

# Afterword

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The 150 years between 1700 and 1850 saw a remarkable transformation in global history. The impact of European maritime activity on the rest of the world, which had been steadily growing since the 1480s, took an enormous leap forward. In 1700 European maritime commerce and power was firmly established along the Atlantic coasts of the Americas, but elsewhere neither was particularly influential. Even in Europe, the impact of oceanic commerce and naval power was limited. Exotic luxury goods from east and west were becoming more commonplace and the legendary silver mines of Spanish America had long attracted the ambitions of statesmen, entrepreneurs and brigands. Yet almost the whole of Europe remained traditional (even feudal), agrarian and insular in its social and economic relationships. European diplomacy, while influenced by maritime events, was seldom decisively affected by them. In 1850 the prospects looked very different. Industrial and technological revolution dramatically affected supply and demand in societies serviced by maritime commerce. Intellectual and political revolution, fed by the wealth, the knowledge and the fears generated in global exchange, had reshaped Europe and its

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relationships with the rest of the world. Europe, and by then the United States, stood on the verge of an imperialist explosion of energy that started ebbing away only in the middle decades of the twentieth century. The 'Age of Vasco da Gama' may have started in the 1480s and reached its apogee in the early twentieth century, but that last great imperial surge was possible only because of the maturing of the maritime infrastructure that occurred largely between 1700 and 1850.<sup>340</sup>

The period was one of intense and almost constant naval conflict between European powers that extended across the globe. During this time, the broad expectation of what it meant to be a professional naval officer was honed in conflicts that covered the whole range of duties from escort and blockade work to control of piracy and large-scale fleet action. By 1700 squadrons were ranging widely from their metropolitan heartlands. Individual captains and squadron commanders were finding more autonomy and responsibility as they operated far beyond the control of their political masters.<sup>341</sup> The wars of the eighteenth century developed both capability and confidence in this independence. The papers in this collection suggest that this phenomenon requires far more examination. This degree of independence of action probably occurred earlier in Britain, stemming from experiences in the 1670s and validated by the general level of success that the Royal Navy achieved between 1688 and 1714. The British system, with its more diffuse and interdependent organisational power networks created a very different relationship between navy and crown than existed in the Bourbon monarchies. It may also have created a political context in which senior naval officers were able (even compelled) to use their initiative to ensure naval success, as they could not be protected from public condemnation by royal favour or instructions. The execution of Vice-Admiral John Byng in March 1757 was only the most dramatic case of how domestic political conditions interacted with operational events at sea. Throughout the eighteenth century British admirals had to be prepared to be as combative in the political arena at home as they were at sea. In France and Spain it was very different. The disappointment over the failure of d'Orvilliers's invasion attempt in 1779 inevitably had repercussions for the unfortunate admiral, but, as Olivier Chaline has shown, his fate was determined far more by relations at court than with any other element in French society. The result was that d'Orvilliers was compelled to retreat from command without public debate over the effectiveness of his performance and the responsibility of others. Napoleon tolerated public scrutiny of military or naval decisions even less than the Bourbons. His judgement was final and an appeal to other parts of society for a different or more sympathetic view was pointless. In 1805 the result was Villeneuve's tragic attempt to salvage his reputation that led to the disaster at Trafalgar and, ultimately, his suicide the following year.

Clearly, the relative absence of public scrutiny did not give French and Spanish naval leaders immunity from disgrace if they transgressed expectations, but

those expectations were different. As Michael Duffy has pointed out, from the very beginning of an aspirant officer's career, both the content and process of their training or education differed from their British counterparts. The structure of the French navy, with its formal geographical division between the three major arsenals, and social division between *les rouges* and *les bleus* (not to mention the earlier division between the galley squadrons and the sailing squadrons), created significant internal political and professional barriers, which could not fail to have operational consequences. The contempt for the *gros manoeuvres* of practical seamanship within the French naval officer corps put them at a distinct disadvantage, not just because it prevented the development of an instinctive understanding of the possibilities in the heat of naval engagements, but because it created a permanent division within the officer corps and between it and the experienced seamen. Officers could impose their will in some situations, but the tense, complex and unpredictable conditions of manoeuvring a squadron into battle required a long preparation by commanders and crews to develop their understanding and commitment to what was about to happen, which could not be generated by formal signals or articles of war. Despite his other qualities, Suffren was to discover this painfully at Porto La Praya in April 1781.

