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Forecastle and Quarterdeck: Protest, Discipline and Mutiny in the Royal Navy, 1793-1814

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Throughout these years both Tony Mason and Jim Obelkevitch were excellent supervisors and demanding teachers. My granfather, Paul B. Sheldon, and my father, Walter C. Neale, passed on to me their love of the sea and naval history. Richard Kuper was crucial in encouraging me get started on this project. Linda Neale, my partner, has talked this over with me a hundred times, and given me the benefit of help for a passionate historian and a talented writer.

Previous Work

This thesis is the third installment of a continuing project. in 1984 I submitted an M.A. Thesis to the University of Warwick: 'Mutiny and Discipline in Nelson's Navy: 1793-1815'. The first half of that thesis, considerably expanded, forms the basis for pages 51-106 and 150-177 of this thesis. The second half of that thesis, slightly cut and rewritten, appears as pages 179-157 of this thesis. The first half I have included here because it is substantially rewritten and reworked, but the second half I have included only because do much of it is integral to the analysis presented.

In 1985 the M.A. Thesis was incorporated, together with considerable further work, into my book, The Cutlass and the Lash: Mutiny and Discipline in Nelson's Navy, London, Pluto Press, 1985. This material, somewhat rewritten, is now pages 1-12 and 51-308 of this thesis.

Style

Upon the first citing of any work, the reference in given in full. After that, only author and page number are given. Latinate forms are avoided, the plural of 'court-martial' is 'court-martials', and Harmondsworth is in London.

When quoting from a letter or book, the original spelling and punctuation is reproduced without comment. That is, there is no (sic). When quoting from a court martial transcript of spoken testimony, I have modernized punctuation and spelling.

Withing quotations, anything in brackets (like this) is a reproduction of the brackets in the original. Anything underlined in brackets (*like this*) is an interpolation by me. Anything underlined outside brakcets, *like this*, is a reproduction of the under-lining in a handwritten text, or of italics in a book. In no case have I emphasized anything within a quotation.

All references to 'Adm'. are to the Admiralty records at the Public Record Office, Kew, London.

Summary

This thesis is a study of disputes and conflicts between officers and men in the Royal Navy between 1793 and 1814. The first part is a general introduction to shipboard life and work, discipline, resistance and protest, and to the sailors' culture and politics. The second part is a detailed study of the mutinies on the Culloden in 1794 and the Defiance in 1795, paying particular attention to the organization of the sailors, the strategy of the officers and the function and working of court martials. The third part is a more general history of the sailors' protests and mutinies between 1796 and 1814. These mutinies and protests are situated with regard to the changing balance of forces between officers and men in the Navy as a whole during these years.

The thesis is largely based on the verbatim transcipts of court martials in the Royal Navy that are now part of the Admiratly Records at the Public Record Office. It is intended as a contribution to the social history of the Royal Navy and the labour history of the period.

PART ONE:

Introduction

Chapter One: Two Mutinies

On the late afternoon of February 20, 1797, the frigate HMS Hermione ran into a sudden Caribbean squall off the coast of Puerto Rico. Captain Pigot ordered his men aloft to reef the topsails. The men leapt up the rigging. The mizzenmast rose from the quarterdeck where Pigot stood, so the men in the mizzentop were directly under his eye. Pigot felt they were working too slowly, and he shouted at them that he would flog the last man down. (1)

The mizzentopmen believed him. Many captains did the same, especially when the admiral was watching. The men felt it was unfair, for the first two men up the yard were inevitably the men out on the ends of the yard, and therefore also the last two men down. But many captains felt it encouraged the others.

The Hermione was an unhappy ship. Her

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(1) This account of the mutiny on the Hermione is based on Dudley Pope, The Black Ship, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1963. My emphasis and some of the interpretation differs from Pope's, however.

previous captain, Wilkinson, had seemed addicted to the lash, and two men had died after repeated beatings. (1) When Hugh Pigot replaced him in 1796, the men held their breath. Pigot turned out to be no better: a shouter, a bully and a flogger.

The Hermiones (the crews were called after their ships) were certainly frightened. They raced back along the yards as the wind made the ship yaw back and forth. Three men fell simultaneously from the mizzen yard. William Johnson was a 15 year old orphan from England. Peter Bascomb was a 16 year old black man from Barbados. The identity of the third is not recorded. All three died as they hit the deck.

The men in the maintop were still gathering in the larger mainsail. They looked wordlessly down upon the deck. Nobody seems to have moved. Captain Pigot shouted an order: 'Throw the lubbers overboard.'

The maintopmen were the most experienced and respected sailors among the crew. They began to murmer among themselves. Down on deck Pigot could not hear what they were saying, but he could

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(1) For a very hostile portrait of Wilkinson by a seaman who served under him on another ship, see <u>The Adventures of John Wetherell</u>, edited by C.S. Forester, London, Michael Joseph, 1954, pages 27-106.

guess. He ordered the boatswain's mates into the rigging to 'start' the maintopmen. The boatswains' mates went up the rigging and out along the yards, beating the maintopmen about the head and shoulders with stout ropes. The maintopmen had to hang on with their hands and could not defend themselves.

The men on deck threw the bodies overboard. Sailors were not religious men. In the heat of battle they would throw the dead over the side. But at any other time it was an invariable and customary mark of respect to say a few words and a prayer over the body before consigning it to the deep.

When the maintopmen came down to the deck Pigot ordered their names taken so that they could be flogged the next day for insubordination. That night several of the crew met and decided to take the ship, but when morning came they had done nothing. It is possible they were frightened.

At noon the maintopmen were flogged. David Casey, a midshipman on the _Hermione_, was later to record that 'A _very severe punishment_ of several men, I believe twelve or fourteen, took place in the usual way at the public place of punishment.'

The Hermiones came for Pigot just after eleven that night. Among the first men into the

captain's cabin were a Dane, an Irishman, an American and a Cornishman. They carried tomahawks and cutlasses. Above them on the quarterdeck Lieutenant Foreshaw heard the killing below. He told William Turner, master's mate, to go below and see what was happening.

'If you want to know you can go down yourself,' said Turner.

Forshaw decided it would be politic to change course and look for help from their sister ship the Diligence, somewhere to the windward in the dark night. Thomas Osborn was the man at the wheel. Foreshaw ordered him to put up the helm. Osborne replied, 'I'll see you damned first.'

Lieutenant Foreshaw hit Osborne. Out of the dark, several Hermiones emerged and began chopping and slicing at Lieutenant Foreshaw. He backed slowly towards the rail, streaming blood. Finally he could go no further, and fell over the side. He landed in the mizzen chains (planks sticking out from the side of the ship.) Half an hour later he crawled back onto the deck, weak from loss of blood. The mutineers at first stepped back, as if from a ghost. When he spoke they realized their mistake. They pitched him back over the side, and he passed out of history.

Captain Pigot went out his cabin window.

James Allen found Lieutenant Douglas hiding under a cot. Allen was 14 years old and worked as Douglas' personal servant. As the men went for the lieutenant, Allen pushed forward with a tomahawk, crying 'Let me have a chop at him: he shan't make me jump about in the gunroom any more.' Midshipman John Smith was 13 years old and widely disliked. The Hermiones pushed him out a porthole.

The people now controlled the ship, and their leaders met in the captain's cabin. Lawrence Cronin stood up to speak to the men. 'I have been a Republican since the beginning of the war,' he began, and went on to give a revolutionary speech, wildly cheered. At the end Cronin said they should kill the remaining officers. The cry was 'Pass them up'. The surgeon, the purser, the first lieutenant, the captain's clerk and the marine lieutenant were thrown overboard.

But the master, the carpenter, the gunner and Midshipman Casey were left alive. These men were liked. Casey had been flogged himself on Pigot's orders only a short time before. The master's boy servant was going through the ship in tears pleading with his shipmates for the master's life. The moderates among the leaders insisted upon a vote, and a forest of hands went up for mercy.

The mutineers took the ship to an enemy port

on the Spanish Main (now Venezuela). There the four surviving officers gave themselves up as prisoners of war. So did one loyalist among the ship's company. All the other men declared for the mutiny. Many changed their names and looked for passage to the United States. The only woman on board was the widow of the murdered boatswain. She went with the mutineers.

For the next twenty years the Admiralty pursued the mutineers with a fierce vengeance. Many of the men continued to 'use the sea', for it was their only trade. 33 Hermiones were eventually caught, and 24 of them were hanged. The four officers who had survived testified again at these trials, sending to the gallows many of the men who had voted to save their lives. Lawrence Cronin, the revolutionary and republican, settled in Venezuela. Almost 120 other mutineers got clean away. (1)

The Winchelseas

The mutiny on the *Hermione* fits a steroetype, for there was a sadistic captain, a bloody rising,

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(1) It is not possible to be more precise about numbers, for the mutineers quite sensibly destroyed the relevant muster books.

and the men ran for the Spanish Main with the Admiralty in cruel pursuit. In fact, it was most exceptional. It was the only mutiny in 22 years of war where the men killed the captain. Far more typical was the mutiny on the _Winchelsea_ at Spithead in 1793. It began with a letter from the ship's company to the admiral:

Winchelsea, Sper. 16th, 1793

Your Honour,

We now lay under the disagreeable opportunity of Informing Your Honour that our usage is not altogether as good as we formerly were used to in others of his Majesty's ships besides it has been heard openly for Captain Fisher that he will use us in a More Crewl Manner than ever he did which gives us a very dismal prospect of the Voyage which we are going to proceed we are all with one accord willing to serve our King and Country upon any Demand Whatsoever but we are fully determined never to go to Sea under Capt. Fisher's command. French Prison will be more agreeable to us or Death alone than to be commanded by him We hope your Honour will Pity our Misfortune & give us Speedy Relief.

As our situation at the Present time is

Shocking to Repeat we all Remain With our Duty to our King.

Yours &c

Winchelseas. (1)

The letter was addressed to Sir Peter Parker, the Commander in Chief at Spithead. The men were clearly attempting to be polite, but they were also clearly threatening to desert to the enemy without a fight.

The next morning they staged a demonstration. (2) The ship was riding at anchor, and the

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(1) This letter is enclosed in a letter from Admiral Parker to the Admiralty, 17 September 1793, in Adm. 1:1005, Letter 480. Throughout this thesis I have left all contemporary letters in the original spelling and pronunciation, as the style and grammar and spelling tell us a great deal about the man who wrote the letter. But in quoting from the verbatim records of the court martials I have generally modernized the spelling, punctuation and capitalization of the clerk, as all these serve to obscure the similarity of the spoken language then and now. I have, however, preserved any underlinings by the clerk in the belief that these reflect an emphasis in the spoken speech. This account of the Winchelsea muinty is largely based on the trial of William Price and others in Adm. 1:5330.

(2) The ship's log in Adm. 52:2539.

boatswain piped all hands on deck to get out the ship's boats, but 44 of them remained below. They used their hammocks and sea chests to barricade themselves in the forward gun bay.

Captain Richard Fisher went below with one officer. The men stood with their backs to Fisher, and in the darkness he was unable to indentify any individual. He threatened violence, and fired his pistol into the hammocks to underline his point. The people were unarmed, though the officer thought he saw a marlinspike gleam in the darkness. The Winchelseas refused to sail and demanded that Captain Fisher allow them to speak to the admiral. They said they could no longer tolerate the way in which they were used. They wanted a new ship and new officers, or individual transfers to other ships. Out of the dark an unidentifiable voice said 'One and all now'. The people gave three cheers.

Fisher continued to threaten them, and they finally agreed that if the officers went up on deck they would follow. After ten minutes, and probably a lot of argument, the men went up on deck and reported for muster. It was the first 'mutiny' of the war.

What is really interesting is what happened afterwards. Two seamen and a master's mate were

court martialled for mutiny. The evidence was thin. Generally only a few seamen ever testified against their mates in mutiny trials. On the Winchelsea nobody did. Every witness from below decks told the same story: he personally had been forced to stay below, and he had recognized none of his shipmates among the 43 men with him. The master's mate was acquitted. The two seamen were convicted only of 'being concerned in the said mutiny, that being present thereat, they did not use their utmost endeavour to suppress the same'. Accordingly on 7 October William Price and William Duggan were flogged round the fleet at Spithead. Price took 131 lashes and Duggan 141 before the surgeon certified that they could take no more. (1) It was not a mild punsihment, but it was not the noose.

The flogging did not solve Admiral Parker's problem. In their letter the Winchelseas had said that they were 'fully determined' and effectively threatened to surrender to the French. There was no way of knowing if they would carry out this threat. Four days after the mutiny Captain Fisher

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(1) As was customary, Captain Fisher asked the Admiralty to pardon them after that, since they had been punished enough. Fisher to Parker and Parker to Admiralty, 18 October 1793 in Adm. 1:1005, Letter 514.

wrote to the admiral. He said that he had found 73 petty officers and able seamen, as well as two ordinary seamen, who wanted a transfer. Fisher wanted them all exchanged into another ship. (1) We can assume that he was unsure of his ability to control his crew.

Nine days after the floggings the Winchelsea discharged Risher, eight petty officers and eight seamen into another ship. Their places were taken by ten seamen, eight petty officers and a new captain. (2)

The Winchelseas had won. Parker had removed Captain Fisher and sixteen of his 'folowers'. Duggan and Price had been brutally beaten, but mutiny had worked.

And of course it had worked on the Hermione as well. Captain Pigot had met a rough justice and over four-fifths of the ship's company had escaped. But the Winchelsea was far more typical. It was not an armed revolt. Like most mutinies of the period, it was really a strike and a demonstration. This thesis will be devoted to the analysis of such 'mutinies'.

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(1) Enclosure from Fisher to Parker in Parker to Admiralty, 21 September 1793 in Adm. 1:1005, Letter 485.
(2) Ship's log in Adm. 52:2539.

Chapter Two: Introduction

This thesis is about the class struggle between officers and men in the Royal Navy between 1793 and 1814. It covers the collective protests of the lower deck: the dignified letters of protest, sullen murmering crowds, noisy demonstrations, strikes and mutinies. It also covers the responses of the officers: concessions, enquiries, compromise, beatings, armed intimidation, court martial and flogging. The intention is to contribute both to the social history of the Navy and labour history of the period.

The basic sources are the Admiralty court martial records for these years, now held at the Public Record Office. Students of eighteenth century labour history usually must rely on spies' reports and brief summaries of trials. The Admiralty, however, insisted on a verbatim record of all the questions and testimony in every court martial. This makes the trials a rich source for the naval historian, and a unique source for the labour historian of this period.

Men stood trial for many offenses, and the

transcript of the average court martial runs for perhaps twenty pages. Many mutiny trials lasted much longer, and often the transcript is more than a hundred pages. A detailed astudy of the transcript can be supplemented by the use of other documents in the Admiralty records: particularly the ship's muster books, letters between officers, and the ships' logs. (There is a detailed discussion of these and other sources in Appendix Two.) This wealth of records means that we can establish quite a lot more about most mutinies than we can about workplace strikes on shore.

This thesis is a study of collective action. So I have read through the volumes of court martial records looking for those that involved some element of collective protest or organization by the lower deck. All of the cases I have found for the years 1793-1796 and 1799-1814 are listed in Appendix One. All of them are mentioned at least in passing in the body of the thesis.

Finding those trials involving collective action or organization was by no means a simple project. There are, for instance, many trials for 'mutiny', 'mutinous behaviour', 'mutinous language' and 'riotous behaviour'. Quite a lot of these are court martials by captains of their inferior officers for quarrelling with them. But

the majority of these trials on inspection turn out to be prosecutions of lone seamen who became drunk and angry and abused and sometimes struck their officers. I have not included them in my sample. I have included all those trials where two or more men protested, and all those where the lone individual received some support from his shipmates. I have of course included all those trials *that reveal a strike or demonstration.*

Many of these were not explicitly mutiny trials. Where there is doubt it is often necessary to read the transcript thoroughly to find out if there was a demonstration or cheering. These may turn up in the trial of an officer for insubordination or of a seaman for desertion or seditious langauge.

I have also included all prosecutions of seamen for writing letters of complaint. These were usually trials of the individuals who wrote the letter, but the organization of a letter was a collective activity. Also, when a ship was lost there was always a court martial of the captain, officers and men to establish responsibility for the loss. These court martials occasionally reveal that the ship was seized by the lower deck and delivered to the enemy. Where mutineers were not subsequently captured, these trials provide

the only record. They usually include graphic descriptions of mutiny.

In addition, I have included trials of individuals for expressing explicitly revolutionary sentiments. I have also included all the trials where officers were prosecuted for cruelty as a result of the organized petition or protest of their men.

I have rather arbitrarily decided to exclude certain sorts of ship from my remit. I have left out almost all mutinies on press tenders and among prize crews on the grounds that these were very small vessels and the men on them were only together for a short period of time. My central focus has been on the dynamics of a ship's company. I have also left out all mutinies on East Indiamen, privateers and whalers, all of which are to be found in the records. And I have left out the collective actions of marines in barracks on shore, but included those on shipboard.

More importantly, I have not dealt in detail with the great wave of mutinies in 1797-98, although Chapter Twelve is devoted to the subject. There are two reasons for this. The first is that these years have been well served by historians

already. (1) The second reason is that a thesis can only be so long. The mutinies before and after

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(1) William Johnson Neale, An Account of the Mutiny at Spithead and the Nore, London, Thomas Tegg, 1842, is largely worthless. G. E. Manwaring and Bonamy Dobree, The Floating Republic, London, Geoffrey Bles, 1935, though the best known of the modern works, is also the weakest. Their middle class arrogance leads them to treat the sailors as stupid: animal metaphors for the lower deck abound. Their political Fabianism leads them to view the mutineers as essentially moderate men led by middle class failures, and to underestimate or ignore both the sailors' strong tradition of protests and the influence of working class revolutionaries on the mutineers. But Conrad Gill's older work, The Naval Mutinies of 1797, Manchester, University of Manchester Press, 1913, provides a balanced and scholarly account. James Dugan's The Great Mutiny, a more colourful and narrative work, provides a useful complement to Gill and is particularly good on the mutinies of 1798. And there is a brilliant chapter (pages 79-109) in Roger Wells' Insurrection: the British Experience, 1795-1803, Gloucester, Alan Sutton, 1983. Among other things Wells brings out the importance of revolutionaries in the fleet in 1797, and of the Irish dimension. Both Wells and Clive Emsley, in his British Society and the French Wars, 1793-1815, London, Macmillan, 1979, have tried in different ways to integrate an account of the naval mutinies into a more general social history of the period.

1797-98 have barely been studied, (1) and I have concentrated my attention on them.

How representative are the collective actions selected for study here? The first answer to this question is that they include the great majority of the collective actions which ended in a court martial. Because of the difficulties in telling what precipitated every court martial, it must be assumed that a few cases of collective action have been missed out: probably two or three, possibly five, perhaps even ten. It is unlikely that these

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(1) There are a few exceptions. Christopher Lloyd's article'The Mutiny of the Nereide', Mariners Mirror, volume 54, 1968, is thin and superficial, most uncharacteristic of a very perceptive historian. But Dudley Pope has published good two monographs on particular mutinies. The Black Ship is a study of the unusual mutiny on the Hermione in 1797, and forms the basis for my account in the last chapter. The Devil Himself: the Mutiny of 1800, London, Secker and Warburg, 1987, is much thinner, because the documentary record on the mutiny on the Diana is not really detailed enough to sustain a book. And that is more or less that, although there is of course an enormous literature on the Bounty: a most untypical mutiny which falls just outside our period. The best account is Roger Hough, Captain Bligh and Mr. Christian: the Men and the Mutiny, London, Hutchinson, 1972. Gavin Kennedy, Bligh, London, Duckworth, 1978, is also good.

include any of the really big mutinies.

But there is a much larger question. To what extent do these recorded mutinies and demonstrations reflect the actual incidence of mutiny and demonstration? And were these in some sense rare and unusual conflicts, which can therefore tell us little about 'normal' class relations on ship? Before tackling these questions, it is best to deal in some detail with some of the problems in interpreting the court martial records.

Problems

The major problem is that the court martials provide a record of defeated protest. The mutiny of the Windsor Castle in 1795, for instance, was more important than the mutiny on the Culloden the next month. (1) But the people of the Windsor Castle won their demand that nobody be victimized afterwards. So this thesis devotes more space to the Culloden.

Moreover, at the court martial the prosecutor

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(1) For these two mutinies see below, chapter Eight.

was by custom the captain of the unruly ship. The defendants were his seamen. The witnesses were mostly his officers and petty officers. In many cases the court records show the prosecutor was trying to establish that the men gave no warning of their feelings and made no prior protests. had they first protested through normal channels and gained no redress, this might mitigate the offense. But it would also reflect badly on the captain, who had been neither firm enough to suppress protest nor fair enough to defuse it. The court, of course, was composed of the prosecutor's fellow captains and perhaps a vice-admiral. The prosecutor did not want his incompetence exposed in that arena.

So both seamen and officers were discouraged from mentioning earlier protests. On the Terrible in 1796, for instance, her particularly unpleasant captain had faced several deputations complaining about bad bread before the men mutinied over the issue. During the trial (1) the captain was at some pains to establish that the men had not protested, and that when they had done so they had been given satisfaction.

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(1) In Adm. 1:5333.

Defendants also usually had more sense than to anger the court by trying to justify their actions. All this means that one sometimes has to read thirty or forty pages of a court martial before discovering the cause of a mutiny. Sometimes one never finds out.

But of course the court was composed of human beings. They were curious, and they could not actually judge the case without knowing the background. Of course they usually knew already, for they were part of the same fleet. But often the record contains enlightening questions from the court, presumably put by a captain who cannot figure out what is going on, or wants to confirm a rumour he has heard.

It is possible to combine such accidental illuminations with other evidence to glean some idea of organization below decks. But the bias in the records means that we can see only the tip of the iceberg. The protests we know most about were more violent and less successful than the average run of protests.

And of course the lower deck witnesses were usually trying hard to conceal what happened below decks. Most seamen on most ships stayed resolutely

silent to protect their shipmates. A few petty officers testified. Their evidence often served to hang a man, but they were usually not verbose witnesses.

Officers were much the best prosecution witnesses. They shared the values and loyalties of the court, so they were more likely to be believed. They were more at ease, and therefore more fluent and more lucic. Their accounts are more detailed and more truthful, except where they were clearly covering for superior officers. But besides their obvious biases, they had no concrete idea of how the men organized. This was because organization was <u>the</u> thing the people were concealing. So the officers' testimony usually concentrates on overt acts: one seaman was standing sentry with a pike or another battered down the ward room door.

In any case, the court wanted all witnesses to concentrate on overt acts. The court was trying to be fair, and to be seen to be fair. They therefore did not go into the question of whether the captain or the people were in the right. After all, the people were so often in the right. Instead, the court concerned itself with the simple matter of whether such and such an individual prisoner had committed specific overt

acts.

At the same time, however, they did want to get the rignleaders. This was partly a systematic hostility to lower deck organization. But it also happened because three hundred people might have demonstrated or struck, and the Navy did not want to and did not dare to try three hundred men. So they had to select exemplary victims on some basis. This tended to mean that the defendants were some combination of ringleaders and angry individuals who had been insulting or violent towards officers. But one always has to remember that the 'ringleaders' were not necessarily the actual leaders. They were the people the officers thought were the leaders. In many cases the people were trying very hard to conceal the identity of their leaders. When they actually took command of a ship, it became very clear who their leaders were. At the Nore in 1797 they elected ship's committees. But when a whole ship's company groans in protest while watching punishment and one man is singled out, it is likely that the captain is only guessing. In cases where most of the petty officers are brought to trial and none of the seamen, it is likely that the captain is trying a scatter shot attack on the men he regards as the probable leaders.

How Many Mutinies?

Having looked at some of the problems with the court martial records, let us return to the original question. How representative are the cases revealed in the court martials?

The answer varies with the type of collective organization. At one extreme we have records of every occasion where the people succeeded in seizing the ship and taking it to the enemy. At the other extreme, in the overwhelming majority of cases where the people wrote a letter of complaint, the letter writer was not prosecuted. The few trials of letter writers are exceptional, but interesting for what they reveal of how letters were written.

In between things are more complicated. One has to rely on guesses, albeit guesses educated by years of nosing around the records. I feel reasonably confident we have records of the majority of major strikes where the people seized and held part of the ship for a time. (The exception to this is 1797 and 1798, when many mutineers won amnesty.) I am equally sure that only a minority of demonstrations and protests resulted in prosecutions. Some captains will have relied on a few floggings, some will have ignored

the protests, and some will have redressed their grievances. It is very difficult to tell how common such strikes and demonstrations were. They were shameful for the officers involved, and no responsible person afloat or ashore wanted to publicize them. They rarely surface in memoirs, or even letters. My guess would be that strikes or demonstrations that avoided prosecution were probably some five to twenty times as common as those recorded here. It is possible, though unlikely, that they were only three times as common. It is also possible that they were more than twenty times as common.

But this is, perforce, guesswork. Nor does it answer the other question. All of the cases I have been able to find of persecuted collective action are listed in Appendix One. They include only twenty cases of riot, strike, demonstration or attempt to replace the captain, and four cases of successful attempts to seize the ship and desert to the enemy. Of course there were many more mutinies in the tow years 1797 and 1798, which I have not included in the appendix. But for the 'normal years', even if unprosecuted demonstrations were ten or twenty times more common, we are dealing with exceptional cases. Most of the time on most ships men were not

protesting or making mutiny. Are these mutinies not abnormal behaviour, symptoms of an unusual pathology of shipboard relations?

This question cannot really be answered properly until the evidence has been presented in the body of the thesis, so it will be tackled again in the conclusion. But for the moment a preliminary point needs making. These collective actions were unusual events which set limits to and conditioned the usual.

The point is familiar from the approach to discipline in most naval history. The exemplary punishment is understood as setting the limits to permissible behaviour. Flogging round the fleet was not the common lot. Hangings were even rarer. But the lash and the noose were essential to discipline. They conditioned what unruly sailors would normally consider doing. In the same way, protests, demonstrations and strikes were not everyday events. But every day everybody on shipboard knew that they were a possibility for the ship's company if they were so minded. The possibility of action set the limits of every day life. The point is also familiar from industrial relations. In almost all industries strikes are rare events, but the possibility of strike action constrains management to deal with unions.

Thompson and Class

Let us turn now from the sources to the argument of the thesis. This thesis is a study of class conflict between officers and men. In understanding this conflict, one useful place to begin is the analysis of eighteenth century society developed by E. P. Thompson in a series of articles. (1) Thompson argues that in the eighteenth century the 'gentry' was hegemonic over the 'crowd'. The crowd were the lower orders, what Thompson at times calls plebians. The hegemony of the gentry meant that while the crowd could, and did, protest, there could be no affirmative rebellion. This was because until the French

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(1) 'Patrician Society, Plebian Culture', Journal of Social History, volume 7, 1974, pages 382-405; 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', Past & Present, number 50, 1971, pages 76-136; 'Eighteenth Century English Society: class struggle without class?', Social History, volume 3, 1978, pages 133-65. The first cited is the most important. For a good description of the eighteenth century working class see John Rule, The Experience of Labour in Eighteenth Century Industry, London, Croom Helm, 1981, and C. R. Dobson, Masters and Journeymen, Croom Helm, London, 1980.

Revoluttion there was no vision of an alternative society.

The rhetoric of the gentry was traditional and paternalist. But they were in fact a capitalist class, one that instinctively reduced everything to cash. The measure of a man was not his lands or his honour, but 'How much a year?' In enclosures, in hiring practices, in labour discipline and in the trade in food, they constantly tended to reduce the element of the traditional for the sake of the monetary. So when the crown protested they protested in terms of tradition, because the economic attack of the gentry on the people took the form of an attack on tradition. The people recalled the gentry to their rhetoric.

Because capitalism is a dynamic system, the attacks of the gentry on tradition were constant. As the century wore on they created more and more islands outside the web of paternalism: holes in the system where the habits of deference no longer applied. The most important of these holes was London.

While the gentry's rule was hegemonic, this did not mean that the crowd endorsed any of their particular actions. Moreover, the gentry did not wish to strengthen a state and a king they had

defeated in 1688, so they had only limited force to call upon. There was no standing army and no police. This led to considerable reliance on what Thompson calls 'theatre': the gentry used the power of ritual to turn metaphors into accomplished fact.

This particular insight has been developed by Douglas Hay in an article on 'Property, Authority and the Criminal Law'. (1) Hay argues that the rule of law was the central ideological prop of class rule in this period. This may be overstating the case. But his analysis of the social implications of the legal system is brilliant. He emphasizes the effect of 'majesty, justice and mercy'. Majesty is ritual plus terror. Justice presented the law as a system above the workings of petty interest. And the prerogative of mercy, exercised upon the intervention of locally powerful gentlemen, reinforced the relations of clientage and deference between plebians and gentlemen.

Much of this applies to the Royal Navy in our period. We find the same importance of the law,

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(1) In Douglas Hay and others, Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in the Eighteenth Century, London, Allen Lane, 1975.

with its terror and ritual, its scrupulous justice and regular mercy. At sea too the gentlemen confront the crowd, and the sailors have a moral economy of their own. And for reasons we shall see, the man of war is certainly one of the largest holes in the fabric of hegemony.

But there is a problem with Thompson's concept of class. Thompson writes of class partly in terms of economic position and partly in terms of consciousness. For him, one cannot speak of a working class until it becomes conscious of itself. Before The Making of the English Working Class one finds 'Class Struggle without Class'. I do not find this useful, and prefer the classic Marxist approach to class.

This approach sees class in terms of relations between groups in the process of production. A serf is one who owes labour, a lord the one he owes labour to. A worker is one who sells labour power, the capitalist is one who buys labour power. The sellers of labour power may or may not have a common understanding of their identity. As long as they must work for wages, they are an economically constituted class.

Class struggle happens when one economically constituted class comes into conflict with another. Most commonly, this occurs at the point

of production and is often only partially understood as class conflict. It may also, however, occur as more general political conflict and even a contest for state power. At this level it may be understood by those involved in class terms, or religious terms, or other terms, or in terms of a mixture.

In no class conflict does one united class face another. Captains of industry do not 'scab': workers do. In every revolution children of the ruling class are to be found working on opposition newspapers. For a conflict to be class conflict it only requires that in general the majority involved line up along class lines. A class conflict is one in which the sides are patterned by the different roles of the participants in the mode of production.

This does not mean that the question of class consciousness is boring or unimportant. It is the very stuff of practical politics. The distinction between a 'class in itself' and a 'class for itself' is a traditional Marxist one. It simply means that one can have 'class struggle without consciousness', or'class struggle with confused consciousness', but not 'class struggle without class.

In these terms, the mutinies and

demonstrations in the Royal Navy were class conflict. The officers were usually gentry. In any case they were the ship board representatives of a capitalist state. The 'people' were almost all men who had to sell their labour to live. Struggle between these two groups was class struggle.

Rediker and Class

After Thompson, the other useful starting point is Marcus Rediker's wonderful book, Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750. (1) Rediker's argument is complex, but again, one must summarize.

Rediker is concerned with British and American sailors, at that time subjects of one state. He starts, like Thompson, with the expansion of capitalism as a system. As capitalism expanded as a world system, it required more and more sailors. Because Britain was a great imperial and capitalist power, many of these ships and sailors were British. At the same time, various processes of 'primitive accumulation' were creating a supply of men without property or land rights, men who had to live by their labour.

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(1) Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987.

These sailors were workers. In many ways their working experience prefigured that of industrial workers of later centuries. They were alienated labour, men whose employers thought of them in terms of the labour they did rather than the person they were, who called them 'hands'. Crucially, they were wage workers who had to sell their labour power to live. They were also casual labour. Their employers, the owners, were more or less pure capitalists. In previous centuries men had worked for shares of the profit of the voyage. Where they could, sailors preserved the share system: in fishing vessels, smugglers, privateers and pirate ships. But in merchantmen (note the name) the relations between master and men were capitalist relations.

The master represented the owner. Sometimes he was the owner. Often he had a share in the vessel or the voyage. As a wage employer, his profits in the end came from the difference between his takings and his wage bill. This created a relentless pressure to drive down wage rates, or manning levels, or both. And that meant driving the seamen, or cheating them on their wages or provisions or both.

This pressure, this opposition, this class conflict between master and worker was new. And

there was a new difficulty in controlling this new labour. On shore, particularly in the countryside, there had been a habit of deference. The lower orders had to live with their betters. On sea they signed on for short voyages and often jumped ship if they were displeased. There was no elaborate web of relations between masters and men. The master needed to drive the men harder but found it harder to do so. Seamen were an 'unruly' lot.

This unruliness came partly from the job. It was hard and dangerous work, and it made men rough. But it came also from their new found freedom from the constraints of land. And it came from the culture they built in opposition to the world of the masters. This seaman's culture was godless, determinedly secular and egalitarian. They lived for the moment, they did not save. They valued skill and generosity and solidarity. They drank too much and died young. And they were workers of the world in several senses. They travelled the world. They lived in ports and looked outwards to other ports rather than inland towards their own country. They came from all corners of the world. And they were workers of the world in the sense that they prefigured the later work experiences of industrial workers.

So a driving capitalist regime confronted an

unruly and egalitarian workforce. This, Rediker argues, goes far to explain the ubiquity of violence by masters to men he describes. The master would summon the authorities in port. At sea he relied in the end on his fist and anything he could grab to hit a man with. If the men were not afraid of him, he could not drive them. And if he could not drive them, he could not compete with those who could.

The sailors responded to this driving with weapons of their own. The first resort was desertion. In theory this was illegal: a man signed a contract for a voyage and could not leave until it was complete. In practice the masters kept trying to use the authorities to reclaim absent sailors, but often failed. At sea, or where desertion was impossible, demonstration and protest were possible. Working more slowly or refusing to work were common, but constrained by the fact that on a ship if the essential work was left undone, everybody would die. In extremity men could and did mutiny and take the ship. Sometimes this led to piracy, the expropriation of the means of production.

This habit of conflict between masters and men led, over time, to a more political cast of mind among sailors. The egalitarian values and

hatred of the masters developed at work were the grounding for the presence of the sailors in the New York and London crowds of the 1770s. And as sailors developed a tradition of withdrawing their labour, the word for taking down a sail (strike) became the general word for withdrawal of labour by other groups of workers.

Of course, Rediker is writing about merchant seaman, not naval sailors, forty years and more before our period. Thompson is writing about the traditions of working class protest on land. But armed with their insights, we can now turn to sketch out the analysis that underlies this thesis.

The Argument

The argument of this thesis is as follows. We begin with the nature of the production process. The naval man of war was a unique machine. The ship was the most complex machine of its day. A merchant ship carried a crew of tens: a man of war of the same size carried a crew of hundreds to work the guns. This made the man of war closer in many ways to a modern factory than to an eighteenth century estate. Several hundred workers were gathered together under the control of one man.

From 1793 onwards the war required hundreds of ships. That meant over a hundred thousand men were needed. The war also expanded merchant trade. Navy and merchant marine competed for an inelastic pool of skilled men, and wages in the merchant service shot up. The only way the Navy could get men for what they paid was to impress them and hold them by force against desertion.

This produced a resentful force of wage labourers working against their will. Once on board they were driven to work by constant low level violence. This was not because their officers were brutal. It was because of the

problem of control the officers faced in policing a large angry workforce who had to be forced to work.

But the low level violence ('starting') was not enough. It did not always work, men skulked, and they could defy the drivers. So to keep order and control there was a whole panoply of 'punishment': flogging, court martial, flogging round the fleet. This was highly ritualized brutality: a theatre of terror.

Sailors, however, had ways of fighting back. These were partly grounded in a forecastle culture with considerable tradition. This culture revolved around women, drink, song and solidarity. Sailors also had a tradition of resistance, from 'round robins' to strikes, and a strong sense of moral economy. In addition to the tradition there was something new: the impact of the French Revolution. This gave many of them a feeling of their rights as men, and just as important it massively broadened the horizons of possible resistance.

So punishment was not a complete answer to the problem of control. The 'people' could, and did, resist in traditional ways. They wrote letters of complaint, they demonstrated, murmered and worked to rule. Above all, they deserted.

This takes the argument to the end of Part Two. In Part Three we shift from general background to a detailed analysis of two mutinies in 1794 and 1795. Here we can see a shift from traditional forms of resistance to something more ambitious: the armed strike. There were certainly precedents for 'mutiny' in the Navy. There had been protests and strikes over pay in port. At times men had seized the ship by force and taken it to the enemy or deserted. Now they were taking part or all of the ship and holding it by force while they effectively negotiated with their commanders over specific issues of shipboard life. They were contesting for control.

The intention in this part is to show the details of this contest. The court martial records of big mutinies provide the only real window into the nuts and bolts of class struggle on a local level in this period. We can watch both officers and people manouvering, struggling to find the tactics which will help them claw back or take control. The aim is to analyse a mutiny rather as a modern sociologist might analyse a strike.

These mutinies were both defeated. This provides the opportunity for a detailed look at the workings of the law. Some of Thompson and Hay's ideas are used to explain what happened in

court martials, how they could be at one and the same time extremely fair and instruments of class rule.

In Part Four the method shifts again: we move from the trees to the woods. This analyses the trends in mutiny, resistance and justice from 1796 to 1814. The exact trends will be outlined at the beginning of Part Four, so they will be fresh in the reader's mind at that point. The approach will be historial: the questions will be what changed, and why? Attention will be paid to wider social forces. But too often the new social history from below ignores the importance of specific events. Much hinges on economic social processes. But, to use a naval metaphor, much also hinges on whether important battles are won or lost. One of the things I will try to show in Part Four is the influence of the outcome of mutinies on the strategy and tactics of both sides in subsequent mutinies. In a sense, as with Part Three the goal is to rescue the phrase 'class struggle' from a slogan and show it as the name for a process among men and women.

Part Five is the conclusion. This sums up the argument, deals with some possible objections, and shows how the thesis relates to the work of a few other scholars in naval and labour history.

Naval Social History

The above is an outline of the plan of the thesis. It is a statement of the argument. The proof of the argument is in the body of the thesis. But before moving on to that, how does this approach relate to the current state of schoalrship in naval history, and in particular, the study of discipline and mutiny?

The first good social history of the Navy was John Masefield's Sea Life in Nelson's Time, based larely on sailors' memoirs. (1) But the modern social history of the Navy in our period begins with Michael Lewis, A Social History of the Navy, 1793-1815, published in 1960. (2) This book broke new territory for naval historians, but it dealt mainly with the officers and was largely statistical. There is little useful on discipline. Christopher Lloyd, The British Seaman, 1200-1600, A Social History, was much better. (3) But Lloyd is weak on discipline and there is almost nothing on mutinies. Dudley Pope is much better. His

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(1) London, 1906.
(2) London, Allen and Unwin.
(3) London, Paladin, 1970.

Life in Nelson's Navy (1) must now be taken as the standard work on the subject. It is good on the culture of the lower deck, but still relatively weak on discipline and mutinies.

There are also, of course, Pope's two good monographs on particular mutinies cited above. And there is the work of Gill, Bonamy and Dobree, Dugan, Wells and Emsley on the mutinies of 1797 and 1798. (2)

Until recently, that was more or less that. Then in 1986 N.A.M. Rodger published a major work of scholarship, The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy. (1) This dealt with the social history of the Navy during the period of the Seven Years War, and to a lesser extent up to 1783. Rodger's project was to rehabilitate the Georgian Navy. He felt that Masefield's 1906 book had set the tone for later accounts of a navy where life below decks was nasty, brutish and short.

Masefield, of course, was dealing with the same period as this thesis. Rodger does not take on the argument directly, because he is dealing

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(1) London, Allen and Unwin, 1981.

(2) See the notes on pages 17 and 18 above.

(3) London, Collins, 1986.

with an earlier period. He produces a panoramic social history. In the course of it he mounts a partial defense of almost every institution that has traditionally been attacked in accounts of the eighteenth century Navy: the press, the purser, the operation of influence, and the lash. It is a partial defense: Rodger is no Neanderthal, and there are things he is not prepared to justify.

Our concern here is with mutiny and discipline. Rodger's description could be roughly summarized as follows. (1) The middle of the eighteenth century was a time of unusual social stability. The officers and gentry felt that their authority was unshakable. They did not think of the world in class terms, and they did not conceive of any possible challenge to their class power. This meant, paradoxically, that they were prepared to tolerate a degree of rowdiness and insubordination on board ship which would have been unthinkable in later times. Rodger folows Thompson in this, and in emphasizing that officers, like the gentry ashore, had few ways of controlling the crowd by force. So they negotiated. Slackers were punished, but not

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(1) See pages 205-244 and 344-46.

flogged unduly hard except by a few unusually sadistic captains. These few were tried by their peers and removed from command. In general, officers and men worked out ways of living with each other which were part of a shared set of values. Desertion was forbidden, and in theory the punishments were draconian. In fact men usually got away with a short flogging. Court martial justice was rough and ready, but fair. Theft, a crime against the lower deck, was treated more fiercely than mutiny or desertion.

On mutinies Rodger writes:

> This is a matter in which most writers today may be said to belong to the Cecil B. de Mille school of history, whose notion of mutiny is of the violent seizure of a ship from her officers, on the high seas. Mutinies of this sort did occassionally occur in merhcantment and privateers, but were virtually unkown in the Navy. The kind of mutiny which did happen, and happened quite frequently, conformed to certain unwritten rules, which if they had been codified, would have looked something like this:

1. No mutiny shall take place at sea, or in the presence of the enemy.
2. No personal violence may be employed (although a degree of tumult and shouting is permissible).
3. Mutinies shall be held in pursuit only of objectives sanctioned by the traditions of the Service.

The only cases in which these rules were broken were mutinies openly led or covertly incited by officers; genuine lower-deck mutiny invariably conformed to them, and so long as it did, authority regarded it with a weary tolerance, as one of the many disagreeable but unavoidable vexations of naval life. It called, not for punishment, but for immediate action to remedy the grievances complained of. (1)

The great majority of these mutinies were over pay. This was not, significantly over pay rates, but rather strikes because money which both officers and men agreed was due to the men had not in fact been paid. But in addition'the ejection of

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(1) Page 238.

intolerable officers was a proper and traditional object of mutiny'. (1) When men demonstrated against bad officers or refused to work while in port, they generally received redress.

There were two mutinies in this period which did not fall within these unwritten rules, on the Swallow and the Chesterfield.

> These two mutinies were exceptions which prove the rules by which other mutineers conducted themselves. These rules were very similar to other sets of unwritten rules by which the Navy conducted its affairs - the rules for impressment, for example, or for desertion. When other methods failed, mutiny provided a a formal system of public protest to bring grievances to the notice of authority. It was a sort of safety-valve, harmless, indeed useful, so long as it was not abused. It was part of a system of social relations which provided an effective working compromise between the demands of necessity and humanity, a means of reconciling the Navy's need of obedience and efficiency with the individual's grievances. It was a means

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(1) Page 239.

> of safeguarding the essential stability of shipboard society, not of destroying it. (1)

The above is Rodger's picture of naval discipline. As will become obvious, it differs in important repsects from the picture of naval discipline presented in the body of this thesis. Of course, Rodger is dealing with a different period. Society changed, and the Navy changed with it. Rodger has some interesting views of the nature of these changes:

> It is clear that the Service which suffered the mutinies of 1797 must have been very different from that of forty years before... (But) perhaps it did not change as much as might appear. Except in being collective movements in which ships co-operated, these mutinies followed more or less the 'unwritten rules' which had long governed such affairs. Like popular riots throughout the century, they were essentially conservative, aimed to restore the just system which had formerly obtained, to rescue the Navy from the deformations recently introduced into it. To men, both on the lower deck and the quarter

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(1) Pages 243-4.

deck, who had seen the excesses of the French Revolution, the mutinies of 1797 seemed very dangerous. Certainly they displayed evidence of class and political sentiments which would have been unthinkable a generation earlier, but it is not clear with hindsight that they were really as novel or as revolutionary as they then seemed. In forty years material conditions in the Navy had worsened. Inflation had ground away at the value of the naval wage, and the coppering of ships had removed the chance of frequent leave. The Service had expanded not only absolutely but relative to the population as whole, to recruit many men (and officers) unacquainted with the traditional accomodations of seafaring. When all these things have been considered, however, we should still beware of exaggerating the changes of forty years. (1)

Rodger, then, feels that some things changed and some things remained the same. At several points in the body of this thesis I will return to Rodger's analysis of naval discipline. The matter

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(1) Page 346.

is complex. For the moment I will summarize it in the following way. Rodger is right that there was a traditional mode of protest, in many ways analagous to the tradition of collective bargaining by riot on shore. However, by the 1790s these traditional protests were not an accpeted safety valve. On one level, neither officers nor men knew what would happen next in any confrontation. On another level, after the French Revolution neither side knew what the ultimate consequences of any mutiny would be. The traditions of protest described by Rodger are real. But mutiny in the Navy in 1797 or 1808 was very different from mutiny in 1745 or even 1783. In the last chapter I will summarize my differences with Rodger and return to historical questions. What changed? Why?

PART TWO:

Officers and Men

Chapter Three: Work and Control

Samuel Leech was the son of servants on an English country estate. As a boy he constantly badgered his mother to let him run away to sea Finally she relented. He joined the Navy carrying two going-away presents: a Bible and a pack of cards. During the War of 1812 he deserted to the Americans. He eventually opened a shop in New England, married a Connecticut Yankee and gave up drink. He wrote his memoirs in 1842. When he described the organization of a ship his mind turned not to the country estates of his boyhod but to the new factores that were springing up around him:

> This community (the ship's) is governed by laws peculiar to itself: it is arranged and divided in a manner suitable to its circumstances. Hence, when its members first come together, each one is assigned to his respective station and duty.... Each task has its man, and each man his place. A ship contains a set of _human_ machinery, in which every man is a wheel, a band, or a crank, all

moving with wonderful regularity and
precision to the will of its machinist, the
all-powerful captain. (1)

In the eighteenth century this set of 'human machinery' was unique. On a man-of-war 600 men worked and ate together under one command. These ships were among the largest workplaces in the world and in many ways were closer to a modern factory than to the country house of Leech's boyhood.

The reason was the guns. The great ships were floating batteries and were described by the number of guns they carried. The usual battleship was a '74': it carried 74 guns. In turn, guns were called after the weight of shot they carried. So a'74' carried mainly '32 pounders' and '24 pounders'. (2)

On the great ships all available space was given over to housing this weaponry. For instance, the Victory at Trafalgar carried 104 guns, 90 of these on the three gun decks. Each gun deck was 186 feet long and 51 feet wide. In other words,

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(1) Samuel Leech, Thirty Years From Home, or a Voice from the Main Deck, London, John Neale, 1844, pages 14-15.
(2) Actually, a '74' usually carried more than 74 guns, but for various reasons some of them were not counted. I am simplifying here.

the total area of all three decks was about half the size of a football field. The ships fought in a 'line-of-battle', the nose of one ship up against the tail of another. The line moved at the speed of the slowest ship.

Speed in itself was unimportant for the 74s. Two factors were crucial in the great sea fights. One was the speed at which the guns could be reloaded and fired again. This was the product of endless drill. The second factor was seamanship. Each fleet tried to tack to gain the weather advantage. Every admiral hoped for some captain on the other side to make a mistake and open a hole in the enemy line. Guns were carried in rows on either side of the ship. Half of them were fired in any one 'broadside'. A ship was terribly vulnerable if an attacker broke the line and passed under the stern or across the bow. Then the attacker could deliver a full broadside. Each gun was fired at pointblank range as the gun passed the midline of the victim ship. At the 'Glorious First of June', for instance, the Queen Charlotte broke the French line and passed behind the Jacobin, forcing the crippled ship to retire from the fight. (1)

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(1) A.T. Mahan, The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire, 1793-1812, London, Sampson and Low, 1892, volume 1, page 139.

The combination of men, guns and sails was crucial to the frigates in a different way. Frigates carried smaller and fewer guns than a 74. So a single broadside from a 74 could blow them out of the water. By tradition the frigates in each fleet sat and watched the larger ships fight it out. But frigates were fast, and they carried messages quickly from fleet to fleet. The British always had a few patrolling outsid the French ports, ready to race home with a warning if the French fleet came out. Though smaller than a 74, the frigate was a terror to merchant shipping, and chased down merchantmen and privateers alike.

There were many smaller ships in the Navy: bomb ships, sloops, brigs and tenders. The frigates and line-of-battle ships were square-rigged. The smaller ships were rigged at least partly fore-and-aft, and could sail fast close to the wind.

The Press

Twenty men could take a merchant ship across the Atlantic. A warship of the same size carried 300. Again, the guns made the difference: ten to fourteen men to each pair of guns. Each gun also needed a woman or a boy to do duty as a 'powder

monkey'.(1)

The demand for men was immense. Any 'landsman' could learn to work a gun or pull on a rope, and the boatswain's mates would beat him until he did. But it took balance and experience for a 'topman' to take in the sails while hanging in the swinging rigging far above the deck. The quartermaster's mates had to take the wheel. The sailmaker's crew and the carpenter's crew were skilled men. Each gun needed a 'captain' who knew the job. Some of the 'waisters' could stand around the ship's waist pulling on ropes, but some of them had to know which ropes were which. Captain Marryat estimated that over a third of the crew had to be men
'bred to the sea'. (2) It was these men the press was designed to recruit, and in fact press gangs were only allowed to impress seamen.

In wartime both the Navy and the merchant marine grew by leaps and bounds. Good seamen were

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(1) Dudley Pope, Life in Nelson's Navy, 1793-1815, London, George Allen and Unwin, 1981, page 206; Michael A. Lewis, A Social History of the Navy, 1793-1815, London, George Allen and Unwin, 1960, pages 227-8.
(2) Captain Marryat, Suggestions for the Abolition of Impressment in the Naval Service, London, J.M. Richardson, 1822, pages 25-34.

therefore in short supply and wages shot up. A sailor could make three or four times as much in a merchant ship as in the Navy. And he was probably more sure of receiving his wages on time.

But perhaps it would not have made a difference if the Navy had paid higher rates. Sailors hated the brutality and boredom of the man-of-war. No experienced seaman seems to have joined willingly in wartime. John Bechervaise, for instance, was a Guernseyman from a seafaring family and a seafaring island. He first went to sea in 1803. Seventeen years later, in the srping of 1820, Bechervaise found himself in London. He could not find a berth in a ship and had a wife and children to feed:

> I looked round the docks. Nothing was stirring... In my rambles I saw men who had been to my knowledge masters and chief mate of vessels, who would now gladly have gone before the mast: to paint the distress that pervaded every part of the merchant service is beyond my power. The immense number of men discharged from ships of war who had foolishly spent their money and now got into deep distress strolling about the streets, some begging, others worse, was truly painful

> to those who possessed any feeling... Of all the places then dreaded by seamen in the merchant service, a ship of war is the worst. I fully had my share of the prejudice, but there was no alternative...Painful indeed was the parting from my home. May the 6th, 1820, early in the morning, I passed by the R---. then fitting out, and for the first time in my life saw the momentous fabric that was to be my residence for several years, with a shudder of grief I cannot describe. (1)

Bechervaise was a volunteer and no malcontent. Having joined as a petty officer, he was soon promoted to quartermaster. He loved the sight of a trim deck with brasswork gleaming. If he says dread of the Navy was common, we should believe him. And his 'prejudice' is echoed by every other seaman who left his memoirs.

James Durand, for instance, was an American impressed into the Royal Navy. When the War of 1812 began he tried and failed to join the American prisoners of war who were taken out of the Navy and sent to Dartmoor prison. 'In fine,

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(1) John Bechervaise, Thirty-Six Years of a Sea-Faring Life, Portsea, 1839, pages 107-8.

all those who went to prison were best off. They were not flogged as often.' (1) Samuel Leech, the boy with Bible and the pack of cards, records that 'The crew, too, by some means had an impression that my mother had brought me on baord to get rid of me, and therefore bestowed their bitteres curses on her in the most profuse manner imaginable.' (2)

It is impossible to tell what proportion of a a ship's company were pressed men. The ship's books show about half, but this is clearly an understatement. Many pressed men took the 'bounty' when they joined, and so went into the ship's books as 'volunteers'. Some experienced seamen do appear to have joined because they needed the bounty quickly. Some were sent as 'volunteers' by the magistrates. (3) And in theory it was illegal to press foreigners. So all impressed foreigners were signed into the books as 'volunteers'.

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(1) James Durand, An Able Seaman of 1812, eidted by George S. Brooks, New Haven, Yale Universtiy Press, 1926, page 67.
(2) Leech, page 14.
(3) For some examples, see Clive Emsley, 'The Recruitment of Petty Offenders during the French Wars, 1793-1815', Mariners Mirror, 1980, volume 66, pages 199-208.

The matter is well summed up by John Nicol, who had volunteered as a boy: 'I was surprised to see so few, who, like myself, had chosen it for the love of that kind of life.' (1)

Even enthusiasts often regretted their decision. Jack Nastyface volunteered and was taken by tender to the Nore:

> Upon getting on board this vessel, we were ordered down in the hold, and the gratings were put over us; as well as a guard of marines placed round the hatchway with their muskets loaded and fixed bayonets, as though we had been culprits of the first degree, or capital convicts. In this place we spent the day and the following night huddled together for there was not room to stand or sit seperate;... some were sea-sick, some retching, others were smoking, whilst many were so overcome by the stench, that they fainted for want of air. (2)

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(1) John Nicol, The Life and Adventures of John Nicol, Mariner, edited by John Howell in 1822, reprinted London, Cassell, 1937, page 39.

(2) Jack Nastyface (William Robinson), Nautical Economy, or Forecastle Recollections, Cheapside, William Robinson, 1836, pages 2-3.

But it was too late for Nastyface to change his mind.

Impressed Foreigners

Just before Trafalgar, Nelson ran up his famous signal to the fleet: 'England expects every man will do his duty.' England did not, however, expect it only of the English, for they formed barely half the fleet. The Irish were the next largest group. There were also many Scots and a large number of blacks from the West Indies and the American South. Some of these were excaped slaves, but many Americans, white and black, were pressed into the Navy.

The English appear to have felt that they had a certain ancestral claim on all these nationalities. But in addition about a tenth of the fleet were true foreigners, men from countries that had never known English rule. During these wars, indeed, many Frenchmen served in the English fleet, and many Englishmen in the American and French fleets. The poaching of American seamen from merchant ships was, as is well known, the official cause of the War of 1812.

Edward Jackson, for instance, was a free black man from Philadelphia. The press gang caught

him in Liverpool in 1795. He was put on the tender _Bruyton_ with other men to be carried to the fleet. The volunteers were allowed to be on deck but the pressed men like Jackson were locked in the 'press room'. At night the volunteers seized the ship. They had already been paid the recruitment bounty, so there was no reason to remain. They seized muskets and threw the officer of the watch down the hatch. Then they released the pressed men and sailed the tender to the shore and freedom.

