

1997

Nelson's Battles: The Art of Victory in the Age of Sail

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Recommended Citation

Mispelkamp, Peter K.H (1997) "Nelson's Battles: The Art of Victory in the Age of Sail," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 50 : No. 3 , Article 46.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol50/iss3/46>

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After reading this thoughtful history of the last days of the Revenue Cutter Service and Life-Saving Service, I look forward to the next volume in the series. There has been much change in the Coast Guard, and no lack of events for King to chronicle. The Coast Guard's activities in this century have been considerable: participating in two world wars; creating an aviation arm; enforcing Prohibition; absorbing the Light-house Service and the Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation; creating the Coast Guard Reserve and Coast Guard Auxiliary; and taking on environmental duties.

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Tracy, Nicholas. *Nelson's Battles: The Art of Victory in the Age of Sail*. London: Chatham, 1996. 224pp. £28

There is no doubt that Horatio Nelson's name will always be associated with victory. His tactical innovation, charismatic leadership, and devotion to duty have become legendary. Yet there is a definite shortage of one-volume accounts on Nelson's strategy and tactics, and this volume offers to fill that void. Tracy is a well known authority on the era of sail, but there is another compelling reason why we should read this work: it is one of the first under the imprint of a new publishing company, founded by the original directors of Conway Maritime Press.

The text is divided into five sections and a concluding epilogue. It also

features a thought-provoking foreword by David Brown, a brief suggested-reading list, and a detailed index. The book is profusely illustrated with contemporary drawings of ships, equipment, and key personages, as well as official portraits. In general, they complement the text, are of good quality, and bear the mark of careful selection. The publishers have also included a collection of tactical maps depicting crucial stages of key battles throughout the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. While the lack of detailed line drawings of various ships is disappointing, it does not detract from the utility of this book for its stated purpose.

The first section provides a very brief introduction to Nelson's early career, as well as a good summary of England's dependence on, and appreciation of, sea power. The second is primarily devoted to ships, sailors, equipment, tactics, and strategy during the early days of Nelson's career. The third analyses four battles, including Cape St. Vincent (1797), where Nelson first made a name for himself, and concludes with his first major victory at the Battle of the Nile (1799). The last two sections detail Nelson's greatest triumphs, Copenhagen (1801) and Trafalgar (1805). Tragically, the last victory was achieved at the cost of his life.

Tracy's narrative makes it clear that Nelson's tactics were based as much on innovation as on careful assimilation of the lessons of earlier battles. His impetuosity, dynamic leadership, and inherent ability to take the measure of the enemy's weaknesses and willingness to fight are the elements that define the "Nelson Touch." To his credit, Tracy

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has not attempted to write another biography of Nelson, nor has he indulged in hagiography. Nelson's few faults as a commander are illustrated and his main human failings (vanity and an unscrupulous disregard for the sanctity of marriage) are also discussed; given the focus of this work, the author could easily have ignored them. In his subject's defense, Tracy argues that the traumatic head wound that Nelson received at the Battle of the Nile may have rendered him more susceptible to the seductive charms of Lady Hamilton.

Fortunately, Nelson's lapses in judgment were usually confined to the conduct of his personal life ashore and not his commands at sea. In the end, his vanity may have contributed to his death aboard the *Victory*—but when he was fatally wounded, the outcome of the Battle of Trafalgar was no longer in doubt. Tracy is undoubtedly correct when he alleges that because the Royal Navy has tended to emphasize the wrong aspects of Nelson's tactics and strategy, it has failed to appreciate the strength of his humanity, his leadership style, and the tactical freedom that he always sought and freely granted to his subordinates.

Overall, this is a well written and carefully researched study of the man and of the weapons, tactics, and strategy that contributed to the defeat of Napoleon's forces at sea. It offers insight into the successes and failures of the Royal Navy since the eighteenth century. There are many modern commanders who may still have something to learn from Nelson's example of the true essence of leadership. Therefore this will be a welcome addition to their library and of naval historians. It clearly shows

that the directors of Chatham have lost none of their "Conway touch."

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Hough, Richard. *Captain James Cook: A Biography*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1995. 327pp. \$29.95

What always amazes me about Richard Hough is the number of books, both fiction and nonfiction, that he has written over the years about seagoing figures and maritime tales—keeping in mind that he served, not in the navy, but as a fighter pilot in the Royal Air Force during World War II.

This work is unlike his 1979 book about Cook's last voyage; it is more scholarly, with a less colorful narrative. Hugh begins his tale with a glimpse into the life of the newly commissioned lieutenant aboard HMS *Endeavour*, who in 1768 was given sealed orders to conduct celestial observations, discover an unknown continent, survey coastlines, study the people, examine the botany, and, with the support of the natives, colonize the land in the name of King George III. This was James Cook's first command.

Twenty-eight chapters trace the naval career of Captain James Cook. Through tireless research and analysis of archives, logs, and records from London to Tasmania, Hough brings to life one of the greatest navigators ever to exist. He reviews Cook's journey from a small Yorkshire town through three global circumnavigations. Hough begins with Cook's early infatuation with the sea. He joined a merchant shipping family