

C S Forester and "Dreadnought"
Christopher Smith, May 2001 (Norwich)

"Dreadnought" is a title that figures in the recently circulated list of works by CS Forester about which information is sought. Perhaps it does designate a short story; if so, many will be eager to have the opportunity of reading it. In the meantime, it is perhaps worth drawing attention to another of CS Forester's publications with which it may have been confused. In 1965 the London publisher Michael Joseph brought out a book entitled *Dreadnought: A History of the Modern Battleship* (a second edition appearing in 1968, a third in 1975). It was the work of Richard Hough, the prolific naval historian whose erudition, enthusiasm and readable style won him considerable popularity. It was possibly in to make doubly sure of the success of this large-format, generously illustrated volume of 268 pages with numerous photographs and an appendix of ships' cut-away silhouettes that Forester was asked to contribute an introduction. He may have been all the more ready to respond to a request from a publisher with whom he had long had good relations since Hough's attractive book offers an expert, but never pedantic, survey of a major element in modern naval affairs. It contains a wealth of both naval anecdotes and the technical details that always fired the imagination of this novelist whose fiction is generally founded on fact.

A substantial essay of some 4,500 words, the Introduction is quite different in tone, manner and content from a mere celebrity endorsement. Perhaps sensing that many of his readers – though not, of course, those who know him best – would tend to associate him with sailing fleets in the Nelsonic period, Forester may not have been unwilling to establish his credentials as a commentator on naval affairs in the twentieth century. He writes with knowledge and insight, appearing hardly less authoritative than Richard Hough himself.

The opening of the Introduction has the liveliness characteristic of Forester who knew the importance of capturing the attention of his readers from the outset and creating at least something of a mystery. He starts with a reminiscence of a visit to Bonifacio in Corsica early in 1930 – the precision is typical – when he fell into conversation with an old gentleman. The latter had a curious tale to tell:

'Years ago, many years ago, he had watched a big English ship of war turning circles in the Strait, circling round and round for no apparent reason, and missing all the navigational hazards by mere hairbreadths. He could not understand why she was doing this; he watched her straighten herself up and steam out of the strait, and he was still unable to offer any explanation why she had indulged in these curious and dangerous manoeuvres.'

Forester records that his suggestion that this was no doubt an incident in the 1917 anti-submarine campaign was rejected out of hand. The old gentleman had seen the strange evolutions of this "great big ship full of big guns" long before the outbreak of war. Only later did Forester connect the incidents with problems experienced by HMS *Dreadnought* during her shake-down cruise. Though Forester gives Hough due credit for mentioning this episode, he makes it plain that he was familiar with the facts before reading about them in the book he was introducing.

Memories of *Dreadnought* out of control because of difficulties with her novel double rudders prompt a 'wild flight of fancy'. Many would have been delighted if the new ship had struck a rock, puncturing Fisher's reputation as both a designer of ships and a reformer of the admiralty. But Forester is sure that any set-back would have been only temporary. The balance of sea-power might have been different if Britain had not, in effect, weakened herself by rendering obsolete its superiority in pre-Dreadnoughts, but there was little chance that a great clash would be avoided, even if between fleets "not generically different from those that fought at Tsushima". Moving on from speculation of what might have been, to assessment of what was achieved, Forester pays tribute first to the technological advances embodied in the Dreadnought programme. Next, he salutes Fisher for persuading the

Liberal government to approve his plans and for then carrying them out at a speed and with a secrecy that wrong-footed foreign powers. What he admires less is the lack of moderation in Fisher's thinking that led to the follies like *Courageous*. Rather surprisingly, in the light of Jutland and the sinking of *Hood*, Forester does not go on to follow Churchill and damn the very concept of battle cruisers too.