Jackson was later caught with another man. He gave his name as 'Edward Jackson'. The court had difficulty accepting a black man with a surname and tried him for mutiny and desertion under the name of 'Prince Edward the Black alias Jackson'. They asked him if he had anything to say in his defense. He had papers to show he was an American with a wife and family in that country. He had carried a 'protection': a letter from the American government stating that as an American citizen he could not be pressed. This he had shown to Mr. Cragg, the Press Master in Liverpool. Cragg had torn up the protection in front of his face:

> I asked him why he tore it. He gave me no answer but took me along with him. I thought it very hard to be taken away in a foreign

country, where I had neither friends nor relations to do anything for me.

Jackson and his mate were acquitted on the charge of mutiny and convicted on the lesser charge of desertion. Each man was sentenced to receive 300 lashes while being flogged round the fleet. (1)

The Navy took men where it could, and was often not very picky about their level of seamanship. Lieutenant Hodgskins disapproved:

> In 1811, I knew Africans, who had been stolen from Africa, taken in a slave-ship, afterwards cloathed, on board of a guard-ship, and without being able to speak a word of English, sent to man the British fleet, to fight the battles of our country. Such a thing is a burlesque upon a national defense. (2)

Samuel Richardson, the gunner, remembered one shipmate. The fleet was carrying many soldiers. The young lord in command of the soldiers met a

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(1) Jackson's court martial in Adm. 1:5335.
(2) Thomas Hodgskin, An Essay on Naval Discipline, London, 1813, pages 97-8.

lost-looking Scandinavian sailor on the docks. The young nobleman, with a charming smile, invited the sailor into his boat. The boat's crew rowed out to Richardson's ship and the man was pressed there. They had to get his name, place of birth and rating. To every question they asked he replied 'Orla Hou'. They supposed that in his langauge 'Orla Hou' meant 'I don't understand you.' So they pressed him under the name 'Orla Hou'. When Richardson left the ship five years later the man was still on baord. He spoke fluent English and was one of the best seamen in the ship. He still drew his pay under the name of 'Orla Hou'. (1)

The Importance of the Press

The press gang was much reviled in the eighteenth century, and the 'problem' of the press was a hot topic among pamphleteers.(2) It remains so among naval historians today.

The classic attack on the press gang is

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(1) William Richardson, A Mariner of England, edited by Spencer Childers, London, John Murray, 1908, page 114.
(2) See J.S. Bromley, editor, The Manning of the Royal Navy, Navy Records Society, Volume 119, 1974.

J. R. Hutchinson, _The press Gang Afloat and Ashore_. (1) This is full of entertaining stories from the court martial records and has the merit of reflecting the traditional sturdy English plebain hatred of the press gang. It has the considerable weakness of treating the events of 1690 and 1810 on an equal footing.

The most recent, and most sophisticated defense of the press gang is that of N.A.M. Rodger in _The Wooden World_. He argues:

> It was, and is, tempting to offer facile condemnation rather than workable alternatives. But the political reality of eighteenth-century England was that the very forces which made the press so unpopular also made it inevitable. Englishmen prided themselves on their liberties, by which as a rule they meant the rights of local authority against central...The Navy, and consequently the press, was pre-eminently an instrument of central central government, and potentially of 'tyrranny'... Thus, in the midst of war, public opinion and the law still worked strongly to hamper the Navy. Even men who

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(1) London, Eveleigh Nash, 1906.

> were most in favour of the war were most active in damaging the Navy's capacity to fight it...The Admiralty had seen too many schemes of conscription or registration damned as instruments of desptotism to have any more hope of a system less arbitrary, less brutal, and in truth less despotic, than the press. Though it bore harshly, erratically and inefficiently, it bore largely on an inarticulate and politically weak group, and the alternatives posed seemd to threaten more powerful interests. So the Admiralty was obliged to make the best of an extremely unsatisfactory job. (1)

Rodger's argument is subtle and his partial vindication of the press gang following is an inspired effort. (2) But in the end he relies on the traditional argument of 'necessity'. The argument is flawed, of course, because the British Navy could always have tried proper wages. That aside, the bottom line is really a matter of loyalties. For Rodger, as for the Admiralty, in the end the Navy had to be manned. And from the Admiralty's point of view that was of course true.

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(1) Rodger, page 164.
(2) Rodger, pages 164-182.

This does not mean, however, that the historian need assume that the victory, or even the existence of the Royal Navy is an ultimate criterion. It is just as possible to begin from the standpoint of the sailors trying to avoid the gang.

But in any case, the central question for my argument in this chapter is not the moral validity of the press gang. Rather, what I am arguing is that several things combined to produce a great hunger for men in the Admiralty. The first was the technical nature of the fighting ship. The second was the expansion of trade in the War, and threfore of the merchant marine. The third was the rising level of wages, and the fact that both merchant and naval captains were drawing on what was in some ways a limited pool of men. All of these factors meant that the press was the main way in which seamen were recruited. The really important point for our purposes is that the majority of seamen did not wish to be on board and had a grievance against the manner in which they had arrived. In William Johnson Neale's phrase, 'a number of outraged individuals were collected in our fleets.' (1)

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(1) An Account of the Mutiny at Spithead and the Nore, London, Thomas Tegg, 1842, page 3.

Work

These outraged individuals soon learned to hate the driving regime of work. Leech describes it well:

> The great disparity of numbers between the crew of a merchant ship and that of a man of war, occasions a difference in their internal arrangement and mode of life, scarcely conceivable by those who have not seen both. This is seen throughout, from the act of rousing the hands in the morning to that of taking in the sail. In the merchantman, the watch below is called up by a few strokes of the handspike on the forecastle; in the man of war by the boatswain and his mates... You immediately hear a sharp, shrill whistle; this is succeeded by another from his mates. There follows a hoarse, rough cry of 'All hands ahoy! ' which is forthwith repeated by his mates. Scarcely has this sound died upon the air, before the cry of 'Up all hammocks away!' succeeds it, to be repeated in like manner... No delay is permitted, for as soon as the above-mentioned officers have uttered

their imperative commands, they run below, each armed with a rope's end, with which they belabor the shoulders of any luckless wight upon whose eyes the sleep yet hangs heavily, or whose slow moving limbs show him to be but half-awake. With a rapidity which would surprise a landsman, the crew dress themselves, lash their hammocks and carry them on deck, where they are stowed for the day. There is a system even in this arrangement; every hammock has its appropriate place... A similar rapidity attends the performance of every duty. The word of command is given in the same manner, and its prompt obedience is enforced by the same ceremonious rope's-end. To sulk is therefore next to impossible: the least tardiness is rebuked by the cry of 'Hurrah my hearty! bear a hand! heave along! heave along! ' This system of driving is far from agreeable; it perpetually reminds you of your want of liberty; it makes you feel sometimes, as if the hardest crust, the most ragged garments, with the freedom of your own native hills, would be preferable to John Bull's 'beef and duff', joined as it is with the

rope's end of the driving boatswain. (1)

As in any armed services, a lot of the work was cleaning and a lot of it was make-work. All hands had to report before 4:30 a.m. to clean the decks. They finished just in time for breakfast at 6:30. Sentries made sure nobody could sneak down the hatches. The men were on their knees scrubbing. A midshipman or mate stood in front of them, moving slowly backwards. He made sure no man advanced on his knees until his bit of deck was thoroughly scrubbed. Sailors hated cleaning the decks. (2)

Many captains spent hours drilling the men in the rigging and in gunnery. The speed of gunnery made an enormous difference in battle. But it was hard work lugging the great guns in and out. And on no account were the men to fire the guns; the Ordnance counted every cannon ball. For instance, when Richardson was gunner he lost four cannon balls overboard in a storm. He went to the captain in a nervous sweat. The captain kindly told him not to worry; he was hoping for a battle soon, and then he could write off four cannon balls. (3)

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(1) Leech, pages 15-16.

(2) Bechervaise, pages 110-11 and Nastyface, page 6.

(3) Richardson, page 141.

The driving regime angered seamen. So did corruption. King Charles is said to have told his council one night; 'If ever you intend to man the fleet without being cheated by captains and pursers, you may go to bed.' (1) Like all the best stories, this one may be apocryphal. But the attitude it expressed was common among sailors in later generations.

The corruption of pursers was legendary. (2) The purser brought all the stores and handed them out. He was a contractor in his own right, and the post was bought and sold for large sums. All pursers paid for provisions at 16 ounces to the pound and then sold them to the men at 14 ounces to the pound. One of the demands of the Spithead mutiny of 1797 was for a 16 ounce pound.

Another demand in that mutiny was that the surgeon stop selling the medicines. It is not clear if the surgeons were any more corrupt than, for instance, boatswains. Probably the men took a lenient view of redirecting a spare sail. But when there were no medicines they took offense.

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(1) Hutchinson, page 63.
(2) Rodger, pages 87-98. extends his revisionist project to a defense of the much maligned purser. For a more balanced view see Dudley Pope, Life in Nelson's Navy.

Like other workers of the time, sailors held a strong sense of 'moral economy'. (1) They knew their rights to proper rations and they were going to have them. On shore workers tended to blame merchants and middlemen for the high price of bread. (2) Afloat, the captain was the centre of any corruption. He signed the dishonest books presented by the purser. He ran the ship and dealt with any complaints. He told the men to shut up or be flogged when they complained about missing cheeses. The captain usually had some fiddles of his own and took a cut of the others. In the nature of things, it is difficult to prove this. But it was in keeping with the temper of the age, and it would be surprising if the Royal Navy was the one public institution in Hanoverian Britain not regarded as a public trough. And there is one important piece of evidence. When the ship's people complained about shortfalls in provisions, it was the captain they blamed and the captain they protested to. On land workers blamed grain

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(1) E. P. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century'. For a particularly forceful statement of the seamen's moral economy, see The Journal of James Morrison, edited by Owen Rutter, London, Golden Cockrel Press, 1935, pages 18-20.

(2) See Roger Wells, Wretched Faces: Famine in Wartime England, 1793-1801, Gloucester, Alan Sutton, 1988.

merchants rather than their employers. At sea the men's anger about both corruption and work focused on their boss: the captain. (1)

The Frontier of Control(2)

The ship was a community of hostile groups. Officers and men understood this class system in terms of the parts of the ship. They spoke of people as places. The officers as a whole were the 'quarterdeck'. The men were the 'focsle' (the forecastle), or more commonly, 'the lower deck'. Junior officers were 'midshipmen'.

On the next page there is a diagram of a ship seen from the side. It is not an accurate diagram of any particular ship. All ships had many more rooms and most of them had more decks. No ship with one gun deck would also have a poop deck. The

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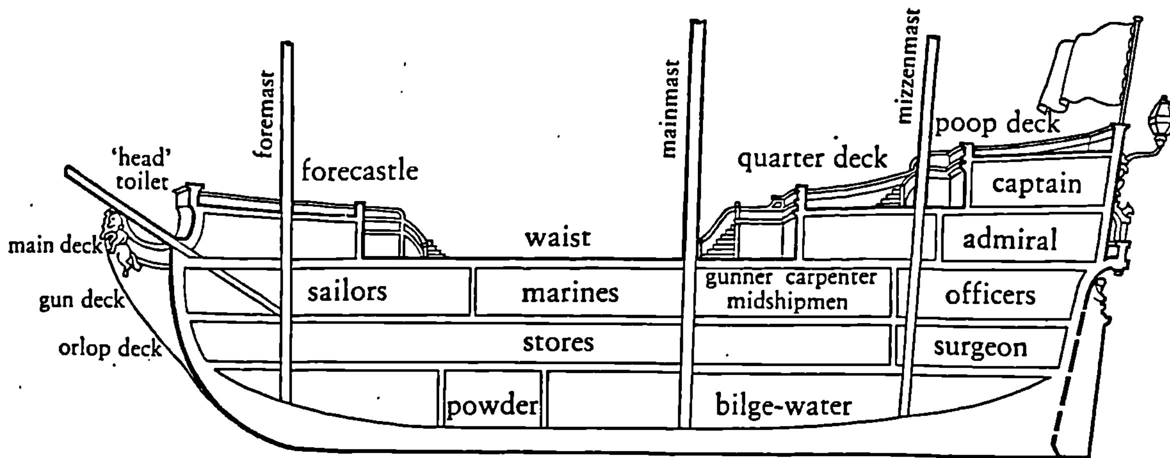
(1) For a good example of a protest about inadequate provisions directed at the captain, see the mutiny on the Terrible. The court martial record is in Adm. 1:5333. See also Solicitors to Admiralty, 14 March 1796, in Adm. 1:3684; Adm. Hotham to Admiralty, 12 Sept 1795, 21 Sept 1795 and 20 Oct 1795, in Adm. I:393, Letters 225, 228 and 242.
(2) The following section is based partly on Pope, Life in Nelson's Navy, and largely on my own reading in the court martial records.



Social organization on board

diagram is a social map. It shows the rough way a sailor automatically divided any ship.

The sailors slept forward on the gun deck. They played on the forecastle. They worked in the tops: the foretop, the maintop and the mizzentop. The officers slept aft on the main deck. They played and worked aft on the quarterdeck and the cabins directly below it. The sailor went to the masthead as a routine duty. The midshipman was 'mastheaded' as a punishment. As it happens, the rigging and the front of a sailing ship are the cold, wet part. The back is the warm, dry part.

These divisions were not just for sleeping. A frontier of control ran down the middle of the ship. A sailor with business on the quarterdeck always stood on the leeward side. That way his head was lower than the captain's on the windward side. (The wind makes a sailing ship tip to leeward.) Jack Nastyface was 'never on the quarterdeck but when ordered on duty, and was only permitted to say "Aye, Aye , sir", when spoken to, at the same time touching the rim of my castor, with all due respect ot my officers.' (1)

Nastyface had to be careful. Sometimes men did come aft singly or in groups. The result could be a court martial for mutiny. The court was

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(1) Nastyface, pages x-xi.

always careful to find out if such men had behaved in a respectful manner. Had so and so talked quietly or loudly? Did he really have his cap in his hand and eyes cast down when talking to the captain or had he merely gone through the motions? The wrong answer could cost a man his life.

Many men patrolled the frontier of control. The first line were *the 'captains': the 'captain* of the foretop', the 'captain of the maintop', the 'captain of the mizzenmast', the 'captain of the forecastle', and so on. There were two of each of these, one in each watch. These men were working foremen. They were skilled at their craft, they therefore held a moral authority, and they did not beat the men. They worked alongside the men and drew wages at the same rate as other able seamen. They lived in the foreward berth with the men, and in a mutiny they went with the other seamen.

The second line of control were the warrant officers: the cooper, carpenter, sailmaker, gunner and surgeon. They lived amidships, between officers and men. They sometimes beat the men and in a mutiny almost always went with the officers.

Any 'captain' or officer facing a recalcitrant man could call for the boatswain or one of his mates. Their main job was driving the landsmen. They would also beat any man singled out

by a foreman or officer. The boatswain's mates messed with the men, but they wielded the cat at formal floggings. In a mutiny the boatswain went with the officers, but his mates might go either way.

If a man got cheeky or resisted the boatswain could call for the ship's corporal or the master-at-arms. In a crisis he shouted for the marines. In battle the marines manned the guns like everybody else, just as in landings they fought side by side with the sailors. No seperate force of marines was necessary for these tasks.

But their main duty was not to make landings or board other ships. Rather, in any confrontation the captain immediately called the marines to accompany him below decks. Their weapons cowed the sailors and they arrested the trouble makers. As Captain Glascock wrote of the marines, 'In such a crisis, every officer must be keenly aware of the inestimable value of a few loyal and courageous hearts.' (1)

On most days the marines did no work but sentry duty. At night they slept between the officers and the men. For formal floggings the

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(1) An officer of Rank (William Glascock), Naval Sketch-Book, volume two, page 51.

people were drawn up on the main deck. The officers stood above them on the quarterdeck. The marines stood with the officers and levelled their muskets down towards the main deck, the powder already in the pan.

Two statistics show just how tense life was on a man of war. At the height of the war the Navy had 20,000 marines and 110,000 sailors. On a man of war with a crew of about 600, almost 100 of them would be marines. Their sole purpose, between engagements, was to keep the men in order.

Chapter Four: Punishment

Work produced constant tension. Because the officers felt that the men would not start work on their own, the boatswain's mates had to 'start' them. Lieutenant Hodgskin describes starting as:

> one man beating another with a piece of rope as hard as he can hit him: the other being perfectly defenseless, and forbid him even to look displeased, as that is contempt or disrespect... Starting is more generally used for want of alacrity than for any other crime.
>
> In hoisting the topsails to the mast-head, hoisting boats in and out, hoisting in beer and water, and such like duties, when they are not done with smartness, the captain stationed a boatswain's mate at different parts of the deck, each with a rope's end, with orders to beat every man as he passed... In performing all the little pieces of duty, every man, almost, as he ran and pulled on the rope, had

> to pass... Thus, whether good or bad, whether old or young, whether exerting himself or not, nearly every man in ship got a beating. (1)

The rope's end might be two inches in diameter. It might be a halyard eight inches thick. Some boatswain's mates used bamboo canes instead. Sometimes a starting was a full beating rather than a passing thwack. An angry boatswain's mate might lay into a man as he danced around to avoid the blows. Or a cranky officer could order an impromptu beating.

Midshipmen were often the worst disciplinarians. Nastyface remembered one who

> was a youth not more than twelve or thirteen years of age; but I have often seen him get on the carriage of a gun, call a man to him, and kick him about the thighs and body, and with his fist would beat him about the head; and those, although prime seamen, at the same time dared not demur.

When the midshipman fell in battle at Trafalgar, 'the general exclamation was,

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(1) Hodgskin, pages 62-3.

"Thank God we are rid of the young tyrant." ' (1)

James Durand, on the other hand, reports that his midshipmen asked the men to stoop so the boys could beat them. Lieutenant Hodgskin, himself once a midshipman, thought their viciousness came from being away from their families so young and not receiving a proper education on board:

> If any man is not convinced, I can only wish him to go on board ship, and see the hours of the midshipmen alternately employed, sleeping, playing and walking the decks, with their hands in their pockets, that he may hear their conversation and see their amusements; and, if he would afterwards make them judges of the actions of men, I should pronounce him mad. (2)

Such summary beatings accounted for the overwhelming majority of punishments. But when a captain became really angry he was supposed to wait until the next day for a formal flogging. Captain Glasscock describes why in his book of advice for young officers:

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(1) Nastyface, pages 27-8.
(2) Durand, page 18; Hodgskin, page 69.

An indulgence, therefore, in passion, under circumstances of disapointment, mistake, or mishap, should be rigidly repressed, which, while the paroxysm lasts, tends to the debasement of those who are its objects, and robs the subject of either reflcetion or the free exercise of the native faculties of the mind. If an anecdote were wanting to exemplify the fatal consequences of unrestrained passion, it would only be necessary to refer to the melancholy fate of the captain of La Revolutionairre who, sailing under sealed order, fell on the deck in a fit of anger at some of the crew, and on being carried below, expired. (1)

Flogging

Punishment came in all shapes and sizes. But the word 'punishment' meant one thing: flogging. The cat-o'-nine-tails was the symbolic heart of discipline, and a formal flogging was the ceremony of power. Samuel Leech describes the ritual on the Macedonian:

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(1) Glascock, volume one, pages 243-4.

A poor fellow had fallen into a very sailor-like offence of getting drunk. For this the captain sentenced him to the punishment of four dozen lashes. He was first placed in irons all night... until the captain bade the first lieutenant prepare the hands to witness the punishment. Upon this the lieutenant transmitted the order to the master-at-arms. He then ordered the grating or hatch of square holes to be rigged: it was placed accordingly between the main and spar (i.e. quarter) decks, not far from the mainmast. While these preparations were going on, the officers were dressing themselves in full uniform and arming themselves with their dirks. The prisoner's messmates carried him in his best clothes, to make him appear in as decent a manner as possible. This is always done, in the hope of moving the feelings of the captain favourably towards the prisoner.

This done, the hoarse, dreaded cry of 'All hands ahoy to witness punishment!' from the lips of the boatswain, peals along the ship as mournfully as the notes of funeral knell. At this signal the officers muster on the spar deck, the men on the main deck. Next came the prisoner, guarded by a marine on one

side and the master-at-arms on the other, he was marched up to the grating. His back was made bare, and his shirt was laid lossely upon his back. The two quarter-masters proceeded to seize him up, that is, they tied his hands and feet with spun yarns, called the seizings, to the grating. The boatswain's mates, whose office is to flog on board of a man-of-war, stood ready with their dreadful weapon of punishment, the cat-o'-nine-tails. This instrument of torture was composed of nine cords, a quarter of an inch round, and about two feet long, the ends whipt with fine twine. To these cords was afffixed a stock, two feet in length, covered with red baize. The reader may be sure that it is a most formidable instrument in the hands of a strong, skilfull man. Indeed, any man who would whip his horse with it would commit an outrage on humanity, which the moral feeling of any community would not tolerate; he would be prosecuted for cruelty; yet it is used to ship MEN on board ships of war.

The boatswain's mate is ready, with coat off, and whip in hand. The captain gives the word. Carefully spreading the cords with the fingers of his left hand, the executioner

throws the cast over his right shoulder; it is brought down upon the now oncovered herculean shoulders of the MAN. His flesh creeps- it reddens as if blushing at the indignity, the sufferer groans; lash follows lash, until the first mate, wearied with the cruel employment, give place to a second. Now two dozen of these dreadful lashes have been inflicted: the lacerated back looks inhuman; it resembles roasted meat burnt nearly black before a scorching fire; yet still the lashes fall; the captain continues merciless. Vain are the cries and prayers of the wretched man. 'I would not forgive the Saviour' was the blasphemous reply to one of these naval demi-gods, or rather demi-fiends, to a plea for mercy. The executioners keep on. Four dozen strokes have cut up his flesh, and robbed him of all self-respect; there he hangs, a pitied, self-despised groaning, bleeding wretch; and now the captain cries, Forbear! His shirt is thrown over his shoulders, the seizings are loosed: he is led away, staining the path with red drops of blood, and the the hands, 'piped down', by the boatswain, sullenly return to their duties. (1)

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(1) Leech, pages 18-19.

Sometimes the hands were more than sullen. Just below the surface the ship's company seethed. At times they greeted each stroke with a moaning so low that no one could be accused of it. At times they did more. On the Victorious the prisoner turned to the ship's company and said 'By God I will not strip.' It appears that the captain did not dare force him but left it to a subsequent court-martial to award 150 lashes. (1)

In June 1802 the marines were drawn up on the quarterdeck of the Audacious. In a low but clear voice marine Joseph Hawkes said 'It's a damned shame.' Another marine was pulled out of the line. The captain slugged him and he was put into irons. Next morning he was taken up to the quarterdeck, where he said it wasn't him, it was Hawkes. The court martial awarded Hawkes 300 lashes.

Flogging was a tense ceremony, a time when officers watched the men carefully. On the America in 1795 the sailors were lining up to witness punishment. For reasons that are unclear, they stood in rows with fixed bayonets. Lieutenant Lake felt that Samuel Beech had been slow in lining up,

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(1) Court martial of 12 Sept 1803, in Adm. 1:5363. For a similar case see the court martial of Jospeh Steel of the Ville de Paris in 1806, in Adm.1:5375.

(2) Court martial of Hawkes in Adm. 1:3360.

so he began beating Beech with a stick. Beech turned to face his tormenter, who raised his sword to ward off an anticipated blow from the sailor. Another seaman, Joseph Collier, made a remark over his shoulder to Beech without turning round. At this point Lake panicked. He had both Beech and Collier arrested immediately. The court martial acquitted both of them. (1)

Flogging was not always the end of punishment. Captain Glascock, in his manual for young officers, advises that:

> The moment the painful duty is ended, no inclination should be shown to keep the recollection of it alive by any ill-timed comment, or intimation (which, unfortunately, is too much the habit with many, in other respects, very judicious officers), that in addition to his punishment the delinquent is set down in the captain's private list. The tendency of such an intimation is to make men reckless of the future, and regardless of character, which they, with a good deal of reason, imagine is irrevocably lost the moment their name is enrolled in writing on

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(1) Court martial of Beech and Collier in Adm. 1:5333.

> that hateful memorial, emphatically denominated by sailors the '<u>Black List</u>'. No unprofitable task in the way of black-list duty should ever be imposed. It is in the recollection of many, that captains have compelled seamen on this list to brighten the 'breeches of the guns', the 'belaying pins', the ring bolts in the deck, and even a two-and thirty- pound shot, tasks which the sailor must himself perceive were useless. (1)

Glascock was writing in 1826, eleven years after the end of the wars. He noted that such practices were gradually dying out in the Royal Navy. They were, however, becoming newly popular in the American Navy, particularly on the smarter ships in the Mediterranean.

Of course, Glascock may not have been typical of officers of his generation. He sometimes seems a trifle soft. For instance, he was against putting men in irons:

> A man of spirit will naturally brood and repine at the unneccessary disgrace thus

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(1) Glascock, volume one, pages 245-6.

inflicted for trifling offenses. The injurious consequences of resorting to irons in the latter case may be most aptly exemplified by referring to numerous well-known instances, where a string of men, whose offences have been trifling have been exhibited, each bolted by the leg on the half-deck, or other most exposed part of the ship, whilst visitors from the shore have been conducted round the vessel by their own officers. A sailor must be made of stone not to feel keenly such ill-timed degradation. The sentiment is not confined to the prisoner: an inference is drawn by the visitant... most discreditable to the character of the seamen and respectability of the service. Thus the injury is twofold; at once inflicting on the sailor unnecessary degradation and pain, whilst it serves the malignant purposes of the malcontents on shore to claim to calumniate the character of the constitutional force, which has hitherto been, and will ever continue, the natural bulwark of these sea-girt isles. (1)

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(1) Glascock, pages 250-1.

A formal flogging was designed to terrify the sailors. The pomp, the ritual, the dress uniforms, the regulated and rhythmic brutality, all contributed to the same effect. (1) But how did it feel to the flogged man?

Flogging was shameful, and few men have left records of their experiences. One man recalled 'Nothing but an O, a few O my Gods, and then you can put on your shirt. ' Another, a soldier, flogged with the lighter military cat, wrote that after the first few strokes:

> The pain in my lung was more severe, I thought, than on my back. I felt as if I would burst in the internal parts of my body... I put my tongue between my teeth, held it there, and bit it almost in two pieces. What with the blood from my tongue, and my lips, which I had also bitten, and the blood from my lungs, or some other internal part, ruptured by the writhing agony, I was almost choked, and became black in the face. (2)

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(1) For a comparison see the discussion of theatrical rituals of power in E.P. Thompson, 'Eighteenth Century English Society: Class Struggle without Class?'
(2) Pope, The Black Ship, page 62.

Punishments varied enormously. A court martial could award a deserter 100 to 300 lashes. A captain could give him a quick two dozen and have done with it. The captain had great discretion. The law said he could not award more than a dozen without a court martial and twelve lashes is indeed the most common punishment recorded in the logs. But on occasion every captain awarded more and noted the fact in the official log. A few men got away with half a dozen: many got two dozen. Some captains awarded three or four dozen regularly. 63 and 72 lashes were not unheard of.

Flogging sometimes killed. This did not have much to do with the number of lashes, and most victims died some time afterwards. Many men survived 200 lashes. Some died after 36. Why?

The soldier quoted above remembered pain in the chest and blood from the lungs. One blow with a naval cat would knock down a standing man. The prisoner was lashed to a grating, and each blow slammed him against it. Dudley Pope did an

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(1) Samuel Billings of the Excellent, for instance, got 63 lashes for 'cheering on the lower deck' on 4 Jan 1803. See the ship's log in Adm. 52:2992. Several men on the Hermione got 72; see Pope, Life in Nelson's Navy, page 226.

interesting experiment. He made a replica of the old cat-o'-nine-tails. He nailed two inch by half inch pieces of pine across a grating. He broke the wood with one blow of the cat. So he tried inch by inch pine. He broke it on the second blow. (1)

It is not hard to see how a man tied to that grating might suffer a broken rib. That rib could float loose and slice into the lung. This would be very painful, and on an eighteenth century ship a punctured lung could easily lead to fatal infection.

When sailors remembered floggings, words like 'meat' and 'liver' kept springing to mind. Here again the danger was infection. Men would not die of the beating itself, but they could later die of gangrene and other infections. This danger in flogging is not mentioned in any contemporary source. But it explains why some men survived 200 lashes and others died after 24, and why they usually died after an interval following the beatings.

But we should not exaggerate. The overwhelming majority of flogged men survived. Nor did all the witnesses feel that a flogging was dangerous. Captain Chamier wrote a novel called

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(1) Pope, The Black Ship, pages 332-3.

Ben Brace, the Last of Nelson's Agamemnons. Ben Brace says: 'As for corporal punishment - which means a little back-scratching - I think I may say that it could not be abolished without injury to the service.' (1) He goes on to explain that men would not work without terror. He was, of course, right. A wage labourer can be threatened with the sack. But the seamen were mostly pressed, and every regime of forced labour requires the lash. Captain Glascock summed up the case for flogging in 1826: 'The materials of which our navy are formed are, like granite, principally valuable for their hard, tough and lasting wear-and-tear quality.' (2)

Of course, Chamier, Glascock and 'Ben Brace' were all captains. No lower deck memoir justifies the lash. Whatever the pain, what sailors hated most was the degradation. Leech describes the scene as his ship heads for home:

> Visions of an old fire-side, of many a humble hearth-stone, poor, but precious, flitted across the visions of our crew that night.

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(1) Frederick Chamier, Ben Brace, the Last of Nelson's Agamemnons, London, Bentley, 1836, quoted in C. Northcote Parkinson, Portsmouth Point, the Navy in Fiction, 1793-1815, London, Liverpool University Press, 1948, page 62.
(2) Glascock, volume two, page 102.

Hardships, severe discipline, were for the time forgotten in the dreams of hope. Would that I could say that everything in every mind was thus absorbed in pleasure! There were minds that writhed under what is never forgotten. Like the scar, that time may heal, but not remove, the flogged man forgets not that he has been degraded; the whip, when it scarred the flesh, went farther; it wounded the spirit; it struck the _man_; it begat a sense of degradation he must carry with him to the grave. We had many such on board our frigate; their laugh sounded empty, and sometimes their look became suddenly vacant in the midst of hilarity. _It was the whip entering the soul anew_. But most of our crew were, for the time, happy. They were homeward bound. (1)

Offenses

Men were flogged for many reasons. On the _Culloden_ in 1793, for instance, men were punished for sleeping on watch, being drunk and disobedient, fighting, neglect of duty and attempted desertion. On 30 March 1795 James Warner received 12 lashes for 'skulking and neglect of

duty. On 11 June Robert Leeky received 24 lashes for 'drunkenness and sundry misdemeanours'. On 13 June Samuel Tickner received 12 lashes for selling his trousers. (1)

Selling one's clothes was not an uncommon offense. Sailors were pressed in what they stood up in. The cold of the North Sea could kill a man without stout canvas clothes. So the purser gave the men clothes on credit and collected the money when they were paid. Often the Navy did not get round to paying the sailors for years at a time.

The men were allowed shore liberty in foreign ports where the captain felt that they would not desert. Their needs were few but strong. They had no money to meet them, as they were only paid in home ports, no matter how long at sea. If he could, a sailor smuggled his spare clothes ashore and sold them for the price of a good time on the Genoa docks. But it was difficult. Officers kept a close watch on men going ashore. They kept lists of the men's clothes and there were regular clothing counts. Sometimes a man must have sold what he stood up in. When he reported for the boat to take him back to the ship, his crime would be obvious. A flogging would follow the next day. This may seem harsh. But, as Captain Marryat said,

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(1) The relevant logs of the <u>Culloden</u> are in Adm. 51:202 and Adm. 51:1130.

'If there were no punishment for selling their clothes, the men would soon be naked.' (1)

The two most common offenses were drunkenness and 'neglect of duty'. 'Neglect of duty' meant making a mistake. Lieutenant Hodgskins explains:

> I have heard it avowed as a principle, by an officer of the highest reputation in His Majesty's service, and I have seen it acted upon, 'that no such thing as an accident could happen'; consequently, any misfortune must have arisen in some person's neglect, and some person must be punished to prevent its recurrence...(Hodgskin goes on to give examples)... Some of the iron allotted to a man to polish does not shine well; his hammock has not been clean scrubbed; his clothes have wanted mending; his shirt has been dirty; or perhaps he may have neglected the captain's stock, or the wardroom dinner: These, and a thousand similar trifles, are

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(1) Marryat, pages 18-19. To be fair, Marryat regarded flogging men for selling their clothes as a regrettable necessity when dealing with pressed men. But he felt it was barbaric, and if his suggested reforms were adopted this punishment could be dispensed with.

what seamen are flogged for, as neglect of duty. (1)

It might seem harsh to flog a man for drunkenness. After all, each day the Navy gave a man a gallon of beer or eight double rums. Like as not the officer who charged him was half seas over as well at the time. But men were not usually punished for such gentle social slipping. 'Drunkenness' meant the sort of falling-down drunk achieved by smuggling drink aboard or by hoarding rations.

Close behind drunkenness and neglect came floggings for talking back and looking surly. (2) This offense was variously called 'disobedience', 'contempt', 'dispresspect', 'insolence' or even 'mutinous behaviour'. It was particularly likely to happen when a drunken officer confronted a sailor himself three sheets to the wind. The angry sailor would fall into obscenities and sometimes into threats. (3) But a man could be punished for

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(1) Hodgskin, pages 42-3.
(2) My estimates of the frequency of flogging for different offenses is based on exensive reading of ships logs.
(3) The majority of the court martials for 'mutiny' in the Admiralty records are in fact

much less. According to Hodgskin:

> It is not uncommon in the Navy for looks to be punished as contempt, for a claim to justice, as a right belonging to every member of society, for a protestation of innocence, particularly is supported by reasoning, against the rash intuitive convictions of a superior, to be punished at this enlightened period of the world as disrespect. (1)

Officers and Punishment

The ships' logs show great variations in punishments. Some ships record at least one flogging a week. Others can go a month without recorded punishment. Where one officer swore at a man another would order two dozen lashes.

The key officers were the captain and the first lieutenant. The captain had the power to order floggings, but the first lieutenant was in

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prosecutions of just such individual angry drunks. For more on the connection between grog, rage and punishment, see James Peck, Nelson's Blood: the Story of Naval Rum, Havant, Kenneth Mason, 1982, pages 60-63.

(1) Hodgskin, page 56.

charge of the day-to-day running of the ship. Furthermore, captains spent a lot of time on shore. Nastyface hated his 'old woman of a captain' for being constantly away in London at parties or in the House of Commons. (Like many naval officers, the captain was also an M.P.) He left control to the tyrannical first lieutenant. Even when on board the captain 'flogged every man that was reported to him by the... lieutenant, without enquiring into the complaint, for that would have been beneath his dignity as a man and an officer.' (1)

It was always a tense time when the ship changed officers. The men waited to see which way the fresh wind blew. A new captain or first lieutenant might be a harsh flogger. Just as important, he would set the style for every boatswain's mate with a rope's end. Leech remarked on one unpleasant surprise:

> While in port we experienced a change of officers by no means agreeable to the crew. Mr. Scott, our first lieutenant, an amiable man, decidedly hostile to the practice of flogging, left us; for what cause, we could

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(1) Nastyface, pages 70-71.

> not ascertain. His successor, Mr. Hope, though bearing a very pleasant name, was an entirely different person... He was harsh, severe, and fond of seeing the men flogged. Of course, floggings became more frequent therefore; for although a lieutenant cannot flog upon his own authority, yet, such is the influence he exerts over a captain, that he has the utmost opportunity to gratify a thirst for punishment. (1)

Such sadists were a minority among captains, but firm floggers were the norm. Nastyface reports that in his fleet of nine ships there were two kind captains. Perhaps that was about average. At the end of the voyage both kind captains received presents of gold plate or cups, bought with pennies contributed by the crew. It was a formal way of expressing appreciation. The seven floggers however, Nastyface says, commanded men slow in their movements, broken in spirit and always speaking ill of the captain. (2)

Everybody appreciated a good officer. Even Leech remembered Lieutenant Scott with admiration:

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(1) Leech, page 21.
(2) Nastyface, pages 108-9.

> Punishment leads to revenge, revenge to punishment. What is intended to cure, only aggravates the disease; the evil enlarges under the remedy; voluntary subordination ceases; gloom overspreads the crew; fear fills the breasts of the officers; the ship becomes a miniature of the house of fiends. While, on the other hand, mild regulations, enforced without an appeal to brute force, are easily carried into operation. The sailor has a warm heart; show him personal kindness, treat him as a man, he will then be a man; he will do anything for a kind officer. He will peril his life for him, nay, he will cheerfully rush between him and danger. This was done at Tripoli, when the brave James offered his own arm to receive the fell stroke of the Turkish scimitar, aimed at the life of the bold Decatur, on board the frigate Philadelphia. (1)

The average captain was neither kind nor blood-thirsty. Lieutenant Hodgskin's captain was

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(1) Leech, page 23. Leech characteristically gives credit to an American officer, Decatur. But he was also loyal to the memory of Lieutenant Scott of the Macedonian.

probably typical: a decent and religious man, he tried his best for the service, but he had been brought up to be a 'smart' officer.

> I have seen this captain flog, I think, twenty-six men, part of them by candle-light, at both gangways, because their hammocks were not properly cleaned.
>
> The number of men is stated from memory, as not thinking, at that time, it would ever become a duty to state it, and reason upon it to the public; and not being a spy upon any man's action, I made no note of the affair, however I might think it cruel; neither do I remember the amount of the lashes, but I am certain they were not less than one dozen each man.
>
> The only time the men were allowed for scrubbing was one hour and a half during the night; in this time they had their hammocks, half a week's dirty clothes, and perhaps, a bag to scrub. It was not because they had not been scrubbed at all, but because they did not look well: I should say it was flogging men for impossibilities. It was in a warm climate, and, in a warm climate before, this captain had seen such things done; he would

allow of no relaxation whatever, justly observing, if he began to relax, he knew not where to stop. (1)

Running

The people had a remedy for a brutal captain: desertion. They called it 'running', a word with a more neutral, even energetic, connotation. Most sailors were pressed men with little desire to stay on board. They were allowed ashore in foreign ports because relatively few deserted there. But in home ports sentries kept a constant watch and the ship's boats rowed around to make sure nobody swam ashore. The punishment if a man was caught could be trrifying. But in an unhappy ship for some men escape from certain hell now outweighed the threat of possible hell later. Men ran from every ship in most months, but a brutal captain increased the rate.

Nastyface says that his captain was so plagued by desertions that he had to recruit 2,100 men in two years to fill 600 places. He may have exaggerated, but desertion was a fact of life. Some men swam ashore in the dark. Sometimes a

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(1) Hodgskin, pages 33-4.

man could get his friends and relatives on shore to have him arrested for debt. Then he could pay off the debt after the ship left. A boat's crew could row the lieutenant back to the ship, watch him jump for the side, and then row like hell for the shore. At Bantry Bay, Ireland, in 1814:

> the men were so determined, that they walked down the side of the ship, in presence of the sentinel at the gangway, and of the officer of the watch, took possession of one of the ship's boats, and notwithstanding they were fired at with ball-cartridges, persisted in their attempt, and ultimately succeeded in gaining the shore. (1)

The great majority of deserters got clean away. Since only a minority were caught, their punishment had to be all the fiercer to cow their mates. Jack Nastyface explains what this meant:

> While lying at Spithead, in the year 1809 or 1810, four impressed seamen attempted to make their escape from a frigate, then lying there; one of their shipmates, a Dutchman, to

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(1) Marryat, pages 5-6; Natyface, pages 120-21; Letter from Thomas Troubridge to Admiralty, 2 January 1795, in Adm. 1:2596, Letter 133.

whom they had entrusted the secret, betrayed their intention, and informed the commanding officer of their designs. They were tried by a court-martial, and sentenced to receive three hundred lashes, each through the fleet. On the first day after the trial that the weather was moderate enough to permit, the signal was made for a boat from each ship, with a guard of marines, to attend the punishment.

The man is placed in a launch, i.e. the largest ship's boat, under the care of the master-at-arms and a doctor. There is a capstan bar rigged fore and aft, to which this poor fellow is lashed by his wrists, and for fear of hurting him - humane creatures- there is a stocking put over each, to prevent him from tearing the flesh in his agonies. When all is ready, the prisoner is stript and seized to the capstan bar.

Punishment commences by the officer, after reading the sentence of the court-martial, ordering the boatswain's mates to do their duty. The cat-of-nine tails is applied to the bare back, and at about every six lashes, a fresh boatswain's mate is ordered to relieve the executioner of his duty, until the

prisoner has received, perhaps, twenty-five lashes: he is then cast loose, and allowed to sit down iwth a blanket rolled round him, is conveyed to the next ship, escorted by this vast number of armed boats, accompanied by that doleful music, 'The Rogue's March'.

In this manner he is conveyed from ship to ship, receiving alongside of each a similar number of stripes with the cat, until the sentence is completed. It often, nay generally, happens, that nature is unable to sustain it, and the poor fellow faints and sinks under it, although every kind method is made use of to enable him to bear it, by pouring wine down his throat. The doctor will then feel his pulse, and often pronounces that the man is unable to bear more.

He is then taken, most usually insensible, to what is termed the <u>sick bay</u>; and, if he recovers, he is told he will have to receive the remainder of his punishment. When there are many ships in the fleet at the time of the court-martial, this ceremony, if the prisoner can sustain it, will last nearly half the day.

On the blanket being taken from his back, and he supported or lifted to be lashed to

> the capstan-bar, after he has been alongside of several ships, his back resembles so much putrified liver, and every stroke of the cat brings away the congealed blood; and the boatswain's mates are looked at with the eye of a hawk to see they do their duty, and clear the cat's tail after every stroke, the blood at the time streaming through their fingers. (1)

The Admiralty clearly intended every man contemplating desertion to see such scenes in his dreams. But terror does not always work. Tens of thousands, at least, deserted. And the above quotation, after all, is from a book published in 1836 by a printer in Cheapside named William Robinson. Robinson wrote the book himself, but it was too risky for him to put his name on the title page. He was a deserter. (2) The book's full title was _Nautical Economy, or Forecastle Recollections of Events During the Last War, Deicated to the Brave Tars of Old England by a Sailor, Politely Called by the Officers of the Navy, Jack Nastyface_.

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(1) Nastyface, pages 110-12.
(2) Oliver Warner, introduction to William Robinson, _Jack nastyface: Memoirs of a Seaman_, London, Wayland, 1973, page 9.

Chapter Five: Forecastle Culture

The strict frontier of control separated officers and men. Daily violence and occasional theatre of terror combined to keep the men in their place. But within their own space, forward and between the decks, the sailors were able to build and subtly defend a world of their own. They created a counter-culture *of the forecsatle*, centered on women, drink and solidarity.

To describe this culture in detail would require a thesis in itself, and the material is certainly there. But this thesis is concerned with class conflict, and in this chapter I will merely provide a minimum of necessary background information on forecastle culture.

Drink

The Royal Navy expected its sailors to drink. The Navy provided the drink free. Ships' crews close to home drank beer. In the Mediterranean they drank wine; everywhere else they usually drank rum. One man's daily ration was a gallon of beer, or a pint of wine, or a half-pint of rum.

Half the ration was served at noon and half at four in the afternoon. So each man had four pints of beer for lunch and four pints at tea-time, four double rums at lunch and four double rums for tea. Of course, the beer and winere were somewhat stronger then than now. In terms of what is served ina modern pub, they were drinking five pints or five double rums twice a day. (1)

Boys got a half ration free until they were 18. If they had any money they could buy the other half. Officers were entitled to the usual ration and to their own wine in the wardroom, which they paid for. The rum was mixed with water, normally in the proportion of three parts of water to one part of rum. This did not mean that a man received less rum, for the water was added after the full ration had been measured out.

The Navy had taken its rum neat until the 1740s, when Admiral Vernon introduced the practice of mixing in water. He hoped that the sailors would drink more slowly and thus get less drunk. Vernon always wore an overcoat made out of a cloth called 'grogam', and his men called him 'Old Grog'. His new drink was called 'grog' too.

Captain Home of the Defiance went further

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(1) My discussion of grog is based on Peck, Nelson's Blood.

than Grogam and ordered his men to mix five pints of water to one pint of rum. They mutinied. (1) And restrictions on drink were often one of the complaints in other mutinies. The sailors had a storng sense of their traditional rights. This was partially because they valued the same 'moral economy' as the crowd ashore. (2) But it was also because their rations and their drink were set by the customs and rules of the Navy. Most of these rules were written down and all supplies were carefully accounted for. So if a man's grog was missing, somebody had taken it: probably the purser or the captain or both. They also felt entitled to refuse any changes in their allowance of food or drink. They often did so, simply refusing to touch the new rations. Many were particularly attached to their grog.

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(1) This mutiny is described in detail in Part Three.
(2) See E.P. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, 'The Many Faces of the Moral Economy: A Contribution to a Debate', Past & Present, 1973, number 58, pages 160-68. An outraged sense of moral economy runs right through the attack on Bligh by Morrison, one of the Bounty mutineers, in The Journal of James Morrison, edited by Owen Rutter, London, Golden Cockrel Press, 1935, pages 18-20.

Denis Mahoney, for instance, was a seaman on the Desiree in 1810. He was tried for striking a superior officer, the boatswain's mate John Toberry. The court-martial established that at six in the evening the watch had been called up. They were slack in coming up, and Toberry asked Mahoney why he had not come up sooner. Mahoney said 'I am here now'. So Toberry hit Mahoney. Then the seaman retaliated. He grabbed the handkerchief around Toberry's neck in one hand, pulled him down and hit him once.

The trial record states that after the prosecution witnesses:

> The prisoner refused all invitation for questioning any evidence, and would not put forward in his behalf; and the only defense was - agreeable to the enclosed written paper by himself.
>
> 'Law makers Must not be Law breakers
> he Struck me and I struck him
> the Captain Stopped 12 days grog from me
> I must have my grog and you
> May have my live.
> Denis Mahoney.' (1)

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(1) Trial of Mahoney, 10 March 1810, Adm. 1:5403.

The court sentenced Mahoney to death.

Two hundred years ago people drank far more than they do now. But even then Navy had a reputation. The popular image of Jack Tar ashore was an amiable drunk singing off-key with one arm around a prostitute and his brains pickled. While customs have changed since the eighteenth century, the human body has not. A man who drank the Navy's ration every day was an alcoholic, and a man of war was community of 600 chronic alcoholics.

Historians sometimes write as if this were glamorous. After 1815 the cold water and icy Christianity brigade gained a foothold between decks. They may not be easy people to empathize with, but there was a reason for their growing strength. Alchohol in large quantities is not good for the human body. And as Hodgskin put it, 'There is no place in the world where personal safety is so much endangered as at sea.' (1)

The captain could order men to the guns right after grog had been been served. Drunken officers would angrily patrol a line of drunken men at the guns. Or the sails might have to be furled. Drunken men would race up swaying rigging and out on to the yards that yawed in the wind. Mistakes

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(1) Hodgskin, pages 97-8.

and floggings were common consequences. When the three boys fell to their deaths on the Hermione, it was six in the evening. Captain Pigot and all the officers and men were drunk. (1) Most men were summarily beaten or flogged for what they said while drunk. But in the court martial records there are several trials every year of seamen who exploded in drunken rage during the early evening against some boatswain's mate or lieutenant who was harrassing them. (2)

The officers all tolerated heavy drinking. Most joined in. Partly this was a matter of custom, for drink was a seaman's right. Merchantmen did not provide the same quantities of drink, and merchant skippers complained that once a man had served in the Royal Navy he was drunk for life and ruined for proper work.

The reason why the Navy gave its men so much drink is not far to seek. Sailors were largely pressed men. They were seldom allowed ashore. At sea a ship 100 feet long contained 500 bitter and sexually frustrated young men. They worked long hours at hard, cold, wet and degrading work. So they drank. And the officers realized, implicitly

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(1) For the Hermione mutiny see chapter one.
(2) For the connecion between grog and punishment, see Peck,pages 57-63.

or explicitly, that it was easier to control them that way.

Bored sailors spent a lot of time thinking about drink. There were a hundred stratagems to get more and a thousand yarns about the strategems. The most common trick was perfectly legal.

Each mess was a group of nine or so men who ate together at their own table between decks. Men chose their own mess. Some unpleasant people had to eat by themselves. Each man took it in turn to be cook for his mess. The cook collected the food from the ship's cook and drew the rum ration for the whole mess. When he shared it out he kept for himself a special large measure: the 'plush'. On some ships this was almost half the ration. He could spend the day getting very drunk indeed.

Men also gave their rations to each other in exchange for a similar favour another day. And there were innumerable stories of smuggling drink aboard. All these let the sailor achieve what he wanted most: oblivion. As Leech said, 'to be drunk is considered by almost every sailor to be the acme of sensual bliss.' (1)

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(1) Samuel Leech, Thirty Years from Home, Boston edition, Tapan and Dennet, 1848, page 65.

Women

Sailors drank more in port. The ships were full of women, and they were expected to smuggle drink on board for the men.

Sailors had no prejudice against women on board. On most ships the gunner was encouraged to bring his wife to sea. He berthed with the ship's boys, and it was hoped his wife could provide something of a mother's tender affections. It was also hoped she might shield them from the tender affections of the men.

Many petty officers and some favoured seamen were allowed to bring their wives. This was an indulgence permitted to the captain's favourites and could be withdrawn at any time. In some cases these women were legal wives. In other cases they were port prostitutes who hitched up with a man for the voyage. John Nicol, for instance, was on the Goliath at the Battle of the Nile in 1798. He remembered the 'boys and women who carried the powder' for the guns. There was a woman from Leith who died of her wounds and another woman from Edinburgh who 'bore a son in the heat of the action'. (1)

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(1) Nicol, page 193.

Of course many sailors preferred men to women. (1) But many must also have made do with what came to hand. It is impossible to tell how common this was. There is one suggestive habit of speech. The insult between sailors was 'you bugger'. Again and again the phrase crops up in the mouths of officers yelling at the men, of sailors joshing each other or provoking a fight, of men searching for a word to emphasize an oath. Many sailors may have disapproved of sex with men, but the possibility was clearly much on their minds.

Still, for the majority of men ports meant women. The press had torn them from their families. Sailors were often pressed off merchantmen as they returned from several years voyage to the east. Unless he deserted a man usually served from the date of impressment until the declaration of peace. In theory he was paid off if the ship could no longer sail, but in practice he would be transferred to another ship before the first was discharged. A man impressed in 1793 remained on baord until the peace of 1802. A man impressed in 1803 would serve ten years. Some unlucky souls were not discharged in 1802 and

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(1) See Arthur Gilbert, 'Social Deviance and Disaster during the Napoleonic Wars', Albion, 1977, volume 9, pages 98-113.

so served right through the wars. Because they were usually not allowed ashore in home waters, their families had to come to them.

This they did. In port the ship was full of aged fathers, weeping mothers and comradely sisters. A pressed man's children would come aboard to see him. When Valentine Joyce of Belfast served in the Channel Fleet his wife lived in Portsmouth. This must have been common, for the Channel Fleet spent much of the winter in port. A man and his wife could make love together on board ship, but they usually had to do it in a room with three hundred other people. So they might sneak off for a little privacy underneath the guns, a practice that has given us the phrase 'son of a gun'.

On pay day, which might only be once in three or four years, most sailors would not have their wives with them. The Admiralty only paid men in home ports. Jack Nastyface describes a typical occasion:

> After having moored our ship, swarms of boats came round us;...a great many of them were freighted with cargoes of ladies, a sight that was truly gratifying and a great treat; for our crew, consisting of six hundred and

upwards, nearly all young men, had seen but one woman on board for eighteen months, and that was the daughter of one of the the Spanish chiefs...

So soon as these boats were allowed to come alongside, the seamen flocked down pretty quick, one after the other, and brought their choice up, so that in the course of the afternoon, we had about four hundred and fifty on board.

Of all the human race, these poor young creatures are the most pitiable; the ill-usage and degradation they are driven to submit to are indescribable; but from habit they become callous, indifferent as to delicacy of speech and behaviour, and so totally lost to all sense of shame, that they seem to retain no quality which properly belongs to women, but the shape and the name. When we reflect that these unfortunately deluded victims to our passions, might at one time have been destined to be valuable companions and comforts of man, but now so fallen: in these cooler moments of meditation, what a charge is raised against ourselves; we cannot reproach them for their abject condition, lest this startling

question should be asked of us, who made us so?

On the arrival of any man of war in port, these girls flock down to the shore, where boats are always ready; and here may be witnessed a scene, somewhat similar to the trafficking for slaves in the West Indies. As they approach a boat... (the boatman) before they come on board surveys them from stem to stern... (He) carefully culls out the best looking, and the most dashingly dressed; and, in making up his complement for the load, it often happens that he refuses to take some of them, observing (very politely) and usually with some vulgar oath; to one, that she is too old: to another, that she it too ugly; and that he shall not be able to sell them; and he'll be d----d if he has any notion of having his trouble for nothing. The only apology that can be made for the savage conduct of these unfeeling brutes is, that they run a chance of not being permitted to carry a cargo alongside, unless it make a good shew-off; for it has been known, that, on approaching a ship, the officer in command has so far forgot himself as to order the waterman to push off- that he should not

bring such a cargo of d----d ugly devils on board, and that he should not allow any of his men to have them. At this ungentlemanly rebuff, the waterman lays up on his oars a-while, hangs his lip, musing on his mishap; and in his heart, no doubt cursing and double cursing the quarterdeck fool, and gradually pulls away to shore again. And the girls not sparing of their epithets on the occasion. Here the waterman is a loser, for he takes them conditionally: that is, if they are made choice of, or what he calls sold, he receives three shillings each; and if not, then no pay.

Thus these poor unfortunates are taken to market like cattle; and whilst this system is observed, it cannot with truth be said, that the slave-trade is abolished in England.

I am now happily laid up in matrimonial harbour, blest in a wife and several children, and my constant prayer to heaven is, that my daughters may never step a foot on board of a man-of-war. (1)

A ship in harbour carried a lot of women. When the Royal George went down in 1782,

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(1) Nastyface, pages, 59-61.

300 women drowned. (1) Or take Richardson's ship when it received a visit from Princess Caroline in 1806. The whole ship was carefully cleaned beforehand and 'hundreds' of women were ordered to hide below until the royal guest had gone:

> As her Royal Highness was going round the decks and viewing the interior, she cast her eyes down upon the main hatchway, and there saw a number of girls peeping up at her. 'Sir Richard', she said, 'you told me there no women on board the ship, but I am convinced there are, as I have seen them peeping up from that place, and am inclined to think they are put down there on my account.' She told the captain to let the women up. They lined the booms and gangways to view the princess. (2)

Many sailors married prostitutes. Sometimes it was only for a voyage. Often it was in the hope of a life-long love. This may seem strange. Captain Glascock tells what he takes to be a funny story about a sailor in love:

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(1) Leech, page 114.
(2) Richardson, page 226.

A seaman, whose ship was on the point of sailing from Spithead, was extremely solicitous to obtain permission to go on shore, for the purpose of leading to the altar one of the chaste sirens of Sallyport. (Glascock means a prostitute.)

