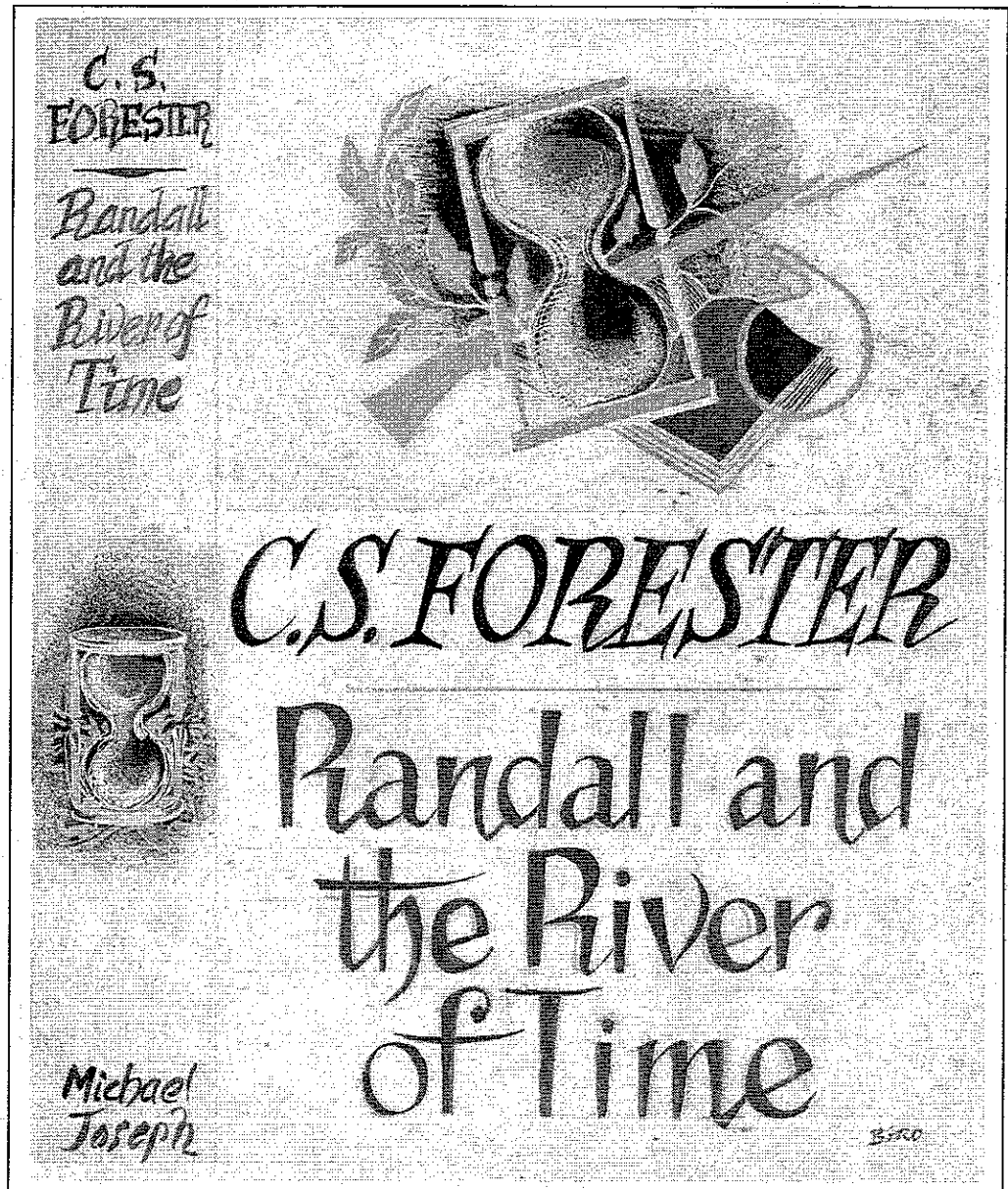


Reflections

A Literary Supplement to the Newsletter of the *CS Forester Society*

Number 11: November 2006

151 Walkley Crescent Road, Sheffield S6 5BA, UK. david-stead@lineone.net



Revised rough by Biro, 1953. Michael Joseph refused it and Biro started afresh with the familiar water and sundial. (This is a negative image of the original - red, buff, yellow & white on black background.)

DOCUMENT: Forester's Preface to the 1947 US edition of *The General*

ARTICLES: U97; Val Biro: artist & illustrator; Forester & the Spanish Civil War

FICTION: *Mr Midshipman Hawker* **LETTERS:** Jacques' Nelson touch;
Steamboats & tin cans; Completing the *Crisis*; Poetics & plain English

VAL BIRO: ARTIST AND ILLUSTRATOR for C S Forester and the *Hornblower* novels LAWRIE BREWER



The 1950s are now often described as the decade of harmony in English history; the nation emerging triumphant from World War II, the factories rebuilding, full and thriving; the assurance of welfare for all. It was now that CS Forester's *Hornblower* novels achieved wide circulation. Larger print runs succeeded the successful issues of the pre-war years, and paperbacks supplemented hardback editions.

The reader taking a *Hornblower* novel off the shelf at the bookshop, or settling to a re-read as a story is selected from a collection at home, is struck by the image on the book cover. Who can fail to remember that vivid sense of movement and sound from the Mermaid *Mr Midshipman Hornblower*, as the gawky young officer shouts for support and strives for activity in his boat? Who does not now recall the portent of those meaningful emblems on the ominous black cover of the Michael Joseph first edition?

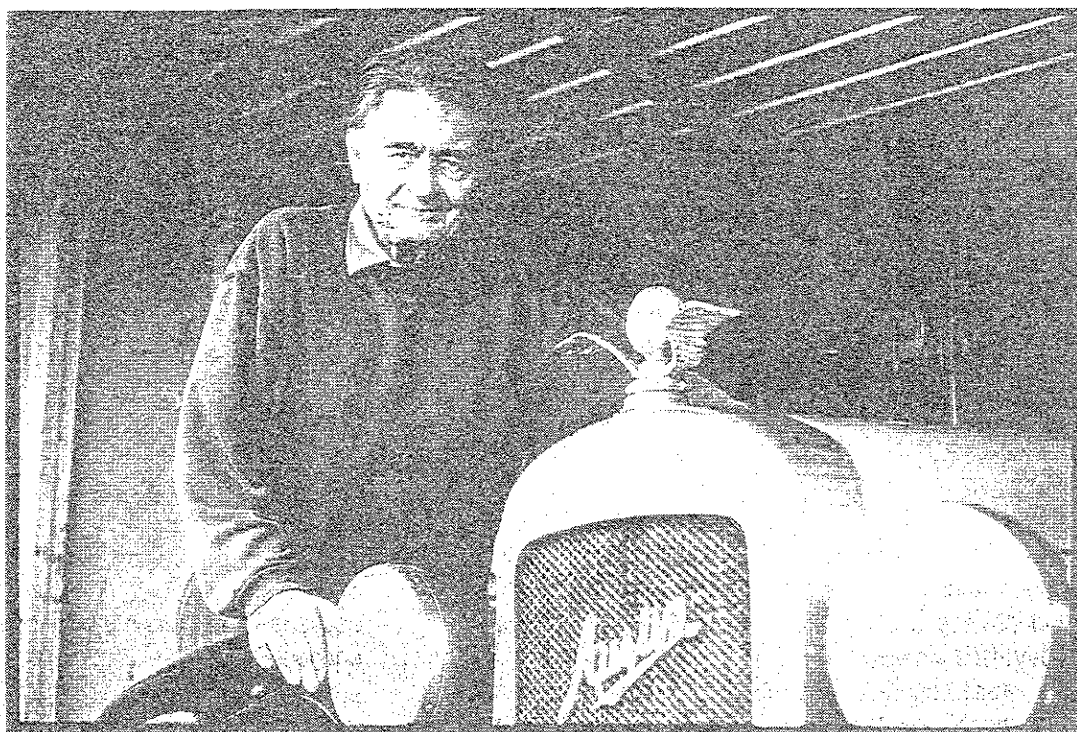
The interested reader would note a tiny name written, often aslant, on the cover illustration: *Biro*. In the late 1980s I was in correspondence with Robert Joseph after the publication of his memoir recalling his father's life, and I asked him who the mysterious Biro was. He referred me to Sir Robert Lusty of Hutchinson's and a former Director of Penguin Books better known as Chairman of the BBC – but when I wrote to him, the letter was returned since he had recently died. The impending entry of Hungary into

the European Union however provided the next clue: Biro is a not uncommon Hungarian name, I learnt from a succession of Hungarian au-pair girls. The name 'Gumdrop' came up in conversation: a 1926 Austin Heavy 12/4, the vehicle for a series of books for children, the author Val Biro. 'Val' a convenient English equivalent for the Hungarian name 'Balint'. 'Biro', rhyming with 'hero' – and no relation to the inventor of the ball-point pen!

Now the chase was on! I corresponded with the publishers of the Gumdrop books, Hodder & Stoughton; Val Biro, alive and well, living in Sussex. In April 2006 I received a letter from Mr Biro:-



"I am so glad that there is such a body as the C S Forester Society, honouring that master story teller and creator of the immortal Hornblower"



Val (Bálint Stephen) Biro was born in Budapest on 6 October 1921. An idyllic childhood in Budapest, in a lovely flat overlooking the Danube, came to an abrupt end when his father perceived the spread and rise of Naziism and despatched 18-year old Val to Cornwall to stay with an exchange partner of the previous year. Val describes his anticipation of England as *"The centre of an Empire, the fog-enshrouded home of A J Cronin and John Buchan, where everybody smoked a pipe and changed for dinner; the home of Jeeves and Lord Emsworth and large policemen"*. Unable now to return to his home-country, attendance at the Central School of Arts and Crafts during WWII brought him under the influence in particular of John Farleigh whose illustration for George Bernard Shaw's *'The Adventures of a Black Girl in Search for God'* had caused such a stir. Noel Rooke and Bernard Meninsky too, were among his teachers. He moved from wood-engraving to scraper-board, developed techniques in pen and ink and watercolour and was employed first by Sylvan Press while working as a part-time fireman; then for C & J Temple; and with the help of Arthur Wragg, for John Lehmann – and then as a freelance from 1953.

