



Fig 3

VII

Warrant Officer
1787-1807

VIII

Midshipman
1787-1795

VII. Warrant Officer, 1787-1807

At the end of the eighteenth century, the officers of the Royal Navy were divided into two categories which could be loosely described as military and civil, or fighting and administrative. The military officers, who comprised flag officers, captains, commanders and lieutenants, held their positions by authority from the sovereign in the form of a commission; they were in fact 'commissioned officers'. The remainder, with the exception of midshipmen (see plate VIII), were appointed by a warrant from one of the departments of the Admiralty, to supervise certain specialised fields; these were 'warrant officers'.

First among them was the master, appointed by the Navy Board. He was responsible for the technical side of sailing a ship on the course selected by its captain, and for instructing the junior officers in navigation. Next came the surgeon, appointed by the Sick and Hurt office, whose duties and position are discussed more fully under plate XV. Then came the purser, appointed by the Victualling Office, who was responsible for looking after the ship's stores and matters of food and pay. The master, the surgeon and the purser were all three 'warrant officers of wardroom rank', that is to say officers, but not quite gentlemen. They all had appropriate assistants who were classed together as 'master's mates'.

The order of November 17 1787, for the first time, laid down a uniform for warrant officers and master's mates. Warrant officers were to have a *'Blue Cloth Coat, with Blue Lappets and round Cuffs; fall-down Collar; Three Buttons to the Pocket and Cuff; White Lining but not edged with White; Button with an Anchor, same as the Captains' former one [fig. 5]:—White Cloth Waistcoat and Breeches.'*

The uniform for master's mates was slightly less civilian in character; it was to consist of a

'Blue Cloth Coat, edged with White; no lappets; Blue round Cuff with Three Buttons, and Three to the Pocket; fall-down Collar; White Lining; Buttons same as Warrant Officers:—White Waistcoat and Breeches.'

In the accompanying plate the warrant officer is wearing a plain cocked hat, and the usual lung-skirted waistcoat and white breeches. His sword is of very simple design and of a type frequently worn when there was any serious prospect of a fight. The hilt is similar to the hangers worn by grenadiers in the Army, but the blade is straight instead of being curved.

In 1805 surgeons were made equal in rank to their counterparts in the Army, and were given a special uniform, and in 1807 masters and pursers were given a full dress and special buttons. The dress coat had a stand-up collar with a button and hole, and had buttons bearing the device of the Navy Board for masters (fig. 6), and with that of the Victualling Office for pursers (fig. 7). The old coat was retained as an undress to be worn with blue or white breeches and, according to the contemporary tailors' pattern book of the firm of Welch & Stalker, blue single breasted waistcoats on occasions. New buttons were worn with this coat as described above.

The old coat with the old buttons (fig. 5) was now to be worn by gunners, boatswains and carpenters, but the 'subordinate classes of warrant officers' continued to wear the old master's mates uniform, but with a stand-up collar with a button and hole. In 1812 crowns were added to all the buttons mentioned above.

VIII. Midshipman, 1787-1795

Midshipmen came into neither of the two categories discussed in the last note. In theory they were not officers at all, but 'young gentlemen', sometimes of incredibly tender years, who were placed by their parents or guardians under the wing of some naval captain of their acquaintance to learn the profession. This was in practice the only way of eventually qualifying for a commission. Although junior to the master's mates with whom they shared the gunroom, they were treated as officers in that they were given small commands like a group of guns, or one of the ship's boats. Their title derives from the fact that their berth was originally amidships on the gun decks, where they were always at hand to carry messages or assist with the distribution of ammunition.

The regulations of 1787 seem to have retained without change the uniform which had been worn by midshipmen for some years previously, namely a 'Blue Cloth Coat, no lapels, Blue round Cuff, with Three Buttons, and Three to the Pocket; stand-up Collar, with small White Turnback as before; White Lining but not edged; Buttons same as Warrant Officers:—White Cloth Waistcoat and Breeches.'

The white turnback was a feature of the first midshipman's uniform of 1748, and was originally part of the blue collar buttoned back to reveal the white velvet lining. By 1787, it had become a patch of white cloth sewn on to the collar, with

a button and a hole, worked in blue thread, almost identical to the patch worn by midshipmen at the present time. The buttons seem in practice to have been very much smaller than those worn by warrant officers (fig. 8).

