



The
Richard Boultho
Newsletter
Issue XXIV



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Douglas Reeman / Alexander Kent
Photo by Kimberley Reeman

Part One

The Backbone

Aboard a man-of-war, large or small, the warrant officers were considered to be the true professionals, and the link in the chain of command between forecandle and quarterdeck. ‘Us and them’, as they were bluntly described.

Most of them were long-serving, packed off to sea as boys by their parents or guardians, volunteered, sometimes unwillingly, for service with the fleet, ‘Our Sure Shield’, because it was all they themselves had ever known, or by others wanted one mouth less to feed at home. It is a sobering thought that when *Bounty* Bligh, as he was known and remembered to the end of his colourful and tempestuous life, joined HMS *Monmouth* (74) as his first ship, he was only seven years and nine months old.

It was a hard climb, for those who had the skill and tenacity to make it. Like the boatswain, a key figure in any ship. To recruits, or those dragged aboard by the hated press gangs, and to old Jacks alike, he was the ship.

Responsible for the miles of standing and running rigging, shrouds and stays, blocks and tackles, needing to perform every act of seaman-ship daily, hourly, in calm or storm, and when



‘Heart of Oak’ by English marine artist
Geoffrey Huband

danger called, in the hell of battle, gun to gun with the enemy, the boatswain had to discover the strengths and weaknesses of all his men, from the nimble-footed topmen working aloft making and reefing sails, to the ‘waisters’, so inexperienced that they were trusted only to lend their strength to heave on braces to trim the yards, and to scrub decks. The boatswain oversaw the ship’s daily routine, calling and mustering the hands for duty, reporting those likely for promotion to the first lieutenant, as well as the ones requiring the heavier

hand of punishment. He was a seaman to his fingertips.

At sea, and especially when sailing alone, cut free of the Fleet's apron strings, the ship was entirely dependent on her own resources. Damage to hull structure, and to the masts and spars which gave her mobility, fell to the carpenter and his crew. Some learned their trade ashore, in dock-yards before they were tempted to a more exciting, even rewarding, life in a King's ship. Others gained their skills by example, and the patience of their mentors.

The carpenter was also charged with the maintenance of all the boats, without which the needs of any ship could not be met. Carrying men and stores, taking officers, particularly the captain, on official duties, even used in face-to-face and frequently bloody encounters, boarding the enemy or in cutting-out operations, care of the boats was vital work for the carpenter and his fellows in the sailmaker's crew. It was not unknown for a carpenter's men to build a whole new boat with whatever materials were available, when the need was vital.

'Beat to quarters and clear for action!'

The call to arms which every sailor was trained and drilled ruthlessly to expect. But when the drums rattled and feet stamped across and through the ship in deadly earnest, it was very different. And there was always a first time, for some.

The gunner, more than any one, would know it was too late to think back on all the hours he had exercised with his crews, timing each drill with his

watch, knowing they were all cursing him under their breath while they struggled to reduce the time taken to load, run out and be ready to fire. The reality of close action left no room for complacency. A minute cut from the time it took for a man-of-war to show her teeth was often the margin between victory and defeat. At Trafalgar, superior gunnery won the day. Many British ships could fire three broadsides in five minutes, considerably faster than both French and Spanish.

In action, the gunner might be thinking of the men at the guns he had trained while he was crouched in his magazine, surrounded by enough charges and fuses to blast his ship to fragments around him. Listening to the squeak and rumble of trucks as the muzzles were run up to their ports, the roar of a broadside, and the close attention to the ritual of loading and running out again, no matter what sights or sounds surrounded them. When each gun was sponged out after firing, it had to be done thoroughly. A smouldering fragment, left unnoticed, could wreck the gun and kill every man around it.

The gunner might have begun learning his trade as a young powder-monkey, running with fresh charges to feed the guns as battle raged around and above him, barefooted across sanded decks and the blood of those who had already paid the price. There was so much to learn and endure, before he became one of the true professionals.

