

C S FORESTER SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

No. 6 July 2001

No summer meeting

Next meeting – 22nd September 2001 – London

possible visit to Sapperton Tunnel – March 2002 (see Hornblower & The Atropos)

Hornblower AandE miniseries – not yet shown in the UK

The Hornblower series has won six Emmy awards for art direction, costumes, hairstyling, makeup, camera sound mixing, special visual effects

Hip Hip Horatio!

The new two-part series of Horatio Hornblower episodes based on Lieutenant Hornblower were broadcast on the Arts and Entertainment TV channel in the US on 8th April 2001 – the rest of the world is still waiting to see them.

TV Guide:

Josh Rottenberg reported in the TV Guide that a huge water tank and 15 foot model of British sailing warships were used at Pinewood Studios to create the navy for the film. This has reduced the dependence on actual sailing ships with all the consequent perils to a shooting schedule brought by inclement weather, uncooperative winds and even seasickness.

Casting

Continuity, however, is assured by again casting Ioan Gruffudd in the title role into which he grows as an actor in parallel with his progress as an ambitious naval officer. The Director, Andrew Grieve is reported to have remarked on his transition from

boyishness to manhood since they started on the series.

Action

There is plenty of action as before, with ship-to-ship battles as well as hand-to-hand fighting. Another dimension is added by the inclusion of the tale of the progressive paranoia and madness of Captain Sawyer. We shall never know, however, how he came to fall down the hatchway.



Naval Gazer – Dean King

Dean King achieved prominence by writing a biography of Patrick O'Brian without being allowed to interview his subject. He also contributes a short article in the TV Guide on C S Forester.

Escapism

Three Hornblower books were written before the Second World War, and immediately became a favourite escapist's vehicle away from the terrors of warfare. It may have struck a chord that in Hornblower's time, England stood alone against an invading European dictator, much as in the early months of World War II.

Success

Whatever the reason, Hornblower was an immediate success. King considers that his complexity, dark moods and constant self-doubt (despite his obvious competence) made him one of Britain's best-loved literary characters. King finishes with the compliment that, although Patrick O'Brian's books may be of a higher literary order, none are better loved than Forester's.

Two Sides of C S Forester – Jerusalem Post, 1954 – Paula Arnold.

Hornblower and the Atropos – Little Brown, Boston. 325 pp. \$3.75. *The Nightmare* – Little Brown. 242pp. \$3.50

Mr Forester has few gaps left in the career of his hero. The section of the Hornblower saga under review, chronologically the third in the series, fills one of them neatly. It is the year 1805 with Hornblower in his first command: supervising the funeral of Nelson; taking on a French privateer which had daringly posed as a British boat in an English port; picking up sunken treasure in Turkish waters against the laws of the sea; and fighting a Spanish frigate on his way home.

Personally, I liked the first chapter best, when Hornblower and his Maria travel all across England on a canal tug, the young new captain shelving his dignity to help propel the ungainly craft through a long tunnel, lying on his back and pushing with his feet. But the whole is as good as ever, with the mixture as before – derring-do and ingenuity, even cunning, spiced with human traits.

(cont on back page)

Be Prepared! For those long winter evenings - superb metal model kits of Napoleon era ships are available from Skytrex of Loughborough, UK. Tel: 01509 213789

Second Annual General Meeting

The AGM was held on Saturday 24th March 2001 at 5.00pm in Green College, Oxford.

Minutes of previous meeting were agreed

- ❖ 10 members were present. New members were welcomed
- ❖ A minutes silence was held in Memory of John Perrott
- ❖ Present Officers of the Society were voted in unopposed
- ❖ A resume of the previous twelve months events was given by the Chairman
- ❖ Subscriptions to continue at £5.00pa for UK and \$10.00pa for overseas members
- ❖ Membership is now 80 covering eight different countries
- ❖ Society to continue in its present format
- ❖ Discussion on the merits of setting up a bulletin board on the website took place.
- ❖ The meeting concluded with a presentation by Count Nikolai Tolstoy

It is with regret that we report the sudden death of Chris Moss on 11 May 2001. He was a founder member and regular attendee at our meetings and will be a great and sad loss to the Society.