He came to design book jackets for the great names of contemporary English literature: L P Hartley, Nigel Tranter, Evelyn Anthony, Ursula Bloom, Rupert Croft-Brooke, Norah Lofts, Colin Wilson, Monica Dickens, Naomi Jacobs, Evelyn Waugh, Noel Coward, Nevil Shute,

Geoffrey Trease, Gerald Durrell, Beverly Nicholls, Mary Stewart. An early commission came from Michael Joseph for CS Forester.

"Victor Morrison Art Director of Michael Joseph in Bedford Square would send me a manuscript to read before he asked me to submit a 'rough' in colour. He would give me a brief, but left the lettering and design to me. After submitting my rough, the sales staff would send it back with comments; when approved at last, I would paint the finished artwork in gouache, about 25% up – and usually against a tight deadline. I would also hand-letter the title and author – that was long before Letraset and the computer!"

"The sales staff at Joseph's did not necessarily show the rough to the author although Forester was important enough to be shown it. I would have speed-read the manuscript, to get the necessary details of plot, setting, characters etc; but in Forester's case the story grabbed me from the first page and I read the whole book assiduously, for sheer thrills and enjoyment."

"My finished artwork for Forester was never returned to me by Joseph (a malpractice that has mercifully ceased since) and I have now only two roughs for Randall and the River of Time."

Your author's own collection of C S Forester's works reveals a series of emblematic drawings for the dust wrappers of the Joseph first edition *Hornblowers*: *Midshipman* – a Spanish flag and the white Ensign; *Lieutenant* – a tattered White Ensign; *Atropos* – the White Ensign with a profiled ship; *West Indies* – Red Ensign and ship; *Horatio Hornblower omnibus* – a compass, with sabre and scrolls; *Captain Horatio Hornblower omnibus* – a pistol, scroll, tricorne hat and telescope.

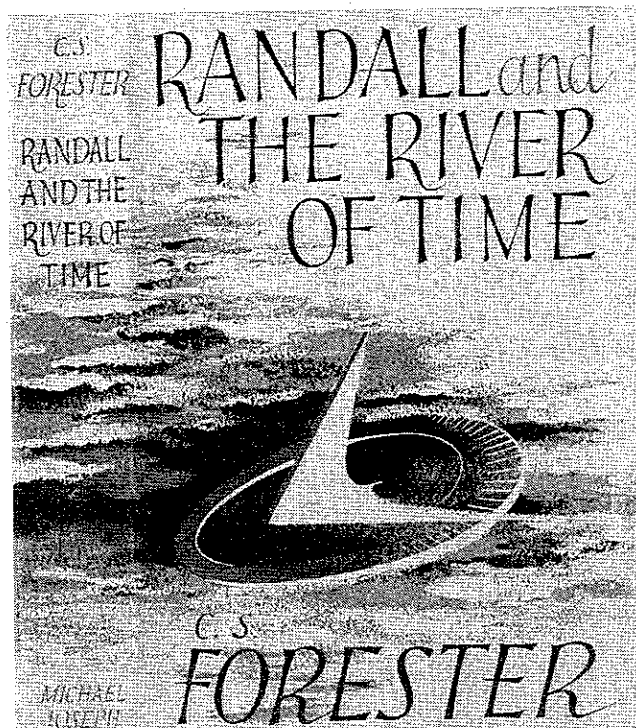
The Mermaid Foresters illustrated by Biro include *Midshipman*, *Lieutenant*, *Atropos*, *Happy Return*, *Flying Colours*, *A Ship of the Line* (opposite) and *The Commodore*. In addition to Hornblower books, Biro also adorns *The Ship*, *The General*, *African Queen*, *Captain from Connecticut*, and *The Earthly Paradise*. All these Mermaid jackets – in contrast to the Josephs – feature a person in action.

Although Biro receives no mention in *Michael Joseph Master of Words* nor in John Forester's *Novelist and Storyteller*, his fame is assured. In addition to the Forester works I have listed, he drew for Radio Times for 21 years. In 1966 he published the first of his many *Gumdrop* stories, based on his ownership of a vintage car. He also retold traditional tales, with his own illustrations, such as *Hungarian Folk Tales* (1981). He drew for *The Good Food Guide* and is a member of the Society of Authors. The Victoria & Albert Museum holds his work. He has 400 books listed on PLR (Public Lending Right), many of which are mentioned in his *Who's Who* entry.

Val Biro writes:-

'My Forester work led me, later in my career, to paint covers for his successors in the genre, such as James Dillon White, Richard Woodman, C Northcote Parkinson and Alexander Kent – incidentally, my last memory of Robert Lusty is at Alexander Kent (aka Douglas Reeman)'s Cobham home where he was swimming energetically one warm summer's day'.

This Forester fan however recalls those crossed flags of *Mr Midshipman Hornblower*, emerging from a sombre background and surmounted by a stately three-master. We picture the ambitious young illustrator from Hungary, crossing a war-ravaged Bedford Square to collect and devour his latest Hornblower brief, and we thank heavens for the life of our artist in England, and for the exceptional contribution he has made to our lives and letters.



Appendix: some other illustrators for the front covers of UK first editions

Robin Jacques	all original Penguins
Rowland Hilder	<i>The Happy Return</i>
	<i>Flying Colours</i>
	<i>A Ship of the Line</i>
	<i>The Commodore</i>
	<i>Lord Hornblower,</i>
	<i>Hornblower and the Crisis</i>
	<i>The Captain from Connecticut.</i>
David Cobb	<i>Hornblower and the Hotspur</i>
	<i>The Good Shepherd</i>
Charles Gorham	<i>Captain Hornblower</i>
	<i>Admiral Hornblower</i>
	<i>The Young Hornblower.</i>
Michael Harvey	<i>The Hornblower Companion</i>
Harvey (the same?)	<i>Long Before 40</i>
Peter Rudland	<i>The Nightmare</i>
A E Barlow	<i>The Sky and the Forest</i>
Barbosa	<i>The Commodore</i>
Ronald Green	<i>The General</i>
Ivan Lapper	<i>Hornblower and the Crisis</i>

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Val Biro and Lawrie Brewer for the cover and page 3 photograph, John Turboer and Jetse Reijenga for help with illustrations.

I said "UP PERISCOPE!" not "SURFACE!" – U97 again

JOHN FORESTER

I disagree with Walt Peterson's evaluation of U97 in the cover feature of Reflections 10: "U97 shares many characteristics with [CSF's] later and vastly more popular nautical classics. It is firmly ... presented within a technically well-founded venue."¹ I don't doubt that Peterson is technically competent in submarines, and his article is based upon the printed play. However, he states that the play is technically accurate on 3 points on which I think it is inaccurate: use of ballast tanks when changing depth, periscope operation, and attempts to get off the bottom.



(1): **Walt Peterson is correct** that, when a submerged boat moves between waters of different density, adjustments must be made. He mentions one, letting water into or pumping it out of the internal tanks. It is unnecessary to pump water in; it flows in as the result of sea pressure. The other adjustment is by use of the planes to achieve lift or weight as the result of forward motion. Peterson claims that CSF understood these operations and wrote dialog and stage directions to accurately portray them.

Act 3 opens in the control room of U97, submerged at periscope depth, with Spiegel at the scope, attempting to enter Scapa Flow. Spiegel reports antisubmarine vessels ahead, and orders periscope down and 20 metres. "The slight hiss of the ballast tanks makes itself heard over the sound of the motors." Having supposedly passed these vessels, Spiegel orders periscope depth. "The sharper hiss and clank of the ballast tanks being emptied is heard." Later, the boat is made heavy to break the hold of nets in which she is entangled. All tanks are filled. "The submarine is filled with a loud hissing." The boat breaks free and falls, upon which the order is given to "blow out the tanks". "The clanking and hissing of blowing out is heard." Later they need to go to periscope depth again. No directions for tank noises, although "The boat is rising as before."

Then down to 20 metres again. "The ballast tanks hiss again." There is no dialogue about the need for trim changes. Indeed, the ballast tank noises come immediately upon the command to change depth, rather than as a result of reaching the new depth and discovering the need for different trim. And there is neither dialogue nor direction to differentiate the internal adjustment tanks from the external ballast tanks, only the generic name of "ballast tanks". There is also no dialogue about plane

angles, just several references to unidentified motions by the two planesmen during the change in depth. So I conclude that CSF intended the audience to think that changing depth was done by changing the amount of water in the "ballast tanks", by use of compressed air or pumps. There is no evidence internal to U97 showing that CSF knew better than that and had just adopted this inaccurate method for informing the audience!



(2): **A submarine's periscope** is long enough to reach from above the periscope housing, which extends above the conning tower, to near the bottom of the boat, lowered into the "well". When in use, the periscope is raised so that its bottom end, with the eyepiece, is on a level with the eyes of the officer on the scope, who is as high up in the boat as is reasonably possible. That allows the greatest upward movement of the periscope from its down position, thus allowing the greatest possible extension of the periscope's eye above the surface while keeping the boat sufficiently deep that it would not be observed. In the US fleet boats of World War II, the periscope was operated from inside the conning tower, an upward extension of the pressure hull. In U97, as was typical in those days, CSF has the periscope operated from the control room. In attack operations when the boat is already at periscope depth, the periscope is raised for a quick look, either around for any enemy, or at the selected target for a fix, and then lowered. When coming up to periscope depth from below, the periscope is raised and manned before the head breaks water, in order to catch the earliest possible view of something that might be a collision danger.

¹ Walt Peterson, *A submariner reads U97*, Reflections 10 (2005), pages 7-11.

