

The Last Glorious Day - Naval Review, 1940

(By Tadatoshi Yokoi, *Ships of the World Magazine*, No. 40, December 1960. Translated by Bill Somerville)

I remember these days twenty years before my visit to the inspection warship Kinryu Maru. In those days this vessel had been commandeered by the navy as a high-speed auxiliary. Its original owners were the Kokusai Kisen Company, it had been completed in August, 1938 as a high-speed freighter, 9,309 tons, 19 knots at Kobe by Kawasaki Heavy Industries. In December, 1941, at the beginning of the war it was serving as an auxiliary cruiser, a member of the Inner South Seas Squadron attached to the 4th Fleet. At that time Kinryu Maru participated in the Wake Island landing operation.

Having been invited to join the Kinryu Maru, I took a notebook along, at this time and later I filled many pages with details and have every confidence in their accuracy. At 0430 on the 11th of October, 1940 I rose in a darkened house and made preparations for the day, at 0630 I arrived at Yokohama station. On the plaza in front of the station there was an imposing arch consisting of brilliant and gaudy warship flags, the colours white and red predominated. I was immediately put in the mood for a great naval occasion after noticing the festive bunting and flags, which flew from every vantage point. Making my way with the throng, I shortly arrived at the Yamashita Wharf. Near a huge crimson navy flag, a naval band was playing the lively Pacific March, nearby was a guard force battalion provided by the Yokosuka Navy Yard. I gazed at the above for a while, then above a storehouse on the wharf suddenly I noticed two large tripod masts towering into the sky, from one an admiral's flag loosely flapped in the morning breeze. Undoubtedly these were the submarine depot ships Chogei and Jingei.

These days, what memories are brought back to me. The pleasant smells borne on the morning sea breeze, the excited throng of people and the two majestic warships tied-up along the wharf. To my right were Chogei and Jingei, to my left was the repair ship Akashi and Kinryu Maru, four warships, all of them this day beginning to embark the invited witnesses to the grand ceremony.

As I hurried up the gangway of my ship, Kinryu Maru, the strange and gallant figure of the newly built Akashi was very conspicuous. The prospects looked good for me as I made my way to the boat deck on the portside. Kinryu Maru's funnel was still in the colours of her owners, the Kokusai Kisen Company, jet-black with white bands, the latter encompassing a figure like a Romanji "A." I studied nearby Akashi, on her enormous hull, forward and rear were twin high-angle 12.7cm guns, also she sported overlapping large and small cranes; she had the appearance of a floating naval arsenal. At 0740 aided by a tug, Kinryu Maru left the wharf, soon she quietly advanced her diesel engines throbbing, by now because of the movement and low noises I was unable to conceal my excitement. I transferred my attention rearward, Akashi was following with a white wave at her bow, she was followed by Chogei and Jingei, the ships formed one splendid line.

The weather was gloriously bright with a morning mist hugging the sea, the air clear with an autumnal invigorating tang; the blue-grey warship's hulls dazzled the eye. The four warships quietly advanced into the Yokohama Sea, suddenly the mist began to lift and the majestic Combined Fleet began to come into vision. Firstly close at hand in repose was one great warship, three times Royal Review ship with the honour bestowed of carrying His Majesty, the battleship Hiei. It had undergone a great reconstruction. Beyond her other shapes came into view one after another, notably Nagato, Mutsu, Akagi, Hiryu and so forth representing a group of huge warships.

Soon Kinryu Maru reached her prescribed anchoring position, K position in the outer row. For the first time I noticed the brand-new auxiliary Soya (in these days Soya again and again has accomplished surveys in every direction in the South Polar region), I supposed this ship to be the first of a class to be built. Then the fleet tankers Shiriya and Hayatomo with their characteristic long large hulls arrived at their prescribed places, they also carried many spectators. At their sterns were the familiar mid-ocean refueling equipment.

As the mist continued to clear I observed an unbroken sweep of warships dominating the sea into the distance. In the adjacent row were newly built submarines of the I-7 class, these and others nearby formed a line of streamlined steel whales, their hulls now sparkling in the sunshine. Their conning towers bearing a vivid white painted name, with overhead a conspicuous crimson warship's flag.