Count Nikolai Tolstoy, author, historian, stepson and biographer of Patrick O'Brian addressed the C S Forester Society on 24th March 2001. His subject was C S Forester and Patrick O'Brian: Parallel Lives?

Count Tolstoy began reading the Hornblower novels when a schoolboy and had not re-read them until now, and he found them still to be a 'good read.'

Forester and Patrick O'Brian had many similarities; for instance, both changed their names. Both Forester and O'Brian sheltered behind the Official Secrets Act to cover what they did during the war.

A difference between the two authors was that John Forester reported the meanness of his father whereas Patrick O'Brian was extraordinarily generous, giving his stepson hard-earned fivers when they could scarcely be afforded.

It is curious that they chose to write novels with a common theme. It would have angered O'Brian to be compared for that reason alone. They wrote about the ship's captain who was in a very unusual position. Like Forester, he was a voracious reader of contemporary accounts. O'Brian was not Irish but re-invented himself as an Irishman. Both Forester and O'Brian were the youngest child and rather apart. O'Brian sought refuge in writing and particularly about the eighteenth century, very early on even adopting an eighteenth century style in

his correspondence and speech (unlike Forester whose letters were gossipy and much as anyone would write). In neither case of Jack Aubrey nor Horatio Hornblower did they take part in any of the great set-piece battles. Perhaps because their authors preferred the feeling of being out on their own, surrounded by the old friends. The sea is an easier world to write about because it is more controlled and more dependent on other factors of history.

O'Brian's deception was far greater and less vulnerable than Forester's. His surname was Russ, and his grandfather was an immigrant German furrier who came to this country at the turn of the century and prospered. His family did not embarrass O'Brian, who published at an early age despite being educated at home, and published three books under his own name.

During the war, Tolstoy's mother met O'Brian and they married under the name of Russ. Two weeks later they changed their names by deed poll. After the war they lived in great poverty in Wales and Patrick O'Brian persuaded people that he had always been called O'Brian until the spiteful revelation by the Daily Telegraph

two years before his death. They then moved to a tiny flat in southern France close to where Cochrane destroyed all the Spanish shipping in Rosas harbour. They eventually bought a little vineyard and they, themselves built a modest house to escape to and write.

Tolstoy thought if someone had challenged Forester that he was really Smith, it would not have been the end of his life, in contrast to O'Brian who had a very private life. O'Brian's view was that there was no call for biographies despite having himself written very good, well-researched, biographies of Picasso and Sir Joseph Banks. Forester fabricated an acquaintance with the famous, such as Hemingway. O'Brian had never met Picasso either. Maybe such invention is what a novelist is for?

Count Tolstoy concluded with "Forester's *The Commodore* is, the first novel I have ever bought. It is much more extravagant than paying a guinea for, say, the learned job (i.e. a straightforward history book). It is a good tale but not as satisfying as the other Hornblower stories. Smacks a little of formula and wants design. Also it has not a great deal of meat. Or, if it has, a greater length is required to give it body."

Extract from Patrick O'Brian's diary, 1945

BOOK REVIEWS

Novelist and Storyteller: The Life of C.S. Forester By John Forester ISBN 0-940558-04-1

Review by Professor John Bayley, Professor of English, University of Oxford "The Good Sailor"

Good novelists and good storytellers are not necessarily good men. That is one simple lesson to be learnt from John Forester's long and fascinating account of his father's life. The latest researchers incline to think that the case was much the same with Shakespeare, and perhaps the news will not come as much of a surprise either to close and devoted readers of the great plays, or – come to that – readers of the remarkable tales of C.S. Forester (real name Cecil Lewis Troughton Smith).

John Forester is candid about his father's shortcomings, but not, one feels, biased or unfair. In one sense, too, the addicted reader of the Forester's novels and stories has already got – or comes to have – a pretty good idea of what their author was like. In a curious way this is a sign of just how good they are. They don't proclaim their author, but they quietly disclose him. As stories they all have the qualities which are out of fashion today – straightforwardness, readability, technical and human interest which does its job without intruding on the reader's pleasure and curiosity. They remind me of the supreme importance of what might be called Scheherazade's Law. That wily lady kept her head on her shoulders by keeping the Sultan guessing, not by any special narrative ingenuity but by stopping at a moment where he feels he must know what happens next. Our curiosity about Hornblower is not about the man himself, but for what next will happen to him, and how he will deal with it. And the same is true, in varying degrees, of the heroes of all Forester's stories.