Joe, during the time the ship's company were at dinner, was seen dodging about the decks, 'backing and filling', for a favourable opportunity to make his simple appeal to the sterner feelings of the first lieutenant. He at length, however, appeared to have 'screwed-up his courage to the sticking place', and made an effort to go aft...In his approach to the lieutenant, he bore more than the appearance of a criminal leading out to execution, than of an anxious bridegroom on the eve of consumation of all his eager wishes. But he felt it was too late to retrace, so he proceeded to open the business, with an awkward inflexion of the body, and a twist of his shoulders, as a token of profound respect. As yet a word had not escaped him, and it appeared still problematical whether, without encouragement, his timidity would not compel him to carry his secret with him to the grave.

His head hung down, and except that now and then he stole a furtive glance at the lieutenant to help him out at guessing how the 'wind lay', his wide eyes were intently fixed on the buckle of his hat-band, which he alternately twiddled with fore finger and thumb of both hands, whilst in a supliant tone, he hesitatingly began, 'Please, sir, I've a bit of a favour to ax.' - 'Well, my man, what is it?' replied the lieutenant. 'I know', rejoined Joe, 'It's more almost nor a man can expect'... alternately shifting his legs and jerking out his words.

(Finally Joe brings himself to say what he wants.)

'The girl be d----d!' exclaimed the lieutenant; 'you don't mean to say, you want to be spliced to that bare-faced hussy that was aboard?' - 'Yes, i' you please, sir; the strands are unlaid.' - 'Unlaid!' said the lieutenant; 'you deserve to have the cat laid on your back for being such an infernal fool. Can you offer,' continued he, in a somewhat more pacified tone, 'the least plausible reason for even thinking of marrying so common a strumpet?' - 'Yes, sir,' said Joe, replying more promptly than hitherto, and

> with an air of self-satisfaction, indicating hopes of carrying conviction as well as his point, 'Yes, sir; 'Kase whenever the ship comes into port, and <u>she's aboard of another</u>, I can always shove alongside and <u>claim her as my own</u>. (1)

Joe stands on the quarterdeck at a loss for words, his hat in his hand and his eyes fixed on the buckle of his hat band. Captain Glascock gives an accurate picture of how men behaved on the quarterdeck. This is what the court martial judges meant when they asked if a man had petitioned in a respectful mamer. A sailor faced a flogging or worse if he looked his officer in the eye and spoke like a man. 'Joe' is helpless, and Glascock is making fun of him for behaving like a slave.

When Glascock told that story in the wardroom, they must have laughed so hard they fell on the floor. Officers could go ashore when they wanted and partake of what pleasures they chose. Joe was trapped on board with the sirens of Sallyport. Lonely folk grab love where they can and return a fierce and awkward commitment.

And sailors and prostitutes had much in

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(1) Glascock, volume one, pages 202-5.

common. A man escaped unhappy love or unemployment or an unhappy family by running away to sea. Sailors were often the bad boys whose spirits could not be contained within the village. A dishonoured woman often moved from unhappy love to prostitution. Women were forbidden male jobs and wild girls could not run away to sea. For them it was the suffocating prison of domestic service or the degradation of the bum-boats.

There were also practical advantages to marrying a sailor. A wife could receive a portion of her husband's pay. *In Portsmouth a working* woman found it convenient to be able to present her marriage lines, when the mayor had one of his periodic rushes of blood to the head and tried to clean up the town by banishing all single women. (1)

In Port

It is hard to find out exactly what went on below decks in port. At the time writers used vague phrases like 'furies and harpies' and 'degradation'. But it is clear that discipline was relaxed. There was much less work to do. The men

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(1) Nastyface, pages 63-8.

had the lower deck to themselves, and the officers did not trespass there. The women smuggled drink on board, and the officers turned a blind eye. There was a party atmosphere.

Christmas in port was a particularly drunken feast. Leech eventually married a Yankee Methodist and turned temperance. He looked back with disapproval:

> The Sabbath was also a day of sensuality. True, we sometimes had the semblance of religious services, when the men were summoned aft to hear the captain read the morning service from the church prayer-book; but usually it was observed more as a day of revelry than of worship. But at Christmas our ship presented a scene such as I have never imagined. The men were permitted to have their 'full swing'. Drunkenness ruled the ship. Nearly every man, with most of the officers, were in a state of beastly intoxication at night. Here, some were fighting, but were so insensibly drunk, they hardly knew whether they struck the guns or their opponents; yonder, a party were singing libidinous or baccanalian songs, while all were laughing, cursing, swearing or

> hallooing; confusion reined in glorious triumph. It was the very chaos of humanity. (1)

Christmas was special. But the officers generally encouraged a relaxation in port and tried to promote a happy ship. That was why they usually ignored drink smuggling. And they encouraged singing, which the men valued. Leech remembered 'Happy Jack':

> By such means as these, sailors contrive to keep up their spirits amidst constant causes of depression and misery. One is a good singer, another can spin tough yarns, while a third can crack a joke with sufficient point to call out roars of laughter. But for these interludes, life in a man-of-war, with severe officers, would be absolutely intolerable; mutiny or desertion would mark the voyages of every such ship. Hence, officers in general value your jolly, merry-making, don't care sort of seaman. They know the effect of their influence in keeping away discontented thoughts from the minds of a ship's company.
>
> One of these official favourites paid our frigate a visit while we lay at Lisbon. We

had just finished breakfast, when a number of our men were seen running in high glee towards the main hatchway... The cause of their joy soon appeared in the person a short, round-faced merry-looking tar, who descended from the hatchway, amid the cries of 'Hurrah! here's Happy Jack!' As soon as the jovial little man had set his foot on the berth deck, he began specimen of his verbal powers. The voice of song was as triumphant on board the Macedonian, as it was in the days of yore in the halls of Ossian. Every voice was hushed, all work was brought to stand still, while the crew gathered around their favourite, in groups to listen to his unequalled performance. Happy Jack succeeded while his visit lasted, in communicating his own joyous feelings to our people, and they parted from him that night with deep regret.

A casual visitor in a man-of-war, beholding the song, the dance, the revelry of the crew, might judge them to be happy. But I know that these things are often resorted to, because they feel miserable, just to drive away dull care. They do on the same principle as the slave population in the South (of the US), to drown in sensual gratification the

> voice of misery that groans in the inner man - that lives within, speaking of the indignity offered to its high nature by the chain that eats beyond the flesh -discoursing of the rights of man, of liberty on the free hills of a happier clime: while amidst the gayest negro dance, not a heart among the laughing gang but would beat with high emotions, and seize the boon with indescribable avidity, should it be offered its freedom on the spot. (1)

In the Caribbean slaves planned their great revolts at happy parties which brought together slaves from different plantations. The great mutiny at Spithead seems to have been planned during visits between different ship's companies.

For solidarity was at the heart of this forecastle world, awash with drink and song. Other sailors were mates: 'shipmates', 'berthmates', 'messmates'. Both officers and men spoke the sailors as the 'people' of the ship. They were the 'ship's company', and that was an almost corporate entity. The officers were not part of the 'ship's company', nor of the 'the people'. The letters of petition from the sailors to the Admiralty would be singned with no man's name, just 'Ship's

Company, Goliath'. In a mutiny or demonstration the ship's company acted together.

In many ways, the people were a collective and that collective was the ship. This was reflected in their langauge. The men of the _Hermione_ were called the Hermiones, the men of the _Montagu_ the Montagues, the men of the _Bellerephon_ the Billy-Ruff'ns, and so on. These collectives reached their highest unity during demonstration, strikes and mutinies. In order to understand what the solidarity of the forecastle meant in practice, we will have to look at these conflicts in detail. But first, in the next chapter I turn to the political background and industrial traditions of the seamen.

Chapter Six: Politics and Traditions

The press gathered in resentful men from every port in the Mediterranean and Atlantic. Enraged by bullying and corruption, they protested. This was not new, but after 1798 the meaning of the protest changed. The possible consequences of resistance were suddenly without limit.

The Scottish lawyer Cockburn remembered that time: 'Everything rung, and was connected with the Revolution in France... Everything, not this or that thing, but literally everything, was soaked in this one event.' (1) From Boston to Istanbul the minority who read newspapers followed every twist and turn in the Revolution. Tom Paine popularized the revolutionary message in The Rights of Man, which sold some 200,000 copies in Britain, a country of only ten million. Hundreds of thousands more borrowed copies or listened as

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(1) Quoted in Kenneth J. Logue, Popular Disturbances in Scotland, 1780-1815, Edinburgh, John Donald, 1979, page 133.

others read. (1)

Many more people knew that the people of Paris had destroyed the Bastille and cut off the King's head. These two events reverberated in many places, because they carried a symbolism many could understand.

The state at this time was still largely a body of armed men. Soldiers and sailors were the overwhelming majority of government employees. War and the law were still the main tasks of government. The symbols of the state were the soldiers, the judge, the noose. At the center of these symbols was the prison. It was not an accident that the London crowd attacked the prisons in the Gordon riots and the Parisian crowd went for the Bastille. But it was not just metropolitan crowds who were moved by the destruction of a great prison. Press ganged Irishmen and enslaved Africans could also translate the meaning of July 14th.

And the King of France was not only head of state. He was also the first in rank in a world of a thousand ranks and orders. When Louis lost his head, the world of aristocracy lost its heart. In

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(1) E. P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, London, Penguin, 2nd. edition, 1968, page 117.

many different places people suffering diverse oppressions understood that the French were avenging themselves upon king and lords.

Moreover, Paris was the capital city of one of the two great empires of the world. The king of France was the king of kings, the French aristocacy the most cultured and sophisticated ruling class in the world. The people who already looked to France for a lead could more easily generalize from revolution in France than from revolution in Geneva or Boston.

Also, the French Revolution for a time weakened the imperial grip of both France and Britain. France looked inwards and Frenchmen in the colonies were split by internal conflicts. The fortunes of war cut off client states and colonies. English agents fomented in Haiti and the Vendee, while French agents agitated British slaves and Irish peasants.

For all these reasons, many different sorts and orders of the oppressed decided that perhaps their time had come. In advanced Holland the democratic clubs were mostly men working at their trades, and therefore the clubs were called 'the leather apron'. In Northern Italy students and poets rallied to the Republics, in Naples many of the leaders of the Republic were priests. In

Poland the King joined the bourgoisie and the Jews in insurrection against the feudal landlords. There were slave insurrections on most large islands in the West Indies, but it was not only slaves who joined. In Grenada the leader was Fedon, a free man of colour and an owner of slaves and plantations himself. On St. Vincent the rising of small whites and Carib Indians was led by Joseph, the war commander of the Caribs. In Germany philosophers, poets and musicians were electrified. (1)

These diverse peoples translated the ideas of the French revolution to fit their circumstances. One example will have to illustrate the point. On San Domingo on 22 August the leaders of the slaves met to plan the uprising. They were mostly African born. Their leader, Boukman, was a priest of the African religion. They sacrificed a pig and shared its blood. Boukman led them in prayer:

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(1) C.L.R. James, The Black Jacobins, London, Allison & Busby, 1980 reprint; Michael Craton, Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies, Ithica, Cornell University Press, 1982; Eugene Genovese, From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World, New Orleans, Louisiana State University Press, 1980; R.R.Palmer, The Age of the Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America, 1760-1800, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1970 edition, volume two.

> The god who created the sun which gives us light, who rouses the waves and rules the storm, though hidden in the cloud, he watches us. He sees all that the white man does. The god of the white man inspires him with crime, but our god calls upon us to do good works. Our god who is good to us orders us to avenge our wrongs. He will direct our aims and us. Throw away the symbol of the god of the whites (the cross) who has so often caused us to weep, and listen to the voice of liberty, which speaks in the hearts of all. (1)

Boukman combined Africa and Paris, Voodun and liberte. He translated the French Revolution.

In Belfast in 1791 the Society of united Irishmen wsa founded by a Protestant lawyer, an army officer and twelve wealthy Presbyterian merchants. Inspired by the secular revolution in Catholic France, these men looked to a united effort by both Protestants and Catholics to reform the Irish parliament. The United Irishmen grew quickly and began enrolling humble folk. By 1795 they were seeking French help to overthrow the English; they had become Republicans. By 1797 they

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(1) James, page 67.

were forging an alliance with the Defenders and the Whiteboys. The Defenders were a Catholic peasant organization that fought land wars with Protestant peasants. The Whiteboys maimed the cattle and attacked the persons of greedy landlords. In 1798 these disparate groups rose more or less together: Presbyterians, United Men, Defenders and White Boys. (1)

In Scotland in 1792, the people planted the Tree of Liberty in the main square of many towns and villages. In Edinburgh they celebrated the King's Brithday with three days of rioting against Dundas, Scotland's political boss. The Friends of the People, founded by Edinburgh lawyers and other moderates, was taken over by a rougher class of men from Glasgow and called a national convention in imitation of the French. (2)

In Britain's largest port in 1792, nine London 'tradesmen, shopkeepers and mechanics' met in a public house to discuss the high cost of provisions and went on to found the London Corresponding Society. As with the Dutch

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(1) Marianne Elliott, Partners and Revolution: the United Irishmen and France, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1982.
(2) Logue, pages 133-147; Henry Meikle, Scotland and the French Revolution, Glasgow, 1912.

democratic clubs, most rank and file members were wage workers. The Society grew quickly. In 1795 they held a monster public meeting in Islington, and three days later a crowd of much the same size surrounded the King as he rode through the streets to open Parliament, stoning the coach and shouting 'No War! No King! No Pitt! Peace!' Thompson estimates these crowds at a quarter of a million of London's one million inhabitants. (1)

In short, the example of the French Revolution changed the political understanding of slaves, mulatto plantation owners, urban artisans, German musicians, Scottish colliers and Carib Indians. It is not surprising that it influenced the politics of British sailors as well.

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(1) Thompson, pages 20-21 and 157-58. Albert Goodwin, The Friends of Liberty: the English Democratic Movement in the Age of the French Revolution, London, 1979, pages 884-6 and 372, queries this and suggests the figure was closer to 30,000. Estimating crowd sizes is always a complicated matter at the time, let alone two hundred years later. It may seem unlikely that twenty per cent of London would demonstrate. But the events of 1989 remind us that democratic movements can mobilize monster demonstrations of a quarter of the adult population. In 1795 the Londoners brought their children as welll.

Sailors

Many seamen in the navy were conscious revolutionaries. From 1793 to 1797 the Irish courts sent thousands of political prisoners into the Navy. In 1797 Pelham, the Home Secretary, estimated that 15,000 Defenders and United Men had been sent into the Navy. (1)

Many of these men must have joined their less political fellows in deserting as soon as possible. Some must have fallen overboard and some died of yellow fever. Some will have been falsely accused and some will have given up politics. Nevertheless, at any given time after 1795 there were probably at least 2,000 Irish revolutionaries in the fleet. Almost every ship would have had at least one active revolutionary like Lawrence Cronin of the *Hermione*. In 1798 the United Irishmen had branches on several ships, with 28 members in the branch on the *Defiance* alone. Valentine Joyce was both a United Irishman and the leader of the great mutiny at Spithead in 1797. (2)

Working beside these political prisoners were

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(1) Wells, pages 81-82.
(2) Wells, pages 79-109 and 145-151.

many thousands more who had joined strikes, demonstrations and revolts on land. Between a quarter and a third of the sailors were Irish, and a quite a few were black. Many sailors who had not joined unrest ashore must have heard about it from those who had.

Sailors, moreover, were men of the world. They travelled for a living. They came from ports and fishing villages with their backs to the land and their faces to the sea. By 1800 a significant minority of sailors had helped to put down slave risings. For these men insurrection was not an abstract concept. In the 1790s, if not later, all sailors knew that strikes and armed revolts were a _possibility_ for men of their station. And, of course, their officers could no longer be sure what the ultimate consequence of armed mutiny might be.

The ideas of the French Revolution crop up in many parts of the Navy. But they are subtly changed into words that fit the reality of the struggle between officers and people aboard ship. Like Boukman, the sailors _translate_. Listen to Leech, for instance:

> The difficulty with naval officers is, that they do not treat with a sailor as a _man_.

> They know what is fitting between each other as officers; but they treat with their crews on another principle; they are apt to look on them as pieces of a living mechanism, born to serve, to obey their orders, and administer to their wishes without complaint. This is alike a bad morality and a bad philosophy. There is often more real manhood in the forecastle than in the wardroom... It is needless to tell of the intellectual degradation of the mass of seamen. 'A man's a man for a' that'. (1)

Again, Richardson's ship captured a privateer in 1796:

> Her crew were a complete set of democrats, who could not suppress their indignation at seeing the officers' servant doing any menial office for them, they said, 'Why did not the officers do it themselves?' (2)

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(1) Leech, page 71 .
(2) Richardson, page 129.

In 1797 the fleet in the Thames estuary joined the great strike over pay. They addressed a leaflet to their countrymen on land:

> Shall we who have endured the toils of a tedious, disgraceful war, be the victims of tyranny and oppression which vile, gilded, pampered knaves, wallowing in the lap of luxury, choose to load us with? Shall we, who in the rage of the tempest and the war of jarring elements, undaunted climb the unsteady cordage and totter on the top-mast's dreadful height, suffer ourselves to be treated worse than the dogs of London Streets? Shall we, who in the battle's sanguinary rage, confound, terrify and subdue your proudest foe, guard your coasts from invasion, your children from slaughter, and your lands from pillage- be the footballs and shuttlecocks of a set of tyrants who derive from us alone their honours, their titles and their fortunes? No, the Age of Reason has at length evolved. Long have we been endeavouring to find ourselves men. We now find ourselves so. We will be treated as such. (1)

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(1) Dugan, page 278.

The man who wrote that leaflet was a child of the French Revolution. But his words ('Long have we been endeavouring') also echo years of struggle by men and women far removed from the Age of Revolution.

Traditions

Rediker, in The Devil and the Deep Blue Sea, has unearthed a wealth of information on the tradition of resistance on merchant ships. (1) This resistance took the form of desertion, protest, sometimes mutiny, and at certain periods piracy. But he notes that in the second half of the eighteenth century the strike came to be a more and more important tactic for merchant sailors. (2)

The Liverpool strike of 1775 will provide an example. (3) In that year there was a dramatic fall in trade in this great slaving port. The sailors waited uneasily for the masters to try to force down wages. On one ship the rate for a

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(1) See especially pages 205-288.
(2) Rodger, pages 288-298.
(3) R. B. Rose, 'A Liverpool Sailor's Strike in the Eighteenth Century', Transactions of the Lancashir and Cheshire Antiquarian Society, 1958, volume 68, pages 84-91.

voyage was cut from 30 shillings to 20. The seamen took down the rigging so the ship could not sail, and nine of them were promptly arrested. That evening a crowd of 3,000 women and sailors released the nine men from goal.

Three days later, on the Monday evening, flying pickets went from ship to ship. Thomas Crockett of the Betsy remembered that 'a great number of sailors, about 150 in number, armed with sticks and larger clubs were coming round the said docks boarding all the vessels therein and taking out all the people they found at work on board.' (1)

The strike was organized by a committee of nine sailors. Two men emerged as leaders: Jemmy Askew and a Mr. H. Blow. Every morning the pickets met at the docks to get instructions.

Tuesday morning a crowd of sailors and women demonstrated outside the Exhange. Since the merchants ran Liverpool, this was also the town hall. The merchants hired and armed 300 men to quell the strike. That night the strike breakers fired on the crowd outside the Exchange, killing several sailors.

The next morning, Wednesday, roughly 1,000

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(1) Rose, page 88.

sailors put red ribbons in their hats and 'broke open the dockside warehouses and the gunsmith's ship for arms and ammunition, and marched on the Exchange'. The subsequent indictment said they were armed with 'cannons, guns, musketts, musquetoons, blunderbusses, pistols, swords, cutlasses, knives, clubs, sticks, stones, bricks and other offensive weapons'. (1) They set up their six cannon, taken from the ships, and began a methodical bombardment of the Exchange which lasted all day. They flew the red flag above their guns. They also marched to the homes of prominent slaving employers, took their possessions into the street and burnt them.

The merchants sent desperate requests for reinforcements to the dragoons in Manchester, and at the same time they negotiated with the sailors. The next afternoon the cavalry rode into town and arrested 50 of the leaders of the strike. One of them was a woman later charged with inciting the men to fire on the Liverpool goal.

Only eight men were convicted. They were not sentenced to death, but were sent into the Navy instead. It appears that the negotiations had produced an agreement to hold wages firm and

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(1) Rose, page 89.

punish the rioters lightly. (1)

It was not an accident that slavers were at the heart of the Liverpool riot. In the eighteenth century the ship was central to the imperial economy. Ships carried coal, slaves, sugar, rum, cotton and cloth. The most militant workers were often the slaves, the miners, the coal-heavers, the shipwrights, the dockers, the cloth-workers, the shoreside quarrymen, the smugglers and the sailors. (2)

Many of these people drank in the same pubs as sailors. Out-of-work sailors might turn to quarrying or dock work. In the winter Cornish smugglers and fishermen went inland to work in the tin mines. In Dorset sailors hid from the press gangs in the Portland stone quarries, protected by the quarry workers. In Liverpool the men and women in other trades joined the sailors in 1775. In 1791 the sailors and shipwrights of Liverpool went

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(1) This is how I read Rose's evidence on page 91. Rose himself feels it was a defeat for the strikers.

(2) For an introduction to the literature on this, see Walter J. Shelton, _English Hunger and Industrial Disorders: A Study of Social Conflict during the First Decades of George III's Reign_, London, Macmillan, 1973; John Stevenson, _Popular Disturbances in England, 1700-1870_, London, Longman, 1970, pages 113-180; Rule.

on strike together for six weeks. In London sailors took the coal heavers' work while they were on strike in 1776, but sailors were in the front row of London mobs in 1776 and thereafter. (1)

The Liverpool riots were unusually violent, but in other ways they were typical of 'collective bargaining by riot'. (2) In 1792, however, there was a change. That year a sailors' strike started in Bristol, and from there it spread to ports all over England and Scotland. These strikes combined the old trdition of pay strikes with the new spirit of revolution. From Newcastle one employer wrote to the Prime Minister:

> When I look around and see this country covered with thousands of Pittmen, Keelmen, Waggonmen and other labouring men, hardy fellows strongly impressed with the new doctrine of equality, and at present composed of such combustible material that the least spark will set them ablaze, I cannot help thinking the supineness of the Magistrates very reprehensible... P.S. Shocking to

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(1) Rose, page 92; Shelton, pages 164-184.
(2) See chapter one of Eric Hobsbawm, Labouring Men, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968.

> relate, the mob at this moment are driving some seamen or officers that have discovered a reluctance to comply with their mode of proceedings naked through the town before them. (1)

The magistrates were not the only supine authorities. The local army and the Naval officers also did not care to take on the sailors and their allies, for nobody knew what the consequences would be. The strike was relatively peaceful <u>because</u> the sailors were so strong and confident. (2)

The port of Aberdeen shows how politics and strikes combined. In June of 1792 the people burned Dundas in effigy. In December they planted a tree of liberty in the main square and the authorities uprooted it. A few days later the sailors descended on the harbour and stripped the

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(1) Thompson, <u>The Making of the English Working Class</u>, page 112.
(2) See N. McCord and D.E. Brewster, 'Some Labour Troubles of the 1790s in North-East England', <u>International Review of Social History</u>, 1968, volume 12, pages 366-378. They see the officers on the spot as sensible and moderate men, but the evidence seems to suggest they were simply frightened.

rigging from the ships. They joined the movement for higher wages that had hit the other ports, and set watches to make sure no sailor worked. The Lord Provost wrote that he had had no idea that the organization of the sailors was 'so extensive in its numbers or so formidable for the Method, regularity and resolution of the actors.' The masters agreed to arbitration and the sailors seem to have won. (1)

The Navy had its own traditions of protest. In chapter two we referred to Rodger's account of how mutinies over pay and against unpopular commanders were an accepted part of naval life at mid-century. (2) We will take one example of a protest rather nearer our time.

In March 1783 the war was over and the crews in Spithead 'insisted on being instantly paid their wages, and discharged from the Navy, otherwise they were determined to run their ships ashore and destroy them.' When they were paid, several ships' companies came ashore together, 'with colours flying and bands playing, and all was complete harmony.' Another group, however, determined to express their hatred of the

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(10 Logue, pages 148-153 and 160-161.
(2) Rodger, pages 237-244.

midshipmen, dressed up a boy in the uniform of a midshipman and compelled him to clean the shoes of anyone they met in the streets: in front of the same group, to make a further point, marched a petty officer 'greedily gnawing on a bone with little or no meat on it.' (1)

Across the channel the sailors in the French Navy welcomed the revolution. All of their officers, by law, were aristocrats, and now all France was attacking the aristocracy. In the second half of 1789 there were riots in every port, and from 1790 on there were mutinies on most ships in the French Navy. Officers were beaten up in the streets, thrown into prison and led to the guillotine. Work discipline broke down, the sailors often refused sailing orders, and by 1793 three-quarters of the officers had left the fleet. At one point that year the Channel Fleet in Brest was under the control of a committee composed of one officer and one sailor from each ship. (2)

British sailors could easily keep in touch with events in France. In 1793 Toulon went over to the British, taking with it a third of the French

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(1) A. Geddes, 'Portsmouth during the great French Wars, 1770-1800', Portsmouth Papers, 1970, number 91, page 5.

(2) Mahan, volume one, pages 35-79.

Navy. Throughout the war British and French fishing boats crossed the Channel as they had always done, and nobody was barbarous enough to attack them. Smugglers ran back and forth from Normandy to Cornwall. American merchant ships would run to France on voyage and England the next. All of these men who used the sea would pass around the news from France in public houses. Newspapers and political tracts, we should remember, were not the only way the ideas of the Age of Reason travelled.

Chapter Seven: Resistance

The press gathered in unwilling men, the driving regime of work embittered them and harsh punishment was meant to keep them within the bounds of discipline. But this was an age of unrest, and the people always had the option of collective protest. Nobody, officers or men, ever forgot this. This chapter will introduce the most common forms of protest.

Letters

Proabably the most common form of protest was writing a letter. The officers usuallv called them 'anonymous letters', but they were not the work of a single angry individual. They were signed by 'Eurydice Ship's Company', or 'Marines of the Bellerephon', or as we have seen above, simply 'Winchelseas'. They were letters from the people as a whole.

In exceptional circumsances individuals did sign letters on behalf of the ship's company. This sometimes happened when the people were already in active revolt and were negotiating with the

captain. At Spithead in 1797, for instance, the delegates of the fleet felt safe enough and proud enough to sign their own names.

The people chose a sailor with good penmanship and style to write for them. Sometimes he wrote in the caprenter's store room or an officer's empty cabin, safe from hostile eyes. But the letters were not secret, and in any case the men had little real privacy from each other. Often the writer worked between the hammocks, consulting the whole ship's company on the wording.

The sailors sent their letters to some powerful and possibly sympathetic man. If they had a cruel lieutenant and a kind captain, they wrote to the captain about the lieutenant and threw the letter on the quarterdeck at night. Usually they wrote to the admiral about the captain and gave the letter to a relative or prostitute to mail on shore. Where they thought the admiral useless, they wrote direct to the Admiralty office in London.

Working people on shore often wrote petitions to powerful people, for British society was a complex web of interest, influence and corruption. It was widely believed and largely true, that if one could gain the interest of the right man, he could fix anything. The sailors' letters have the

same respectful, even crawling, tone as these petitions. Nevertheless, on both ship and shore there was always a silent threat behind any letter from a group of workers: We are together. We are organized. We stick by each other, and you will not discover the writer of this letter. Therefore, if you do not redress our grievances, there may be trouble. (1)

The Bellerephon provides an example. On 29 September 1795 nine marines were tried for 'attempting to make mutiny among the whole party on board, by complaining of harsh and improper treatment... and being accessory to the writing of a publick letter.' (2)

At the root of the matter was a grievance over job descriptions. Marines were supposed to do sentry duty and nothing else. But those on the Bellerephon had to do much seaman's work, even including cleaning the decks. And while they were on their knees cleaning the boatswain's mates

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(1) For parallels on shore, see E. P. Thompson, 'The Crime of Anonymity', and Douglas Hay, 'Property, Authority and the Criminal Law', both in Douglas Hay and others, Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth Century England, London, Allen Lane, 1795.
(2) Trial of Benjamin Kelly and others, in Adm. 1:5333.

abused them. So they wrote to the marine commander on shore requesting a transfer.

It was a polite letter. The shore commandant told Major Walker Smith, captain of the marines on the Bellerephon, to look into it. Unfortunately, somebody traced the handwriting to marine John Cook. Summoned to the quarterdeck and faced with the evidence, he broke down and agreed to testify against his mates at a court-martial. This was most unusual. In civilian life Cook had practised as an attorney in Lancaster, and he may have been unfamiliar with working class conventions of solidarity.

He was transferred to another ship immediately. The officers probably thought he would be happier there, and perhaps remain in better health. At the trial Cook said the whole marine company had been in favour of writing the letter. He named nine men whose berths were near his.

Cook said that everybody had told him their objections, and he had then summarized them in the letter. The other marines had told him that this was often done. The marine commandant confirmed this in his evidence. He said that he had given the letter to Walker Smith to investigate, and then thought no more of it, for he received many

such letters. At this point one of the judges seems to have taken fright, for he asked the commandant if the meant the marines on different ships in the fleet were conspiring to write similar letters. The commmandant reassured him that all the letters were on different subjects.

The prosecutor at the trial was Lord Cranston, the captain of the Bellerephon. The usual string of officers testified that Lord Cranston was 'very sweet' to the marines, and that he was 'particularly kind and open' to them whenever he had them flogged at the gangway.

Then Walker Smith, the commandant of marines, testified. He was discreet and carefully ambiguous, but he made it clear that he and the first lieutenant hated each other. He allowed the court to understand that the lieutenant was persecuting the marines in order to get at him. Walker Smith also said that they were the finest body of men he had ever commanded, and that they had fought with great bravery when released from irons as the ship went into battle. The court took the hint. They convicted all nine marines but declined to punish them. Instead, the court admonished them not to write letters in future.

This case shows how letters normally worked. Lord Cranston had scented organized discontent and

so charged the men with 'attempting to make a mutiny'. The letter, however, had not threatened mutiny, and some officers even approved of the complaint. The court did not think it was mutiny.

We seldom have such a window on the writing of letters. Although an enormous number were written, (1) very few of their authors were brought to trial: on average one or two a year in the whole Navy. We can see why from the case of Bryant McDonogh. (2)

Mc Donough was a seaman on the Eurydice in 1796. He wrote a letter for the Eurydices to the Admiralty, complaining about First Lieutenant Colville. He wrote that Colville had them cleaning the decks from four in the morning, and if a man took any rest he was struck in the face. He then bled on the 'holystone': the prayer-book shaped rough stone used to clean the deck. Colville then made the man wash the blood away and reported him to the captain for dirtying the holystone. McDonough also said that Colville flogged men with no provocation, and he alluded to 'other

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(1) The petitions sent to the Admiralty are collected in Adm. 1:5125. The great majority of petitions were sent to line officers and have been lost.
(2) Trial of McDonough, 8 July 1796, in Adm. 1:5336.

grievances too numerous to mention'.

The Admiralty promptly sent two captains from other ships to enquire into the case. As usual, they could find no sailor stupid enough to confirm the charges in front of Colville. Accordingly, they cleared the lieutenant.

Colville used the direct method to find out who wrote the letter. He assembled the ship's company and told them he would 'stop every indulgence it is in my power to give till I find the men or men who are concerned.'

McDonough had often been kind enough to write letters home for men who could not write down their words themselves. These men did not come forward to name him, but his hand was well known and several of the company appear to have identified it. A funny thing happened on the way to the court martial.

The first witness was John Blake, the purser's steward. The prosecutor showed him the letter . Blake said the writing was like McDonough's hand in some characters, but different in others. William Colly, the captain of the forecastle, said that McDonough had indeed read him a copy of the letter, but it was not the same letter as the one produced in court. He thought the one he was looking at now was probably the

work of James Martin. As it happened, Martin had recently run from the ship in Ireland and got clean away. Samuel Buckner, foremast man, did remember somebody saying 'Shall we go down in the fore cock pit and write that now?' But he could no longer remember who had said those words. Thomas McSeed, master's mate, was called and sworn. He was asked one question: 'Do you know anything of your knowledge to prove that the prisoner wrote the letter you have read?'

McSeed answered, 'I do not.'

Michael Divine, the captain of the foretop, had been in irons with McDonough off Belfast. He could not remember McDonough confessing anything to him then. He certainly had not had any conversation about a confession with George Hendrick. John Saunders also could not remember anything. He especially did not remember telling the captain that many of the ship's company had known about the letter. John Burn, boatswain's mate, swore that the letter did not look like the prisoner's hand to him.

The final witness was George Hendrick, the boatswain's mate who had not had the conversation with Michael Divine. Hendrick knew nothing about the letter. He had never heard of it before the officers brought the matter up. The prisoner

offered no defense and was acquitted.

The case shows the remarkable solidarity of the forecastle. But the witnesses were not simple seamen. All but two were petty officers or 'captains', the men Colville had to rely on for the daily working of the ship. On many other ships petty officers, in particular, were often witnesses for the prosecution.

The Eurydices had probably been leaning on their petty officers. But both the petty officers and the warrant officers seem to have felt the men had a shadowy right to petition. The Navy and its courts could not approve of writing letters. But while individual officers like Colville might be enraged, in most cases the authorities tolerated written complaints. After all, even the worst traditional despots always trumpeted the right of the people to petition.

This does not mean that letters were completely innocent. There was always a veiled threat, and after 1797 the threat was pretty much out in the open. That year the fleet petitioned Admiral Howe for an increase in wages. He ignored the petitions and the sailors went on to stage a mutinyu wich shook the state and left Ireland open to invasion. After that, an admiral might choose not to respond to a petition, but he could not

treat it as of no consequence.

<u>Protest</u>

If the letter was the first resort of many a ship's company, it was not the last. Sailors could stage elaborate bits of theatre to make their point. William Richardson, for instance, was serving on the <u>Minerva</u> in 1793. The 19 year old captain did not like people talking on deck, and he hated swearing:

> Not an oath was allowed to be spoken, but as there were so many new pressed men in the ship it was almost impossible to avoid it, and when any was heard to swear their names were put on a list, and at seven the next morning were punished, though not severely, few getting more than seven or eight lashes; yet it was galling, and how I escaped God only knows...
>
> Though the punishment was light, it displeased the men very much, who had not had time to divest themselves of this new crime they had been so long accustomed to, and was nearly attained with serious consequence. Every evening, weather permitting, it was

customary for the people to have a dance, and one of these evenings the lanthorns were lighted as usual, and hung on each side of the launch...and the fiddler on the topsail sheet bits began to play away on his violin, but nobody came to dance.

By-and-by the gunners' wads began to fly about in all directions, the lights were extinguished, the lanthorns knocked to pieces, and a wad rolled into the admiral's cabin as he walked there. The old boy soon saw that something was the matter and sent for Captain Whitby; but when Captain Whitby came he pretended that the knew nothing was the matter with the ship's company. The admiral's steward came into the cabin at the time, and being asked if he knew what was the matter with the people, replied that he heard the men say that there was too much dancing at the gangway in the morning to keep them dancing in the evening. (<u>The men were flogged at the gangway</u>.)

So the admiral, seeing through it immediately instead of using severe means (as many a tyrant would have done, and perhaps caused a real mutiny), adopted a better way, and that was in cautioning Captain Whitby not

to use the cat on such light occassions, and never flog a man without his permission. (1)

The protest was carefully calculated. Dancing was a privilege, not a duty. It was supposed to be fun, and the captain could not make the men have fun without looking the fool. Moreover, they only threw the gunner's cloth wads. They could have used cannon balls.

On dark nights they sometimes rolled cannon balls along the deck in the hope of breaking the legs of unpopular officers. The officers do not seem to have reported the matter. It must have been hard to identify the culprit in the dark, and a report would have exposed the officer's unpopularity to his superior. So most officers singled out for this treatment seem to have kept one ear cocked for the roll and jumped the balls as they came.

Richardson reports another inventive method of dealing with an awkward captain, William Taylor. In 1795 Richardson was on the Prompte. The Promptes were never given shore leave, and so many ran. The embarrassed Captain Taylor ordered a tight watch at night to make sure no potential

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(1) Richardson, pages 105-6.

deserters were on the move:

> So strict a guard was kept at night that a man could not go to the head without being challenged by the sentries with 'who comes there?'... So one day, when the captain went on shore, the girls of the town had made up their minds to have a little fun on the occasion with him, and as he came near they ranged themselves into a line, and one of them cries out 'who comes there?' another replies 'William Taylor': 'Pass him along,' says another, and then they set up a hearty laugh, which so humbled him that there was no more 'passing' the people to the head of the ship afterwards. (1)

On other days the 'girls of the town' were to be found on board the Prompte as the 'wives' of the sailors. On land, though, there was nothing that Taylor could do to them.

Sometimes only mute protest was possible. During the War of 1812 Samuel Leech deserted from the British Navy to the American Navy, which had been modelled on British lines. Leech did not have

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(1) Richardson, pages 117-18.

to deal with the confusion of new ways. On the Boxer one of Leech's shipmates was trying to pilot the ship. He ran aground, doing the ship no harm:

> The captain flew into a passion, ordered him to the gangway, and commanded the boatswain's mate to lay on with his rope's-end. I did not witness the flogging, for the hands were not called up to witness punishment, unless administered by the cat-o'-nine-tails, but one of my messmates said that he received at least a hundred lashes. I saw him several days afterwards, with his back looking as if it had been roasted, and he unable to stand upright. He wore the same shirt in which he was flogged for some time afterward. It was torn to rags, and showed the state of his back beneath. His object in wearing it was to mortify and shame the captain for his brutality. (1)

Demonstration

We have already dealt with the demonstration on the Winchelsea in the introduction. The

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(1) Leech, pages 81-2.

Excelent provides another example. (1)

On Christmas Eve, 1802, the West Indian fleet was electric. The war had come to an end, or so they thought. But there was still considerable slave unrest in the West Indies, and in Haiti the slaves were more or less in control. Some sailors would have to stay to support the planters.

The commodore decided that the Excellent would have to stay behind, and the rest of the fleet could sail for England. He then transferred three of the Excellents to the Castor so that they could go home. This favouritism was the last straw.

The master's log tells what happened on Christmas Eve: 'In turning the hands up, found the ship's company aft in a body. On orders being given for their going to their duty they dispersed with evident marks of discontent. ' And that, the officers probably hoped, was that. At this stage nobody wanted to prosecute, so they called it discontent, not mutiny.

After all, it was Christmas Eve. Christmas in a home port was usually one long party, with unlimited drink, songs, fights, vomit and no

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(1) Court martial of Matthew Loyal and others, 27-19 December 1802 in Adm. 1:5362, and ship's log in Adm.52:2992.

discipline between decks. The custom was not observed on the Excellent this year, but a certain rowdiness could be tolerated.

The commodore must have had other worries at the back of his mind. The Excellent had been sent out to keep an eye on the black revolutionaries in San Domingo. (1) The example could be contagious. After all, in these waters five years before the people of the Hermione had killed Captain Pigot and his officers. When the fleet returned to England, the Excellent would be vulnerable on her own, as the Hermione had been. Moreover, the sailors on the ships returning to England would live, for the most part. The majority of those who stayed behind could expect to die from disease. A sensible officer would hesitate to make enemies of his men in these circumstances.

On Christmas morning a stream of petty officers led small deputations to the quarterdeck. On many ships the petty officers took the men's

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(1) Richardson, pages 188-9, says the Excellent came out to the West Indies to put down the Haitian revolt. On pages 183-95 he gives a fascinating picture of the tensions in the West Indies at this time from a sailor's point of view. He had worked on a slaver himself, and was particularly sensitive to the danger of slave revolts.

grievances to the captain. On other ships the 'captains' of the tops and the deck stations took this role. It was an important line of communication. The petty officers and 'captains' were usually old and respected seamen. They were part of the forecastle world and also agents of the captain's discipline. They were expected to approach the captain respectfully, their hats in their hands.

Not all captains encouraged this custom. On some ships the men must have felt it would be a waste of time to talk to the captain, but all ship's companies knew of the practice. At court martials the judges sometimes told the seamen that they should have gone to their officers in this proper and respectful manner.

On the *Excellent* things were not that simple. Boatswain's mate Matt Loyal led a deputation onto the quarterdeck. When the commander asked who had sent him there Loyal was said to have replied:

> That the ship's company had to know why they could not go home with the *Castor*. And that the men were grumbling about their wives (*and*) children, and that he had an old mother who he had not seen for eight years. He said that when the *Castor* got under weigh the

ship's company meant to follow in the Excellent and see if it was war or not.

He meant that they would check the rumour that peace had been declared. He was also threatening to seize the ship.

Loyal led his deputation off the quarterdeck. The commodore called him back on his own, and said, 'Take care, you are speaking a little too fast.' The officers were still treating the events as a petition from the petty officers, but they were getting rattled.

The people went below for their dinner. Loyal reported to them. He told them not to send him aft again. He had been at sea many years, he said, and well understood the difference between home and abroad, but he could do no more. If they wanted to talk to the commodore, they could go themselves.

Those may not have Loyal's exact words. I have taken the speech from his evidence at the court martial, where he was fighting for his life. But note that there are two ways of reading that speech.

The men immediately gave three cheers and shouted 'Home, home.' Sailors sometimes gave three cheers for the admiral. They usually gave three cheers when they headed into battle. The great

Spithead mutiny had started with three cheers from the rigging of the flagship.

According to the log:

> Hearing the Ships Co. Cheer on the lower deck the marines rushed on deck and the officers of the ship, and armed with all possible despatch. The commodore...and a guard of marines and other officers went on the lower deck and pulling out the chiefs of the disturbance, had them secured, and sent to the Blenheim. Having dispersed the people and made every regulation to prevent any other disturbance happening...Kept a guard under arms to go round the decks with the officers.

Matthew Loyal and 22 other men were put in irons and tried for mutiny. Thirteen were acquitted: one quartermaster, eight able seamen and two ordinary seamen. Ten men were convicted. One was sentenced to 200 lashes, four to 500 lashes each, and one man to 800 lashes. All six were seamen. Four petty officers were sentenced to death: a quartermaster, a quarter gunner, Loyal, and Crabb, another boatswain's mate.

The officers did not bother to wait for the usual appeals to the Admiralty. The next day the

four petty officers were hanged in front of the fleet. At the same time all the other convicted seamen were pardoned as a sign of the commodore's humanity.

At their trials Loyal and Crabb had argued that the petty officers were only doing their duty in representing the men to the officers. It is difficult to tell if this was an honest defense in Loyal's case. Crabb certainly organized protest. But it is clear that the Excellents were using customary forms of protest which suddenly turned into 'mutiny'.

It is time now to refer back to Rodger's idea of customary and unwritten laws for protest. The case of the <u>Excellent</u> both conforms to Rodger's picture of an earlier period and deviates from it. Clearly the Excellents thought they were obeying a set of unwritten traditional rules. They conformed to Rodger's three criteria. They were not in the presence of the enemy. The nation was at peace, at least with France if not with its own subjects in the West Indies. The mutiny did not take place at sea. It was in pursuit of a traditional right in the Service: men had often demonstrated to be paid off when peace came after previous wars. Yet four men were hanged.

Is this because at some point the Excellents

went over a traditional line? In one way, yes. But this point was not fixed. At one point the commodore called Loyal back and told him he was going too fast. He was warning Loyal that the demonstration was getting too rowdy. He was also asserting that he could declare the men mutinous at that point. But he actually acted when they cheered. Something had changed in 1797. After that, a cheer might be part of a rowdy demonstration. It might be the signal to take the ship. Nobody knew.

These customary protests were not formal rituals, where everybody knew what would happen next. Life on ship was potentially explosive, for the men were embittered and they heavily outnumbered the officers. The ships themselves were isolated and usually too dispersed for there to be an immediate source of reinforcements for the officers. This was true even when ships were lying at anchor together, for they usually lay several hundred yards apart to avoid fouling each other. The hierarchy of command was therefore tightly organized, constantly vigilant, obsessively violent. There were arms chests everywhere. Both sides remembered victorious mutinies and savage court martials. Any protest could shift abruptly into armed mutiny. Collective

complaint might be redressed, or might be answered by swift hangings. Once the people started muttering and gathering in small groups, nobody could be sure what would happen next. This uncertainty, paradoxically, explains much of the moderation and caution both sides showed in most confrontations.

Perhaps an anachronistic comparison will help make the point clear. During the 1980s there was a riot in Tottenham against police brutality. During the course of the riot the crowd killed a policeman. The day after one of the leaders of the local working people said that the police had got what they deserved, 'a bloody good hiding'.

If we look at this as a historian of the eighteenth century would, we can see a forthright assertion of traditional values by a riotous crowd and a pithy statement of these values by their leader. This is a reasonable way to look at the event. But we should remember that this was not how it seemed in British politics to those involved at the time. Many found the justification of killing a policeman deeply offensive, and the local politician was eventually forced to retract it. The police did not passively accept the moral economy of the English crowd: they did everything they could in subsequent years to imprison as many

rioters as possible and make life unbearable on the local estate. From the perspective of enough historical distance, one can see the Broadwater Farm demonstration as a 'safety-valve'. But that was not how it appeared or felt to those in the crowd or the Metropolitan Police.

Clearly, this is an anachronistic example. London and London politics had changed much in two hundred years. But I use it to bring home the point that *what may seem to a historian a* safety-valve may seem to those involved a ticking bomb. We should not forget that many of the traditional riots we know about from the eighteenth century, we know about because some of the crowd were subsequently put on trial for their lives.

Summary

This brings us to the end of Part Two. Let us summarise the argument so far.

We start with the work. The line-of-battle ship was the most sophisticated machine of its day, and the guns required hundreds of men to work them. From 1793 on, the war created an endless hunger for seamen in both the merchant service and the Navy. The only way the Navy could see to fill

this need was the press. This gathered together large groups of angry men.

This in turn created a situation unusual in the late eighteenth century: workplaces of hundreds of workers. These workers were bound together by shared work, dangers and traditions. Sailors had traditions of protest, strike and mutiny, and a traditional culture of solidarity. But this was also the epoch of the French Revolution. There certainly were some organized revolutionaries in the fleet and many more who now believed in the Rights of Man. But more important was the new sense of possibility, of activity. The French had killed their king and destroyed their prison. Merchant seamen in 1792 had both demonstrated against their king and struck against their masters.

This was the background to the class struggle on board ship. This struggle was not an occasional feature of shipboard life. It began every morning, when the boatswain's mates beat the people up on deck to work. The class struggle in industry today is a struggle over the conditions and rewards of work. In this way the Navy in 1795 was closer to a twentieth century car factory than an eighteenth century English farm. We can understand this struggle in terms of control from the quarterdeck

and resistance from the lower deck.

The front line of conflict was over work. As we shall see later, this was most often conflict between the topmen and the officers over their work aloft. But on ship the Navy was both employer and provider of goods. This meant that any conflict over provisions also became a conflict over the shifting frontier of control in the ship.

The officers' first line of control was starting. The violence endemic to shipboard life did not grow out of sadism. The naval officers were right when they said it came from 'the necessities of the Service'. But starting on its own was not enough. The officers needed a complex ritual of terror. At its simplest -flogging- this was a normal part of shipboard life. All ships flogged, and most flogged several men a month.

But neither starting nor flogging on their own solved the problem of control. The sailors had a tradition of desertion, protest and demonstration. They used it. At times officers allowed these protests and at times they redressed the mens' grievances. At times they reacted with the full force of court martial, floggings round the fleet and possible hangings.

This, then, is the background to mutiny in this period. In Part Three we will look at two

mutinies in detail: the Culloden in 1794 and the Defiance in 1795. There are several themes in these analyses. The first theme is simply an attempt to show what can be done with the court martial records. They are unique documents for this period, enabling us to see the struggle between gentlemen and workers in the sort of detail we will never be establish for strikes on shore. If this thesis only establishes the richness of these sources for the historian of the making of the English working class, it will have done its work.

The second theme is to continue the dialogue with Rodger. Both of these mutinies were mutinies of a new type. They were neither traditional protests not Cecil B. DeMille mutinies: they were armed strikes. I will try to show how these mutinies differed from earlier protests. I will also try to show this was not because the sailors were the scrapings of the bottom of the barrel or a new kind of landsman. The leaders and the participants in these mutinies were an alliance of landsmen and skilled men bred to the sea, of Irishmen and Englishen and Scots.

The third theme is to look at the mutinies as episodes in 'class struggle'. This is an emotive term, so it is necessary to explain exactly what

is meant. I have argued above that class is best understood in terms of relations to work. On a ship, the 'people' were the wage workers. This is not a metaphor: they in fact worked for wages, and the great majority had worked for wages all their lives. The officers represented their employer's authority. The rest of the thesis will be devoted to conflicts between officers and men for control over aspects of their shared lives. There is a tradition of explaining this struggle in terms of sadistic captains on the one hand, and fair trials on the other. The struggle will not be explained in these terms in Part Three. The actions of the two captains make sense in terms of their positions. So do the actions of the admirals and the admiralty, and so do the actions of the people. We will look at the 'struggle' in terms of how these people contested for control, what their tactics were, what limits they faced because of previous struggles and what lessons they had learned from these struggles. We will try to desribe a struggle which for those involved was not fixed. We will watch people who did not know what would happen next, but who guessed and tried to weigh the consequences of different strategies.

The court martials after the two mutinies will be seen as part and parcel of this struggle.

The law was as much an episode in the struggle as the armed demonstration. This does not mean that the officers had no regard for justice. No system of soical control or class rule survives without a combination of force and at least passive consent. A class cannot rule sitting on bayonets, and it cannot rule simply with sermons. The law worked in the way it did on board ship because it combined force and consent, vengeance and justice, terror and ritual. The law worked in a complex and contradictory way. This cannot be understood properly without a detailed look at how the law worked in particular cases.

PART THREE:

Two Mutinies

Chapter Seven: The Culloden Mutiny

Part One was a general introduction to discipline and protest in the Royal Navy. In Part Two the emphasis shifts from the general to the particular. The intention is to show how much we can learn from detailed analyses of two mutinies: the *Culloden* in 1794 and the *Defiance* in 1795.

Troubridge

On 9 November 1794 Thomas Troubridge took over command of HMS *Culloden*. Troubridge knew the ship was eleven years old and 'crank': it did not sail well. But the *Culloden* was a 74 gun ship of the line, and he could count himself lucky to be in command.

A naval officer's career largely depended on interest: which influential people one knew. Promotion on merit alone was rare. Troubridge had no 'influence' and was fortunate to rise. His father was a baker in the Strand. He must have been at least a small master baker to get his son accepted as an officer, and he may have been quite a respectable businessman. But he was certainly

not rich, and other officers felt that Troubridge came from a humble home. In the words of the Dictionary of National Biography, *Troubridge had* to be 'the architect of his own destiny'. (1)

His previous command had been the frigate Castor. In May Troubridge and the Castor had escorted a convoy of merchantmen out of Jersey. They soon ran into several French warships. Troubridge had to strike his flag. A few days after his surrender he was present at the first major naval engagement of the war, the 'Glorious First of June'. Unlike the other ambitious captains in the British fleet, Troubridge was locked in the boatswain's store cupboard of the French flagship. He spent the battle cursing the guard at the door. (2)

The British captured the French flagship and thus recaptured Troubridge. He immediately faced

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(1) John Marshall, Royal Naval Biography, Supplement, Part One, 1827, page 279. See also Ludovic Kennedy, Nelson and his Captains, London, Collins, second editon, 1975, page 75, and 'Sir Thomas Troubridge', DNB, volume 19, pages 1183-84. The main source for this chapter and the next is the trial of the Culloden mutineers in Adm. 1:5331. All quotations not credited to another source are taken from this transcript.
(2) Kennedy, page 76.

a court martial for the loss of the Castor. The Navy always tried the officers and men after a ship was lost. This was by no means a formality. Many officers were broken in rank and some 'dismissed the service'. But Troubridge emerged from the trial with flying colours. The court raced through the business, cleared him of any blame and commended him for his actions. (1)

But Troubridge was now ashore on half pay. As is often the way with pay, half pay was much less than one half of full pay. Nor did it compensate for the many skims and sources of unofficial income open to a captain on active service. But more important to Troubridge, he was an ambitious man who had spent the last twenty years climbing the ladder rung by slow rung. Now war gave captains the opportunity to display their courage and merit. Troubridge could not be sure that peace would break out the next year. He must have chafed at the bit. After four months on shore he was given command of the Culloden.

He was in trouble almost immediately. Tuesday, November 18th was a stormy night. The Culloden was moored at single anchor at St.

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(1) The court martial of Troubridge and his officers for the loss of the Castor is in Adm. 1:5331.

Helens, down the coast from Spithead. At one in the morning the ship ran aground abaft. Troubridge quickly ordered the guns moved forward to raise the stern and free the ship. The ship's company went into the hold to break open the water casks. Then they pumped the water out to lighten the ship. Within an hour the ship 'struck very heavy'. The rudder was knocked off, and Troubridge was forced to run up a distress signal, but nobody came. The other ships in the small fleet were fighting the gale too, and one of them had also run aground.

The gale continued all that day, and the pumps were constantly manned. The men threw provisions overboard to lighten the ship. On Thursday they were still aground and still pumping. Troubridge ordered the men to jettison two and a half tons of shot. The Navy Board usually enquired closely about the fate of every missing cask and the gunner had to account for every cannon ball. Troubridge was clearly worried.

Friday the men were still pumping and throwing casks overboard. Saturday afternoon they finally got the ship off, with the loose rudder lashed to the side. The _Culloden_ could not make it back to Spithead without a rudder and had to be towed in by the frigate _Fox_. Troubridge and his

shame passed before the watchful eyes of the fleet. (1)

The Admiralty demanded a written explanation of the captain's reasons for anchoring in such shallow water. Troubridge's reply was defensive, almost desperate, in tone. There was a heavy sea and very low ebb tide, he explained:

> I believe so much sea has not been seen for many years... I imagine that the place the Ship struck on was a Knowl, I have not had time to sound since... it appears from the uneveness of the ground that the Chart now published is erroneous with respect to soundings, if ships were to lay at St. Helens in common with S.E. Gales, I have no doubt but that accidents would frequently happen.

He added that other captains took the same risks, and the anchor had probably moved a little. (2)

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(1) For the accident see the ship's log for 19-23 November in Adm. 51:1130, and Captain Mann to Admiralty, 22 November 1794, in Adm. 1:2128, Letter 76.

(2) Troubridge to Admiral Parker, 26 November 1794, Adm. 1: 1008, enclosure in Letter 509.

There was something in what Troubridge said. However, naval ships had been anchoring safely at St Helens for centuries. In addition his admiral had already complained to their Lordships in London that 'if the ships had considered themselves obedient of my motions thoseaccidents would not have befallen them.' (1)

Troubridge may or may not have known about the knife in his back, but he did know that he could not afford to lose a second ship. He could not even risk an exensive refit, for that in itself would probably mean a court martial. Even an acquittal there would leave a sadly blemished record.