Now consider how CSF handles these procedures. First, I point out that any professional theatre has sufficient space over and under the stage to represent that portion of a periscope that is visible in the control room as the periscope rises and falls. There was no need to fake dialogue to represent what could not be shown, and every reason to portray the dramatic rising and falling of the periscope. The act opens with Spiegel already using the scope. Spiegel then orders down 'scope and descend to 20 metres. After the boat has dived, "Spiegel leaves the periscope" and looks around the control room. There is no stage direction for lowering the periscope. So it stays there, on stage, with its eyepiece at eye level. Then Spiegel decides to rise to take another look. "Periscope depth!" and he takes hold of the periscope. "Hold her at that! -- Dive! Twenty metres! Hard a-starboard." Again, no stage direction for periscope rise or fall. Spiegel decides to take another look. He goes to the periscope. "Periscope depth!" Having made his observation he orders "Periscope in." But there is no stage direction for periscope movement. They are depth-charged. Spiegel orders "Periscope depth!" The boat is rising as before. [Spiegel is] Turning periscope back and forth. Then he orders "Dive. Twenty metres", without any order for periscope movement.

Walt Peterson argues that this presents a picture of proper periscope operation, and that Spiegel's order of "Periscope in" is the exact English translation of the German order. I think that, if presented on the stage as written, it shows a periscope that does not rise or fall, written by a person who did not understand the method of its use. I offer no theory of how CSF thought that periscopes operated; for that matter, he might have thought that they extended and collapsed like a spyglass. I argue only that had CSF understood the basics of periscope operation, he would not have described them so badly and in such a limited way.

Conclusion

Had CSF possessed the technical knowledge with which Walt Peterson credits him, he would never have written so badly about technical matters in *U97*. I had never seriously discussed *U97* with him, for I had read it first in London when I was eight or nine years old, and never again until Colin Blogg sent me a xerographic copy a few years ago. However, I have had sufficient other experience of the sophomoric level of CSF's technical knowledge that the errors of *U97* do not surprise me.

NOTES: There are currently 3 copies of *U97* advertised for sale through www.abebooks.co.uk – with prices from £200-£300!

There was an error in transcription of Johannes Spiess, *Sechs Jahre U-Bootfahrten* (1925) in the article by Walt Petersen. What I had printed (*Reflections* 10, page 11) was:-

"Contemporaneous British terminology typically uses the phrases 'Up periscope' or conversely, 'Down periscope.' In all of the several instances that Spiess recounts dialogue relating to periscope operation, the German text uses the imperative *Gehrohr einfahren* (or *ausfahren*), translated as 'Periscope in (or out)'"

In fact, German for 'periscope' is *das Sehrohr*. Thanks to Jetse Reijenga for pointing this out – and my apologies. EDITOR



(3): The procedures by which Spiegel and crew attempted to get *U97* off the bottom were exactly the correct procedures that were used for that purpose, argues, Walt Peterson, even quoting the standard Royal Navy submarine procedures manual. However, the circumstances were entirely different. The manual covers the intentional resting of the boat on the bottom, for crew rest, repairs, waiting for darkness, waiting for the enemy to go away, while using the minimum of battery power and maintaining silence. Then, the boat has been made heavy, so it rests on the bottom, by filling the internal tanks that would be only partially full when at diving trim. You need to rise slowly, avoiding surfacing before you can make a scope scan to see if there is any enemy about. Therefore, you pump out the internal tanks slowly, until the boat leaves the bottom, when you go slow ahead to maintain depth control. The case of *U97* is entirely different. The boat has been made heavy, very heavy, by the influx of water into the damaged forward torpedo room and after motor room. There is no possibility that pumping out the internal tanks can sufficiently lighten the boat. Besides, the crew are *in extremis*; they intend to surface so they can surrender and stay alive. The only possibility that they have of surfacing is to blow the ballast tanks. Maybe Peterson had forgotten that?

Finally, CSF did not know German, either to read or to speak. The suggestion that he picked up some naval submarine German while navigating the *Annie Marble* through the German lakes is most unlikely. He traveled as a tourist, although accredited as the correspondent of *Motor Boat* to the speedboat races at Potsdam. Even there, I suggest that conversations about submarine operation would be unlikely.

CORRESPONDENCE



Jacques' Nelson touch

Robin Jacques' cover of the 1964 Penguin edition of *Lord Hornblower* might suggest a different interpretation to that of Jetse Reijenga, who sees Hornblower "in full dress, ribbon and star, in front of a couple of mutineers" on the point of shooting "the escaping rebel leader... no doubt the man with the broad moustache on the front cover".² Hornblower's futile negotiation with the white-haired Nathaniel Sweet, leader of the *Flame* mutineers, occurs in chapter 5, and is quite separate from the capture of the *Flame* and the French lugger *Bonne Celestine* in chapter 7. He boards the *Bonne Celestine* with his sword in his [right] hand and a pistol in his left, drops the sword as he scrambles up on to the *Flame*, and then – rescued by Brown – sees a wounded French officer sitting on the deck, and a party of mutineers now disarmed and guarded by *Porta Coeli*'s crew. One of the prisoners – with a striped shirt and pigtail – claims to have been fighting the French. With the maindecks secured, a group of Frenchmen and mutineers try to swim to freedom. One of them is Sweet, whom Hornblower shoots with a musket.

² Jetse Reijenga, *Robin Jacques' covers for Penguin Foresters*, *Reflections* 10 (2005), pages 18-19.

The detail in Jacques' picture does not fit either Jetse Reijenga's interpretation or a freeze-frame of any moment in Forester's narrative. Hornblower is upright, sheathing his sword, pointing his pistol at a man who seems to be wearing a striped shirt, who has black hair and a – surely typically French(?) – moustache. The man sitting dazed on the deck is a seaman, not an officer... But what most strikes me is not the detail in the text which Jacques has confused, or reworked, but a touch that he has added.

In chapter 12, Hornblower reads the *Morning Chronicle*'s account of the capture of the *Flame* across the decks of the *Bonne Celestine*. "There was only one example in history of a similar feat – Nelson's capture of the *San Josef* at Cape St Vincent... The comparison was quite absurd...", at least to Hornblower, as 20 more lines explain. But now look at Jacques's picture again.

Hornblower, who is still only KB, not yet a Lord, has at least three orders sewn to his coat, in the manner of Nelson on the *Victory* at Trafalgar. Jacques gives the Hornblower-Nelson comparison a new dimension!

Paul Ellison Hunter, Philadelphia.

Steamboats and tin cans!

On Hornblower in New Orleans, Jetse Reijenga says: "Evidently steam power had advanced further into daily life on the rivers and waters of the New World than in England, at least in the Navy."³ I quote from *The Advent of Steam* in *Conway's History of the Ship*:

"Such were the advantages of steam propulsion on the western rivers of the United States, where supplies of wood for fuel were almost limitless, that by 1819 100 steam vessels had been constructed there as opposed to 43 in the whole of the British Empire. As an American historian has put it, the steamboat changed 'the relations of the west which may almost be said to change its destiny.'" *New Orleans saw its first steamboat in 1811, which boat descended the river from its building spot near Pittsburgh, but remained on the lower Mississippi... The Enterprise, built some 50 miles above Pittsburgh in 1815, was the first steamboat to steam successfully to New Orleans and return to the upper Ohio.*"

³ Jetse Reijenga, *Technical innovations in the Hornblower series*, *Reflections* 9 (2005), page 5.

The tin cans "welded" together from pieces of tinned iron would have been soldered together, welding at the time being impractical for tins of beef stew - and probably impractical today, requiring something like laser-delivered energy! The crews of the *Erebus* and *Terror* on Franklin's doomed quest for the North-West Passage in 1845 are thought to have succumbed to lead poisoning, from the solder, produced by a diet largely of tinned food.⁴

John Forester, Lemon Grove, California.

- The discussion on steamships has now gone well beyond CSF and is therefore closed!

Bismarck turned turtle...

Recently I read *The Navy at War 1939-1945* by Captain S W. Roskill, Collins (1960). It helped to put into context the C S Forester books of that period, including *Hunting the Bismarck*, *The Ship* and *The Good Shepherd*. Have other members found books that put things into context? Would a list of background books be worth adding to the Web site? Could not find the web site - is it off line?

I hope the member or former member who was so upset in the last newsletter is feeling better having got their views off their chest. I still think it is interesting to see how text has been changed or mistakes have been made. But we all make mistakes - even our favourite author.

Simon Karner.

JUST a line to acknowledge receipt of *Reflections 10* - it's always a treat when this arrives through the letterbox - a fascinating and educational mix, as ever!

I was sorry, however, to see the letter "at logger-heads" - it seems very short-sighted and, perhaps, misses the point that *Reflections* is a literary supplement to the Newsletter where, surely anything goes! I suppose you can't please all the people all the time. However, I'd like to offer my support for all you do, and the remarkable articles, stories, facts, etc, that you gather together for each issue - this member, at least, is most appreciative. This time, the U-97 submarine article was particularly interesting - and educational! - and the story accompanying the Robin Jacques illustrations was quite delightful, although indeed the whole publication was certainly up to your usual standard. So, again, thanks for all your hard work on our behalf.

Sue Forbes

- The website is "in the pipeline". If anyone has an idea for an article, the best thing to do is to write it!

Completing the Crisis

As you say, "Name withheld by Editor" is fully entitled to their opinion, and your well-reasoned response. I can imagine some readers may find my completion of *Hornblower and the Crisis* a trifle irritating if they see it as an attempt to copy CSF's style. It seems to me it would not be at all easy to complete *Hornblower and the Crisis* without seeming to write a pastiche of CSF, for, inevitably, there is Hornblower himself, a ready-made character, with all the traits with which CSF has invested him - his knowledge of seafaring life, his uncertainties over his marriage to Maria, his various idiosyncrasies including his seasickness and his doubts about his suitability for his chosen profession. Then there are all the other characters, including the stoical Bush, who appear in the 9 completed chapters of *Hornblower and the Crisis* as well as possible references to earlier events in Hornblower's career.

When I came to write the completion of *Hornblower and the Crisis* - and, as you say, it had been instigated when the gauntlet to do so was thrown down to *The C.S. Forester Society* - it seemed a good idea to steer clear of nautical detail - I was not confident of writing a satisfactory story which included, say, a sea battle. I suppose one of my motives was to write a story which might prove entertaining for readers and members of the Society - little thinking that it would bring forth the reaction of "Name withheld by Editor" - and to have a little fun myself in doing it.