And what about the women? Several of his friends, as well as his two wives, were to remark with varying degrees of tact that he could not portray a woman convincingly or give them any interest as individuals. This seems to me only partly true. The heroine of *The African Queen*, for instance, displays that strength of mind and inner determination which are to be found equally in genteel suburbs, colonial outposts, or among aristocrats and great ladies of the present and the past. Like her "brother", Sir Arthur Wellesley (the relationship, although wholly fictitious, is none the less curiously convincing), his fictional sister, Lady Barbara, does what has to be done, and what the patrician's view of duty tells her she has to do; and as it happens this quality goes perfectly with the nature of the tale she is part of its excitements and its overall psychology. Lady Barbara looking after the wounded on board the *Lydia* in *The Happy Return* is, at least momentarily, such another figure, although where Hornblower's emotions are concerned she is not much more than a dream of wish-fulfilment.

Women, none the less, are an important key to the psychology of the novels. A good woman will aid a man in his work and play activities, however little she understands them, a bad woman will not. This is shown most clearly in *Randall and the River of Time*, in its way a promising novel, and one in which I used to regret the absence of a sequel. The Comtesse de Graçay in *Flying Colours* is wish-fulfilment of a particularly self indulgent kind, but she has one admirable moment when she comes secretly to say goodbye to Hornblower before his departure with Bush down the River Loire. She tells him without bitterness and almost with affection that he will never know what love is all about, and disappears before a for once speechless Hornblower can find a word in reply.

The more recent naval novelist Patrick O'Brian is not much more convincing about women than was Forester, although they fit more easily into the essentially social and conversational pattern of his novels. When it comes to action Forester beats O'Brian hands down, however: it is in the interplay of action and technology that we see Forester at his best. John Forester gently points out that his father often got things wrong: the unforgettable description of going through Sapperton tunnel in a canal-boat, at the beginning of *Hornblower and the Atropos*, is apparently inaccurate and misleading in some respects; as is the equally memorable account of tacking ship, and the pursuit by the frigate Loire, in *Hornblower and the Hotspur*. But the great thing for such an author, as Kipling very well knew, is not so much to get the thing right as to seem to get it right: the effect, as sober and fascinating as the details can make it, is much more important than are the requirements of more pedantic accuracy.

John Forester effectively blends loyalty to his father with a clear-sighted awareness of his faults and of the good and bad sides of his character. He is also highly aware of the close relation between life and art in Forester's works, about which he is often extremely illuminating. To say that Hornblower is essentially the same man as his creator would be an oversimplification, but the whole effectiveness of the Hornblower novels depends on the subtlety of the relationship between the author and character, and its comfortable, if unspoken, intimacy. Hornblower's exploits are, of course, his creator's own kind of wish-fulfillments, but they none the less correspond in some quite subtle sense with what the creator might feel himself capable of doing in the world of fact, as in the world of imagination. As a doctor's son in class-conscious late 18th century England, Hornblower has to make his own way in the world, as Forester himself had



to do (though Hornblower had no elder brother, as Forester had, to give him a hand and help pay his expenses as a medical student – an abortive career which was soon abandoned).

Hornblower's "consciousness" is an exceptionally solitary one, dominating the novels entirely, and in a way that for the reader, at least for the reader who has become addictive, is quite remarkably comfortable and cosy. It is tempting to compare the case of Ian Fleming's James Bond, whose "reflection-life" occupies the whole space in each novel in the same way, and is equally obviously the reflection-life of Ian Fleming. Neither in Fleming nor in Forester are there any other characters except those required for a story.

