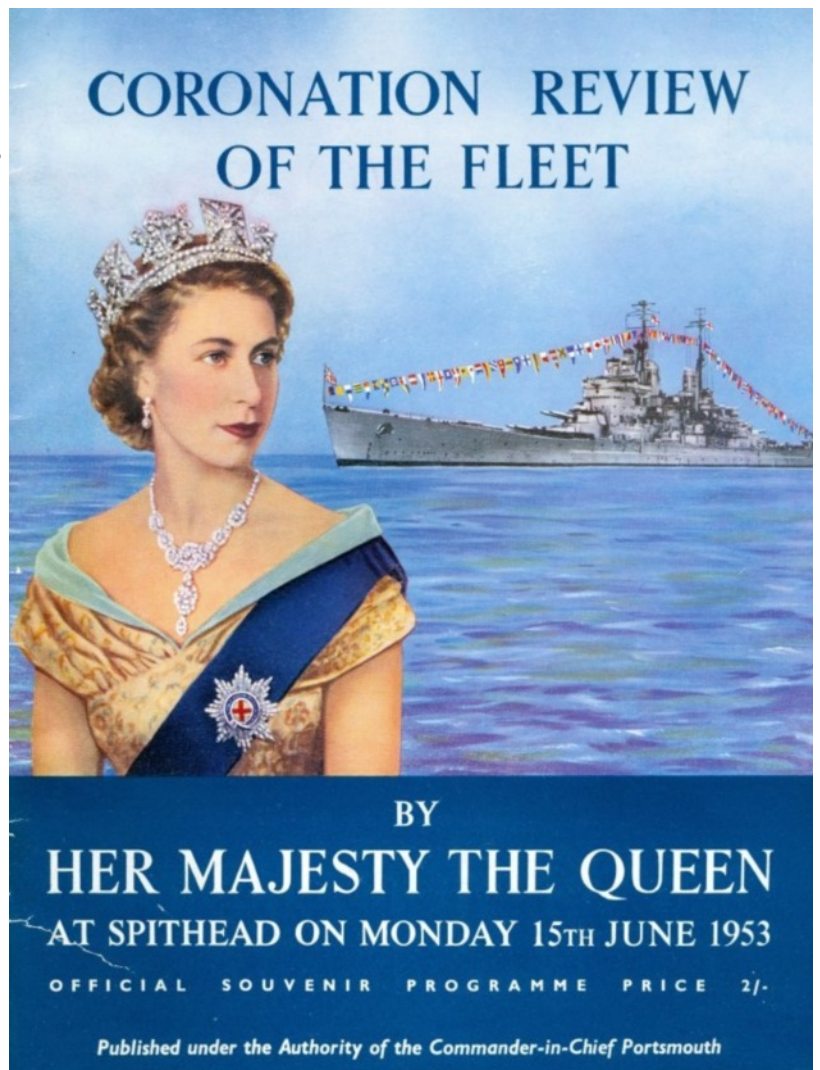
We then had a day at sea on full power trials south of the Isle of Wight - quite exciting particularly when cadets took over the steering at around 30 knots. We also witnessed gunnery trials with both the 4.5 inch and Bofors guns - happily a blind eye was turned to the souvenir hunters as the empty cases were collected up.

We returned direct to our Fleet Review anchorage where we stayed for several days. There were several hundred ships packed in to the Shiphead anchorage for the event....British and foreign warships also several merchant vessels.

<http://www.historicalfirearms.info/post/53037352137/coronation-naval-review-1953-60-years-ago-today>
<http://www.britishpathe.com/video/spithead-review-1953>