Reviewing the course of the Great War, Forester, who is respectful towards Jellicoe and does not refer to Beatty, argues that command of the seas was maintained by Britain, though complacency was battered in 1916. In a paragraph drawing comparisons with the War of 1812, Forester considers these events from a trans-Atlantic perspective. When he turns to World War II, Forester, like Hough, follows English nomenclature and allows that *Graf Spee* and the others of her class were battleships, albeit of a pocket variety. Function and employment, as well as radius of action, suggest that the German term *Panzerschiff* would, in this instance, be better translated 'armoured cruiser'. These ships were never intended to figure in fleets and battle it out against counterparts approximating to them in strength and fire power. In fact, the *Kriegsmarine* also endeavoured to use *Bismarck* and *Tirpitz*, though undeniably no less battleships in dimension than design, as commerce raiders.

Forester ends with a question: was it "significant or merely symbolic – or was it pure accident – that the peace terms with Japan were signed on the deck of the U.S.S. *Missouri*?" the dubitative note echoes both general uncertainty about the role of battleships in World War II and what appears to be a certain drop in Forester's enthusiasm after he had recounted the Battle of the River Plate. His Introduction to Hough's *Dreadnought* starts rather strikingly and continues quite magisterially, but, like the historical theme it develops, tails off towards the end. All the same, it reveals stylistic vigour, technical awareness and an abiding fascination with the remarkable men who directed the Royal Navy. If not vintage Forester, it is still a drop of the real stuff. Whether *Dreadnought* also inspired a tale may, of course, be another story.

Footnote from The Lord Fisher, 29 July 2001

"...my Grandfather caused a great upheaval introducing all the so necessary reforms one hundred years ago. Churchill vilified him over the Dardanelles and it might interest you to read *Fisher Churchill and the Dardanelles* by Geoffrey Penn which answers this one sided attack.

The Armoured Cruiser/Battle Cruiser argument has not really been sorted out, at least not for me until I started reading Andrew Gordon's *The Rules of the Game*. Chapter One, pages 7 to 16, puts it pretty clearly and at the bottom of page 14 you will see that the Admiralty had decided to disband the Battle Cruiser squadron in May 1915. Was the concept a ship for defence of our commerce world wide, an evolution of the turn of the century Battleship or for the van of a battle fleet? I think not, though that was its role at Jutland."

Update on El Salvador Appeal - unfortunately we omitted to add where funds could be deposited
Bank transfers to: Account: Nobody's Backyard, No. 11785692, Royal Bank of Scotland,
Broomhill Sort Code: 16-14-30 or
Cheques made payable to Nobody's Backyard and sent c/o Mr D Stead, 151 Walkley Crescent
Road Sheffield S6 5BA, UK or
Via OXFAM, Christian Aid, CAFOD for El Salvador Appeal

CHALLENGE:

Hornblower and the Crisis - an unfinished novel
The following is one person's view, does it inspire you
to submit your entry?

A personal ending contributed by Richard Miller, dated 12 March 2001

"My dearest Maria"

Hornblower stared out of the window, chewed his quill and gazed at the blank, sheet of paper. Inspiration struck.

"You will be enchanted to learn that I am now, not only a Captain in name but also one in reality. Yesterday I was able to read myself in as being made Post and whilst rejoicing at this fortunate step, I cannot but regret that it keeps me here at my post of duty, apart from my darling wife, the choicest jewel in the firmament, and our darling son. As you will see I write from Maidstone where I am in command of the *Fencibles*. I have three Lieutenants under my orders and a worthy band of longshoremen, fishermen and I surmise some part-time smugglers. The work is not arduous, the surroundings congenial and I enjoy meeting my Officers at the Ship Inn at Faversham. As I say the work is not arduous but yet demands attention and that demand obliges me to bring to an end this message of love to my dearest wife. For a little time you may not hear from me for, as you can understand, although I am now made Post, yet I am unable to do all that my heart desires, thus depriving me of the pleasure of writing to my beloved."

The address was written and the sand applied. Hornblower sighed with relief knowing that this fulsome epistle would be cherished by the mother of his son who unflinchingly gave him the love, which he felt incapable of giving to her.

His duty towards Maria completed to his satisfaction Hornblower turned his mind to yet another loathsome task, which he felt he must undertake. He had never liked Captain James Percival Meadows, who had succeeded him as *Hotspur's* Captain; who had soon after, wrecked her upon the Black Rock, been subsequently court-martialled and died at the hand of the French Captain of the *Guepé* during her capture. Hornblower felt, however, the good fortune which had lead him to take the despatches found on board her to the Admiralty, demanded that he was duty bound to pay homage to an arrogant, reckless, thoroughly unlikeable man who had, in his death, helped him to mount the ladder from whose tottering height he was to make the leap to failure or success.