They had their own mess, apart from the ship's company, and separate from the senior warrant officers, the purser, sailing master and surgeon,

who were given wardroom status.

But as some one once remarked, ‘Aft, the most honour. Forward, the better men.’

The backbone.

Part Two

‘Heart of Oak’

It is February 1818, and Adam Bolitho longs for marriage and a safe personal harbour. But with so much of Britain’s fleet redundant, he knows he is fortunate to be offered HMS *Onward*, a new 38-gun frigate whose first mission is not war but diplomacy, as consort to the French frigate *Nautilus*.

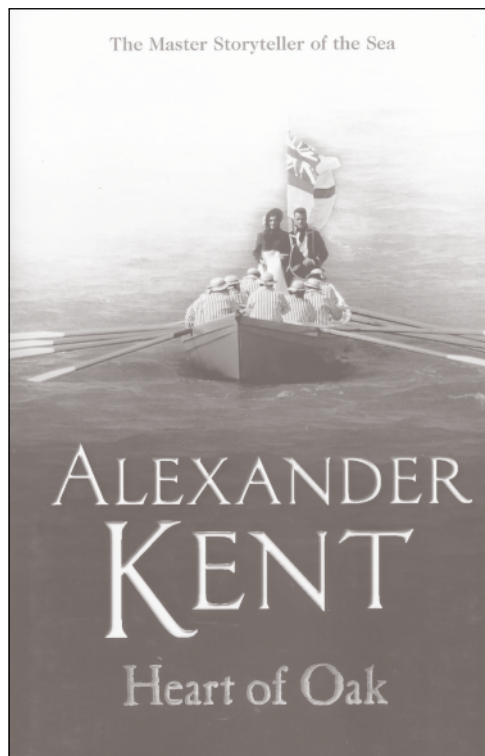
Under the burning sun of North Africa, Bolitho is keenly aware of the envy and ambition among his officers, the troubled, restless spirits of his midshipmen, and the old enemy’s proximity. It is only when *Nautilus* becomes a sacrificial offering on the altar of empire that every man discovers the brotherhood of the sea is more powerful than the bitter memories of an ocean of blood and decades of war.

Part Three

Onward

by Kim Reeman

Douglas, you went back to the distant past to write *Band of Brothers*. Was it difficult to



leap forward from that time back into Adam Bolitho’s life for *Heart of Oak*?

No, because I was reminded a lot of the big part the midshipmen play as I was writing *Heart of Oak*. So much of the action takes place on the ship, and you get to know the people so well. We have Adam’s midshipman, Napier, whom he’s sponsored, and his friends. It seemed a natural transition.

Did the life of a midshipman change much between

Richard Bolitho's day and Napier's?

I don't think it did, except that there is no action, they're not in the middle of a war or on the brink of war, as was the case with the young Bolitho. That was the main difference. I think the most important thing for all of them in *Heart of Oak* is that it is a brand new ship, and they're all learning, not just the midshipmen. I was trying to see it from Adam's point of view, but everybody's new, and even the ship is built differently from Bolitho's day, of lighter, cheaper material, because there weren't any oaks left. It was a shipbuilder's dream, because a new ship took half the time to build and sold for twice as much.

Sounds like today.

Yes. When you think of HMS *Kent*, for example, and the millions recently spent on her refit – cost more than it did to build her.

How did you prepare for Heart of Oak?

I went back to *Man of War* and just immersed myself in Adam's life. He's not a green youth any more, he's a senior post-captain. But he hasn't forgotten what it was like, and he has sympathy, compassion, which he probably gets from his uncle. What Adam is very aware of, and no doubt any captain of any sensitivity, is the difference between the new hands and the seamen who've seen a bit of action, hardship, which they think is lacking in peacetime.

Did it make a different navy?

It had to be different. The press gangs had been abolished, you couldn't just go and snatch people off the street. There had to be some incentive for men to volunteer, and I think it made people less wary about joining, men who actually wanted to go to sea. The navy never forgot the great mutinies, and the lessons had been learned – the old hands in *Heart of Oak* all remember that.