It would, of course, be a tall order to actually emulate CSF and his marvelous style for, as "Name withheld..." rightly said, he was a wonderful writer. I am under no illusion over my own efforts - "Name withheld ..." is quite close to the mark when he says "You've only got to read a paragraph of their well-meaning efforts to realize why CSF was so outstanding and unique." Incidentally, even authors themselves are sometimes not very good imitators of their own style. Graham Greene once entered a *New Statesman* competition for a Greene parody under an assumed name. His submission only won 3rd prize...

Adrian Taylor.

- Hornblower and the Crisis does come to mind:-

⁴ ...tin cans, frozen water - and literature, *ibid.* pages 4-5;

"You seem to have made good use of your time in Ferrol, Captain," said Barrow...
 "At least I managed to learn to speak a little Spanish," [Hornblower] said...
 "Many officers would not have taken the trouble"...



Poetics and ordinary language

Comments on "boring academic theses" will have done great harm. But look dispassionately at *Contrary Imaginations: Hornblower and Literature*.⁵ The main point is that Forester wrote in a very flexible and imaginative way: any reader will immediately see his meaning but those who probe will find a deeper layer. This point and others could have been made more clearly. Caligula "forced men to shave their heads, and devised a torture called death by a thousand cuts" – no doubt, but the link to Simpson bullying Cleveland and Hornblower should have been spelt out! The caption to the coin could have said: "C[aius].. and his sisters. Caius was the emperor's real name; Caligula i.e. "Little Boots" a nickname."

The main part sees the literary discussions on the *Lydia* as an extended game of cards. Fine, given the flair of Hornblower and Barbara for whist, and the gaming

metaphor: "she turned the tables". But some of the commentary on the game is questionable. It says that "Hornblower does not miss the point" of Barbara's quote from Juvenal; in fact, he knows the meaning and source of the tag, but gauche misunderstands its relevance, applying it to the maid - not the mistress! For the reader, there is real irony there, in view of the sequel!

The column on *Romans and romantics* packs in difficult details. It is not clear what Epicureanism and Deism have in common – or what they are! The account of "heroic couplets" is witty, and part of an attempt to explain English and Latin poetics simply to a reader who knows nothing of either. It doesn't quite work; there is too much translation-theory, and the symbols used for the metrics aren't self-explanatory! The discussion of Wordsworth is ingenious, but all Barbara is really says is - you can appreciate Wordsworth without turning up your nose at Gray (or vice-versa). "Campbell's poetics looked to traditional models rather than the contemporary iconoclasm of the Lake poets" - in plain English, Campbell's diction is nearer to Gray's than to Wordsworth's!

Paul Ellison Hunter, Philadelphia.

- O, for a proof-reader! You are quite right as to my intentions, and identify flaws in the final result. The passage quoted from Gray is adapted from Lucretius (c55 BCE), who in turn is offering a Latin version of the 3rd-century BCE Greek philosopher Epicurus. His main doctrines were: the gods are indifferent to the world; this life is the only one; therefore we must pursue happiness. The notion of God as an absentee-landlord is a hallmark of 18th-century Deism; whether Gray was actually a Deist is another matter. David Stead.

Forester & the Munich crisis: Preface to the 1947 US edition of *The General*

I have received the copy of *The General* that I ordered on your suggestion. As you suspected that it might, this edition contains a Foreword, dated January 1, 1947. I was absent from home, at prep school, from August 1946 through June 1947, so I was not informed of this foreword, but it contains parts of the story that CSF had told me, probably more than once, over the years. The existence of this edition substantiates that some of CSF's works were recommended reading for students in the military academies. The edition was printed for the History Department of the United States Naval Academy.

John Forester, Lemon Grove, California.

⁵ Reflections 10 (2005), pp 15-20; Reflections 11 (2005), 2.

A Preface to *THE GENERAL*

AN OFFICER of the Czech General Staff sat on one side of the table and I sat on the other, with a map of Bohemia spread between us. He was outlining the defensive campaign the Czech army hoped to make should Hitler's demands for the Sudetenland lead to war. Despite the fact that we were both speaking a language foreign to us the conversation proceeded with ease and understanding, while from the outside, periodically, came the roar of aeroplane engines warming up as the little Czech air force held itself ready to sacrifice itself in the defence of Prague against the *Luftwaffe*.

What had brought that Czech general and me together was *The General*. It was one of the few English military books which had appeared in the Czech language and, having been studied as a textbook by the Czech army, it saved me much preliminary trouble in explaining my fears and opinions and hopes. There had been several other translations, too, in German and Polish and Spanish and Italian, so that a fair proportion of European military opinion had at least been exposed to the influence of my reading of past events.

During those nightmare months before war began my German publisher told me with frightened pride that the book was not only being bought by the masses but was being carefully studied in the very highest circles. The *Führer* himself had read it and was recommending it to his friends; among the Christmas presents which he gave away in 1938 were several specially bound copies. The publisher could not find out for whom they were destined, but he was sure that it would be great men like Goering and Keitel; he uttered the names with a respectful catch of the breath. He was in continual terror in case I should publish something which had disrespectful remarks about Hitler in it, or that I should utter a protest about the treatment of the Jews, or do something else which would lead to the banning of my books in Germany and at one stroke kill the goose which was laying so many golden eggs for him, and which might even lead to his removal from the perilous but pleasant upper circles of German society to a concentration camp. It was a source of relief to him that chance had led me to embark upon a trilogy of novels dealing with the naval side of the Napoleonic Wars.

Perhaps *The General* may have influenced the history of the world, if Hitler read it with care and yet with that complete lack of sympathetic understanding which was so

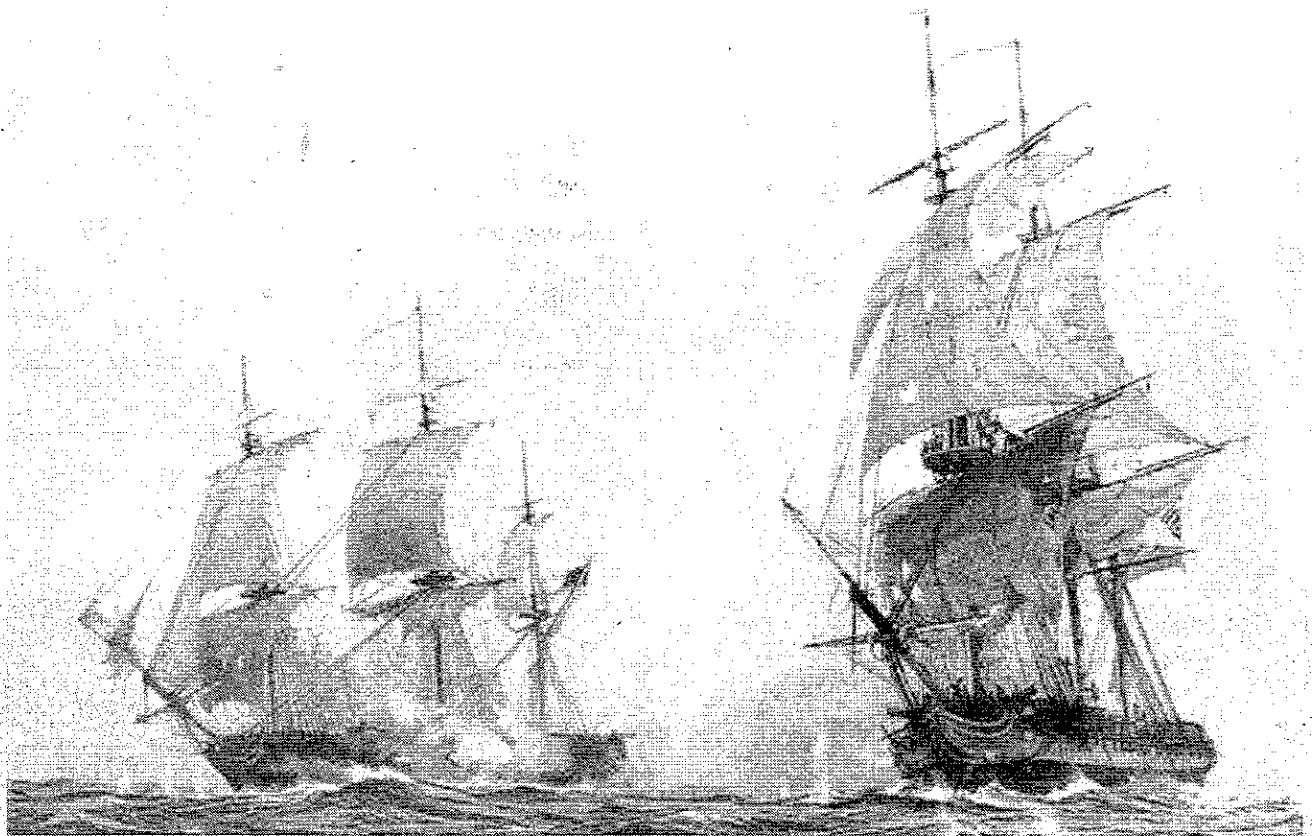
conspicuous a part of his intellectual make-up. He may have been appreciative of the words and not of the spirit, just as he displayed a complete misunderstanding of the spirit of England both in peace and in war. For all I know, it may have been Hitler who set Lord Haw-Haw to broadcast to England excerpts from *The General* at the same time as the B.B.C. was broadcasting excerpts from *The Ship* - a battle of the books.

Yet when I sat down to write *The General* the possibility of influencing history never entered my mind. Why does a novelist write novels? He may want to exhibit himself, he may want money, but whatever his motive or his end the means he employs is first to catch and then to hold the attention of his readers. All I desired to do was to keep pleasantly occupied for a few hours the minds of the people who would read the book. I was writing a novel, a self-proclaimed work of fiction, and fiction does not mean the truth, and certainly does not mean the whole truth and most certainly does not mean nothing but the truth. I told of one fraction of English society, and I described the development of one trend of English thought, but even if I had told the whole story about these two things which I did not I left undescribed an infinity of other aspects of my country and my people. I hope the discerning mind can guess at them.

For although I wrote the book to interest and to entertain, and with never a thought of instruction, there must have been a reason for my choosing this particular theme out of the many which occupied my mind at the time. Something must have impelled me to it and the obvious explanation (and the true one, I believe) is that I was in a state of irritation at the indifference England was displaying towards her future; the groove into which she had settled seemed to be heading towards calamity. Let me repeat that it never occurred to me to try and divert her from that groove; I merely wished to tell a logical and reasoned story, and it was the circumstances in which I found myself which selected for me this particular story.

