

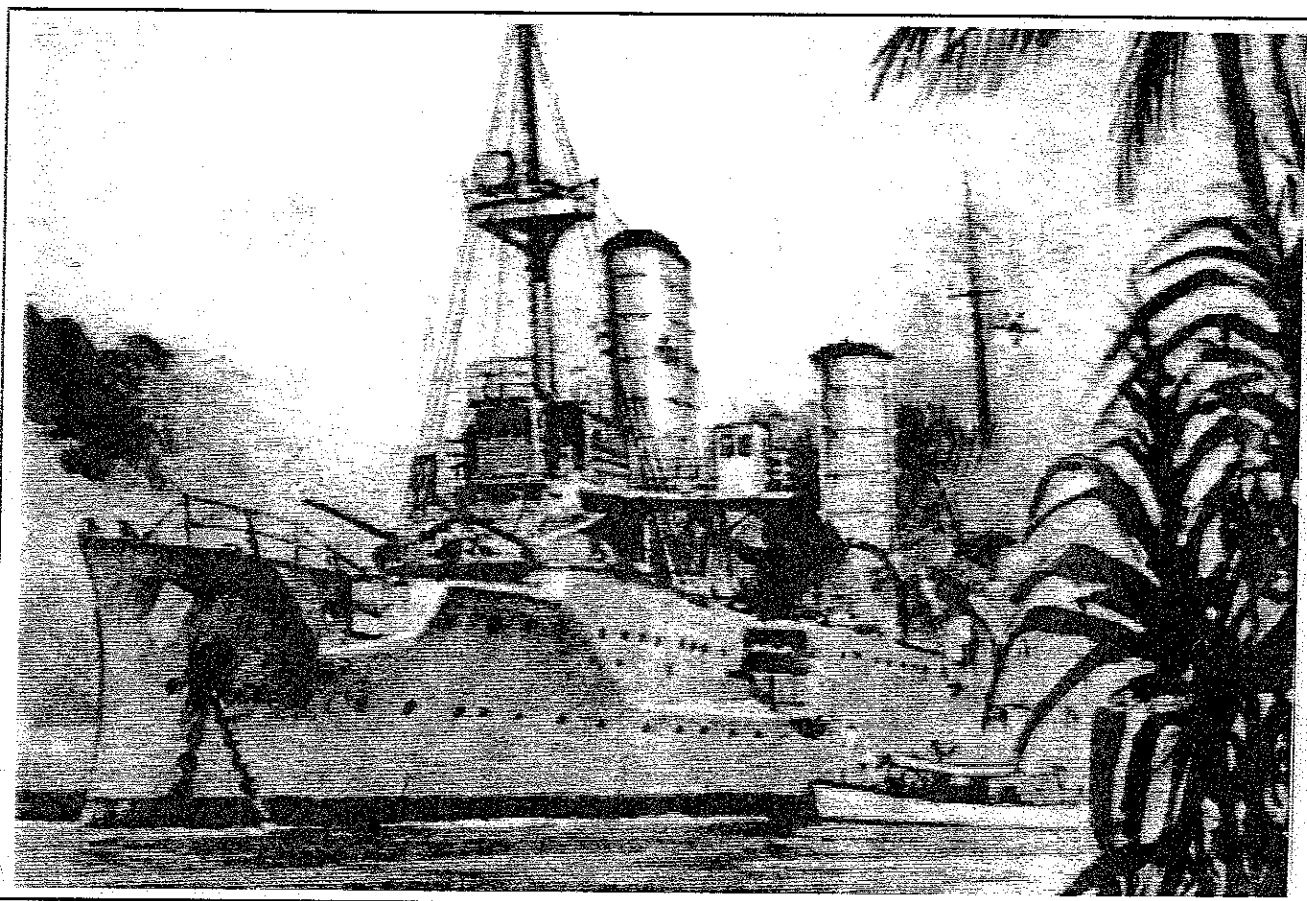


Reflections

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

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White tropical uniforms and awnings show a German navy pinnacle going about her business. The discharge from the fore turret reveals that the cruiser Königsberg is in action against British monitors. Otherwise, we could well have a scene from

The original *AFRICAN QUEEN* – as serialised in 1934.

***Tales of War from the Pen of a Storyteller* – Mark Corrison on CSF**

BOOKS: Colin Blogg on *The Bedchamber Mystery*;

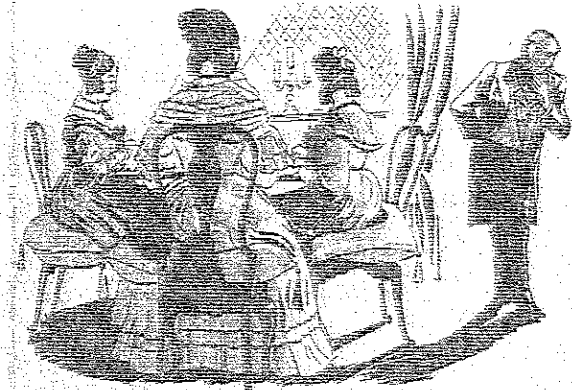
Christopher Smith on *HM frigate MACEDONIAN*;

FICTION: Adrian Taylor – continuing *Hornblower & the Crisis*

CORRESPONDENCE: In the wake of *A Ship of the Line*; *Arms and the Man*; *Hornblower's Charitable Offering*; *Guedalla and Churchill*; *Richard Sharpe*.

My favourite Forester book? –

THE BEDCHAMBER MYSTERY - COLIN BLOGG



Published by S.J. Reginald Saunders & Co, Canada (1944), this is the shortest book ever published by CSF and contains three short stories – *The Eleven Deck Chairs* (or, *The Eleventh Hour*), *Modernity and Maternity* and *The Bedchamber Mystery*. They were printed and published in Canada by Saunders and Co in 1944. They may have had to be published in Canada because wartime rationing of paper in Great Britain and the United States made it impossible to publish there.

The theme common to all three was their depiction of sexual transgression – at least so in the mind of the author.

The Bedchamber Mystery concerned three spinsters whose principal social delight was to spend one evening each week playing whist with a widowered General Practitioner. By some mishap, when one of the ladies was using a bedchamber, it broke, causing a gash in the posterior of the unfortunate sister. Too embarrassed to allow the GP to know which sister had been injured, they arranged for the inspection of the wound and suturing to be carried out while the identity of the victim was concealed by drapes. None of the sisters dared speak. When the sutures had to be removed the concealment was renewed. Eventually the unknown sufferer was fit enough to resume the weekly whist contest. At last the identity of the victim would become obvious, but when the GP arrived at the table, each of the sisters was sat upon a cushion and they could not be told apart.

The second story, originally published in *Argosy* Magazine 1944 as *The Eleventh Hour*, is set on a sea voyage by which the wives of various government officials were being evacuated from the vicinity of civil conflict.

These ladies adhered rigidly to the social precedence of their former colonial life. Shortly after they had embarked, the captain of the ship addressed the group

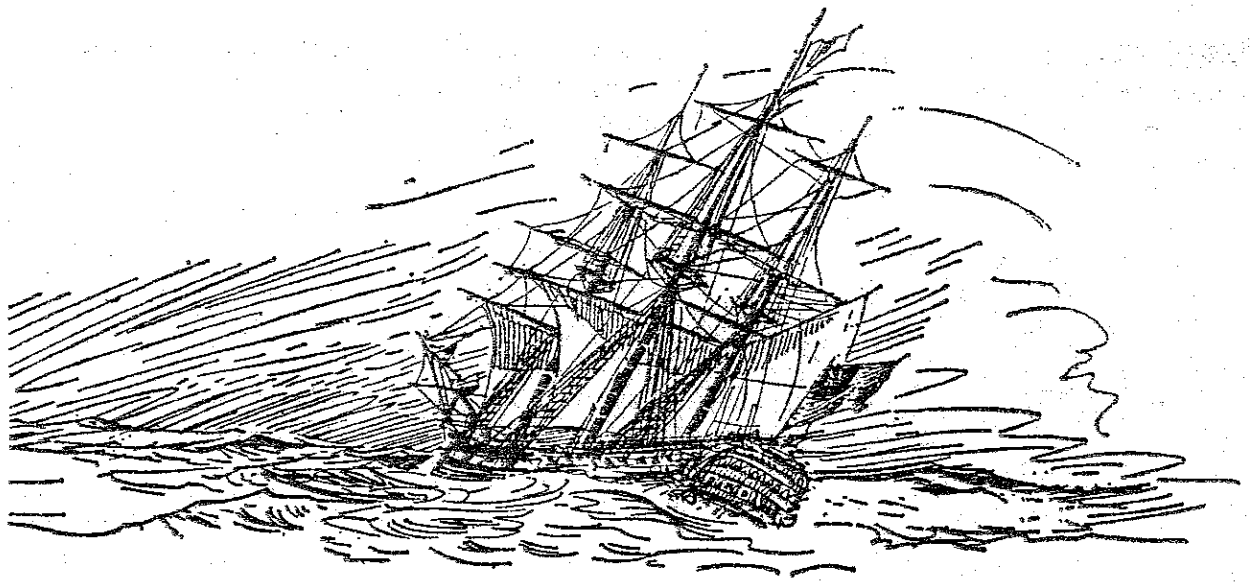
of eleven ladies and demanded the company of one of their number for the night. Veiled threats of violence, or worse, persuaded them to comply, for they realised that they had little option. So, the unfortunate wife of the Assistant Commissioner of Fisheries and Mines was selected to be the first to face the ordeal.

At breakfast the next morning the victim was shunned, ignored, and rather pitied. But after the same sequence of events was repeated on the second morning, things were different as the 'victims' had each other to talk to, to describe their experiences and to further intrigue those who were yet to be selected. And so the sequence was repeated each day, until only the formidable wife of the Vice-Governor was left inviolate. But then the Royal Navy intercepted the ship and the ladies were rescued. The previous social distinctions were restored, and the wife of the Vice-Governor had the satisfaction of retaining the moral high ground.

The third story, *Modernity and Maternity*, was presented as a tale of the future when machines had taken over some of the chores of living and the advancement of science had extended to other matters, such as the production of children. Males had become superfluous; meals were produced mechanically and farming was supervised from the cockpit of a helicopter. The feisty and independent heroine of this tale is seen to be pregnant. She is so unlikely to have found a lover, that the general view is she must have had some form of artificial conception and so demonstrated the social change resulting from scientific advance.

To consider these three stories as pornographic would have stretched even the sensitivity of wartime Canadians. At most, credulity is stretched rather thin. The first two tales have rounded plots typical of CSF and are quite economically written. The third demonstrates CSF's fanciful attempts at science fiction.

Why is this my favourite Forester book? First, it was published despite paper rationing. Second, the style of the stories, which were written as comedy, differs markedly from his usual unamusing contributions to the *genre*. The sequence of the three stories reflects the developing moral attitude of the times. But it leaves open the question of whether CSF wrote them with his tongue firmly in his cheek. I suspect he was teasing the reader – much in the way the same story was published under different titles. *The Eleventh Hour* – *Lilliput* (December 1944) reappeared as a 'new' short story, *The Eleven Deckchairs* – in *Lilliput* (September-October 1952). It is intriguing to speculate on what would have persuaded CSF to make gains from duplicate publishing.