Navies depend on success at sea and ashore. They had to be understood if they were to be effectively resourced by the political systems they served. Achieving this was an essential prerequisite for putting well-found and expertly trained navies to sea. It might be expected that a reputation earned at sea would be an important indicator of influence ashore, but it is remarkable how seldom this was the case in the period under review. The clearest case of these social and institutional barriers were those that prevented a fighting officer such as Antonio Barceló from reaching the very highest level of command. Of the officers in this study, perhaps only George Anson and Edward Hawke managed to bridge the wet and dry dimensions of their profession entirely successfully. Why success at sea did not translate into success at the highest political level is a phenomenon that still needs to be more fully investigated. Undoubtedly, the social structures were part of the situation. Also, the skills necessary for the successful negotiation of naval interests at the highest level were not naturally learned by spending years on a heaving deck in foul weather. In Britain, as in France, there was ingrained a disdain for those officers whose career took them down a path of engagement with the administration and politics of naval power. Interestingly, this juxtaposed with a grudging regard for the few, like Sir Charles Middleton, Lord Barham (1726–1813), who played a central role in the American War of Independence and the French Wars.<sup>342</sup> Naval history is most often written with a view to impressing on the reader how events at sea influenced events ashore. Far less is written to explain or explore how events ashore translated into power at sea. Without doing both, we will not understand seapower in its whole context.

An important question that arises from this is how far these social and professional barriers played a role in shaping the expectations of the officers corps? Simon Surreaux has shown that in reaching the highest ranks of the French navy under Louis XV, a citation for successful, sustained and aggressive fighting was not pre-eminent. It was, of course, there, expressed in many different ways, but it did not stand out from among all the other qualities that were considered appropriate for a senior naval commander. We should be careful not to presume too great a distinction between these apparent criteria for senior leadership in France and those that were employed in other nations. In the eighteenth century, patronage and promotion were complex social processes, not driven by a nineteenth-century utilitarian rationalism that was itself never applied as consistently as its theorists desired. Throughout the eighteenth century, the relative importance of criteria shifted in all countries. These need to be examined in detail for a fuller understanding of how the social expectations and consequently the ambition of officers worked in different navies. For example, long periods of peace, such as between 1714 and 1739 (and for Spain between 1748 and 1779), limited the amount and type of combat experience that could be drawn upon to justify promotion. Patrons rose and fell; state policy shifted; practical experience gleaned in the heat of battle, in hard weather and even in the administrative functions of the navy, decayed as the years passed. What filled the gaps when combat experience was limited needs exploration. It was a phenomenon that repeated itself between 1870 and 1914 and has again since 1945.

In sum, we still need to know far more about what states and societies expected of their officers. Surreaux and Duffy have shown that differences clearly existed between states. This can also be deduced from other aspects of naval activity. The design of warships which emphasised different characteristics suggests the naval intentions of states were not identical. In the first half of the eighteenth century there was a clear difference between the heavily armed, weatherly British warships, intended for long cruises and battle, and the faster, more lightly-armed French ships whose principal purpose was not to seek battle but to carry out specific missions and return to port. This was reflected in the instructions given to officers. The readiness of the political leadership of the state to dictate the operational behaviour of the fleet was evident in France and Spain. D'Orvilliers's instructions hindered his tactical options. Napoleon's plan of the naval campaign gave Villeneuve very little room for initiative and manoeuvre. Catherine Scheybeler has shown that Ferdinand VI's policy of armed neutrality imposed a restraint in action that had a distinctly detrimental impact on officer behaviour and performance, but that restraint was effectively demanded by the state. Agustín Guimerá's explanation of the tactics adopted by Mazarredo between 1797 and 1802 shows how firmly his behaviour was driven by the defensive nature of Spanish naval policy.