Prints of midshipmen by Dominic Serres and Rowlandson, dated 1777 and 1799 respectively, show cocked hats being worn 'athwartships', as in the accompanying plate, although 'round hats'—or as we should call them top hats—are mentioned in a list of items in a midshipman's wardrobe as early as 1780. Other contemporary pictures, notably Edridge's drawing of Midshipman Charles Adam, dated 1795, show hair worn very long and flowing over the ears.

Mather Brown's painting of the deck of the *Queen Charlotte* shows a midshipman wearing a coat as described above. The rest of his costume consists of a short double-breasted waistcoat, and loose white trousers with the front flap fastened with large regulation buttons. Under his left arm he carries a large telescope, and on his left side hangs an ivory-hilted dirk with an escutcheon bearing an anchor. This would appear to be a semi-official pattern dirk based on the '5-ball' sword. In the accompanying plate we have shown the dirk worn from a black leather shoulder belt, with an oval gilt plate bearing an anchor. These plates, which went out of use about 1805, were unofficial, and sometimes had the fouled anchor on them and sometimes some special badge connected with a particular ship.



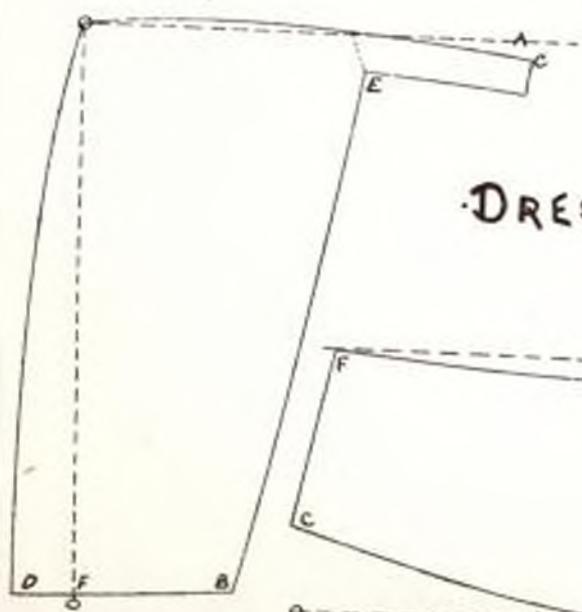
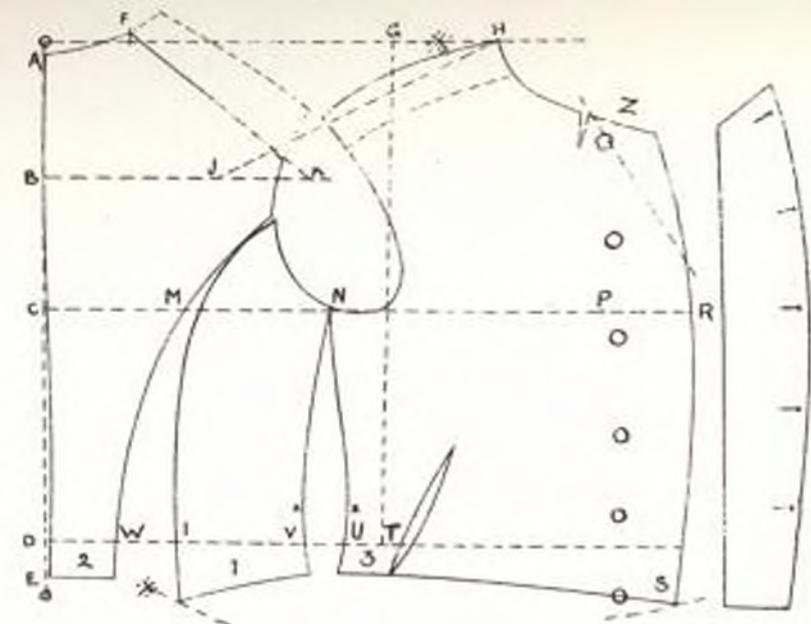
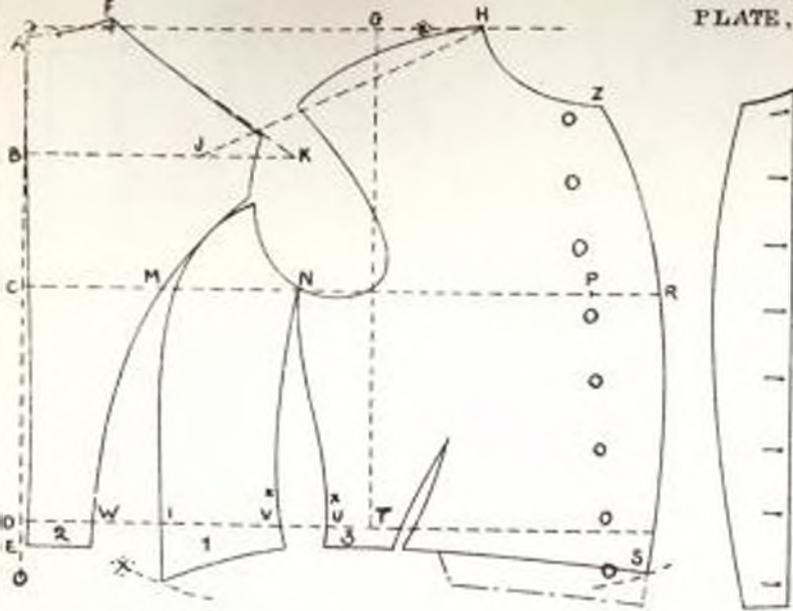
Fig. 6