So Troubridge kept reassuring the Admiralty that nothing was really wrong. Repairs could be done quickly and easily. The rudder might have been damaged, but the gudgeon pins that supported it were all right. Eight days after running aground, Troubridge was able to assure their Lordships in London that he would 'be ready by Saturday for sea every exertion in my power their Lordship may depend on.' (2)

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(1) Admiral Howe (Parker's superior) to Admiralty, 21 November 1794, in Adm. 1:101, Letter 506.
(2) Troubridge to Admiralty, 23 and 26 November 1794 in Adm. 1:2595, Letters 73 and 74.

Of course he meant the exertions of his crew. But the people of the Culloden saw things differently. Selfish to the core, they cared less for their captain's career than they did for the lives of the five hundred men on board. They all felt that the ship needed an extensive refit or she would sink the next time the put to sea.

The Cullodens

The Cullodens had been in the thick of the fight at the 'Glorious First of June' five months before. The ship had been badly hurt then, and unable to sail without help for some days. Two of the Cullodens had been killed in the battle.

The previous year the Culloden had gone on a cruise to the West Indies. On the voyage out John Pope and John Williamson had fallen overboard and were drowned, Daniel Driscoll had died of illness and John Peters had drowned. In the West Indies John Tottle and James Watts had died of illness, Rees Watkins had fallen from the foretop to his death, and George Grubb and John Knight drowned. The ship sailed for England on 1 August 1793. In the middle of September sick men began dying: William Pascoe on the fifteenth, John Harris on the seventeenth, Thomas Search on the nineteenth

and the captain's clerk five days later. Within a week a further five men had died: Richard Batten, John Coombe, Henry Collins, John Ward and Abraham Dyke. (1)

On 30 September the _Culloden_ reached England and fresh provisions. The ship fell upon a convoy and impressed many seamen to make up their numbers. One hundred and twenty-two men lay sick in the hold, the majority with fevers or the 'flux'(dysentery). Ten had ulcers. Others had contusions, rheumatism, consumption, gravel or shrivelled testicle. (2)

The _Culloden_ had a particularly long sick list, but the experience of losing more men to illness and the sea than to battle was the norm. The war against France lasted from 1793 to 1815. In the fourteen major battles of the war the Royal Navy lost 1,875 dead. More than 72,000 died from illness and accident, and 13,600 were lost in

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(1) The ship's logs for 1793, in Adm. 51:202, gives the details of deaths.
(2) The sick list is an enclosure in a letter from Admiral Gardner to Admiralty, 2 October 1793, in Adm. 1:316. It is the only sick list I have ever come across, and Gardner must have thought it particularly bad.

ships that went down. (1)

This goes a long way towards explaining something which at first sight appears contradictory. The sailors were often mutinous and many admired French ideas of equality. Yet everybody who served in the Royal Navy was impressed by the enthusiasm and heroism Jack Tar showed in battle.

Jack Nastyface, for instance, hated the Navy and hated the officers. He also fought at Trafalgar. He idolized Nelson:

> From the zeal which animated every man in the fleet, the bosom of every inhabitant of England would have glowed with patriotic pride... Men from the ships that bore the brunt of the fighting would meet on shore. They would say, 'Oh, you belong to one of the Boxing Twelves, come and have some black strap and Malaga wine,' at the same time giving them a hearty shake by the hand. (1)

Sailors were proud and patriotic. This did not mean that they were blood-thirsty. Sir William Dillon, for instance, was a patriot, a snob and a

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(1) Nastyface, pages 16 and 36.

flogger of the old school. He first saw battle as a midshipman at the 'Glorious First of June'. Afterwards the crew had to clear the decks:

> The number of men thrown overboard that were killed, without ceremony, and the sad wrecks around us taught those who, like myself, had not before witnessed similar scenes that War was the greatest scourge of mankind. (1)

The sailors had contradictory feelings. Leech fought on the HMS Macedonian in 1812 against the USS United States. The American ship won, and Leech deserted to the Americans. He married a good woman from Connecticut, and thirty years later he tried to explain his feelings in the battle to an American audience:

> Such was the terrible scene, amid which we kept on our shouting and firing. Our men fought like tigers... I felt pretty much as I suppose every one does at such a time. That men are without thought when they stand among the dying and the dead, is too absurd to be

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(1) William Dillon, A Narrative of My Professional Adventures, edited by M.A. Lewis, Navy Records Society Number 93, 1953, volume one, page 138.

> entertained a moment... Still, what could we do but keep up a semblance, at least, of animation? To run from our quarters would have been certain death from the hands of our own officers; to give way to gloom, or to show fear, would do no good, and might brand us with the name of cowards, and ensure certain defeat. Our only true philosophy, therefore, was to make the best of our situation, by fighting bravely and cheerfully. I thought a great deal, however, of the other world; every groan,every falling man, told me that the next instant I might be before the judge of all the earth. For this, I felt unprepared; but being without any particular knowledge of religious truth, I satisfied myself by repeating again and again the Lord's prayer, and promising that if spared I would be more attentive to religious duties than before. This promise I had no doubt, at the time, of keeping. (1)

At Trafalgar Nastyface and the Boxing Twelves were on the winning side. Leech's captain ran up a massive 'butcher's bill' before accepting the

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(1) Leech, page 46.

humiliation of being the first British captain to strike to the Americans. Leech's pacifism may have had something to do with this experience. But notice that Leech and Nastyface were both radicals and deserters, yet they fought as patriots.

It takes a leap of the imagination to understand their attitude towards war. In our time the horror of war is at its worst on the battlefield and under the bombs. In their time it was at its words in camp and on shipboard. Now officers who want to defend war feel they must underplay the slaughter. Then Dillon, Nastyface and Leech all condemned the slaughter. But Dillon liked the war and the Navy, while the two seamen hated both. Similarly, the democrats on shore staged mass demonstrations against the war. But their slogans did not protest at the slaughter. Instead they condemned the war taxes, the press gangs and the high cost of bread.

For the sailors the two worst horrors were the West Indies and a ship lost at sea. The Cullodens were lucky. They cruised to the West Indies, spent four months mainly sailing around, and returned. But among the soldiers who served on land there the mortality from yellow fever was terrible. Many sailors, too, regarded a long

cruise in the West Indies as a death sentence. Samuel Richardson was a gunner. When he was sent to the West Indies his wife wanted to come with him. He tried to talk her out of it, but she insisted. Some of the crew were transferred to other ships, but most died. When the ship returned to England Richardson, his wife and two others were the only people on board who had made the outward voyage. (1)

John Nicol went to the West Indies, too:

> While we lay at St. Kitts, I took the country fever, and was carried to the hospital, where I lay for some days; but my youth, and the kindness of my black nurse, triumphed over the terrible malady. When able to crawl about the hospital, where many came in sick one day, and were carried out the next to be buried, the thoughts of the neglect of my Maker, and the difference in the life I had for some time led from the manner in which I had been trained up in my youth, made me shudder... I could now see the land crabs running through the graves of two or three whom I had left stout and full of health. In

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(1) Richardson, page 195.

> the West Indies, the grave is dug no deeper than just to hold the body, the earth covering it only few inches, and all is soon consumed by land crabs. (1)

The fever spared many like Nicol. But when a ship went down most of the hands went with her. The Royal George capsized at Spithead in 1793 while being heeled over for cleaning. Most of her men and almost all of the 300 women on board drowned. The Navy did not teach its sailors to swim. A large ship carried three boats; two large ones for the officers and one small one for 500 sailors. As the ship went down the sailors swarmed up the rigging, fighting to keep above the waves. The custom that the captain should be the last to leave had not yet been invented.

This was the fate the Cullodens feared. The surviving evidence shows that the Culloden was an old ship with weak masts and constant leaks. She sailed badly, particularly to windward. Indeed, Nelson thought Troubridge to be 'as full of

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(1) Nicol, pages 50-51.

resources as his old "Culloden" was full of defects.' (1)

The documentary evidence does not show if the Culloden was seaworthy after running aground. But the Cullodens themselves were agreed that the ship was not fit to be taken out. Hundreds of them were willing to risk their lives to stop the ship

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(1) Mahan, volume one, page 75.
(2) The evidence on the sea-worthiness of the Culloden is enormous and not entirely consistent. Gardner to Admiralty, 2 October 1793, in Adm. 1:316, includes a review of the state of the Culloden on return from the West Indies by the ship's carpenter, Dikes. Another report by Dikes some months later is included in Captain Rich to Admiralty, 1 March 1794, in Adm. 1:2331. Dikes found a lot of defects, particularly problems sailing to windward and a weakness of the knees of the masts. The year after the mutiny the ship did lost the mainmast in a storm: see Admiral Hotham to Admiralty, 26 November 1795, Adm. 1:393, but this was not uncommon. For the state of the ship in 1797, see the mixed reports in letters from Admiral Jervis in the Mediteranean, in Adm. 1:396, Letters 21, 107, 141 and 242. The ship's logs for 1793 and 1794 are in Adm. 52:1876, 51:202, 51:1130 and 51:1150. These contain running accounts of repairs. Also suggestive are the large number of shipwrights and kindred trades carried on the ship's muster book for victuals only at intervals over these two years: see Adm. 36:12166-12169.

sailing. Most of them had sailed together for about two years, and about a third of them were skilled men bred to the sea. It would be reasonable to trust their collective judgement over Troubridge's.

The people let the officers know they were upset. They began to murmur. 'Murmuring' was a common tactic. Small groups of men would gather and talk to each other by the lee rail. As an officer passed they became suddenly quiet. Raised voices drifted up from below through the forehatch, but the words were indistinct. Subtle changes in look and manner made it clear that the people were angry. Such signs also gave warning to the officers that the men might be contemplating further steps. So it was in the Culloden. In his defense at the court martial Francis Watts said 'there were continued Murmurings in the Ship before the Mutiny.'

James Calloway was flogged the day after the ship returned to Spithead. He got 24 lashes for 'mutiny and contempt to a superior officer'. (1) The sentence was stiff but not unusual. The offense was unusual. 'Mutiny' could cover a multitude of virtues. It might mean getting drunk

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(1) Ship's log, 27 November 1793, Adm. 51:1130.

and cursing an officer. It sometimes meant planning an insurrection, but the penalty for that was more than two dozen lashes. It could mean refusing to do a job and shouting about it. At this time and place it probably means that Calloway had said something about the state of the ship and refused to withdraw it.

The men went beyond murmuring. At the trial Lieutenant Griffiths said that 'some days previous to the Fourth they refused to bring their hammocks up. When piped and on Captain Troubridge and the officers going below they called out a new Ship'. The day's work began with men bringing their hammocks up to air, so in effect this was a lightning strike. On some ships at some times such a demonstration would have been treated as mutiny. The Cullodens could have been tried and hanged. But Troubridge probably felt he was in no position to become involved in a trial which would highlight the recent accident. He talked the men back to work.

The demonstration probably happened on Tuesday 2 December, two days before the mutiny. At the court martial Lieut. Owen was asked, 'Had any complaint been made on the 2d. December after the ship had struck?'

He answered, 'None had been made on 2d.

December in a regular manner.' Witnesses at court martials chose their words with great care. We may assume that there was a complaint on that day in an irregular manner.

At some point in this week <u>some</u> of the Cullodens decided there was no real hope of moving Troubridge. They began to organize a mutiny. Probably they made the decision on Tuesday night following the hammocks protest. The ship was due to sail on Saturday, 6 December. Murmuring continued, and by Thursday night many people on both sides sensed that something was about to happen.

Mutiny

Dvid Hyman collapsed into his hammock at seven o'clock on Friday night. He was tired from a long day rowing the ship's launch into town and back. Hymans was a 22 year old Irishman from Cork. (1) He was no sailor, for he was still rated as a

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(1) All the data in this chapter and the next about men's ages, birthplaces and ranks are taken from the ship's muster books. The relevant volume for the mutiny is Adm. 36:12169. This needs to be checked with earlier volumes since men often changed rank. The earlier volumes are Adm. 36:12166-12169. These ages are approximate. For

landsman after two years in the ship. But the officers trusted him enough to put him in the crew of the launch, with all the consequnet opportunities for desertion ashore.

Hyman could not sleep. At about eight o'clock Isaac Flinn was making a noise on the fore hatch gratings. Hyman desired him to make no more noise, as I was much fatigued, and on duty the most part of the day. On this the boatswain replied, "You are a very bad fellow, and what business have you at this time?"' (1)

Soon after this Hyman fell asleep. He woke to find the master, John Murray, beating him about the face. Hyman asked 'What did you do that for?'

Murray told him that it was because of the affair that was about to happen. Hyman told the master to go away. The master walked aft, slapping the men in their hammocks as he went. He was presumably trying to frighten them and defuse the mutiny.

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a more detailed discussion of interpreting the evidence in muster books, see Appendix Two.

(1) This account of the beginning of the mutiny is taken from a paper someone wrote for Hyman in his defense, which is included in the court martial record. It may be that the original dialogue was more pithily phrased.

It did not work. To quote Hyman, 'In a few minutes after, Lieutenant Owen and the ship's corporal came down the fore hatchway. And about as near as I can judge, about forty or fifty men, huzza'd forward in the bay, and a number of shot rolled aft along the deck.'

Some of the men called to the others to stand fast heaving the shot and hear what Owen had to say. He tried 'to reason with them'. With one voice they replied from the dark that the ship had struck and they would not go to sea. They demanded ' a new ship or this one overhauled'. Some moderate voices said they had no objections to their officers and were prepared to serve with them on another ship. Some militant voices added that if they went to sea they 'would not fire a shot, but would be taken by the French'. The men began throwing cannon balls at Owen in the dark, cramped space between decks. He fled back on deck. (1)

The mutineers swept through the ship below decks. They were hunting for skulkers hidden behind the bulwarks and gentlemen cowering in their berths. Joseph Curtain was a 21 year old

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(1) The remainder of this account of the mutiny is based on the evidence of other witnesses, not on Hyman's defense.

landsman from Cork. He shouted that they must drive all the quarter masters and quarter gunners on deck: 'We are not to be hung on account of them'.

All over the ship men made split-second decisions. Loyalists leapt for the hatchway ladders. Most of them got up on deck before the people pulled the ladders down, so that the waverers could not go up and the marines could not storm down the ladders. The people put sentries on each hatch. They surrounded the hatches with hammocks to conceal the identity of the activists below. They broke into the magazine and handed out muskets and cartridges. Armed sentries guarded every critical point below decks. Barricades went up in case the officers tried to come down again.

Samuel Triggs took charge of the guns. He was a 27 year old Cornishman bred to the sea. (1) He had been in the ship just under two years, and had years a seaman behind him. His officers had always regarded him as a 'diligent, sober, deserving man,' but he had now had enough. He got a gang to manhandle two of the guns so they faced towards the hatchways the marines would have to come down. Triggs stood by one of the guns holding a lighted

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(1) Adm. 36:12169 gives his age as 46 and Adm. 36:12167 gives his age at entry to the Navy as 26. Probably the clerk miscopied.

slow match. He was to remain there for the five days and nights of the mutiny.

Up on deck Troubridge began to count his officers. His clerk took down the name of every loyal man for future reference. Troubridge found he had the majority of his officers, but four petty officers and four midshipmen were still below. (They were cowering from the polite but firm mutineers.) Troubridge also had all but six of the marines, and he had thirteen seamen. Over 300 men remained below. They had the guns, the muskets, the ammunition, the food, the water and the initiative. Troubridge realized he had to negotiate.

He headed for the after hatchway to talk to the people. There was hubbub from the decks below. Some of the people threatened to shoot up the hatchway. Cornelius Sullivan kept poking his musket up through the hatch and threatening to shoot Troubridge. Sullivan was a 22 year old landsman from Bandon in Ireland. He was angry and, unlike most of the mutineers, drunk. The people shouted up the hatchway their demand for a new ship. One voice added that bringing three or four other ships alongside would not make them give up their purpose. Sullivan remembered an insult from First Lieutenant Whitter. He jeered up at

Troubridge, 'Where is Whitter with his empty pistols now? Why does he not come down and frighten us now?'

Troubridge retreated from the hatchway and sent off a letter to the admiral. Below decks the men consolidated their organization. Francis Watts had been a leader from the beginning. He was only 21, and like all the other leaders we know of, he had joined the Culloden early in 1793. He had been to the West Indies and back and fought at the 'Glorious First of June'. He was no sailor: he was rated as a landsman. His station was in the afterguard, a largely unskilled job pulling on ropes. Much of the time, however, he actually did duty as a tailor.

Watts was born in Launceston in the centre of the Cornish tin-mines: union country. He probably did not join the Navy from Cornwall, however. Many miners moved seasonally to the coast, but the press gangs were scared of the militant Cornish fishermen. He might have joined from London, where trade unionism was strong among tailors. (1)

Wherever he had been pressed, Watts was certainly a worker by trade and an organizer by inclination. On shore many such craftsmen were

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(1) Rule, pages 152-7.

self-taught intellectuals. Watts was not. He could not read. So he went in search of somebody to write out watch bills for him.

Seaman John Walker agreed to do it. Watts wanted the men divided into nine watches. Walker listed twenty-seven men in each watch. 243 were 'watched' in all. Each watch had a corporal who placed the men at their sentry stations. Each watch stood sentry for two hours in eighteen.

The leading mutineers began to administer oaths to every man below, handing a big Bible to each in turn. A silent crowd would surround the two men. If a man showed any hesitation the crowd shouted for him to kiss the book and swear.

We do not know the exact wording of the oath. The sailors took oaths seriously, and at the subsequent court martial even those prosecution witnesses whose evidence helped to hang their shipmates refused to repeat the words of the oath they had taken. They would only say that the general meaning was that they would reveal nothing to the officers afterwards. Some witnesses added that they would not surrender until they had a new ship.

Every man below was sworn. The officers were not sworn, but confined to a cabin so they could not see what was going on. Similarly, it looks as

if the women were not sworn. In all the court martial evidence women are never referred to, thought this does not mean they were not present. Everybody knew, of course, that women were <u>never</u> called as court martial witnesses, so there was no need to swear them.

Everything points to a careful organization and tight discipline throughout: the way potential scabs were driven on deck, the hatches stripped of ladders, barricades built and the magazine broken open, and the way men were watched and sworn. One thing above all else points to careful discipline. As on any evening, several men were drunk at the beginning of the mutiny. The mutineers had broken into the magazine at the first opportunity. Between them and the spirit room was one paltry lock, which they could have broken with ease. Nobody touched it. Three hundred thirsty tars went cold sober for five days and nights.

Who planned and led the mutiny? This is not an easy question to answer. The Cullodens tried very hard to shield their leaders. Nevertheless, there are some pointers, and we shall return to them in the next chapter.

Negotiations

As the people were being sworn below, Troubridge was writing off to Admiral Lord Bridport, his immediate superior. By early morning the admiral despatched his fifth lieutenant, George Delanoe, to talk to the Cullodens and report back. The men allowed Delanoe below to negotiate directly with them. He told them he would represent their demands to the admiral and promised them a fair deal. They told him they wanted a new ship. Some men also shouted that they wanted rid of Lieutenant Whitter. Others shushed them, emphasizing that a new ship was their only demand.

Delanoe went back to Admiral Bridport, who in turn reported to Parker, the admiral in command on land in Portsmouth. Parker did not know what to do. The Cullodens were armed and prepared to fight. On the other hand, he did not know how the Admiralty in London would react if he gave in to them and offered the men a complete refit for the Culloden. Parker decided to write to their lordships and to send Lord Bridport and two captains to talk to the Cullodens.

The three officers came on board on Saturday

morning, thirty-six hours after the start of the mutiny. They spent their time 'expostulating and reasoning with a part of the crew... without being able to make any seeming impression of their determination, which All on the Ship having been on shore, insisting on that Account of her being docked, or their removal to another ship.' (1)

The Cullodens decided to submit their case in writing. As letter-writer they chose James Johnston the Second, a twenty-three year old landsman from Godalming, near Guildford. (2) His letter survives. The handwriting is good and the style clear. He obviously had some education, but he was no gentleman:

> H.M.S. Culloden Saturday Morning
>
> My Lord,
>
> I am desired and appointed by the Ship's Company to address your Lordship on a subject which is very disagreeable to me, and must certainly be to every individual concerned especially where the lives of so many Brave

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(1) Parker to Admiralty, 5 December 1794, Adm. 1:1008. Letter 541.

(2) He was called the Second to distinguish him in the muster rolls from another Culloden of the same name.

Sailors is at stake. Your Lordship seemed to approve of our former conduct and likewise was pleased to Compliment us thereon, and especially when we were most depended on, that was when we were to contend for the Honour of our King, Officers & Country we did it without the least reluctance and gladly embraced the favourable opportunity to distinguish our courage and valour, in so Glorious a Victory - we now ask your Lordship candidly to consult your feelings (as we know you are possessed of the Nicest feelings possible can be inspired in the Breast of Man) and see if our case does not deserve to be Minutely and favourable looked into they therefore hope your Lordship will consider their State, as it seems rather precarious and as they seem to be all of one opinion that the Culloden is not fit for his Majesty's Service without being either overhauled or more properly examined and is surprised that any Ship Wright should report a Ship sound after so many and Violent strokes as she received at different times especially when the damage lies so far under water, likewise thinks it is impossible to assertain the true State the Ship's botttom

is in. There is another objection which seems rather displeasing that is the indifferent usage of our first Lieutenant Mr. Whitter - in the first place he has represented us a set of Cowardly Rascalls. and that he was the person that should have cowed'd them with a small empty Pistol, which is enough to irritate the mildest and couldest tempers in Mankind in the next place his usage altogether is quite diffeent from any we have hitherto received. They therefore hope your Lordship will take the trouble of Visiting us once more when we will be best able to Treat with your Lordship upon what terms wwe can can most Amicable and Honourable Settle. be Pleased to favour us with the sight of their Lordship's letters from the board of Admiralty thats concerning the present Crisis.

I am my Lord your
very Humble and
Obedient Servant, A delegate.

Johnston wrote his letter as the usual respectful petition, full of the common politenesses and flattery. But behind the

customary phrases, we can hear the people between decks feeling their power. The case is clearly and professionally stated. The sting comes in the last line 'to treat with your Lordship upon what terms we can most Amicable and Honourable Settle'. This is the language enemies and equals use for negotiations: 'treat...terms...settle'. And the men wished to settle with their honour intact. Honour was usually reserved to gentlemen. Moreover, the mutineers did not believe that the admirals necessarily possessed honour. That is why they ask to see the correspondance from the Admiralty. They imply that Lord Bridport might have been concealing the Admiralty's true intentions. As we shall see, he was.

The signature sums it up. Johnston is Lord Bridport's very humble and obedient servant. He is also 'a delegate'. The word comes from the French Revolution, and was used by British radicals and trade unionists. It means the democratically elected representative of people in struggle.

The Cullodens were confident. On Friday morning the moderates had shushed those who complained about Lieutenant Whitter. They probably wished to appear reasonable and to stick to the important demand. By Saturday, however, the Whitter-haters had the upper hand. Johnston

attacked him on behalf of the whole ship's company.

What did they have against Whitter? It is difficult to tell. The character of the first lieutenant was of enormous importance on any ship. Whitter had been a lieutenant on the Culloden since early 1793. But he had only been promoted to first lieutenant on 27 November 1794, right after the accident and a week before the mutiny. Until then the Culloden seems to have been a reasonably happy ship, as these things went. The Cullodens had known Whitter for some time. They must have watched his behaviour in his new post with nervous expectation.

This is what made the incident of the empty pistols so significant. We do not know if he actually snapped an empty pistol in somebody's face. The best guess is that he threatened them with his pistol during the hammocks protest and afterwards crowed over them about their retreat. Whatever he did, the people took it as a sign he would not make a good shipmate.

There is a postscript to the letter. Johnston must have read out what he had written to his mates, only to find that they wanted changes. The addition is in Johnston's hand, but the writing is shakier. He probably wrote it standing up:

P.S. The Ship's Company surrendurs on the following propositions. 1st a new ship of the Old one Docked or all the people at present between decks (word unreadable here) on board of different ships as your Lordship think most proper & your Lordships word and honour not to punish any man concerned in the present business or to mention or remember it there after.

The letter combines tact and threat. The postscript is the blunt bottom line. Incredibly, it was signed by Johnston and William Leader. A third man's name is written and then crossed out so that it cannot be read. That was probably Watts: one witness said he helped with the letter.

The letter was handed up the fore hatchway on the end of a cleft stick. It was taken by Fourth Lieutenant Digby Willoughby. He duly carried to to Captain Troubridge. The beleaguered captain carried it across to Lord Bridport and opened it in the admiral's presence. Even in a crisis, the admiral was sheltered from direct contact with the power of the people.

The Windsor Castle

Admiral Bridport took the letter to Admiral Parker on shore. Parker reported to the Admiralty in London. Their lordships' response was coloured by what had just happened on the Windsor Castle. (1)

The Windsor Castle was a 98 gun line-of-battle ship, part of the Mediterranean fleet. On the evening of 9 November 1794 the hands were turned up. They refused duty and assembled on the lower deck 'in a most riotous and mutinous manner, pointing to the foremost guns aft, seizing the small arms which were in the Gun Room, and firing several of them off, barring in the Ports fore and aft.'

The officers and marines attempted to force the lower gun deck, but failed. The captain came on board and led the marines below again. The people kept shouting for a new captain and a new lieutenant.

Next day the men wrote the admiral a letter:

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(1) The following section is based on the court martial of Captain Shield and Lieutenant McKinley of the Windsor Castle on 11 November 1794 in Adm. 1:5331. The letter from the men is an appendix to the transcript.

Admiral Hotham

Sir

Necessity has Obliged us to proceed to our present Oeconomy, which necessity is thus. Since Admiral Cosby left us we have had a very Different Kind of Usage to that we had at the time he was with us, for no man can go aloft now, But what he is in dread of being punished with Lashes, their wine is stopt and given to another part of the Ships Co. which is quite contrary to the rules of the Navy, and Yesterday Morning the scouring stone was not to be found, all the Main top Men was Called up to Know what was become of it, every man said he knew nothing of the matter, a Brick was immediately put in the hands of every man in the ship (we were in three watches) and all hands of them was made to scour the 2nd and main deck, and last evening bricks were issued out again to the main top men, the first lieut., told them in a short time they should have a heavyer burden on their backs, two or three of them smiling together on a different affair, was pooped, and one seized up to missen riggen, them men that came on liberty from other ships, was called up and pooped for reasons we know not,

which hurted us very much, and we never had the like usage before, we should have presented the case to Admiral Linzee before we had proceeded thus, but, we very seldom have the opportunity of seeing him and no petitions is admitted to him. for these reasons we desire other officers and better usage, for at present we are used in a cruel and oppressive manner, and we wish no more than to share a similar usage with the Brittania's ships company. (and the Boatswain to exchange duty, for we cannot live with his tyranny)

We hope that your honour will take this into consideration, and mitigate the oppression of your msot Obedient humble

Servants

Windsor Castles Ships Co.

The complaint about the boatswain is jammed in between the lines in small handwriting. It looks like an angry afterthought.

The letter reflects the 'moral economy' of the Windsor Castles, their outraged sense of traditional rights. Their 'usage' is not moral. Their wine is stopped 'quite contrary to the rules of the Navy'. On Sundays they had their one moment

of permitted relaxation when they entertained men from other ships in the fleet. Their private space was violated and their guests punished. The shame 'hurted us very much'.

The maintopmen were clearly at the centre of it all. 'No men can go aloft now' and punishment of the topmen is constant. The first lieutenant could not find the scouring stone, the large block of stone used to scrape the deck during cleaning. His mind immediately flew to the possibility that the maintopmen had heaved it right over the side. He was probably right: a scouring stone was far too big to lose. Somebody had deep-sixed it, and they meant to convey a message to the officers.

There was clearly a conflict between officers and topmen here, and the root of it was conflict over work aloft and work cleaning. The maintopmen were the elite of the crew, mostly bred to the sea and usually able seamen. They were also often the informal leaders of the ship's compnay. This was no revolt of disgruntled quota men and politicized landsmen.

The most striking thing about the letter is the tone. It is polite, detailed, logical and firm. It does not plead and it is not defensive. There is no crawling. The letter is the work of men fully aware that they held the initiative.

The Mediterranean was largely enemy territory. The <u>Windsor Castle</u> had guns and the men were prepared to use them. The ship was more than a match for any single line-of-battle 74. Moreover, the fleet could not afford to lose men and ships in a civil war.

The day after the letter Admiral Linzee came on board. He attempted to 'bring them to a sense of their duty'. (1) They would not budge. So Captain John Shield and First Lieutenant George McKinley were rowed across to the <u>St. George</u> to face a court martial.

This was quite extraordinary. At first glance the admiral appeared to be taking the side of the men. Certainly, he was at least treating their complaints with the respect they deserved. However, this was not how the men saw it. The admiral sent a letter to the ship's company, asking them to produce a list of witnesses against their officers. The people were assembled on deck. They replied that the paper they had submitted was all they had to say. They would produce no witnesses. (2)

One can perhaps surmise that the men felt the

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(1) Ship's log, 11 November 1794, in Adm. 52:2537.
(2) Ship's log, 11 November.

witnesses might be punished later. One might even venture to suggest that the whole thing was a judicial charade designed to break the mutiny. Nothing, of course, could be more foreign to the traditions of British justice. But it does appear that the Windsor Castles entertained some such suspicion.

The court martial could only have confirmed their doubts. A string of petty officers from the *Windsor Castle* testified that they had never heard or seen anything but perfect behaviour of the most humane kind from the captain and first lieutenant. The court cleared them on the grounds that no witnesses had come forward to back up the charges. The court was careful not to say that the charges were untrue. The captain and first lieutenant walked free.

In theory they still commanded the ship, but in practice the Windsor Castles now commanded themselves. The morning of the court martial, Captain Gore came on baord and read an order from the admiral taking over command. Unimpressed, the crew remained on the lower gun deck. At six that evening the court martial gave its verdict. Nobody knew who was in charge. An hour later Admiral Linzee came up the side. He assembled the crew and gave them everything they were asking for. A new

captain and a new first lieutenant read their commissions to all hands. (1)

Nobody was punished. The next day the ship's log recorded the crew 'drying sails and other jobs as the service required'. (2) Armed and disciplined mutiny had won the sailors their demands and prevented victimization.

Endgame

There are obvious similarities between the mutinies of the *Windsor Castle* and that on the *Culloden* four weeks later. The Cullodens may or may not have known about the *Windsor Castle*. One ship had come to Portsmouth from the Mediteranean since the mutiny, but it was still in quarantine.

The Admiralty, on the other hand, did know. The *Windsor Castle* was a precedent, and giving an amnesty to the Cullodens could make that a habit. Without terror, the Admiralty might well face a rash of mutinies. So the Admiralty wrote to Parker that he should give in to the Cullodens and send the ship to the Hamoaze for repairs. But they

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(1) Ship's log, 12 November.
(2) Ship's log, 13 November.

instructed him not to promise an amnesty. (1)

Admiral Parker, caught in the middle, dithered for two days. He sent Captain Pakenham to negotiate with the obstinate Cullodens. According to Pakenham, he persuaded the men that the ship was seaworthy. He pointed out that for some days the pumps had produced only black bilge-water, a sign that there was no longer a leak. He said the men saw the point of that. Nevertheless, they refused to come up without an amnesty. (2)

At six in the morning on Tuesday 9 December Parker received a letter from the Admiralty. He was instructed to put two three-deckers alongside the Culloden and take the ship. Parker replied that the wind was blowing too hard at that moment for him to communicate with the ships at Spithead. (3)

Parker was stalling. On the second day of the mutiny Surgeon's Mate George Jarvis had gone below decks on the Culloden. He was needed for a gravely ill man in the sick bay. Before he was taken down there the Cullodens swore him to silence. While he

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(1) Parker to Admiralty, 7 December 1794, Adm. 1:1008, Letter 551.
(2) Report from Seymour and Pakenham enclosed in Parker to Admiralty, Letter 551.
(3) Parker to Admiralty, 9 December 1794, Adm. 1:1008, Letter 556.

was below decks, however, he was taken aside by three of the loyalists trapped with the mutineers. They told him that some of the Cullodens were threatening to blow up the ship.

Jeremiah Collins was one of the loudest of the intransigents. He was an able seaman from Cork, and at the age of forty had spent much of his life at sea. He told one man that 'he was the man who would blow the ship up with an Inch of Candle before they could get their ends.' This was not an idle threat. An inch of candle in the magazine would detroy the whole ship and all aboard in seconds. He told another man, 'by the holy St. Jesus, before we will come up without coming to honourable terms I'll blow them to the bounds of buggery.'

Surgeon's mate Jarvis realized that the men who were telling him this were very frightened. They were not a front for the mutineers. Indeed, two of them later testified extensively against the mutineers. They wanted Jarvis to warn the officers when he went back on deck.

Admiral Parker could not know how seriously to take such a threat. But he did know it would be a considerable risk to try to take the Culloden. Nobody knew what would happen if seamen were sent to put down mutineers, because nobody had ever

dared to try it. It was quite possible that the men on the other ships would refuse to fight. Then Parker would effectively be facing a mutiny of the whole fleet.

As soon as he could contact the fleet, Parker told the captains of the Royal George and the Royal Sovereign to prepare to take the Culloden. But first he sent Captain Pakenham to talk to the men again. (1)

Pakenham talked to the men down the hatch. There was dispute afterwards about what he said. At the court martial one of the judges asked Pakenham if the men proposed any conditions for their surrender. He replied, 'Yes, they desired to give my word and honour for pardon for them. But this I declined as did also Captain Troubridge, and indeed it was not thought of by us.'

This is not really believable. Pakenham and Troubridge must have at least thought of meeting the men's demands. Parker was under intense pressure from London. Troubridge was finished if they stormed the ship, and Pakenham was the man of the moment. He must have been tempted to promise amnesty and betray later. The captain of the Defiance was to take this line in 1795, and the

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(1) Parker to Admiralty, Letter 556.

Admiralty was to try it on at Spithead in 1797. (1) It could solve everything so neatly.

In later years the sailors of the fleet believed that Pakenham had offered an amnesty. (2) There were whispers at the court martial, which is why Pakenham was asked if the men had any conditions. Unfortunately, however, the most pertinent document is missing. The Admiralty records contain a letter from Parker reporting on the end of the mutiny. Parker writes that he encloses a report from Pakenham, but the enclosure is missing. (3) Enclosures and letters are often missing from the Admiralty records. The other letters and enclosures about the Culloden in 1794, however, are all there. Perhaps the letter was destroyed, or perhaps one of the Lords borrowed it and forgot to return it.

In any case, the popular tradition can all too rapidly become encrusted in legend and rumour. And if we are to believe the sailors, we have to disbelieve the word of a British officer under oath at a court martial where the lives of several

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(1) See Chapters ten and twelve below.
(2) Dugan, pages 108-9.
(3) The enclosure should be in Adm. 1:1008, Letter 557.

men were at stake. One can only assume that in the stress of the moment, the Cullodens suffered a mass auditory hallucination.

Pakenham finished speaking to the people, and below decks they discussed what to do. Samuel Triggs, the 'corporal of the gun'. said, 'We better go on deck. If our muskets are fired we will all be hanged. The longer we stay the worse it will be for us.' The people decided to come up. As they came up the hatchways Pakenhamd gave a hand up to Francis Watts, the young Cornish leader, and called him a 'good fellow'. The ship's company fell in for muster. The mutiny was over.

Chapter Ten: The Defiance Mutiny (1)

On 29 December 1795 the Defiance, a 74 gun man-or-war, sailed up the Firth of Forth and anchored in the Leith Roads near Edinburgh. The ship had been in the North Sea and off the coast of Norway for three months. The weather had been filthy. (2) The people were looking forward to the possibility of shore leave.

It was Sunday morning as the ship sailed up the Forth. Landsman John Graham was writing up a journal for Midshipman Mudie. He may have been paid to do it, or he may have been unable to refuse the officer a favour. In any case, copying that journal later cost him his life.

Graham was twenty-one years old and came from East Whitton. Like many of the crew, he was a

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(1) This chapter and the next are largely based on the trials of the Defiance mutineers in Adm. 1:5334. The data on age, place of birth and rating on board are from the ship's muster books for 1795-6, in Adm. 36:11909-11910.
(2) Captain Home to Admiralty, 3 January 1796 in Adm. 1:1915, Letter 311.

'quota man'. (1) Captain Home had been raising men since early spring, but in July the admiral thought the hip 'very indifferently manned'. He atributed this to the large number of men discharged to hospital, sick below, or run. Captain Home felt that the admiral blamed him. (2)

Home was not the only officer desperate for men in 1795. At the beginning of the war two years earlier the press gangs had swept the ports. Now many experienced sailors were already in the Navy. Many of the ports seem deserted and forlorn, with no young men on the streets. But the Navy was still expanding, as were the army and the militia. Unlike those services, the Navy was draining a shrinking pool of skilled labour. The press gang alone would not provide the answer.

So in 1795 the government set up the 'quota' system. Each city or council had to raise so many men for the Navy each year. The local

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(1) The high proportion of quota men can be seen from the muster books. By and large the quota area is different from the place of birth.
(2) Home to Duncan, enclosed in Duncan to Admiralty, 27 July 1795, Adm. 1:522, Letter 137; Duncan to Admiralty, no date, in Adm. 1:522, Letter 143.

authorities paid a cash bounty to each man who signed up. This bounty varied from place to place and time to time, but it was often quite large. It could be five pounds, ten pounds or substantially more. It might appeal to men facting debtor's prison, or in the bad year of 1795 to men with hungry families. It may have temtped sailors who wanted a collosal blow-out before they shipped again. The magistrates sometimes supplemented the quota by giving poachers and revolutionaries a choice between transportation and the Navy. In Buckhamishire, for instance, Richard North was given the choise of the army or the Navy for getting Elizabeth Foulkes with child. In 1795 a bricklayer's apprentice got the same sentence for stealing a scaffold board. (1)

Captains did not like quota men. Naval historians have largely followed their lead. The traditional quota man is a puny, lousy, undernourished dirty thief, the scum of the streets and the sweepings of the prisons. He was more than likely carrying typhus or revolutionary ideas. He is sometimes held responsible for the mutinies in the fleet.

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(1) Clive Emsley, 'The Recruitment of Petty Offenders during the French Wars, 1793-1815', Mariners Mirror, 1980, volume 66, pages 199-208.

The picture is unfair, for the sailors already had some naughty ideas and many quota men were able seamen bred to the sea. Nor should we think less of a man for stealing a chiken or getting into debt. But perhaps the captains found it dificult to rid themselves of a certain contempt for men who had volunteered for the Navy.

John Graham had signed up as part of the Whitby quota. Like the other quota men on the *Defiance*, he had collectd the local bounty. But he had also expected to collect the normal naval bounty paid to men when they volunteered. This was denied to the Defiances, and they were angry about it. The captain petitioned the Admiralty on their behalf, but without success. (1)

The whole North Sea fleet had trouble raising men. The other ships had no complement of marines at all, but they carried soldiers to do the job. The admiral complained that the soldiers were nearly useless, being either sick or incompetent. (2) The *Defiance* did not even have soldiers, and this was to be crucial in the mutiny.

Every captain relied on the marines to control the ship. The Navy had sent Lieutenant

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(1) Home to Duncan, enclosed in Duncan to Admiratly, 27 July 1795, Adm. 1:522, Letter137.
(2) Letter 137 again.

Bligh to Tahiti without marines in order to make space for the breadfruit trees the Bounty was to collect. When Bligh attempted to get tough with his men, there were no marines to back him up. So his ferocious rage began to sound like bluster, and the habit of power slipped through his fingers. (1)

Without marines and soldiers, there would be no sentries. So Captain Home had some of the people issued with small arms. From among them the master-at-arms selected various men to be 'constant sentries'. Most of these men seem to have been foremast hands. And many of the foremast hands seem to have stuck with the captain in the mutiny.

At least one sentry had no stomach for the duty. John Prime was a thirty-two year old ordinary seaman. He was born in Suffolk but had joined as part of the Port of London quota. In court he later complained that:

> I was to do no duty than that of Sentinel (saving) the getting up of the Top Gallant Yards, and in with the Captain's barge... One time in particular when I came off my post at

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(1) The best analysis of this process is in Gavin Kennedy, Bligh, pages 17-112.

mid-day (being at three watches) I went to the galley to cook my dinner. I had not been there long 'ere Mr. Wrangham asked, why was I not at work. I told him I had just come off sentry at twelve o'clock. He immediately took up one of the boatswain's mates canes and he truck me with it. From this I went below to the master arm's birth, considering the orders I had received from his as a protection against such violence. I would have gone to the quarterdeck, but from the treatment usually met with by shipmates I could have had but little hopes of redress from that quarter.

I had not long remained 'ere he (Mr. Wrangham) visited me a second time, when he knocked me down with his fist. It was now Mr. Blair (<u>the master-at-arms</u>) remonstrated to him on the impropriety of his conduct. He replied he'd have me flogged and instantly complained of me to Mr. Hewitt, first lieutenant. When I was called aft... I related the transaction. Judge then how severe it was for me to here meet with treatment worse than before. Mr. Hewitt kicked me off, and said if I appeared again he would flog me.

> I then went to work with the masters until seven or eight o'clock in the evening, and when the others were turning into their hammocks I was posted on the poop till midnight. Thus to stand sentinel at three watches and work when I was off like the others, who had no such duty: I considered a grievance.

Notice that sentence: 'I would have gone to the quarterdeck, but from the treatment usually met with by shipmates I could have had but little hopes of redress from that quarter'. The men trusted neither Captain Home nor First *Lieutenant* Hewitt. And note also that the sentries messed, worked and berthed with the other sailors. Marines and sailors, by contrast, had seperate berths and seperate jobs.

When the ship moored in Leith Roads the men hoped for shore leave: 'liberty'. The captains of the other ships in Leith Road sent their men into Edinburgh in small groups of twenty or thirty at a time. The men were on their honour to return so that the next group could go ashore. The majority of naval ships in this period did not allow such leave, but where it was tried it seems to have worked well. Sailors certainly thought it the only

decent system.

Captain Home was not having it. This was probably because he felt his superiors blamed him for the high desertion rate. So he followed the more usual naval practice and forbade his men any shore leave. Then he followed another common practice. He had himself rowed into town by John Prime and the other bargemen. He slept ashore and left First Lieutenant Hewitt in charge of the ship.

Mutiny

The next Saturday night the people of the Defiance got down to some serious angry drinking. At eight o'clock on Saturday night all seemed normal between decks to Master's Mate William Watson. He went on deck to take over as master of the watch on the Defiance. The first he knew of the mutiny was half an hour later. He was watching Acting Lieutenat Malcolm go down the starboard ladder into the waist. He saw Malcolm 'instantly seized and pulled down and took out of my sight aft under the half deck.' Then 'there was a general cry through the ship of "out all lights". The people were running in different directions through the ship.' They drove off the sentries on

the gangway to the quarterdeck. The quarterdeck soon filled with 'armed people who came from different directions'.

Enthusiastic mutineers swept through below decks. If any man refused to rouse and join them, they cut down his hammock and spilled him on the deck. The lights were all out. At intervals men called out that they would have liberty and more grog. Mostly there was a 'profound silence'. It was broken only by the sound of cannon balls rolled along the deck to prevent officers moving about in the dark.

Watson went down to the wardroom to report the mutiny to First Lieutenant Hewitt. Hewitt went up to the main deck where

> I observed the people to be very noisy and riotous between decks. I immediately enquired amongst them the cause of the uproar which then prevailed. Some of them made answers. 'They wanted liberty and better usage, and liberty they would have.' I begged them to be peaceable and quiet and go to their hammocks. And that as soon as ever day light appeared in the morning I would hoist out one of the Cutters and send Mr. Hughes the fifth lieutenant with a letter to Sir

George Home, requesting he would indulge them leave to go ashore twenty or thirty at a time, as he thought proper. It had very little weight with them. For they were determined to go on shore that night and some of them called 'All hands out boats'.

Hewitt found that he 'could not previal on them to desist from their intentions'. He scuttled up the main hatchway. Somebody threw a cannon ball up the hatchway after him.

On the quarterdeck Hewitt found a group of loyal men. Quietly, he ordered them to cut the tackle of the ship's boats to stop the mutineers from getting them into the water. Hewitt sent the clerk and three petty officers into the jolly boat. They rowed silently into the night to find Admiral Pringle on the _Asia_ and beg for help.

On the gun deck the people were hauling out the starboard foremast gun. They pointed it aft. There was powder in the pan and shot in the barrel. Somebody stuck a crowbar down the mouth of the gun. If the officers tried to charge, the crowbar would whip through them.

It appeared to Hewitt that the mutineers 'were now in complete command of the ship'.

Watson, the master's mate, had other ideas. He quietly began to unship the quarterdeck guns. He wanted to point them aft so they could fire into the mutineers. Robert McLawrin saw him.

McLawrin was a local man, Edinburgh born, who had shipped as part of the Sunderland quota. He was a skilled able seaman, and did duty as captain of the afterguard. To Watson he seemed to be 'one of the leaders of the mutineers'.

According to Watson, McLawrin

> stopped at the gangway and called to the others '<u>to come up for they were casting the quarter deck guns loose</u>'. He with a number more came up and surrounded men and asked who gave me orders to cast the guns loose. I answered him, I had orders for what I was doing. Some of them laid hold of me and dragged me away from them: (<u>McLawrin</u>) telling me that I had no business with the guns.

McLawrin and some of the others went to cast the boats loose. They wanted to row for shore and probably never return. But the tackle had been cut and they could not leave.

By now it was ten o'clock at night. Hewitt was back below decks endeavouring:

to prevail on them to return to their duty and go peaceably and quietly to their hammocks. While I was speaking to them, I received a blow on the shoulder with a handspike, which nearly I believe beat off half the sleeve of my coat and bruised my shoulder...

I asked them if they meant to murder. Some of them answered that not a hair of my head should be hurt and made enquiry amongst themselves who it was that struck me. But that was not discovered. I thought it not safe to trust myself any longer amongst them and immediately went off the quarter deck.

By this time Admiral Pringle had made a signal for all boats manned and armed to come to our assistance. And when the people found that, they hauled the lower deck ports up; shotted the lower deck guns and run them out; with a full determination to sink every boat that should attempt to come alongside. The officer came into the ship. The boat was obliged to put off immediately for fear of the people's being knocked on the head, by the shot that was thrown into her from the lower gun deck ports... Pistols were at this fired out of the ports, but I didn't know

> whether shotted or not, in order to intimidate the boats from coming alongside. The boats played round the ship. And as they either went ahead or astern, so the people assembled either on the poop or the forecastle to keep them off.

Midshipman Robert Hones was in charge of one of the circling boats. From the poop McLawrin shouted at him 'Keep off, you bugger, keep off'. He returned to his ship. Hewitt considered the balance of forces and ordered his men to tell the boats to keep off.

Hewitt may have been influenced by the adventures of Lieutenant James Dunbar, the officer who leapt aboard from the Jupiter's boat;

> On my coming quite close I was repeatedly told to keep off. And on my ascending the side after having got on board, some person or persons on the gangway showed me some opposition. The person most forward appeared so diminuitive that I got on board without any resistance. When I got on the quarterdeck... There were assembled a number of men apparently inoffensive.

A few minutes later Lieutenant Dunbar was in the waist of the ship:

> Some men came by the larboard gangway and began relating their complaints. I recommended their going quietly below and await the result of the next day, or until their captain came. A voice unknown seemed to be displeased with my conduct or person. It is proper to observe that the greater part of the ship's company were in a state of drunkeness and as if they were recovering from their inebriety.
>
> At this time the other boats of the squadron were approaching the *Defiance*, rowing up in her wake principally. And the mutinous part of the ship's company ordered them to keep off or they would fire into them. About this time a number of men armed with pikes came upon the quarterdeck from the larboard gangway, whether with any personal intention towards an attack on my life I know not. But not caring to risk the issue, judging any resistance imprudent, I retired hastily upon the poop being close pursued by the mutineers.

According to the surprised witnesses on the quarterdeck, they saw about a dozen men chasing Dunbar. They were variously armed with pikes, cutlasses and tomahawks. One enraged sailor was armed with the cook's burgoo stirrer. As Dunbar ran up the ladder to the poop, he slipped. He fell back almost into the arms of the man behind him. Then, according to Dunbar:

> I ran over the taff rail. Still pursued by the boarding pikes, I descended precipitately down the stern ladder. I was discovered in that situation, and a voice exclaimed 'There is a bugger on the stern ladder.' All the boats at this time were out of reach and I thought of nothing but my own preservation. Some of the well disposed at that time in the Wardroom threw open the windows.

Some loyalists and officers had instinctively taken refuge on the quarterdeck. Others had headed for the wardroom (the officers' mess). Here were gathered a few officers and many of the foremast hands who had stood constant sentry duty. The rear window of the wardroom opened over the rudder. They gave Dunbar:

Such relief that I was enabled to get down the rudder and secret myself on it close under the coat. At this time I may observe, for it struck me so at the moment, that I was the object of their revenge.

Below Decks

Below decks both sides had moved to gain control of the magazine. Matthew Hollister was the gunner's yeoman, the man in charge of the storeroom outside the powder magazine in the bottom of the ship. Hollister was a forty-two year old Londoner. He was an experienced sailor who had joined as part of the Chestre quota. At the beginning of the mutiny he was asleep in his hammock.

He was awoken by Gunner's Mate William Hyndson. Hyndson told Hollister that the ship was in a state of mutiny and he had the keys to the storeroom. They went there together. Hyndson gathered up some pole axes and slow matches and took them up to the quarterdeck to arm the officers.

Shortly afterwards the outer door was shattered. Three men spilled into the storeroom, where Hollister still stood. Michael Cox was a

forty year old ordinary seaman from London. John Lawson was an American from New York, a thirty-two year old able seaman. William Morrison, an ordinary seaman from Clerkenwell, was only twenty. All three were much in liquor, Lawson most of all. They were after arms and powder for the mutineers.

Hollister told them that he had no powder, it was all in the inner storeroom. Between them and the powder was a stout door. It was always securely locked. Every experienced sailor knew one spark in the powder magazine could blow up the whole ship. It had happened before, and in the 1790s people lacked an easy familiarity with great explosions. They were a new horror. When the French L'Orient, 120 guns, exploded at the Battle of the Nile in 1798, the whole battle stopped for a few minutes. Nobody spoke and the guns were still. Men and women on both sides just looked. (1)

The Navy was careful with its powder. There was no light in the powder room itself. The yoeman of the powder room worked by the light from a lantern outside the storeroom, on the other side of a thick screen. The women and boys who fetched the powder had to wear thick cloth wrappings

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(1) Ludovic Kennedy, page 131.

around their shoes, lest static electricity blow the ship sky high.

Now Matt Hollister and the yeoman of the powder room faced three drunks with naked candles. The drunks wanted to take their candles into the powder room. The yeoman opened an arms chest to show it was empty of powder. Young Morrison took some pole axes, tomahawks and gun wads out of the arms chest. Morrison told Hollister that if there were no keys he was going to break the door down. He then went to work on the inner door with a crowbar.

At that point Lieutenant Hughes came below. All three men raced after him to see what was happening. A few minutes later William Parker took up a position in front of the magazine. He had a cutlass in one hand and a pistol in the other.

Parker was an experienced able seaman. He was 'captain of the maintop' and, at twenty-four, young for the job. He originally came from Scarborough but had joined the ship in London. He was a leader of the mutiny from the start. At nine p.m. he had been carrying a cutlass and directing his mates to point the guns aft. Half an hour later he was one of the leaders of the men trying to get the boats out. Some time around ten p.m. he realized what was happening outside the magazine.

He did not want to be blown up, so he went to stand guard.

Robert McLawrin came up to Parker. McLawrin had already led the men on to the quarterdeck, and now he wanted to get into the magazine. Parker barred his way and McLawrin hit Parker across the mouth twice.

'If you strike me again I will give you the contents of this pistol,' said Parker. 'You do not know the consequence of going into the magazine with lights. It's only that you're in liquor, or you would not attempt such a thing, to end the lives of the ship's company or the ship.'

McLawrin slunk away. The three men who had first broken open the magazine were now feeling their drink. Matthew Hollister saw Lawson standing outside the magazine: 'He seemed very much in liquor. Very ill. He was standing like a statue and white as a sheet.' Young Morrison returned to his hammock briefly about midnight. He had 'shitted his trousers' and had to change. All three men were asleep by early morning. Parker remained on guard all night. When any attempted to pass he said, 'Take care, gentlemen, of what you are doing. Before any man shall go down with a naked light, either they or me shall suffer death.'

Disorganization

Not all the people of the *Defiance* were part of the mutiny. Many were resting in their hammocks or hiding in corners. William Kiddy, for instance, was one of the foremast men.When the mutiny began he took his wife and children forward to the manger. They waited out the night with the sheep, and then when the muster was called at noon on Sunday, Kiddy went on deck.

Another man was brewing a pot of tea in the galley for his mother when the mutiny began. It took him half an hour to make the tea, and then he took it down to her. He sat by her until morning, except for one trip on deck to make water.

The ship was full of women. Many of them would have had experience of drunken sailors in an angry mood. There were a large number of very drunk men running around the ship shouting and flourishing their tomahawks. Many of the women took refuge aft by the steward's room.

The mutiny was *disorganized*. The chaos around the magazine shows this clearly. The magazine was crucial. The mutineers needed powder, because

without it, they would be unable to fight off the other ships in the fleet. But there was no immediate disciplined attack on the magazine. Instead there were three easily distracted drunks with naked candles. William Parker had been one of the leaders of the mutiny, a part that must have come naturally to him, for as captain of the maintop he was perhaps the most skilled and respected to the able seamen. His leadership in daily work probably led easily to leadership in the mutiny. But when Parker saw what was happening around the magazine, he stopped being a mutineer and became a sentry. In a properly organized mutiny, Parker would have detailed men to stand watch over the magazine. Then he would have begun to take out arms and powder carefully and gently.

Almost all mutines were carefully planned beforehand. For one thing, any rebellion on a ship with a full complement of marines did not stand a chance without detailed organization. Even when Captain Pigot ordered the Hermiones to throw the lubbers overboard, the men waited two nights to organize the mutiny properly. No matter what the provocation, sailors very rarely simply rioted.

The _Defiance_, however, seems to be an exception. On the _Culloden_ the majority of the ship's company had served together for eighteen

months. All the leaders of the mutiny had been on board for eighteen months. All the leaders of the mutiny had been on board for this period. They had survived a long cruise to the West Indies. They had come back with men dropping every day and a hundred and twenty-two men in the sick bay. They had been through battle together at the 'Glorious First of June', and they had seen captains come and go. They were a unit, a 'ship's company'.

The people of the Defiance hardly knew each other. Most had been on board three months, and desertion was rife. They had seen no battles and only one short cruise. There was no informal lived solidarity from which organization could grow.

The Muster

After midnight the ship began to settle down. Lieutenant Hughes wandered around making sporadic efforts to persuade little groups of men to return to their duty. At about two in the morning Captain Home finally returned on board. Two other captains joined him. The admiral had sent them to find out the seamen's grievances and, if possible, end the mutiny. All three captains went below to talk to the men. Some of the people told them they wanted liberty to go on shore. Home kept them on board

like convicts, they said. Others insisted on no more five-water grog. Some emphasized that they wanted no more Captain Home, either.

