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Colin White and the 1805 Club, **The Trafalgar Captains: Their Lives and Memorial**, Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2005. 128 pp., maps, illustrations, bibliography.

Reviewed by Charles Steele

Department of History, United States Air Force Academy

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In writing *The Trafalgar Captains, Their Lives and Memorials*, Colin White and 13 select members of the 1805 Club set out to rescue from obscurity the neglected heroes of what has passed into history as Nelson's final triumph. In taking on the task of introducing a new generation to the men who led their ships into action on 21 October 1805, the authors have produced a compact guide that contains much that is useful to those interested in the age of Nelson and little that is not. Indeed, if this small tribute lends itself to criticism it is that in its slightness, often a result of a dearth of information, it may only serve to whet one's appetite for details concerning the lives and actions of these remarkable men.

The book is a mere 128 pages, yet it does an admirable job in serving as a specialized biographical encyclopedia. Proceeding alphabetically, White and his associates furnish accounts of each captain's role at Trafalgar and provide synopses of the lives of the 37 men who were most instrumental in bringing Nelson's tactical vision to life. The compact biographical portraits span the ranges of experience from Nelson's second in command, Vice Admiral Cuthbert Collingwood, to the Lieutenant commanding the 10-gun cutter HMS *Entreprenante*, Robert Benjamin Young. This compendium serves well to augment any existing history of the great battle. While it has long been possible for students of Nelson to gain familiarity with the names and strengths of the ships in his majesty's service at Trafalgar, there have not been many sources that offer acquaintance with the men who commanded them. In producing this colorful guide, White and company have filled an important gap.

As with any compilation the quality of individual contributions varies from author to author and while some sketches are less enthralling than others, one should not assume that because the individual accounts are brief that this book is void of artistry. For instance, the well regarded author Stephen Howarth (along with his father, David, the author of *Nelson: The Immortal Memory*) succinctly pays tribute to most of the men whose lives are detailed in this book by evaluating an officer who was not extraordinary in comparison to his brethren at Trafalgar. The story of the captain of HMS *Minotaur*, Charles John Moore Mansfield, helps to identify one of the key problems in assembling a work of this type and it also calls attention to the extraordinarily high expectations that attended the assumption of a ship's command in the days of Nelson. Howarth notes that owing to a lack of correspondence and other evidence, it is

difficult to know much about Mansfield. However, in ascribing to him the qualities of being “able but average” he continues on to make the point that “[i]n another era, he might have been more distinguished; yet like today, it was on the ‘able but average’ that so much fundamentally depended” (p. 94).

Perhaps it was because the Royal Navy produced so many excellent commanders that their full stories did not seem worthy of great attention in their own time. As a result of this unfortunate circumstance, instead of satiating all yearnings to know of more than the captains’ roles in the battle, readers may at times find that they are merely being tantalized. How else would one describe the account offered by John Goddard of the abrupt end of HMS *Dreadnaught*’s captain John Conn, who, while commanding HMS *Swiftsure* in a pursuit in the vicinity of Bermuda, “fell overboard and, although boats were lowered and the utmost endeavours [sic] made to save him, these were unfortunately without effect and he was drowned” (p. 46). Without further details, one can only wonder how so able a seaman as Conn managed to meet such an inglorious end.

In addition to detailing the lives and deaths of the Trafalgar Captains, White and his compatriots provide a practical guide to the monuments erected to immortalize the men most responsible for giving Nelson his greatest victory. Whether a humble grave marker, or as in the case of Nelson and his most socially and militarily prominent subordinates who were honored with multiple and often times quite elaborate memorials, the curious shall not want for details concerning the final tributes to these captains. In providing references to the locations of the memorials, and when possible pictures as well, this book becomes indispensable as both a guide for history buffs wanting to make a pilgrimage to the memorials of Nelson’s captains, and to the student of history eager to learn more about the men who commanded the victorious ships at the battle of Trafalgar.



The Editors  
International Journal of Naval History  
[editors@ijnhonline.org](mailto:editors@ijnhonline.org)

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