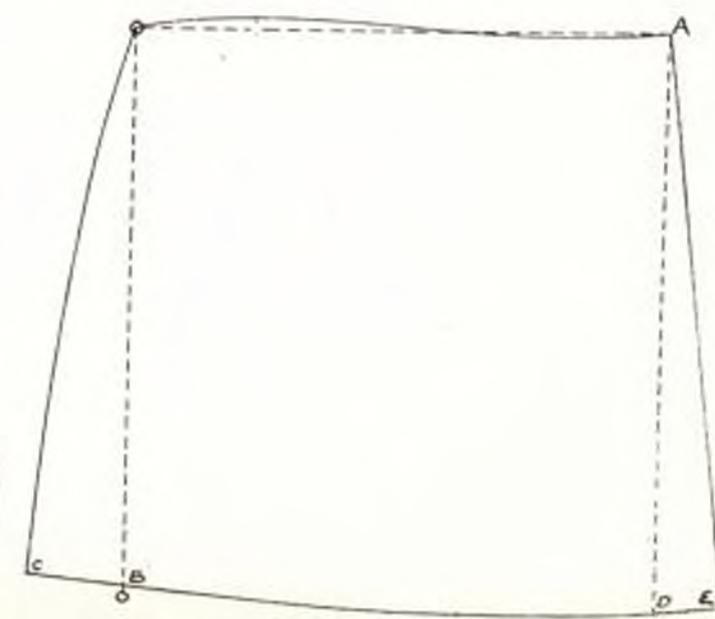
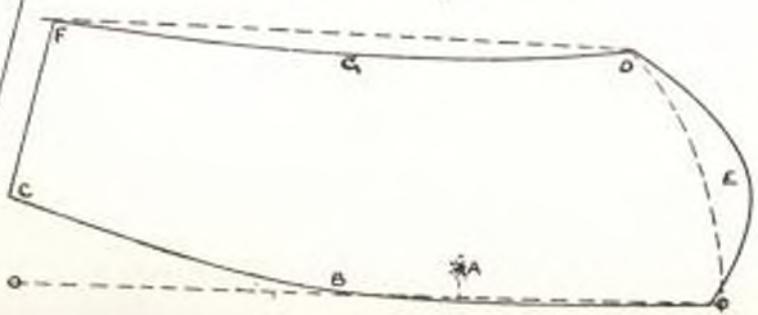
Fig. 7