At about this time some people broke into the spirit stores. By five in the morning most people were asleep. The two visiting captains went to report to the admiral, leaving a forlorn Captain Home on the quarterdeck.

When morning came it was clear that the people were still in control. The two captains returned to try to talk the men back to work. Below decks the mutineers began to beat out the drum roll 'Call to quarters'. The people sprang to their stations by the guns. The ports went up and the guns rolled out. The sailors were at their quarters, ready for batle. They were telling the captains that they controlled the ship and they would fight any attempt to take it.

William Handy had been patrolling the deck since early morning. He was a twenty-eight year old Londoner. When he was pressed in Rochester he had rated himself a landsman, although he seems to have been an experienced sailor. He did duty as 'captain of the mast' and now he was performing the same job for the mutineers. He paced back and forth along the deck. Sometimes a man popped up on the deck hoping to join the loyalists on the

quarterdeck, and Handy ordered the man below. In his hand he held the cook's burgoo stirrer. Six hundred men ate considerable burgoo porridge, and the stirrer was a stout piece of wood shaped like an oar but somewhat smaller.

When the drums began to roll, Handy led a party of mutineers on to the quarterdeck. Handy carried his stirrer and the others held cutlasses. They ordered the loyalists to go below and man the guns with the others. Some seamen demurred. Handy had to thwack one man with the stirrer before he would go below. Another was punched in the head and knocked down. But with a little gentle herding and some violent oaths most of the loyalists were persuaded below. The officers were left on the quarterdeck with a few stragglers.

The officers had to negotiate. The two visiting captains went round the ship talking. They promised to convey the people's grievances to the admiral. It is unclear what else they promised, but they managed to persuade the men to report for muster. The boatswain's pipes sounded at noon and the crew fell in for muster. After the muster Home put eight men into irons as ringleaders.

Confrontation

William Parker, the sentry at the magazine, was one of the eight. Another was Robert McLawrin, who had led the attack on the quarterdeck on Saturday night, and a little later had hit Parker in the mouth. With them was William Handy, now without his burgoo stirrer.

The eight prisoners were on the quarterdeck, as far aft as possible. Each man had chains round each ankle, and a straight bar was slotted trhough a ring on each chain. The prisoners therefore sat in a row, threaded along the bar like beads. Somebody rigged an awning to protect them from the sun.

The loyalists and the officers stood forward of the prisoners. They looked down upon the people in the waist and barred the way to the prisoners. The atmosphere was uneasy. Home ordered the men to run in the guns, but nobody obeyed. The officers held the quarterdeck and little else.

Somebody wrote out a letter for the captain to take to the admiral:

> We the Ships Company belonging to His Majesty's Ship Defiance are sorry to trouble

you with our present grievances which are stated as follows --

We are sorry to inform You that being Commanded by Sir George Home who makes our case quite disagreeable to us, we are allowed a proportion of Rum of one half pint per day, that he pleases to have mixed for us with a proportion of five Waters, which renders our Grog of no service to us being thereby spoiled. in the 2nd. Place there are no Cheese on board unfit for mens use and not of the quality allowed by they Navy, for that we have looked for redress, but being answered by our Captain. Who gave us Priviledge to be a Judge of Provisions. Allowing that we/as we must suppose/ were no Judges of Provisions, 3d. We have then on board an Acting Lieutenant. Mr. Markam who when he gets intoxicated uses us in the most brutal manner, by striking and abusing us unbecoming to human beings, 4th we have no Liberty granted us which all the ships here has Liberty, but just the same as Pisoners their 7 of our Men in Irons, which they being intoxicated in liquor and they were more taken notice of than any of the Rest, and we hope that You will look over Them, it will be

a bad Consequence to go to Sea with Ship without redress.

Defiance Ships Company

This letter was probably written by John Graham, the same landsman who had copied the ship's log for Midshipman Mudie. (1) Graham had joined as part of the quota for Whitby, and Yorkshire speech, then and now, often misses out the definite article. That is why Graham wrote 'with Ship without redress'. 'We hope that You will look over Them' means 'We hope you will overlook them.'

At the end of the letter there was a a quiet threat. If the ship put to sea without redress, the people would act. It was left unclear if they would mutiny or take the ship and run for France.

At about three in the afternoon the two captains went back to the admiral's flagship, taking the letter with them. As he left, Captain Latchmere told Captain Home he would have to release the prisoners before dark. If he did not, the men would release themselves.

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(1) The letter is attached to the court martial record. Graham probably wrote it, and he certainly wrote the later letter from the ship's company quoted in the next chapter.

As the afternoon wore on, the people began to form groups in the waist: the open deck directly below the quarterdeck. There was a general murmuring. The officers could hear constant loud shouting, but few individual voices were clear. Foremast man John Prime was still angry about being a constant sentry and working three watches. He kept popping up to shout that he would do no more duty as a sentry. Some voices shouted that they should all go aft to free the prisoners. Others repeated the original demands: 'Liberty and no five-water grog.' Below decks there was a constant cheering and the rumble of cannon balls rolling along the deck.

At six dusk was closing in. The officers sensed movements in the waist to rush the deck. Soon they would be defenseless in the dark and unable to tell mutineer from loyalist. There were scores of loyal men on the quarter deck. Captain Home ordered them to take up arms to subdue the people.

Nobody obeyed.

The loyalists may have felt frightened and outnumbered, and they may have been unwilling to kill their shipmates. Captain Home ran up the signal to the other ships in the squadron asking for assistance. The flagship did not reply and no

boats came. Home did what he had to do. He ordered Lieutenant Hewitt to release the men in irons. But first he retired from the quarterdeck to sulk in his cabin, leaving the public humiliation to Hewitt.

Hewitt ordered the men released. He said to William Parker, 'As you are now at liberty once more, I hope that you will take care and behave yourself better in future.'

'You may depend on it,' rpelied Parker.

Hewitt took another prisoner by the arm and led him to the gangway to the forecastle. In full view of the ship's company he said, 'You have got your liberty. Avoid such things in future and return to your duty. Go below to your hammocks, and no more will be thought of it.'

Some of the crowd in the waist were still shouting. They refused to believe the prisoners had all been freed. Hewitt repeated his promise that there would be no further trouble. He said they could come up on the quarterdeck and look for themselves if they wanted.

The people realized that they had won. They gave three cheers and returned happily to their duties. But they still expected a reply to their letter from the admiral. What they did not know was that Lieutenant Hewitt had no intention of

keeping his promise.

Admiral Pringle read the men's letter. He was unsure what to do, but the Calcutta was part of his squadron. Admirl Pringle could turn to her brave and decisive captain for advice, and Captain William Bligh had some previous experience with mutineers.

Chapter Eleven: Defeat and Court Martial

Admiral Pringle called his captains to a council of war. William Bligh advised his fellow officers:

> Many places were mentioned, & the best way discussed, how to subdue this mutiny, & I did not hesitate to declare that a party of troops embarked on board of another ship & laid alongside, was the most effectual manner that I knew of, because they could be protected, which by any other means they would not if resistance was made. (1)

Pringle took Bligh's advice. As he had no marines and could not get any soldiers on short notice, he borrowed two hundfred fencibles. The fencibles were a part-time home-guard force under the control of the Navy. Many of them were seamen

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(1) Gavin Kennedy, 'Bligh and the Defiance Mutiny', Mariners Mirror, 1979, volume 65, pages 65-68. Unless otherwise indicated this chapter, like the last, is based on the trial of the Defiance mutineers in Adm. 1:5334, and the data in the mustere books in Adm. 36:11909-11910.

and fishermen who had joined as a protection against the press gang. There had been several recent mutinies by fencibles and militia. Pringle could not really trust them, but they were all he had. (1)

He put them on board two seventy-four gun ships, the Jupiter and Edgar, ordering both ships to weight anchor and put themselves alongside the Defiance. But then at the last minute Admiral Pringle changed his mind. He had his reasons.

John Nicol was one of the seamen on the Edgar that day. He later remembered:

> While we lay in Leith Roads, a mutiny broke out in the Defiance, 74; the cause was, their captain gave them five-water grog; now the common thing is three-waters. The weather was

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(1) There were four seperate mutinies by fencible regiments in Scotland between March 1794 and June 1795; see John Prebble, Mutiny: Highland Regiments in Revolt, 1743-1804, London, Penguin, 1975, pages 262-391. These land fencibles were not the same force as the sea fencibles used by Pringle, but both land and sea fencibles were militia forces. For the militia mutinies as a whole, start with Roger Wells, 'The Militia Mutinies of 1795', in John Rule, editor, Outside the Law: Studies in Crime and Order, 1650-1850, Exeter Papers in Economic History, number 15, 1983.

cold; the spirit thus reduced was, as the mutineers called it, as thin as muslin, and quite unfit to keep out the cold. No seamen could endure this in cold climates. Had they been in hot latitudes they would have been happy to get it thus, for the sake of the water; but then they would not have got it. The Edgar was ordered alongside the Defiance, to engage her, if necessary, to bring her to order... She was manned principally by fishermen, stout resolute dogs. When bearing down upon her, my heart felt so sad and heavy, not that I feared death or wounds, but to fight my brother, as it were, I do not believe the Edgar's crew would have manned the guns. They thought the Defiance men were in the right; and had they engaged us heartily, as we would have done a French 74, we would have done no good, only blown each other out of the water, for the ships were of equal force; and if there were any odds, the Defiance had it in point of crew. (1)

Pringle ordered Bligh to take eighty men in open boats and seize the <u>Defiance</u>. Bligh did not

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(1) Nicol, pages 180-81.

like it, for the boats were too vulnerable. However, we can guess at the admiral's point of view. If the Edgars and the Jupiters refused to fight then Pringle would face a mutiny of the fleet. If they fought he could lose hundreds of men and might lose three ships. In 1795 food riots, strikes and monster demonstrations were blazing across Britain. (1) If the Defiance won the battle the broadsides would be heard by every angry demoncrat and hungry mother in the country. If Bligh and his men in the boats were blown to smithereens, that would be a most unfortunate tragedy, but the Royal Navy could live with it.

Breaking the Mutiny

On the Defiance one of the mutineers was already a prisoner. John Prime was still angry about standing sentry duty and working three shifts. At eight o'clock Monday morning Corporal Bradly reported to Lieutenant Hewitt that Prime was still refusing to be a sentry. Hewitt ordered him directly to do his duty, and Prime refused directly. Hewitt had him arrested.

A litte later Leonard Bearby and Martin

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(1) See John Ehrman, The Younger Pitt, London, Constable, 1983, volume 2, pages 441-176, and Wells, Insurrection, pages 44-65.

Ealey were working in the head. Ealey was twenty-seven, an able seaman born in Waterford who had joined as part of the London quota. Saturday night Ealey had been among those driving the skulkers forward. Bearby, a foremast man, had refused to leave his berth. Ealey was very much in liquor and had beaten Bearby brutally. On Sunday, Ealey had been one of the eight men released from irons. At some point during that day Bearby had gone on the quarterdeck and told the captain about the beating.

Now Bearby was washing the swabs in the head and Ealey was wringing them out. Ealey told Bearby 'What a bad fellow I was for offering to swear against him and take his life away and all that. And I told him I would not wish to take his life away and made him an offer of half a guinea.' Bearby, frightened, was trying to buy off Ealey's anger with two weeks wages. Ealey refused the money.

A bit before noon the men of the _Defiance_ could see the boats coming. Somebody threw a letter on to the quarterdeck:

> We, the Ships Co. of H.M. Ship Defiance under your comd. (all and Singular) make bold to inform you, that we are not agreeable that

any Marines shall come on board, till we have an answer from the Admiralty, and then we will with the greatest Pleasure comply with any terms conformable to the Rules of His Majesty's Navy, and furthermore we are agreeable to do the duty of Marines until this affair is settled, and till them, never a man shall go out come into the Ship, except Officers of Commanders --

2nd. There is a quantity of Men upon record who gave in their Names to the Ships Clerk Mr. Thompson as Royalists, these we ordain to get out of the Ship (to make room for Marines as soon as we have convenience to receive them) and no other. Given in under our hands this 19th day of Oct. 1795,
Your Humble Servants and dutifull Ships Company upon Honble Terms. (1)

The gloves were off. The loyalists are described as 'Royalists'. At that time and place the opposite of a Royalist was a Republican, and to be a Republican was to be a revolutionary.

The letter is proud, angry and arrogant. The people 'make bold', they 'ordain'. The writer, as

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(1) There is a clerk's copy of the letter enclosed in Pringle to Admiralty, 19 October 1795, in Adm. 1:522, Letter 275.

before, is John Graham. But this time he writes in the tone and style of a man addressing his inferior. The militants were feeling their power.

They were also bluffing. The letters from the Windsor Castles and the Cullodens were polite, clear and firm. They did not need loud words, their organization and their guns spoke for them. But no Defiance, mutineer or officer, knew what would happen as the boats approached.

John Sullivan started climbing the rigging. Saturday night he had chased Lieutenant Dunbar over the poop with a boarding pike in his hand. At two on Sunday morning he had come on to the starboard gangway and called, 'Let us go down and break the spirit room open for we will have grog.' Sunday night he had been in and out of irons. He did his regular duty in the tops, and now he was climbing there, hoping to stay out of sight. A lieutenant saw him and shouted at him to come down. Sullivan descended sheepishly and stood quietly on the deck.

The boats came alongside. There was a 'great noise below'. From the waist and the lower deck hundreds of voices roared, 'Keep off, keep off, we'll sink you'. On the quarterdeck the master and the officers began to cast off the guns.

Bligh later wrote about those moments:

> With these two boats I proceeded in two division until close to the Ship. When from the orders I had given the respective officers, the Divisions opened and rowed to each Gangway and preceded by myself & a Major, the Commanding officer of the Soldiers in a seperate Boat. Instantly the cry was one & all - 'clear away the Guns -sink them', and we cheered the troops not to mind this, but to come on, which they did, and got up on the Poop without any hurt but a slight Bruise or two & a boat stove with the shot that were thrown out of the ports. We had now the remaining soldiers to get on board, which I effected very speedily and without any resistance which it was expected I should have met with, both in going out and coming in: but I had only a few fellows who pointed at me said there he goes. (1)

The sailors had clearly heard about Bligh, and they may have used other phrases besides 'there he goes.'

The mutiny was broken. Captain Home emerged

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(1) Gavin Kennedy, 'Bligh and the Defiance Mutiny'.

from the shadows to reclaim effective command from Lieutenant Hewitt. He clapped the eight men back into irons and the questioning began. Soon seventeen men were in irons and Admiral Pringle had them transferred to the locked room on one of the press tenders. This was unusual, and suggests that he may not have trusted the crews of his other 74s.

Pringle was certainly nervous. He wrote to the Admiralty that the Defiance was quiet. But though the fencibles 'have gone upon their service with alacrity', he said he would be happier with real soldiers on board. Indeed, he thought it essential to keep control of the ship. (1)

Three days later Pringle finally found 135 officers and men of the 134th regiment to replace the fencibles. However, he still had no marines on any of his ships and could only find a handful of soldiers to do sentry duty on his flagship. He wrote to the Admiralty:

> It is impossible for me to stir from that ship (the Defiance) or carry her to sea on a cruise, as I cannot esteem her in safety till

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(1) Pringle to Admiralty, 20 October 1795, Adm. 1:522, Letter 278.

> she is in some of His Majesty's Ports, and indeed it appears highly advisable to me that Her present Crew should be turned over to other ships. (1)

So Pringle sailed his whole squadron four hundred miles down the coast to join the fleet at the Nore buoy in the Thames estuary. A contingent of marines from Chatham came on board the Defiance. (2)

Trial

Three months after, on 20 January 1796, the trial of the seventeen mutineers began. William Bligh had received the signal to report to serve on the court martial. He objected to his admiral that he had been the principal officer in putting down the mutineers and therefore had seen the ship in a state of mutiny. He felt it was his duty to mention this fact for the information of the admiralty and 'in justice to the prisoners'.

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(1) Pringle to Admiralty, 21 and 23 October 1795, in Adm. 1:522, Letters 280 and 283.
(2) Log of the Defiance, 6 March 1796 in Adm. 51:1101.

Bligh was released from court martial duty. (1)

The trial lasted twenty-two days. Captain Home was an unusually disorganized and incompetent prosecutor. There is no reason to believe that this seventeen selected victims were the leaders of the mutiny. The crew in their letter had said that the eight men clapped in irons were no more guilty than the rest. They were just drunk and the officers noticed them more. But these eight men did conduct a joint defense. They asked the court to delay the case until their attorney arrived. The court said they would hear the prosecution witnesses immdediately, but they would wait for the attorney before hearing the defense.

The attorney drew up a joint written defense for all eight men. He argued that Hewitt had promised forgiveness when he released them from irons. Robert McLawrin, Martin Ealey and John McDonald signed the defense with their names and the other five men with their marks.

Each of the eight defendants called Lieutenant Hewitt as a witness and each asked him identical questions. Under pressure an embarrassed Hewitt admitted that he had publicly promised an

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(1) Bligh to the Admiral at the Nore, 14 January 1796, Adm. 1:726, Letter 56.

amnesty. But he added that he had done so under duress and had had no intention of keeping his promise. The court, of course, did not care what Hewitt had promised. If the prisoners had done what they were accused of, then they were guilty.

Two of the seventeen defendants were discharged 'not proven'. Six cases were found 'proved in part'. Two of these were sentenced to one hundred lashes and four to three hundred lashes. One of them was John Graham, the letter writer. John Prime also received three hundred lashes for refusing sentry duty. So did William Parker, who had spent the long night guarding the magazine.

On 11 February the court sentenced nine men to death. On the twentieth Prime, Graham and Froud were flogged round the fleet. On 6 March an extra forty-five marines came on board the Defiance. That evening the nine prisoners came on board. Two days later, in the morning, they were brought on deck. Four of them were pardoned, including John Lawson, the drunken American who had broken into the magazine, and William Handy, who had patrolled the decks with a burgoo stirrer.

Five men were hanged. Robert McLawrin was the man who slapped Parker in the face outside the magazine. William Morrison and Michael Cox had

tried to force the magazine open. Martin Ealey was the man who had refused the half-guinea when he was working with Bearby in the head. John Sullivan was the man who had tried to disappear into the rigging as Bligh approached. (1)

Next day the captain had all hands turned up and made a speech to them. But the Admiralty was still worried about the *Defiance*, and they took Pringle's advice and dispersed the crew. One hundred men went to the *Director*, now commanded by William Bligh. Within a month almost all the rest of the seamen had been dispersed to other ships, (2) although many petty officers remained on the *Defiance*. This dispersal, however, did not completely solve the problem. One year later Bligh's *Director* was the first ship to mutiny at the Nore and the last to surrender.

Two Witnesses

The mutiny on the *Defiance* was defeated because the men were disorganized. The crucial moment was when Bligh came alongside. They lacked the collective organization to turn their shouts

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(1) Ship's log, 8 March, Adm. 51:1101.
(2) Ship's log, 9 March, and muster books in Adm. 36:11910.

into actions. Their fate shows clearly why almost all other mutinies were carefully planned beforehand.

But the Defiances were not broken. Even after the mutiny the Admiralty did not dare to let them remain together. And at the court martial some of the witnesses showed a spirit of decency and resistance.

'Big Job' Else testified over and over again against his shipmates. Jacob Hill, a foremast man, told the court what he thought of men like Else:

> On Monday morning after the prisoners were in irons, I was warming some water on the galley fire on the larboard side and Job Else came in to warm some water in a pot the same. I was standing just close by the prop by the bar, and some other people were there, I don't know who. I said to Job Else, 'What, have you got Martin Ealey in irons? I understand he's in irons.' And he made answer and said yes. Then I said, 'Job, what did he do to you? Did he knock you down?' He said he did not knock him down but he pulled him and lugged him about a great deal and used him very ill. And I answered, 'What's that all he had done to you. And the poor man had got in

chains, and I saw him quietly at different times.'

He then made answer that he should not have thought so much of it. But Martin Ealey was the man who went and made a complaint to the doctor when he (Else) was in the doctor's list. Then he went and told the doctor he was fighting in the galley with one of the maintop men. And I said to him, 'Why, that's a very hard thing that a man should lose his life through such a thing as that.'

Joseph Nicholson was a witness for the defense of John Lawson, the American. His evidence gives a vivid picture of life below decks at the start of the mutiny. Nicholson and Lawson were probably lovers, and Nicholson is clearly trying to save his mate's life. He is establishing that Lawson was so drunk at the start of the mutiny that he could not have been a ringleader and was not responsible for his actions. Lawson was pardoned, and Nicholson's evidence probably saved his life. Notice that at the end of the testimony Nicholson gets so angry that he takes the risk of using sarcasm to the judges.

Lawson: On the evening of 17th October last did I turn into your hammock and ask what time was it?

Nicholson: The prisoner Lawson did turn into my hammock about seven o'clock that evening.

Lawson: What was the time and occasion of my turning out of it again?

Nicholson: The occasion was that they were cutting the hammocks down, when the prisoner said to me, we had better turn out. This might be about ten o-clock...

The court asked: Did the prisoner and you always sleep together or had you separate hammocks?

Nicholson: No. We had separate hammocks, but he laid alongside of mine.

The court: How came he to sleep in your hammock with you that night?

Nicholson: I supposed he was a little intoxicated with liquor when he turned in.

The court: How did you so particularly notice the time of his turning out again?

Nicholson: One of my messmates had a watch and looked at it when we were turned out and there was a light in the berth.

The court: Who turned first into the hammock?

Nicholson: The prisoner turned in just before me.

The court: How came you then not to turn into his hammock?

Nicholson: It was not hung up.

The court: How came you to have a candle in your berth at ten o-clock at night?

Nicholson: There was a woman and a child laying there at the time and it happened that the child was frightened at the noise and she was looking at it.

The court: Did you wake your messmate to look at his watch?

Nicholson: No. He was awake in the berth.

The court: What could be your reason for wishing to know the time so exactly?

Nicholson: My reason was that I supposed I should be called on as a witness for John Lawson.

The court: What reason had you to suppose you should be called on as a witness for John Lawson?

Nicholson: In case he should be detected afterwards, that I might know the time.

Conclusion

At the end of chapter nine we paused to consider what light the mutiny on the Culloden threw on the themes of Part Three. This section will repeat the process for the mutiny on the Defiance.

How does this mutiny conform to Rodger's unwritten rules? It happened in port. It did not happen in the face of the enemy. One of the two demands, that over grog, was certainly an assertion of a traditional right.

Nor was this a demonstration by the dregs of the shore, unused to the conventions of shipboard life. We have quoted Nicol's memory that 'she was manned principally by fishermen, stout resolute dogs.' Of the five men executed, Morrison and Cox were ordinary seamen, Ealey and Sullivan were able seamen, and McLawrin was an able seaman and captain of the afterguard. We have evidence of organization or leadership by four men. McLawrin was captain of the afterguard, Parker was captain of the maintop, Handy was rated landsman but served as captain of the mast, and Graham was a landsman. Graham is the only one who can plausibly be seen as an agitator from shore. This was a

sailor's mutiny over very traditional sailors' demands.

Yet it was not simply a safety valve, a rowdy demonstration that exasperated officers accepted as part of shipboard give and take. Much does not fit: the men who pursued Lieutenant Dunbar with cutlasses and tomahawks, the men who aimed the gun at their officers and jammed a crowbar down the gun mouth, the men who stormed the quarterdeck and the men who called for firing the guns. Like the Culloden, this was an armed strike. The great difference, and the great weakness, was that the Defiance was not organized.

One is reminded of the sailors' strikes in Aberdeen and Tyneside in 1792, the sheer rowdiness and exuberance of the crowds of sailors. It seems that the traditions of the sea had changed. What happened on the Defiance was, from the sailors' point of view, 'collective bargaining by riot'. After all, they attempted to bargain with the captain and seemed to have got his agreement to free the men. At the same time, the sailors' idea of riot had reached a point which the officers felt they could not tolerate. What we see here is a tradition of protest in the process of change. These are tradtional men, 'stout dogs', fighting for traditional goals, in a way that is neither

new nor old, in a way that is changing year by year.

The second theme of this part is looking at mutiny as 'class struggle'. As with the Culloden, this is not a mutiny caused by sadism or anarchy. It is a protest over conditions of ship board life. The men were avoiding the press and deserting the fleet in large numbers. It was this that caused a defensive captain to refuse liberty, and this also that deprived him of the support of marines or soldiers. We cannot understand the causes or course of the mutiny without understanding the pressures of the war on recruitment and the resistance of the men by voting with their feet.

Again, Admiral Pringle's actions make sense in terms of the more general struggle for control by the officers. He was under pressure from the admiralty not to cede the men's demands and to punish the ringleaders. After the Windsor Castle and the Culloden, anything less would have opened great holes in the officers' control. If men could chase officers with cutlasses and have shore leave when they wanted it, naval discipline would be severely threatened. But Pringle had to be careful: there was always the threat of other ships backing the Defiances.

Again, we see a captain caught between the power of the lower deck and the demands of the Admiralty. Again, the solution is duplicity. But there is a major difference between the two mutinies: organization. The moment at which this told was the moment Bligh's boats came alongside. The shouts went up to open fire. But the men had not organized their own chain of command. Without that, and without organized discussion beforehand, they were never likely to go into battle.

In the aftermath, we again see the operation of the court martial as social control. But it is incomplete control. The ship still had to be disbanded, and the one hundred men who went to the _Director_ remained a future nucleus of mutineers.

Our third theme was the importance of detailed studies. It is hoped that these two case studies have illustrated some of what can be done with the extensive court martial records. Such studies could fill a thesis many times over. But in the next part, attention will shift from the wood to the trees. We will look at the whole course of mutinies between 1793 and 1814.

PART THREE:

Mutiny and Protest, 1793-1814

Chapter Twelve: The Explosion: 1797-98

Part Four will be a chronological history of the mutinies and protests from 1793 to 1814. It will touch on almost all of the conflicts that ended in court martials in those years. In some ways the aims of this part are different from the aims of Part Three. Then the intention was to describe the workings of two mutinies in detail. Here the intention is rather to give the reader a feel for the range of shipbarod protest in these years. There has also been a running dialogue with Rodger's work on mutiny in an earlier period. In this section that dialogue will fade into the background, but the conclusion will return to the topic in the light of the evidence presented in this part.

The main theme of this part will be a continuation of the attempt to understand mutiny and protest in terms of the struggle between officers and men. Over time, the balance of power between quarterdeck and lower deck shifted back and forth. This affected how officers responded to protest, and also the forms that protest took. At the same time, the particular struggles themselves

affected the balance of power in turn. The rest of this thesis is, then, an attempt to situate particualr disputes in terms of this changing balance of forces. The matter is complex. But as a signpost for the reader, it will be helpful here to crudely summarise the shifting tides of struggle in this period.

Broadly, the first years of the war saw several major mutinies on line of battle ships, met by an increasingly firm line from the Admiralty. This firm line was decisively defeated by the great mutinies of 1797. The victory at Spithead provided the men with a confidence that continued into 1798. But the defeat at the Nore had drawn a limit to what the men could achieve, and in 1798 the bloody purges of United Irish cells in the Navy began a process by which the Admiralty regained most of their control of shipboard life. In the early 1800s mutiny and protest continued on a lower level, sometimes successful, sometimes defeated. Then in 1809, for reasons we shall explore, there was a visible change in the approach of the Admiralty and the captains to protest. From that time until the end of the war there was far more willingness to redress the grievances of individual ships against individual commanders. But this did not mean an

end to protest or mutiny, and it did not mean an end to the repression of some protesters.

The most important events of these years were the mutinies of 1797-98. For reasons given in the Introduction, these events are treated quite briefly in the rest of this chapter. (1) The intention is not to provide a narrative history. It is rather to touch on some disputed questions of analysis and situate the mutinies in terms of the events that preceded and followed them.

The Roots of 1797

To understand what happened in 1797, it is helpful to review the major mutinies from '93 to '96 in the order in which they happened. At the beginning of the war in 1793, the Winchelseas wrote a letter and held a demonstration. They had two men flogged around the fleet and the Admiralty

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(1) This chapter is based upon James Dugan, The Great Mutiny, the best history of the naval mutinies; Conrad Gill, The Naval Mutinies of 1797; and Roger Wells, Insurrection: the British Experience, 1795-1803, which is particularly helpful analytically. Dobree and Manwaring, The Floating Republic, is not so helpful, and nor is W. J. Neale, An Account of the Mutiny at Spithead and the Nore.

agreed to remove their captain. (1) Next year, in 1794, the Windsor Castles took over their ship in the Mediterranean. They ran out the guns and made it clear that they would fight unless their captain and first lieutenant were replaced. The admiral conceded their demand. (2)

Within weeks the Cullodens at Spithead refused to put to sea. The admiral on the spot was reluctant to take them on. The Admiralty, while prepared to promise a refit, feared that another amnesty might lead to a rash of mutinies. So Pakenham promised forgiveness and the Admiralty prosecuted.

Next year, 1795, the same thing happened on the Defiance: Lieutenant Hewitt promised forgiveness and a trial followed. The Admiralty was angry with Captain Home for releasing the men from irons on the Saturday night, and pleased with Admiral Pringle's resolute action in putting down the mutiny.

In September 1795 there was a mutiny on the Terrible in the Mediterranean. The Terribles were angry with the ship's discipline in general and with the bad bread their captain forced them to eat in particular. The Windsor Castle was also

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(1) See above, pages 7-11.
(2) See above, pages 211-217.

part of the Mediterranean fleet, and like them the Terribles seized the lower decks and barricaded themselves in. Captain Campbell shouted 'We'll have no Windsor Castles here.' He also, interestingly, said that he was not prepared to tolerate Peep-o-day Boys. He had the marines take a crowbar to the planks of the deck and begin firing down into the men. Several were badly wounded and the people surrendered. A few were flogged on the spot until they broke down and talked. After the court martial the leaders were hanged. The whole fleet, including the Windsor Castle, watched the execution. (1)

From the Winchelsea to the Terrible it is possible to see a stiffening of the attitude of the Admiralty, and to some extent of the captains too. Demands might be met, but it was essential to prosecute the leaders afterward to restore discipline and control. It is in this context that

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(1) The main sources on this mutiny are the trial of the mutineers in Adm. 1:5333; Solicitors to Admiralty, 14 March 1796 in Adm. 1:3684; Admiral Hotham to Admiralty, 12 September 1795, 21 September 1795 and 10 October 1795, all in Adm. 1:393, Letters 225, 228 and 242. The Peep-o-day boys were Protestant peasant organizations in Ulster that pursued an underground war against their Catholic equivalent, the Defenders, and sometimes against landlords as well.

we must understand the official response to the petitions for a pay increase that began to come from the Channel Fleet in 1796.

Spithead

1795 had been a year of dearth and subsequent inflation. Because of this pay increases had been granted to soldiers, marines, naval captains and naval lieutenants. It is not surprising that the sailors in the Channel Fleet began to petition for rises too. These petitions were ignored. The official explanation afterwards was that they had been sent to Admiral Howe. Thinking them the work of a lone crank, he had simply pocketed them. This explanation, given by Howe to a gullible House of Lords, will not do. Captain Pakenham had written a detailed letter to Spencer, the First Lord of the Admrialty, setting out the men's grievances and the probability of serious protest. (1) And while the precise details of the sailors' organization were secret, every officer in the fleet knew that the men were publicly discussing action over wages for days before they finally moved.

The Admiralty, of course, would have found it

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(1) See Julian Corbett, editor, Private Papers of George, Second Earl Spencer, Navy Records Society number 48, 1914, volume two, pages 105-109.

difficult to meet pay increases, as Spencer informed Pakenham. But when they finally had to find the money, they did. And one must recognize that their recent instinct had been to break militancy in the fleet by confrontation. So they responded to reports of general unrest in the Channel Fleet by ordering Admiral Bridport to send the fleet to sea.

The sailors refused. 'Flying pickets' rowed from ship to ship, and each ship's company crowded the rail to exchange cheers with the ships anchored closest to them, just as ships did *before* they went into battle. Each ship elected two delegates to a committee of the fleet, which met in the admiral's cabin on the Queen Charlotte. The officers had lost control of the fleet.

This was no small matter. The Channel Fleet was charged with keeping the French fleet bottled up in Brest. For the moment the wind kept the French in port, but should they break out to Ireland or the West Indies the course of the war could change. This put the sailors in a very strong position, and the Admiralty had to move quickly. Their Lordships raced down to Portsmouth. They offered pay rises of about twenty per cent, and met some of the men's lesser demands as well.

Admiral Gardner was sent to meet the

committee of delegates on the Queen Charlotte. They liked the offer. Gardner was an admiral's admiral: bluff, tempestuous, joking, brave, open and foul-mouthed. He heartily congratulated the delegates on agreeing to the offer. The committee explained that they had to wait for the return of the four delegates from shore. Gardner accepted this, and sat down in the cabin among the delegates to write out a letter of thanks for the delegates to sing and send to the Admiralty.

Valentine Joyce was one of the four delegates still on shore. He was a twenty-nine year old quarter master's mate on the Royal Sovereign. The quarter master's mate was the man who took the wheel. Joyce was a skilled seaman, born on the seafaring island of Jersey. (1) But Valentine Joyce is not a Jersey name. In 1793 Joyce had been running a tobacconists's shop in Belfast. That year he was arrested for sedition and sent into the Navy as punishment. He was an active United Irishman, and the informal leader of the delegates of the fleet.

It is not known what Joyce and the other delegates were doing on shore at this point. It is

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(1) Muster books of the Royal George for 1793 in Adm. 36:11699, and for 1797 in Adm. 36:11704.

possible that they were consulting with democrats on shore. They returned to the Queen Charlotte to find the other delegates gathered around Gardner. Joyce must have known at once that if they signed the letter of thanks they were dead men. He began arguing with the other delegates that they must have a signed pardon from the king before they returned to duty.

Many delegates did not agree. Joyce walked out of the cabin onto the quarterdeck. He and his three mates started talking to the Charlottes on the forecastle and in the waist. 'Remember the Culloden', they said, 'remember the Culloden.'

The Charlottes remembered. The Culloden was now in the Mediterranean, but two years before it had been part of the Channel Fleet with the Charlotte. Every ship in the fleet had heard the execution gun, every ship in the fleet knew the story of Pakenham's promise of an amnesty, and Pakenham was still a captain in the fleet.

The Charlottes surged aft on the quarterdeck. Admiral Gardner was which way the wind was blowing. He lost his temper and accused them all of being a damned mutinous set of blackguards that deserved hanging. He grabbed one man by the collar and said, 'I'll hang you, and I'll hang every fifth man in the fleet.'

The Charlottes bustled Admiral Gardner roughly off the ship. That afternoon the red flag flew from Joyce's ship, the Royal George. The delegates met there and sent the Admiralty a message. They would return to duty when they had a pardon signed by the king for every ship in the fleet. All around Spithead the sailors opened the ports and ran out the great guns.

Earl Spencer, the First Lord, left Portsmouth that night and was in London by nine in the morning. At five in the afternoon he left London for Windsor with Pitt. Four hours later they persuaded George III to sign a royal proclamation decreeing a total pardon. A hundred copies were printed and rushed south. By next morning every captain in the Channel Fleet read out the proclamation. The men returned to duty. The five Cullodens had been executed, but not forgotten.

The Second Mutiny

The men of the Channel Fleet returned to their duty on 23 April in a confident mood. But apparently they still did not trust the Admiralty to fulfill their side of the bargain. The promised increase in wages was not actually paid immediately. The reason given was that it took

time for the neccessary business to work its way through Parliament. This may have been true. But when a Whig peer, Bedford, attempted to get the matter discussed in the Lords, the government refused.

At the same time the Admiralty wrote a general letter to captains instructing them to take a firm line and immediately suppress any further disturbances with forceful measures. Then, before the increase in wages was approved, they ordered several ships to put to sea. They were clearly reasserting control.

And so the mutiny broke out at Spithead again. Most captains wisely obeyed the mutineers, but on the London Admiral Colpoys attempted to follow the Admiralty's new orders. The marines were drawn up and ordered to fire on the sailors. They began to do so but then threw away their weapons, after wounding several seamen, two fatally. The enraged Londons wanted to hang both Colpoys and one of his officers on the spot. But Valentine Joyce was present at this crucial juncture as well, and this time he intervened to save the lives of the two officers. Had the sailors executed an Admiral, of course, the line would have been truly drawn and there would have been no settlement likely short of insurrection.

In saving himself Colpoys revealed his Admiralty orders, and the delegates realized the Admiralty meant to have a decisive test of strength.

So they stripped the ports, ran out the guns and raised the red flag. They also put one hundred and fourteen unpopular officers ashore and refused to have them back. To claim the right to dismiss officers was a challenge to the heart of naval discipline and the naval heirarchy. Moreover, most disputes between officers and men centered around the control of work, and most disputes over work took the form of objections to the style and punishments of particular officers. The wholesale sacking of officers in the Channel Fleet resolved many such disputes in the favour of the men. The Terribles, for instance, who had mutinied against Captain Campbell the year before, now put him and every one of his officers save one midshipman ashore.

The Nore

The victory at Spithead encouraged a wave of mutinies in other fleets in the Caribbean, the Cape and the Mediterranean. There were also many further individual ship mutinies in the Channel

Fleet in 1797 and 1798. (1) There appears to have been a general relaxation of discipline in the Channel Fleet during this period, and on _La Nymphe_ John Pollard appears to have been able to strike his captain on two different occasions without punishment. (2)

But in the aftermath of the Spithead mutiny the Admiralty was looking to reasert its control. And with the crisis past, some in the cabinet began to argue that Pitt had been too soft. The Admiralty's need to reassert itself met the sailors' increased confidence in the mutiny at the Nore.

During the course of the Spithead mutiny the delegates had written letters and sent delegates to the ships at Plymouth, the Nore and in the North Sea Fleet, appealing for joint action. Pymouth had joined the mutiny but had returned to duty with the fleet at Spithead.

The mutiny at the Nore, in the Thames estuary, had begun just before the Spithead mutiny was settled. It was at first regarded as a smaller sideshow, which it was. The mutiny at Spithead was the work of line of battle ships, but at the Nore

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(1) Dugan, pages 397-435.
(2) Wells, page 108.

there were only two line of battle ships until late in the mutiny.

When Spithead settled the Nore mutineers also demanded a firm promise of amnesty for the ringleaders. They also demanded that the officers they had recently sent ashore be not returned. These demands the Admiralty refused.

The mutineers at the Nore were in a weaker position than those at Spithead for several reasons. Firstly, the fleet at the Nore was a chance agglomeration of ships in the Thames estuary, coming or going out for supplies or repairs or remanning. Like the Channel Fleet, they elected delgates to a committee of the fleet, and unlike them they also had a committee of twelve men on each ship to coordinate the strike. But at Spithead the core of this committee appears to have been the men who had already planned and organized the mutiny. At the Nore it was the men of the moment. The committee had no experience of working with each other, and fell out almost from the start. Nothing illustrates this better than the election as President of the committee of Richard Parker, a man who had only been on his ship for a few weeks.

Secondly, the Channel Fleet had already settled. Now the Admiralty, rather than facing a

potential rising of the whole Navy, was able to take on the fleets one by one.

Thirdly, the strategic position was much worse. The Admiralty had to negotiate with the Channel Fleet in haste lest they leave the Channel open. But the ships at the Nore had no strategic role. And with the Channel Fleet now at sea and at least some of the North Sea Fleet standing off Holland throughout, the Admiralty could afford to wait out the Nore.

By refusing to negotiate on the central issues, the Admiralty ensured that the leaders of the mutiny would do all in their power to prevent a surrender and their own hanging. They had four possible courses of action. They could try to raise London in solidarity and strike for peace. This was tried and failed. They could blockade the river and cut off London's supplies. This they did, but very quickly hundreds of vessels anchored by the blockading fleet. The sailors realized they could be overwhelmed and called off the blockade. Or they could take the ships and run for France or the Americas. Many argued for this, particularly the United Men. It is difficult to tell if the crews would have followed them in this, for in the event the Admiralty had the navigation buoys and lights removed down the Thames and it became

effectively impossible to sail the great ships into the Channel.

The fourth course of action was to wait and hope the Admiralty would break. This they did. Pushed into a corner, the more militant leaders of the mutiny reacted with enraged words and symbols. They wrote angry letters, behaved rudely to admirals and hanged Pitt and Dundas in effigy. As the Admiralty waited them out, the more fainthearted sections of the crew began to argue for surrender. The committee threatened to fire on any ship that tried to leave the mutiny. Several did leave, and while there were no pitched battles and nobody was injured, several symbolic shots were fired. But the fleet gradually dropped away. On the fifteenth of June the last ship on strike took down the red flag: the _Director_, with her Captain William Bligh and her hundred old Defiances.

The Admiralty proceeded to an exemplary blood-letting. Well over a hundred men were put in irons. Richard Parker was soon killed, and followed by at least thirty-five other men. (1) William Bligh, alone of all the captains at the

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(1) Estimates vary, as it is difficult to establish how many of the men sentenced to death were actually executed.

Nore, intervened personally to make sure that not one of the men under his command was executed, no matter what their guilt.

Consequences

The admiralty clearly intended to make an example of the men at the Nore, and clearly did so. The hangings at the end, it was hoped, would leave an impression of a defeated movement. Later historians have sometimes followed them in this impression, or in the more sophisticated line that the Spithead mutineers were moderate and responsible men and *therefore had* their just demands met, while the wild men of the Nore could only expect what they got. If anything, the reverse was true. The Spithead mutineers won because the action they were prepared to take threatened the heart of the British state. The language of the leaders at the Nore sometimes appears more militant because they were pushed into a corner by the Admiralty.

Nor did the defeat at the Nore mark the defeat of the sailors as a whole. Mutinies continued for the next eighteen months, with a special relaxation of discipline in the Channel Fleet. After all, the mutiny at the Nore had been

a smaller affair than that at Spithead, the leaders at Spithead were still serving in their ships, and the rise in wages won at Spithead was being paid to every ship in the Navy. And even at the Nore the Admiralty realized the could not go too far or have exectuions 'too frequent', lest they provoke further mutiny. (1)

The Wider Context

But the Nore did reveal the limits faced by the movement in the fleet. The mutineers at Spithead had the support of the Whig local administration in Portsmouth and the active backing of the Portsmouth crowd. They demonstrated with the sailors, and they did not allow 'God Save the King' to be played in Portsmouth theatres during the mutiny.

The workers and militia in Sheerness had also made their active sympathy for the mutineers at the Nore clear at the beginning. But here the decisive arena was London. The London bourgoisie were against the mutineers. While many workers felt a passive support, the activists of the London Corresponding Society were no longer

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(1) Wells, page 106.

remotely able to organize demonstrations in support. In short, the largest strike of the 1780s was taking place at a time when the radical movement in England as a whole was in retreat.

The sailors were connected to this movement in many ways. Roger Wells has mustered a great deal of convincing evidence for the influence of the revolutionary movement in general, and the United Irishmen in particular, in the fleet. (1) Valentine Joyce was a United Man, as was John Blake, the leader of the intransigent faction at the Nore. There were thousands of Irish political prisoners sent into the fleet as punishment. Pelham, the Home Secretary, estimated in 1796 that 15,000 Defenders and United Men had been sent to the Navy as punishment. Even if he exaggerated, and even if many were gut Defenders rather than cerebral United Men, and even if many of them deserted or lost their politics, there must still have been a significant number of active political prisoners below decks. And by 1798 there were clearly branches of the United Men on at least a dozen ships. The influence of democrats and trade unionists ashore is also evident in the structure of 'delegates', 'committees' and a 'President'.

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(1) Wells, especially pages 81-84 and 91-104.

And the leadership of Joyce at Spithead was of crucial importance.

But equally, if not more, important was the influence of democratic ideas in general. At the time captains and admirals blamed the mutinies on the influence of the quota men. They argued that the simple British seaman, long accustomed to a harsh discipline, lacking in the finer feelings and none too intelligent, had been joined by educated landsmen and artisans who were unused to such subordination. These educated men, fired by French ideas, agitated relentlessly among the more traditional sailors and brought them to a new realization of the indignity of their position.

This view served the needs of officers who wished to disassociate the naval tradition from the shame at Spithead. The real sailors did not mean it, and anyway they were misled. It had become the general view among naval historians, and unfortunately even Roger Wells accepts it. No evidence whatsoever has ever been advanced for it, and upon inspection the argument collapses.

For one thing, the leaders of the mutiny were quite simply not educated landsmen. Richard Parker was an educated sailor, a former officer who had spent most of his working life at sea. Valentine Joyce at Spithead and John Blake at the Nore were

both Irish able seamen. And there is the case of Matthew Hollister of the Director. He was the yeoman who barred the three drunks on the Defiance from the magazine, and took no part in the mutiny. The muster book of the Defiance gives his age as forty-two. In the books of the Director he is fifty-six and Bristol born. (1) But it is the same man with the same rank on both ships. Men were not too particular what they told the ship's clerk. Hollister was clearly at least an old salt from southern England. He was also one of the four delegates sent from the Nore to talk to the mutineers at Spithead, and he was subsequently sent to Yarmouth to persuade the fleet there to come out.

Hollister's case illustrates an important point. There were landsmen on the committees, but they were a minority. And there was no such thing as a group of simple sailors accustomed to naval discipline. Rather, there was a trade called sailor, and most of these tradesmen served on merchant vessels in peace time. In times of war they were impressed into the Navy, and resented the discipline. These sailors had been in the van

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(1) Defiance muster books, Adm. 36:11909-11910; Director muster books, Adm. 36:12781.

of the strikes and demonstrations of 1792. There is no reason to assume that the men who planted the Liberty Tree in Aberdeen in 1792 and then organized the sailors' strike there could not organize a mutiny in the fleet.

Nor, of course, was the democratic movment the sole preserve of educated men. A few lawyers and poets may have been prominent. But the mass of the members of the London Corresponding Societies, the Defenders and probably the United Scotsmen were workers or peasants, resolutely plebian. Eben Thomas Hardy and Francis Place were not of the same class as Danton and Robespierre.

Moreover, the London Corresponding Society was a mass movement and the United Irishmen became one. At any one time in these years there were a quarter of a million sailors in the Navy and the merchant fleet combined. This was a very significant proportion of the young men working in the major ports. It is not surprising that the politics of the fleet should have reflected the politics of workers in the ports. The captains, in short, were right that the fleet had changed its politics, but wrong not to notice that Jolly Jack himself had turned on them.

1798

Throughout 1798 there were mutinies on individual ships. But sailors were part of a wider movement. On land the central event of '98 was the defeat of the Irish insurrection. At sea it was the purge of the organization of the United Irishmen in the fleet. (1)

The United Men had been important in 1797, and they had organized with the English and Scots on board. After the mutinies the Dublin leadership realized the importance of the fleet and began the serious organization of branches on ships. By '98 they had branches on *at least a dozen ships,* and probably many more. But as the rising developed in Ireland, it became more and more a rising of Catholic against Protestant.

Moreover, the majority of the rebels sent to the fleet had been Defenders rather than United Men. They were part of an organization of wage labourers and mall tenants for the defense of Catholic lives and liberty. They were not a bourgoisie and heavily Protestant organization for

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(1) The following is based on Wells, pages 145-51, and Dugan, pages 420-434.

the Rights of Man. So on ship after ship there developed a split between Catholics and Protestants, Irish and English. The instructions of the United Men were to take their ships over to the enemy one by one. This made sense if one sided with the French and Irish against the English. But it divided the English off, and they were the majority of the crews.

The split was not automatic, and the English sailors wrestled with their consciences. On the _Haughty_, for instance, the Irish sailors struggled in silence with the English sailors for control of the guns off the coast of Ireland. It was only several days later that a deputation of English seamen brought themselves to tell the officers of the plot to take the ship.

On many ships the English sailors spent weeks in fear of being murdered in their beds before one of them talked. Even when the captain began to arrest large numbers of Irishmen, they had great difficulty finding witnesses among the English sailors. Nor, of course, were any English sailors actually hurt.

But the Irish on the _Prince Royal_, the _St. George_ and the _Marlborough_ did try to run thier ships into Cadiz in May. Plots to do the same were discovered in June and July on the _Haughty_, the

<u>Pluto</u>, the <u>Adamant</u>, the <u>Mars</u>, and on the <u>Caesar</u>, where sixty-eight men were put in irons. In August there was a mutiny on the <u>Ramilles</u>, an aborted one on the <u>Defiance</u> and arrests on the <u>Neptune</u>. Further arrests followed on the <u>Nemesis</u>, the <u>Zealand</u>, the <u>Druid</u> and the <u>Queen Charlotte</u>. There are suggestions that United organization extended to many more ships.

These arrests split the fleet. The year before the Irish hotheads had been in the van with the English hotheads. Now they were being arrested, and even if there were few witnesses from among the English, there were some. Moreover, these arrests provided the Admiralty with the occassion for a show of repression they had not felt confident enough to mount after the Nore.

On most ships good witnesses were hard to come by, and so only a few men could be proved guilty enought to hang. But on the <u>Defiance</u> (almost completely remanned since the mutiny in 1795) one witness was prepared to testify to the presence of twenty-five other men at an oathing ceremony in the galley. Twenty of them were hanged at once.

This level of killing on one ship is unique in this period. Part of the explanation, of course, is that they had been plotting treason and

that the uprising in Ireland was no sideshow. But one of the effects of this wave of repression, probably intended by some officers, was to bring to an end the period of lower deck confidence that had followed the mutinies of 1797. This confidence had been highest in the Channel Fleet, and it was the Channel Fleet that stood and watched twenty men at the rope's end. This was to have its effect.

The next chapter will trace the decline of confidence among the men after 1798. From 1799 the officers slowly reasserted their authority. This did not mean an end to protests and mutinies. Indeed, as the prospects of a successful mutiny became less, there seems to have been a rise in attempts to take the ship and run for a foreign port after 1800. The years 1800 and 1801 seem to have been a period of particular bitterness, though not of particular conflict. Then there was a year of peace and partial demobilization. With the resumption or war there were continued mutinies. But their incidence was a bit less and the bitterness surrounding them was also reduced. The chapter ends in 1809, just before the mutiny on the Nereide and the important changes of 1809.

Chapter Thirteen: The Tide Recedes, 1799-1808

In 1799 many officers were still clearly running scared. Captains sent men for trial on grounds they might previously have ignored. Several marines on the Royal George, for instance, were drinking in their hammocks. One of them proposed a toast: 'Success to the United Irishmen and may the Tree of Liberty be planted before us.' One witness also heard him wish victory to the enemy. Four marines were tried for either joining in the oath or not preventing it, and each was sentenced to 300 lashes. (1)

William Davis of the Lowestofte was tried for disrespect to the officers and for having said while in irons that 'he hoped he should see the Tree of Liberty planted in the centre of the Lowestofte and extended all through the British Navy.' In his defense he protested fervent loyalty to the British Constitution, but he was sentenced to 500 lashes and two years solitary confinement. (2)

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(1) Trial of Patrick Townsend and others, 15 January 1799 in Adm. 1:5348.
(2) Trial of Davis, 24 January 1799 in Adm. 1:5348.

In March two seamen of the *Ramilles* were tried for circulating a letter asking for the removal of their captain and several other officers. In their defence they said that they had never meant to provoke a mutiny, they were only agitating over the right to have bum boat women admitted to the ship. The court took the possibility of mutiny seriously. They sentenced one man to death and recommended the other to mercy. (1) This may have had something to do with the fact that the *Ramilles* had been off Work when the letter was circulated, and Ireland was still a sore point. But it may also indicate that in 1800 the officers felt that industrial relations were so tense that it was unwise to allow the people their traditional custom of sending petitions to the Admiralty. Probably any collective action was a threat, and the officers were aware how quickly it might escalate.

That same month in the North Sea fleet, Bouzelia Forbes was sentenced to 300 lashes and Alexander Kerr to 200 for writing a letter. They had met with other shipmates by candlelight in the manger to write to the Lords of the Admiralty complaining of their captain's usage. They had

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(1) Trial of Green and Layton, 4 March 1799 in Adm. 1:5348.

torn up the first draft as not painting the picture black enough. (1)

Sometimes it is clear why a captain would react angrily to a letter. John Ferris, master at arms of the Stag in the Channel fleet, wrote a letter to Earl Spencer at the Admiralty on behalf of the ship's company, 'one and all'. The letter effectively accused Captain Yorke and the purser of embezzling the crew's share of the prize money. Ferris sent the letter to his friend, Corporal Joseph Peters of the marines, so that Peters could improve the handwriting. Captain Yorke sent both Ferris and Peters to trial for attempting to stir up a mutiny. The court found them not guilty of stirring up mutiny, but guilty of writing an unfounded letter. They were both broken in rank and sentenced to eighteen months solitary confinement. (2)

But in several cases the court martial officers seem to have taken a much less serious view of an offense than did the captain reporting who sent the man for trial. On the Caesar Thomas Mahoney had terrified William Oliver by coming to

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(1) Trial of Forbes and Kerr, 22 March 1799 in Adm. 1:5348.
(2) Trial of Ferris and Peters, 28 March 1799 in Adm. 1:5348.

his berth and asking how it felt to hang a man? He accused Oliver of being the man who had reported 'the Romans intending to take the lives of the Protestants', and so had as good as hanged six innocent men. Mahoney heaped a good deal more abuse on the informer and then took off his own neckerchief and undid his shirt collar. Baring his neck, he said 'Here is a white neck! I defy both you and them.'