A FRIGATE'S STORY

Christopher Smith

"Porta Coeli, the gate of heaven, Silly Porter was what the men called her. Hornblower had a vague memory of reading about the action which had resulted in the strange name appearing in the Navy List. The first Porta Coeli had been a Spanish privateer... She had put up so fierce a resistance that the action had been commemorated by naming an English ship after her. The Tonnant, the Temeraire, most of the foreign names in the Navy List were the result of similar actions – if the war were to go on long enough there would be more ships in the Navy with foreign names than with English ones, and among rival navies the reverse might eventually come true. The French Navy boasted a *Swiftsure*; maybe the Americans would have a *Macedonian* in their Navy List in future years."

So Hornblower muses in Chapter 9 of *Lord Hornblower*. He is reflecting on the ignominy of surrendering a warship and the agony of the subsequent court martial. It is the name of his present command that triggers his thoughts. He does not only recall what were for him recent episodes in naval history; he notes too the habit navies had of retaining the names of any vessel they captured and then, in due course, transferring them to new construction, to celebrate the triumph and capitalize on it.

The vagueness of the reference to the *Macedonian*, however, is an example of cunning in Forester's narrative tactics. The novelist, of course, knew just what was involved. What is more, any reader who happened not to be equally well informed on a detail less familiar than, say, the story of *Temeraire* and went to the trouble of looking it up would find it confirmed as both historical and apt. Typically, fact serves to reinforce Forester's fiction.

The crucial episodes in the story of *Macedonian* belong to the War of 1812. Accounts of them in their historical framework can be found, for instance, in Theodore Roosevelt's stirring *The Naval War of 1812* and in Forester's own *The Age of Fighting Sail*. In *Chronicles of the Frigate 'Macedonian' 1809-1922*, James Tertius de Kay takes the opportunity to explore his theme at far greater length.¹ The details that he provides are, besides, set in a wide context, and the first part of the book in particular casts light on the world of Hornblower. A paperback published in New York by W.W.Norton in 1995, the *Chronicles* might by now seem a little elderly for review in *Reflections*, were it not that economically priced remaindered copies have just started appearing in London bookshops.

Laid down at Woolwich in 1809 and named after Alexander the Great, HMS *Macedonian* was constructed at a time when there was a severe shortage of sound, well-seasoned native timber. So supplies had to be brought in from the Baltic lands. This is a reminder of the importance of that region as a source of maritime supplies, and a recurrent theme in the ship's history is how susceptible 'Danzig' oak was to the ravages of rot. Perhaps not everyone will care for the way De Kay sometimes seeks to add human dimensions to his narrative. Better illustrations of the *Macedonian's* lines would have been welcome too, and so would more facts about such machines as the ship's pumps. All the same, the description of the enterprise of building the frigate is both informative and vivid.

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¹ James Tertius de Kay, *Chronicles of the Frigate 'Macedonian' 1809-1922* (New York: W.W.Norton, 1995), pp.336.

By the time the *Macedonian* was ready to put to sea, the Royal Navy was running short of men as well as *matériel*. Mustering a crew was not the only problem either. The early chapters of De Kay's narrative paint a sorry picture of more or less inadequate captains at odds with their officers and mistreating the seamen. It is not only in fiction that personality clashes, shameful peculation and sadistic punishments were the disorders of the day. Blatant class discrimination often put a sharper edge on them too. Perhaps it was fortunate that for a while the frigate was not to be involved in serious action with the enemy.

It was on 25 October 1812 that events took a decisive turn when HMS *Macedonian* encountered USS *United States* off the Cape Verde Islands. It was to be one of the classic frigate duels that characterized the War of 1812. The defeat and sinking of HMS *Guerrière* had been regarded in Britain as nothing short of a national disgrace. Now it was the turn of *Macedonian* to continue the sorry pattern. To make matters worse, she struck her colours, and the battered ship was captured.

Making use of contemporary sources, De Kay is able to write a description of the engagement that is as graphic as a novel. He also discusses what motivated the two captains. When the action commenced, both, he argues, would have seen opportunities for personal enrichment and a way of achieving fame while aiming a blow at their country's enemy. Commodore Stephen Decatur's object was not just to defeat the British frigate. American opinion might take that as just a repetition of Isaac Hall's triumph when *Constitution* had beaten *Guerrière*. Now Decatur wanted to go one better. His tactics were to batter *Macedonian* into submission and then to take the British frigate back home as a prize. Captain John Carden, for his part, underestimated his opponent and played into his hands. He allowed the more heavily armed *United States* to bombard his ship from a safe range. Finally, after heavy casualties, he recognized the hopelessness of the situation and surrendered.

Though prevailing attitudes respected the desire to avoid futile slaughter, British opinion generally was outraged. Carden was, however, not treated harshly when he faced court martial and lived on, though with no particular distinction, to rise in the Service. Naturally enough, Decatur was hailed as a hero. He was, however, faced with a tricky problem of the sort that Hornblower comes up against. Defeating the enemy was one thing; it was quite another to persuade the authorities to shell out the prize money with which they motivated daring deeds.

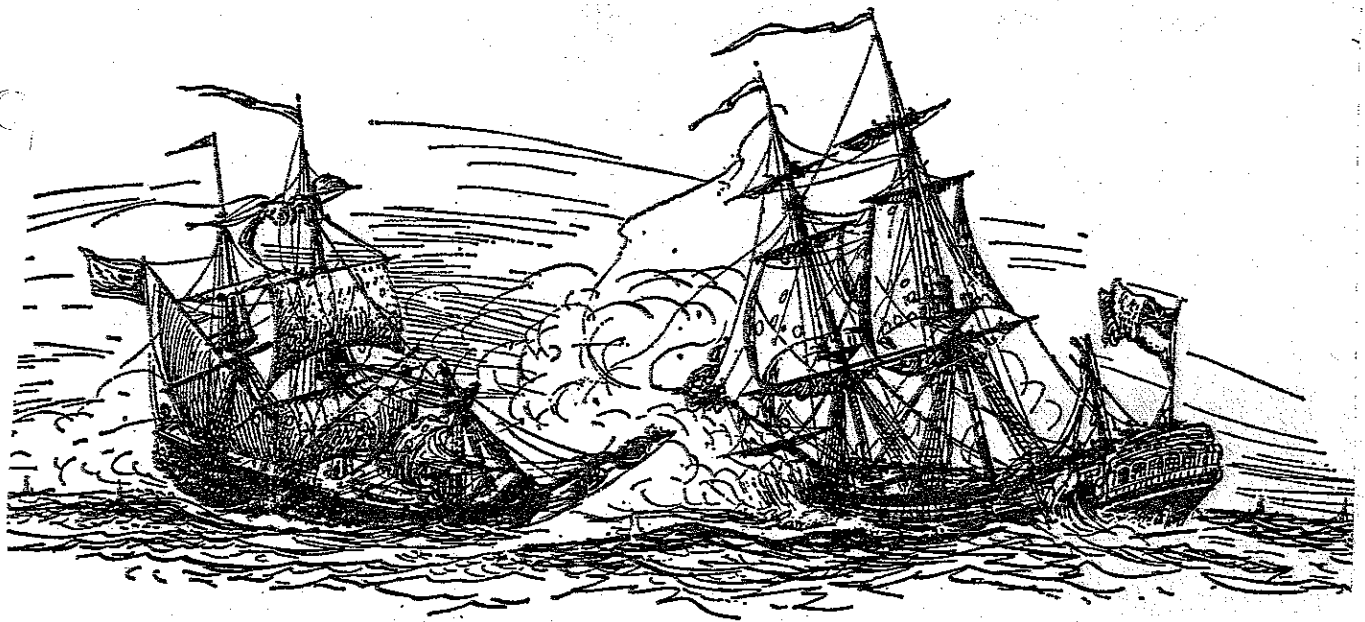
Provided Decatur could establish that the two frigates were of equal strength, the prize money for him and his crew would amount to a very considerable sum. The

story of haggling and downright obstruction shows the administration of the fledgling republic in a curious, not to say comical light. The upshot was that the *United States* was finally adjudged the stronger of the two warships. This was reasonable, given the larger size of her crew and the greater weight of her armament, and also tends towards Carden's rehabilitation. Any sense that Decatur and his men were hard done by when their prize money was cut by half is offset by the thought that the remainder of the money went into a fund for old sailors.

Though badly damaged, the *Macedonian* had been sailed back to Newport, repaired and sent to sea again under the American flag. The tale of subsequent voyages and campaigns, of refits and periods in reserve amounts to a series of remarkable snapshots of the naval history of the United States. Apart from the remarkable self-seeking conduct of successive captains, what is particularly striking is the way the ship was kept in service. Though the inferior quality of the materials used in her construction was the subject of much disparagement, it always seems to have been thought worth patching her up again. Sentiment no doubt played a part in the preservation of this prize wrested from the British. But a wooden hull crafted by shipwrights also had a value that could not be disregarded in a navy rarely awash with money.

A new chapter opened in the mid-1830s when, amid some administrative confusion, Carden's frigate was broken up. But the opportunity was not neglected to salvage timbers and some metal work and reuse them in a new warship that then took the name *Macedonian*. Rebuilding - or new construction that maintained tradition? Either view could be taken, depending on the case being presented by or to the authorities. What is certain is that it was not only the figurehead of Alexander the Great that was incorporated into the second *Macedonian* (and is now proudly displayed at the Annapolis Naval Academy). After a full life including service in Parry's squadron that demanded the opening up of Japan, the story ends in the twentieth century. After she was broken up, some of her timbers were reused once again, this time in the construction of an hotel and restaurant on City Island, New York, that was burnt down in 1922.

The end of the story is, then, rather inglorious. But *Chronicles of the Frigate 'Macedonian'* makes good reading that will hold the attention of anyone with an interest in Hornblower and the naval world in which he leads his adventurous life. An additional factor is that the focus is, in large measure, less on personalities than on the ship herself; that is, of course, something that might well have appealed to Forester.



Tales of War from the Pen of a Storyteller Mark Corrison

CS Forester, as described by his son John Forester, was a storyteller.² Forester's contemporary, Ernest Hemingway, said "I recommend Forester to everyone literate that I know".³ These two statements speak to the spirit of Forester's writing, suggesting (1) that he was an exceptional storyteller if not an outstanding novelist, and (2) most readers will at least enjoy Forester's stories and find them worth reading. Forester wrote in a clear, simple, short story style. His plots were never deep, nor complicated, but this is not to say that the stories were pedestrian. Indeed, his plots were for the most part very original, and avoided the stereotypical trappings that some authors resort to when writing historical fiction. And within a diverse circle of current fans, Forester is considered "gentle on the reader". I mention these points with respect for his audience, which spans a wide range of ages, gender, generations and cultures – it is an audience that continues to expand.⁴

² John Forester, *Father's Tales*, *American Scholar* 66 (1997), pages 543-555. John Forester comments on the autobiographical work *Long before Forty*, published by Little, Brown and Michael Joseph (1967), written by the author many years before his death. In this work, CSF created an elaborate disguise about his life, ostensibly for posthumous consumption. The younger Forester notes that analysis of his father's letters and family history reveal a large admixture of lies that confirm elaborate efforts on the part of CSF to conceal facts about his origins and early life. The significance of this may be evident in Forester's exceptional talent at storytelling that is a fundamental form of "fiction".

³ The Hemingway quote appears on the dust jackets of most Forester works published [in the USA] after 1950.