What differences do you see in the navy from Richard's time as a midshipman to 1818?

The older hands hadn't changed, and remained very unsympathetic about the general hardships people had to accept. In the background is the new navy, the iron navy, and steam was being used in an experimental way, treated very disdainfully by senior officers who should have known better, but the fundamental aspects of life aboard ship had not changed. The dangers at sea were the same.

As a tactic, the line of battle was no longer necessary . . . the next big battle under sail, in fact the last, would be fought in enclosed waters, so there was no hope of using that manoeuvre.

When Adam first came on the scene, did you foresee that he would 'inherit the sword', as it were, and carry on the series?

I'm not even sure about that myself. Even today when he puts on the sword, he's very conscious of

it, the fact that it appears in so many of the family portraits, with every implication and obligation that goes with it, and people who are close to him expect him to wear it, possibly for the same reason.

How do you compare him to Richard Bolitho, and his father, Hugh? Is he over the stigma of being both illegitimate and the son of a man perceived as a traitor, or will those elements of his identity always haunt him?

He's more impetuous than Richard, sometimes dangerously so; very concerned with people trusting him, being loyal to him, which is a sign of his own uncertainty. As for being Hugh's son, I think that comes up a lot more frequently than we know about; people would still gossip about him, in Cornwall and in the navy. Of course, there were lots of people who did exactly what Hugh did. John Paul Jones wanted to be in the Royal Navy, and was turned down because he had been a slaver, but it was the navy he wanted to join, not the Americans.

The illegitimacy issue never really comes up – Adam has never mentioned it to me, and Uncle Richard brought him properly into the family and changed his name, so I don't think there's a problem with it. The big battle for Adam, and for all captains, is the lack of a future, and this tremendous build-up of names on the Navy List, nine hundred captains, and no possibility of work for most of them, and not an admiral under sixty years of age. I would think that uncertainty would

haunt him more than anything in his past.

What's in the future for Adam?

Like all sea officers, he's torn between home and duty, but his life is the navy and he'll have to go where he's sent if he doesn't want to be like one of those men in the waiting room at the Admiralty. The East India Company is a big temptation, just like being in the navy except the pay was better and the food was better. It offers a strong future. But they haven't made him an offer yet.

And for you? Any gaps in Richard Bolitho's life to be filled?

There aren't very many now, I'm afraid, but there are one or two. I'm tempted, but I'm not sure. Having finished this book, I feel even closer to the people I write about. They tell me what's going to happen, and I miss them when I'm not with them, either in Falmouth or in Portsmouth or at sea.

For now, I'll follow Adam to the next horizon.

Part Four

Douglas Reeman in New Tall Ships

Documentary by Chip Richie

A new film documentary, *Sea Warriors – the Royal Navy in the Age of Sail*, by Richie Productions, features interviews with Douglas Reeman. The video is an excellent counterpart to

the great seafaring novels of Alexander Kent, C. S. Forester, Patrick O'Brian and others. It gives a factual account of what life was like in Nelson's navy, making it instantly relatable to the novels we all love to read. The re-enactments aboard HMS *Trincomalee* and the *Endeavour*, along with the original art and graphics used in the film, make it a must-see.

'What I have seen to date is quite fascinating,' states Douglas Reeman, 'Chip's passion for his subject and his craft is obvious. I especially appreciated the scenes near Falmouth, which of course was Richard Bolitho's home.'

The documentary film is hosted by author/historian Richard Woodman (Nathaniel Drinkwater novels) and was shot on location throughout the United Kingdom, as well as on board HM Bark *Endeavour*. There are interviews with Colin White aboard HMS *Victory* in Portsmouth, with Robert Gardiner in the mold loft in Chatham, and others. In addition, author Julian Stockwin (Thomas Kydd novels) discusses the life of the common seaman.

The film is available now at:

www.seawarriors.com.