Oliver was clearly frightened by Mahoney's moral contempt. He turned Mahoney in to the captain, who sent him for trial. The court awarded 50 lashes. This was a punishment the captain could have awarded without going through all the trouble and formality of a trial. Of course 50 lashes were not insignificant to the man who took the beating. But it was still a derisory sentence for a full court martial. This may reflect a a private contempt for informers on the part of the officers of the court. (1)

Again, in August Thomas Perkins of the _Mars_ was sentenced to a hundred lashes. A number of boats had been alongside the ship. The women in them could not be persuaded to come on board. Perkins had called out, 'Come, men, what do you

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(1) Trial of Mahoney, 23 July 1799 in Adm. 1:5350.

say, let's all go ashore after the women. I will be the first to make a break.' The surgeon told Perkins to mind what he said. Perkins replied, 'I don't care if the admiral heard me.' (1)

In Torbay Thomas Lewis of the Russell was sent for court martial because while scrubbing the decks he remarked to the men around him, 'By the Holy Ghost, if every man in this ship was of my mind we would not scrub the decks. There is not a ship in the fleet that does it but us and the bloody Ramillies.' He was sentenced to 50 lashes. Again the captains seem to have felt that their brother officer was being unduly jumpy. (2)

One night in April Robert Powell of the Repulse was well in liquor. The ship was tense. That evening an anonymous letter had been dropped for the officers to read. Powell was heard to say 'I am a United Irishman and I hope I shall gain my ends or die in the attempt'. Staggering towards his hammock he shouted 'Vive le Republique toujours'. His shipmates urged him to go to his hammock, shut up and go to sleep. But when one of them informed on Powell, the captain decided that

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(1) Trial of Perkins, 6 September 1799 in Adm. 1:5350.
(2) Trial of Lewis, 27 September 1799 in Adm. 1:5350.

he had found the ringleader of the letter writers. This may in fact have been the case, or it may not. The court awarded 100 lashes. (1)

These prosecutions reveal captains nervous about odd remarks and any scent of sedition. We should not leap to the conclusion that these were silly fears. On the _Volage_ in the West Indies, three men were tried for organizing a conspiracy to seize the ship and run her into an enemy port, and for administering oaths to their shipmates not to reveal the plan. It seems clear from the evidence tht this was a serious plot and that many of the ship's company knew about it. The court took a relatively lenient view. The defendants were sentenced to 500, 300 and 200 lashes respectively. (2)

In May the captain of the sloop _Hope_ discovered that at least twenty-four of his able seamen and petty officers were plotting to take the ship and sail her into an enemy port in Madagascar. The plot was revealed while they were still swearing men in one by one. This time four

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(1) Trial of Powell and McAllister, 30 September 1799 in Adm. 1:5350.
(2) Trial of Dunavon and others, 12-15 August 1799 in Adm. 1:5350.

men were sentenced to death. (1)

On _La Sophie_ even the first lieutenant was moved to urge the men to petition the Admiralty. After punishment one day he leapt up on the carronade slides and addressed the ten or fifteen men nearby, saying that he wondered that they did not write to complain of the captain, and that 'I have a list of the people's names who have been flogged since I have been in the Ship, and if I am called upon I shall know what to say.' He was dismissed the service and rendered incapable of ever serving in the Navy again. (2)

The Navy was clearly tense throughout 1799, with the possibility of mutiny still lingering in the air. But we need to realize that despite the fear and the aboritve plots, only one actual demonstration made it into the court martial record: the 'mutiny' on the sloop _Dart_.

One day in June the carpenter's crew on the _Dart_ were rigging up the gratings for a flogging. The ship's company moved aft in a disorderly manner, whispering among themselves. When the prisoner was seized up they refused an order to

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(1) Trial of the mutineers of the _Hope_, 3 January 1800 in Adm. 1:5351.
(2) Trial of Thomas Vanthuysen, 3 January 1800 in Adm. 1:5351.

move back. When he was ordered to strip they 'all ran forward crying out he shall not be flogged'. The officers dived for the arms chest and shared out the weapons. The people moved back and the man was flogged. At the subsequent trial one man was sentenced to death and four others to between 100 and 500 lashes. (1)

The fact that this is the only demonstration in the court martial record does not mean that other ships did not demonstrate and escape with a whipping. Probably some did. But it must be remembered that 1799 was only two years after the great wave of mutinies in 1797. What is striking is the absence of mutiny and the severity of repression. The punishment of the Darts was severe for what was only a demonstration. Men found themselves on trial for sedition after the odd remark below decks. The officers were reasserting their authority. The United Irishmen had been defeated on land in 1798, and broken in the fleet as well. Reaction now ruled afloat and ashore.

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(1) Trial of John Miller and others, 4-6 July 1799 in Adm. 1:5350.

1800

This pattern continued into 1800. On March 5th of that year Florence McCarty, a seaman of the Phoebe, was lashing up his hammock. He was working next to Thomas Holloway, the captain of the forecastle and presumably a trusted and experienced sailor. The Phoebe had recently captured a French privateer with eleven English speaking men among her crew. Holloway told McCarty that he was happy to think that 'we had found out these men, Americans as they deemed themselves, and I said that they deserved hanging if they were subjects of the Crown of Great Britain.'

There is reason to believe that the captain of the forecastle already knew something of McCarty's politics and was trying to wind him up. If so, it worked. McCarty replied that he would do the same as the eleven men. Holloway and McCarty began quarrelling. Holloway told McCarty that he deserved punishment as bad as the eleven. McCarty said that 'if he went into any service and took the bounty of any nation he would fight as long as he could, and he gloried in them young fellows for so doing.'

Holloway threatened to report McCarty to the quarterdeck and McCarty told him to go bugger

himself. Holloway reported him instead and the captain sent him for court martial. He was sentenced to 500 lashes and two years solitary confinement. The court took treason seriously, even when it was only treasonous words. They commended Holloway, who was promoted to gunner and removed to another ship. This was, of course, a reward, but it also got him out of the way of the other Phoebes. (1)

Many officers were touchy. The majority of trials for the offense called 'mutiny' were in fact raving drunks shouting at their officers. Usually such a man would be flogged the next day. If sent for court martial he usually received 100 to 200 lashes. But when William Gillfinnan of the Monarch was drunk one night he said to some of his shipmates, 'Ye buggers, if ye were of my mind, the ship would not be here.' He was reported and taken to the lieutenant of the watch, who told the sailor he would have him hanged. The court martial concurred. It is clear that Gillfinnan was in no position to launch a mutiny. After all, he was complaining about the other buggers who would not do anything. But it is equally clear that in 1800 the captains on this court were sensitive enough

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(1) Trial of McCarty, 7 April 1800 in Adm. 1:5352.

to the threat of mutiny to kill a man for mentioning it. (1)

And while in 1800 sailors certainly still had the <u>right</u> to petition for redress of grievances, they could be seriously punished for exercising that right. The marines of the <u>Diadem</u> at Spithead had previously written to their Major General on shore and reeived some satisfaction. It is unclear what they had complained about, but clear that he did not object in principle to them writing letters. But then in April 22 marines wrote to him asking for relief from the oppressions of their ship's officers and their marine lieutenant. Sixteen of them signed their names and six made their mark. This suggests that they were confident of the Major General's response and felt that their protest was legitimate. But this time a line was drawn. John Briscoe, the writer and organizer of the letter, was tried and sentenced to 200 lashes and six months in the Marshalsea prison. (2)

Writing letters might be dangerous that year, but people still clearly felt it was their right. In May seaman Thomas Lawrence and marine David

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(1) Trial of Gillfinnan, 7 July 1800 in Adm. 1:5353.

(2) Trial of Briscoe, 18 April 1800 in Adm. 1:5352.

James of the sloop El Corso were tried for organizing a letter to their admiral, Lord Keith. They had wanted to complain of their captain's style of punishment, particularly the way men were treated in the brig. In trying to persuade one of his shipmates to sign the letter, Lawrence had made it clear that 'it was neither mutiny nor sedition, but the legal complaints that the ship's company laboured under.'

The prisoners stuck to this line at their trial and defended their legal right to petition. James was sentenced to 500 lashes and Lawrence to 200. But the court did not specifically deny their right to petition. Instead they sentenced them for 'stirring up the ship's company to write against the officers without any just ground.' (1) They thus preserved the doctrine of an Englishman's rights while denying its practice.

But even in 1800 some court martials do still suggest that the captains felt some respect for the moral economy of the forecastle. The abusive Gladiators provide an example.

John Jones had been the captain's steward on the Hermione (2) and had testified at the trial

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(1) Trial of Lawrence and James, 10 June 1800 in Adm. 1:5353.

(2) See chap. one above and Pope, The Black Ship.

of at least one of the captured mutineers. One day he was in a ship's boat passing near the _Gladiator_. A woman on the forecastle called out:

> There goes bloody Jack Ketch, belonging to the Hermione, you bloody bugger, you hung the man the other day, if ever I catch you on shore I will have your bloody life taken from you.

As the boat drew away she kept calling after him. This must have shamed him deeply in front of the Gladiators on the forecsatle.

Jones had the men put the boat about and went back and boarded the _Gladiator_ to complain about the woman. The officers blandly told him that the woman could not be found, an unlikelihood. It is unclear whether they respected her sentiments or simply did not relish punishing women. Jones clearly thought the officers were being obstructive, and the Gladiators felt free to abuse him. As he pulled away, Thomas Nelson called to him from the head:

> You bugger, who are you going to hang now? That is the bloody bugger belonging to the Hermione who hangs all the men. You bugger,

> if I had my will I'd hang you, I'd make a swab of you upon the beach.

Jones saw no use in returning to the Gladiator to protest:

> He still kept abusing me as far as I could hear him. As I was passing along to go on shore I could not understand what he was then saying, but he kept his eyes on me all the time. I then went on shore and made my complaint to my captain. He gave me a letter to *carry on board the Gladiator to the* commanding officer...

And there Jones identified Nelson, who was brought to trial. He escaped flogging and received the relatively mild sentence of two years solitary confinement. It seems likely that at least some of the officers of the court sympathised with the sailors' code on informers. Clearly the officers of the Gladiator had not wished to challenge their people on this. After all, they must have heard Nelson shouting if his voice followed Jones all the way to the land. And his eyes, which Jones could not forget. (1)

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(1) Trial of Nelson, 30 July 1800, Adm. 1:5353.

The court also made allowances for the seamen's moral economy in the case of the Overyssel. There some new beer had been hauled on board and the people refused to touch it. They wanted their grog. When they refused the noon ration, the captain compromised and gave them half rations of grog. But when they refused their beer again that evening the captain snapped and arrested three ringleaders.

The court sentenced them to 150, 80 and 50 lashes respectively. The court had to back up the captain. But their refusal of the beer was a traditional tactic, and relatively legitimate. Their captain implicitly acknowledged this. He did not charge them with refusing the beer or with organizing the refusal, but with 'making use of language tending to create a disturbance or riot in the ship.' (1) Said riot of course never happened. If it had the court martail sentences would have been much more severe. The relatively light sentences on the three men indicate that the court saw some merit in their behaviour.

Of course, these are relative matters. Fifty lashes was a mild sentence for a court martial but a serious sentence for the man who had to

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(1) Trial of Bendal, Turner and Laverty, 13 October 1800 in Adm. 1:5354.

withstand it. Any sentence of more than a hundred lashes was really a statement about the severity with which the court viewed the offense, rather than a serious intention to adminster that many strokes. The surgeon was present at floggings round the fleet, and it was his duty to step in at the point where in his opinion further beating was likely to kill the man. He almost always had to step in before the boatswains' mates reached 200 strokes. The prisoner would then spend a period in the sick list. After his release from the sick list, he was sometimes flogged round the fleet again to make up the required lashes. But in the majority of cases, as far as I can tell, the prisoner appealed for mercy after the first beating and received it.

If the Overyssels did not riot, the Daphnes did. In the early evening of 19 September 1800 their sloop was working her way with some trouble into English Harbour in Antigua. Some of her crew seem to have blamed the trouble on the incompetence of her commanding officer, Mr. McKenzie. He must have been acutely embarrassed. English Harbour was the home port for the fleet, the entrance is not that difficult, and the other ships in harbour must have been watching what appeared to be sloppy seamanship.

McKenzie blamed the men for being drunk. The ration had just been switched from wine to grog. Witnesses later differed as to whether the men started out riotous, but as one seaman admitted, the Daphne was 'in a bad state for all the men being groggy'. So McKenzie ordered the boatswain's mate, Gillespie, to start two men for drunkenness.

Gillespie went about his duty very reluctantly. Then McKenzie ordered him to seize up one of the men for more vigorous punishment. Gillespie refused. He said he didn't know how. He was clearly being economical with the truth.

For some time the people had been angry with McKenzie for his general treatment of them. Now they began to protest noisily against the starting of the two men. One of the people said that if they were all of the same mind as him, they could sweep forward and have a clean sweep of the deck. While the drunks were debating, McKenzie armed himself and his officers and called out the marines. They forced the men below, but not before Peter Hook had cut off a piece of the painter (bow-rope) of the ship's boat. He threw it at McKenzie and scored a direct hit in the face. The next morning the men were quieter. But during the night persons unknown had cut a lot of the running rigging, and McKenzie therefore still had great

difficulty working the ship into English Harbour. (1)

Gillespie, Hook and one other seaman were court martialled. Their defense and the court's judgement is missing from the record. We can assume that at least Hook and Gillespie would have been sentenced to death. But this was the only 'riotous' demonstration in 1800. The contrast with 1797 and 1798 could not be clearer. And this one clearly was not organized.

Taking the Ship

If 1800 saw few demonstrations and a firm line taken with letters and grumbling, it was also the high point for organized seizures of the ship. It seems likely the two were connected. Men who were too frightened of repression to demonstrate might turn to mutiny instead.

There were many occasions between 1793 and 1814 on which small groups of men took control of press tenders, prize crews and the ship's boats. There were several occasions when the people tried to take control of a ship and return to a friendly port where they could seek redress from

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(1) Trial of Gillespie and others, 25 November 1800 in Adm. 1:5354.

an admiral or the Admiralty itself. There were also many occasions on which at least some of the people planned to take the ship but were betrayed.

But I have only been able to find five mutinies in which the crew successfully took the ship into an enemy port. One of these was the Hermione. 1797 was an exceptional year, Pigot was an exceptionally brutal captain, and it is the only mutiny where the people killed their officers.

Of the four remaining mutinies three were in 1800-01 and one was in 1806. All were on small ships like sloops and ketches. This may reflect the very real difficulty in organizing and keeping such a secret on a larger ship.

It is not easy to find out what happened in these mutinies. The captain and officers were usually courtmartialled for the loss of the ship. But the court was not interested in the reasons for the mutiny. In their eyes nothing could justify an offense which combined mutiny, armed revolt, desertion and treason. Their only question was whether the officers had done their utmost to prevent the mutiny.

The Navy usually caught a few mutineers in ones and twos over the years. But the prosecution in these trials was only concerned with whether

the men had participated in the mutiny, and if so, what they had done. Any defendant who tried to introduce evidence justifying the mutiny would have ensured his already highly probable hanging.

But some times the odd remark in the transcript provides a clue. There are some indications that Lord Proby of the Diana in 1800 was a flogging captain, but the evidence is unclear. (1) Certainly all of the leaders of the mutiny were topmen, and it was topmen who were most likely to come into conflict with a flogger. William Jackson, the captain of the foretop, was one of the two leaders of the mutiny.

The other leader was 'John Brown'. He was one of several English speaking sailors captured on board the French privateer Bordelais. All of them said they were Americans, and some may have been. In any case, one did not join a French privateer by accident. One volunteered. 'Brown' was almost certainly a purser's name, for he told his shipmates that he had been one of the mutineers on the Hermione. There is no reason to doubt this. He may not have been a Virginian, as he claimed, but it is likely he had been a slave. Several other

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(1) The following is based on Dudley Pope, The Devil Himself: The Mutiny of 1800, London, Secker & Warburg, 1987.

old Bordelaises were forward in the mutiny as well.

A minority of the people seized the ship one night off Brest and ran her into the port. On shore the majority of the crew of 120 joined the mutineers. Many of them wore the revolutionary cockade in their hats. It would appear that in this case, a few hardened enemies of the British state combined with a majority of natives who had come to detest Lord Proby, the Royal Navy, or both. (1)

Much the same seems to have happened on the schooner Goza in the Mediterranean in 1801. The people seem to have planned the mutiny carefully for midnight on July 23rd, when the small ship was off the coast of Naples. As on the Diana, they had already sworn oaths to stand true to each other. Precisely on the hour they surged on deck and went straight to the cabin of their commander, Lieut. Milne. They planned to kill him. Milne awoke to find a boy cutting his head with a cutlass. He was hurt, but they did not kill him.

Several men hustled Milne on deck, where he confronted the leader of the mutiny, John Cochrane. He persuaded the other mutineers not to

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(1) I should emphasize that this is my interpretation of Pope's evidence, and not his.

kill Milne, who was put in chains. The mutineers were the large majority of the people , and they were armed with cutlasses and pikes. They forced the officers below and ran for the shore. The French took them in. (1)

It is clear that they hated Milne. The plan to kill him was very unusual. Cochrane's remarks suggest that Milne had been responsible for the death of at least one seaman. But there are also strong suggestions of political motives. Several of the Gozas wore French revolutionary cockades on shore, and at least one of them defiantly told a loyalist that he was a 'True Republican'. The prosecutor at the mutineers' trial (2) was certainly looking for evidence that men had said they did not give a damn for king and country. That prosecutor was probably Milne himself. Of course he would have had good reason to emphasize a revolutionary plot and thus implicity belittle his responsibility. But this does not mean that the Gozas could not have encouraged towards

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(1) Trial of Milne and others for the loss of the Goza, 26 November 1801 in Adm. 1:5359; Trial of Jones, White and King, 14-15 Decmeber 1801 in Adm. 1:5359. The minutes of the trial of Drummond and Bardelle, 23 February 1802, in Adm. 1:5360 are missing.

(2) Trial of Jones, White and King.

republicanism by the tyranny of the royalist they knew best. The evidence either way is thin, and we shall never know.

It is remarkable how reluctant mutineers were to kill their officers. The bomb ketch Albanaise had a crew of of forty-two in 1800. (1) On Novemvber 23rd they decided to take the ship and run her into Malaga. Her commander, Francis Newcombe, later testified:

> I was awoke by a whispering in my cabin. I called my servant by name but no answer was made. I again repeated it and immediately a clashing with cutlasses and other weapons was made and Casalino said, 'Captain, if you do not lay still and behave like a gentleman we will have life for life. Laying hold of my cot at the same time, I immediately turned out without saying a word, got at my pistols and shot one man dead in the cabin. I immediately ran on deck to alarm the officers and was received by three or four men with cutlasses, at the same time pursued by those who were in the cabin. Godfrey immediately laid hold of me and swore if I spoke another word I should be put to death, that all was

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(1) Ship's muster book in Adm. 36:14126

> secured and nobody would help me. I put the muzzle of the other pistol to his breast which unfortunately snapped (<u>misfired</u>). I received some blows with cutlasses from some other men and several blows with a tomahawk were made at me by Godfrey which I fended off... (1)

But once they had disarmed Newcombe, Jacob Godfrey intervened to save the captain's life. Remember that Newcombe had just killed one man. He had just tried to kill Godfrey, the ship's carpenter (2) and leader of the mutiny. But when Godfrey said 'For God's sake, men, don't put the captain to death; don't take the captain's life, and I will stand by him', the people listened. (3) They sailed the ketch into Malaga and gave themselves up to the Spanish. Fourteen months later Captain Newcombe's testimony hung Godfrey.

It is clear that some people may have disliked serving under Newcombe, but there is no

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(1) Trial of Thomas Parsons and others, 19 June 1802 in Adm. 1:5361.
(2) Ship's muster book in Adm. 36:14126.
(3) Trial of Jacob Godfrey, 11 June 1801 in Adm. 1:5360. See also trial of John Ferrel, 19 June 1802, in Adm. 1:5361.

clear evidence why they took the ship. And it is also difficult to find out why the men of the sloop _Dominica_ mutinied. They seized the sloop in harbour (Dominica, the place) one night in 1806, and slipped quietly out of port, bound for Guadeloupe. The acting master did testify that as the mutineers overpowered him, George Farrington of the carpenter's crew told him 'We are all resolved on death or liberty.' But again, he told Osborne not to be afraid, for there would be no blood shed. His words echo Patrick Henry's 'Give me liberty or give me death', but liberty may have been used in its more restricted meaning of getting ashore and leaving the Navy. (1)

In fact, simple desertion may have been a motive in all of these ship seizures. Small groups of men commonly took over prize crews or tenders or ran away with one of the ship's boats. Usually they went to the English shore, but sometimes to an enemy port. The _Goza_, the _Albanaise_ and the _Dominica_ were all small, and even the _Diana_ carried only 120 men. Their crews may have been not so much treasonable as just totally lacking in

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(1) Trial of Proctor and Mancon, 30 June 1806, and trial of Dean, officers and men for her loss, 21 July 1806, both in Adm. 1:5376; and trial of Loach and others, 3 November 1806 in Adm. 1:5376.

patriotism.

However, a ship seizure had to be planned and carefully organized. This probably required a combination of quite political leadership with an unhappy crew. It is not surprising that such mutinies should have reached their peak in 1800 and 1801. The Admiralty were taking a firm line, murmuring and sedition were firmly dealt with, and few crews seem to have had the confidence that, if they demonstrated, their grievances would then be redressed. In such circumstances, collective desertion would have seemed a reasonable solution to an unbearable ship.

1801-1802

1801 was a bitter year. In the normal course of events, when a captain took exception to his men writing a letter, one or two men were tried and sentenced to to fifty or a hundred lashes each and perhaps a year or two in prison. But that year the people of the *Active* wrote a letter asking for a change of commander. About one hundred men signed their names in a circle, so that all knew they stood together. This time there were two separate trials and seven defendants. One man was

sentenced to 500 lashes and one to 300. (1)

The Glenmores tried to strike. On 5 June 1801 two men were tied up to await punishment for insulting the boatswain's mate. The people gathered to watch punishment and began to murmer. One of them, Charles Turner, called out that broomsticks were not fit things to punish men with. He too was seized. The people surged aft. The marines were called out and the first lieutenant went aft and threatened to run through any man who held back from watching punishment. The people then assembled in their proper places.

The punishment began presumably with a broomstick. The first lieutenant later testified that Turner, when first beaten, looked steadily at the ship's company and seemed to be hoping that they would rescue him. But part way through the beating he began to beg Captain Talbot for mercy.

Once order was restored, Captain Talbot chose

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(1) Trial of Charles Coleman and others, 25 March 1801 in Adm. 1:5355; and trial of John Betham and others, 9 April 1801 in Adm. 1:5356. Round robins were an old tradition among merchant seamen. See Rediker, pages 234-236, where he points out that the round robin was an organizing tactic to persuade the men that they stood together, by demonstrating to each other their united signatures.

not to treat the demonstration as a mutinous assembly: he did not send anybody for trial. That night the Glenmores began oathing below decks. They wrote a letter to the admiral, but when Talbot found out he assured them no attention would be paid. They determined that they would not raise anchor until Talbot was replaced. Two days after the punishment Admiral Gardner was in a schooner that passed very close to the Glenmore. The people may have thought that he was coming to give redress, and as he passed they 'assembled very thick on the forecastle'. He had other business and passed by. This time Talbot chose to construe the demonstration as mutiny. After all, the admiral knew of their complaints and had seen for himself that Talbot had lost control. The prisoners, however, were not tried for their behaviour in massing on the forecastle, but for their protest at the punishment two days before. Two men were sentenced to death. (1)

Discipline in these years was fiercest in the West Indies. The people of the Castor clearly had to put up with a brutal regime. As so often in other ships, the topmen were the flashpoint. About

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(1) Trial of Joseph Williamson and others, 1 October 1801 in Adm. 1:5358.

half an hour after dark on 13 December 1801 they were coming down the rigging after taking a reef in the topsails. The captain decided that several of them had been too slow in doing their duty. He had the boatswain pipe all hands up for immediate punishment.

The people must have discussed their reaction beforehand. Those below refused to come up and began cheering. Many of those coming down from the yards raced down through the hatches to join their fellows. The captain armed his officers, and the marines swept through below decks and restored control of the ship. (1)

Four men were tried for mutiny on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. Three were sentenced to be flogged round the fleet. William Linfield was one of the topmen who had been awaiting punishment. He was sentenced to death and hanged.

Holding the trial on Christmas Eve was deeply offensive to the fleet. William Richardson was a gunner on one of the ships, and he never forgot his indignation. (2) Christmas was a special festival in the Navy: by tradition a happy

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(1) Trial of William Linfield and other, 24-25 December 1801 in Adm. 1:5359.
(2) Richardson, page

drunken party. Part of that tradition was a marked relaxation in discipline. But the people could hardly party happily after seeing their captains off to the flagship for the trial. The admiral was singalling his contempt for the morality of the forecastle, and thus making clear to them his willingness to take a firm line.

This influenced what happened on the Syren of the same fleet two months later. The Syrens were unhappy with Captain Gosselin. First they tried a traditional form of protest. When the hands were turned up for punishment, one man began hooting and the rest answered him. The officers tried to find out who had started the hooting and could not. The protest, however, does not seem to have worked.

The Syrens had been together a long time and knew each other well. Sailmaker's mate Henry Ross and several of the other Syrens began to organize a mutiny. They did not plan to take the ship to the enemy. But after the experience of the Castors they must have known the probable consequences of a demonstration or a strike. So they hit upon a bold plan: they would go over the admiral's head and seek redress. They planned to seize the ship and turn over the command to the first lieutenant, Mr. Waller. They felt he was a 'true gentleman'.

He and they would sail the ship to England. There they would turn Captain Loring over to the flagship as a prisoner and demand a court martial.

Ross and the others wrote out a paper and invited their shipmates to sign it. The paper said they agreed with the plan. When a man signed it he also kissed the book (preumably the Bible) and took an oath. Men who refused to sign were also asked to swear that they would not inform.

But one man did. Twelve were sent for trial. Nine were able seamen or petty officers, one was an ordinary seaman, and two were marines. Seven were hanged, four sentenced to 300 lashes each and one was acquitted.

There were three trials in all. One of the odd things about them was that the prosecutor, Captain Loring, asked most witnesses what the men alleged against him. Most answered vaguely, but Quarter Master Atkinson Williams told him:

> What is alleged against you is, that you used the ship's company very severely who were used like men before when Captain Gosselin had the ship, and we are now thrashed like dogs, and mustering the hammocks every morning on the quarter deck and mustering the people by divisions who was never used so

> before, and a short allowance of liquor which was due to the ship's company when Captain Gosselin had the command, was measured out and put into a cask in the after hold and they could not get it, at which they murmured very much. The ship's company said if Captain Gosseling had the ship, there would be no mutiny in it. (1)

The whole moral world of the forecastle is in Atkinson's words. There is the idea of rights to their liquor, their _due_. There is the suggestion that the reason they are not getting their due is that the captain is stealing it. There is the insistence that the captain is departing from the customary standard; unlike Gosselin and the first lieutenant, he is not a true gentleman.

All of this is tradional in form. But there are also echoes of the Rights of Man. They would not be beaten, the Syrens muttered to each other, like animals; they would be treated like _men_. They echo the leaflet produced by the mutineers of the

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(1) Trial of Henry Ross and others, 23-25 February 1802 in Adm. 1:5360. See also trial of Seton Ross, 27 February - 1 March 1802, and trial of Richard Croft, 4-5 March 1802, both also in Adm. 1:5360.

Nore: 'We have long laboured to find ourselves men. We now find ourselves so. We will be treated as such.'

The Syrens were not treated as such. Nothing illustrates the relative severity of discipline in the West Indian fleet in 1801-02 better than the different responses to unrest in the *Excellent* and the *Gibraltar*.

The mutiny on the *Excellent* has been described in detail earlier. (1) The war was over, and on Christmas Day 1802 the Excellents wanted to go home with the rest of the fleet. At their dinner below decks they shouted 'Home, Home'. The marines were sent in and four petty officers were hanged.

The people of the *Gibraltar* in the Mediterranean also wanted to go home at the end of the war. On 6 October 1802 they surged aft onto the quarterdeck and demanded to go home. They stayed there about fifteen minutes, chanting 'Home, Home', and complaining that it was over twelve months since peace had been signed. When the *Dragon* sailed by they cheered her people, for they knew the Dragons were also organizing demonstrations to go home.

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(1) See pages 166-69.

Captain Kelly decided not to punish his men at all. He seems to have come under considerable pressure from his superiors, and several days later he did agree to send two men for court-martial. One was sentenced to death. The court reproved him for not sending more men to be tried and for doing nothing to suppress the demonstration. Five months later he was court martialled for this and dismissed the service. (1)

Of course, the difference between the two cases is not that great. The Admiralty did eventually make it clear that they expected dmeonstrations to be suppressed. But the Gibraltars had gone much further than the Excellents in the West Indies. They had cheered from the quarterdeck, not below decks, and they had cheered the men of another ship. That was how the mutinies had started at Spithead and the Nore.

Why were the captains in the West Indies more brutal? There are two probable reasons. One is that the other fleets were now at peace, and this

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(1) Trial of Bream and Silk, 1-3 November 1802 in Adm. 1:362; Trial of Captain Kelly, 3-5 March 1803 in Adm. 1:5363. See also trial of Beard and Morgan (First Lieutenant and Boatswain) for not suppressing the mutiny, 15-16 March 1803 in Adm. 1:5363.

involved an inevitable relaxation of discipline. In the West Indies they were still at war with the slaves of Haiti. They had recently faced or were now facing slave insurrections on many islands. Discipline was required.

The second reason is the nature of the war they fought. Mortality from disease was higher in the West Indies. The repression of slave risings was, perforce, a brutalizing business. I have found little evidence that many sailors approved of slavery. Several of those who left their memoirs clearly did not. The captains of the West Indian fleet had to persuade their men to do loathsome work in great danger. It is not surprising that they felt they had to keep a firm grip.

1803-1808

After 1803 the temperature of the class struggle seems to fall. Of course, it is possible that there are fewer records because fewer captains were sending demonstrators for court martial. But the most serious mutinies would still have ended up in court, and there are very few of them.

The people were still writing letters, and

some captains took exception. Men were tried for writing letters on the _Trident_ and _Princess Royal_ in 1803 (1), the _Tartar_, the _Locust_ and the _Dryad_ in 1805 (2), and the _Phoenix_ in 1806. (3) Other men were still tried for subversion. Patrick Murphy of the _Prince_ was tried in 1803 for saying that he was a United Irishman and a pikeman. (4) Walter Fenton, the ship's clerk of the _Magicienne_ was tried for saying that he was a United Irishman and he had buried pikes and would do so again. (5) And Fagan of the _Hindostan_ was tried for subversion in 1806. He had become very angry and abusive at his shipmates who were gathered around the grog tub singing 'Rule Britannia'. He wanted to know why they were going on about Britons never being slaves, and yet allowed themselves to be treated as such. His defense at the court martial was that his remarks had not been treasonable to

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(1) Trials of 15-16 October 1803 in Adm. 1:5364 and of 3 September 1804 in Adm. 1:5366.
(2) Trials of 4 April 1805 in Adm. 1:5369, of 22 June 1805 in Adm. 1:5370, and of 11 December 1805 in Adm. 1:5371.
(3) Trial of Johnson and others, 19 April 1806 in Adm. 1:5373.
(4) Trial of Murphy on 15 October 1803 in Adm. 1:5364.
(5) Trial of Fenton on 29 November 1805 in Adm. 1:5370.

his country, because he was in fact an American and owed no loyalty to King George. The court accepted this defense. (1)

There were also mutinies between 1803 and 1808. In 1805 the people of the sloop Favorite demonstrated their support for the a first lieutenant who had, among other things, tried to get them off working in port on a Sunday. Upon his discharge from the ship, they cheered him as he was rowed away from the ship. (2) The people of the Tormant held a series of demonstrations in the same year. During *one of them a crowd assaulted* the boatswain. (3)

There were also several attempts to seize ships. In 1804 some men of the Montagu began to plot to take the ship, kill the officers and run for Brest. They were betrayed and three were hanged. (4) That same year off Bordeaux three drunken sailors on the prize Eliza talked of

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(1) Trial of Fagan, 13 March 1806 in Adm. 1:5372.
(2) Trial of Charles Perkins on 25 March 1805 and of John Froade on 3 April 1805, both in Adm. 1:5369. Favorite was spelled that way.
(3) Trial of twelve seamen of the Tormant, 15-16 February 1805, in Adm. 1:5368.
(4) Trial of Dunn and others on 19 June 1804 in Adm. 1:5366.

taking her, and one paid with his life. (1) On the <u>Dominica</u> in 1806, of course, the men did succeed in taking the ship to Gaudeloupe. (2) In 1808 nine men of the schooner <u>Bream</u> were tried for attempting to cut the ship's anchor cables so she would run aground and they could desert. (3) And the Ferrets very nearly made it.

Just after twelve one night in OctoOber 1806 the men of the <u>Ferret</u> gave three cheers and ran aft to the quarterdeck. They were planning to take her and run for a Spanish port in the West Indies. Captain Cadogan yelled 'Guard the hatches' and sprang from his cabin onto the deck with a pistol in one hand and a cutlass in the other. The mutineers were carrying pikes and cutlasses. The captain asked one them the cause of their 'mutinous and dastardly conduct'.

'Ill usage', replied John Armstrong, a cutlass in his hand.

Captain Cadogan advanced on Armstong saying 'I have but one life to lose, and I will have one of yours'. He disarmed Armstrong. The other Ferrets lost their nerve and dropped their

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(1) Trial of Blacking and others on 20 June 1804 in Adm. 1:5366.
(2) See above.
(3) Trial of 3 March 1808 in Adm. 1:5386.

weapons on the deck. They received West Indian justice. Eleven were sent for court martial. One was acquitted and ten were sentenced to death. The court also ruled that the bodies of four of them should be hung in chains in the most conspicuous place the Commander-in-Chief 'shall think proper to direct'. (1)

1807 was a quiet year, with no court martials for mutiny at all. In 1808 five men of the Edgar were prosecuted after the ship's company mustered at night and shouted 'A change of ship'. One was sentenced to 700 lashes, but none were hanged. (2)

But all in all, one's impression of the years from 1803 to 1808 is that they mark the low point of active shipboard unrest.Why?

A partial reason is the peace. Before the peace the ships often held crews who had years of service together. They were likely to be very fed up, and also to have a web of complex solidarities with their shipmates. After 1802 we are largely dealing with new crews. Many of them had served in the Navy before, but not with these particular shipmates. And in the first two or three years

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(1) Trial of Thomas Simpson and others, 8 October 1806 in Adm. 1:5375.
(2) Trial of 2-4 April 1808 in Adm. 1:5386.

they may not have been so desperately fed up with the Navy.

The other reason is the marked lowering of the class struggle ashore between 1801 and 1810. To some extent the sailors must have responded to the more general mood ashore. But I suspect that it was the mood ashore at the time they were pressed that was often their benchmark. After 1802 the working class, democratic and Irish organizations were in general on the retreat.

This may have depressed radicalism afloat. It may also have led the captains to feel less threatened by militancy. In 1799 and 1800 the records seem to show many captains on edge, and the Admiralty clearly wanted to stamp on resistance. From 1803 on the captains may have been more confident.

And, of course, the revolutionary wave in Europe was weaker than before. In Britain it was almost completely silenced. This meant fewer revolutionaries in the fleet, and it meant less fear of revolution for the captains. It is quite possible that there are fewer records of demonstrations because more captains were simply dealing with disturbances themselves rather than invoking a court martial. It may also be that some admirals were dealing with complaints informally

by having a word with the captain.

Of course, all this is informed speculation. All we know for sure is that there is a drop in recorded mutinies. But as we shall see in the next two chapters, there is reason to believe that a gradual change was taking place in officers' attiutdes after 1802. But to understand that change, we must now turn to the mutiny on the *Nereide* in 1809.

Chapter Fourteen: The Nereide Mutiny

We now come to a significant turning point in Admiralty policy and in the relations between officers and men: the mutiny on the *Nereide*. But the story really begins with the case of Captain Nesbit Willoughby of the small sloop *Otter*. (1)

On 17 August the ship's company of the *Otter* wrote a letter to Admiral Beattie in Cape Town:

> Honured Sir,
>
> Your honor being the only person we can apply to this side of the Board of Admiralty, to redress our grievances, humbly implore your protection; ever since Captain Davis left the ship our treatment is cruel & severe, especially the last cruize were out, getting continually starting, and flogging, altho' we were superior in any kind to the *Nereide*, or *Charwell*, or in short we were not beat by any ship in the Navy since the Otter has been in

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(1) Unless otherwise specified, all evidence on the Otters comes from the trial of Nesbit Willoughby on 9-14 February 1809 in Adm. 1:5992.

Commission: if a Court martial, or any trial has been passd on these men that have been punished they would not receive a lash but, Captain Willoughby, after he has a man seized up, declares that seeing a man get three, four or six dozen is more satisfaction to him than going to a good dinner: he has at various times asked the officer of the morning watch how many were started: when told, that there were none deserved it, his reply has been, that he was sorry for it, as by not having ten, or twelve started every morning watch, the officer had not done his duty: since we are in port *he declared, to* use his own expression/ that he has flogged like Hell, & would flog like hell, on the least occasion;/ for flogging a man is only amusement to him, we one and all thought it proper to acquaint your honour of this, before we should go on another Cruize, for if he goes out with us again, our treatment will be worse than convicts. We remain, your honors Petitioners, the Ships Otters Company, one and all. (1)

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(1) Otters to Bertie, 17 August 1808, enclosed in Adm. 1:60, Letter 80.

Nesbit Willoughby was a lieutenant with seventeen years service. He had twice before been in trouble with his commanding officer. On the second occasion he had been broken in rank, only to regain it as a reward for personal heroism. The *Otter* was his first independent command. This was his chance and he wanted to do it properly. Part of doing that was running a ship that looked taut and performed manouvers at least as well as the other ships that sailed with her. In this case, those ships were the *Nereide* and the *Charwell*. Willoughby felt that the Otters were a slack lot and it was his task to whip them into shape: literally. In their letter the Otters complained that this was unfair because in fact they performed better than the other ships. This was to be a recurrent bone of contention between them and Willoughby at his court martial.

The final reference to another cruise with Willoughby could be read as an implied threat to take action on the next voyage. Admiral Bertie certainly seems to have read it as such, as we shall see.

His first action was to send two captains to enquire on the *Otter*. This was the traditional form, the correct response to an acceptable petition. The report by the two captains implied

that there was some substance to the Otters' complaints. Bertie removed Willoughby from his command, and placed him under arrest on the Grampus until he could face a court martial. (1) He explained the Admiralty that:

> I did not consider it prudent that Captain Willoughby remain on board of her till his trial could take place, fearing least in the face of an Enemy's Port, some ill-disposed person should so far influence the rest, as to induce them to depart from that mode of conduct, they had in the first instance adopted, and by which measures most disastrous to the service might be affected. (2)

Bertie, it should be remembered, was commanding a fleet that was rather more at war than the rest of the Royal Navy in 1808. The French still held Madagascar. Both privateers and French men of war were a constant threat.

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(1) Johnstone and Tait to Bertie, 24 August 1808, and Bertie to Willoughby, 27 August 1808, both enclosures in Adm. 1:60, Letter 80.
(2) Willoughby to Admiralty, 30 September 1808, Adm. 1:60, Letter 80.

Bertie was chronically short of men, and a sloop like the Otter was often on detatched service. He could not afford to risk losing her or her men.

So he effectively deprived Willoughby of his command for an indefinite period. A court martial requires at least five post captains, and it was no common event for five captains to be in Cape Town at the same time. Moreover, Willoughby wanted to call in his defense every officer and petty officer on the Otter, some forty men. Bertie could not spare so many from duty, so they would have to wait until five post captains and the Otter coincided in port. That might be a very long wait indeed. (1)

One detects in the increasingly formal correspondence between Willoughby and Bertie a rising level of personal animosity. This may have contributed to Bertie's decision to hold Willoughby. Be that as it may, what was important was how the matter must have appeared to the Otters themselves. They had appealed to Admiral Bertie for redress, and redress had been

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(1) Bertie to Willoughby of 27 August 1808 and 3 September 1808, and Willoughby to Bertie of 2 September and 5 September 1808, all enclosed in Adm. 1:60, letter 80; Willoughby to Admiralty, 4 October 1808 in Adm. 1:2704, Letter 223.

forthcoming. They had said they did not want to sail under Willoughby, and now they did not have to.

The Nereides

The Otter departed on a cruise to Madagascar under the command of Lieutenant Benge. There her crew will have passed on the news of their victory to other ships, among them the Nereide. She was an unhappy ship. Captain Corbet was a vicious flogger, and his men found the starting on board unusually cruel. They had twice written letters to their Admiral on the Bombay station, Pellew, but had had no redress. (1)

When they heard the news from the Otter, they must have decided that Bertie was a different class of admiral. There is no evidence for this in the documentary record, but it is a fair inference and it explains what happened next.

At 7 am on 8 January 1809 the Nereide was anchored off St. Mary's, Madagascar. The boatswain piped all hands on deck and ordered them to weigh

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(1) Christoper Lloyd, 'The Mutiny of the Neriede', Mariners Mirror, volume 54, 1968, page 247. In general this chapter is not based on Lloyd's account.

the anchor. They gathered forward and announced they would only raise the anchor if the ship was bound for the Cape. Corbet and his officers rushed onto the quarterdeck. We will let Lieut. Blight's testimony at the court martial take up the story:

> Orders were given by Captain Corbet to turn the hands up, 'Up Anchor', and there was a general answer from forward; 'No, No'. The marines were drawn across the quarterdeck. with as I then supposed the immediate determination of forcing compliance. Captain Corbet remarked that there would be fair play for it, or something to that effect, and called for the ship's books. (1)

Blight was then ordered to take William Wilkinson prisoner and put him into double irons. Wilkinson was a topman and one of the leaders of the demonstration.

> I found him forward in the crowd but immediately carried him down, under the half deck. On perceiving him to look anxiously

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(1) My account of the mutiny is based on the trial of the mutineers, Wilkinson and others, 18 January to 1 February 1809 in Adm. 1:5391.

> about him and supposing he was going to speak, I remarked it was a very awful time and warned him to hold his tongue. He instantly answered in a very independent sort of way, 'No Sir, but we have written for redress and we will have it'...

Blight was warning Wilkinson that he might he hanged if he called upon the other sailors for support. Blight returned on deck, where Captain Corbet already had the purser calling out the names of the men from the ship's muster books. As each name was called Corbet invited the man to report himself present and loyal or go forward with the crowd and be considered a mutineer. The great majority of the people went forward. Blight again:

> Captain Corbet took the trumpet and loudly called out that he gave them five minutes to consider before he turned the hands up, 'Up Anchor', which said he: 'If not obeyed I will fire on you', ordering me at the same time to note five minutes by my watch. Some of the people requested to be heard. Captain Corbet said, 'Come one or two but no more. Recollect, we are now enemies'.

A few men came forward along the narrow gangway that ran from the forecastle to the quarterdeck. Corbet came forward to meet them. They said they wished to go to the Cape and Corbet said they could not. He himself wanted to go home, he told them, and he could not have his wish either.

So the deputation returned to the forecastle and reported. 'The tenor of all that I (Blight) heard was, "You hear we can't go to the Cape, what do you say? Why don't some of you speak? Say what you want".'

The men, and their leaders, were clearly at a loss exactly what to do. It seems that they had not planned for this moment. Or, as is possible that they had not allowed for the marines arming themselves so quickly. In any case, they now faced organized armed force and a captain who was very sure what he was doing. As the delegation were begging men to speak up, Captain Corbet

> Loudly called I'll have but two words, obey *or not obey,* and warned them to recollect seriously what they were about, saying also, 'What the Devil do you take me for, a coward or what?', remarking that they ought to know him by this time. John Robinson then returned

to the gangway and told Captain Corbet that the ship's company were very ready to obey or go to the cruise, provided they went with any other captain. By this time upwards of four minutes had expired. What Robinson had stated as their request to the Captain was immediately told to them was impossible. There was then a general call forward of Obey. When the hands were turned up, 'Up Anchor', there was a partial answer, 'But to the Cape'. The marines were then ordered to ready and I immediately remarked that many men were coming to their stations. Captain Corbet called aloud, 'Those who choose to obey and go to their stations, go, and those who do not, remain on the forecastle as mutineers and be shot.'

I believe every person went to his station and the anchor was immediately hove up.

It seems clear that the Nereides had planned on a peaceful demonstration, not on taking the ship by force. In refusing to raise the anchor they had followed the tradition of the Spithead mutineers twelve years before. But the Spithead mutineers had never forgotten that such a strike

had to be backed by the implicit threat of organized force. Corbet did not forget it either, and he called the Nereides' bluff.

He had nine men arrested and put into irons with Wilkinson. Then he headed for the Cape. It is not clear if this had been his destination all along. But in any case he could not court martial his ten mutineers anywhere else. Neither Bombay nor Madagascar could provide five post captains.

When he arrived at the Cape the ten men were immediately court martialled. Their defense was that they had been non-violent at all times. The verdict was unique. All ten men were found guilty, and all ten were sentenced to death. But nine of them were recommended to the Admiralty for mercy. The court thus effectively singled out one man, William Wilkinson, for an exemplary death.

They hanged him the next morning. (1) This too was unusual. There was usually a wait while the verdict was referred to the Admiralty. Of course, immediate executions were not unheard of, particularly on distant stations. St. Vincent in the Mediterranean had ordered the exemplary executions of two agitators and two gay men on a

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(1) Bertie to Admiralty, 18 February 1809, Adm. 1:61, Letter 39.

Sunday because he could not wait. But that had been right after the mutiny at Spithead, and St. Vincent clearly expected a mutiny of his fleet if swift action were not taken. The speed of Wilkinson's execution does suggest some worry on Admiral Bertie's part.

So does the destination of the other nine defendants. Bertie was desperately short of men. The usual procedure would have been to pardon the nine men upon the occasion of the execution and return them to the ship's company. Instead Bertie put them all on another ship and sent them back to England for disposal by the Admiralty, presumably to other ships. (1) It was clearly important to Bertie not to return the leadership of the Nereides to the forecastle.

Wilkinson was hanged on board the _Nereide_ on the second, a Thursday. This was not the end of the story. On Saturday the Nereides sent a letter to Admiral Bertie. They complained of cruelty and asked for a court martial on Corbet. Seaman John Slade signed the letter with his own name on

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(1) Bertie to Admiralty, 18 February 1809, Adm. 1:61, Letter 39.

behalf of the ship's company. (1) Bertie responded by ordering a court martial to begin on the Monday, the first possible day after he received the letter. It is possible that he had encouraged the men to write the letter: we will return to this question later.

The prosecutor in the trial was one of the topmen, probably Slade. This was in no way contrary to the laws that governed court martials. But it was very unusual indeed: I have been unable to find another case where a seaman prosecuted a court martial. It was common, of course, for junior officers to prosecute their seniors. This right was not being extended to the lower deck. This in itself was a major victory for the Nereides and a public humiliation for Corbet. A stream of witnesses came forward to testify against him. They had not been broken by Wilkinson's execution.

They produced considerable evidence concerning cruel floggings. But what they really objected to were the endless startings. The only way to convey the flavour of life under Corbet is

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(1) There is a copy of the letter in the proceedings of the trial of Corbet on 6-8 February 1809 in Adm. 1:5392. The following section is based on this trial.

to quote one witness at some length. This is because it was the repetitive nature of the punishment that really outraged the Nereides. John Smith, topman:

> The first time he ordered me to beat was... I was stowing the hamnmocks, when the hands were turned up to loose sails. I went to my station on the yard. While I was up somebody threw two hammocks into the fore part of the netting (<u>the place for stowing hammocks</u>). Captain Corbet called me off the yard, and when I came down on deck he enquired, 'Who stowed the hammocks?' I said it was me. He asked me if I called them hammocks stowed? I told him they were two hammocks the people had hove into the netting whilst I was aloft. He then called for a Boatswain's Mate and told him to give me a good licking which he did with a rope's end. Captain Corbet then made me take every hammock out of the netting again and stow them afresh and then sent for the Master's Mate and stopped my grog and wine for a week...
>
> When setting the foretopmast studding sail I was pulling the jack block on the main rigging and happened to take the hitch above

the sail instead of under. The captain asked who did it. I said it was me. He then sent for John Allen Boatswain's Mate and told him to go beat me, which he did. The weight of the stick was so heavy that I could not stand. Captain Corbet said if you don't stand, I'll make you and then sent the Boatswain's Mate for seizings to seize me up to the Jacob's Ladder, which he did and then beat me as long as Captain Corbet thought proper. I was then cast off. My flesh was terribly bruised, but I was not incapable of doing my duty.

Another time, I was setting the Maintopmast Studding sail and was on the Main Yard. I cast off the head stop of the sail and the weight of the sail had jammed the other stop so that I could not cast the knot off, it being a new stop. Captain Corbet asked me what had jammed it. I told him the weight of the sail. He then called me down off the Yard. He asked me what held the stop. I told him it was tied in a reefknot and being fresh blacked I could not get it off. He then sent for Moses Veale the Boatwain's Mate to beat me. He gave me six or eight strokes. I could not stand. Captain Corbet

then told me if I did not stand he would seize me up to the Jacobs Ladders. I was then seized up and beat as long as he thought proper. Another time we were reefing topsails off the Isle of France, after we taken in the reef a little of the sail showed underneath the yard. Captain Corbet asked who was these? Somebody told him it was Smith, meaning me. He called me to him and asked if I saw that. I said Yes. He asked my why I had not hauled the sail up. I told him I thought that I had hauled it up. Said he, 'I'll make you'. He sent for a Boatswain's Mate. Moses Veale came aft.

After he had beat me, Captain Corbet sent the topsail yard men up on the yard again to shake the reef out. He then called us down on deck and as soon as we were down he told to aloft to take the reef in again. (Smith means this was just make-work.)

My armd being so sore that I could not tie my points so tight as any other man he asked me whose point was that. They told him it was mine. I was then in the top. He called me down on deck and asked my why I did not tie the points taut. I told him my arm was so sore from the beating I had got I could not.

> He sent for a Boatswain's Mate. Moses Veale came aft. He told him to give me a damned good licking, which he did. Then he sent the yardmen aloft to shake out the reef again and after the reef was out called us all down again. And then he sent the topsail yardmen up to take the reef in again.

Smith is implying here that Corbet was playing with them. It would take considerable time and effort to get aloft, reef the sails, and come down again. Each time they would hope to have finished their task, only to be ordered aloft again. But let Smith continue:

> He sent the Boatswain on the starboard side to see if the points were all taut. And my arm being so sore (<u>from the beating</u>) I could not tie my points so tight as any other man he asked me who tied them slack points? The Boatswain told him it was me. He then called all the topmen down upon the deck. When I came down he called me to him and asked me the reason I did not tie the points tauter. I told him my flesh was so sore I could not bear ny frock to touch it. (<u>Smith means he could not bear the pain when his clothing</u>

> touched his skin.) He said he would make sore and called for a Boatswain's Mate and told him to lick me which he did according to his orders. We went up and shook the reefs out and took them in afresh several times after that. And after we had done my flesh being so sore I was forced to go to the doctor and he put me on the list...

It is not hard to see why Smith joined the protest on the forecastle. His evidence shows a cruel captain, but not a pointlessly cruel one. There punishments were not arbitrary. They were part of a conflict over work. And as on many other ships, a conflict over work meant primarily a conflict with the topmen. They were at the heart of the protest. The prosecutor was a topman and Corbet himself felt that his problem was 'a cabal of topmen'.

One of the reasons for this, of course, was that the speed and precision of the men in reefing sails or changing tack was one of the things that other captains could notice easily. But few of them would notice how tightly Smith tied his reef points. Not even Corbet could see. He had to send the boatswain up to look.

Note that none of the punishments Smith

recounts was a flogging. They were all startings. These constant beatings during the course of work were the main complaint of the witnesses at the trial. Of course many captains did the same, if not most. But the Nereides felt that Corbet was doing it more than others they had served under. And he clearly had some wrinkles all his own.

For instance, William Wiggins, the gunroom cook, was beaten on the loins in front and as a result pissed blood for four months afterwards. George Scargill, a topman, testified that he had been flogged for not being the first man off the yard. At this point one of the judges intervened to check what Scargill had just said. Many captains, after all, flogged men for being last off the yard. Scargill repeated his meaning: he had been flogged for not being the first down.

Augustus Dundas, another topman, was warned by Corbet that he had a cat in pickle for Dundas because he was not the first man off the yard. Corbet meant that the cat was waiting for him, marinating in vinegar. This would make the wounds produced by the cat more painful. In the event Dundas himself was not flogged, but other men did have pickle juice rubbed into their backs after a flogging.

Corbet also told Dundas that he could desert

to the Spaniards as the rest had done. Once Dundas had been in the maintop when a clue line was let go. No one man confessed to it, so all were flogged 'most unmercifully'. This perhaps explains why his fellows identified the injured Smith to Corbet when he made mistakes.

Corbet injured their dignity as well as their bodies. Seaman Thomas Cumberledge found some 'dirt' (faeces) on the anchor cables. He 'went for a swab to wipe the nuisance off, when Captain Corbet said he would not allow anything of the kind.' Corbet forced Cumberledge to wipe the cable clean with his nearly new blue waistcoat. Cumberledge was proud of that waistcoat. Then Corbet had Cumberledge put on the waistcoat and then he had him started with it on. He told Cumberledge that 'if he caught the cable in that state again he would make me lick it off with my tongue. I then went up to the head and threw my waistcoat overboard.'

Judgements

The prosecutor, probably Slade, faced a problem in bringing his case against Corbet. What the people really hated was the starting. But this was the most difficult grounds for conviction, because many captains might feel sympathetic. Corbet may have been fierce, but it was only an extreme version of something they did regularly themselves.

So 'Slade' also brought forth a potentially more serious charge. He claimed that Corbet had sold captured slaves to French merchants. This wsa three serious offenses in one. Firstly, the slave trade had recently been forbidden and the Royal Navy was supposed to enforce the ban. Secondly they implied that Corbet had pocketed the prize money for the slaves without sharing it with them. Or the admiral. Thirdly, he had been trading with the enemy. And in addition to selling the slaves he had sold the ships they came in.

Corbet managed a defense acceptable to the court. He proved that at the time he sold the slaves the order forbidding the slave trade had not yet been officially conveyed to his fleet. He produced witnesses to show he had kept the books

in order. And he demonstrated that the slave ships were not seaworthy enough to send on to the Cape. So he had been faced with a choice. The French merchants came out from Madagascar to offer to buy the slaves. Either he had to sell them or forgo the money. The court saw the force of this practical approach.

But what did count against Corbet was the sticks for starting. 'Slade' had Boatswain's Mate Moses Veale produce them in court. They were much larger than those normally in use in the Navy for starting, and some of them had been sharpened. Veale admitted that he had also made sticks of sharpened whale bone, but said he had now lost them.

The court acquitted Corbet of everything but the sticks. They found:

> The charge of cruelty and oppression has been partly proved by punishment having been inflicted on board the ship with sticks of an improper size and such as are not usual in H.M. service. The court do therefore adjudge the said captain to be reprimanded.

And reprimanded he was. He remained in command of the _Nereide_, of John Slade and John

Smith and Moses Veale. The court immediately moved on to the trial of Nesbit Willoughby, the captain of the Otter whose arrest had inspired the Nereides to seek redress in Cape Town.

Corbet now moved over to be a judge in Willoughby's court martial. A succession of Otters came forward to prove that Willoughby was not much better than Corbet. Many times he had told his men what a pleasure it was to him to see them punished, and they believed him. William Lot, the carpenter's boy, had been flogged with thirteen dozen (156) strokes for stealing liquor. Another boy, Connolly, had been mericlessly flogged for giving his grog away because he did not want it. But here again most of the violence had been against the topmen. (1)

Willoughby too had found his men slack in the topes. As the Otter sailed together with the Cherwell and the Nereide, Willoughby had been timing his men up and down the yards, starting and flogging them if they were not faster than the other ships. The Otters were particularly bitter because they knew they were never bested by other ships. (So did the Nereides, of course.)

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(1) Trial of Willoughby, 9-14 February 1809 in Adm. 1:5392.

There must have been several times when the Otter and the Nereide ran on the same tack, their captains racing each other, their eyes on the set of their sails and the other ship, both beating, beating, beating.