⁴ The 1999 A&E (*Arts and Entertainment Channel*) television broadcast of the *Horatio Hornblower* mini series created a new generation of fans who have offered a great wealth of comment about the character, the movies and Forester's works posted on more than a dozen interrelated message boards. Many agree with

Forester's career as a writer evolved gradually and was punctuated by periods of writing in which trademark themes emerged. Those themes associated with historical fiction, many in a war setting, form a body of work that is best remembered, and for which Forester is best remembered. The credibility of Forester's stories about war attracted a large international following that grew to include (of all people) Adolph Hitler, who presented gifts of Forester's novel *The General* (1936) to close friends.⁵ Another famous fan is former US President Jimmy Carter, and many still remember that he introduced Hubert Horatio Humphrey as "Hubert Horatio Hornblower" on national television.⁶

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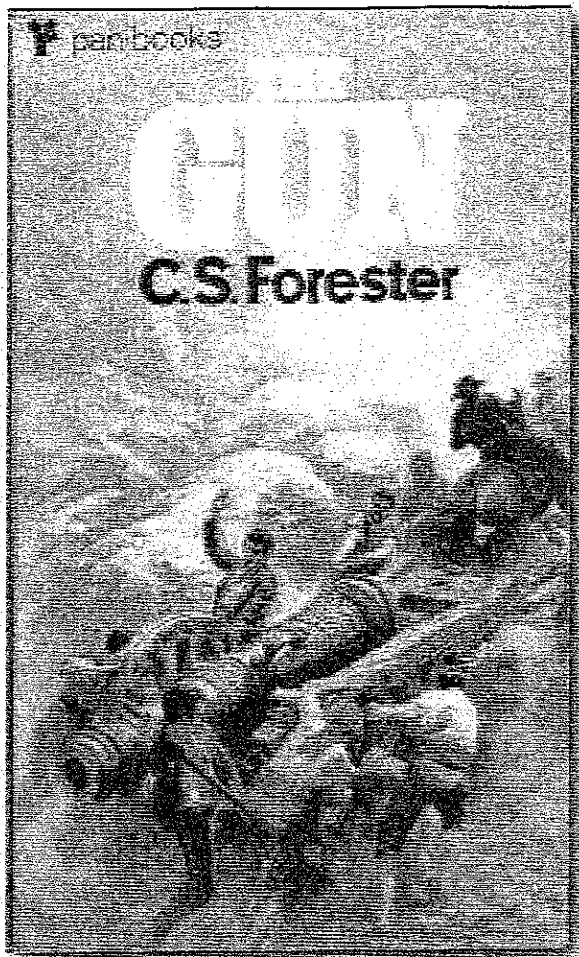
the statement of one frequent poster that among Forester's great talents as a writer is readability, and "being gentle on the reader".

⁵ CS Forester, *The General*, Boston: Little, Brown (1947), page vii.

⁶ The remark was made early in Carter's speech of acceptance of nomination as the Democratic Party's presidential candidate for the November 1980 elections, Madison Square Garden, New York, 14 August 1980.

We'll win because we are the party of a great President who knew how to get reelected—Franklin Delano Roosevelt. And we are the party of a courageous fighter who knew how to give 'em hell—Harry Truman... And we're the party of a gallant man of spirit—John Fitzgerald Kennedy. And we're the party of a great leader of compassion—Lyndon Baines Johnson, and the party of a great man who should have been President, who would have been one of the greatest Presidents in history—Hubert Horatio Hornblower—Humphrey. I have appreciated what this convention has said about Senator Humphrey, a great man who epitomized the spirit of the Democratic Party...

Vice-President Humphrey had died on 13 January 1978. Editor.



Genesis of the Man Alone

"CS Forester" is the pen name of Cecil Lewis Troughton Smith, born in Cairo in 1899.⁷ Cecil was the son of a British government official in the Ministry of Education in Egypt, but spent his youth in England. He was one of that generation destined to fight in World War I, but a serious medical condition resulted in his own rejection from military service. Ironically, he wrote extensively on the subject of war and in the richest of detail, while having no direct experience in combat or the military.⁸

Cecil grew up knowing a level of hardship and emotional pain in his relations with other boys. He was described as stoic, somewhat fatalistic, and for showing an affinity for activities that required precision, detail and discipline. It is exactly these qualities that surface and become infused into the personality of Horatio Hornblower. It is this character, Horatio Hornblower, for whom Forester is best known. Hornblower: this legendary British naval captain of the Napoleonic era embodied the characteristics of the ideal naval officer, rising through the ranks through merit, and demonstrating the professional requirements essential for survival and success in the British Navy. Hornblower also provided Forester with a deeply intriguing character study through

⁷ John Forester, *Father's Tales*, page 544.

⁸ Sanford Sternlicht, *CS Forester and the Hornblower saga*, Syracuse University Press (1999), pages 22-24.

the literary prism – the "man alone". Although Forester explores this persona in earlier novels, only with *Hornblower* was he able to slice and dice, dissect, inspect, and analyse the character to the desired level of psychological scrutiny. The idea of the "man alone" obviously intrigued Forester and has likewise intrigued uncounted numbers of loyal followers for the last seventy-five years. *Hornblower* was just such a "man alone", an eyewitness to naval warfare in the Age of Napoleon through which a twentieth century reader is given a chance to imagine and understand the experience of sailors and soldiers during a climactic era through dramatic historical fiction.

Imagery and inspiration

Forester tended to focus on the technology and detail of naval life. Indeed, I believe that Forester found as much personal pleasure when writing about this subject, as from any part of his craft. The stories are rich in vivid imagery that lets one look back two centuries and witness, for example, the repair of a cannon – a cannon mounted on a peninsula on the eastern end of Haiti, overlooking Samana Bay in the year 1800, at that time a haven to privateers and pirates; pirates who were likewise being threatened by a slave insurrection led by the "Black Napoleon", Toussaint l'Ouverture. The past comes alive through the eyes and thoughts of Forester's characters. He used such historical backdrops to demonstrate the power and prowess of the Royal Navy, and he promotes the tenets of Alfred Thayer Mahan's *The influence of Sea Power upon History*. That episode with the cannon follows an earlier sequence in which *Hornblower* is compelled to master the art of heating "red-hot" shot: when fired from a cannon, red-hot shot could quickly turn any wooden ship into a blazing wreck. Such details as may be described in historical accounts can be researched in a variety of technical sources. But Forester's great talent lay in telling a story that provides extraordinary detail, combining story with imagery, and personalised by presenting it to the reader through the eyes and thoughts of Horatio Hornblower.

Forester was a master at combining the four elements with the five senses into a story that can be visualised by almost any reader. The *Hornblower* series can be read on several levels, with each onion-like layer peeled away to reveal some unique new quality, content or perspective. But, to repeat, the stories and the details are never so complicated or deep as to be over-the-head of the average reader. They are, for the most part, historically accurate.

Forester wrote one exceptional book, *The Hornblower Companion* (1964). It is part historical atlas and part autobiography, i.e. an autobiography of his writing styles, his inspiration, his methods – and filled with interesting vignettes. In one, he tells how his fictional

account of the defence of the town of Riga from Napoleon's northern army imperilled – almost ended – a valued friendship. A personal friend and eminent historian wrote to Forester after reading the novel *Commodore Hornblower* (1945), saying: "I knew that British forces were engaged at the siege of Riga, but I never have been able to find out much about them. What were your sources?" Forester sent a lame reply saying, essentially, that he had had no sources; adding that "Riga could not have been besieged without British forces arriving to help, and Hornblower (as usual) had been handy". Forester then relates that "no-one would believe, without reading the letter he received in reply, how hard was the rap on the knuckles that historian administered to him", adding "it still smarts to this day, even though I know it was undeserved".⁹

Forester's research was thorough and meticulous. He prepared the plots for the ten Hornblower novels carefully, developing stories that were historically plausible, if one appreciates and excuses the fictitious use of British naval forces at Riga. Many of Forester's ideas for plots were drawn from and inspired by three volumes of *The Naval Chronicle*, a periodical written for and by British naval officers during the Age of Napoleon. I think it is worth mentioning that Forester, in turn, provided inspiration to several other authors who have carried on the tradition of novels about the Royal Navy during the Age of Fighting Sail. Fans of this genre often argue that these authors and novels are "better and more historically accurate" than Forester, yet some of this literature is little more than formula romance novels, set at sea.

Forester's great achievement is in readability. He wrote clear, straightforward stories filled with the details of military life, technology, equipment and historical events focussing on the profession. He wrote extensively about the British Navy, a service that operated primarily beyond the sight of those on land, conveying that drama to a wide audience. After collecting several dozen of his novels (most of them used copies), I am very impressed by the large number of women readers (young and old) who were given Forester novels as birthday or Christmas presents. Forester, it seems, was not merely a gift given to "little Ricky" or "Uncle Henry". I believe that this stands as testament to the readability and skill of Forester in writing novels that provided something beyond mere adventure or romance.

Forester wrote a number of biographies and even some non-fiction. The biographies, completed early in his career, were written about Napoleon (1924), the Empress Josephine (1925), Nelson (1929), Louis XIV (1928), Victor Emmanuel II of Italy (1927) – and

Christopher Columbus, in a fictional biography entitled *To the Indies* or (in the British edition) *The Earthly Paradise* (1940). For the young audience, Forester wrote about the Barbary Pirates, one of the Landmark Books collection published by Random House. These books put bread on Forester's table and received only modest critical acclaim, and collectively they are not considered among his most memorable efforts. There is, however, one non-fiction work that provides a significant contribution to a well-covered period of history, Forester's *A History of the Naval War of 1812* (1956) embodies a unique perspective and interpretation and possesses an uncommon level of historical insight.

Blood and water

Forester worked for the British Ministry of Information during World War II. He resided in the United States and turned out about one book a year. His contribution to the Allied war effort may be passed off as minor, but a case can be made for the invaluable contribution he made to morale on the Home Front. Forester wrote several novels about the Allied naval effort that appeared in serialised form in such magazines as *The Saturday Evening Post*. His gripping accounts portrayed the desperate effort on which Allied victory was hinged. The stories were sophisticated propaganda, soft-pedalled to penetrate the psyche like a soothing tonic, and very effective at reminding those on the Home Front about what was at stake.