What about Lieutenant Bush it might be asked? All Hornblower fans are fond of Bush, but in an unmistakably patronising way, as are Hornblower and his creator themselves. Bush has no centre of his own: he is far from being even a Sancho Panza, let alone a narrator in his own right like Dr. Watson. Hornblower is "absurdly gratified" when he wakes up after an idyllic picnic and night on an island in the Loire to find the sleeping Bush's arm flung protectively across his. There is of course no suggestion of explicit homosexual feeling, and the relationship is one long standardised, indeed almost hallowed in heroic fiction, going back to Achilles and Patroclus, or David and Jonathan. In simpler and humbler forms such relationships must have been common enough in the world of the navy.

But what about Forester's own feelings? Did they diverge here from the persona and consciousness of his creation? Possibly. His son reveals the existence of a large library of pornography, but does not say whether this had any specifically homosexual vent.

The question is not really relevant, for sex in all Forester novels is a standardised affair, strictly subordinated to the requirements of action and of various kinds of more technical interest. One of the pleasures of our relationship with Hornblower, none the less, is to share with him while we are reading the book his own kind of consciousness of the world and its affairs, sex included. Many of us dream of Lady Barbara or a Vicomtesse de Graçay, or someone more or less like them. But first things first: it is more important to get our interior fictive lives in proportion; and this means where our Hornblower consciousness is concerned that eighteen-pounders are more important than sex, or even six-pounders (handy for demolishing a pursuing boatload of French soldiers).

Facts in John Forester's account of his father can give as much pleasure as they do in his father's novels. How agreeable to find that Forester's senior colleague while he worked (and hated it) at a Hollywood studio, was called Busch, while the name of a really big cheese was Hornblow and that there was a Barbara around as a photographer. Most of the cast of *The Happy Return*, in fact, supplied gratis, and at a time when the author was himself dreaming and longing to get back to England, to complete the first novel that was to make him famous.

John Bayley, July 2001

Ordering information for copies shipped to England.
Order from John Forester, 7585 Church St., Lemon Grove, CA 91945-2306, USA. Tel: 619-644-5481 www.johnforester.com
Price \$45 book plus \$20 shipping (by air post; sea post takes a long time, is not much cheaper).
Send either cheque payable on US bank or International Money Order.
Copies will be numbered and signed to the purchaser from author.



FUN SECTION – (Quiz 6 cont)

7. Match the stars to the film

- | | | |
|-------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| Humphrey Bogart | Geoffrey Keen | Payment Deferred |
| Cary Grant | Ioan Gruffudd | Brown on Resolution |
| Katherine Hepburn | Robert Lindsey | Sink the Bismarck |
| John Mills | Antony Sher | The Pride and the Passion |
| Sophia Loren | Dana Wynter | The African Queen |
| Frank Sinatra | Maurice Denham | Horatio Hornblower |
| Gregory Peck | Robert Beatty | Capt Horatio Hornblower RN |
| Robert Morley | Virginia Mayo | Hornblower |
| Charles Laughton | James Robertson Justice | Sailor of the King |
| Kenneth More | Maureen O'Sullivan | |
| Michael Horden | Jeffrey Hunter | |

COCHRANE: The Life and Exploits of a Fighting Captain by Robert Harvey 2000 London Constable
382 p, illustrations 11, maps 4. ISBN 1-84119-162-0
Review by Dr Colin Blogg

One of the fascinations of reading the Hornblower novels is trying to guess who the model was that C.S.Forester used on which to base his hero. Many have been suggested –ranging from Nelson and Gordon, to Pellew and Boscawen. Having now read this latest account of the extraordinary life and career of Thomas Cochrane, it is tempting to ask of Cochrane who was his model. This factual account of his life reads more like a tale of fiction, full of adventure and excitements perhaps better described as 'exploits'?

He was a man of contrasts. Consider his background –noble, but only in a Scottish sense. A landed aristocrat but virtually penniless. He was painstaking in his preparation for battle to ensure minimal loss of life of his forces; yet he devised innovative ways of mass destruction of civilians. The justification was that such destruction would hasten the end of fighting and thereby ultimately reduce death and destruction; a consummate tactician of sailboats, he also pioneered the introduction of steam power. Cochrane's naval career initially was blessed by phenomenal success, but he suffered others badly and they responded in kind. On reaching the rank of Captain, he found that his opportunities to display his genius in single ship actions were thwarted.