The American edition of *The General*, which was first published in February 1936, has been out of print since February 1943. I did not mind its being unavailable to readers here during the Second World War but I am glad now that the publishers have decided to reissue it.

C. S. FORESTER, January 1, 1947



***Mr Midshipman Hawker* - by Richard Miller**

I

THE DULL TONES OF THE REVEREND PERCIVAL Lee's monotonous voice droned on and on. The lesson would not finish until the end of afternoon school and the Roman Conquest of Gaul, as narrated by the Reverend Lee, served to kindle scarcely a wisp of enthusiasm in the minds of his youthful pupils.

Paul Hawker was absorbed. Not, however, in the History lesson, which dragged its weary way through the long hours of that last lesson of the day, but in the task of fashioning upon his desk lid the outline of a ship. Several thick volumes served to hide the artistry which Paul was creating with a sharp knife. But suddenly he became aware that the dull-tones had ceased and that all eyes in the room were focused on him.

"You seem absorbed in your work," the detestable Lee exclaimed. "However I doubt, Sir, if it is my lesson, for I fear that some other enterprise has demanded your attention."

Paul watched as the Master's pallid features flushed with rage and waited for the next utterance, which would

undoubtedly prove most painful for him. The Reverend Lee stood above the boy and gazed at the outline of the ship which adorned the inside of the lid.

"A ship!" he exclaimed. "Hawker, you are obsessed with things nautical since your brother joined the Navy. I have no time for ships. The only thing that I have in common with the Navy is discipline and, since you seem to admire the Navy and its ways so much, I shall punish you in naval fashion. You shall be beaten, boy! Two dozen strokes – and I shall see that they are given across your bare back. You shall be punished after roll-call tonight; now, however, the History lesson will continue."

Paul was eleven years old and had on many occasions been beaten in company with his fellows since his arrival at the Reverend Lee's select private School. Such punishment was part and parcel of school life. But the punishment which the Master now ordered was new to the school and nothing so severe had been practiced before in the establishment.

After the lesson, as the other classes gathered for tea, word spread among the pupils of Paul's impending fate and a sense of frightened anticipation pervaded the long, cold dining room.

Roll-call took place at half-past six, when the whole school assembled to answer their names and hand in their completed work. The long schoolroom, dimly lighted by candles, was a dramatic arena in which Paul was to play a leading part. The hundred pupils, ranging in age from eight to fourteen, stood in their class groups, all under the stern supervision of the five ushers, who as usual carried their canes. Paul stood among his fellows and waited for roll-call to end. Then the Reverend Lee spoke up.

"Paul Hawker is now to be punished and, as he is guilty of a serious offence, his punishment will be severe. Young Spartans were punished in this fashion centuries ago, so now let us see how tough this young scoundrel is, or if he will scream or cry out under the lash. Hawker, remove your clothing and come to this end of the room."

Paul was bound securely at wrists and ankles to hooks on the end wall. The coachman, whose duty it was to administer punishment, stepped forward. The assembled boys gasped as he produced a leather horsewhip whose plaited lash dangled from a short handle.

"Now," the Reverend Lee announced, "we will see how much of a young hero this fellow really is." Paul gritted his teeth, afraid lest he should cry out under the punishment.

The whip cracked. A hot, knife-like pain seared across his back and he winced as slash after slash cut into his defenceless flesh. Agony forced him to writhe in his bonds and his stomach felt sick as the whipping continued. However he was young, tough and hard as nails, so he remained silent and stood pale and bleeding when the whipping had finished. The roomful of boys looked solemn and frightened at what they had witnessed but Paul, strangely enough, felt pleased that he had been able to take his punishment in silence.

The Reverend Lee spoke again. "Well, Hawker, now you have paid the price, your back will remind you of it for some time to come. And remember: the medicine can always be repeated!"

Paul, released from his bonds, limped to where his clothes were piled and made his way to his dormitory. Later that night, a circle of admiring boys admired the wheals, fast becoming scars, on his back; and, later still, he lay on his face, his back throbbing as he muttered stubbornly, "All the same, I still love ships."

II

SHIPS, INDEED, WERE HIS LOVE. A one-legged ex-seaman was a master in the art of creating beautiful model ships and Paul, on half-days, scurried out of school bounds to his cottage, where he watched the man turn dull-looking timber into marvelous things of beauty. They were sailing models, and the ex-seaman regularly took part in contests against other builders whose models raced against his ships.

The model under construction today was that of a revenue cutter, a type of craft familiar in the school's locality, for smuggling was rife along the southern English coast. The builder talked as he fashioned the handsome craft.

"A sturdy little ship, boy, an' a big crew. Plenty of guns – and fast under sail. She should win me some races on the big pond! I hear Luke Runnel is building a model brig. She would be fast, too' it should be a good contest."

He was an excellent ship builder. The wood turned to handsome curves and sweeping lines under his skilled hands and the little cutter seemed to emerge as a real ship at the touch.

"That's how I lost my leg," he announced. "I was a cutter's man, once upon a time, working out of Penzance – the *Resolute* was her name. Many's the merry chase we had, right down to Scilly sometimes. A rough life, though; we would be wide awake, rolling to an anchor, when decent folk were abed. We worked smugglers' hours. A light on the cliff, a shadow in the offing – 'Slip the cable, boys!', and we would be off. Never knew what to expect. Maybe a fishing boat, full of small time free-traders, or maybe a big lugger, armed to the teeth.

"Well, one night we met a mighty big lugger, a Frenchie, a real nasty piece of work! We saw her drop her kegs, we saw her flash her signals and we stood into the bay. That's when I became One-Leg Jack. The Frenchie, he loosed off a gun, brought down the mast, and there was me, under the lot! I don't remember much. Good job, I wager! Next thing I'm a cripple!

"Well, boy, that's it! Let's hear *your* story!"

Paul gulped and told the ex-seaman of his beating for carving a ship on his desk lid. He turned round and pulled up his shirt.

"Well, boy, he certainly tanned you that time! Many's the beating I got when I was a lad, a leather belt across my

back an' no questions asked. 'Just do as I tell you!' That's how I learned to pull an oar."

Paul liked the old seaman. He was matter-of-fact, a bit of a rogue and a good storyteller!

III

THE EVENING WAS GROWING DARK as Paul made his way back to the school. The dark countryside and the slightly lighter sea were lonely and silent. Few people were about and those who were hurried to their cottages and warmth. A swinging lantern caught Paul's eye. It must be a ship at anchor, he thought. But how could a ship at anchor be there, in very shallow water, just near the reef?

Another light became visible – a bobbing light, far out to sea and heading straight for the shore. *That* must be a ship! On such a night, what could it mean?

Then reality dawned. There was an onshore breeze; a heavy surf rolled into the bay – and the swaying lantern must be the working tool of wreckers!

Paul stood aghast. What could he do? Tell the Reverend Lee? The detestable cleric would laugh at the tale, have Paul beaten for going out of bounds – and do nothing.

Yet something must be done! One-Leg Jack, *he* would know! He had been a revenue man; he would help! Forgetting school, the Reverend Lee and everything else in his excitement, Paul raced back to the cottage, where a feeble light still gleamed.

The mutter of voices could be heard. Some men were inside. Paul slackened his face and tip-toed to the window.

"The old fool was a navy man, just remember that," one voice said. "Just keep him out of meddling in our business until morning."

Paul peered inside. Three men stood in a circle. One-Leg Jack was bound to a chair, a thick wad of cloth gagging his mouth.

"With this wind," another said, "she will strike the reef in two hours or so. She's a big packet, bound up-Channel, not sure of her position, and bound to see our light."

"Rich pickings for us all!" exclaimed another. "And nobody there to interfere!"

Paul gasped. *Wreckers* – those merciless fiends, about whom the boys had talked endlessly on winter nights. Wreckers, here – about to lure a ship and its people to their doom! He must do something; yet, what could be done?

"We'll 'bide here for an hour or so," muttered another. No need to show our faces. Just wander down and collect the pickings. Then, maybe, tell the coastguards about it. Or maybe not!"

They all laughed. A bottle clinked, as its fiery contents were tipped into a mug. "Good Spanish brandy by morning, boys, to wet our gullets. Not this filth!"

Paul crept away. He needed to think; but the luxury of thinking-time was not to be indulged, for action must be swift if it was to be of any use. He made his way to the cliff's edge and, there, he found the answer.

Hay ricks. Fire the ricks! Show the menacing coastline; warn the ship that she was standing into danger. He rummaged in his pockets. Twine, fishing-weights, knife – and, at last, his flint and steel.

Near the ricks, he waited. Not too soon, or the ship would not see the reef. But not too late, or she could not claw her way out of the bay.

At last it was time! Flint and steel scraped, sparked, scraped again and finally struck a light. To fire ricks was a terrible crime. Of that, Paul was well aware. But terrible deeds demanded terrible measures.

Slowly, the rick caught fire. A dull red glow burrowed into the hay – and then it was ablaze. A flame shot into the night sky. The flames spread. Another rick caught fire as the blaze leap-frogged along the cliff. The sky turned red, a brilliant flame raced along the ricks and a burning light was cast upon the bay.

Out at sea, the light still headed shore-wards. On and on it came until, suddenly, it faltered – and from its angle Paul knew that the ship had changed its course. The light receded. Saved!

Savage shouts erupted from Jack's cottage. "Some fool has fired the ricks! All our work gone for nothing."

Paul made his way back to school. An open window and a scramble up the ivy gained him admittance to his dormitory. Soon afterwards, a master on his rounds looked into the room.

IV

At ASSEMBLY THE NEXT MORNING, excitement reigned. a whole field of ricks had been fired, terrible damage had been done! Scarce any other conversation was held.

Later that day, the owner of the ricks called upon the Reverend Lee. A lengthy talk was held, behind closed doors, and at last the farmer departed. Then Paul was summoned. The Reverend Lee was beside himself with fury. Paul paled as the tirade was let loose upon him.