Syracuse University professor Sanford Sternlicht completed a critical biography and study of Forester's published works in 1979. Sternlicht outlined the challenge that lay before Forester in the handling of plot and the deft skill required, in his words:

*"to overcome the difficulty for a writer to serve a patriotic cause and simultaneously be true to his art. This is so, because most propaganda requires a sharp contrast between the values and also the people of both sides, with one set being portrayed as exemplary, and the other as unmitigated evil, whereas the artist intuitively realises that life, and therefore true art, is not so pat."*¹⁰

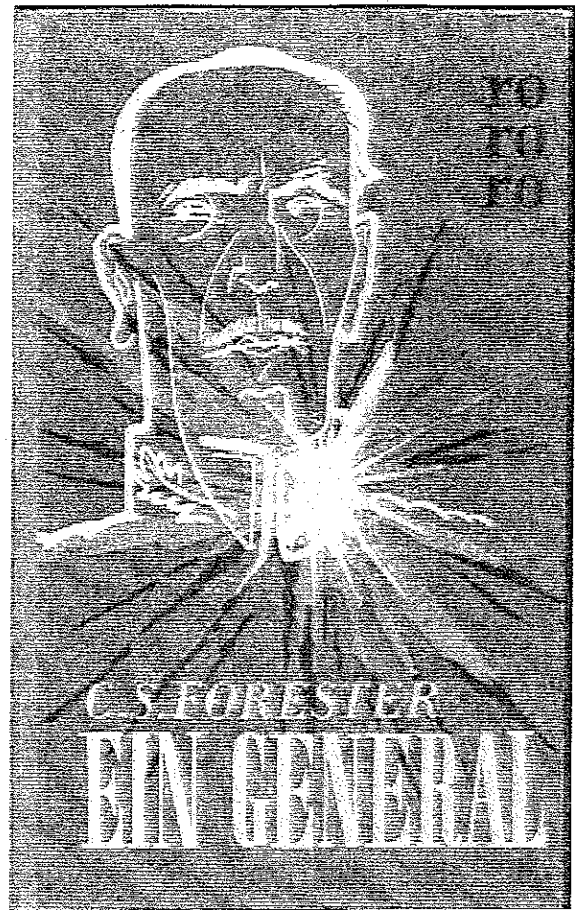
The Ship, a novel written in 1943 – and written at a time when the outcome of World War II hung in the balance – is a wonderful example of Forester's characteristic style. As propaganda, it suggests the eventual triumph of British naval power in the Mediterranean. As propaganda, it also perpetuates the popular stereotypes about the British Navy and its sailors and the Italian Navy. As a novel, it is classic Forester, written in short-story style. Forester takes the reader from the armchair of America's home front heartland to the bridge of a British cruiser in the Mediterranean, painting a picture in

⁹ CS Forester, *The Hornblower Companion*, Boston: Little, Brown (1964); London: Chatham publishing (1998), page 130; *Some personal notes, Long before Forty*, Michael Joseph (1967), page 244.

¹⁰ Sternlicht, *CS Forester and the Hornblower saga*, page 123. First published as *CS Forester*, GK Hall & Co. (1981).

words that immediately transports his readers into the sights, sounds, smell and emotion of the setting and plot. The reader forms an immediate and complete impression of the first character in the book, *what is going on, the time of day*, and a myriad of other details – and this he accomplishes in not many more words than I have just used to describe the opening scene. Forester uses “the ship”, HMS *Artemis*, as a metaphor for a living thing: the ship’s range-finders are its eyes, its guns are its teeth and claws, the boilers are lungs, the engine room and propellers are legs and feet, and the galley is its stomach. The sailor who brings coffee to the captain and officers on the bridge represents the arterial system feeding lifeblood to the brains of the ship. Combining all such elements between bookends was how Forester wove tales – tales read by teen girls, elderly uncles, gold-star moms, and young sailors serving aboard Allied warships. In a clever twist, *The Ship* can be read in what is very close to real time, taking approximately six hours to read (the approximate elapsed time in the story). *The Ship* is a compelling, quick read, and it is easy to complete in one sitting – that is, if the reader has about six hours of time.

Almost at the moment of US entry into World War II, Forester completed *The Captain from Connecticut* (1941), a novel about a Yankee frigate captain sparring with his British counterpart during the War of 1812. The timing could not have been better, and it seems apparent that Forester was writing with an ulterior motive, that is to strengthen the political, military and cultural bond between Great Britain and the United States. The story is almost formula, somewhat cliché, and predictable, concluding with an all-too-convenient ending. But there is an underlying message, subtle for those who have to be told, or glaring for those who recognise, that Forester is stating (almost shouting), “Britain and the United States may have had their differences in the past, but they will never be separated in this war against the Axis Powers!” Similar sentiments have been uttered before and since. During the Opium Wars, American Commodore Josiah Tatnall reputedly proclaimed “blood is thicker than water” as he intervened on behalf of threatened British naval forces in battle against the Chinese. More recently, Secretary of State Alexander Haig told Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher that the United States would stand by Britain in the Falklands War not because their war was just, but simply because “it was Britain”. And in the days following the 11 September 2001 attack on the United States, Prime Minister Tony Blair proclaimed without condition “we were with you at the beginning, we will stay with you to the end”. That Forester suggests the same is not that extraordinary. What is significant is that he wrote an entire novel in which to say it. And to this day, *The Captain from Connecticut* remains among Forester’s most popular novels.



The General and the corporal

After *The General* drew the attention of Adolph Hitler, Forester went to some pains to qualify, explain, or distance himself from any intentional association with the Nazi dictator. Coming as it did on the eve of World War II, Forester explains some of the circumstances connected with the publication of *The General* in Germany, in the foreword of a second-edition copy. According to Forester, Hitler had apparently read the book and was recommending it among friends. He gave several special-bound copies as Christmas presents to his inner circle in 1938. Forester relates these facts and continues with further explanation about how the message, *his* message, may or may not have been understood by the *Führer*. Forester concludes the discussion with a commentary about the author’s art, earning a living, and ultimately explaining his motives in writing the book, in his words “a desire to pleasantly occupy the minds of readers for a few hours”.¹¹

The General is an extraordinary novel, and a book that is still on recommended reading lists of military academies around the world. *The General* was a satire, but a satire without humour – or at best grim humour – and steeped in irony. It is the tale of a hero who was in fact anti-hero. Forester’s story “exposes the folly of the British operational plans that perpetuated stalemate and

¹¹ CS Forester, *The General*, Boston: Little, Brown (1947), page vii, has an account of Hitler’s gifts of copies of *The General*.

sacrificed a generation of young men. How ironic, then, that Hitler found profound meaning in it. But what meaning, we can only contemplate. Hitler was, after all, a World War I veteran, with combat experience in the trenches of the Western Front. We do not know if Hitler believed that this story proved the inferiority of British military capability as an encouragement for the confidence of the German high command, or that the story could provide a useful lesson on what the German high command should avoid. Or perhaps Hitler may merely have enjoyed the book on its merits. We will never know. The message presented in *The General* may date from 1936 and provide lessons about World War I, but the message is *relevant* still. And to this day *The General* remains among the most acclaimed Forester works.

After World War II, Forester continued writing on the subject of war. *The Good Shepherd* (1955) focused on convoy duty in the North Atlantic. In this novel, he inserted biblical references that provide a "good shepherd" allegory related to the title that works very well with the plot that concerns the ever-vigilant protection of convoys by Allied naval escorts.¹² Forester also wrote a novel entitled *The Nightmare* (1955) that exposes the horror of Nazi Germany in a series of short stories based on testimony given during the Nuremberg war crimes trials.

The 1960 movie *Sink the Bismarck* was based on a Forester novel that barely qualifies as fiction. Entitled *Hunting the Bismarck* or (as published in the USA) *The last nine days of the Bismarck* (1959), it indeed chronicles the last 9 days of the giant German battleship and does not differ in any significant degree from the known facts contained in naval reports and survivor accounts.

From screen to silver screen

Several more of Forester's books have made it to the silver screen. *The Pride and the Passion*, starring Cary Grant, Sophia Loren and Frank Sinatra, was based on the novel *The Gun* (1933). *Sailor of the King*, starring Jeffrey Hunter, was a remake of the movie *Forever England*, based on Forester's novel *Brown on Resolution* (1929) – published in the United States as *Single Handed*. The 1951 movie *African Queen* starred Humphrey Bogart and Katherine Hepburn contending with a German gunboat in German East Africa. This film was perhaps the most faithful adaptation of a Forester novel, published under the same title in 1935. And ultimately there is *Captain Horatio Hornblower* with Gregory Peck in the title role. The "man alone" commands one of His Majesty's Ships, fights a renegade dictator, triumphs in battle over a Spanish ship



twice the size of his own, and is smitten by the love of Lady Barbara Wellesley, played by Virginia Mayo. Forester created Lady Barbara as the fictional younger sister of the Duke of Wellington. Today, a young actor named Ioan Gruffud has taken Gregory Peck's place in a series of A&E movies about the "Indomitable Hornblower".

Forester may have chanced upon a very popular formula for his stories about the "man alone". The man alone is an individual that Forester describes as being thrust into a situation, perhaps command or some other life event, in which success or survival depends solely on his own skill, courage and wits.¹³ Any soldier, sailor or airman who has survived combat understands this man-alone experience on some level. In Forester's novel *Rifleman Dodd* (1932) – English title *Death to the French* – set in Portugal in the year 1810, during the Peninsular War, the main character carries on a guerrilla war, almost single-handed, behind enemy lines. Comparisons with popular action movies, such as *Rambo*, *Die-Hard* and others of that genre, are very easy to make. It is ours to decide whether Forester had already mastered this formula in the early 1930s.

As a storyteller and writer of historical fiction, Forester created authentic, plausible and generally accurate depictions of war, in novels and non-fiction that comprise nearly half of his published work. His tales have withstood the test of time and remain popular to this day. The character of Horatio Hornblower was even claimed by Gene Roddenberry to have provided some of the inspiration for Captain Kirk of the *Star Trek* series. So this is the final testament to Forester's wide-ranging appeal that remains a standard against which a wide body of historical fiction may be measured.

¹³ Forester, *The Hornblower Companion*, Chatham Publishing (1998), page 92; cf. *Some personal notes in Long before Forty*, Michael Joseph (1967), pages 187-188.

¹² Sternlicht, *CS Forester and the Hornblower saga*, page 144.

Adrian Taylor: Hornblower does some sleuthing!

Episode 7 in a continuation of *Hornblower and the Crisis*

It was nine o'clock in the evening and Horatio Hornblower had just battled manfully through at least half of another of the gargantuan suppers at *The Saracen's Head*. As he lay on his bed, seemingly pole-axed by his efforts to make at least a show of eating his meal, he thought anew of this William Wilson business and its possible connection to the forgery of that first letter from Maria. Encouraged by certain hints in the Reverend Clive's letter, he had in fact more or less concluded that Wilson was a skilled forger of handwriting who was possibly in the same league as Dr Claudius.

Hornblower had been furiously busy during the late summer's day which had just ended and he was thoroughly exhausted, a state perhaps reflected in his drinking thirstily his pint of ale that evening and actually requesting another one, although he managed to drink only half of it. There had been further matters to clear up at the Admiralty and he was by now so heartily sick of the minutiae of bureaucracy that he cared not to think any more about all that again. And he could at last relax in the privacy of his room at *The Saracen's Head*.

Now Hornblower yielded to a sigh and he arose with stiff legs – he had walked some distance that day as once more he had decided to forego a cab-ride after he had left the wherryman that evening. He must, he decided with some resolution, find that letter, which he had suppose, was from his distant wife, but now realised that this very likely was not so. It must surely still lie in one of the drawers of the desk which stood against the far wall where he fancied that he had placed it.

And there, wonder of wonders, he found it almost at once, lying beneath the letter he had received which was indeed the earnest work of his spouse – or was there another puzzling layer in this game of counterfeiting? He withdrew the two letters and studied them as minutely as he was able to in the light of the candle which burned upon the desk. There seemed to be little doubt about it: the first letter that he had received was a most excellent forgery; the two letters had to all intents and purposes been written by one and the same person. Now he placed the letters back into the drawer whence they had come. For once he found that the ale which he had just drunk was stimulating his thoughts most satisfactorily and his mind focused upon what seemed to him a critical question: who was it who had delivered the forged letter directly into his own hands some week and a half ago? A confederate of Wilson's? Surely not the idiot son? There seemed to be more questions than answers in this game of seeming plot and counterplot. And there was the undoubted fact that *The Saracen's Head* was a

veritable honeycomb of rooms and broom cupboards: many potential hideaways for some nefarious purpose. Hornblower's jaw set in his determination to plumb the depths of this little game, even if it might mean that his own life was at perilous risk. He felt a tingling up his spine and he clenched his right fist. With a thrill he realised that he had stumbled upon adventure in landlubberly London, far from the heaving seas and the bloodthirsty thrust of the cutlass.