A combination of idealism, opportunity and the looming unemployment, which followed the ending of the Napoleonic wars, resulted in Cochrane being elected (with the help of some injudicious bribery) to Parliament. There too he found a made enemies and spent a while in jail from which he boldly escaped to reappear in the Houses of Parliament!

He had fought fiercely for his country, and then, disillusioned, bitter and broke, he abandoned patriotism to command in turn the navies of Chile, Brazil and then Greece before gaining financial reward and acceptance by the Establishment.

Cochrane's ingenuity as a fighting Captain probably exceeds Hornblower's. This leads to the conclusion that CSF had access to less original or biographical material than Robert Harvey. For instance, Cochrane, pursued by three faster, bigger, better-armed ships and apparently doomed, suddenly hove to. His opponents could not stop and sailed on. When they eventually were able to change course and try to claw their way back after Cochrane again he was beyond pursuit.

Again, in an encounter with a superior ship, he used his smaller size to sail inside the closest range of the opposing cannons which could not be depressed enough to bear on him.

Harvey warms to his task after a dry beginning. The account of Cochrane's life then becomes as fascinating as that of Horatio Hornblower. It lacks of course the excitement of narrative, but makes up for that by the frequent, but maddeningly un-referenced, snippets from contemporary accounts. Scholarship and quality of the research necessary to produce this book does not intrude to interrupt the flow. The illustrations usefully give flesh to the word descriptions of Cochrane. The four maps (charts?) usefully complement the intricate accounts of sea battles.

On the loss of Patrick O'Brian, we deserve a successor to write the all-time sequel of 'Hornblower and Cochrane meet Aubrey and Maturin'. Having now completed reading this compelling and readable biography, I now know who would win!

Colin Blogg
June 2001



Date for your diary:

next meeting of the C S Forester Society will be on Saturday 22nd September 2001
A film show – Brown on Resolution and The African Queen

Venue: Chapel Public House, 8 Chapel Street, London NW1
(near main Edgware Road underground station)

Time: 2.00-5.00pm

Further details will be sent out nearer the time.

Hornblower The Horse (and the Cat that Never Was)

Lawrence Brewer, June 2001

C S Forester's publisher of many years, Michael Joseph, was fond of racing and justified the hobby to his family by claiming he owned race-horses to advertise his authors and their books. That their costs were in part tax-deductible, made them still more attractive. In 1951 he spent the sum of £1000 on a horse he named "Midshipman Hornblower". The rider for the first race at Kempton Park on July 25 was one Lester Piggott, aged 15. Alas the result was a disappointing fourth – but he won at his third outing, triumphed at the Sidrena Stakes, and at the Teddington Selling Stakes came in second.

Encouraged by these successes Michael made a further purchase which he named "Lord Hornblower". A hurdler, new racing colours were designed; 'Navy blue, silver cross-belts and sleeves, striped cap'. Lord Hornblower came in second at the Newtown Maiden Stakes and had some success. The young Dick Francis was jockey on this occasion but sadly "Lord Hornblower" 'ended his days as a hack' (not that sort of hack, of course).

These details are taken from the biography of the publisher *Michael Joseph – Master of Words* by his son Richard Joseph (Ashford House Publishing 1986). There are many insights into the relationship between C S Forester and his publisher. CSF was among Joseph's first authors when he started his own publishing house and Heinemann were piqued to lose him. Joseph had been friendly with Forester over many years and in 1933 he wrote "... he excelled at boxing and cricket and despite his record of evil [this comment in repudiation of Foresters' own description of his school career as 'Undistinguished, except for my consistent naughtiness. I must have been easily the most wicked child or born'] contrived to achieve some remarkable success... It is refreshing to meet an author who was not invariably at the bottom of his class."

Before the Michael Joseph publishing house was formed, CSF had rung his agent A D Peters and hold him to send his next book there. It was *The General* and became a best-seller, occasioning H G Wells' comment:

The General is a magnificent piece of work and a portrait for all time of an individual in his period. I take my hat off – belatedly, I regret to say, because I see he has done half a score of books – to C S Forester.