To the left Mizuho, Soryu, Hiryu and Akagi composed a huge aircraft-carrier group; behind them (in the third row) were heavy-cruisers of the Mogami and Tone classes. Further back were rows four and five, warship shapes overlapping and stretching in the haze to the horizon. However, I mainly gazed at the second row's huge battleships, drinking in every detail.

At 0900 the train with the Emperor and his attendants arrived at the Yokohama harbour station. His Majesty along with other dignitaries then disembarked. Among them were Yasumasa Matsudaira (household minister), Marquis Koichi Kido (the lord privy seal), Admiral Saburo Hyakutake (the grand chamberlain), Shigeru Hasunuma (the Emperor's chief aide-de-camp), Prince Hiroyasu Fushimi (chief of staff of the Imperial Japanese Navy), Koshira Oikawa (navy minister), and Admiral Koichi Shiozawa (commander of the Yokosuka Naval District.) They were welcomed by the commander-in-chief of the Combined Fleet, Vice Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, he was the naval review commander of the day. They all proceeded to the royal pier at Yokohama Harbour and boarded the royal launch.

At this time, the attendant warships Takao, Kako and Furutaka as well as the royal warship Hiei began firing a 21-gun salute. With gunfire flashes between, white smoke billowed out from each and the sound echoed across the sea. Meanwhile, all hands on the nearby submarine group straightened up and came to attention. Soon the launch reached the harbour's outskirts, there His Majesty boarded Hiei, here Prince Takamatsu (at the time the gunnery chief) introduced the members of the royal family to the important personages onboard, some, including the navy minister Koshira Oikawa were given the privilege of a brief audience with the Emperor. At 0940 Hiei separated from her buoy, again 21-gun salutes sounded forth and white smoke billowed out into the autumn sky.

Meanwhile, from about 0930, one by one the attendant warships had left the anchorage, now they joined Hiei as she approached, the former then smoothly slid into their allotted positions. Leading warship: Takao (under the command of Captain Kengo Kobayashi) with the commander of the 2nd Fleet, Vice Admiral Mineichi Koga onboard. Royal warship: Hiei (under the command of Captain Koso Abe.) Accompanying warships: Kako (under the command of Captain Yoshiro Horie) with the commander of the 6th Squadron, Rear Admiral Minoru Tayui onboard. Furutaka (under the command of Captain Banryu Shiraishi.) The four warships headed in column quietly towards the nearby place of review.

The commander of the review's flagship Nagato and his fleet, almost 100 warships in six ranks seemed to overwhelm the Yokohama Sea. To the south was the outside row, which consisted of the ships bearing the invited guests, No. 1 row consisted mainly of aircraft carriers and submarines; No. 2 row contained four giant battleships, destroyers of the 1st Squadron and the target-ship Settsu. Row No. 3 consisted of high-speed warships and new destroyers, the latter of the powerful 2nd Squadron; row No. 4 contained various warships such as old destroyers, submarines and seaplane-carriers. Finally, row No. 5 contained more old destroyers and submarines plus various warships attached to various naval and guard districts.

As the royal warship advanced tidal waves of "Banzai" cheers rose from the decks of the warships passed, also wind instruments played the national anthem and more 21-gun salutes rent the air. Firstly Hiei and her supporters cruised down between the first and second rows, meanwhile the captain of Kinryu Maru had signaled for all onboard his ship to stand to attention.

While Hiei was passing Nagato to port and Akagi to starboard, with a heaven-shaking thunderous roar over 300 aircraft of the 1st Air Squadron (under the command of Rear Admiral Jisaburo Ozawa) began sweeping low overhead across the place of review. The group consisted of a huge formation of the new Type

99 dive-bombers (later, during the early period of the Pacific War these planes carried out sterling service), at this time although in service since December 1939 and performing great deeds on the China front, their existence was not known by the general public. In the van of the formation were a 100 Type 96 medium bombers and a large group of Type 96 fighters (at this time the small number of Zero fighters in service were away at the China front undergoing combat evaluation, none were with the carrier groups.) More aircraft followed, Type 97 and Type 96 attack-planes and Type 96 dive-bombers.

I let my line of sight fall to the sea's surface; already Hiei and her consorts were approaching. The remodeled Takao had the honour of leading the way, calmly she passed raising a white bow wave, her main mast had been repositioned further aft, in between it and her second funnel could be seen catapults and seaplane facilities. The changes drew attention to her extraordinary length. Takao's bridge superstructure had been reduced in size and appeared more compact, the flag of rear Admiral Koga fluttered from her main mast.