Next day Hornblower arrived at the Rectory. Meadows had been well known in Maidstone and a local gossip told him that Mrs Meadows and the two small children were staying with her father, the Rector, while Captain Percival Meadows was at sea.

To his dying day, Horatio Hornblower would remember that morning. The chaise had made its way up the winding avenue, the jingling of harness causing a small boy and his serious faced sister to come running.

'Here comes Papa', the little boy had shrilled.

'Huzza', his sister had shouted.

Horatio Hornblower felt an utter fool in coming to visit wearing a sea officers' coat. Dismounting from the chaise, he had seen deep disappointment etched large upon the childrens faces. Assuredly this was not their darling Papa. Clutching the childrens hands, Hornblower had gone to the house from whence a lady, clearly Meadows' wife, emerged.

'I fear Madam, I bring you the deepest of bad news', Hornblower murmured.

'Your husband died a hero, worthy of his right to wear the King's coat, worthy of such a mother to his children and able to leave a legacy of devotion and love'.

How much of this was true, Hornblower knew not, only that Mrs Meadows must be made to feel that the burden of grief had a caring heart.

'Is Papa coming soon?' the little boy stammered.

'No love', his mother replied, 'Your Papa is safe in Heaven with Dear God, getting everything ready for us when we go to Heaven.'

'Can we go soon?' the boy sobbed. 'I want to be with darling Papa.'

Horatio Hornblower gulped. He had been oh, so wrong. The arrogant, rash, foul-mouthed Captain had been a loving husband and father. James Percival Meadows had been acting a part. His way of coping with the demands of the hard sea service had been to don the mantle of a tough, ruthless Officer, leaving his real self, the kind father and husband, ashore.

'Now, Ralph and Ivy, go and look after little Bouncer, for I think he is lonely.'

The two distraught children wandered to the keen to comfort their little puppy. Perhaps their caring for him would help to soften their loss. Pale, tearstained, yet smiling, Mrs Meadows went into the house.

'It is good to know that my husband had such a loyal friend as you, Captain Hornblower', Mrs Meadows said simply.

Hornblower thought the death of Galbraith on board the *Lydia* or the shattering of little midshipman Longley's body on board the *Sutherland*, had not been nearly as awful as this. Gazing back, Horatio had seen two tear soaked faces, the boy and girl, who would never again have the comfort of their dearest Papa.

Two days later, feeling strangely out of character, Hornblower made his way to the Prospect of Whitby Inn. Wearing civilian dress he mused, that he was totally out of step to commence action without a navy blue coat upon his back. He realised that until the mission, which his time aboard the *Guepe* had brought about, he would continue in the guise and raiment of a Spaniard's servant, not of the King's Officers. A private room had been secured and there, the Landlord provided refreshment for the six men whom, he had been told, were investors in cargoes for the West Indies convoy now assembling in London River. Hornblower cast an appraising eye over these men who were to assist him in the delicate task of forwarding orders purporting to come from Napoleon to Villeneuve at Cadiz.

Jose Miranda, a tall aristocratic nobleman had good reason to hate the French and had readily agreed to take part in the venture. Legros, a Jerseyman, an accomplished agent specialising in forgeries and Guishard, a French émigré physician, an expert in opiates and Dinford of the Revenue Service were in earnest conversation with Wicks, a London agent who specialised in the picking of locks. Whilst the man who was to command the vessel destined to land and hopefully return the conspirators to England, gazed at a passing lighter and comforted himself with the thought that he had escaped transportation, or worse, by the intrusion of his late adversary, Dinford. Dinford, who grudgingly admired him as a cunning smuggler, well capable of landing kegs, letters, brandy or men under the long noses of coastal sentinels.

Pengelly, the smuggler, knew of a suitable ship – a French coasting vessel now at Spithead. Her crew of six were composed of four seamen, temporarily absented from the berth deck of a frigate, and two expert Royal Marine marksmen, were even now making ready on board her.