The General – collectors will prize a first edition giving the publisher's address as 17/18 Henrietta Street, where Joseph's were located for only a few months in the autumn of 1937 – was chosen as Daily Mail Book of the Month. A letter from CSF to Joseph during WWII says that the British Army had come a long way since 1918 – the British generals he met in the USA had all read *The General* and said they liked it!

Among Michael Joseph's best sellers, the trilogy *Captain Hornblower* is noted as having sold 15,000 copies, and *Captain from Connecticut* over 30,000. Such successes encouraged the inclusion of Forester novels in the Mermaid Editions – a delightful collection to assemble today – their inexpensive, decorative and durable binding inspired by Bob Lusty.

During 1951 Michael Joseph announced the filming of *Captain Hornblower*, starring Gregory Peck. He took the occasion to comment that during the war years the Admiralty had offered CSF a post as Public Relations Officer inspired by their reading of *The Ship*. Back had come the cable, "Sorry, know nothing about ships". It emerged that *The Ship* was based essentially on conversations with the officers and men of HMS Penelope while she was in dry dock.

In the 1920's the two men had been dining at the Savage Club and Michael found himself picking up the tab as usual; 'Forester was known to be very frugal with his hospitality' – but it all changed when Michael Joseph were publishing the Hornblower series and CSF would insist on staying at the Savoy.

We are left with two mysteries. When Michael Joseph purchased his first horse he wanted to call it "Captain Hornblower" – but could not do so since a horse of that name was already registered in France (of all places). Can anyone shed light on this Gaelic pretender?

More speculative is the absence of one character from the Hornblower novels; the ship's cat. We meet pigs, hens, bullocks, rats and horses. But never a feline presence, despite its legendary marine role and reputation – and Michael Joseph adored the breed (see his wonderful book *Charles – the Story of a Friendship*). Are we brushed off with that trick of wind and waves, the cat's paw?

Michael Joseph – Master of Words by Richard Joseph
With acknowledgements to Richard Joseph

QUESTIONS & CORRESPONDENCE

One of many received via the website

Any comment? '...your little graphic of an anchor is not accurate, but I'm sure you know that and you are using it since it is the usual depiction even in heraldry. But as sea-going folk perhaps the society should review this. The symbol of the Admiralty is a "fouled" anchor. The upper bar has a slope, in an attempt to show the real thing, a 3 dimensional thing is hard to show as a graphic - yours wouldn't work. HJB.

Burial site

I recently learned from an article in our Orange County Register newspaper that Mr Forester is buried in Loma Vista Memorial Park, Fullerton, Ca. Since Fullerton is a long way from Berkeley, about 400 miles, I wonder why it was chosen as the great author's final resting place. Calling the cemetery to ask, they informed me that no-one there had any idea about a burial which took place so long ago! JY

PS There is a website with a picture of the grave stone...www.findagrave.com



FUN SECTION

Quiz 6

1. CSF went to Hollywood in 1935 at the invitation of?
 - a. Paramount Productions
 - b. Universal Studios
 - c. Walt Disney
 - d. MGM
 - e. Meridian

2. The film 'CSF was working on was discontinued when an almost identical pirate film was released:
 - a. What was the rival film called?
 - b. Which studio released it?
 - c. Who starred in it?
 - d. Name CSFs aborted film

3. CSF's producer was called:
 - a. Charles Blowhorn
 - b. Sean Blow
 - c. Arthur Hornblow
 - d. Karl Schornblau
 - e. Horace Hornschblau

4. CSF's collaborator was called:
 - a. Niven Busch
 - b. Neil Butsch
 - c. Niles Bush
 - d. Neiman Putsch
 - e. Rose Bush

5. Which of the following novels were made into films?
 - a. The Gun
 - b. The General
 - c. Death to the French
 - d. Two and Twenty
 - e. The Peacemaker
 - f. Plain Murder
 - g. Payment Deferred

6. Give the film or TV series made from these Books:
 - a. Brown on Resolution
 - b. Mr. Midshipman Hornblower
 - c. The Gun
 - d. Lieutenant Hornblower
 - e. Hunt the Bismarck

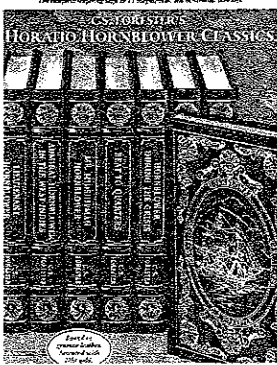
(cont...)