Next, in her wake came gliding past the heroic figure of the Royal Warship Hiei, glittering in the sun the Emperor's brocade flag on which was His Majesties chrysanthemum crest in spun-gold. A feeling of profound obeisance affected all hands; we bowed deeply as before one's eyes Hiei seemed to fill our vision to the utmost. After receiving the order, three full-strength banzais reached for the heavens from all onboard Kinryu Maru and Japan's prosperity was prayed for.

Over the years Hiei had served as the Royal Warship on a number of times, on those occasions she appeared slim and elegant, now she also had been remodeled. Her bridge superstructure and funnels were thicker and the earlier withdraw 36cm No. 4 main gun turret had been restored along with her side armour and catapult. Hiei bristled with numerous sets of 25mm. machine-guns; she was hardly recognizable from her earlier appearance and was now a thoroughly modern battleship.

The Royal Warship continued onward; then I took note of her followers Kako (the flagship of the 6th Squadron) and Furutaka. The previous distinctive forward feature, pyramid style single 20cm gun turrets (and aft turret) had been replaced by three twin turrets, their bridge superstructures had also been modernised, with conspicuous catapults and torpedo mounts aft, they cut noble figures. I realized that all four warships had undergone considerable reconstruction, giving the appearance of excellent, tough new warships.

I watched the warships pass by as if in a semi-trance, a collective sigh rose up from my companions. Just then unexpectedly a formation of more than twenty Type 97 flying boats; their wingspans of 40 meters making them appear like enormous flying battleships passed overhead, spontaneous applause burst out from the watchers. Next came groups of Type 94 and Type 95 seaplanes, both types wearing their China front floral pattern camouflage, finally bringing up the rear came Type 91, Model 2 flying-boats as well as the newest Type 99 medium flying boats (this was the first time they had been seen in public, in fact their existence was not officially announced until 1942.) This second formation of planes were about 200 strong, in all a total of 527 aircraft took part. As the aircraft passed over the Royal Warship, each for a short while dipped its nose in salute, they then departed, splitting up into separate groups.

As the Hiei and her supporters moved onward, in turn banzais rose up into the autumn air and gun salutes thundered out from the warships they passed. I felt almost drunk with this dazzling display of pomp, splendour and military power celebrating the virtue of the Emperor.

Thus without hindrance, at 1130 the review drew to a close with Hiei and her consorts dropping their anchors at their designated positions. Hereafter, the staff and dignitaries mainly responsible for the review were granted an audience with the Emperor, the latter bestowed on them and other guests an Imperial Rescript. Meanwhile we, the other guests gazed out at the almost 100 warships laid out before us, then we partook of a midday lunch, by this time the keen autumn air had given everyone a hearty appetite.

As we ate, a Type 97 flying boat descended and accomplished a smooth water landing nearby, before our eyes.

At 1330 Hiei up-anchored and headed for Yokohama Harbour, as she did so more 21-gun salutes were fired. At 1420 the Emperor transferred from Hiei to the royal launch, which headed for the pier, ten minutes later Oikawa, Fushimi, Yamamoto, Shiozawa said their goodbyes and the Emperor then boarded a train at Yokohama station for his return journey to Tokyo.

At 1500 the 10 guest ships (Chogei, Jingei, Katsuriki, Akashi, Mamiya, Hayatomo, Shiriya, Soya, Choko Maru, Kinryu Maru) one by one raised anchors and following in line, headed eastward to the end of the first row, there they rounded the destroyer Yakaze and with the destroyer Fubuki to starboard, sailed westward at low speed between the first and second rows, in fact they took the reverse route of the royal warships. Meanwhile I looked left and right, gazing at the newest warships and those remodeled, which were in hailing distance. A great spectacle, years later the sights are still fresh in the memory.

The Yokosuka Naval Review took place in honor of the 2,600th anniversary of Emperor Jimmu's enthronement. 98 Imperial Navy ships with a total of 596,000 tons were present. Emperor Hirohito (Showa) inspected the fleet from his flagship, the battleship Hiei. The ceremony was supervised by Rear Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, Commander in Chief of the Combined Fleet, from his flagship, the battleship Nagato.