The social and political conditions within European states permit some broad generalisations. For example, on the whole, the Royal Navy had an offensive

ideology consistently endorsed by the main political actors within the British system. They demanded success, and thus the development of skills and competence within the officer corps was honed by time at sea that its European counterparts did not experience. However, no state in Western Europe thought in terms of investment for the long-term capability of senior naval officers. Who got to command, what they brought to the situation, how they exercised their command and how they related to their political masters were the product of unique circumstances. Ultimately, therefore, understanding the role of command in campaigns is a matter of understanding detail not generalisations.

However, changes in expectations that did occur over the period are also evident from these essays. Carlos Alfaro Zaforteza shows that the task facing Salazar during his second term as minister of the navy between 1823 and 1832 was so different from his eighteenth-century predecessors that a metropolitan 'fleet in being' defensive strategy was no longer credible. Salazar had to give operational autonomy to his commander on the spot in Cuba, Ángel Laborde y Navarro. With Salazar giving support from Spain and Navarro left to make his own decisions in the West Indies, Spain's position in the Americas finally stabilised after two decades of chaos and disaster.

Navarro was not alone in the independence of action he enjoyed. By 1815 a generation of naval officers had become used to the freedom, responsibility and challenges of distant stations. They had also become used to a degree of public recognition that had very seldom been enjoyed by previous generations. However, outside of Spain, even as the French Wars ended, governments were taking advantage of the dramatic reduction in the size of the fleet to claw back control of these officers. It was a long and disjointed process that was never completed. It continues to the present day as technology and operational conditions put new demands on commanders and the political authorities.<sup>343</sup> Naval officers lost to the fleet through retrenchment and paying off were not necessarily lost to the state. Andrew Lambert's study of Captain Charles Napier shows the value of allowing capable, independent officers to use (and continue to hone) their skills in the service of other powers. The Constitutional Party in Portugal was provided with an officer who brought a decisive edge to the naval war, leading to the occupation of Lisbon and the ending of the civil war in 1833. Britain found its foreign policy objectives cheaply and effectively served as well as having an improved officer return to her own naval service in 1837.<sup>344</sup>

What impact did all this change have on the naval officer? Perhaps the most significant was the emergence of a popular ideal of a naval officer, understood not just within the profession but by the wider public. Britain was undoubtedly one of the great winners in the wars of 1793–1815. She was richer; her empire was more extensive and her economy demonstrably moving beyond that of her neighbours. Much of this could be attributed to the great industrial changes that were going on, but behind them it was clear to contemporaries that this depended on national independence and the free flow of raw materials and

finished products across the world. In turn, this depended on the Royal Navy. The sea power that the Royal Navy wielded was deep and complex, but it was easily comprehended by the public by the simple fact of victory in battle. The Royal Navy won battles and it did so because its men and materiel were superior to that of its enemies. Naval leaders were an essential part of this. Nelson has a place of his own in public and professional recognition of his qualities, but by 1815 the pantheon of naval heroes was full and their names were to endure in the public mind in histories, monuments, art works and literature.

There is no doubt that the period between 1700 and 1850 saw major social, political and economic changes. There is equally no doubt that naval leadership penetrated far more deeply into the public consciousness by the end of the period, principally as a result of the wars of 1793–1815. However, what is far less clear is how far the practice of officership actually changed in the period. Compared to the dramatic tactical and operational changes in land warfare brought about by the *'levée en masse'* and Napoleonic organisation, the war at sea seems to have retained its essential character from the *ancien régime*.<sup>345</sup> The totality of land warfare, with societies engaged more fully in all aspects of conflict from large-scale conventional armies to guerrilla wars and intense economic engagement, seemed to be of a different character from the wars that had dominated the previous 100 years. From it there seemed to emerge a more professional approach to war and a desire to establish a universal theory of war which developed during the nineteenth century.<sup>346</sup> Social background and courage in the field were still vital attributes, but there were the faltering first steps towards a more professionally educated army officer and a more 'scientifically' organised military force; the latter eventually being exemplified by the Prussian Great General Staff.<sup>347</sup>