IN THE NEWS: In the Week (a weekly review newspaper feature in which notable people list their six favourite books) 14th July 2001, page 23 The List - Best Books chosen by Antony Woodward included *The African Queen*, who added 'At the same time as humble self-doubting Cockney mechanic Allnutt discovers he can shoot rapids, repair a propeller without tools, traverse leech-infested swamps, and even construct a torpedo, the reader, too, becomes infected with the belief that there's little that can't be achieved with sufficient self-belief.'



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Quiz 5 answers
 1 = e) c) a) b) d)
 2 = Geoffrey & Hugh in London
 Marjorie, Grace & Cecil in Cairo
 3 = c) whist
 4 = e) a) c) d) b)
 5 = a) b) c) d) – rejected
 6 = d)
 7 = d)
 8 = Annie Marble

A Pertinent Simile? Adrian Taylor, May 2001

It is not surprising that Sir Hugh Walpole described 'The Gun, together with 'Death to the French" (C.S. Forester's other Peninsular War story) as 'His best works... these two military episodes are remarkable for their vividness and commonsense. He writes like an eyewitness.' Forester, a masterly historical novelist, would employ the available primary source material as well as his considerable novelist's imagination.

It seems likely that an example of the former is to be found in 'A Soldier of the Seventy-First' which is the journal of an anonymous soldier in the Peninsular War (edited and with an introduction by Christopher Hibbert). This work contains a passage which may strike the reader of 'The Gun' as evidence of Forester's research:

'Many came up to the army dreadfully cut and wounded by the French cavalry, who rode through the long lines of those defenceless wretches, slashing among them as a schoolboy does amongst thistles.'

In 'The Gun' there appears:

'At any moment the Dragoons might appear in pursuit; the gunners had seen them in among the rear-guard once or twice already during the retreat, slashing about with their swords like a schoolboy among thistles.'

Although the incidents referred to in the two works do not relate to one another, it does seem likely that the literary labours of the unknown soldier were the origin of Forester's simile and therefore it is perhaps demonstrated that his fiction has a solid grounding in reality. It may be underlined though that there is no certainty in this matter when one bears in mind his prowess as a novelist.

References:

- 'A Soldier of the Seventy- First' Edited and with an introduction by Christopher Hibbert. 1975. Leo Cooper
- 'The Gun' C.S.Forester 1933 London John Lane, The Bodley Head

Editor's note: Whilst preparing this for the Newsletter, I happened to be re-reading 'Death to the French' and suddenly came across a strangely familiar passage in Chapter VI: 'the Frenchman caught up with the man on foot. The sabre flashed again as he swung it round, slashing like a boy with a stick at a nettle'

Little, Brown combined the two stories in one volume with a jacket design by Jan Daubrava. *Death to the French* was re-titled as 'Rifleman Dodd' for the American market and was published for the first time in the United States in 1942.

Footnote: On BBC-Radio 4 (23 July 2001) a description of 'the best cricket commentator', John Arlott, described a stroke as 'slashing, like taking a walking stick to a patch of nettles...'

(cont from front page)

The Nightmare is very different, a collection for ten stories, each more gruesome than the next, all about Nazi bestiality. Each could be true. Suffering, treachery, cruelty, horror, ruthlessness prevail, but there are also gentleness, love, and sacrifice. Perhaps the most significant of the tales, in view of certain developments in America, is "The Physiology of Fear", telling how a brilliant German scientist is assigned the task of finding out, experimenting

with slow torture and the like, how different people behave under the influence of fear. When he submits the results, showing that Nordics and "the lesser breeds" behave exactly alike, he is arrested and charged with treason. This is an excellent reminder of what should not be forgotten, but is recommended only to people with strong nerves.

Paula Arnold 4