Willoughby wsa acquitted of all charges but advised by the court not to use such bad langauge in future. The fleet seems to have returned to a sort of normality. Admiral Bertie reported to the Admiralty that he had court martialled the mutineers, hung one man and tried two officers:

> I trust the example that has taken place, and the fair investigation by which these Officers have been acquitted, will operate to the perfect satisfaction of order and subordination. (1)

There, in a nutshell, is an explanation of the social function of law in this period. The 'example' is William Wilkinson's body. And yet, of course the merciful pardoning of his nine shipmates is also part of the example. This is no simple policy of repression. The goal is the same:

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(1) Bertie to Admiralty, 18 February 1809, Adm. 1:61, Letter 38.

perfect order and subordination. But the men will now be given a fair chance to state their grievances. They too will have access to the Law.

Of course it is a jury of the defendant's peers, and justice the sailors will not have. As Blake put it, 'One Law for the Lion and the Ox is Oppression'. (1) But Bertie feels that justice has been seen to have been done, and that this matters. It is because the trials of Willoughby and Corbet fitted so well into Bertie's strategy that I suggested above he may have encouraged the Nereides to bring their case. This would fit with Bertie allowing a topman to prosecute, and with Slade's confidence in signing the letter. But it may have been that Bertie only took advantage of an unexpected letter.

Aftermath

Corbet retained his command. But the real significance of the mutiny on the *Nereide* was in what happened afterwards. On 4 August 1809 the Admiralty wrote to express their public disapproval of 'the manifest want of management, good order and discipline' in the ship. They added

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(1) In the *Proverbs of Hell*.

a general prohibition of starting, because it was 'unjustifiable' and 'extremely disgusting to the feelings of the British seaman. (1)

This did not mean that starting ceased. It of course continued on almost all ships. But the Admiralty's letter was a public statement of an ideal. And it was part of a larger change of line that will be explored in the next chapter. The letter also helped to create the Naval legend of Corbet the monster. For the murmuring was to follow Corbet to his death and after.

In the spring of the next year, 1810, Corbet was appointed captain of the Africaine. Her crew wrote a round-robin to the Admiralty refusing to have him aboard. The Admiralty had the Menalaus drop alongside with her guns ready to fire into the Africaine, and the crew grudgingly accepted their new captain. This suggests some limits to the Admiralty's moral indignation over Corbet's disciplinary habits.

On September 13th the Africaine went into battle off Madagascar with the support of three smaller ships against two French frigates. Corbet

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(1) This letter is quoted in the entry on Corbet in the Dictionary of National Biography, 1887 edition, volume 12, page 205.

was wounded in the foot and thigh and taken below. He died a few hours later.

The *Africaine* carried 295 men. She lost 163 killed or wounded, including every officer, before, dismasted, she surrendered. Legend later held that her men had refused to fight and stood to be slaughtered rather than follow such a man. Naval legend also held, variously, that Corbet had been killed by his own men, or that, unable to bear the shame of defeat, he had torn the bandage from his foot and thus bled to death. (1)

It is impossible to tell how much credence to give these legends. For our purposes the important thing is the existence of these legends in the fleet. The court martial may have left Corbet in his command. The legend testifies to the sailors' conviction that the mutiny on the *Nereide* had been, in the largest sense, a victory, and that they would no longer stand for men like Corbet.

In the end, they were right. The mutiny on the *Nereide* was the occasion for a change in the Admiralty's public and private response to

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(1) For Corbet's later career and death, see *DNB*, volume 12, pages 204-6; Lloyd, pages 250-51; William James, *Naval History of Great Britain*, London, 1859, volume 5, page 183.

petitions. The next chapter will explore this change in some detail.

Chapter Fifteen: Prosecuting Officers: 1809

The court martials of Corbet and Willoughby marked an important change in naval discipline. Both men had been acquitted, but their trials had become very public matters. The admiralty's reaction signalled to other officers that complaints from a ship's company would now be taken much more seriously. There had certainly been some court martials before when officers were accused of murder. But now there was a sudden increase in the number of officers tried for cruelty. The Admiralty was responding to petitions, and at least some admirals were following their lead. In this chapter we will first look at several trials from 1809 in some detail, and then turn to a consideration of the possible causes of the changes they refelct.

The Euryalus

Fifteen days after Captain Corbet's acquittal, the people of the *Euryalus* wrote to Admiralty to complain of the cruelty of their captain, George Dundas. It is unlikely that they

had heard about events at the Cape, for they were part of the North Sea fleet. But the Admiralty sent Dundas for court martial, and it is a sign of their changing line that they did so. (1)

The trial lasted eight days because a very large number of sailors came forward to testify against Dundas. The great majority were topmen. The root of their grievance was Dundas' attempt to harry his topmen into working quickly without mistakes.

It was a tightly run ship. Men were not allowed to speak to each other on deck. In theory they were forbidden to talk in the tops as well. But the evidence shows they did: the rule was unenforceable. Below decks there was a marine sentry in each berth to prevent the men from making much noise or conversing in large groups. Dundas seems to have been of the school that held talking was inimical to hard work. It also seems he was frightened that the men might organize some form of resistance below decks. And of course they did: they wrote the petition that brought about his court martial.

There were regular floggings. The topmen were

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(1) Trial of Dundas, 9-18 March in Adm. 1:5393.

started a good deal to punish them for making mistakes or for denying to Dundas that they had made a mistake. The people found these startings unneccessarily cruel. But what they most resented was being sent aloft without proper clothes.

The Euryalus was part of the North Sea fleet, and it was winter. It was the usual practice on board for the first lieutenant, when giving the order to go aloft, also to order the topmen to take off their jackets and hats. This was done in all weathers. Sometimes it was snowing or sleeting, and often it was blowing hard. The men were often on the yards for two or three hours. They regarded it as punishment, and would go down to their dinner afterwards 'much hurt' by the insult. It seems that Dundas intended this practice to emphasize his general lack of satisfaction with their work.

On January 27th the men were upwards of two hours on the yards in intense cold. Richard Coombe said to the man next to him on the yard that 'he was certain it would be the last time for him as he had received his death by being as he termed so long upon the yard half-naked.' After he came down he told another maintopman that his 'breast was so bad he would not be able to go any more aloft.' To quote a paper submitted to the court martial by

several of his shipmates, 'this unfortunate man lingered until the 5th and then expired.'

The captains of the court faced a problem. Clearly the behaviour of Dundas offended against the morality and dignity of the men. At the same time, it was not notably worse than the behaviour of many other captains. Many of them would have understood the necessity ot starting and flogging men for neglect of duty. So they cleared him of all charges of 'having inflicted severe floggings, cruel startings and other improper treatments.' Implicitly, they decided the startings had been not cruel and the punishments proper. They also, crucially, decided that Coombe had died as the result of a long standing lung complaint. But they did say that Dundas should not have struck William Stephenson with a spyglass, though they recognized that Stephenson had provoked him.

The morality of the forecstle had confronted the morality of the captain's cabin and lost. This was to be the common, but not invariable, pattern in such cruelty trials. And an acquittal by the court martial did not leave an officer's career in shreds. Dundas continued to serve, as did Corbet and Willoughby. The Admiralty respected their own legal system in a way that would be most unusual in a modern bureaucracy. If the court said a man

was innocent, he was innocent, and the Admiralty did not punish him. In every case I have followed up, if the court said a man should be dismissed, he was. If the court acquitted him, he kept his job and it did not count against him afterwards. Thus even Corbet, of whom the Admiralty clearly disapproved, obtained further commands after he left the Nereide.

Does this mean that such court martials were a sham because captains were judging captains? To a certain extent, yes. But we should not underestimate the importance of theatre in the class struggle in this period. The Euralyuses were able to organize prosecution publicly and many of them had the courage to come forward and testify. This meant something: they were now able to make a public statement of their morality. They could stand like men and challenge their captain. And no captain was likely to relish such a ritual and public challenge.

Other Cases in 1809

Moreover, sometimes the officer was convicted. It is likely that Lieut. William Richards of the sloop Dart would have escaped trouble if it had not been for the Admiralty's

change of line. His offense occurred on 26 November 1808, but he was not tried until eight months later, six months after Corbet's trial.

He was accused of causing the death of William Robinson, a supernumerary (probably a seaman), on the Pompee. Robinson had been drunk one morning and Richards ordered him put into irons. Robinson later asked loudly to be allowed to go to the head and relieve himself. Richards refused and had the drunken man gagged. Then he walked away, leaving the man without a sentry. Robinson choked to death on his own.

The other Pompess insisted that the body be taken to hospital for a post mortem, but the corpse was spirited away by boat.

And there the matter rested for eight months, until Richards was finally brought to trial. As in many cruelty cases, the court split the difference. They found him innocent of causing the man's death. But they ruled that he should be dismised the service because he had not provided a sentry over Robinson and had dumped the body at sea without even the formality of a prayer. (1)

It is clear that the new policy was having an

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(1) Trial of Richards on 18 July 1809 in Adm. 1:5397.

effect on the seamen. The people of the Doterel sloop, for instance, seriously considered refusing to take down their hammocks in protest at Captain Thomas Muston's brutality. But some of them argued that a letter would bring redress. Forty six of them signed a letter to the Admiralty. This indicates a level of confidence in not being victimized not seen since 1798. They did in fact obtain a trial. A long string of witnesses testified to 6o lashes on the bare breech for talking in church, 60 lashes for having a dirty shirt, and much more. Such punishments were unusual, and the court found the charges proved in part. Muston was dismissed from command of the sloop, but not from the service. (1)

Officers also began charging each other with offenses against the men in cases which were essentially arguments between the officers themselves. Lieut. Fredrick Parker of the Bombay, for instance, court martialled his captain on series of charges in 1809. One of them was

> Scandalous, infamous and unofficerlike conduct in ordering a quantity of the

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(1) Trial of Muston on 21-23 September 1809 in Adm. 1:5399.

composition made from oatmeal and water, commonly called Skillagolee or Burgoo, to be taken every morning from the Ship's Company's Breakfast, for his pigs, before the Ships Company had theirs served, thereby causing a murmuring and discontent among the ship's company, by feeding the very Brutes before the Crew entrusted to his care and protection by the Lords of the Admiralty. (1)

And there is the case of the Honourable Captain Lake of the Ulysses. He was court martialled by his first lieutenant in September 1809. Lieut. Young alleged that Lake did not support his officers and allowed them to be 'treated with greatest disrespect, insolence and contempt by the inferior officers and men.' He often refused to punish men after his officers had taken their names or put them in irons. When the crew of the gig complained about Young, Lake had the lieutenant put under arrest and gave the gig's crew the night off duty, presumably to enjoy the lieutenant's humiliation. Finally he sent Young

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(1) Parker to Collingwood, 20 May 1809, enclosed in trial of Captain Cuming, 7 June 1809, in Adm. 1:5397.

to work in the flat boats instead of doing duty as first lieutenant. This lead the petty officers in the cockpit, always a riotous place under Lake, to say they were glad of it and hoped never to see Young again.

The court acquitted Lake of not supporting his officers, but did note a a want of correctness 'in not sticking to the established rules of the service.' They also found in part that he had lowered Young in the eyes of the men. For this they admonished Lake. (1)

But soon afterwards Lake was on trial for cruelty. The disgruntled purser who turned him in insisted to the Admiralty that he had never met Lake but was only passing on a rumour that was commonly known throughout the West Indies. However, it is not beyond possibility that Young and the other officers had a hand in encouraging the purser.

The purser accused Lake of marooning. On 13 December 1807 Lake had been in command of the Recruit off Sombrero Island in the West Indies, about five or six leagues from Dog and Prickly Pear Island. Standing on the deck and looking at

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(1) Trial of Lake, 28-29 September 1809 in Adm. 1:5399.

Sombrero Island, Lake remarked to the master that they had some thieves on board. The master agreed. Lake ordered one of them, Robert Jeffrey, be rowed ashore and left on the island. Sombrero was a 'desert island': nobody lived there.

This punishment was not provided for in the Articles of War, and the news spread around the West Indies. It was over a year and half, though, before anybody told the Admiralty. When they found out, they wrote to his mother. She replied that she was very worried, the boy had always been good during his apprenticeship as a blacksmith, and he was two days short of his eighteenth birthday on the day he was marooned. The Admiralty launched a search, and Jeffrey came forward to say that he had been rescued by an American merchant ship after some weeks alone. The court martial dismissed Lake from the service. (1)

The Admiralty was also taking complaints seriously even in cases where there was no suggestion that somebody had been killed. John South wrote to the Admiralty from his bed in Greenwich Hospital, where he was not a pensioner.

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(1) Trial of Lake on 45-6 February 1810 in Adm. 1:5402, and the large number of letters attatched.

He accused Lieut. Westropp of the _Surveillante_ of cruelty. Westropp had had South beaten on the quarterdeck with a rope's end for misunderstanding an order. Then he was sent forward for work. But when Westropp's back was turned South tried to sneak below to get a pair of shoes. So Westropp had him rope's ended on the forecastle.

At the trial the captain said that on both occasions the smalles t available rope was used. After the beating South could not use his left arm. The surgeon testified that he had advised South to exercise his arm lightly, and South had ignored his advice. The captain, in his evidence, was not prepared to say whether or not South had willed his arm to stop working like 'certain devotees of the East', but he had no doubt that South had gone to no trouble to preserve the use of his arm. South had eventually been invalided out to Greenwich Hospital.

The court acquitted Westropp. (1) The surgeon's evidence was important in these cases, and the surgeon supported the accused officer in the great majority of cses. After all, he was an officer himself. He had to live in the wardroom, not the forecastle. On the _Cambrian_ in 1809, both

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(1) Trial of Westropp, 23 August 1809 in Adm. 1:5399.

the surgeon and his assistant appear to have lied to save a lieutenant's career.

Lieut. Connolly had ordered the rope's ending of George Hollingsworth for not getting his hammock down from the rigging in time. He also had a record of bad conduct and drunkenness, Connolly said, which he had previously tried to overlook. Witness disagreed about the severity of the beating. The best witness was Robert Wise, the boatswain's mate who gave Hollingsworth the beating. He was clearly troubled afterwards. He said thet he beat the man first with the Top Gallant Clueline and then with the Yard Tackle Tricing Line, both about two inches thick. The beating lasted about eight or nine minutes. He was asked if the punishment was 'such as to cause his death.' He replied, 'I do not know, but it was as severe a starting as I ever gave a man in my life.' He left Hollingsworth on the quarterdeck leaning against a carronade.

A friend helped Hollingsworth to his hammock. He stayed there until his death eleven days later. At the trial the assistant surgeon stated that he had examined Hollingsworth after the beating but that he had never looked at his back. Both he and the surgeon said that the man had died of a long standing 'internal complaint' exacerbated by

drinking. The man's messmates were very clear in their evidence that they had never heard of this complaint. They had heard the assistant surgeon say, right after Hollingsworth died, that there were suspicious marks on the body.

The court acquitted Lieut. Connolly. But afterwards Admiral Collingwood did write a letter to Captain Fane pointing out that under regulations the first lieutenant was not supposed to have regular authority to punish in the captain's absence, and that in future Connolly should not have such authorization. (1)

Changing Rules

It is clear that from 1809 onwards the Admiralty was changing the rules of the game. This left many serving officers unsrure where they stood. It also left the court martial captains unsure. Take the case of Thomas Simmonds, midshipman of the *Orion* in 1810.

Simmonds had a servant named Edward Cooper. Carried on the books as a boy, Cooper was in fact

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(1) Trial of Connolly on 10 April 1809 in Adm. 1:5395. I have lost the reference for Collingwood's letter.

a young man with a beard. One night when the ship was at anchor Simmonds went looking for his servant. He found Cooper on the deck and ordered him below. As Cooper was going down the stairway Simmonds hit him several times with a rope's end. Cooper turned to say something, perhaps to protest. Simmonds slugged him onto all fours.

Several minutes later Cooper's friend Patrick Murphy saw him coming out of his berth. Cooper said goodbye to Murphy, who assumed he was going to his beer. Cooper passed Hugh King crying and said, 'He'll never thrash me again, for I will jump overboard.'

Thomas Molloy was in the head when Cooper came in. Something in Cooper's manner alerted him, for he leapt to stop the boy but Cooper managed to swing out and jump. He may have been trying to swim ashore, but nobody had ever seen him swim and the ship's boat found no trace.

Simmonds was tried for causing Cooper's death. His defense was interesting. He submitted it in writing. He began:

> With all possible duty and respect I beg leave to express that my feelings are distressed and awakened beyond measure, at the nature of the charge exhibited against

> me- that I should be pointed at as the young sea officer who was tried for beating a man, till he jumped overboard is of itself punishment, before judgement... (1)

This is an important point, and it is echoed in the defense statement of many officers in this period. Even when an officer was acquitted in the face of strong evidence, the trial was not simply a sham. The defendant did not escape scot-free. In addition to the ritual humiliation of arrest, there was the finger of public suspicion. For years afterwards the older hands could point out an acquitted officer: 'There goes the man who...' And as he trod the deck of each new ship, he would be followed by a murmuring so low no one man could be accused. This was the fate of Bligh and Corbet, and in a smaller way it could be Simmonds' fate too.

Of course, this does not mean we are dealing here with a fair legal system. Disgrace and death are not equivalent penalties. Officers were almost never tried for murder, even when they delivered the blow that led to a man's death. The charge was usually something like 'causing death'. Even in

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(1) Trials of Simmonds on 12 March 1810 and 28 March 1810, both in Adm. 1:5403.

the one exceptional case, where Lieut. Griffon of the Griffon was convicted of murder after running through Sgt. John Lake of the marines for disobeying an order, the court still recommended him for mercy because of his previous good character. (1) But if Cooper had returned the midshipman's blow even once, he would have hanged for it.

Of course, the evidence did not not show that Simmonds had used unusual force on Cooper. He also tried to prove that Cooper had been drunk when he jumped from the head. All his shipmates would admit was that the young man had been 'a little hearty'. Simmonds' problem was that the written rules of the service did not allow a midshipman to punish a man. He should call a boatswain's mate to do it. But as Simmonds wrote in his defense:

> If I have erred, I am truly sorry for it, and humbly submit to the wisdom, experience and penetration of the Court, whether anything premeditated took place on my part, and whether from your youth, it has not been a very general rule, or custom, in the Service for a midshipman to start his servant, with

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(1) Trial of Griffon on 27 October 1812 in Adm. 1:5430.

> a rope's end, when he has considered him disobedient or neglectful; and if complaining to a Captain in such a case would not be construed into teazing, or importuning him...

Simmonds was right, of course. The five captains sitting in judgement on him would all have beaten boys in their time. As captains, if they did not laugh at a midshipman who complained of his servant, they would at the least judge him not to be a future leader of men.

So the officers faced a problem. The official rules were changing. Or rather, the Admiralty were insisting on observance of the written rules. But the custom of the service and the necessities of discipline were not changing. What they had done as boys and now tolerated in their own midshipmen, they were now required to judge harshly when its worst consequences appeared.

They must also have reflected that even an emotional boy is unlikely to throw himself overboard after one beating. All the evidence suggest that violence was a customary part of the relationship between the two boys and that one night Cooper cracked.

So the court delivered a compromise verdict. They said that Cooper threw himself overboard

because he was drunk and it was not Simmonds' fault. But they convicted him on the technicality of beating Cooper himself 'contrary to the rules of the service', and they dismissed him from the service.

Lieut. John Root of the Peruvian provides another case of confusion about rules for discipline. He was court martialled in December 1809 upon the complaint of Charles Saltmarsh, a young landsman scarcely older than a boy. Saltmarsh had been the captain's servant, but was convicted of stealing his master's rum and moved to be galley cook. Lieut. Root frequently had cause to complain of Saltmarsh's uncleanliness, both in the galley and about his person. One day he finally told Saltmarsh the galley was 'not half cleaned' and called him a 'damned dirty son of a bitch'. He had Saltmarsh tied over a gun and flogged 'as a boy': that is, with a cat of six tails. The boatswain's mate delivered a dozen strokes and ten boys six each: a total of six dozen.

Saltmarsh wrote Lord Mulgrave. At the trial the evidence of Captain Douglas was crucial. He said that he had not given Root permission to punish during his absence on shore, and that Root had not informed him or entered the punishment in

the log. This was important, for this was not just a starting, it was a flogging. Nor had Root asked the surgeon to be present.

In his written defense Root began by fully acknowledging the 'impropriety' of the punishment. But: ' I beg leave to call the attention of the court to the task of the executive officer endeavouring to do his duty...' Saltmarsh had been dirty and had not listened at all. And:

> It is now for me to appeal to the feelings of members, now arrived at a distinguished rank who no doubt have served in the same capacity as I do, whether or not it was frequently necessary to inflict temporary punishment and tho I am now fully convinced of the irregularity, might say, I have frequently seen put into practice since I have been in His Majesty's Service. (1)

The court took the point. Again they delivered a compromise verdict. They found the charge proved and sentenced him to be dismissed the service. But in view of the very good character given by his captain and of his fifteen

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(1) Trial of Root on 30 December 1809 in Adm. 1:5400.

years of zealous service, they begged the mercy of the Admiralty for his. This would have been forthcoming.

Analysis

After 1809 there were many more trials of officers for cruelty. (1) In the next chapter we

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(1) Among others, the trials of Lieut. Fynmore of the marines on 16-19 July 1810 in Adm. 1:5407; of Captain Scobell of the _Vemiera_ on 7 July 1810 and Surgeon Hamilton of the same on 12 July 1810, both in Adm. 1:5407; of William Murray, Master's Mate of the _Ardent_ on 8 August 1810 in Adm. 1:5408; of Lieut. Carr on 6 December 1810 in Adm. 1:5408; of Captain Watts on 3 january 1811 in Adm. 1:5412; of Lieut. Keiley on 30 April 1811 in Adm. 1:5415; of Thomas Bourne, Master's Mate on 29 July 1811, and of Hornsby, a Master's Mate on 2 August 1811, both in Adm. 1:5417; of Lieut. Grove on 6 June 1811 and Lieut. Harvey on 17 June 1811, both in Adm. 1:5416; of the Lieutenant and Surgeon of the _Hearty_ on 12 December 1811 in Adm. 1:5421; of Mahor Edward Nicholls of the marines on 6 April 1812 in Adm. 1:5425; of the Boatswain of the _Fawn_ on 19 May 1812 in Adm. 1:5426; of Lieut. Pritchard of the _Dersent_ on 20 October 1812 in Adm. 1:5430; of Lieut. Scott of the _Gladiator_ on 20 December 1812 in Adm. 1:5433; and of Lieut. Burgess of the _Pincher_ on 7 June 1813 in Adm. 1:5346.

will deal with four cases that illustrate particular points. But first we must pause to ask what were the causes of all these cruelty trials. True, there had been such trials before. But there were nothing like as many of them, they were almost all caused by the actual death of a seaman, and even those trials were rare.

The cruelty trials in these years usually, but not always, acquitted the defendant. Does this mean that reformers at the Admiratly were forcing unwilling captains to change their ways? I think not, for several reasons.

Firstly, there is no significant change of personnel at the Admniralty in this period. Nor was there a change in the Ministry in 1809. There was a political attack on punishment in the Army led by Cobbet and Burdett, but it came after the Admiralty's change of line, not before.

Most important of all, serving captains formed an essential link in the process of charging an officer. When an Admiral received a petition from a ship's company, he could choose to ignore it. If he chose to respond, he did not inquire into the matter himself. When a court martial was a possibility, the correct procedure was to send two or more captains from other ships to investigate the charges.

From 1809 onwards some of these visiting captains began recommending a court martial. They usually said that they had taken evidence from several of the people and that there appeared to be a case to answer. The crucial thing, though, must have been how they behaved towards the people when they came on board. They could begin by being extremely friendly with the captain. Of they could call the people together and address them, asking for evidence to back up the charges.

In the latter case, everything would depend upon their manner. Sailors were not fools, and the judgement of officers' true intentions was one of the skills of the trade. In some cases the man who spoke out would find himself prosecuted to writing the letter. In others the visiting captains would listen carefully, take notes and report back honestly. In 1800 many crews were willing to write letters, but individuals were not willing to step forward. In 1810 many were, and this must have been because the visiting captains wanted them to do so. Of course, it is probably than many visiting captains still discouraged witnesses. It is in the nature of the records that we only encounter the cases where captains said there was a case to answer. So the most we can be sure of is that some captains now wanted their peers tried

for cruelty.

Moreover, it was the captains who actually composed the court martial. On some level they themselves had to consent to the changes in discipline. Of course, their consent was only partial, and some may not have consented at all. For in addition to whatever solidarity they felt with other officers, there was a real structural problem. Officers called it 'the necessities of the service'. This was not simply a cant phrase. I have already argued that naval discipline grew out of the process of work on board. Labour that was press ganged, underpaid and denied shore liberty was unwilling and hostile labour. Unlike an employer on shore, the officers could not threaten a man with the sack. Unlike army officers on shore, they could not call for other troops to put down revolt. Often there was no other ship in sight, and the men heavily outnumbered the officers. Men would not work as hard if they were not beaten. After all, why should they? And the whole panoply of punishment and theatre was neccessary to make the control of the officers seem natural and invulnerable. Remember, we are not dealing with some invariant feature of a brutal age. Merchantmen during the wars had lighter discipline. There men were paid more and

unhappy crews could leave at the end of the voyage. It is significant that when captains debated the question of discipline in print in this period, they did so almost wholly in terms of schemes for the abolition of impressment.

After 1808 we see the courts wrestling with the same problem again and again. How do we satisfy the complaints of the people and yet maintain the customary discipline and control in the fleet? This was not an easy problem to solve, because the contradiction was structural.

But why were the captains themselves wrestling with this problem in 1809, when they had not in 1798? There is no way of knowing for sure. It is clear that the problem of controlling the work force was a key concern for all captains at most times. Yet it was not a problem that was openly debated. They did not argue about it in print directly, nor does it surface often in their letters. Individual captains who got into serious trouble might be labelled as weaklings or sadists, but even this was largely a matter of gossip rather than print. The question of control was taboo. This taboo was part of the ideological control of the officers as a class. Radicals read book and newspapers. So did seamen. If officers began discussing the matter where seamen could

overhear them, their control was threatened. There was no place on a ship where officers would not be overheard by at least one servant. Perhaps the only truly private forum was the discussion among the judges at a court martial. Of this, of course, we have no record.

So there is remarkably little direct evidence outside of the court martial records themselves. There one can see the change in line, both in the frequency of cruelty trials and in the way courts asked questions and rendered verdicts. But to understand why so many captains seemed to be of a different mind by 1810, we are thrown back upon speculation.

That said, I think there are three factors which can account for the change. The first is that the captains of 1810 were, on the whole, not the captains of 1797. They were the midshipmen and lieutenants of 1797. They had lived through the mutinies of that year as relatively junior officers, somewhat closer to the men. As far as one can tell from remarks in later memoirs, their collective retrospective judgement was that the men had been justified in many of their grievances but too forward in their methods. In any case, they had seen the potential power of the crews.

By 1809 they had also lived through up to

sixteen years of war. The problems of control in those years had been more severe than the Navy had ever faced before. Men were compelled to serve for longer. They were more influenced by revolutionary politics, and the trade union movement ashore was stronger. Moreover, mutiny had been a sporadic but continuous reality throughout these years. And there must have been many more demonstrations that never surfaced in court martial records. All these factors must have slowly combined to change the general climate of opinion among the officer class. In a sense, there had been enough unrest for long enough for commanders to begin to decided that grievances ought at least to be seen to be met, even if they were not always redressed.

And by 1809 there were two political facts of considerable importance that may have made reform easier. The first was that the years from 1804 until 1810 were the absolute bottom point for revolutionaries and working class activists in Britain and Ireland. The class struggle on shore was at a low ebb and the remnants of the United Irishmen had been smashed in 1803. The Luddites were not yet active. A judicious reform, mostly by a nod and a wink, did not carry with it any risk of revolution, or even of encouraging lesser class conflagration on shore. In 1797 it had been

necessary to claw back control of the fleet after the Spithead mutiny in order to control Britain and Ireland. In 1809 it was not.

The second political fact was Trafalgar. The Royal Navy now did not have to worry about control of the sea. A mutiny in the Mediterranean was no longer a strategic threat: a French invasion of Ireland wsa no longer a nightmare result of a mutiny in the Channel Fleet. The reins could be relaxed.

Of course, neither of these political facts were part of the conscious motivations of most captains, if any. Rather, they formed part of the background facts which set historical limits to what men in certain positions are likely to think.

Let us summarize. There was a gradual shift in the attitudes of many officers after 1800. Because it was gradual, and because it was not publicly discussed, it was only partly conscious. After the *Nereide* mutiny it seemed that new signals were coming from the Admiralty. This enabled the gradual shift in attitudes to *crystallize* into a rapid shift in behaviour.

Chapter Sixteen: Reform and Repression: 1810-1816.

There was a real change in 1809. But it should not be exaggerated. There was no revolution. Nor was there a public and permanent break with the old ways. There was a quiet and partial reform. More ship's companies found their petitions answered and more officers were prosecuted for cruelty. But the majority of heavy floggers never faced a court martial, and most of those who did were acquitted. In many ways the Navy continued to observe the customs of the Service. Most of the accounts of cruel punishment I have quoted above, such as those of Leech and Hodgskin, belong to the years after 1808. And if there had been a pause in mutiny court martials in 1806 and 1807, from 1808 onwrds there seems to have been a revival in the struggle.

Mutinies and Demonstrations

1809 began with the mutiny on the *Nereide*. Then in August there was an attempted mutiny on the sloop *Columbine* off the American coast. For

days the Columbines debated secretly below decks whether or not to take the ship, run her onto the American shore and desert. It was not a plan to desert to the enemy. They were not then at war with America, and many British seamen did run in America. But the Columbines were unable to agree on whether or not to mutiny, and one of them informed. The court martial took a serious view of their plans. One French prisoner, two seamen and one marine were sentenced to be hanged and then to be hung in chains 'in such conspicuous places as the Commander in Chief shall direct'. The boatswain, another French prisoner and a marine were sentenced to simple hanging. The carpenter was banished for life and sentenced to fourteen years in irons. The cook wsa banished for fourteen years with seven years in irons. Two men 500 lashes and seven years in irons, three got 300 lashes and seven years. One man got away with only 500 lashes, four with 300, two with 200 and one with 150. There were few reformers sitting on that court. (1)

On the Bulwark in 1809 the marines were making a row in their berth in protest about being reported for punishment. The sergeant told them

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(1) Trial of William Coates and others, 6-12 September 1809 in Adm. 1:5399.

them to stop it and Frederick Becker and William Hemingway talked back. The sergeant said he would report them and Becker said they should all go up. They rushed up together in an unruly fashion. They fell in before the captain, but protesting noisily as they did so. Becker was sentenced to death and Hemingway to 100 lashes. (1)

In 1810 the petty officers of the frigate Naiad, who had been a long time together, organized, on behalf of the ship's company, a letter to the Admiralty. They complained about Captain Hill: his cruelty, the extra polishing work, and the five waters grog in winter without lemon or sugar to make it drinkable. The Admiralty did not reply so they wrote again, and this time they threatened not to go to sea under Hill.

They learned that Admiral Buller was to come aboard in response. They hoped he would redress their grievances. They wanted to be drafted into another ship. Two days before Buller was to come, the organizers met secretly in the Carnatic hulk, moored next to the Naiad. Almost all the petty officers were present, and they agreed that if called into the cabin and asked they would say

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(1) Trials of Becker, 26 June 1809, and of Hemingway, same date, both in Adm. 1:5397.

they wanted to be drafted. On the day Buller came aboard twenty or thirty of them tried to come aft to speak to him, but the first lieutenant shooed them away. Eight of them were tried for mutinous assembly: the meeting in the hulk. Three were sentenced to death. (1)

On the Latona in 1810 Antonio Miller, an impressed German landsman, was sentenced to 500 lashes for talking about mutiny over cards with some French prisoners. (2) There was a riotous demonstration on the Bellerephon in 1810, (3) on the Diana in 1811 (4) and on the Ulysses in 1812. (5) In 1812 Captain Douglas came on board the Polyphemus and read out his commission to the ship's company. They cried otu 'No! No!' and went below. (6) And in 1813 the ship's company of the

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(1) Trial of John Campbell and others, 26-27 March 1810, in Adm. 1:5403.
(2) Trial of Miller on 12 October 1810 in Adm. 1:5403. For a similar case see the trial of John Peter and others from Gun Boat No. 2 on 12 February 1811 in Adm. 1:5413.
(3) Trial of five men on 18 December 1810 in Adm. 1:5411.
(4) Trial of three marines on 16-17 october in Adm. 1:5419.
(5) Trial of 30 December 1812 in Adm. 1:5423.
(6) Trial of 17 February 1812 in Adm. 1:5423.

Resistance invaded the quarterdeck. They attempted to take control of the ship. They planned to replace their captain, Fleetwood Pellew, with the second lieutenant. They would then take ship peaceably to join the rest of the Mediterranean fleet. But they failed to take the ship, and four of them were hanged. (1)

Letters

None of these collective actions were that different in kind from what had gone before. But notice how often the 'mutiny' is in fact a case of men being punished for attempting to redress their grievances. This was true of the Naiads meeting on the hulk and the Resistances trying to get back to their admiral. After 1809 some ships at least were having their grievances listened to. But some were also being savagely punished for trying to get somebody to listen. This indicates both that people thought redress was possible, and that they were sometimes mistaken.

During these years some men were also still being prosecuted for writing letters. On the

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(1) Trial of seven men on 14-23 May 1813 in Adm. 1:5437.

Dannemark in 1811 William Coombes was acquitted of writing a letter. (1) On the Fawn one man was tried for writing an improper letter in December 1811, but five months later the Fawns did manage to get the boatswain court martialled for striking a man contrary to his captain's orders. (2) On the gun brig Martial five men were tried in 1812 for writing a letter complaining about provisions, and one was sentenced to 200 lashes. (3)

Of course, the officers had always *implicitly* acknowledged the people's right to send letters, even if they objected to the actual letters sent as improper. But it does appear that people were now becoming more confident of their right. This can be seen from the case of the cutter Dwarf in 1813.

The Dwarves were angry with their commander, Lieut. Samuel Gordon, and with the acting master of the ship. John Denton, a marine, began organizing the men to send a letter to complain to to the Lords of the Admiralty about their harsh

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(1) Trial of Coombes on 8 October 1811 in Adm. 1:5419.
(2) Trials of 9 December 1811 in Adm. 1:5421 and 19 May 1812 in Adm. 1:5426.
(3) Trial of 9 July 1812 in Adm. 1:5428. See also trial of Dujaidin on 2 June 1812 in Adm. 1:5427.

and bad treatment and the 'unwholesomeness of the provisions'.

Denton could not read, so the people approached Arthur Johnstone, who was known to be able to write well, to write the letter. Johnstone's rank was ordinary seaman. He was probably a landsman rather than a man born to the sea. He was at first most reluctant, but Denton collected the names of 28 or 29 men who supported the petition. On a cutter this would have been a sizeable proportion of the ship's company. Denton got them all to sign a piece of paper to show their support. Many petty officers put their names forward; the quartermaster's signature was first on the list. Johnstone enquired of the petty officers if they really supported the letter. They said they did, and so he wrote it.

Donald McClellan, a seaman, later testified:

> I came down the main ladder and was going forward. There were several people laughing. I said, 'What is the fun?' (Denton) came to men and asked if I wished to have my name down for a new ship.

McClellan said he was not in favour of injuyt to officers, and Denton reassured him on this point.

So McClellan agreed that if it was done in a reasonable manner his name could be put to it. The ship's company clearly thought they would get a new ship.

They sent off the letter unsigned. The list of signatures had been collected not for the officers but to reveal to the Dwarves themselves their solidarity and seriousness of purpose. This was common on other ships. It had been part of the sailor's tradition for at least sixty years. (1) Even when men were planning to take the ship they often collected lists of signatures. In a partly literate society, of course, signing your name counted for something. For few sailors was it an everyday act. But more important, if men planned mutiny they had to know that they stood together before they began. Otherwise they would be easily broken. A man who would not put his name to a list was a man who could not be counted on at the crunch. In any such confrontation, the oppressed only stand together if they believe that their fellows are resolute enough to stand with them. Otherwise they break and run. The list of signatures stiffened the mutineers. And it could

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(1) See Rediker, pages 234-36.

be used by the organizers to demonstrate to the waverers the support they had.

When the Admiralty received the letter from the _Dwarf_ they sent a Captain White to enquire into the allegations. He came on board and asked who wrote the letter. Johnstone said he did. Captain Gordon had him court martialled. (1) His defence was that he did not organize the writing of the letter: John Denton did.

The notable thing about Johnstone's trial was that Johnstone was not informing on Denton. The Dwarves had clearly made a collective decision to stand by their letter. One witness after another freely admitted that he had put his name forward and encouraged Johnstone to write the list. All agreed that John Denton had organized the letter. Denton freely testified to the same effect.

The first witness, for instance, was John Jones, the boatswain's mate. The questioning started:

> Q. Do you know anything of a petition from the crew of the _Dwarf_ which was sent to the Admiralty?

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(1) Trial of Johnstone on 8 March 1813 in Adm. 1:5435.

A. Yes.

Q. Do you know who wrote it?

A. Yes. Arthur Johnstone.

Q. Did you, or any of the cutter's crew desire him to write it?

A. Yes. I did.

Q. Did you propose to the Prisoner that he should write the petition, or did he propose it to you?

A. I proposed it to the Prisoner.

Q. Why?

A. I thought him more capable of doing it than any other as he was considered a Scholar.

Jones and the others were clearly asserting their right to sent the letter. The court found the charge proved in part but decided that because Johnstone had not led the others on, he should only recieve three dozen lashes.

Captain Gordon could have awarded that punishment himself. He might have let the matter rest there. He did not. Nineteen days later John Denton went for trial for organizing the letter. The testimony was much as before, with the Dwarves

again clearly asserting their right to write letters. This time Denton ws sentenced to 150 lashes. (1) By 1813 these sailors were feeling confident of their right to redress, but this did not mean they were going to recieve it. The same court that awarded a minor punishment to Johnstone could award a severe one to Denton. This ambivalence in court martial captains was also found in many of the cruelty trials after 1809. We turn now to a few examples.

Ganymedes and Sylvias

The changes were partial and limited, but real. So court martial judgements could be full of contradictions. Sometimes the court both acquitted an officer and told him not to do it again. In 1811, for instance, the Ganymedes wrote to complain about Captain Preston and the officers. As the men came up on deck for duty, the boatswain and his mates were always waiting by the hatchways to beat them with rope's ends and broomsticks as they passed. Men who cried out while being beaten were taken aft and flogged with three or four

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(1) Trial of Denton on 27 March 1813 in Adm. 1:5435.

dozen. They also complained of the captain's langauge. He abused them as 'you sodoms' and 'you godamns', while the boatswain's mate was flogging them. This was literally adding insult to injury.

The court martial ruled that the

> Charges of cruelty, tyranny and oppression... have not been proved...and...Captain Preston is hereby acquitted accordingly, but the Court however cannot help feeling it their duty to express their sense of the irregularity of punishment in many instances on board the Ganymede, and strongly recommend to Captain Preston a future change of conduct in that respect. (1)

Such a verdict did not supply the Ganymedes with the change of officers they had requested, but it did vindicate their case. Captain Preston probably heeded the advice.

Officers were sometimes convicted of cruelty where a man had died, but convictions were simple brutality were hard to obtain. There were exceptions.

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(1) Trial of Preston on 17-23 October 1811 in Adm. 1:5419.

In 1811 the crew of the cutter _Sylvia_ wrote to the admiral at the Cape about their commander, Lieut. Crawford. Again it was punishments they complained of, but Crawford had gone further than the Admiralty allowed. Starting and flogging by the boatswain's mates was one thing. But Crawford himself was a hitter. He beat a helmsman while the man was steering the ship. He hit a man so hard he knocked him over a gun. He also had men taken to his cabin. There he would kick them and hit them until they fell down, and then he jumped on them. The crew also complained of his language. He did not call them by their individual names, but instead used general terms of address like 'pig' and 'animal'.

The ship's company signed their letter in a round robin, a sign of their confidence in the admiral. He in fact talked to Crawford privately and admonished him to behave more gently. At the same time he allowed the crew to learn the gist of this private conversation. They all agreed that from then onwards Crawford was no longer oppressive. One assumes that such informal settlements must have been much more common than full scale court martials.

But we know of this informal settlement because the Sylvias were not satisfied. They still

wanted Crawford removed. The admiral sent ship and captain back to Spithead for court martial. There the Admiralty removed Crawford from command. He later wrote he was

> given to understand (although not officially) that until my character was freed from the unfavourable effect of the imputations thus cast upon me by the seamen there could be no hope of my ever again being honoured with employment in the service. (1)

The court seems to have taken their cue from the Admiralty. They found the charges proved in part, but in view of the fact that he had already been removed from command, they did not dismiss him from the service. They did severely reprimand and admonish him and took away one year's seniority. The punishment was symbolic, but it must have meant the end of his career. The grievances of the Sylvias had been redressed.

Most captains tried for cruelty, however, were still acquitted. Crawford was unusual in

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(1) From his defense at his trial on 5 December 1811 in Adm. 1:5421. See also Hall and others to Curtis, 12 August 1811, enclosed in the transcript.

that he punished himself, and this destroyed the whole theatre of repression. The case of the Nemesis is more typical. The ship's company wrote to their admiral to complain 'under the command of Captain Feris...the usage we are met with is very severe and more than we can bare'. They also complained that their first lieutenant had murdered a boy, and they added a threat:

> To prevent any unbecoming behaviour of this Ship's Company we the old Nemeses have thought this is the prudentest way to make our grievance known to your Goodness hoping you will order us better usage until we get to England as *your Honor's interference* may hinder some mischief if our present usage *continue*,- Honord Sir, believe us we are so disenheartened with our usuge that we cann not go to our Duty like British Seamen. (1)

The letters writers may indeed may been loyal old Jack Tars trying to restrain the young hotheads, or this pose may have been a bit of a

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(1) Ship's Company to Manley, 19 December 1809, in trial of Thomas Hodgskins, 7 February 1810, Adm. 1:5402. See also trial of Ferris, 5-7 February 1810, Adm. 1:5402.

ploy, or both. In any case, the threat worked. Admiral Dixon ordered court martials on both Ferris and First Lieutenant, Thomas Hodgskin. The latter, of course, is the political economist and defended or the claims of labour whose work on naval discipline I have freely quoted above.

The first court martial cleared Ferris. It was clear that he had been a regular flogger. He is doubtless the captain Hodgskin later remembered as flogging twenty-six men for not cleaning their hammocks properly. At one point he had twenty-eicht topmen brought to the gangway for doing their duty in too relaxed a manner. On that occasion he pardoned them, but there seems to have been a constant struggle between Ferris and his topmen. It was probably one of the topmen who wrote 'Ferris is a Tyrant' on the ship's gunwhale.

It was clear to the court of captains that while Ferris may have been strict, he was not much more strict than they would have been themselves. Hodgskin's testimony did much to support his captain. He would have been a fool to do otherwise, for his trial was next.

He was accused of causing the death of John Bentley, a fifteen year old boy. Bentley was brought to Hodgskin on the quarterdeck one morning. They boy had beshitted himself all over

while doing his business below decks and the smell made it impossible for other men to go below. Hodgskin ordered the sergeant at arms to take the boy forward and scrub him clean. That was the last Hodgskin had to do with him.

The sergeant kept the boy naked in the head for more than twenty minutes. Then either he struck the boy, or according to his own testimony, the boy slipped and fell. He cut his head badly and was dead within half an hour. But it was Hodgskin and not the sergeant who was on trial, and the court acquitted him.

I think this was a fair verdict. The court martial transcipt does suggest some tension between Ferris and Hodgskin. The next year Ferris had Hodgskin court martialled for allowing a man to desert so Hodgskin could claim his clothes. Hodsgkin's defense was furious, but he was dismissed the ship and lost two year's seniority. (1) He promptly went ashore and wrote his book.

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(1) Trial of Thomas Hosgskin on 25 April 1812 in Adm. 1:5425.

Britomart

The great majority of complaints against officers were about cruelty: that is, beatings. It was very hard to get a conviction in these cases, except when the officer had killed somebody. But sometimes the men could assert their dignity in other ways.

On Christmas Day, 1811, Lieut. George Ellerby was in charge of the watch on the sloop Britomart. We may presume that all concerned were half seas over. For some hours Ellerby had been riding Boatswain's Mate Elijah Kelly on the subject of the pigs. They were kept in a sty on deck. Kelly had gone below, probably to get away from Ellerby, Ellerby called him back up again. He told the men around him that the pigs were waiting for Kelly, that Kelly would rather have connexion with pigs than with a woman, that he had catched Kelly in the pigsty not once but five hundred times, and that in future he would have two men over him in each watch to look after him by night.

Kelly came up on deck and Ellerby said to him, 'No call to button up your trousers, for there are two pigs in the sty waiting for you.'

Ellerby clearly regarded all this as good cruel fun and expected the seamen to share in the

drunken humour. They did not.

This was partly a matter of dignity. On different ships, again and again, the men complained of the language their officers used towards them. They regarded being sworn at or called names as deeply offensive. In this respect their moral world differed from that of the modern armed forces. And Ellerby's joking could also end in Kelly's death.

The year before Patrick Muleraty, a seaman on the Theban, had been caught in the hen house. There were terrible squawks from there, as of a bird in pain. The watch investigated immediately, to find Muleraty on the deck with his trousers down and a dead chicken. He had a stupid smile on his face. They took him down to the surgeon who found blood and feathers on his penis. The chicken's posterior was covered in blood. It is hard to tell what had had been done to Muleraty to bring his sexuality to this pass. But the Navy knew what to do. They hanged him by the neck until he was dead. (1)

This was the common punishment for sex with animals. The offense was classed as 'buggery': the

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(1) Trial of Muleraty on 17 September 1811 in Adm. 1:5419.

same as sex between men. In both cases the offense was clearly seen as against nature. Again and again the prosecutor and the witnesses at trials for homosexuality refer to the 'unnatural crime'. We should not simply assume that this attitude was the same as late Victorian prudery. What worried them was not an offense against the family so much as a transgression of the boundary between nature and culture. This was a period when people still shared much of the traditional human obsession with this boundary. Human culture, after all, was not then as overwhelmingly dominant over nature as it is today. And if there was any group who would be conscious of the fragile grip of culture over nature, it would be men who made their living sailing small ships across great oceans.

The danger in sex with animals was mystical danger. In one case in the 1780s (1) a seaman was found having sex with a sheep in the manger. Before anyone touched the man, before anything else was done, they called for the chaplain to defuse the situation with a prayer. Before they hanged the man, they killed the sheep and threw it overboard.

This was why the Britomarts did not take

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(1) I have unfortunately lost the reference to the court martial record.

Ellerby's joking lightly. The next day, Boxing Day, they went to complain to the Captain Hunt. He called in three captains to investigate. They recommended a trial. Hunt kept Ellerby confined for forty-six days before the trial. He was not allowed to write to his wife or his mother.

There was clearly bad feeling between the two officers. Hunt was the prosecutor at the trial. Ellerby said in his defense that he had seen Kelly coming from the pigs before. If so, Hunt asked, why had Ellerby not reported Kelly?

Ellerby explained that on a previous occasion he had had trouble with the captain of the afterguard. The man had effectively dared Ellerby to arrest him and said he would take the case to the quarterdeck. So Ellerby took the man to Captain Hunt. The captain

> Merely said to the man that he must not talk in that way to the first Lieutenant and sent him about his business. He went forward, and I heard him remark to one of his command, 'He had complained of me but I knew the captain would laugh at it'.

So when Ellerby had discovered Kelly being unclean, he had not wanted to go through that

again. The court did not belive him. They found the charge proved and dismissed him from the Britomart, although not from the Navy. They also severely reprimanded him and took away two years seniority. (1)

Nereus

The Britomarts had taken advantage of a known animosity between officers to protect their shipmate. This was not the only ship where a commander was more liberal than his officers. We have met many cruel captains in this thesis. They were not monsters by the standards of their fellow officers. many of them, however, would have been seen as severe. Some officers, a minority at the time, thought Pigot and Corbet deranged. But the record reveals at least one captain who was a model of fairness and kindness. We move now to the last case to be examined in this thesis. The good captain was the prosecutor.

The story begins with George Packha, the master of the Nereus in 1810. He was one of the awkward squad. For some time he had been on intimate terms with William Fynmore, the

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(1) Trial of Ellerby on 4 February 1812 in Adm. 1:5423.

lieutenant of marines. But Fynomre was also the caterer of the officers' mess. Packham refused to pay part of his mess bill on the grounds that he had been ashore during the relevant period. The two men quarrelled bitterly.

At much the same time Packham informed on a brother officer. The captain later testified:

> I had given verbal order... that the officers should never have immodest unmarried women on board, considering it a bad example. While at Chatham the ship's company hulked, I received a letter from Mr. George Packham, informing me that he had been put to much inconvenience as a married man, by one of my officers having disobeyed an order of mine, and he said that that officer had had a woman of the town on board the hulk, and therefore he could not have Mrs. Packham on board with him. On enquiry I found that that officer had a woman on baord unmarried to him. I ordered her out of the ship immediately and as the officer expressed sorrow at having mistaken my meaning as to the application of the order I gave at Gibraltar, thinking, I only meant it to apply to the ship and not the hulk, I was induced to look over this fault. He

> requested me to inform him who had told me, which I did, and it was afterwards intimated to me, that the master himself was not married... (1)

The Captain called Packham in and demanded to see his marriage licence. Packham prevaricated for a while and then was foolish enough to forge a license in his own handwriting: the same had he used to fill in the log every day. The Captain checked the license with the curate of the parish of Seven Oaks, who could find no record of such a marriage.

Packham confessed to the forgery, and the Captain sent Sarah Mayton ashore. He also recommended privately to Packham that he apply to leave the ship, and Packham did so. But the Captain did not bring a court martial or otherwise disgrace the master. It is worth noting that when asked by the officer who informed on him, the Captain named Packham. It may be that he did not like informers. It is also noticeable that at the subsequet trial the Captain was careful not to name thne repentant officer. One might hazard a guess that it was Lieut. Fynmore, and perhaps

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(1) This whole section is based on the trial of Lieut. Fynmore, 16-19 July in Adm. 1:5407.

one might guess that it was Fynmore who informed on Packham in turn.

So far this was just one more tale of claustrophobic gun room hatreds, hundreds of which surface in the court martial records of these years, in welters of accusation and counter-accusation. But what happened next made the matter a bit more serious.

Packham sat down and wrote an anonymous letter to Colonel Bell, the commandant of the marines on shore. It read as follows:

> If Colonel Bell Commanding the Royal marines at Chatham was to enquire into the treatment of Jas. Stephens a private marine who died on board His Majesty's Ship Nereus, he would find it to be the most wanton barbarity ever known.
>
> If the Marine Officer in that Ship ever beat this said Stephens, or used him cruelly himself, if he was scrubbed with birchbrooms & scrubbing brushes till the flesh wsa scrubb'd off his back sides & posteriors. If the Marine Officer of the Nereus did not kick and beat the said Stephens three days previous to his death.
>
> There are at Head Quarters now a

> Sergeant and part of men who were in the same ship, to testify the same as well as Corl. Mellish and Roberts now on board and a number of other people.
>
> I am Sir
>
> a Friend of the Marine Corps

This time Packham had learned to disguise his hand. He had a friend on shore copy out the letter for him. But he forgot something. When a marine committed an offense on shore, he was tried by the marines. When he committed an offense on board, the case fell to naval justice. So Colonel Bell forwarded the letter to the captain of the _Nereus_. He in turn requested a court martial on Lieut. Fynmore. His letter to the admiral read in part:

> I must take leave to observe, Sir that the facts asserted in the anonymous letter to have taken place on board the ship I have the honour to command, never came to my knowledge, through any channel whatever; I am the more surprised at them (if they did really happen) because the following written order of my own addressed to the officers expressly forbids every one of them to inflict punishmen of any degree viz.

"The improper practice of what is called starting men with a Boatswain's mate, is hereby strictly forbidden to be used by any Officer whatsoever in the Ship: Punishment corporally shall only be inflicted by the Captain, or under his sanction and eye; as to him alone in the Ship the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty have thought it proper to entrust that power": (1) and the master is also particularly directed by another order of the same date (July 31. 1809) specially addressed to himself. 'on every occassion to report to the commanding officer any disorder or irregularity he shall discover of from time to time may be wanting.'

It appears therefore that the Master neglected his own duty by not immediately at the time acquainting me with what he must have known to be entirely subversive of the system of order and good discipline which I was desirous of establishing in the Nereus.

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(1) The underlining is as in the copy the court clerk made for the court martial records. I assume he was also copying the Captain's underlinings.

This is unusual. The Captain not only forbade all starting but also ordered the master to report to him if anybody hit a man. And he meant it. At Fynmore's trial one witness after another testified to the Captain's lenient regime. What had happened?

Marine James Stephens had presented himself to the surgeon in later October of 1809. He complained of weakness and said he was unable to use his legs properly. The surgeon did not believe him, for he seemed to have no symptoms of a disease. He was just a fifty old man who had not bothered not to defecate in his trousers. He had developed 'blisters and excoration from laying in his own excrement and urine, which out utmost attention was not able to prevent.' So the surgeon sent Stephens back to his duty.

His corporal, however, discovered that Stephens was useless for sentry duty because he could not stand up. His messmates blamed the surgeon for being unable to cure the blisters. So the corporal and his messmates sent him back to the sick list.

At some point in November Surgeon Jackson decided that Stephens was suffering from 'a collection on the brain which caused an occasional derangement.' Stephens' symptoms fit

well with a progressive disease of the central nervous system, which may have been what the surgeon meant. This would explain both his progressive inability to walk or stand and his incontinence as he lost muscular control.

Be that as it may, Lieut. Fynmore seems still to have thought that Stephens was skulking. Certainly the other men below decks would not have wanted to lie day after day next to him lying in his own excreta. And the surgeon had ordered that he be taken on deck for regular exercise and that he be washed twice daily so his sores did not get worse.

That meant he had to be carried on deck, or that he had to be made to get up himself. The people began to murmur among themselves. James Read, the captain of the forecastle:

> mentioned it myself at the grog tub, but this was before I saw him beat; I said it was murdering him the way in which he lay having myself picked him up out of the lee-scuppers at night: he was wasted to a mere skeleton.

The William Brown, the master at arms, saw something that upset him:

William Rugg the Corporal of Marines he had the morning watch. James Stephens the deceased then hung (in his hammock) between two guns on the larboard side of the half deck. Rugg came to him and ordered him to get out of his hammock. The man replied he was not able. Rugg told him he was a damned skulking rascal, and that he was able, and likewise laid hold of him and drew him out of his hammock, and stripped his shirt over his head and threw a number of buckets of water over him. He put his shirt over his head again and ordered him to put on his trousers. The man replied he was not able to put them on. With that Rugg lifted one leg at a time and put them on himself, and ordered him to go to the gangway, his trousers not being then buttoned but still about his heels. He ordered; still the man replied he was not able to walk... (Rugg) then took a rope's end, as near as I can judge of an inch and a half, round his shirt flap and cut him across the rump. He beat him on the backside, gave him a number of strokes. Mr. Fynmore, then standing on the starboard gangway, Mr. Fynmore said, 'Give it to the damned rascal.'.