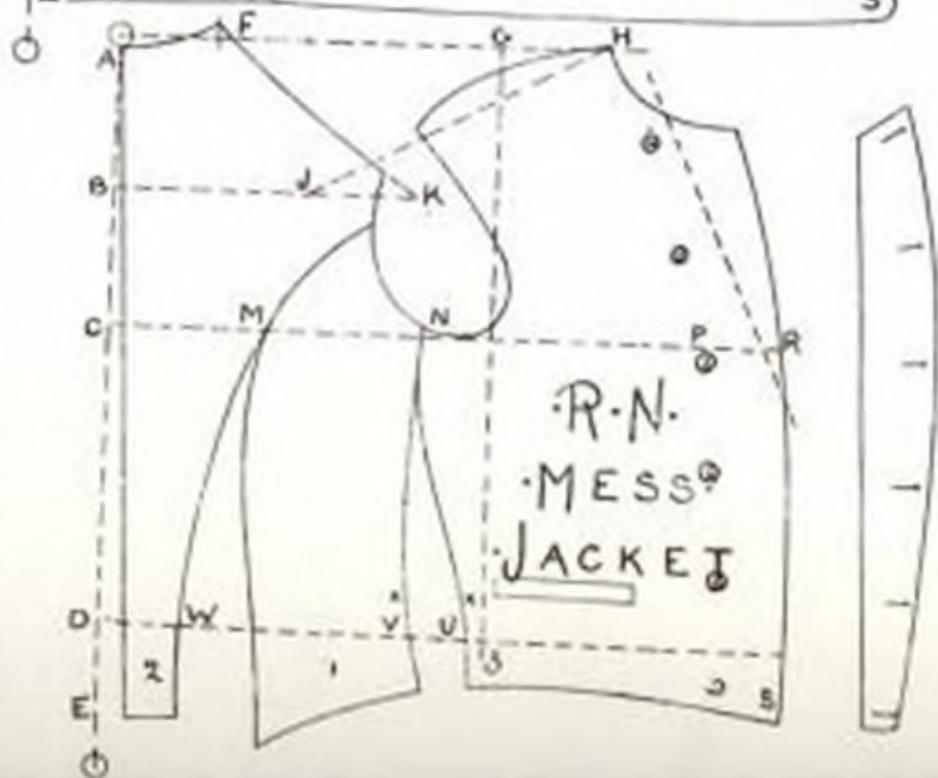
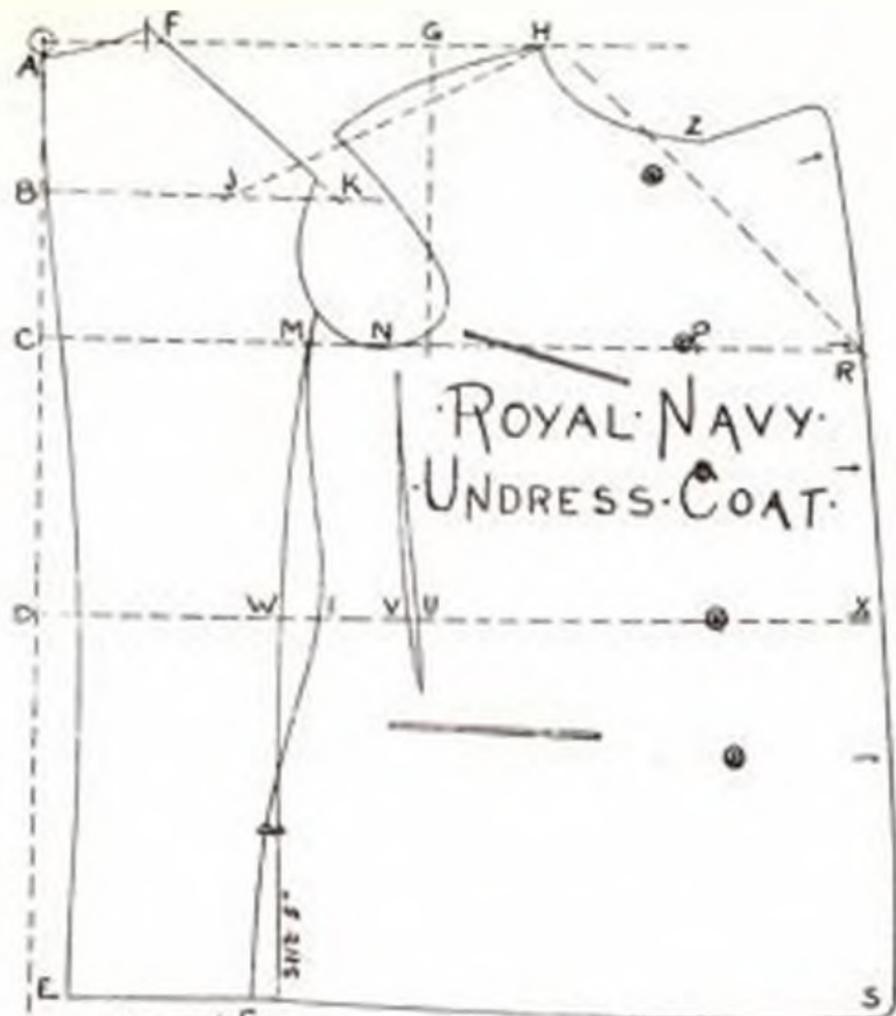
Fig. 8



ROYAL NAVY.
 DRESS & FROCK COAT.
 SYSTEM.

