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C. Northcote Parkinson, **Portsmouth Point: The Navy in Fiction 1793-1815**, Liverpool University Press, 2005, 156 pp.

C. Northcote Parkinson, ed. **Samuel Walters, Lieutenant R.N.: Memoirs of a Naval Officer in Nelson's Navy**, Liverpool University Press, 2005, 156 pp.

Review by John T. Broom

Norwich University

Being a former soldier as well as a military historian concentrating on the development of military thought and doctrine my interest in things nautical is somewhat paradoxical. However, I was introduced to war gaming at an early age and while I was in college became enamored of war games centered on the sailing ships of the Napoleonic era. This naturally led me to begin reading both naval history and the fiction derived from the glory days of wooden ships and iron men.

I quickly discovered the Hornblower series and the 'fictional' biography of Horatio Hornblower written by C. Northcote Parkinson. Shortly afterwards I found Parkinson's 'Delancy' series. I was hooked. I consumed Dudley Pope's 'Ramage' series and Alexander Kent's 'Bolitho' saga. Of course Patrick O'Brien's 'Aubrey/Maturin' series captured my attention even though getting the British books was somewhat difficult back in the 70s and early 80s. In time I also found the 'Privateers and Gentlemen' Series by Jon Williams to be a fun read. So it was with great joy that I discovered that Liverpool University Press had re-released two of Parkinson's early works *Portsmouth Point: The Navy in Fiction 1793-1815* and *Samuel Walters LT R.N.*

Obviously these two early works, one a historical examination of early nautical fiction and the other the editing of a rather typical Royal Navy officer's reminisces of his days in Nelson's Navy, form the bedrock of Parkinson's later fictional writings on Hornblower and Delancy. When combined with his purely historical writing on Sir Edward Pellew and the Royal Navy of the period; Parkinson established himself as perhaps the most qualified of the many authors of naval sailing ship nautical fiction.

Portsmouth Point is the essential reference for any author or reader endeavoring to understand nautical fiction. The combination of Parkinson's insights into the realities of the Nelsonian Navy and his judicious quotations and discussions of 19th Century memoirs and 'fictional' accounts forms a basis for any good research for someone interested in the period. In breaking down the subject into specific topical areas, he provides a ready reference guide to virtually every critical aspect of the period. Admittedly it is not an exciting read, but the depth of detail and sense of the period makes up for the lack of edge of your seat reading. Simply reading it one walks away with a good sense of the reality of late 18th and early 19th Century life in the Royal Navy.

His editing of Lt. Samuel Walters' memoirs to include their comments on the often tedious and frustrating duties of blockade so common to the Royal Navy as well as the astute insights provided for such little known campaigns as the seizure of Buenos Aires and Montevideo by joint British forces including such luminaries as Admiral Popham, Generals Beresford and 'Black Bob Crauford' before they gained later fame, adds to both the historical values of his editorship and our knowledge of these lesser known campaigns. Reading much like a logbook, leaving out the tedious daily navigational plottings, Walters' memoirs discuss the significant events of his career from 1805-1810. Walters is no grand hero seeking to establish his legacy, instead he appears to be a competent sailor and a solid if uninspired officer doing his duty for King and Country.

Serving aboard a variety of large frigates and small ships of the line, Walters' commentary re-emphasizes the continual struggles that even the seemingly dominant

Royal Navy had in the post-Trafalgar period. With ships ever in demand, the apparent ease with which the French and Spanish ships repeatedly escaped from British ships tells a different story than one gets solely from reading either general histories and from even well done nautical fiction. It always seems in Walters' world that the British ships are either too few to conduct effective blockades or too slow to capture the evading French vessels.

Personally, I found his discussion of the South American Campaign of 1806-07 to be the highlight of the work. In addition the account of the actions around Ile De Bourbon (which had actually been renamed Reunion by the French Revolutionary Government in 1792) and Ile de France (today called Mauritius) in 1810. Theses lesser known British campaigns seldom receive the coverage that the European or North American campaigns of the Royal Navy do.

All in all, these are two wonderful additions for anyone interested in the Royal Navy of the Napoleonic era.



The Editors
International Journal of Naval History
editors@ijnhonline.org

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