Without further reflection Hornblower arose from his seat at the desk and set out on his quest to explore the nooks and crannies of this seemingly innocent hostelry with its jovial landlord. His mind seethed with possibilities that did not preclude the underhand workings of bands of thieves. And so he opened the door, crept out as quietly as he was able in his excited state, and closed it behind him with a barely audible click.

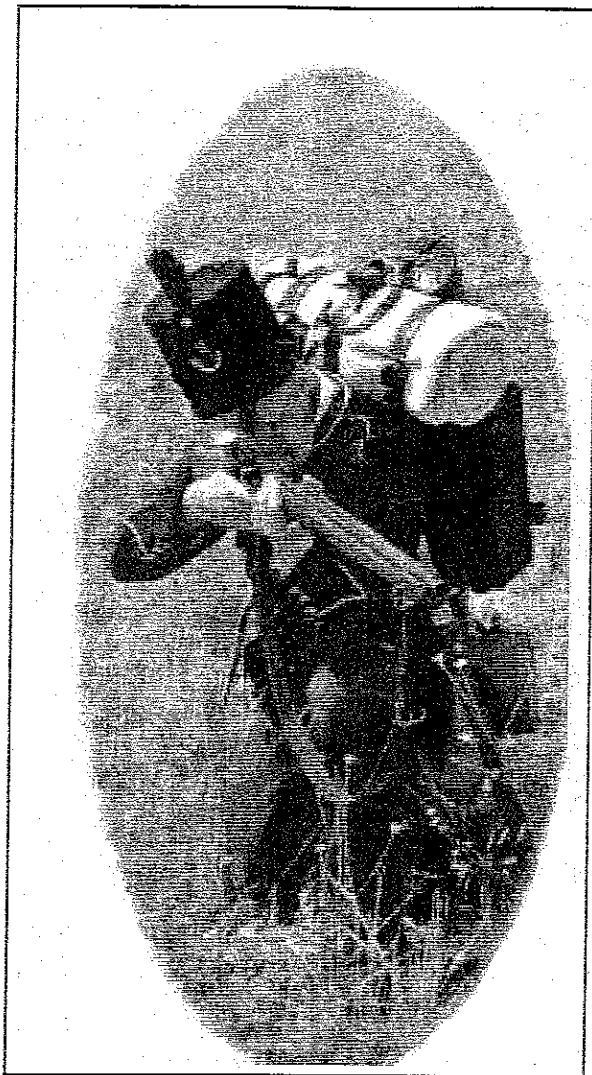
It was nearly an hour later, perhaps, that Hornblower tiptoed back into his room. He went to sit at his desk and he breathed deeply to relieve himself of his tension. He had explored much of *The Saracen's Head* and its rabbit warren of rooms. And he had finally found what he was looking for; he had discovered the forger's hideaway. After searching much of his own floor and some of the one above – the idiot son had passed him twice, grimacing at him, like the undoubted lunatic he was, on both occasions – he was returning to his own room seemingly empty-handed, when he noticed a door which he had not tried.

It took only ten minutes for that small room to yield up most of its secrets: the unmade bed, the writing materials lying in disorderly fashion on the small desk, the churchwarden pipe laid carelessly to one side with a scattering of tobacco ash. And, most important of all, the meticulous copy of his wife's signature, which was lying upon the desk for all the world to see if they cared to look, and which was presumably laid there by William Wilson. There was also a note which said:-

*"Dear Shaver,
"I have written the letter. It is in the left-hand drawer of the desk. Take it to H.H. as arranged. W.W."*

He had stood and looked at these effects for a full minute. Then he had quit the room to leave them undisturbed. As he sat at the desk in his own room he realised with a pang that there arose the question of a motive for this forging of his wife's letter. These were deep waters indeed, far deeper, to Hornblower's fevered mind, than those Atlantic depths to which careless or unfortunate mariners were sometimes consigned.

CORRESPONDENCE



Sharpe - a Hornblower on dry land!

Another addition to the roll of authors influenced by CSF (Not without honour, Reflections 7, page 11) must be Bernard Cornwell, author of the Sharpe series. At the very start of his appearance on Radio 4's Desert Island Discs on 18 April, he was asked how he set about his first novel, 25 years ago, and replied:-

"Years and years ago, I read all the Hornblowers. When I had finished Hornblower, there was no more to read. CS Forester tragically only wrote eleven, so I went off and found the non-fiction histories, and discovered wonderful stories about Wellington's army." He thought someone would surely write a "Hornblower on dry land" series, and "haunted bookshops" waiting for it to appear. When it didn't, he decided to write it himself! Pressed by Sue Lawley on his fascination for Wellington, he said it came totally from Hornblower!

Hornblower also influenced the construction of his story:-
"I took two or three books of which I was very fond,

including a couple of Hornblowers. I literally broke them down, paragraph by paragraph, to show what's going on on huge coloured charts. Where's the romance, the dialogue, the action, the flashbacks?" He recorded what he disliked in blue - "I'll take these out or shrink them", and what he liked in red.

This was a plan he recommended to all authors. Find a book you really like, and disassemble it, to find how the author did it. He was surprised that more authors didn't use this method! For *Sharpe's Eagle* was, of course, an instant success.

Richard Miller, Co. Wicklow.

Like CSF, perhaps, Bernard Cornwell sees himself as "a story teller, not a historian". But surprisingly, he said nothing about Rifleman Dodd, who might have seemed a more obvious model than Hornblower for Richard Sharpe, although Sharpe has recently gone to sea for Sharpe's Trafalgar, and Sharpe's Prey, might shed light, in more ways than one, on The Commodore.

Death to the French and The Gun are in print again in the UK, as Cassell Military Paperbacks. And Sharpe is apparently to live to old age, when his reminiscences might evoke the bald and boozy Dodd, holding forth from the chimney corner.

■ HELP

There is another anecdote about Dodd which I have not been able to pin down. Death to the French was issued to soldiers of a 1990s NATO peacekeeping force (in the Balkans?) on the recommendation of a (USMC?) CO who saw in Dodd a paradigm of a soldier's duty.

Does anyone have exact details of name, date and location?

Fiction and history: CSF and Guedalla

I read Reflections 7 with interest. I enjoyed Richard Miller's story *The Admiralty Clerk* - the description of "a scar-faced knife-grinder" was particularly good. I have drafted a couple of chapters of a story about Rifleman Matthew Dodd as an elderly man, set at the time of the Crimean War, which may be suited to Reflections.

I also read Christopher Smith's article on *Louis XIV* with particular interest. I enclose some details about Philip Guedalla, from *Twentieth-century Authors*, edited by Stanley J Kunitz and Howard Haycraft, a massive volume which I picked up for £8 at *Jackdaw Books* in Holt a few years ago.

Adrian Taylor, Norfolk.

Dreaming of the Past: *temps perdu*, *temps retrouvé*

Philip Guedalla (1889-1944), essayist and historian, was educated at Rugby School and Balliol College, Oxford. He followed a number of career paths in 1913-1923 (barrister in the Inner Temple, before and after being a legal adviser to the government on munitions and flax) before becoming a full-time writer. He also unsuccessfully contested four different constituencies in the five general elections of 1922-1931.

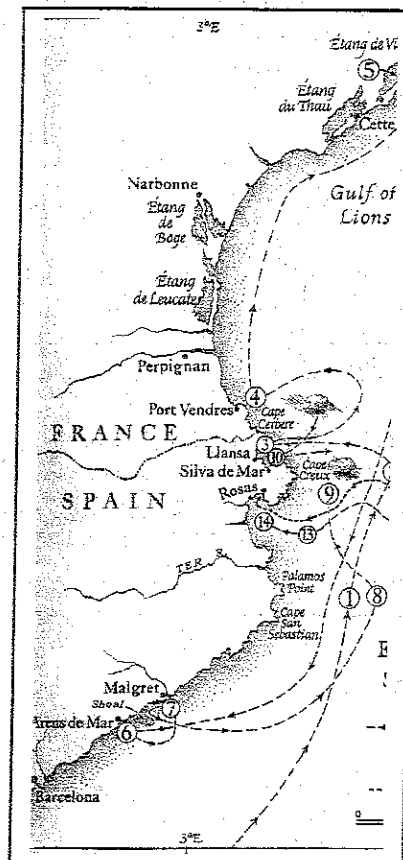
"A liberal, a sceptic, a Zionist, and the fine quintessence of Balliol", Guedalla had published poetry and parodies, and a sober and scholarly dissertation on *The Partition of Europe (1715-1815)* at Oxford. The glittering, coruscating Guedalla style evolved later, when he shared with Lytton Strachey the glory of reviving the writing of history and historical biography, achieving success in both the UK and the United States with *Independence Day (Fathers of the Revolution in the USA)*, *The Duke* (selected as *Wellington* by the American Literary Guild in 1931), and *The Hundred Years* (1936), covering the century from the accession of Victoria to that of Edward VIII in 30 episodes, which included several phases of American history.

"To resurrect [historical characters], to set them moving, catch the tone of their voices, tilt of their head and posture of the once-living men", was how Guedalla defined the historian's task. "The past should, for the historian, be his present. He must never write from the angle of today, but almost always from the angle of contemporaries with the events he describes... When his reader is set dreaming of the past, the historian has done his work, only provided that the dream be true. For then *temps perdu* has become *temps retrouvé*, and the quest is ended."

- Not quite, perhaps. It would be interesting to show in detail if, or how, Forester's writing was influenced by that of Guedalla! This applies as much to CSF's interest in *Wellington*, the subject of a Guedalla biography, as to his own biographies of Louis XIV, Napoleon, Josephine and Victor Emmanuel.
- Forester and Guedalla both professed themselves Liberals before World War II. And both wrote about Churchill. Guedalla's 340-page biography *Mr Churchill: a Portrait* was published in November 1941. On 15 March, Churchill had written to Guedalla: "... I need scarcely say that I should be much honoured if you thought it worth while to devote your distinguished abilities to such a topic, as you suggest. I quite agree with you that it should be an independent study."
- On the subject of Churchill, comment was made in a previous issue on the rapid disappearance of CSF's review of *The Gathering Storm*, the first volume of Churchill's *History of the Second World War* (*Reflections* 6, 2003, pages 14-16). To some extent, of course, this is part of a general problem, which

affects all of Forester's journalism. But in this case, there may be another relevant factor.

- Churchill's second volume, entitled *Their Finest Hour*, dealt with a much more edifying drama, and was reviewed at much greater length by Isaiah Berlin, a much more eminent person (as both intellectual and opinion former) than CSF! Berlin's review appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* 184 No 3 (September 1949), and in *Cornhill Magazine* 81 (1950). It was quickly excerpted into other newspapers, and published as a pamphlet on both sides of the Atlantic, going through various editions until the 1960s.



In the wake of *A Ship of the Line*

We're just back from a very windy couple of weeks near Perpignan, where Captain Hornblower in the *Sutherland* had a most successful period off the Mediterranean coastline between France and Spain, intercepting the vital French maritime logistic routes to Spain. In those days, the roads ashore were limited, as they had to climb over the foothills of the Pyrenees, and were vulnerable to guerrilla attacks. But even now the coastal roads are very convoluted, and the single motorway inland has to climb and twist considerably. The more that could be sent by sea, edging its way round the coast, the better.