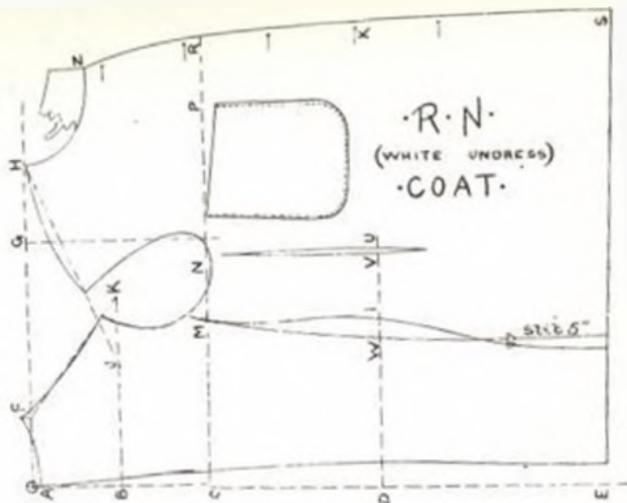
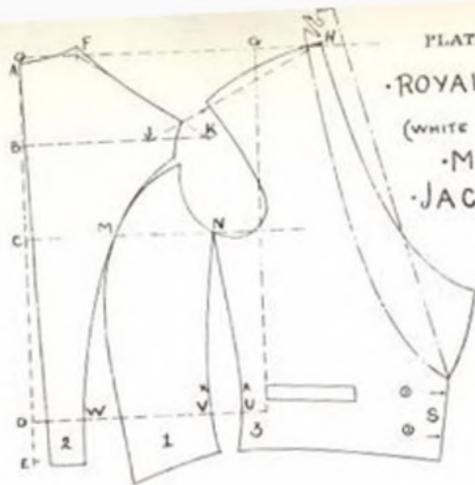




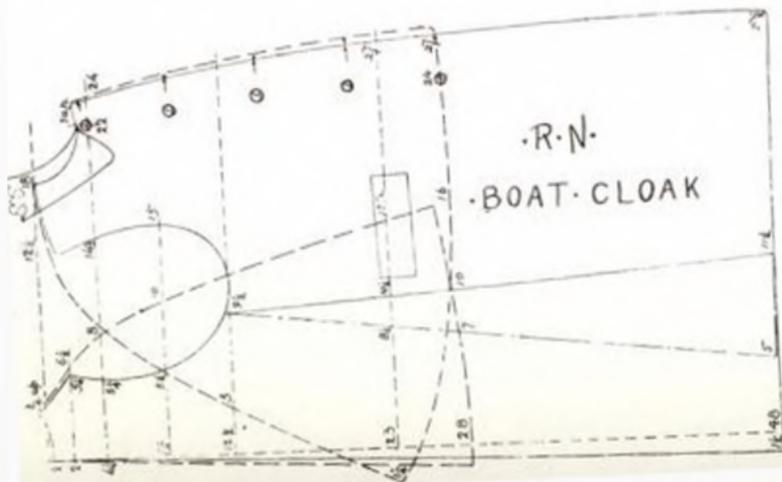


PLATE, LXXV

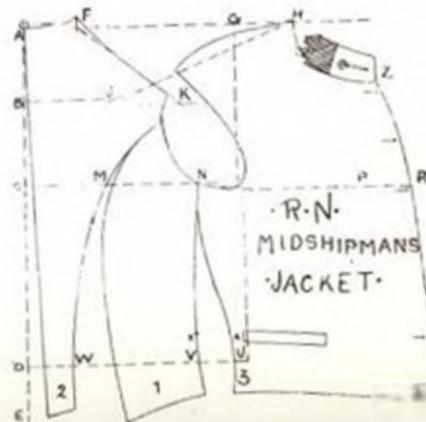
·ROYAL·NAVY·
(WHITE UNDRSS)
·MESS·
·JACKET·