"As you well know, ricks were set ablaze last night. The farmer who owns them has just called upon me and I find it was a boy from this school who set them ablaze. More so, I know it was you – you scoundrel, you knave, you common criminal. You could be brought to the Assizes for this, you could be deported, you could be... Words fail me! But I will have you whipped - whipped so hard that you will remember it until your dying day. Now go and tell your form-master that you are to be locked up in the cellar. Tonight, my boy, you will scream and scream until the whip lays bear your backbone!"

That night, Paul was whipped – and scream indeed he did. The beating, utterly merciless, was administered under the watching eye of the farmer. Then the Reverend Lee announced that Paul was to be expelled from the school.

Three days later, Paul – still pale and limping – was helped into a carriage, whose owner grinned at him.

"It must be a good story, Paul. You must have done something utterly terrible to so upset the Reverend Lee. Have you eaten his hot muffins? If not, then what is the matter?"

Propped on cushions, Paul told his story. His uncle, a wise old man, listened keenly. "Best thing that could have happened. Never liked that old hypocrite. And ,by the by, a berth has become vacant in a ship of the Fleet."

Paul smiled, a forced sad smile yet a smile of triumph. For now he was to become a sailor!

V

HMS *LEONIDAS* WAS DRIVING INTO A RISING westerly gale. Spray scornfully tossed aft by her marching forefoot drenched the cluster of officers and ratings on her quarterdeck. Midshipman Paul Hawker felt cold water trickle down his back beneath his sodden shirt and jacket.

The frigate was in furious pursuit of a French corvette and, as the sea and wind increased in strength, her weatherly qualities and the good craftsmanship of her builders at Buckler's Hard became more and more apparent. Her sister ships *Apollo*, *Blanche* and *Euryalus*, all designed by William Rule, were perhaps the finest cruisers in the Navy. That, together with the dash of her captain, the Honourable Richard Anson, made her one of the most glamorous ships in the Channel Fleet.

Paul Hawker gripped a mizzen backstay and his dancing eyes blazed with the excitement engendered by a headlong chase. Three hours ago, a keen eyed lookout had seen the snowy-white topsails of the Frenchman. Indeed their colour alone portrayed her French origin, for as Jem Pengelly, the senior quartermaster, remarked:

"Them Frog-eaters don't need no anchors. They lie snug in harbour aground on the rubbish they throw overboard. Not like us Jacks, butting about outside the back door, rain, hail or shine!"

Just now, the British canvas, strained to its limit, was showing its worth, and the eagle eye of Mr Gales, the First Lieutenant, saw to it that it was trimmed to a nicety. Captain Anson looked at Paul and grinned.

"Soon, boy, you will smell powder! Better by far than chalk-dust at Reverend Lee's school, I wager."

The twelve-year-old midshipman flushed, delighted that such a remote figure as the Captain should spare him a thought. Mr Norton, the sailing master, stood beside the wheel, his years at sea paying homage to the skill of his Captain. His admiration leaped as Anson remarked, "We will shake out those reefs in the topsails and then we will walk up to Mr Frog."

"If you please, Mr Gales, beat to quarters!" Anson said quietly. Pipes shrilled, the Royal Marine drummer sent the thrilling notes of "Hearts of Oak" echoing through the ship and, like a disturbed ants' nest, a crowd of scarlet-coated marines and blue-clad, brown barebacked seamen erupted from the berth deck. Agile powder monkeys raced

to the magazine where, behind a serge curtain, the gunner and his mate handed out the charges.

Dickie Price, the youngest of the ship's boys, pulled off his shirt, tied a cloth over his ears and ran along the main deck, to where the crew of number one gun of the starboard battery were assembling.

"See, lads! Here comes Dickie with his spoon of tonic for Johnny Frog!" The gun crew roared with laughter, the quarter gunner slapped Dickie on the back and the boy smiled with delight. Again the Bosun's pipe shrilled. A flood of men threw themselves into the rigging, and under the power of the increased sail area, *Leonidas* shouldered the sea aside, threw dollops of water over her forecastle and marched into the Frenchman's wake.

"Send for Mr Giles," the Captain now ordered.

The warrant gunner strode aft, touched his hat and grinned. "Show us some fancy shooting, Mr Giles. Knock away a few spars if you can."

Making his way to the starboard chaser port, Mr Giles busied himself with the nine-pounder. The gun crew, pleased to be allowed to show their skill before the whole crew, threw their weight on the gun tackle, ran the gun back, loaded it and, with a hearty heave, ran it up the sloping, soaring deck until its muzzle jutted from its port.

Unhurried, Mr Giles watched and waited. He judged the rise and fall of the sea and gauged the wind. Satisfied, he fired. Right in the corvette's wake, a tiny splash in the rough sea marked the shot's fall.

Again and again, the gun blazed out. Finding the range, Mr Giles knocked out the quoin, jerked the lanyard and – with a sharp crack, the Frenchman's mizzen topmast snapped just above the crosstrees. Shot followed shot as the corvette flew into the wind, her canvas flogging itself to ribbons.

Grasping a speaking trumpet, Mr Gales, his voice tuned by Atlantic weather, roared across the heaving water. "Haul down your flag, or you will get our broadside!"

The menace of the main deck eighteen-pounders sealed the Frenchman's fate. Her tricolor slid down from her gaff and her crew stood jabbering and gesticulating on her deck.

"Mr Hanson," the Captain ordered, "take a boat over and secure the prize. Take Mr Hawker with you."

Paul gulped. This was life; this was what being a sea-officer meant. Oh how very lucky he was! Why, at this very hour, they would be construing Greek with the Reverend Lee.

The larboard cutter was lowered, Joshua Cubbin, the coxswain, at the tiller, Trotter and the other scallywags of her crew grinning with pleasure as the young midshipman jumped into the boat, fell over a thwart and laughed as Will Marsh, the stroke oar, remarked, "Take more than that to knock us all overboard, young sir!"

Paul was happy. Rough, uneducated men on the berth deck, sea-seasoned shellbacks at the wheel, gallant polished officers on the quarterdeck – all accepted him for what he was, and the boy basked in the knowledge that he was liked.

The cutter dipped away from the frigate's side and soon Trotter hooked on to the corvette's main chains. The French captain stood dejectedly by the wheel, his officers beside him, as the British seamen swarmed on board. This was Paul's first glimpse of a Frenchman and he looked with amazement at the moustaches of the officers and the slovenly appearance of the crew, whose swarthy skins showed little of the sea-burned tan of the Englishmen.

VI

TWO DAYS LATER, the captured French vessel was escorted into Portsmouth, and Captain Anson – having had a long discussion ashore – returned aboard the *Leonidas*.

Soon after his arrival, all the officers were called to his cabin and there, sitting on the edge of a chair, Paul Hawker gazed with admiration at his Captain as he outlined his plan.

"Gentlemen, as we all know, the French have a large number of coasting vessels at anchor under the guns of their forts. They scurry from protected anchorage to protected anchorage and lie there secure each night. It is my desire, and intention, to disturb their security.

"The corvette we have captured will sail with us and the frigate *Lycurge*. As you are aware, the *Lycurge* is a captured French ship, taken only six months ago.

"We will all fly French flags and, naturally, those ashore will assume that this ship is a prize of the French. That will allow us to sail right into the anchorage. We will enter as

dusk falls and, lowering our boats, send seamen and marines to destroy their harbour defences, under cover of our bombardment. It is what our gallant predecessor Drake would have called 'singeing the beard'.

"Well, gentlemen, we will not only singe the beard, we will give them all a good close shave, and trim their hideous moustaches!"

The assembled officers chuckled, and Paul blinked in scarce belief at the audacity of the plan.

VII

THREE DAYS LATER, the ships left Spithead: *Leonidas*, *Lycurge* and the French prize *Rochelle*, now renamed *Salamis*, with a Royal Navy crew and fifty Royal Marines on board.

Closing the land as the winter's day shortened, the French flags were hoisted, and from information gained from the captured Frenchmen, the correct signals flown unsuspectingly. Those ashore watched the ships approach and beamed with pleasure at the sight of a British frigate flying the White Ensign below the Tricolor. Excited crowds made their way to the quayside to admire the fine capture. The three ships, majestic and stately, crept slowly into the inner harbour. Then, in a moment, joy turned to anguish.

Suddenly the French flags were struck. White Ensigns soared aloft and three broadsides crashed out, to echo and re-echo about the enclosed anchorage. The attack was utterly ruthless. Again and again, the flickering broadsides hurled shot into the heavily-laden coasters, splintering them into matchwood and sinking them at their moorings. A thunderclap of horror marked the sinking of a powder barge.

Down on the gun decks, sweating seamen loaded, fired, ran back, reloaded and fired again, working like well-oiled machines. Dickie Price, panting from his efforts, scampered from gun to magazine, magazine to gun.

On the upper deck the Royal Marines stood ready. Stay tackles were manned, launch and pinnace were swayed outboard from the skid-beams. The two quarter boats and the jolly boat hit the water together as their falls chirped through the blocks. Down went their crews, seamen and marines, all eager to teach Napoleon's fellows a bit of British manners.

Some boats made for the batteries guarding the harbour entrance. The Jollies did not stand on dignity. They came suddenly and they suffered no man to stand in their path. Their red coats and white cross-belts struck terror into the hearts of the French gunners, who in their wildest dreams could never have envisaged such a savage onslaught. Panic-stricken, they abandoned their guns and raced for safety, closely pursued by the bayonets of the Marines.

The crackle and flash of small-arms fire was scarcely visible to Paul, on the quarterdeck of the *Leonidas*, but he could feel the shudder of his ship as the guns on the main deck roared out. Jim Pengelly, beside the wheel, touched the boy's arm.

"Look'ee here, Mr Hawker, I say it again and again, nobody but our Captain could play a trick like this. Why even the men we pressed in Penzance say they never saw the like. He is what we sailormen call a Gentleman. A real sailor. When he leads, us lads will follow. Never fear, boy, with him in front and us behind, we can never lose!"

Paul blushed with pride to think that he, Paul Hawker, was one of this crew, that he was part of the Royal Navy. Forsooth, the scars across his back were a trifling price he had had to pay in order to be a sailor.