Cap Cerbère, the actual border, is where the spine of the Pyrenees reaches the sea in a spectacular setting, between the harbours of Collioure, Port-Vendres and

Banyuls in France, and Roses (or Rosas) 30 kms to the south in Spain, as the crow flies. To get round Cap Cerbère and Cap de Creus and the other headlands is perhaps twice that.

There are numerous French fortifications on each small headland to the north but fewer to the south, mostly dating from the 18th century or earlier. Spain originally owned the territory considerably to the north including some of the Corbières, but gradually fell back, leaving behind a trail of border forts. Probably the most impressive is at Salses, a vast 6-storey affair, almost sunk below ground level, the first big Spanish artillery fort built at the end of the 15th century – more or less contemporary with Henry VIII's artillery forts including Southsea. Vauban was reportedly so jealous that he wanted to demolish Salses.

Cap Cerbère itself has quite considerable cliffs, and would be most uncomfortable if it were to be a lee shore. It would also be an ideal spot, just as Cap de Creus was, to catch small merchant ships - to be safe these vessels would inevitably be forced to round the Capes at some distance to seaward of any covering coastal batteries, especially in an onshore wind.

Between Cap Cerbère and Cap de Creus lies a large half moon shaped bay, with El Port de Llança in the middle, facing east. The port is quite small, but there are a couple of sheltering headlands. Before the port was built, it would have been quite exposed to easterlies, but would have otherwise have offered a good spot to pause before rounding Cerbère and Creus, if necessary waiting for a good wind.

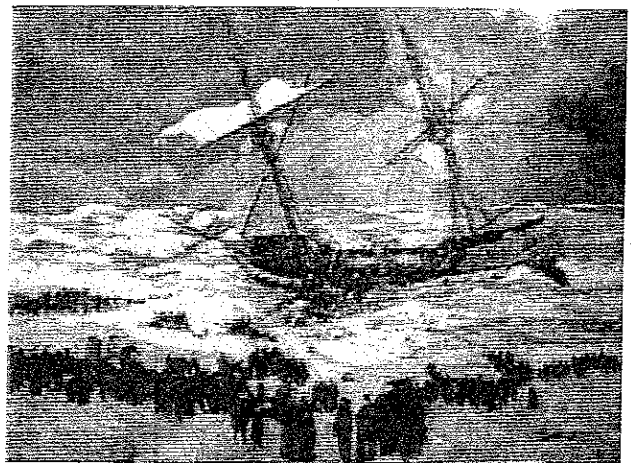
Cap de Creus is a much larger headland, around 10 kms square, of which Cape Creus is the most north-easterly point. Then there are several small east-facing bays, and eventually you round Cap de Norfeu, to the southeast, and reach Roses (Rosas) to the west, where the hilly headland area descends to flat coastline. The headland hinterland is wild and rugged, rising to over 600 metres, and part of it is a nature reserve, with very little disfiguring modern development. There is no trace of a battery on the low point of Cap de Creus, just a small lighthouse. The Cape itself is very rocky.

Roses Bay curves gently down 16 kms to the west and south. Roses/Rosas (it can be spelt both ways, the Catalan signs on the spot spelling "Roses") dates back to Greek and Carthaginian times, and the south facing Citadel eventually took over all the land upon which the original town was built. The current rather ugly town is to the east, between the Citadel and the rising hills of the headland, surrounding the port. The Citadel includes the earlier Greek and Roman remains, outlines and remnants of barrack buildings, a big church - and two circuits of massive 18th century walls, originally

separated by a water filled moat, now mostly dry. The Citadel itself is not on a dominant hill, but is beside the beach on flat land: it includes about 12 hectares of land inside the extensive inner walls. The Citadel is being carefully restored and is very well worth a visit. It covers the landward approach to Roses harbour. Having given his parole, Hornblower would have looked out to the southwest, to watch the destruction of the French squadron and the dismayed *Sutherland*.

The *Bassin de Thau* is considerably further to the north, one of a string of brackish *Etangs* or lakes, connected by a lateral canal, itself leading to the *Canal du Midi*. It would have been easy for Hornblower to find a stretch not covered by shore batteries, which were confined to such ports as Agde and Sète. Nowadays the *Etangs* are used as oyster breeding grounds or for wind surfing - there is usually a strong wind, and being separated from the sea by dunes, the waves are not too serious. The whole area is worth a visit - but not in July or August!

Ken Napier, Chazarem, France.



Taking liberties with history - over early lifesaving apparatus?

Judith Edwards sees Forester as *Taking Liberties with History*, in order to supply detail to the Hornblower stories (*Reflections* 7, pages 5-6). One incident she records is the wreck of Lydiard's *Anson*, with the loss of 100 lives, on Loe Bar in Cornwall on 29 December 1807. A sequel to this catastrophe might shed some light on the short story *Hornblower's Charitable Offering*, which could be an afterthought to *A Ship of the Line*, or perhaps a discarded chapter. In this story, Hornblower adapts a six-pounder cannon in the *Sutherland's* launch to shoot a line to a group of castaways trapped on a rocky shore, which then enables them to haul in quantities of life-saving materials.

It was in fact after witnessing the wreck of the *Anson* that Henry Trengrouse (1772-1854) of Helston in Cornwall began to experiment on rescue apparatus. He experimented with line and hawser, carried to a ship by

a primitive rocket device. The rocket was aimed and launched from a cylinder attached by the bayonet joint to the barrel of a musket, whose priming ignited its fuse.

At the same time in Norfolk, George Manby (1766-1854), modified a 6-1b boat mortar to carry a line from shore to ship, to allow a boat to be hauled out after it. In February 1808, Manby supervised the rescue by such means of the crew of a merchant brig stranded offshore at Great Yarmouth. He then set about a modified design that would put a block-and-tackle aboard the wreck, to pass an endless line-and-cradle apparatus back-and-forth between another block-and-tackle on the shore.

Was Hornblower's patent lifesaver an invention of Forester's, or a combination of the approaches of Manby and Trengrouse, which the author had discovered in his research?

Paul Ellison Hunter, Philadelphia.

Who knows?

Arma virumque cano (?)

Lawrie Brewer's evocative reminiscences about reading *Flying Colours* (*Reflections* 7, pages 5-6) mistake an important point. Lawrie starts: "We begin *in medias res*, as every best epic should!" He later describes what became the trilogy: "The first-written, *Happy Return*, was expected to be a one-off; the second, *Ship of the Line*, was a story to which Hornblower was appended -- the 'discarded character' said CSF. But here we have a particular story, designed for a particular, establishing character. Now CSF is getting serious about his nascent hero."

The phrase 'discarded character' comes from *The Hornblower Companion*, in which the account of the origin of Hornblower should be taken with quite a bit of salt.¹⁴

While the start *in medias res* is true for the volume *Flying Colours*, it is not accurate with respect to CSF's plot. CSF thought out one plot, which might be thought of as Hornblower's recovery from the missed opportunities of *The Happy Return*. That plot naturally broke into two volumes, so that *Flying Colours* naturally started *in medias res*.

There are two lines of evidence for this, one internal, one external. The internal evidence consists of the care with which CSF planted characters and events in *A Ship of the Line* that would provide for the outcome of *Flying Colours*. One can argue that the end of *A Ship of the Line* was intended to be similar to *The Happy*

Return, or to *Brown on Resolution*, or to *Death to the French*, or to *The General* for that matter, in which the protagonist carries out his duty to the very end, but whose excellence in performance is never officially recognized. By that argument, *A Ship of the Line* is just an exciting series of naval adventures capped by the courageous decision to fight the predictably disastrous battle of Rosas Bay.

However, consider that CSF's stories are always plot driven; CSF never leads the reader down a path of thought, however interesting, only to abandon it. Sure, there are bits in *A Ship of the Line* about miserable Spanish soldiering and miserable Spanish mules, and the like, but they are necessary to telling of the exciting events that are the story, and don't lead to sidelines of description about conditions elsewhere in Spain. Therefore, one must conclude that the early scenes in *A Ship of the Line* that contrast Maria Hornblower and Lady Barbara, and the statement that Horatio had made Maria pregnant again, which have no further purpose within the plot of *A Ship of the Line*, were inserted to serve some other purpose. They are necessary to set the stage for *Flying Colours*. There are other events in *A Ship of the Line* that were also "plants", to use CSF's own word for these insertions that set the stage for future events without alerting the reader: using a false flag, for one; Bush's loss of lower leg, for another.

There is a bit of external evidence. On 24 November, 1946, CSF wrote to Frances Phillips. "Very interesting this morning; some old symptoms have been showing up for the first time for several years -- I think the last time was on the deck of a ship going round England at the time of George VI's coronation when I thought out the final plot of *Flying Colours* -- no, it was *A Ship of the Line*. Anyway, there was the old heart beating fast and the respiration quickened and so on. Something like a plot was coming to me." Certainly CSF corrected himself, but the need for the correction demonstrates the degree to which he thought of the two books as one plot.

Lastly, it is pretty obvious that *Flying Colours* was intended to finish the Hornblower saga. Its plot resolved all the earlier tensions, wound things up. CSF was not "getting serious about his nascent hero," but was putting him to rest. It was only later unpredicted events that aroused Hornblower from his sleep, for our continued pleasure.

John Forester, Lemon Grove, California.

- *It is hoped to continue the discussion of Flying Colours, and of the making of A Ship of the Line, in a future issue. The matter impinges upon that of CSF's alleged visit to Spain in the Civil War. But did he -- like Captain Hornblower -- speak good Spanish?*

¹⁴ CS Forester, *The Hornblower Companion*, Boston: Little, Brown (1964); London: Chatham (1998), pages 93-94; *Some personal notes*, Long before Forty, Michael Joseph (1967), pages 200-203.

Seventy years ago: the original *African Queen*

The *News Chronicle* published a 10,000 word serial version of *The African Queen* in 5 parts between Monday 9 July and Friday 13 July 1934. This was very different from what eventually appeared as a book. An earlier article compared the two plots with real events of World War I.¹⁵ This one will look more closely at the serialisation, to show how – and perhaps suggest why – the plots evolved as they did. For close comparison of the serial and the book reveals differences which cannot simply be attributed to the different lengths required by each format. And thus, conclusions may be drawn about Forester's working methods and the often convoluted gestation of works which most readers only perceive, and then usually uncritically, in their finished form.

There is, of course, much for which issues of format can offer a good explanation. The first two episodes of the serialisation anticipated almost to the letter the opening pages of the book. The very minor variants might be explained as minimal paring of an established text for purposes of abridgement, or a subtle raising of tone and precision between first and final draft. This fits in well with our perception of the author, and even better with a perception of the author as he wished to be perceived!

The page of autograph reproduced in *Some Personal Notes* shows marked elegance, precision and clarity of direction.¹⁶ Such qualities may well have characterised much of Forester's composition throughout his career. But we should not attribute such flair to every page that he conceived. Nor should we be convinced by his own testimonials, in public statements as well as private letters, to his literary accomplishments.