> 'Oh, sir', says he, 'I'll cut his shiter off'. Rugg then beat him up the midships ladders and Mr.Fynmore then took a rope's end and beat him in a like manner, telling him at the same time, that he was a damned skulking rascal. I looked till I see Mr. Fynmore beat him to the break of the forecastle, and I turned up myself and went under the half deck to prevent my seeing any more of it, and I prayed at the same time that the captain might upon the deck that he might see it with his own eyes. From that day the man was in his hammock in the afternoon and to my own knowledge I never saw him out of it again.

The beating may not have hurt Stephens as much as one might imagine. It is quite possible that by this time the disease had deprived him of most of the feeling in his legs. When Brown was asked, 'Did the deceased when he was so cruelly beaten as you have described express the sense of pain that he must have felt by cries?', he replied:

> It appeared to me that he had not his natural feelings as his legs were very much swollen, for when he went to fetch one leg up with the

other it was several seconds before he could get even with the other.

Notice that the master at arms prayed for the Captain to come on deck, but he did not tell him what was happening. The master at arms would have been an appropriate person to tell him. And there was certainly murmuring among the crew, but none of them told either. Why not?

We can only speculate, but I think the answer lies in the solidarity of the officers. They were clearly agreed among themselves not to tell the Captain about the repeated beatings. As one witness put it, they kept it 'altogether... a secret from (the) Captain.' After Stephens finally died Packham, the master, led the rest of the ward room in joking with Fynmore about how he had cleaned the man to death.

This was not the only beating the officers concealed. Brown, the Master at Arms, testified that starting wsa forbidden, but 'I have seen it done.' We have seen that the Admiralty prohibitied starting in 1809, but the practice continued. It was not only that it was the custom of the service. It was difficult for many officers and boatswains to imagine another way of motivating such unwilling labour. And, in truth, it is

difficult for me. Individual officers could gain the enthusiastic loyalty of their men by being far more liberal than usual. But if a whole ship or a whole Navy behaved in that way, the people would probably work much less hard.

In any case, the officers of the Nereus used starting, and they stuck together. But why did none of the petty officers approach the Captain? One answer might be that Stephens was a marine, they were seamen, and there was a traditional rivalry between seamen and marines. But the seamen were murmering too. The probably answer is that no one individual wanted to take on the officers as a whole. After all, captains came and went. This particular Captain was in fact transferred the next year. The men would have to go on living with their officers. The captain was not on deck all the time, he did stand a night watch, he did not walk the yards with the boatswain's mate. Probably they figured that it was not worth earning the enmity of the officers as a whole. In fact, the scandal did not break out until Packham and Fynmore fell out.

Probably the beatings did not kill Stephens, though repeated beatings on infected sores would have done him no good. Packham alleged in his letter that the flesh had been brutally scrubbed

off Stevens. At the trial Packham was the only witness to this. The only other people present had been the marines who did the scrubbing. (What was Packham doing watching?) The marines said they had been washing him under the orders of their corporal. They admitted to using a broom to wash him: they probably wanted to keep their distance. They said he had such bad sores that when they washed him the blood ran down his posterior. But they insisted this came from the contact between the water and his sores, not from their scrubbing. They were adamant that they were scrubbing him for his health and not as a punishment. This is probably all true. But reading their testimony, one is left with a feeling that they resented their orders and were not overly gentle with their shipmate.

Packham organized the testimony at Fynmore's trial. The Captain had realized who must have written the letter, and Packham had admitted it. By this time he had quarrelled so bitterly with the other officers that none of them were speaking to him. So all the gentlemen testified that they knew nothing of any cruelty. So did most of the marines. Many of them had washed Stephens at one time or another, and they may have felt implicated. And the marines had to live with

Fynmore afterwards. Outside the courtroom Packham privately railed about perjury. Some of the seamen testified to cruelty and some did not, but all agreed that there had been murmering.

As so often in cruelty trials, the court returned a compromise verdict. They judged that:

> The charge of having cruelly used... Stephens, is in part proved by his having struck him, but that other charges are not proved; and they do therefore in consequence thereof, (in consideration of circumstances and the high testimony bore to his character) only adjudge the said Lieutenant William Fynmore of the Royal marine corps to be severely reprimanded and he is hereby so sentenced accordingly.
>
> The Court feel it their duty to observe that the anonymous letter dictated by Mr. George Packham... appears mark'd with a malignancy which is subversive of discipline and extremely injurious to the Public Service.

Packham's career was in ruins. Fynmore remained the marine lieutenant on the _Nereus_ for two more years, and in 1814 returned to service on

the Goliath. (1) The court had formally supported the Captain's regime by reprimanding Fynmore. But in practice they left him in command of the marines, and made it clear that to complain of such behaviour was to subvert discipline. One imagines that after the Captain left the ship in 1813 the officers went back to starting them when necessary.

Who was this Captain?

He was Peter Heywood, the only man ever to have been promoted to captain after being sentenced to death for mutiny. Devotees of the naval novel will remember Heywood as the young narrator of Nordhoff and Hall's Mutiny on the Bounty. It was a matter of dispute as to whether Midshipman Heywood was an active mutineer in 1789, but he certainly did not get into the launch with Bligh. When HMS Pandora came to Tahiti looking for the Bounty mutineers, Heywood turned himself in. He was kept with the other mutineers in a cage on Pandora's deck. When she foundered and began to sink, her captain refused permission to unlock the cage. Several of the prisoners drowned. Heywood and the others only survived because at the last minute the master at arms disobeyed orders and

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(1) Steels Navy List, 1810-1814.

threw them the keys to the cage. This experience may have shaped Heywood's distinctive approach to naval discipline. (1)

The surviving Bounties were court martialled for mutiny upon their return to England. Heywood was one of the six sentenced to death. But he came of an influential family, and they managed to win mercy for him. The ostensible ground was his youth, but in practice they won sympathy for him by launching an attack upon Bligh's reputation. Thomas Morrison was also pardoned, later promoted to gunner, and died when Thomas Troubridge's flagship sank in the Indian Ocean. The other four Bounties were hanged. Heywood returned to the Navy and was eventually made post.

After the Nereues, he captained the Montagu. He seems to have continued the same gentle discipline there. Marshall, in his compendium of naval biographies, reproduces a poem written by a seaman of the Montagu and presented by the whole ship's company to Heywood on the occasion of the ship's finally being put out of commission. The men were paid off, and as Marshall says, the poem

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(1) The best source on Heywood's life is John Marshall, Royal Naval Biography, London, Longman, volume 2, 1824, pages 747-797.

is the more remarkable for being presented at a moment when the men were 'freed from the restraints of naval discipline, and consequently not liable to the imputation of seeking his favour by undue adulation.' Marshall had written the biographies of hundreds of naval officers, and had 'already had occasion to notice the presentation of numerous swords, snuff-boxes, &c. But we have never yet met with an instance of a naval commander recieving a tribute of "respect and esteem" from his crew, better qualified to gratify a benevolent and humane mind than "THE SEAMAN'S FAREWELL TO H.M.S. MONTAGU".':

> Farewell to thee, MONTAGU! yet ere we quit
> thee
> Will give thee the blessing so justly thy
> due;
> For many a seaman will fondly regret thee,
> And wish to rejoin thee, thou gem of the
> blue.

For stout were thy timbers, and stoutly
commanded;
In the record of glory untarnished thy name;
Still ready for battle for battle when glory
commanded,
And ready to conquer or die in thy fame.

Farwell to thee, HEYWOOD! a truer one never
Exercis'd rule I'er the sons of the wave;
The seamen who served thee, would serve thee
forever,
Who sway'd, but ne'er fettered, the hearts of
the brave.

Haste home to thy rest, and may comforts
enshrine it,
Such comforts as shadow the peace of the
bless'd;
And the wreath thou deserv'st, may Gratitude
twine it,
The band of true seamen thou ne'er hast
oppress'd.

Farewell to thee, shipmates, now home is our
haven,
Let our hardships all fade as dream that is
past;
And be the true toast to Old Montagu giv'n-
She was our best ship, and she was our last.
(1)

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(1) Marshall, volume 2, pages 796-7.

PART FIVE: Conclusion

Chapter Seventeen: Conclusion

This chapter will summarise and explore the relationship between the argument of this thesis and the work of a few other historians. It will also summarize the argument.

Rodger

It is time now to summarise the differences between Rodger's view of mutiny and discipline at mid-century and our own picture of mutiny and discipline forty and fifty years later. What changed?

Quite a lot. We have shown that theft was no longer taken more seriously than mutiny. Rodger produces a set of 'unwritten rules' which governed mutiny in his period. To quote them again:

1. No mutiny shall take place at sea, or in the presence of the enemy.
2. No personal violence may be employed (although a degree of tumult and shouting is permissible).

3. Mutinies shall be held in pursuit only of objectives sanctioned by the traditions of the service.

The only cases in which these rules were broken were mutinies openly led or covertly incited by officers; genuine lower deck mutinies invariably conformed to them, and so long as it did, authority regarded them with a weary tolerance, as one of the many disagreeable but unavoidable vexations of naval life. It called, not for punishment, but for immediate action to remedy the grievances complained of. (1)

In our period many genuine lower-deck mutinies broke one or more of these rules. The Hermione in 1797, the Nereide in 1809, the Resistance in 1813 and several others all mutinied at sea. There were no mutinies in the actual presence of the enemy, but at least five ships were taken by their crews and turned over to the enemy. The crew of the Africaine were also widely believed to have refused to fight because of their hatred of Captain Corbet. This may well not be

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(1) Rodger, page 238.

true, but the fact of its wide belief argues that the possible norm had changed.

The limits of personal violence had also changed. On dozens of ships, if one includes 1797, the men took control by force and put their officers ashore. They made it clear that they were prepared to fight. On the _Defiance_ they attacked an officer physically. At Spithead and the Nore they ran out the guns. At the Nore they fired them. Their bluff was called three times.. On the _Defiance_ and the _Terrible_ they backed down. On the _Queen Charlotte_ at Spithead the officers and marines opened fire. The people returned the fire, and the marines threw away their weapons. Samuel Triggs of the _Culloden_, standing by the loaded gun with a slow match throughout the mutiny, was a representative of many who had gone beyond rowdiness.

But there were still limits to lower deck violence. It is notable that when men seized the ship, they did not kill their officers, even when they hated them. On the _Goza_ in 1801 they had even agreed beforehand to kill Lieutenant Milne. But when it came to the moment they could not. This was a moral rule of the lower deck. Men who took the ship to the enemy would be hanged if caught. They ran no extra risk in killing an officer. In

fact, they ran less, for the witnesses who hanged mutineers were usually officers. Yet in several cases where we have records of men plotting to take the ship, the organizers assure the others that they mean to harm to the officers. These were clearly men who were prepared to threaten violence and use armed force, but drew the line at killing helpless officers. They crossed the line drawn by the Navy. They observed their own line.

The exception is the Hermione, and nobody has ever suggested that Pigot did not have it coming to him. The men must have felt the same way about the officers who supported him. The other exception, of course, is the officers. Even in Rodger's period, the rule that violence was not to be employed during mutinies applied only to the lower deck. Violence by officers was a daily fact.

The third rule is that mutinies should be in pursuance of objectives sanctioned by tradition. In practice this meant complaints against captains and demands for unpaid pay. In our period many mutinies exceeded these limits. The demands of 1797 for a pay rise are the clearest example. So was the unilateral putting ashore of officers and the demands for a sixteen ounce pound from the pursers. Many more mutinies were really about the control of work, especially the many disturbances

where the topmen figured prominently.

This does not mean that all disturbances departed from the unwritten rules of the earlier period. Many conformed. We shall return to this point. It only means that the lower deck often departed from these customs.

But did the officers still hold to these unwritten rules? Did they prosecute those who broke them but redress the grievances of those who stuck to the old ways? Sometimes yes, sometimes no. Many mutineers who observed the rules were hanged, as on Excellent and the Castor. On the Naiad in 1810 three petty officers were sentenced to death for organizing the writing of a letter and a formal protest to the admiral. On the Bulwark in 1809 Frederick Becker was sentenced to death for being part of a rowdy demonstration. Men were often flogged for demonstration. In many other cases, probably the great majority, demonstrations were passed over by the officers. But this was not an invariant rule: the men did not know what would happen when they began to demonstrate.

Nor were grievances necessarily redressed. It is in the nature of the records that demonstrations without redress or prosecution seldom appear. But there were demonstrations

before the mutinies on the _Culloden_, the _Terrible_, and the _Excellent_, to take three examples. And there were many more petitions against officers for cruelty than there were trials of officers. Even in the relatively responsive period after 1809, less than thirty officers were tried for cruelty. Most of these were lieutenants and below in rank, and most were confirmed in their command. Only one captain of post rank, Lake, was removed from command, and this was in response to complaints from his officers rather than his men. The picture Rodger paints of an earlier period when cruel captains were removed in repsonse to the orderly complaints of their crews seems to apply only to the _Winchelsea_ in 1793.

None of this means that Rodger is wrong about the 'unwritten rules'. They existed in the minds of men and sometimes in practice. Those 'mutinies' that ended in court martials were largely demonstrations, strikes and armed strikes, not seizures of the ship. Many more demonstrations, protests and strikes never entered the records. There was still a tradition of 'collective bargaining by protest'. It is not possible to tell how common such protests were. But they were certainly much more common than the ones than ended in the court martial room.

There was, in other words, a traditional system. But it was a system in change. When a demonstration began, nobody knew what would happen. It might end in a negotiated settlement. It might end in an armed strike or the rope. Also, we are not dealing with a system of customary law in a society without written law. The Navy had very specific and strict written laws for dealing with 'mutiny'. In important respects these contraditicted the 'unwritten law'. And the officers could choose which set of laws to invoke.

Rodger and Change

By 1797, Rodger and I are agreed, much had changed. To requote Rodger again in some detail:

> It is clear that the Service which suffered the mutinies of 1797 must have been very different from that of forty years before... perhaps it did not change as much as might appear. Except in being collective movements in which ships co-operated, these mutinies followed more or less the 'unwritten rules' which had long governed such affairs. Like popular riots throughout the century, they were essentially conservative, aimed to

restore the just system which had formerly obtained, to rescue the Navy from the deformations recently introduced into it. To men, both on the lower deck and the quarter deck, who had seen the excesses of the French Revolution, the mutinies of 1797 seemed very dangerous. Certainly they displayed evidence of class and political sentiments which would have been unthinkable a generation earlier, but it is not clear with hindsight that they were really as novel or as revolutionary as they then seemed. In forty years material conditions in the Navy had worsened. Inflation had ground away at the value of the naval wage, and the coppering of ships had removed the chance of frequent leave. The Service had expanded not only absolutely but relatively to the population as a whole, to recruit many men (and officers) unacquainted with the traditional accomodations of seafaring. When all these things have been considered, however, we should still beware of exaggerating the changes of forty years. (1)

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(1) Page 346.

There clearly was a change. I differ with Rodger on the causes and extent of this change. Let us take the causes first. Rodger points out that material conditions had changed. He probably does not mean that rations or berths were worse: they were not. What he means, I think, is that the effects of inflation and copper sheathing were important material changes. Copper sheathing did make a difference in reducing liberty and shortening the length of commissions of any one ship. However, in our period men did not leave the Navy when their ship was decommissioned. During the war years they were simply transferred to another ship. Moreover, mutinies were if anything more common among the Channel Fleet, which spent much of its time in port, and in the West Indies, where there was much leave ashore.

Inflation was important. On shore the inflation of 1795 was clearly a spur to the rapid growth of trade unionism in the same period. It was also the motor of the demand for wage increases in 1797. This was not a traditional demand: it was a new sort of demand. But inflation of itself did not determine the contest between Admiralty and sailors. Before the mutinies the government had already given wage rises to compensate for inflation to the army, the marines

and the naval officers. It was not inflation of itself that was the problem. It was the crisis of the British state, embroiled in a world war which stretched its economic and social resources to the utmost.

The expansion of the Navy was part of this great stretching of the state, and it was one of the major causes of the change. But this was not because it brought in men who were unacquainted with the traditions of the Navy. The greatest period of unrest was 1794-98. The officers who mattered in these mutinies were not beginners at sea. Troubridge, Pringle, Bridport, Gardner, Campbell of the _Terrible_, Bligh and the rest were men with many years at sea in the Navy behind them. Where the records show the leaders of the different mutinies, they do not show a group of agitators and landsmen leading the rest. What they show is a combination of men which reflects the combination of experienced seamen and landsmen among the crew. This was true of the _Culloden_. The _Defiance_ was even more clearly a seamen's mutiny. And many of the mutinies desribed in these pages were led by topmen or petty officers. Both were experienced seamen.

This is not to underestimate the importance of United Men and other revolutionaries. Agitators

mattered. It is merely to say that many of them, like Joyce at Spithead and Blake of the Inflexible at the Nore, were both revolutionaries and seamen. The point is not that the seamen had not changed. At the time older officers were more or less unaminous in the conviction that they were dealing with a new breed of men, and in blaming this on the landsmen. In part they were right. The sailors they now had to deal with were different. But the sailors had changed because working people as a whole had changed. The officers were correct in their perception that able seamen now acted and thought like riotous landsmen. They were wrong in thinking that this was an infection carried aboard like landsmen. Sailors had learned these ideas and habits as part of a larger and changing class before they ever came aboard.

Nor were their protests 'essentially conservative'. But before taking up this point, it is necessary to turn to a problem raised by the work of Rediker.

Rediker

There are two ways of stating this problem. Much of the basic argument of this thesis was first set out in my The Cutlass and the Lash in

1985. Two years after, Rediker published The Devil and the Deep Blue Sea. In my earlier work I had traced the roots of sailors' militancy back to the 1770s. Rediker has clearly established that they go back much further, and argues quite convincingly that the nature of capitalist control on merchant ships created a counter tradtion of solidarity and resistance. This tradition, as he describes it, has much in common with my picture of the Navy. Violence is a front line measure of social control. Desertion is the common reply and protest and mutiny are possible replies. The seamen's culture is like that desribed by Rediker: there is the same solidarity, irreligion, and drunkenness. But, in that case, why was there so much unrest on Naval ships in our period, when the merchantmen seem relatively quiet? Why does every sailor of the period who served on both merchant and naval ships mention naval discipline as worse? Why, to quote the very experienced seaman Bechervaise: 'Of all the places then dreaded by a seaman in the merchant service, a ship of war is the worst.' (1)

We can state the problem another way. If one reads Rodger's book on the Navy and Rediker's book on the merchant service on successive days, one is

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(1) Bechervaise, page 107.

left with a feeling of puzzlement. Both books are major pieces of scholarship. They seem to be describing different worlds. Rodger gives a picture of social peace in the Navy and Rediker a picture of class war in the merchant service. Yet they are dealing with the same period and the same sailors. The Navy did not press its men from Mars. What accounts for this difference?

Partly, of course, it is a matter of politics. Rodger and Rediker are looking for different things, and they find different things. Rediker is an explicit Marxist. Rodger's politics are best expressed by his choice of the verb 'suffered' in the phrase 'the Service which suffered the mutinies of 1797'. In looking at any given mutiny, Rediker and Rodger identify with different sides. One welcomes mutinies, the other regrets them.

But this is not all there is to the matter. There was a real difference in class relations in the Navy and the merchant servie in 1750. In many ways the positions had reversed in 1795. How are we to explain this? Rediker, I think, provides the answer:

> The first half of the eighteenth century witnessed a cycle of seamen's struggle in

which tactics shifted according to larger social and economic patterns and circumstances. During wartime and the ensuing postwar booms, when labor was scarce and wages high, seamen relied on desertion and perhaps 'embezzlement' to improve their situation. The diversity of the maritime work force, brought about by the lifting of restrictions on the number of foreign seamen allowed in the merchant service in wartime, encouraged the use of such tactics. During periods of peace, when wages dropped, shipboard conditions grew harsher, and crews became more homogenous, conflict tended to take different forms. Desertion, though less effective, continued. But mutinies multiplied and piracy, in many ways the most extreme form of resistance, erupted after the Treaty of Ryswick in 1697 and again after the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713. With the suppression of piracy in 1726, social conflict at sea did not abate, but was transformed into more personal acts of violence, sometimes murder, between officers and crew. From the seamen's perspective, England's "era of political stability" was thus marked by the most extreme violence and terror. After the Seven

Years War (1756-63), seamen incresingly resorted to the strike. The hands that set the sail learned to strike it. (1)

To simplify, there was a tendency for class relations in merchant men to be more hostile during periods of peace. In wartime the extra demand for seamen meant that skilled men could win conditions by deserting to another ship, or even by choosing their master. It was a seller's market in labour power. This process must have applied even more between 1793 and 1814. The war went on far longer, the demand for men was far greater, and it was accompanied by an increase in trade. Wages soared, often to three times their previous level. Men who did not have to put up with a master or low wages had less need to be brutal or to strike for increases. Masters who had to keep their men would resort to less brutality.

This does not mean that tension between capital and labour on merchant ships disappeared. It does mean that it was relatively less, and relatively less expressed in violence by masters or mutiny by men. This is part of the explanation for our seeming contradiction.

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(1) Rediker, page 292.

There is another part. Why was the Navy relatively quiescent in 1750 yet so militant in 1797? The answer lies in two contradictory processes. On the one hand, there is the sheer scale of naval ships. The line of battle ships were, I have argued, far larger workplaces than the merchant ships. Hundreds of workers were gathered together in one place and oppressed together. This created a unique potential power, a potentially serious problem of control for the officers.

On the other hand, there was the level of repression in the Navy. Mutiny in the armed services is usually the most dangerous kind of strike that there is. The Royal Navy was not an exception. On a merchant ship the master had to establish his physical superiority with violence. If he did not, his men could and did hit and ridicule him. On a naval ship the rating who struck his captain was killed, unless his madness could be established. The master had at most his mate to fall back on. The captain of a 74 had a score of officers and over a hundred marines. Rediker emphasizes that merchant seamen faced long odds when they resisted their masters. Naval seamen faced longer odds.

There are two countervailing processes here: the potential strength of the naval crew and the threat of naval discipline. Up to a certain point, the threat of naval discipline could keep unrest within limits set by the officers. Beyond this point, the strength of hundreds of workers could carry them past these limits. But the threat of the court martial meant that when the men moved they had to be organized and serious. They were playing for higher stakes. The appearance of social peace and the eruption of mutiny were two sides of the same coin. The question, of course, is what forces pushed the men past these limits?

Control

In answering this question, we can make use of John Bohstedt's ideas in Riots and Community Politics in England and Wales, 1790-1810. (1) There Bohstedt describes in some detail first the operation of a tradition of riot and negotiation in the small industrial towns of Devon, where the employers and the workers knew each other, and the workers themselves were tied together by many bounds of community. He contrasts this to the

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(1) Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1983.

developing crisis of control in Manchester after 1790. Here there were too many workers, divided among themselves in too many ways, without an organic relationship to their employers. The consequence was that the traditional way in which the magistrate dealt with the rebellious crowd no longer worked in Manchester. Instead the employing class as a whole had to fall back on a combination of 'cavalry and soup kitchens.' Naked force replaced negotiation with the crowd, whose increased power had to be simply crushed. But at the same time the grievances had to be redressed, not by a process of negotiation with the leaders of the crowd, but by generalized welfare measures of alleviate distress.

Much of this seems similar to what happened to the Navy. Here too there was a crisis of control. The old negotiations no longer work reliably. So the Admiralty turned to a generalized reform. In 1797 this meant giving way on pay. In 1809 it meant trying to change the response to complaints about cruelty. Yet at the same time the officers resorted to repression far earlier than they would have previously. This was particularly the case after 1797, when the dimensions of the crisis of control were clear to them.

Manchester and the Navy had three things in

common. They had, in relative terms for their time, very large workplaces. They had a highly politicised workforce. And at critical times wage workers from many different workplaces were able to act together.

Bohstedt's idea, which I am developing here, is really an elaboration of Thompson's ideas about the effects of the development of capitalism. (1) Thompson makes the important point that the development of capitalism created a series of widening holes in the fabric of paternalist control. London was of course the largest of these wholes. Rediker's work has alerted us to the fact that London's major industry, the sea, was the site of a particularly severe fracture in paternalist control.

Thompson makes a related point of importance. The development of capitalism constantly led the masters to revolutionise the conditions of production. In Marx's phrase for capitalist society, 'All that is solid melts into air.' The pressure of capitalist competition pressured the employers and the merchants into attacks on the customary relations of employment and the market.

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(1) See particularly 'Patrician Society, Plebian Culture'.

The resistance of workers was thus very often phrased in traditional terms, in terms of defending what people had already got.

But there is a contradiction in this resistance. The development of capitalist production relations opens holes in the fabric of paternalist control. At the same time it pushes the workers under attack to fight back in terms of protecting tradition. Their goals are phrased in traditional terms while their activity is creating a new force. Their demands are conservative but their growing power is the opposite. They wish to conserve what they have and change the balance of power in process of production and distribution.

Once this is understood, one can see what was happening in the Navy more clearly. It was not simply, in Rodger's words quoted above, that mutinies 'Like popular riots throughout the century ... were essentially conservative, aimed to restore the just system which had formerly obtained, to rescue the Navy from the deformations recently introduced into it.' Rather, what was happening could be understood in different ways.

On the one hand, many of the mutinies reflected the sturdy moral economy of 'stout resolute dogs'. As such they could be accomodated within the traditions of the Navy. But when these

mutinies reached a certain point, they posed the problem of control. Mutinies in the tradition of the service raised the untraditional question of who controlled the service. We are now in a position to outline what caused this crisis in control.

Summary of the Argument

Several factors combined to create a crisis of control in the Navy. The first was the sailors' tradition of revolt. As Rediker emphasizes, this tradition had been a long time in the making. But it had also developed over time, with the strike becoming more important.

The second factor was the French Revolution. This meant that unrest below decks was far more frightening for officers. For all they knew a mutiny on one ship might develop into a mutiny of the whole Channel Fleet led by an Irish Revolutionary. And indeed that came to pass. This closed down the room for flexibility.

The French Revolution also opened far greater possibilities for the men. It did other things: it gave them an idea of their rights as men, as moral equals of the officers. It also provided a model of a people not just defending their rights but

going on the offensive to create new rights.

But perhaps the most important effect of the Revolution was indirect. It inspired an explosion of working class radicalism, strikes and trade union organization on shore between 1792 and 1795. The sailors on shore were part of this explosion: they took politics and tactics on board with them.

On board they were held down by the force of naval terror. But at the same time they were gathered together in their hundreds. And they were gathered together unwillingly. The war against France strained both the British and French states to their limit. The Navy's relentless demand for men had the paradoxical effect of increasing the attractions of the merchant service. Men arrived on board in their hundreds, bitter, politicised and unwilling. On board they were driven to work. And while they were driven, a state and social system strained to its limits refused to raise their pay in the face of inflation, itself caused in part by the war and in part by capitalist development. At the same time they were cheated on provisions.

They sailors resisted in traditional ways, above all with desertion. The Navy tried to maintain order in the traditional way at sea: violence. Beatings 'started' work. But there was a

spiral at work here. The more men deserted the more the pressure to recruit. The more men were beaten to control them the more they resented that control.

It is not possible to tell whether the level of violence was far greater in the Navy of the 1790s than before. It certainly seems greater than Rodger's picture of the occasional necessary beating. But it may also be that the new sensibility of equality influenced those who left their memoirs. The Narrative of William Spavens, a Chatham Pensioner, by Himself, published in 1793 at the end of Spaven's career below decks, describes a world in many ways as brutal as Jack Nastyface's. What is missing is the sense of outrage. That , for Spavens, is just how it was. Nastyface has the idea it might be different. But in any case, the level of violence on board ship certainly affronted men in a way it had not before.

So the Navy faced a chronic problem of control. This was not simply a matter of mutiny. On a day to day basis, the constant niggling conflict over work was far more important. There was constant flogging for 'skulking'. This should remind us of the extent of repression, but it should also remind us that men were refusing to

work. And the court martial records reveal conflict after conflict between topmen and boatswain, first lieutenant or captain.

The navy had ways of dealing with this crisis of control. Rodger points out that 'The Eighteenth century Navy...lacked even a single word for discipline.' (1) He goes on to assert that this was because they did not have to worry much about it. This is mistaken. 'Discipline' is a modern euphemism, rather like the general change from 'Ministry of War' to 'Ministry of Defense'. The Navy did have two useful words: 'order' and 'punishment'. The latter word resonated for every sailor and officer in the wooden world. Its central meaning was flogging. But it included everything from an impromptu rope's-ending to a group hanging.

So at first the Navy reacted in its traditional ways. The mutiny on the Winchelsea was the first of the war. The men protested in a traditional way and the Navy reacted in a traditional way. It conceded their demand and flogged two men around the fleet.

But from 1794 onwards a new sort of armed strike created new problems of control. The Windsor Castle won. The Culloden, the Defiance and the Terrible had to be severely punished. In the

process the tradition of negotiation was severely damaged, because the Admiralty was no longer willing to keep its word.

Then in 1797 the tradition of strike in the merchant ports over pay reached the Navy. This time the strike was led by radical and revolutionary sailors. At Spithead they posed an insoluble problem of control for the Admiralty. Lying to them did not work, and the Admiralty had to concede pay rises. Just as important, the sailors put off those officers they did not like. They were challenging directly for control.

The Admiralty tried to claw back control at the Nore. There they faced a force of sailors with no strategic importance and simply waited them out. The Admiralty followed this with many executions. And then in 1798 two connected things happened. The first was the defeat of the United Men in Ireland. In 1795 the radical movement in the British Isles had been largely driven underground, but it had not been defeated. Revolution was still a possibility. In 1798 the defeat was total. That defeat took the form of a split between Protestants and Catholics. This in turn rebounded in the fleet, where nervous English Protestants began to turn in the United Irish cells on board. The mass executions of Irish

rebels from the yard arm that followed took the heart out of the movement of 1797.

But this did not simply mean a return to the old relations between officers and men. After 1798 the officers allowed very little room for resistance. The years until about 1802 were bitter years. Men were hauled up for court martial on the suspicion of sedition, tried for writing letters of complaint, and executed for demonstrating. In these years too there is a spate of 'Cecil B. DeMille' mutinies. Some crews, despairing of normal protest, take the ship and run. Others plot to take it but are betrayed.

In the years after the peace of 1802 the temperature moderated. Petitions continued, demonstrations continued, and sometimes even strikes. The crisis of control moderated. The radical movement on shore was on the defensive. The example of the French Revolution was losing its force. The officers were less frightened and the men were pressed out of less politicised ports. But if the crisis of control moderated, it did not disappear. Nothing illustrates this better than what happened after 1809 and the Nereide.

In some ways the Admiralty's reaction in 1809 was an attempt to go back to an earlier system. The Admiralty in Rodger's period had tolerated

starting while complaining about it, and they had removed captains upon the complaint of their crews. But 1809 was not 1750, because 1797 had intervened. The court martial captains were torn. They wished to redress some of the grievances of the men. But they did not wish to replace the captain. In an earlier period such justice would have reinforced the Navy's hegemony. In this period it would increase the power of the men. And, as defendant officers kept saying, how were they to maintain control in the Service if they could not be violent? Torn, the courts admonished officers and confirmed them in their commands, while removing the odd lieutenant.

This does not mean that the changes after 1809 were meaningless. From 1809 onwards there are many cases of cruelty, most of which have been cited in Chapters Fourteen to Sixteen. Except for the odd trial of the Captain of the *Windsor Castle*, I have not found any such trials in the years before 1809. It is probable that I have missed two or three, but unlikely that I have missed dozens. Before 1809 the traditional system of redressing grievances simply broke down. The crisis of control did not allow it. Even after 1809 it could not function as before, even when the Admiralty wished it to.

In Conclusion

This brings us almost to the end of this thesis. But there are still two points to be tackled. The first is the question of how representative these mutinies were. Were they not abnormal events, isolated pathologies, unusual events which shed little light on the kinder and more normal tenor of shipboard life?

The first answer to this question is that these demonstrations, stikes and mutinies were indeed unrepresentative. As a glance at Appendix One will show, they were rare. Of course, this leaves out the mutinies of 1797 and 1798, the years when mutiny was a common experience. But still, the mutinies covered in this thesis are unrepresentative in two ways. They were defeated, and the defeated were prosecuted. Successful strikes and demonstrations disappear from the record. For the _Windsor Castle_ we happen to have the pro forma trial of her captain, and for the ship seizures we have the trials of the captain and officers for the loss of the ship. But where the captain conceded the point or the admiral had a word with him, we have no record. Officers did not discuss these things in print, they did not

write to the Admiralty about them, and they did not write to their relatives about them. This silence is in itself an important social fact, but very frustrating for the historian.

In short, the records we have grievously underestimate the force and success of demonstration and strike. If anything, the tenor of 'normal' naval life was far stormier than the records would indicate.

But this does not mean that the mutinies did not have an effect on daily life. We have argued above that after 1793 any demonstration was a chancy thing. Neither officers nor men knew for certain what would happen next. The great set piece mutinies set the parameters of the smaller confrontations. If most men had not mutinied outside of 1797, most experienced seamen had seen the results of court martials of mutineers. The convicted were flogged round the fleet from ship to ship. When they were hanged, the whole fleet was mustered to watch. This was not some arcane custom. The Navy wished to make a point. Nor, especially after 1797, were captains ignorant of the possible consequences of pushing their crews too far.

Moreover, it has been argued above that the changing course of the mutinies affected the more

general course of class relations on board. The crisis of control was manifested in mutinies. The results of these mutinies in turn affected the limits of control on board ship. This point will not be laboured here, as it has been one of themes of the whole thesis.

There is also a sense in which these mutinies, although unusual events, provide a unique window into normal life on board. After all, if you want to shoot the horizon, you do it from the crest of the wave. One of the things the mutinies reveal starkly is the nature of the class relationship on board ship.

This brings us to our second question, the question of 'class'. Were these mutinies class struggles?

The answer is yes. Part of this, of course, depends on definition. I have argued above that class conflict is most helpfully understood as conflict which is patterned by people's position in the process of production. Relations between people in the process of work pattern the conflicts between them. The point was made that the position of any individual in these conflicts were not necessarily predetermined. Individuals might find themselves on the 'wrong side'. The conflict was a class conflict because people _tend_

to be on the 'right side'. And it does not matter if they understand that they are behaving in that way because of their class position. It is enough that the tendency can be observed.

In fact, these qualifications hardly need to be made for the class struggle in the Navy in this period. The officers were all, in theory, gentlemen. If some of them in fact were not, they were entitled to be outraged if reminded of the fact. The great majority of the sailors were men who would work for wages all their lives. Most of their fathers had worked for wages as well. And while a gentleman down on his luck could occasionally volunteer for the bounty, the press did not take gentleman. A gentleman's dress was sufficient protection against the gang, and a man improperly dressed could escape the Navy if he could prove he was a gentleman. On board one conscious class faced another.

The ship was divided in class terms. The very parts of the ship faced each other in binary opposition: the quarter deck and the lower deck, the quarterdeck and the forecastle, us and them. The 'people' thought of themselves as a corporate group. They signed themselves the 'Ship's Company' and thought of themselves as the 'Cullodens'. In a regiment the 'Argylls' include the officer. In the

Navy all these terms, the people, the ship's company, the Terribles, excluded the officers.

In the great moments of class struggle, the demonstrations and mutinies, the officers and people moved as compact and united classes. The mutiny on the *Bounty* is the exception that proves the rule. Fletcher Christian was the only officer in this period to side with mutineers. That was the enduring source of his fantasy appeal for the middle classes. But one officer after another, most of whom detested Bligh, got into the boat with him to what seemed like almost certain death. The master and the carpenter were not members of the ruling class. But they were officers.

After the *Bounty*, there is no officer who joins the men in mutiny. Richard Parker at the Nore was a gentleman, but an officer who had been dismissed the service and re-enlisted as a seaman. A few seamen did report for the captain's muster on the *Culloden* and the *Defiance*, but very few. In comparative perspective, what is impressive about the strikes in the Royal Navy in these years is the solidarity of each class against the other.

Appendix One: Trials

This appendix contains a list, by year, of all collective actions which ended in court martials, for the years 1793-1796 and 1799-1814. The name of the ship and the nature of the action is given. This list does not include trials of officers for cruelty, and includes the writing of letters only when the writer was prosecuted. All cases mentioned here are referred to at least in passing in the body of the thesis. This list is as complete as I can make it, and I am sure it includes the great majority of such trials. The year is the year of the protest, not of the trial.

1793

Winchelsea, demonstration.

1794

Windsor Castle, strike.

Culloden, strike.

1795

Defiance, strike.

Terrible, strike.

Bellerephon, letter.

1796

Eurydice, letter.

1799

Ramilles, letter.

Forbes and Kerr, letter.

Stag, letter.

Caesar, verbal abuse of informer.

Mars, restive sailor.

Russell, sailor complaining about work.

Repulse, sailor shouting United slogans.

Volage, plot to take ship.

Hope, plot to take ship.

Dart, demonstration.

1800

Phoebe, seditious talk.

Monarch, loose talk while drunk.

Diadem, letter.

El Corso, letter.

Gladiator, verbal abuse of informer.

Overyssel, collective refusal of beer.

Daphne, riot.

Diana, taking the ship.

Albanaise, taking the ship.

1801

Goza, taking the ship.

Active, letter.

Glenmore, demonstration.

Castor, demonstration.

1802

Syren, plot to replace captain.

Excellent, demonstration.

Gibraltar, demonstration.

1803

Trident, letter.

Princess Royal, letter.

1804

Montagu, plot to take ship.

Eliza, plot to take ship.

1805

Tartar, letter.

Locust, letter.

Dryad, letter.

Favorite, demonstration.

Tormant, demonstration.

1806

Dominica, taking the ship.

Ferret, attempt to take ship.

1807

Edgar, demonstration.

1808

Bream, attempting to cut cables.

1809

Nereide, attempt to replace captain.

Columbine, plot to take ship.

Bulwark, demonstration.

1810

Naiad, letter and petition in person.

Latona, talking about mutiny.

Bellerephon, demonstration.

1811

Diana, demonstration.

Danemark, letter.

Fawn, letter.

1812

Ulysses, demonstration.

Polyphemus, demonstration.

Martial, letter.

1813

Resistance, attempt to replace captain.

Dwarf, letter.

Appendix Two: Sources

The most important source for this thesis is the court martial records. These have been discussed in Chapter Two. This appendix will consider the other sources used.

Muster Books and Logs

A range of other admiralty records can be used to supplement the court martials. The muster books of most ships have been preserved. (Where they cannot be found, it is often possible to use the Treasury pay books, although they are less detailed.) The whole ship's company was mustered at frequent intervals. The clerk put a check against the name of each man present. When a new man entered the ship, the clerk put down his name, his age, his place of birth and his rating. When he changed his rating, the clerk also noted that. But a man's age never changed, except that when he was promoted from boy first class to seaman his age changed from sixteen to eighteen.

So the muster books can give us some idea of the composition of the ship's company and tell us

something about their leaders. However, there are problems. Many men joined the Navy under assumed names, and they may also have lied about their homes. The muster book tells whether a man was pressed or a volunteer, but most pressed men were offered the bounty and thus 'volunteered' after baing pressed, and appeared on the books as volunteers. And the muster books give a man's place of birth rather than his place of residence. Sailors moved around a lot. A man bornin Kerry but living in London for the last twenty years appears as Irish. A second-generation Irishman in Liverpool appears as English. This does not necessarily reflect either man's subjective identity.

Again, a man's rank on entering the Navy does not necessarily reflect his experience of the sea. Men rated themselves upon joining, and able seamen may well have rated themselves as ordinary seamen. Writing of the American Navy in 1841, Dana said:

> There is a large proportion of oridnary semane in the Navy. This is probably because the power of the officers is so great upon their long cruises to detect and punish any deficianecy, and because, if a man can by any means be made to appear wanting in capacity

> for the duty he has shipped to perform., it will justify a great deal of hard usage. Men, therefore, prefer rather to underrate than to run any risk of overrating themselves. (1)

The American Navy was modelled bery closely on the British, but the officers were harsher in 1793 than in 1841. And there is a lot of evidence that at this period work discipline bore particularly harshly on the skilled topmen. So we must assume that many 'ordinary' seamen were in reality able men bred to the sea.

There are also the ships' logs. The master made daily entries in the log. Every so often the captain's clerk copied the master's log word for word into the captain's log. For most ships one log or both are preserved. Given a choice, I have used the captain's log. The clerks were professionals at hadnwriting and the masters were professionals at other things.

The logs are not all that useful for our purposes. They largely record weather, course, latitude and prizes taken. The master was also supposed to enter any floggings, but many did not. So if floggings are recorded in the log, one knows

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(1) Richard henry Dana, The Seaman's Manual, London, Edward Moxon, 1841, page 174.

they happened. If they are not, one does not know if they happened or not. There is sometimes a brief description of a mutiny, but lesser collective actions are never mentioned.

Letters

The Admiralty's in-letters are, by and large, the main source after the court martial records. Unfortunately, the files are by no means complete. The Admiralty was very punctilious about saving trial records and musters and log books. But many letters are missing from the relevant volumes. It is fair to assume that some were lost and some were weeded. But many were probably simply taken home by an interested Lord or clerk who never got round to returning them.

The admirals' letters are the most important. The admiral in charge of each fleet or station reported by letter to the Admiralty almost daily, and sometimes two or three times in one day. These letters contain many 'enclosures'. These are letters the admirals themselves had received, mostly from their subordinates, but also petitions in some cases from a ship's company. They include many reports on mutinies by the captain of the relevant ship and reports from captains sent to

enquire into the grievances of various ships, as well as a host of miscellaneous papers.

The captains' and lieutenants' letters are less useful. These officers reported regularly to their admiral, not to the Admiralty. Indeed, to write directly to London was clearly a departure from normal procedure. But there are often interesting letters generated by quarrels between admirals and commanders, by the necessity for a captain to explain some major failure, or be letters from officers on shore.

The Admiralty minutes and out letter books are almost useless for our purposes. But the in-letters include many letters besides those from officers: correspondence with the Navy Board, the Solicitor's Ofice and many others. These are occassionally useful. Fortunately, the Admiralty maintained an index of all letters by both name of ship and officer, so it is not difficult to trawl for the relevant letters.

In using these letters, one must always bear in mind that these are men in a bureaucratic heirarchy justifying their actions to their superiors. Moreover, they are providing a written record which their superiors can and will refer back to. And in most bureaucracies men report many things verbally to their superiors which they do

not put into writing. This was the case, for instance, between admirals and captains, except when the captain was on prolonged detatched service. All of this muddies the historical record.

But with the admirals' letters there is a countervailing tendancy. Their Lordships might not see an amdiral from one year to the next. If they wanted to know what was happening, the only way they could find out was from detailed written reports from the man on the spot. When an admiral reported amutiny, it was his job to explain to his superior what had actually happened, as well as to justify whatever actions he had taken. So such letters often explain clearly the admiral's strategy in dealing with a mutiny.

Memoirs

There are several lower deck memoirs for this period, and I have leaned on some of them heavily in Part Two. Here I will give an outline of their authors, their biases, strengths and backgrounds.

James Morrison, the gunner on the Bounty, left a journal which was finally published

in 1935. (1) It is in the form of a diary, but was clearly written up in 1792, probably while he faced trial for the mutiny. Most of the diary is devoted to life on Tahiti. Because Morrison was an intelligent and acute observer it is much the best source on traditional Tahitian society. (2) But for our purposes the only useful part is pages 17-30, which provide a succinct statement of the seamen's moral economy and their consequent contempt for Bligh. It is a pity, though, that the diary is not more detailed, for it is the only memoir by a mutineer.

One senses that John Wetherall might have mutinied if he could. He was a Whitby man, bred to the sea, one of thirteen children of a whaling captain. He was pressed at sea in 1803 into the Hussar, captain Philip Wilkinson. He was soon captured and spent eleven years as a prisoner of war in France. He left a diary, which has been edited by C. S. Forester. (3) It is of limited

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(1) The Journal of James Morrison, edited and with an introduction by Owen Rutter, London, Golden Cockrel Press, 1935.
(2) See its use in the standard work, Douglas Oliver, Ancient Tahitian Society, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 1974.
(3) The Adventures of John Wetherall, London, Michael Joseph, 1954.

value, but pages 27-106 provide an interesting picture of Captain Wilkinson, who had been the captain of the Hermione before Pigot. Wetherall hated him.

The diary form in general is of little use. Robert Wilson also left one. He was pressed into the Navy in 1806, and one of the aims of his diary was to keep a record of the severity of naval discipline. But by dint of some small influence he was soon promoted to midshipman. He then dropped his diary, deciding it 'would be very unpleasant reading'. He eventually deserted. (1)

John Bechervaise was the son of a Guernsey sea faring family. (2) He did not join the Navy until 1820, which is outside of our period. But he did serve in the merchant marine from 1803 to 1819, and on pages 107 -122 he has an interesting discussion of the daily routine of a man of war. This discussion is the more interesting because he

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(1) 'Robert Mercer Wilson', pages 121-276 in H.G. Thursfield, editor, Five Naval Journals, 1789-1819, Navy Records Society, number 91, 1951.
(2) John Bechervaise, Thirty-Six Years of a Sea-Life, by and Old Quarter-Master, Portsea and London, Longman, 1839. His later A Farewell to Old Shipmates and Messmates, by an Old Quarter Master, Portsea, W. Woodward, 1847, is thin and anecdotal. It reads more like a hack writer's idea of sea yarns than like Bechervaise's earlier book.

himself became a quartermaster who always liked a clean deck.

Mary Anne Talbot's memoirs are absolutely fascinating. (1) They were taken down by R.S. Kirby, a printer who published a sort of monthly freak show of odd characters: the fattest woman in the World, the dwarf and the giant best friends, etc. Talbot made this gallery because she had served in the Navy in the dress of a boy, and been wounded at the Glorious First of June. Her memoirs reveal a brave, determined and snobbish young woman, but are not as revealing as they might be about life afloat.

Robert Hay wrote up his memoirs for his children, and one of his descendants eventually published them. He was a Paisley wearver, and during a depression in trade in 1803 he found work in the Navy, finally deserting in 1811. His memoirs are entertaining, and he was clearly an attractive man, but they are not as useful as they might be. (2)

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(1) Mary Anne Talbot, The Life and Surprising Adventures of Mary Anne Talbot, in the name of John Taylor...related by herself, London, R.S. Kirby, 1806.
(2) Landsman Hay: The Memoirs of Robert Hay, 1789-1847, edited by M.D. Hay, London, Rupert Hart-Davis, 1953.

William Richardson also left a manuscript memoir. In 1908 this was edited down by Spencer Childers, the maritime novelist and Irish Republican. (1) Richardson was from a sea going family in South Shields: at one point in 1795 all four of his brothers had been pressed into different ships in the Navy. He served in coal ships, merchantmen and a slaver, and was a gunner in the Royal Navy for 23 years. His account of the Navy is interesting, particularly for the West Idnies. His account of his time as a slaver on the Spy is very useful, and includes a detailed account of a slave mutiny he helped to exterminate. (1)

The three most useful memoirs are those by Nicol, Nastyface and Leech. (2) John Nicol followed his father in the cooper's trade near Edinburgh. But his mind was always on the sea,

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(1) William Richardson, A Mariner of England, London, John Murray, 1908.
(2) The Life and Adventures of John Nicol, Mariner, edited by John Howell, foreword and afterword by Alexander Laing, Cassell, London, 1937; Samuel Leech, Thirty Years from Home, or a Voice from the Main Deck, Boston, Tappan, 1843; Jack Nastyface (William Robinson) Nautical Economy, or Forecaste Recollections, London, William Robinson, 1836.

because 'the first wish I ever formed was to wander, and many a search I gave my parents in gratifying my youthful passion.' (1) There was always work for coopers afloat, and from 1776 to 1800 Nicol served in Naval ships, various merchantmen, a Greenland whaler and a South Sea whaler, and on a convict ship. He was pressed at sea in 1794 and served in the _Edgar_, the _Goliath_, the _Ramilies_ and the _Ajax_. The striking thing about Nicol is his human sympathy with everybody: women, slaves, convicts, Chinese. But if he was an enemy to slavery and sexism, he was a also loyal to his kings. In his words, he was 'an old tar'.

His memoirs were recorded in 1822, when he was 67. He was then a well known character on the Edinburgh streets, and held a status somewhere between beggar and racounter. John Howells, an Edinburgh printer and occasssional writer, met him when 'he was pointed out to me as a most interesting character... He was walking feebly along, with an old apron tied around his waist, in which he carried a few small pieces of coal he had picked up in his wandering through the streets.' (2) Howells found his story interesting and published it partly, I think, to help Nicol

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(1) Nicol, page 35.
(2) Nicol, pages 215-16.

financially. Alexander Laing in his 1937 postscript says that the style is nothing like that of Howell's other books, so it must have been Nicol's own style. (1) Nicol was clearly a polished storyteller who had spun his yarn many times before. But his style was not old tar jokey, and there is no reason to believe him less than completely truthful. Nicol has long been the favouring memoirist of naval historians. (2)

'Nastyface' has not. William Robinson was a printer in Cheapside in 1836, but he had served in the Navy from 1805 to 1811. He wrote under the name 'Jack Nastyface', a common term of address officers used when they could not remember their names.

In Robinson's preface, addressed to the 'Brave Tars of Old England', he tells them that he aims to rell the truth, and more so than any officer or gentleman's account, for:

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(1) Nicol, pages 221-23.

(2) For a rather different evaluation of many of these memoirs from mine, see Christopher Lloyd, The British Seaman, 1200-1860, A Social Survey, pages 199-207.

A statement, written on a seaman's chest below, is likely to be as accurate, to what passes _'tween decks_, as the flowery display coming from the cabin _dilletante_... for all you know that the men in the foretop can give a better description of what passes in the horizon, than the _gallant observer_, however gifted by education, whose eyes rise but little above the drum-head of the capstan.

The order of the present day, _on land_, it seems is _reform_:- then why should the _sea-service_ have its imperfections unattended to? To bring about, therefore, a reform in that all-important department of state, it is, that without being considered an improper intruder, I may be suffered to offer for public consideration my mite of information. (1)

The rest of the book is in keeping with this perface: angrily class conscious, frnkly political and clearly allied with reform movement on shore. Robinson hated the officers of the Royal Navy when he was in it, and twenty-five years later he hated them still. He was not a radical who brought his

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(1) Nastyface, pages iv-v.

politics to the Navy: the Navy made him radical. This frank and manly attitude has not endeared him to most naval historians, and his book has been little used.

But for the historian of the lower deck it is a mine of information. Because Robinson had a political argument to make, his 124 page book analysed the Navy, rather than producing a catalogue of his adventures or a diary of daily events. Because he hated naval discipline, he tells us more about it than any lower deck writer.

Samuel Leech was born in Wanstead. His parents were both servants, but his cousins were sailors and he volunteered for the Navy at the age of 12 in 1810. He deserted to the American Navy at the age of 14, was recaptured and remained a prisoner of war until 1815, living in daily dread of discovery.

He finally settled in Connecticut, moving from trade to trad and then opening a shop. When he attended his first tent meeting he heard his first sailor-preacher, the Rev. E. E. Taylor. As he listened, he felt 'unutterable delight':

> Still I feel the tears chasing with each other down my cheeks, as I grasped the hand of the sailor preacher so firmly, that it

seemed I should never let go: while he, seeing my emotion, observed, "Never mind, brother, we are on board of Zion's ship now". (1)

Leech joined the Methodists and married a Yankee girl. he backslid from time to time: drink was always a minor problem.

His book is well written and caustic. He is by now a Yankee through and through. He is concerned with presenting the facts. He feels a proletarian anger towards the officers. He is an American nationalist. He reagrds sailors not as degraded animals but as suffering fellow sinners. It is the politics of the Yankee artisan: agressively egalitarian, proud of America, contemptuous of rank, hard working, Christian and abolitionist. Leech was a thoroughly decent man. He was also the most perceptive of forecastle writers, because he was the one with the most analytical mind.

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(1) Leech, page 272.

Other Sources

A variety of other sources have been used. The most important of thses is Thomas Hodgskin's An Essay on Naval Discipline, published in 1813. Hodgskin, of course, went on to become 'one of the most important of the English economists.' (1) But he began life as the son of a clerk in a naval dockyard, and was lucky that his father was able to find him a place as a midshipman. He eventually passed his exam for lieutenant and rose by seniortyto the post of first lieutenant. A man of

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(1) Karl Marx, Capital, Volume One, translated by Ben Fowkes, London, Penguin 1976, page 1000. For Hodgskin's life see Elie Halevy, Thoms Hodgskin (1787-1869), Paris, 1903. For his economics see his Labour Defended Against the Claims of Capital, London, 1825, and Popular Political Economy, London, 1827. For comments on his ideas see William Stafford, Socialism, Radicalism and Nostalgia: Social Criticism in Britain, 1775-1830, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987, pages 232-249, and Karl Marx, Theories of Surplus Value, translated by Jack Cohen and S. W. Ryasanskaya, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1972, volume 3, pages 263-319. None of these sources say much about his naval career. Also interesting is Hodgskins, 'Aboliton of Impressment', Edingurgh Review, 1824, pages 154-181.

his background was unlilely to go higher. But in the event he fell out with his captain and was dismissed the ship after an acrimonious court martial in 1812. He promptly wrote his book, which was clearly the work of a man embittered by his humble background and personal grievance. An excellent work, it is the only book of the period entirely devoted to naval discipline. All previous writers on naval discipline have ignored it, presumably for reasons of class and politics. It does include a few theoretical chapters of a Benthamite slant which are now entirely useless, but thankfully by the twenties Hodgskin had found a more congenial place as the economist and journalist of the labour movement.

I found it necessary to work through a large number of contemporary manuals on the various naval trades, but they have not been used in the body of the thesis. Special mention, however, should be made of John MacArthur, A Treatise of the Principles and Practice of Naval Courts Martial. (1) The officers memoirs and biographies of the period proved of little use. The one source of shich considerable more use could have been

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(1) London, 1792 and subsequent editions. For other manuals see the bibliography in Dudley Pope, Life in Nelson's Navy, London, Unwin Hyman, 1981.

made was the naval novels later published by the vetrans of these years, particularly those who served on the lower deck. (1)

For documentary records I have relied exclusively on the Admiralty records in the Public Record Office. This may seem almost unscholarly, but nothing useful was found in either the various Portsmouth record offices or the National Maritime Museum. I stopped there, because I became increasingly aware that I was only scratching the surface of what could be done with the Admiralty records. With a great deal of work in other record offices and private collections it might have been possible to find further useful material. But had I had four times the time for research, I am sure I would still be stuck in the Public Record Office. I feel safer in this strategy after reading Rodger's The Wooden World. This is a magisterial, conservative and very scholarly work, and it based almost entirely on the Admiralty records.

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(1) For an introduction see C Northcote Parkinson, Portsmouth Point: the Navy in Fact and Fiction, 1793-1815, London, Liverpool University Press, 1948.

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