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Eyes of the Admiralty: J. T. Serres—an Artist in the Channel Fleet, 1799–1800

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lesser Axis members) is presented in context but without excess sympathy. The ideology and associated atrocities of Germany and Japan strengthened morale at home and intimidated some, but brutality prevented any prospect of willing economic or military support from conquered areas, particularly China and the non-Russian parts of the Soviet Union. The failure of the German and Japanese governments to mobilize their economies effectively when at war contrasts with efforts by the key Allied powers.

Willmott argues convincingly against numerous popular ideas concerning the war. He attacks the “myth of German military excellence,” offering numerous examples of error and failure in military efforts and in related economic and political activities. He highlights the paramount importance of the Russian front, covering the enormous scale of combat and the tremendous improvement in Soviet military strategic and operational skill.

This work is rich with comparisons between campaigns, strategies, and countries, and it covers land, sea, and air operations with good balance. Numerous statistics illustrate key ideas and strengthen the historical narrative. Dozens of maps help illustrate key campaigns. Also, the general index is useful. Corrections to page numbers in the “Campaign Index” planned for the second printing will make this book invaluable. The bibliography organizes suggestions into fourteen categories that reflect regions or themes in a way that may compensate for the absence of citations.

Willmott’s impressive credentials include faculty experience at several universities and at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst. He has written

nineteen books and coauthored several others. He is a fellow of the Royal Historical Society.

Because this work is “a general overview of military events” with some emphasis on correcting popular misunderstandings, it offers a great deal to readers at every level of expertise. This sweeping history provides the reader with great insights into World War II in particular but also into enduring issues, including relationships between military, political, and economic power.

BRENT BOSTON
Commander, U.S. Navy



Barritt, M. K. *Eyes of the Admiralty: J. T. Serres—an Artist in the Channel Fleet, 1799–1800*. London: Hydrographic Office and National Maritime Museum, 2008. 144pp. \$39.95

For centuries, the port of Brest in northwestern France has been the chief naval base and dockyard for French naval operations in the North Atlantic and the Channel. For Britain, during the Napoleonic Wars—as well as in all the maritime wars between Britain and France in 1689 and 1815—the French Brest squadron was a central threat to the Royal Navy. British naval strategy to counter this threat had a number of elements. The Royal Navy’s Channel Squadron had, as a primary duty, the blockade of Brest. These operations served the strategic function of deterring the Brest squadron from leaving port and, thereby, of preventing it from launching an invasion force against Britain or its overseas possessions, attacking the British fleet, or interfering with British warships and merchant convoys that were using the nearby

sea-lanes en route to various other parts of the world. Given the central importance of dealing with the French naval threat, British naval activities off Brest are important in naval history and, not surprisingly, they feature too in the widely read historical naval novels that are set in the period of the naval wars of the French Revolution and Napoleon.

This volume is about a British naval intelligence operation off Brest in 1799–1800. The story begins at a critical moment. The Second Coalition against France had just been formed in June 1799, and in December Napoleon was making his way back from Egypt to overthrow the Directory and to make himself First Consul. In London, halfway between those events in September 1799, the First Secretary of the Admiralty, Evan Nepean, found that nothing available in any government office in London provided a detailed visual image of Brest that the First Sea Lord, Admiral Lord St. Vincent, could use to understand the operational challenges or opportunities that the port presented. To fill this gap in British naval intelligence, Nepean ordered John Thomas Serres to report immediately to a frigate with the inshore squadron on blockading duty to paint a series of views of Brest and the nearby coast of Brittany.

John Thomas Serres (1759–1825) was the son of Dominic Serres (1719–93), a French merchant seaman, who had been captured in 1748 and brought to England. Making his hobby of drawing and painting into a lucrative new career, the elder Serres had become one of the founders of the Royal Society of Art. His evocative and highly accurate depictions of naval battles during the War of the American Revolution had brought him wide praise and, at the

very end of his life, in 1791, the title of Marine Painter to King George III. On his death two years later, his son, John Thomas Serres, who was already Master Draughtsman to the Admiralty, inherited his father's position.

Serres's beautiful and informative sketches and paintings from this important mission have lain long unnoticed by naval historians at the archives of Britain's Hydrographic Office in Taunton, Devon. Captain Michael K. Barritt, Royal Navy (retired), has now brought them to light in a beautifully produced volume that is accompanied by Barritt's well researched, skillfully written, and informative history of Serres's mission. Barritt first came to learn of this material when in 2003 he retired after thirty-three years of naval service, having risen to become Hydrographer of the Royal Navy. Fascinated by a framed image from this series that he received as a retirement gift, he set out on a research quest to understand more about it. This book is the result of that research, which is informed by his naval career and professional hydrographic expertise as well as by his undergraduate education in history under Piers Mackesy at Pembroke College, Oxford. The story that Barritt tells in this volume is a valuable contribution to naval history, one that directly complements the documents in the Navy Records Society's volume edited by Roger Morriss, *The Channel Fleet and the Blockade of Brest, 1793–1801* (vol. 141, 2001). At the same time, Barritt describes in this beautifully illustrated volume a naval mission that is full of action and interest for both the general reader and the naval professional.

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