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Trafalgar: Countdown to Battle, 1803-1805

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protection and comparable speed. The true story is much more complex.

Sumida's careful analysis shows how the journalist and inventor Arthur Hungerford Pollen came to define the gunnery problem and set about solving it before anyone else. Pollen's complex travails are discussed with great skill and at necessary length. The Admiralty's misjudgments resulted in the rejection of Pollen's equipment in favor of an inferior, partly plagiarised version that was incapable of providing a fire control solution for a manoeuvring ship and thus proved ineffective under the conditions of the coming war. While Pollen made errors in his relationships with the Royal Navy, it is clear that neither its personnel nor administrative structures were capable of dealing with the complex technology of gunnery fire control. Although Sumida is restrained in his conclusions, the incapacity of the understaffed Admiralty to manage a navy of the size of 1910 is manifest. This proved to have dire consequences during the First World War. Similarly, the technical comprehension of most "expert" officers left much to be desired, not from a lack of formal technical training but through a general absence of intellectual curiosity, due to some extent to sheer overwork both in the Admiralty and at sea.

Sumida's work not only illuminates an important aspect of naval history but suggests directions for further research. His own interests are demonstrated in his plans for a sequel to cover the years to 1939 as well as in a

recent paper, "British Naval Administration in the Age of Fisher," which reveals more about the Admiralty's fundamental difficulties in this era.

In addition, we need to know more about Fisher's thinking. The creative, and derivative, ferment which was his mind can be likened to an intellectual catherine wheel. He has been compared to Hyman Rickover; but while his ability to grasp great concepts was equally remarkable, he possessed little of the latter's comprehension of the associated risks and technical difficulties encountered in placing *any* new system into service. Sumida has been careful not to overstress the connection between predictive fire control and Fisher's "all-big-gun" theories, but the evolution of the Admiral's thinking on the subject *without benefit of hindsight* deserves more attention. This process has been started by Charles Fairbanks in his essay, "The Origins of the *Dreadnought* Revolution: A Historical Essay."

Jon Sumida's effort to improve our understanding of the Royal Navy before the First World War can best be summed up by St. Matthew: "The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner."

JAMES GOLDRICK
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Schom, Alan. *Trafalgar: Countdown to Battle, 1803-1805*. New York: Atheneum, 1990. 431pp. \$27.50
This book starts off with a dubious proposition—namely, that "most

British naval historians" have "ignored or misinterpreted" the series of events that began with the renewed hostilities between Britain and France in 1803 and ended with the famous battle of Trafalgar two and a half years later. In particular, Alan Schom asserts that the role played by the British fleet commanded by Admiral Sir William Cornwallis in blockading the main French naval arsenal at Brest and thereby preventing Napoleon's invasion of England has not been understood. Very few naval operations throughout history have been as exhaustively studied by so many famous historians as the campaign that led to the action off Cape Trafalgar on 21 October 1805. It would indeed be surprising, then, if so many talented historians and strategic analysts had missed such a critical aspect of the Trafalgar campaign—and, of course, they have not. To be sure, Cornwallis's name is put in the shadow by Nelson's glory in popular accounts of the actual battle of Trafalgar, but it is simply untrue to say that serious naval historians have not understood the critical role played by Britain's naval forces in the Channel in fending off Napoleon's attempted invasion. One need only recall the famous passage by Alfred Thayer Mahan about those "storm-beaten ships" to realize that naval historians have long understood the strategic importance of the blockade of Brest. In addition to this unwarranted attempt to denigrate the work of other historians, Schom's writing style at times leaves much to be desired: his sentence structure is

frequently confusing, and this clumsy writing makes his account difficult to read. *Trafalgar: Countdown to Battle* is also marred by some irritating errors; for example, you would think that Schom, who is so determined to set the record straight and give Cornwallis his due, would get his nickname right and call him "Billy Blue" and not "Blue Billy."

But this book is not without merits. Its principal value is that Schom effectively exploits the studies done by Edouard Desbrière about French invasion plans of England, and he has used French archives for further information about Napoleon's strategic schemes and preparations. Schom is at his best in providing character sketches of France's leaders and in examining Napoleon's difficult relationship with his admirals. In addition to that of Admiral Villeneuve, the unfortunate commander of the Franco-Spanish fleet at Trafalgar, Schom quite rightly highlights the important role played by the hard-driving Admiral Denis Decres, the French navy minister, in attempting to carry out Napoleon's plans to defeat Britain. In his typical fashion, Napoleon aimed at delivering a knockout blow against the British, which meant landing a large army in England. Napoleon consistently underestimated the difficulties of transporting an army across the Channel. When his unrealistic plan failed, Napoleon blamed Villeneuve, Decres, his Spanish allies—in short, everyone but himself for the failure of the invasion plan to come off as planned. Although Schom

has not delivered on his promise to offer a corrective to our understanding of British naval strategy in the period 1803-1805, he has provided a good account of French plans, preparation, and operations. Despite this book's flaws, it also places the fleet movements that ultimately led to the battle of Trafalgar within a larger strategic context.

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Howarth, Stephen. *To Shining Sea: A History of the United States Navy, 1775-1991*. New York: Random House, 1991. 563pp. \$25

Stephen Howarth has provided an entertaining and readable work that is helpful in combining personal experiences and knowledge with the history of the navy as a whole. Written by a Briton, it is a history with a different view of our institution's historical wake. Reading it, one is reminded that many current problems have been around for many years. For example North African pirates and postwar budget cuts are nothing new, but it is instructive and sometimes entertaining to learn how these problems were handled in the past. Howarth has offered a single neatly focused and explicit volume of 214 turbulent years of history.

From the other side of the Atlantic the author writes lovingly of "our" navy and its heroes, with a palpable reluctance to step on America's toes. Unlike the navy's benefactors and heroes, those few characters who

attract his scorn do not have ships named after them—with one notable exception, Albert Gallatin, Jefferson's secretary of the treasury. Gallatin was notorious for cutting the navy budget, so it is appropriate that the ship which bears his name is a coast guard cutter.

Howarth can be forgiven for comparing American naval history to the British experience at sea and for quoting his own admirals. However, he is on target in employing a famous Nelsonian remark in defense of Admiral Halsey at the Battle of Leyte Gulf: "No captain can do very wrong if he places his ship alongside that of an enemy." He explains the controversy over Halsey's action, but he does not maintain the same balance in having apparently interviewed only Admiral Elmo Zumwalt to describe that officer's polemical years as Chief of Naval Operations in the early seventies.

To Shining Sea has changed my perspective of the U.S. Navy's history and of my own thirty-year participation in it. For example, I never knew before reading this book that the six Russian submarines discovered in the vicinity of Cuba in October 1962 actually surfaced at American request in obedience to orders from Moscow. This reviewer was witness to a Foxtrot surfacing off the north coast of Cuba; I had thought we had hounded them to exhaustion.

Another personal story: Howarth describes how after the battle off Santiago in the Spanish-American War of 1898 the Spanish admiral was fished out of the water hatless and shoeless. When he arrived on the quarterdeck