Taken together, autograph and testimonials portray an author who, at least in the acknowledged works of his maturity (itself a considerable qualification) could rarely have been caught off guard.¹⁷ Forester's self-portrait of an author in his prime declares the greatest irritation was the physical effort of transferring ideas to paper. Embryonic ideas for several books might lurk in his mind, but he only ever worked on one at a time. He had little difficulty conceiving plots. Gestation might be prolonged, but was never interrupted by what nowadays we call writer's block, let alone by radical changes of direction. All he had to do was steel himself, and then – like the King of Hearts – start at the beginning, go on to the end, and then stop! The formula particularly applied

to the Hornblower books. *The Companion* all but ignores nearly everything else written in the 30 years after 1936, and demotes *The African Queen* to a mere part of the overture to Hornblower.¹⁸ We are, of course, awed by Forester's achievement! But the Alice-in-Wonderland theory of novel writing should not be believed, even in cases where there is no hard evidence about the process of composition. And the definition of Forester as "writer of Hornblower" is incomplete and anachronistic. Proper account should be taken of the actual circumstances in which each book was actually written.

External evidence on the making of *The African Queen* – suggesting that it began as a parallel version of *Brown on Resolution*, conceived at much the same time – was discussed elsewhere.¹⁹ The primary document – the *News Chronicle's* actual text – might suggest that Forester saw serialisation as an opportunity not just to promote his work but to expose incomplete draft versions of his stories to public scrutiny, in anticipation of radical reworking. This hypothesis needs to be tested against a wider range of examples, in a way that accounts for similarities as well as differences.

The explanation of the unchanged opening episodes 1-2 of the serial of *The African Queen* may be that, if the attention of readers is to be retained, it must be properly hooked at the start. For, almost at once, emphasis and omission in odd sentences point to differences of great importance. Little, for example, is done to give character to Allnutt. He has none of the shiftiness or fecklessness of his later incarnation, and his attitude to Rose is not amusement or resignation:-

"We must do something for England," she said... Allnutt looked up and met her eyes. There was something of devotion to the dog-like brown of his.

"Yes, miss," he said, nodding. "Yes, we must."

Rose speaks to him with a tone "reminiscent of when she spoke to recalcitrant servants". They are always mistress and servant. Anything else is ruled right out. In the book, Rose has attained a highly symbolic 33, but retains much of the beauty of 10 years before, when she came to Africa. In the serial, she is already 43, she has been an old maid for years, and mission accomplished she and Allnutt have no future. The loyal servant so thoroughly accepts this that he is hurt by Rose's notion that he will only accompany her into the finale at gunpoint.²⁰ Before then, much else will appear as strange as the African sky and the forest between which the great river carries the pair to their destiny.

¹⁵ David Stead, *Stranger than fiction: the origins of The African Queen*, *Reflections* 5 (2003), pages 9-10.

¹⁶ CS Forester, *Some Personal Notes, Long before Forty*, Michael Joseph (1967), page 176; *The Hornblower Companion*, Chatham Publishing (1998), page 71.

¹⁷ See John Forester, *Novelist and Storyteller: the life of CS Forester* (2000), pages 199; 199-253 – for the basis of the qualification, and the real circumstances of CSF's mid-career.

¹⁸ CS Forester, *Some Personal Notes*, page 189; *The Hornblower Companion*, page 83.

¹⁹ David Stead, *Stranger than fiction*, pages 9-10.

²⁰ *What Rosie knew: how the News Chronicle ended its serialisation of The African Queen*, *Reflections* 1 (2002), pages 3-4.

The first "AFRICAN QUEEN"

Third Instalment

ROSE put her big masculine chin into her hand and tried to think. Von Hanneken and his twenty thousand negro riflemen had wasted all this side of the country into a desert. Now he would be lost in the heart of the forest.

In the months to come English troops would begin to feel their way after him, marching up from British East Africa, or coming from the side of the sea. There was nothing she could see that they could do here, save tamely await their arrival.

And Rose, with her experience of African travel, could guess how much time and labour would be necessary before an army could be moved into the forest.

"What is there down the river?" she demanded sharply.

"Well, Miss, down in the delta is that German cruiser, the Dortmund, but –"

"A German cruiser? What is it doing there?"

"Iding, miss. At least, that's what I 'eard at Limbasi. If you 'aven't been down in the delta you can't think what it's like. There's 'undreds of channels there, miss, an' all marsh in between. That delta's a 'undred miles long, I should say, miss, an' fifty broad. All mangroves an' fever swamp. There aren't more than 'alf a dozen deep water channels leading into the sea. The Germans 'ave got those mined, I should fink, an' the Dortmund's just waiting 'er chance to slip out one dark night an' cut loose and raid the shipping. 'Alf the British Navy's waitin' for 'er, doin' sentry go outside, but they'll 'ave a time of it."

"Why don't they come in and take her?"

"Cause of the mines, miss – or so I suppose. And no one's ever charted that water. I shouldn't like to tike a big ship up them channels meself, not under fire. Let alone if there were mines."

"Will they catch her all right if she comes out?"

"Don't know, miss," said Allnutt sadly. "The Dortmund's a new ship, brand new, 25 knots, or so I've 'eard. On a dark night and a 'undred miles of coast to watch she ought to get away easy. Don't expect there's nothink on this coast to catch 'er. Old armoured cruisers, I 'spect. They tole me at Limbasi there was four funnelled English ships waiting for 'er."

Rose's chin went to her hand again. It was ten years ago that she had come out here, sailing with her brother in the cheap and nasty Italian cargo boat in which the Argyll Society had secured passages for them.

The first officer of that ship had been an oily and ingratiating Italian, and not even Rose's 33 years of frozen spinsterhood had sufficed to keep him away.

She was the only woman on board – in fact for long intervals she was the only woman within a hundred miles – and he could no more stop himself from wooing

her than he could stop breathing. He was the sort of man who would make love to a brass idol if nothing better presented itself.

IT was a queer wooing, and one which never progressed even so far as a hand clasp – Rose had not even known that she was being made up to. But one of the manoeuvres which the Italian had adopted with which to ingratiate himself had been ingenious.

At Gibraltar, at Malta, at Alexandria, at Port Said, he had called Rose's attention to the British Navy, to the big ships, grimly beautiful, with the glory of the White Ensign fluttering at the stern, guarding the trade routes of the far-flung Empire, and ready to fight to the death for their country.

It was a subtle form of flattery, deserving of more success than the unfortunate Italian with his fascinating broken English actually attained.

It had caught Rose's imagination for the moment, the sight of those storm-beaten ships pitching in the high, steep seas of a Levanter, the White Ensign keeping guard over the Red, all the glamour and romance of the senior fighting service – even though she was sister and housekeeper and devoted disciple of a man of peace. That could be as it would: in part it was her navy; its tradition of glory was in part *her* tradition: the blood that ran in the veins of the Navy was kin to *her* blood.

Now, ten years later, her memory stirred and quickened.

That Italian officer had sowed better than he knew, even if the reaping was not to be his. Rose could picture the flat green coast as once before she had seen it, with here and there a brilliant white gleam of coral. And now the White Ensign would be there, the great grey ships keeping unsleeping watch as they drove their white furrows across the blue sea.

"A thousand tons of coal a dye, I reckon," said Allnutt meditatively. "That's what it costs to watch the Dortmund."

"A thousand tons a day?" repeated Rose, shocked to the depths of her economical soul. Her father had been wont to complain when the domestic coal consumption rose higher than three tons a year.

"Yerss, miss," said Allnutt. "And best Welsh at that, if they can get it."

THE casual statement set Rose's imagination working faster, it gave her a hint of the strain the task of watching even one cruiser can impose, be the other navy never so powerful.

Two or three ships to keep guard, ever ready for instant action; other ships refitting ready to take their

places when they must return to port; colliers to bring them coal; escorts for those colliers, burning coal themselves; escorts for convoys in case the Dortmund should escape; all this a[t] the very time when all England's strength should be gathered in the North Sea for the great battle which might occur at any moment. For England's sake the cruiser must be struck down in her ambush.*²¹

Rose suddenly clenched her hands hard as she saw the opportunity which she sought opening before her. The Germans were guarding the seaward side of the delta. But they would give no care for the landward side, where the Ulanga came down through a thousand miles of German territory.

Here was the African Queen laden to the gunwale with explosives, so Allnutt had said. Surely they could achieve something for England with this material and this opportunity.

"Allnutt," she said sharply. "Could you make a torpedo?"

Her rising hopes were rebuffed as she watched his face.

"Nao, miss," said Allnutt, shaking his head. "I couldn't do that. You see, miss -"

Allnutt's explanation was not too lucid, but it served. Torpedoes are representative of the last refinements of human ingenuity. They cost at least a thousand pounds apiece.

The inventive capacity of the cream of a large body of men, picked under the most rigorous system of selection, over a period of 30 years, has gone to make it possible to destroy what thousands of other inventors have helped to construct.

To make a torpedo capable of running true, in a straight line and at the right depth, as Allnutt pointed out, would call for a workshop full of skilled mechanics, supplied with accurate tools, and working under the direction of a specialist in the subject.

No one could expect that Allnutt working by himself in the heart of the African forest with only the African Queen's repair outfit could achieve even the veriest botch of an attempt at it.

YET Allnutt's explanation served to make it clearer in Rose's mind as to what a torpedo really was. A torpedo was, when one eliminated accessories, a small boat filled with high explosives, dispatched under its own power to detonate against the side of a ship. Rose felt inspiration flooding into her veins.

"Supposing," she said, "we were down in the delta with this boat. Couldn't we send it against the side of the Dortmund so that it would go off there? Wouldn't that do?"

²¹ The compositor's attention might have been wandering at this point. "a[t]" is my emendation of "as", and "anchorage" would serve better as the last word. DS.

And this time Allnutt nodded, so that Rose was suffused with fierce joy.

"Yerss, miss. I suppose it would. I could even make a detonator all right. Revolver cartridge would do. 'Twouldn't be easy, but -"

The light of inspiration glowed suddenly in Allnutt's face as he remembered another part of the African Queen's cargo.

"Come 'ere, miss, and I'll show you."

They went forward past the engine. Lying in the bottom of the boat, half covered by the cases of tinned food, were two long black cylinders. At their exposed ends were gauges and taps. To Rose's eye they were menacing and dangerous in themselves.

"They're the cylinders of oxygen and 'ydrogen I told you about, miss. They're good an' thick to stand pressure. Let the gas out of 'em, tike out those gauges and stuff 'em full of this gelignite 'ere. Put detonators in the 'oles. Rig 'em up in the bows so that they stick out a foot or two - cut 'oles in the boat's side for that matter. There's our torpedo, miss."

UNDER the influence of Rose's urgency Allnutt had not achieved a new invention, but he deserved as much credit as if he had. The spar torpedo driven by a launch against a ship's side was invented fifty years before Allnutt thought of it, but as far as Allnutt was concerned it was an original idea. Yet it was Rose's promptings which were ultimately responsible.

"That's what we'll do, then," said Rose with decision. "And the sooner we're off the better."

Allnutt blinked his admiration at her. In this country which sapped the initiative and the strength of every white man who set foot in it those qualities were rarely enough met with. It hurt him to have to damp her enthusiasm.

"It can't be done, miss. I'm sorry, but it can't."

"Why not?"

There was a rasp in Rose's voice, reminiscent of when she spoke to recalcitrant servants.

"Because of the river, miss. You 'aven't seen it between 'ere and the delta. I 'ave. It's all right up 'ere, in a manner of speaking. But lower down - There's two 'undred miles of rapids. Rocks and whirlpools. There's places where the 'ole river isn't more than 20 yards wide an' the water goes shooting down there like - like out of a tap, miss. We couldn't never get this 'ole launch down there."