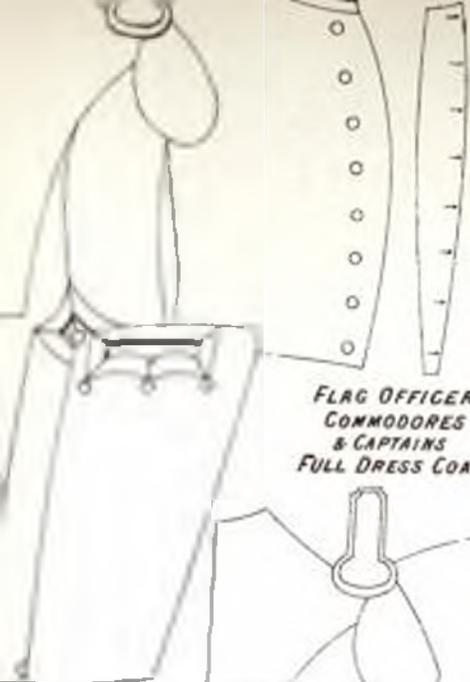


·R.N.
·BOAT·CLOAK



·R.N.
MIDSHIPMANS
·JACKET·

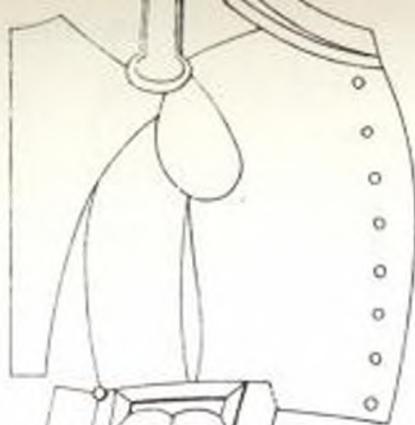




**FLAG OFFICERS
COMMODORES
& CAPTAINS
FULL DRESS COAT.**



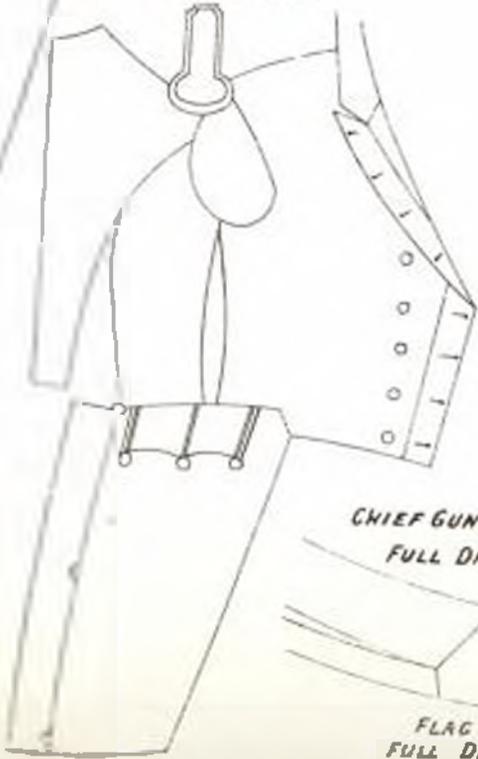
**MIDSHIPMANS
COLLAR**



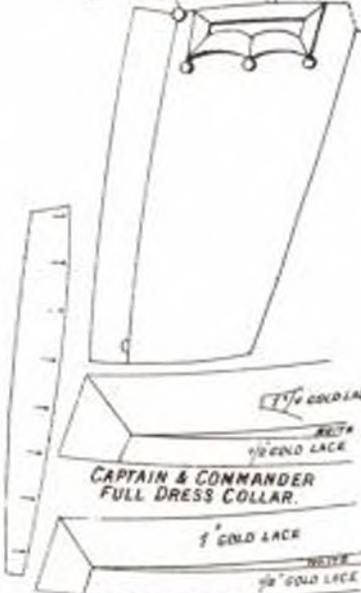
**COMMANDERS
&
LIEUTENANTS
FULL DRESS COAT.**



CADETS COLLAR



**CHIEF GUNNERS
FULL DRESS COAT.**



**CAPTAIN & COMMANDER
FULL DRESS COLLAR.**

1 1/2" GOLD LACE
WHITE

**LIEUTENANTS & SUB-LIEUTENANTS
FULL DRESS COLLAR.**

1" GOLD LACE
WHITE



**UNDRESS COAT
FOR ALL RANKS.**



**FLAG OFFICERS
FULL DRESS COLLAR**

1 1/2" GOLD LACE
WHITE