

Heather Noel-Smith, Lorna M. Campbell. *Hornblower's Historical Shipmates: The Young Gentlemen of Pellew's Indefatigable*. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2016. xii + 248 pp. \$45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-78327-099-6.

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Between 1937 and 1967, C. S. Forester penned a series of novels around the fictional character Horatio Hornblower, a British naval officer of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. Although a fictional character, Forester's protagonist was written into many historical events and interacted with historical characters. Chief among those was Edward Pellew, 1st Viscount Exmouth, who commanded the British frigate HMS *Indefatigable* during the early years of the French Revolutionary Wars. Pellew was an exceptional officer in the British Royal Navy, rising to the rank of admiral and holding several lofty commands, including the East Indies Station and the Mediterranean Fleet over fifty years of service. Pellew's career, as is the case of most celebrated officers, was an exception to the general career arc of most officers in the Royal Navy. Pellew was known as a patron of junior officers who had served well under him, accelerating their careers at a time when the British naval officer corps consisted of far more men than the Royal Navy could put into service, and promotion prospects were bleak at best. Thus, Forester chose to construct the character of Horatio Hornblower as beginning his career as a young midshipman serving under Edward Pellew, who in Forester's world shaped Hornblower into a naval officer and helped to propel his career.

This is all relevant to the book review at hand, because Forester's series has inspired many to study naval history, and also has helped to create near legends out of the already famous Pellew and his frigate, HMS *Indefatigable*.

Heather Noel-Smith and Lorna M. Campbell's book, *Hornblower's Historical Shipmates*, examines the careers of the seventeen officers and midshipmen who served under Edward Pellew aboard HMS *Indefatigable* in January 1797, when Pellew's crew, along with the crew of HMS *Amazon*, engaged and ran aground the French 74-gun ship-of-the-line, *Droits de l'Homme*. The book is divided into ten chapters, of which four are subdivided into microbiographies of these seventeen midshipmen. These microbiographies are very short (some only four pages long) and in most cases the authors struggled to find sources for the men. The other six chapters offer a short biography of Edward Pellew; a biography of HMS *Indefatigable*; a chapter discussing officer careers; a brief summary of the Action of 13 January 1797; a chapter discussing Pellew's patronage of these men; and a concluding chapter that discusses the later lives and reflects upon these seventeen midshipmen. The purpose of this book is to examine briefly the careers of these seventeen young individuals from diverse backgrounds; it attempts to

capture a snapshot of the Royal Navy's officer corps. Noel-Smith and Cambell's work aspires to produce an image of the Royal Navy during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars.

This book is problematic because it is not an accurate view of the officer corps of the British Royal Navy. All of these young men were born between 1768 and 1782, served aboard a ship famous for capturing prizes, and enjoyed the patronage of an exceptionally successful and powerful naval officer in Pellew. This was not the case for most officers of the Royal Navy. Many midshipmen and officers were born too early or late to have the same promotion prospects as these men. The majority would have been assigned to ships that spent much of their life at anchor or performing the less than exciting task of blockade, without seeing battle. Finally, the mass majority simply did not benefit from spending their formative midshipman years under the tutelage of a famously gifted commanding officer; nor did they benefit from the patronage that Pellew provided. Even though these men had very differing degrees of success in the Royal Navy, this book cannot be seen as an accurate snapshot of the Royal Navy's officer corps or life as a sea officer. Recent scholarship from Samantha Cavell and Evan Wilson has demonstrated that career prospects for midshipmen and officers of the Royal Navy between 1770 and 1815 were bleak at best.[1] Thus, what is left is an analysis of seventeen young officers who served under Pellew in 1797. Individually, these biographies are short and read as a list of ships they served on and actions in which they participated; they say little about the world they lived in or the experiences, good or bad, that they encountered. Much of the problem here is due to limited source material for some of these individuals. Of the remaining chapters, Pellew has had multiple biographies, the ship *Indefatigable* has received plenty of attention, and the Action of 13 January 1797 has been analyzed.

What, then, to make of this book? Noel-Smith and Campbell have clearly put a lot of work into this project, but this is simply not an academic study. As a companion piece to Forerster's Hornblower series, however, it works just fine. Readers interested in straightforward, short, and easily accessible biographies of Pellew and midshipmen who were not unlike the fictional character Horatio Hornblower will not be disappointed. However, academics looking for a serious book that says something about the Royal Navy or war and society during the Great Wars with France will not come away from this read fulfilled. Although this book does rely on extensive manuscript material, it does so to tell a narrative of Pellew, HMS *Indefatigable*, and the midshipmen serving aboard her in 1797.

Note

[1]. Samantha Cavell, *Midshipmen and Quarterdeck Boys in the British Navy, 1771-1831* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2012); and Evan Wilson, *A Social History of British Naval Officers; 1775-1815* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2017).

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