That was a facer for Rose. But it was not in her to yield at the first sight of difficulty.

"Then how did the launch get here, then, in the first place?"

"By rille, miss, I suppose, like all the other 'eavy stuff. 'Spect they sent 'er up to Limbasi from the coast in sections and put her together on the bank."

"M'm," said Rose, chafing at this unexpected difficulty. "Doesn't anything ever go down the river?"

"NOTHING to speak of, miss. One or two of those dugout canoes. That Spengler did it, you know, the German gover'ment chap oo was surveying for the map. 'E got down in a canoe with 'alf a dozen Swahilis. Don't know of no one else."

"M'm," said Rose.

Not all her quite extensive experience of African travel had included a sight of an African river tumbling over the edge of a plateau.

All African rivers have cataracts or waterfalls a greater or less distance from their mouths – a fact which arises necessarily from the geography of the country.

All round the whole huge continent there is a low-lying rim of land, and every river descending from the interior upland tumbles over the edge, either in a cataract, as does the Nile, or as a waterfall, as does the Zambesi at the Victoria Falls.

But somehow Rose was ignorant of what an unchained river can be like, just as she was superbly ignorant of the differences in navigating a handy canoe with half a dozen paddlers and a worn out steam launch like the African Queen.

"Well, we've got to get down there. We've got to. So we'd better try," said Rose.

"Very good, miss. We'll try," said Allnutt. One of Drake's or Nelson's lieutenants might have used that tone of acquiescence in a hare-brained scheme.

Fourth Instalment

FOR the first two days down the river Rose had the opportunity of learning some of the African Queen's pretty little habits without being faced at the same time with overwhelming navigational difficulties.

All those grey pencils of steam oozing out of the engine were indicative of the age of that piece of machinery, and the neglect from which it had suffered.

Every water tube joint leaked; practically every one had been mended at some time or other in the botched and unsatisfactory manner with which the African climate leads man to be content at unimportant moments. Some had been brazed in, but more had been patched with nothing more than sheet iron, red lead and wire.

IN the incredibly distant past, when that engine had been new, a boiler pressure of eighty pounds to the square inch could be maintained, giving the launch a speed of 12 knots.

Nowadays, if the pressure mounted above 15 the engine evinced unmistakable signs of dissolution, and no speed greater than four knots could be reached.

So that Allnutt had the delicate task of keeping the pressure just there, and no higher and no lower, which called for a continuous light diet for the furnace. Then the water feed pump had a fit of choking at important moments, demanding instant attention lest the whole boiler should go to perdition. And the lubrication had long ceased to be automatic, so that Allnutt was kept busy stuffing grease down the oilcups on the tops of the cylinders, while there were never fewer than two bearings calling for instant cooling and lubrication. And the glands leaked and there were hectic moments when in the midst of all this the wood ash threatened to choke the furnace, so that Allnutt, tending that engine, was as active as a squirrel in a cage.

At the same time there was anxious watch to be kept for snags and mudbanks in the river, and every hours or so they had to land to collect wood – only dead wood was effective under that boiler, and the supply at each stopping place was necessarily limited.

Coming to anchor within reach of the shore in that current was a delicate operation, but now Allnutt was saved from the necessity of running from anchor to tiller by Rose's learning how to steer – at least, under Allnutt's supervision.

And every now and then during the day the heavens would open and cataracts of rain would pour down – rain so heavy as to upset Allnutt's delicate operations with the boiler and to set the floorboards awash; moreover, as the whole hull leaked like a sieve it was constantly necessary to pump the boat out with a pump which was as inefficient as everything else on board, and choked and refused duty and squeaked and jammed until Rose (who early took over the duty of pumping) came to hate it with a personal hatred exceeding any she had ever known. And the flies bit and stung, and the Turkish bath atmosphere exhausted them.

All the same, perhaps these distractions served a useful purpose in leaving Rose so tired that her mind could not dwell on her equivocal position here alone in a small boat with a man.

AT night she was only too glad to rest – as much as the mosquitoes permitted – on the floorboards in the sternsheets, while Allnutt lay decorously but uncomfortably on the piled up stores in the bows, so that at least they had the engine between them.

And her ten years in Africa had at least had the result of broadening her mind in at least some of the respects in which her upbringing in childhood had narrowed it; she could bring herself to tolerate without qualm some of the intimacies which life in cramped quarters necessarily involved.

She was far more concerned at the thought of Allnutt sleeping, as he did, on a couple of hundredweight of high explosive. She protested at that.

"Don't you worry, miss," said Allnutt soothingly. "This is good stuff, this is. It's quite 'appy in its cases 'ere. You can let it get wet an' it doesn't do no harm. If you set fire to it, it just burns. You can 'it it wiv a 'ammer and it won't go off – at least, I don't fink it will. What you mustn't do is to bang off detonators, gunpowder, like, or cartridges into it. But we won't be doing that, will we, miss?"

"No, we won't," said Rose.

"We'll just leave it laying where it is until the time comes to make them torpedoes, miss. Don't you worry about it."

So Rose tried not to worry.

THEN came the time when the mud of the banks of the river gradually gave place to rock, and the channel perceptibly narrowed, and the stream grew perceptibly faster. Then rocks began to show in the midst of the river, with white water boiling round them.

"Rock ahead, miss," called Allnutt, and a moment later, "Rock to starboard. There's a whirlpool there too, miss."

Rose tore the rotten awning away from its stanchions, and stood on the seat in the stern so as to have a clear view forward. Stooping, she grasped the tiller in a large unwavering hand.

"I'll steer the boat," she said. "You keep the engine going."

A glance at the bank told her how fast the boat was tearing along now. The rocks in the channel came hurtling up towards her with terrifying rapidity. There was constant need for instant decision in picking the right course. Yet she could not help noticing that the water had lost its brown colour and was now a clear grassy green. Lower down the channel was almost obstructed by rocks.

She saw a passage wide enough for the boat and swung her bows into it. Stretching down before her there was a long green slope of racing water. And even as the African Queen heaved up her stern to plunge down it she saw that at the lower end of the fairway a wicked black rock just protruded above the surface – it would rip the whole bottom out of the boat if they touched it.

She had to keep the boat steady on her course for a fraction of a second until the channel widened a trifle, and then fling herself on the tiller to swing her over.

The boat swayed and rocked, and wriggled like a live thing as she brought the tiller back again to straighten her out. For a dreadful second it seemed as if the eddy would defeat her efforts, but the engine stuck

to its work and the kick of the propeller gave the African Queen steerage way enough to take up the new course.

They shaved through the gap with inches to spare on either side, and the bows lurched as Rose fought with the tiller and they swung into the racing eddies at the tail of the rapid.

Next moment they had reached the comparative quiet of the deep fast reach below, and Rose had time to sweep the streaming sweat from her face with the back of her left forearm.

It seemed only a few seconds before they reached the next rapid, like the last a stretch of ugly rocks and boiling eddies and green inclined planes of hurtling water, where the eye had to be quick and the brain quicker still, where the hand had to be steady and strong and subtle, and the will resolute. The African Queen reeled and lurched as she met the conflicting currents of the swirls.

HALFWAY down the rapid there was a wild confusion of tossing water in which the eye was necessarily slower in catching sight of those rocks just awash which spelt ruin to their plans.

Rose rode the mad whirlpool like a Valkyrie. She was conscious of an elation and an excitement such as only the best of her brother's sermons had ever aroused. The African Queen pitched in the broken water; spray was flying, and Rose forced the sluggish boat to obey her will and weave a safe course through the imminent dangers.

Lower down still the river sank into a narrow gorge walled in with sheer faces of rock, between which the water tore along at incredible speed.

To Rose, with a moment to think during this comparative inaction, it seemed as if this must be almost as fine as travelling in a motor-car – an experience she had never enjoyed but had often longed for. Then there came to her ears the familiar roar of water boiling over rocks, and she had to tighten her grip on the tiller to face the next rapid.

In the next breathing space she became aware that Allnutt was frantically trying to arrest her attention. Fuel was running low, and fuel they must have to give steerage way in these currents; it amazed her to realise that two hours must have elapsed since the first rapid.

Rose waved reassurance to him. Her mind was like a calculating machine now. She could judge swirls and eddies and the force of a current to a nicety. There was a long reef of rock running out from one bank. She shaved past the swirl at the end, swung in behind the reef, waved to Allnutt to shut off the engine, and brought the boat to rest in the slack water at the rock's edge, while Allnutt marvelled; the boat hook was in his hand ready to fend off the disaster which had not occurred.

It was toilsome work gathering fuel in those rocky gorges; had it not been for driftwood left on

shelves by past floods the problem might have been insuperable. And at every stop it was necessary to overhaul the boat – to pump her out, and to grease the bearings, and to rake out the fire box, and to clear the feed pump of the debris which choked it.

And there were two hundred of those rapids to descend. Two hundred times Rose had to brace herself, and peer forward with narrowed eyes and set jaw as they came swooping down upon the white water, and swing the boat first here, and then there, and shave past rocks, and battle with the jerking tiller in the swirls, and pick her course with lightning decision from second to second.

THEY spent two days and two nights among the gorges and rapids, sleeping moored in some favourable eddy with the roar of the water at their very ears. When Rose closed her eyes at night she could still see the smooth glossy whirl pools and the streaks of foam at which she had stared with such intensity all through the day. But fatigue made her sleep, despite the heat and the din, and despite the fever which was in her veins and that other fever which was in her brain.

As they descended the country changed. There were palms and mango trees to be seen on the banks now, and at last the river began to grow slower and broader, and the land flatter and richer, and the rocks began to disappear, and soon there were no rapids. A big river came in and joined their own on the right.

"That must be the Saisi, miss," said Allnutt. "We must be near the delta by now."

Then they reached the delta, where the water was black and turbid and the current grew hardly perceptible, and the stream began to send off side arms and to twist tortuously through swamps. The banks were lined with mangroves now – nightmare trees closely interlaced, whose roots it was hard to distinguish from branches.

And the heat was terrific and to the swarm of flies which tortured them was added a new variety which left a drop of blood on their swollen faces and hands at every bite. And as they churned their way slowly through this inferno Allnutt suddenly pointed ahead across the swamp.

"Look there, miss," he said. Two slender spars were visible, reaching skyward, and beneath could be seen the faintest, tiniest hint of smoke.

"That's the Dortmund, miss," said Allnutt.

A PROCLAMATION

To all Young Men and Women of *Spirit*, who wish to strike a Blow for *Literature* and to cause the *deluded* Followers of the *Surgeon and his Mate* to wish they had never dared the *Wrath* of our Intrepid Band. The *CS Forester Society* is imminently commissioning at *Bristol*, and a few *Vacancies* still exist to complete its Company. Captain *Hornblower* and his Crew have lately returned from a *triumphant Five-Years'-Voyage* around the World. What Heart of Oak can resist this Appeal to Join this Band of Heroes and Heroines and Share with them the new Glories which await them in the *Glorious Bicentennial Year of Grace 2005*? Who will teach *Mr R.P.R.* that the Genre is *FORESTER'S* where no "Irish-Catalán" Usurper can show his face? There will be *Newsletters* and *Bulletins* every Quarter, the Best of Company and the Best of Discussion... In the *Place* from which this notice issues can be found a Representative of the *CS Forester Society* who will enlist any *Willing Hearts* who Thirst for Adventure.