Navies appear to have been untouched by this military revolution. The technologies remained largely unchanged. The organisation of navies, their operational imperatives and tactical concepts were very similar to those that had been inherited from previous generations. The idea of a universal theory of naval warfare only really attracted interest in the last decade of the nineteenth century. This needs far more investigation across a range of navies, and it is probably wise to be cautious at this stage about drawing too large a distinction between the higher education of naval and army officers in this period. Progress in military education was slow and varied greatly between states. Officers in both armies and navies had to master the essentials of their professions. Surviving at sea required a far more demanding and formally tested initial education than that required on land. This understanding applied to both naval officers and the common seaman. Both services relied on the ability of officers to command a disciplined performance from soldiers and sailors. Both services were strongly influenced by a geometric approach to movement and manoeuvre. There was always a fundamental difference in the demands placed upon army and naval officers, however. Armies are essentially people who have

weapons, and in the chaos of combat people have options. Maintaining control in a crisis was an important role for an army officer. Conversely, ships are weapons that have people. The weapon only works when the people are carrying out their function exactly as demanded. Individual options in combat are very limited and the nature of control in a crisis consequently differed. While this is a highly simplistic distinction, it points to the fact that from daily routines of existence to the ultimate crisis of battle, armies and navies were different. How important this was in the way they and their officer corps performed has yet to be examined in any detail. Add to this the different contracts for service in an army and a navy, and the different social milieux from which they recruited, and the current lack of clarity in our understanding of officership in the period 1700–1850 becomes more obvious.

Clearly these essays leave many questions unanswered and, indeed, raise more questions. There are also other areas of study that need to be added. For example, the United States navy is missing from this collection. This was the formative period for a new navy and a new republic. America had plenty of skilled seamen employed along the Atlantic seaboard, but improvising a navy was even more challenging than creating an army. The Americans had at least a well-established militia system and experience of raising provincial expeditionary forces. They had little to guide them in raising naval forces. A new weapon had to be forged and the role of the officers chosen for this task was going to be critical. In 1776 Congress found itself with many more applicants than commands to fill. A navy had to emerge from competing demands for ships, for funding and for political authority.<sup>348</sup> Victory in that war did not resolve some fundamental tensions within American society about the role of a navy. A navy was revived in 1794, largely to protect trade from North African corsairs, but also to protect United States interests under threat from the belligerents in the great war that had broken out in Europe.<sup>349</sup> The years that followed, with a quasi-war against France (1798–1801), continued action against the Barbary states and increasing conflict with Great Britain, which led to war in 1812, forged the United States navy as an instrument of policy.<sup>350</sup> The naval successes against Britain and the North Africans created a founding legend that became important in the development of the US navy, but did not resolve the debate in Congress about how the navy should be structured and led. American scholars have taken a great interest in the emergence of a distinctive officer corps, reflecting republican values that were debated in Congress.<sup>351</sup> The experience of the United States naval officer corps is an important feature of the period 1794–1850 that needs to be explored in far greater depth in relation to its distinctiveness from the European norm.

Finally, there are the other naval powers that were developing in this period. Russia became a naval power in the Baltic as a result of the Great Northern War (1700–21) and was an expanding naval power in the Black Sea in the 1770s and 1780s. Throughout, Russia turned to foreign expertise to help build her naval

power. While some important work has been done on the foreign officers who influenced the Russian fleet, there is a great deal more that is needed to fully understand how the Russian and foreign officers worked together in establishing Russian naval power in the Baltic and Black Sea.<sup>352</sup> Another state whose naval power was undergoing major change at the end of the eighteenth century was the Ottoman Empire. After the devastating defeat of the Turkish fleet by a Russian squadron at Çeşme in July 1770, the Ottomans began a major technological and design shift in their naval construction. With the help of foreign expertise, principally from France, the Turks created a new fleet that successfully constrained Russian ambitions in the Black Sea between 1787 and 1791.<sup>353</sup> How far Ottoman naval leadership changed in this period, and how much it was linked to foreign navies in this process, is still something that needs to be discovered. Less dramatic, but equally important if a full picture of professional development in this period is to be understood, are the navies of the United Provinces, Denmark-Norway, Sweden and Venice.

Collectively, the authors of these essays have tried to create a focus on the performance of various officers or officer corps at a critical period in European and world history. They have highlighted contrasts and comparisons that can help explain the differential performances of navies during a period of intense naval competition. What they have also done is emphasise that despite the masses of work carried out upon navies in this period, and the equally vast energy that has been put into understanding the concept of leadership over the past four decades, important questions about naval leadership still remain to be answered.