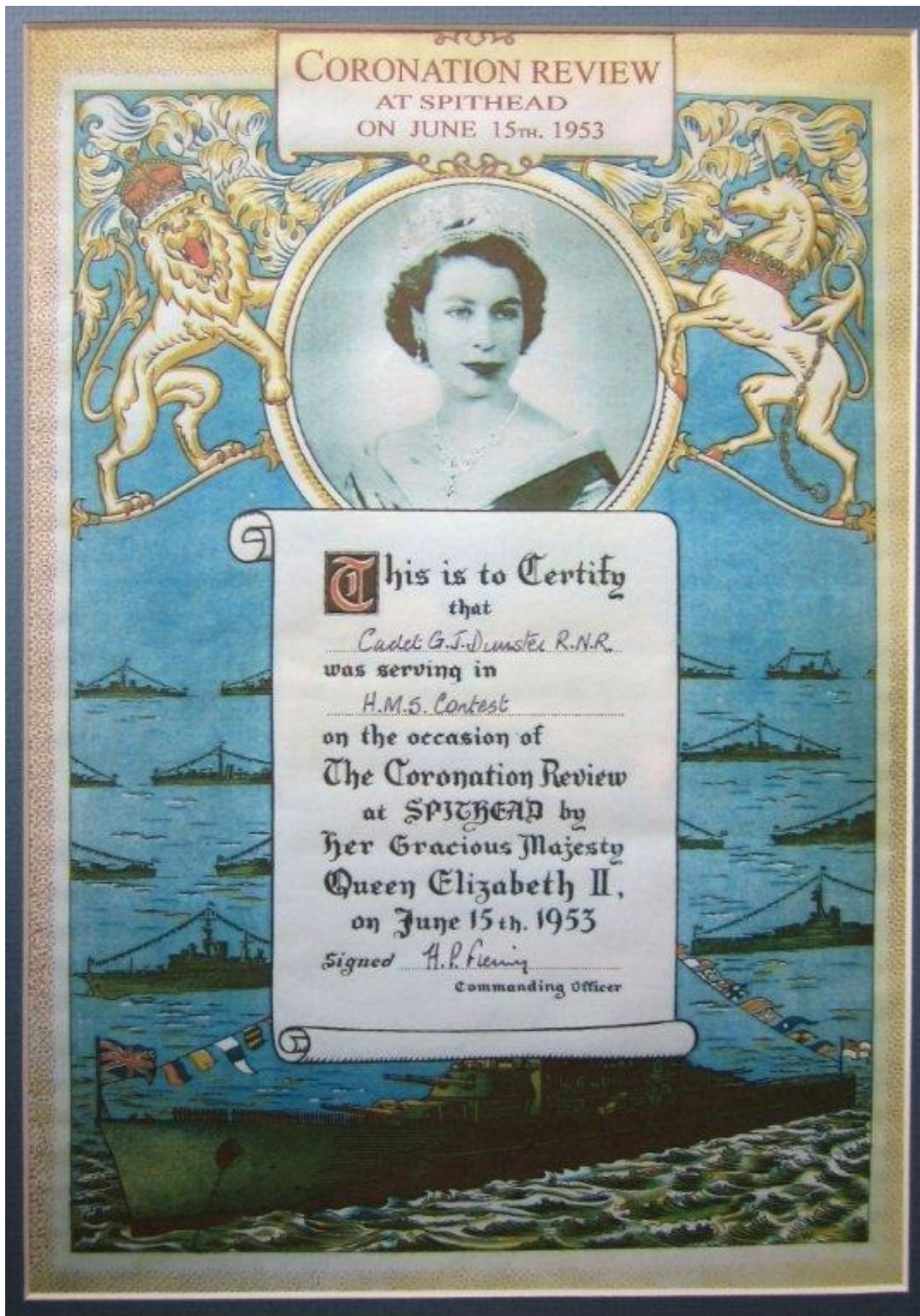
A final burst of cleaning and polishing on Review Day had our ship looking spic and span and - smartly turned out in our No. 1s - we manned the sides as the Royal party went past in the despatch vessel HMS Surprise and cheered appropriately. Sadly the day was somewhat marred by the bemedalled Commander Mulhall falling down a companionway snapping his sword in the process!

The day ended with a spectacular firework display verging on the dangerous as scores of rocket sticks the size of broomsticks cascaded down on us - we were removed down below until the danger was past!



After the event, we retraced our steps to Greenhithe with many memories of a unique occasion and we all received a handsome certificate confirming our attendance. Mine is hanging on my study wall as I write - a treasured souvenir of a unique occasion.

There is also an article by Colin Steere of his memories of the Fleet review in the Jan 2014 Dog Watch starting on page 21.



UNIFORMS

You must give me the name of your tailor!

The “Worcester was no exception when our uniform followed the changing fashions. When I joined the Ship at the end of 1951 the old RNR & RNVR had just been combined and cadets had to change their collar “badges” from blue to white twists following Admiralty dictates for the uniform of “Naval Cadets, RNR”. In addition a new design of brass button was introduced for RNR personnel.

Staff members had their own design of “Worcester” cap badge with special brass buttons to match and non-British cadets also used this insignia. On Sunday mornings the senior members of the staff appeared in frock coats! However, the demise of King George VI at the start of 1952 heralded many changes.....The day after the announcement of the King's demise the representative of SW Silver made an unscheduled visit to the Ship clutching a large carton. This turned out to contain scores of "Mourning Bands" which cadets had to wear on our No. 1 Uniforms. They were clearly produced at the rush & were a band of "doeskin cloth" but each came complete with two safety pins! The officers were provided with a somewhat superior version. Needless to say when the period of three month Court Mourning ended they were discarded - but were very useful for shoe polishing

Any item that incorporated the Royal Crown had to be changed from the “Kings Crown” to the “Queens Crown” - this applied to both cap badges & brass buttons. Happily, it was announced that the older designs could be used until “no longer serviceable”; I took this perhaps a little to literally as I was still using my “Worcester” vintage cap badge on RNR duties in the 1990s!

There were radical changes on the quarterdeck starting in 1952. Captain Steele was appointed a Honorary Captain RNR and from that time always wore the appropriate uniform of that rank. Cornel Donner (OW) became Chief Officer and continued to wear “Worcester” uniform but three ex-RN staff joined (Knight, Mann & Steere- the latter two both OWs) who were Lt.Cdr, Lt, & Sub-Lt respectively all of whom wore their RN uniform. There was also a brief engagement of a RN Commander whose name now escapes me whose stay on the staff was mercifully brief!



Captain Steel



Sadly, the frock coats appeared no more!
G.J.Dunster 51-53

PS After living in a box in my loft for many years the last uniform made for me under the “Worcester”/SW Silver contract is still in service with the Guernsey Sea Cadet unit - due to their “offshore” status their staff do not get the normal MoD issue. Despite being over sixty years old - and having survived many changes of lace & buttons - it is still looks good on the 1st Lieutenant!