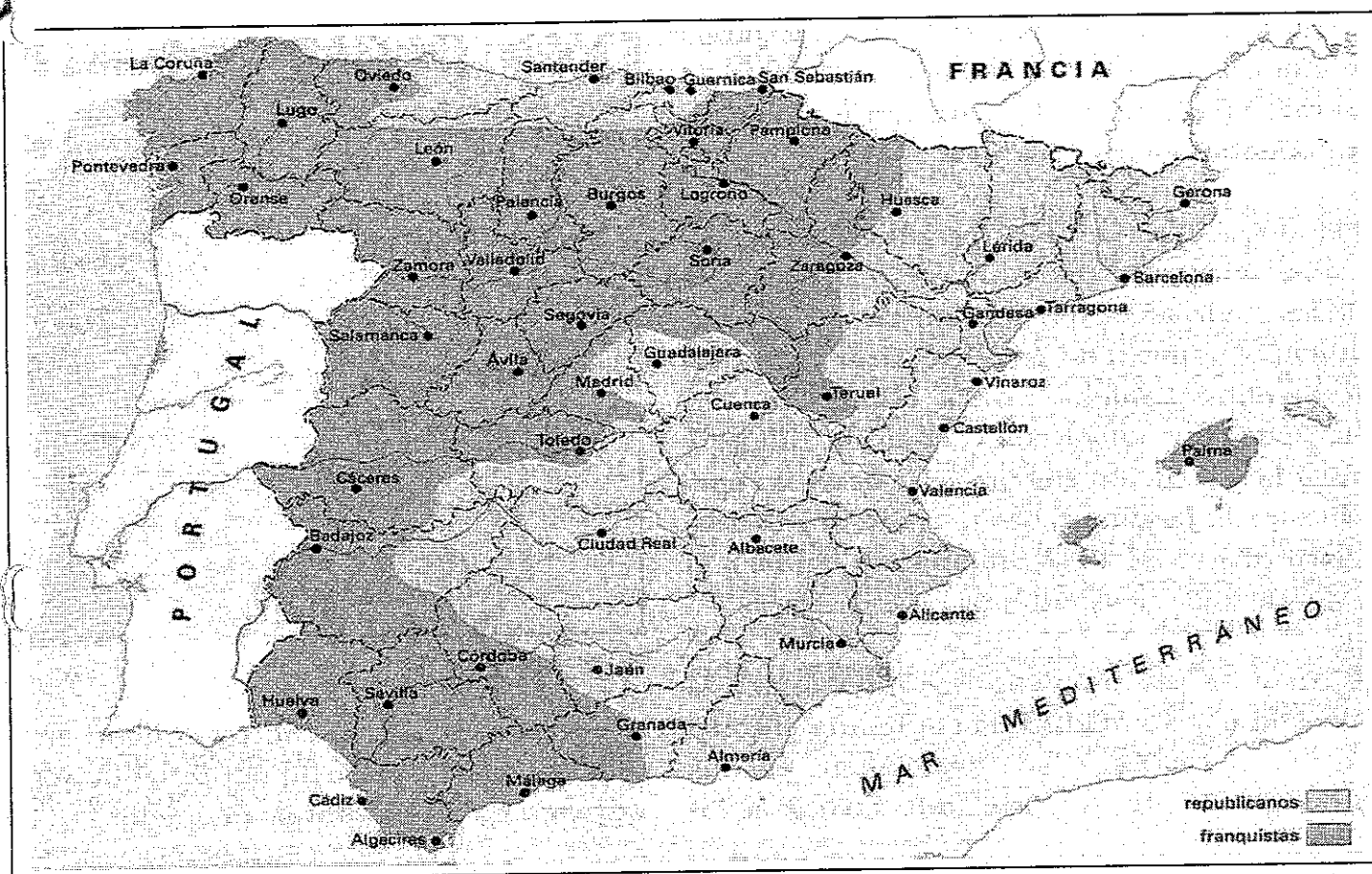
Suddenly the whole bay was rocked by a vast explosion, a massive thunderclap which assaulted the ears. Mr Giles, the warrant gunner, had done his work well. Going ashore in the pinnace, guarded by the Royal Marines, he had placed his charges deep amidst the hundreds of kegs of powder. Stones, guns, toppled ramparts would present a sorry sight when dawn broke.

Soon the boats returned. The tired Marines hauled themselves on board, their powder-smearred faces proof of hard fighting. Trotter, the bow man, smirked as he tugged a dirty rag about his elbow.

"Reckon I won't be pulling an oar for a couple of weeks, Mr Hawker. Kind of Johnny Frog to arrange me a little holiday!"

Paul blinked. Agony was written across Trotter's face. Such men, such courage! The boy vowed that he would never let such men down. He had smelt powder, he had seen action, but more – oh, ever so much more – he had seen the bravery of a badly wounded man. The boy straightened his back, gulped and spoke with a laugh.

"I wager, Trotter, it will not stop you swilling your rum!"



Forester and the Spanish Civil War - fact and fiction

David Stead

This article is a preliminary study of a little-known episode in the career of CS Forester. In 1937 he visited the battlefield in the Spanish Civil War. What he said to his family on his return, and what he eventually published in *The Hornblower Companion*, was evasive and misleading. Cross-examination of these accounts, and the identification of third-party evidence, will begin to establish the truth.

Castles in Spain⁶

Forester refers twice to the Spanish visit in *The Hornblower Companion*. After *The Happy Return*, he had an idea for another period novel, based on actual operations around Barcelona. So far, so good, but:-

"Now came real life, horrible reality, unpleasant to remember and unpleasant to write about. General Franco had raised the standard of revolt in Spain, and the Spanish civil war was tearing the country to pieces, and I was one of the men who went to try to find out what was happening. Fortunately I do not have to go into details of what I saw; all that is necessary for me to say here is that

it was an extremely unhappy experience... and I returned to England deeply moved an emotionally worn out."

He took refuge in work. The trip had given his knowledge of Spanish history a new dimension, novelistic details were already taking shape. And one final piece of inspiration – the new novel should be a sequel to *The Happy Return*, with the same hero!⁷ Delighted to learn the origins of *A Ship of the Line*, the reader will immediately sympathise with Forester's reticence about his own experiences – and suppose that, though it hardly matters, he visited *Catalonia* in the civil war.

⁶ MAP of the Spanish Civil War: the situation of March 1937 (<http://www.sabuco.com/historia/atlas%20hespa%C3%B1a.htm>)

⁷ CS Forester, *The Hornblower Companion*, Chatham Publishing (1998), pages 92-93: cf. *Long before Forty: some personal notes*, Michael Joseph (1967), page 200.

The other passage is explicit:-

"Somewhere in this book the influence of the Spanish Civil War on the writing of *Ship of the Line* has been mentioned. During those disturbed years there were other factors... The Spanish War was still going on, and Europe was in a turmoil..." With demand down, P & O was offering cut-price return trips to Marseilles. Forester took them up, following Hornblower's tracks to the Catalan coast, enjoying the views, taking advantage of the chance to write a thousand undisturbed words a day. But there was danger "(does anyone remember now)" from Italian submarines. One morning he saw a British destroyer keeping silent escort – "an inexpressibly moving sight in those troubled days. It was more moving still to read at a much later time of the heroic end of that destroyer in battle against overwhelming forces."⁸ Just like the *Sutherland*, of course!

The Italian attacks on shipping bound for government-held ports in Spain began in August 1937 and were terminated in September, after protests coordinated by Britain and France.⁹ This fits with the *Companion*; but, privately, Forester had already told a parallel story! In the early summer of 1938, he first met his particular friend Frances Phillips in the United States, on a promotional tour for *A Ship of the Line* and *Flying Colours*. 8 years later, he told her how he had conceived the 2-volume work on a round-Britain cruise at the time of the coronation of George VI in May 1937. "By his own account," says his son, "he was taken by surprise by the appearance in his mind of a new plot that placed his forgotten Captain Hornblower among the Spanish scenes and characters he had recently observed."¹⁰ Now, Forester could well have sought repeated inspiration at sea throughout the summer of 1937! But it is more likely that the voyage to Marseilles is as fictitious as the alleged recent observations it serves to support. For it was not in Catalonia that Forester investigated the Civil War. Catalonia was in government hands from the start to almost the very end – and, John Forester says, the offer to his father "from one of England's conservative, sensational newspapers (possibly the *Daily Mirror*) [was] to cover the Franco side". John recalls his father's evasiveness; Forester wrote no letters, he never talked about his visit, and John never saw what was published. There was one detail: an otherwise trivial anecdote about food, which alerted Forester to the propaganda being spun by Rio Tinto Zinc, a pro-Franco

company which gave a briefing before departure. Nearly 50 years later, Forester's first wife Katherine Belcher also recalled his evasiveness.¹¹ At this stage of research, complete scepticism was extremely tempting! But few would have invented a visit to Franco's camp.

Don't mention the War!

At a late stage, volume 2 of *Novelist and storyteller* reveals a key fact. In the summer of 1963, Forester visited the famous military theorist BH Liddell Hart. Hart was at work on his own memoirs, Forester about to start on the *Companion*:-

"I had a hell of a shock..." he told Phillips. "[Hart] had a copy of the notes I made for the War Office when I got back from Franco's War, which he wanted to quote. I didn't argue about it... and if what I wrote was nonsense I'll have to put up with it."

John Forester may have missed the implication of these last two lines. He says: "There was more to worry Cecil than his prewar evaluations. We now know that the correspondence disclosed his lies about the literary cooperation on *The General*..."¹² Long ago, Forester had told his son, falsely, that Hart had advised him while he was writing *The General* – and there had been other trivial lies.¹³ But it is clear that, in 1963, Forester's worry was with what Hart might soon put in the public domain. He had already written to the wife he had divorced 18 years before:-

"I've become involved in writing a small portion of my memoirs – just literary ones and highly respectable. But there's a part of 1937 which has completely escaped me. I don't expect you have any recollections of my work at the time, but you might perhaps help me to recall the state of affairs. It isn't important, though; I've no objection to saying that I don't remember."¹⁴

John Forester sees this as a reference to "the original Hornblower written in 1937", explaining that Kathleen was offended at the recent portrayal of Maria in *Hornblower and the Hotspur* (1962), which she saw as based upon herself. Further correspondence bears more spurious consolation, but details hardly matter.¹⁵ Kathleen might well have been equally offended by the contemptuous portrait of Maria in the book written in 1937, i.e. *A Ship of the Line*. But in the original Hornblower, *The Happy Return* – published in 1937, Maria does not appear;

⁸ *The Hornblower Companion*, page 52.

