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Joseph F. Callo, **Nelson in the Caribbean: The Hero Emerges, 1784-1787**. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2002. 248 pp, illustrations, chronology, notes, bibliography, index, \$34.95, cloth; ISBN. 1-55750-206-4.

Reviewed by LCDR Douglas McLean, Officer in Charge (Canadian Forces Contingent), Naval Air Station, Whidbey Island.

England's most famous naval hero, Admiral Horatio Nelson, continues to be an inspiration for authors. This latest contribution to the library of Nelson literature comes from a retired Rear Admiral in the US Naval reserve. In this slim volume Callo endeavours to draw lessons from a critical formative period in Nelson's early career, a period not usually the focus of scholarly study. The three year's he spent as the senior Royal Naval officer afloat in the West Indies proved a turbulent time, witnessing strong disputes between Nelson and local authorities - including the shore-based Admiral commanding the West Indies - as well as an opportunity to meet and marry his wife. There is therefore an abundance of issues to explore.

The author employs a thematic approach, touching upon chronological events while also moving forward and backward through time to develop the topics he has chosen. Callo also diverts his account when appropriate to explore geo-strategic and economic forces at play in this period. Consequently the narrow dates indicated in the title are not entirely accurate. The intent of this approach is worthwhile, but overall the context provided by Callo is not always sufficient or persuasive. The focus on military and naval aspects is too narrow at important points, undermining some of the arguments put forward.

The most important theme that Callo pursues is Nelson's leadership. He examines the qualities that were already evident in the young naval Captain when appointed to command HMS *Boreas*, his ship while in the West Indies, and discusses their development under the stresses and events of the three focal years. This is perhaps the

best element of the book, with Callo competently drawing upon his own insights and experience as well as the extant literature on this subject to sketch out a useful analysis. He notes Nelson's quick intelligence, and capacity for rapid decision buttressed by a willingness to take risks - invariably well-calculated risks, but often perilous indeed for Nelson himself in either physical or career terms. Nelson's ability to inspire peers and subordinates, closely related in many ways to his willingness to assume these risks, is also drawn out in the book.

Callo's effort to explain the strategic and naval aspects of this period of Nelson's career is less successful. His review of the War for America, which ended shortly before Nelson's appointment to the Caribbean, emphasises the importance of having sufficient naval power in order to achieve victory. He notes as well the paucity of ships in the West Indies under Nelson, ensuring that only intermittent control of events could be achieved. Ultimately Callo concludes that the tendency, common to the Royal Navy of Nelson's period in the West Indies and to the United States Navy today, to 'build to ... budget, rather than to the potential threats' (p 193) is lamentable. While there may be some truth in his assessment, the problem of identifying an appropriate force structure is far more complex than the unfortunately cursory analysis found in this book would indicate. In many ways Callo reduces the argument to an excessive level of simplicity.

Perhaps the greatest weakness is the book's failure to identify the many dimensions involved in determining the size of a military or naval force. Diplomatic, social and even cultural considerations have real, if not always appreciated, weight. One of the reasons the Royal Navy suffered serious defeats in the War for America was not simply that the Royal Navy was too small (for budgetary or other reasons), but also because the diplomatic policy followed through many of the years of that war offended so many nations, resulting in Britain becoming embroiled in conflict with almost all of Europe as well as the Thirteen Colonies. Adopting a unilateral policy that few other nations agree with creates potential threats that almost no military force can consistently overcome. In some ways the strict enforcement of the Navigation Acts by the Royal Navy in the 1770's and early 1780's created potential threats that could not be met successfully by force alone, even if a generous budget were provided. In short, Callo's narrow focus on military and budgetary issues ensures that his theme on force size is

inadequately developed, and his conclusion unconvincing. Victor Davis Hanson's recent book, *Carnage and Culture*, is vastly superior in its canvassing of the many issues associated with a nation developing its military and naval force structure.

It is not easy to identify the intended audience for this book. Aside from specialists on Nelson, there are not likely to be many interested in studying this small slice of his life in detail. Generalists with an interest in Nelson can turn to many outstanding biographies for fuller accounts. As a case study in leadership there is some value here, but the author dilutes his focus to look at other issues, many of which are not well developed. Nelson aficionados may find it somewhat worthwhile, but general readers may be disappointed.



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