Part Five

The Bolitho Collection

Alexander Kent takes pleasure in presenting this exquisite bone china figurine portraying Captain Richard Bolitho, the hero of his best-

selling novels about the men and ships of Britain's eighteenth and nineteenth century navy. Bolitho wears the uniform of a post-captain, as he would have appeared while commanding HMS *Hyperion*, one of the most popular ships in the series.

Each figurine is one of a numbered edition, ten inches (twenty-five and a half centimetres) high including the base, hand-crafted and authentic in every detail – a remarkable recreation not only of a stirring period, but of an individual. A limited number of figurines are still available at £100.00 including VAT, postage, packing and insurance. The figurine may be ordered from the Douglas Reeman website: www.douglasreeman.com.

Limited edition, fine art prints of Geoffrey Huband's paintings for the covers of *To Glory We Steer*, *The Inshore Squadron*, *Sloop of War*, *Form Line of Battle*, *Passage to Mutiny* and *Midshipman Bolitho*, numbered and signed by the artist, are also available from the Reeman website.



The Richard Bolitho Figurine

Part Six

Richard Bolitho – A Life

		1795	promoted Flag Captain <i>Euryalus</i> (100). Involved in the Great Mutiny. Mediterranean. Promoted Commodore (<i>The Flag Captain</i>)
1756	born Falmouth, son of James Bolitho	1792	Captain <i>The Nore</i> . Recruiting ('With All Despatch')
1768	entered the King's service as a midshipman in <i>Manxman</i> (80)	1793	Captain <i>Hyperion</i> (74). Mediterranean. Bay of Biscay. West Indies. (<i>Form Line of Battle and Enemy in Sight!</i>)
1772	Midshipman <i>Gorgon</i> (74) (<i>Richard Bolitho – Midshipman and Midshipman Bolitho and the Avenger</i>)	1795	promoted Flag Captain <i>Euryalus</i> (100). Involved in the Great Mutiny. Mediterranean. Promoted Commodore (<i>The Flag Captain</i>)
1774	promoted Lieutenant <i>Destiny</i> (28) Rio and the Caribbean (<i>Stand into Danger</i>)	1798	Battle of the Nile (<i>Signal – Close Action!</i>)
1775-77	Lieutenant <i>Trojan</i> (80) during the American Revolution. Later appointed prizemaster (<i>In Gallant Company</i>)	1800	promoted Rear-Admiral. Baltic. (<i>The Inshore Squadron</i>)
1778	promoted Commander <i>Sparrow</i> (18) Battle of the Chesapeake (<i>Sloop of War</i>)	1801	Biscay. Prisoner of war. (<i>A Tradition of Victory</i>)
1780	birth of Adam, illegitimate son of Hugh Bolitho and Kerenza Pascoe	1802	promoted Vice-Admiral. West Indies. (<i>Success to the Brave</i>)
1782	promoted Captain <i>Phalarope</i> (32). West Indies. Battle of Saintes (<i>To Glory We Steer</i>)	1803	Mediterranean. (<i>Colours Aloft!</i>)
1784	Captain <i>Undine</i> (32). India and East Indies (<i>Command a Kings Ship</i>)	1805	Battle of Trafalgar. (<i>Honour This Day</i>)
1787	Captain <i>Tempest</i> (36). Great South Sea. Tahiti. Suffered serious fever.	1806-07	Good Hope and second Battle of Copenhagen. (<i>The Only Victor</i>)
1792	Captain <i>The Nore</i> . Recruiting ('With All Despatch')	1808	shipwrecked off Africa. (<i>Beyond the Reef</i>)
1793	Captain <i>Hyperion</i> (74). Mediterranean. Bay of Biscay. West Indies. (<i>Form Line of Battle and Enemy in Sight!</i>)	1809-10	Mauritius campaign. (<i>The Darkening Sea</i>)
		1812	promoted Admiral. Second American war. (<i>For My Country's Freedom</i>)
		1814	defense of Canada. Second American war. (<i>Cross of St. George</i>)
		1815	killed in action. (<i>Sword of Honour</i>)