⁹ AJP Taylor, *English History 1914-1945*, Pelican (1975), p. 516; <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/SPitaly.htm>

¹⁰ John Forester, *Novelist and Storyteller: the life of CS Forester* (2000), pages 323 (emphasis added), 329; CSF-FP 24 November 1946.

¹¹ *Novelist*, pages 321–322; Kitty tape, 10 November 1984.

¹² *Novelist*, pages 679–680; CSF-FP 12 July 1946.

¹³ *Novelist*, page 680; cf. pages 250-251.

¹⁴ CSF-K 625, 29 January 1963.

¹⁵ *Novelist*, pages 680-682.

Hornblower talks about her stoicism at the loss of both her children, and there are plenty of hints that he and she have grown apart, but that is all. And why should Forester suddenly be so concerned about Kathleen's feelings? Because she might be interviewed about his memoirs, and disclose some embarrassing detail of 1937, the year of the tour of Franco's army? Letter 625 looks like a heavy hint: "don't mention the {Spanish Civil} War!" – and in the end, Kathleen would take anything she did know about the matter to the grave.

Letter 625 coincided with another moan to Phillips:-

*"I'm writing the accursed introduction, which is really causing me a lot of trouble – there are so many hurdles to take and pitfalls to avoid."*¹⁶

But the published *Companion* has no introduction! Part 1, *The Hornblower Atlas* contains maps and commentary; Part 2, *Some Personal Notes* explains how the series came to be written. The published order puts the cart before the horse; Forester's complaint reveals that *Some Personal Notes* was originally intended as the introduction. In other words, logic and the original intention would have presented Forester's two comments on the Spanish war in the order they have been presented in this article, not in the order they finally appeared. The original order would have begun with questions Forester wished to avoid – but the actual reader has been beguiled by Forester's fictional visit and voyage to Catalonia well before anything controversial is broached! John Forester remarks that "[the] creator's exposition of how each Hornblower story came to be written... required considerable care to tell a story that sounded like the truth but actually concealed it".¹⁷ It has now been shown how precisely these comments apply to the *Companion's* remarks on the Spanish Civil War, with which the pitfalls were ingeniously avoided. In the end, the hurdle was safely passed, when Hart's *Memoirs* were published with nothing embarrassing about Forester's visit to Spain.

The trip: a provisional reconstruction

Full detail of Forester's visit to Spain lies in two items in the Liddell Hart archive in Kings College, London.¹⁸ We therefore know that Forester was back before 18 April 1937, when Hart made a note on his discussion with him, on his return from a *tour of the army of General Don*

¹⁶ CSF-FP, 25 January 1963.

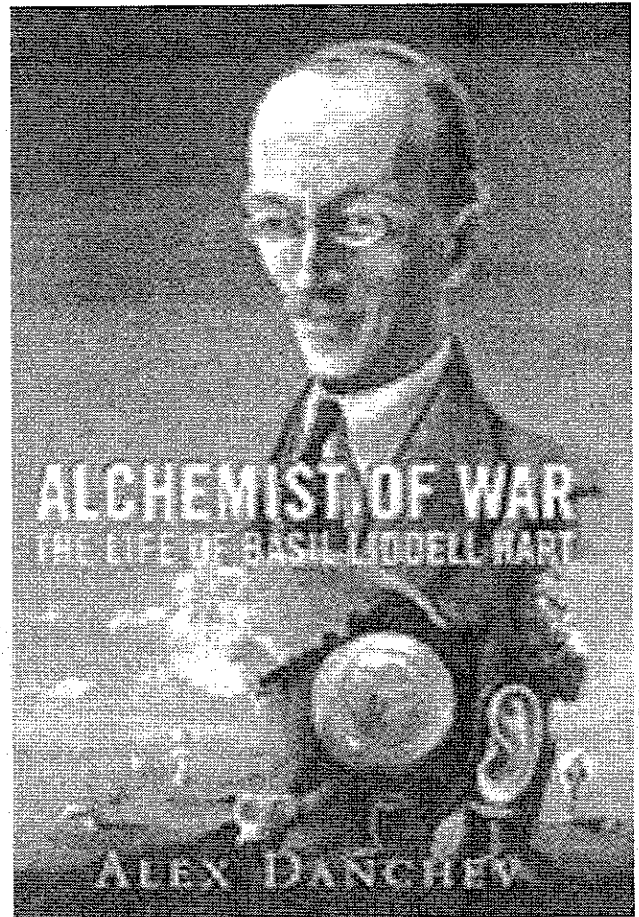
¹⁷ *Novelist*, page 680.

¹⁸ LIDDELL: 11/1937/23 1937 Apr 18

<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/lhcma/cats/liddell/li1136.htm>

LIDDELL: 15/3/380 1936-1939,

<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/lhcma/cats/liddell/li1503j.htm>



Francisco Franco Bahamonde. Forester then sent 36 black-and-white photographs, of Franco in Burgos, his Spanish and Moroccan troops, captured ordnance and a military base in the Guadarrama Mountains, north of Madrid.

When did Forester depart for Spain? Franco was declared head of the "Nationalist Government" in Burgos on 1 October 1936. But Keele University Professor Alex Danchev showed John Forester a letter from Forester to Hart dated 14 March 1937:-

"If I ever had the least hope of surviving you, I should ask if I might be your biographer (a ghoulish but necessary subject of discussion) and I think I should do it competently – but there is no chance of it." John Forester put his father's dismal prediction down to chronic morbidity.¹⁹ It would make even more sense in a letter written on the eve of departure to the perils of the front!

We may, therefore, provisionally conclude that Forester visited Spain sometime between mid-March and mid-April 1937.

¹⁹ *Novelist*, page 251; citing Liddell Hart Archives 292/26. It seems that the method of catalogue has changed!

Hart's Memoir

In early 1937, Hart opposed the Chamberlain government's policy of non-intervention in Spain, arguing that in practice it gave a free hand to those whose intervention was determining the course of events (i.e. Germany and Italy). Editors like Geoffrey Dawson and Robin Barrington Ward of *The Times* reflected the government line, that opposition to Germany and Italy in Spain could precipitate a wider war. Hart was also concerned about "concealed influences on British opinion that proceeded from very different motives", and this prompted a note to Barrington-Ward on 20 April, as follows:-

"I had a visit on Sunday from C.S. Forester, who had just been out to Northern Spain on a tour of Franco's Army. He had been asked to undertake this by Allied Newspapers, and then found that a group of City financiers was behind the arrangement – with the idea of getting favourable publicity for Franco. On which – so he discovered – certain City interests are spending a lot of money. He had an interesting tour and came back with an impression very different from what they had evidently hoped he would form. I jotted down the chief points he told me, and enclose it for your private information, and that of Geoffrey Dawson."

Hart then tells his readers about Forester and his role:-

*"At that time Cecil Forester had made a rapidly growing reputation with a number of novels, the most recent being that superb military character study *The General*. One day out of the blue came an invitation to meet the Marquis Merry de Val, former Spanish Ambassador in London – who asked him whether he knew Spain and Spanish, but otherwise gave him no clue as to the reason for the invitation. But the next day he was asked to see the Editor of the *Daily Sketch*, who offered him a job at a very high weekly fee to go to Nationalist Spain and write of conditions there. That rather surprised him as he had never done newspaper work, and when he asked why he had been chosen he got no clear answer. Two days later he was invited to meet some of the directors of Anglo-Spanish Construction at lunch, and there met Franco's press officer, Luis Bolin, who was in London on a visit. Bolin introduced him as 'the special correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*', and when Forester corrected him replied that he 'had arranged' for some of the articles at any rate, to appear also in that paper. In the course of conversation at lunch, members of the company told Forester, in answer to his probing questions, that they hoped to get orders from Spain 'after Franco's victory'. As might be expected, however, his articles were objective in their*

*report on conditions, and did not lend help to pro-Franco propaganda."*²⁰

Evasion in Context: some conclusions

In the light of this discussion, the necessary preliminaries to examining the archives may well be complete. There may be further questions, which only such examination, and a search for newspaper articles round the relevant dates, can answer. For some readers, Hart's remarks in themselves will be enough to close the case. This writer's preliminary conclusions are as follows:-

It would not be surprising if Forester wished to divert attention from the fact that he had been behind Franco's lines during the Spanish Civil War. In the 1960s, when Forester was writing *The Hornblower Companion*, Franco had been a pariah for decades, but was pressing claims to Gibraltar and, of course, opening up Spain to the package tourist. The context of 1937 would be particularly provocative. Shortly before Forester's arrival (if my dates are correct) the International Brigades – including the British Battalion – had played a key part, and incurred very heavy casualties, in the successful defence of Madrid against two major attempts by the Nationalists to isolate and capture the city. And the day after Forester's meeting with Hart on his return to England, Franco had consolidated his dictatorship by forcing the squabbling Spanish right into a single fascist party under his own effective control. The infamous Guernica raid took place a few days later.

On the 60th anniversary of the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, interest has been renewed with a spate of new publications, and with a determination in Spain to reopen matters which had been consigned to oblivion by generations of Franco and post-Franco government. The time may well have come for a definitive study of Forester's visit to Spain. Such a study must begin with scrutiny of the Kings College Liddell Hart archive, by which (obviously) the reconstruction done in this article will stand or fall!

The writer of this article would be interested to hear from anyone who is interested in such study, or is in possession of further relevant information.²¹

²⁰ BH Liddell Hart, *Memoirs*, Cassell (1965), volume 2, pages 133-134.

²¹ All material for *Reflections* should be sent to the address on the cover or, if possible, by email to: david-stead@lineone.net. Items longer than 250 words should be sent as MS Word attachments; any illustration should also be sent electronically.