The Prospect of Whitby Inn was warm, the refreshments plentiful and the company extremely congenial. The inner flow of satisfaction was not alcohol-infused, for Hornblower, an abstemious drinker was warmed by the knowledge that the tools, which he would yield, were well tempered and imbued with his desire to succeed.

'Gentlemen, courage is not, not being afraid, but carrying on,' Hornblower remarked as they made their farewells.

Two days later they were ready to sail. Hornblower was seated in the stern of the trading vessel's dinghy as she made her way out from the sallyport. He shifted in his seat. The little boat was leaving England. He was a 'spy'. A shameful profession. He, a King's Officer, was willing to face death. But as a spy! Unthinkable. He was ready to face death, but in an Officer's coat and if death were to come, it would be on a Warship's deck, amidst his comrades.

Did the trusting Maria deserve such a man for her husband? Yet his was not the choice. His was the duty, no matter what. His masters dictated that he had to do the same as a humble seaman, ordered to furl sail in a raging gale. Nonetheless, Hornblower was under orders. The black doubt slid from him. His was not the pleasure of choice: his was the task of doing. A chimney sweep is not a gentlemanly job, but it makes life cleaner. No matter what coat was on his back, so long as he left a cleaner, better world, it would suffice. James Percival Meadows' death must not prove to have been in vain.

Now they were passing ships. Broad beamed comfortable ships, East India men, passengers on board, rich cargo in the holds, whilst he was on board a humble ship masquerading as a supply ship for the blockading squadrons south of the Scillies. A cloud of canvas revealed itself as the Frigate *Diamond*, last seen from the deck of the water hoy *Princess* through the surly Baddlestones; telescope. That day, so shortly gone, seemed a decade past before this adventure had even been born. The *Diamond* surged past. Her men doubtless grinning at the slovenly appearance of Hornblower's ship.

Earlier he had remarked, 'No need to let others know you are men of war's men, do it in a lubberly fashion. I have got no Bosun's mate on board to put scars across your banks with the cat'.

His crew had loved the joke. One even dared to spit on the deck. Closing the coast more British ships are sighted. *Euryalus*, *Serius*, *Niobe*, *Phoebe*. Ships of a sentinel chain. Horatio looks longingly at these superb cruisers and hopes in his deepest heart that they will not question his right of passage. Surging past the frigates, head to take up their stations.

Hoisting French colours, their ship draws toward Bayonne. It was now that Toby Pengelly showed his worth.

'See 'ere Zur, we wants to land at low tide, no foot marks on the sand, you see.'

'No wonder you kept out of our clutches for so long', remarked Dinford, 'It is good to see you put your blackguardly skill to good use'.

Toby Pengelly grinned and slyly asked, if the Revenue man fancied a sup of good French brandy, adding 'that it won't pay duty once it's down your gullet'.

As dusk falls they creep shorewards and the group of intruders wade ashore. Striking inland, lead by Legros, they make for the highway to San Sabastian. There Jules is waiting. Long acquaintance and profitable trade had bred in him a deep respect for Pengelly, and as long as gold coin found its way to his pocket, little did he care if a party wished to land in secret. An Inn lies ahead. A solitary refuge on the long road south. Its owner pleased to welcome tired thirsty travellers and is delighted to learn that they are an escort for a messenger due with Imperial Orders and that they will wait his arrival. Up the road Hornblower stands ready with Miranda and the two Royal Marines in Gendarme uniforms. Hours pass. Dawn brightens the sky and with its coming the horses appear. Three men, an elegant Officer and his escort. Stepping forward, Hornblower introduces himself as Miranda's servant, who announcing his authority proclaims,

'I, Count Miranda welcome you to my district. My servant and two of my men will escort you south. Please come to the nearby Inn. There we will dine and then suitably refreshed, your escort can return.'

Hot food, pleasant conversation and rest, balm to the tired courier and his men. Good naturedly the escorts make their farewells, for now they were to return homewards, signing a receipt forged by Legros of the District Commander's signature. Several very enjoyable hours ensured. The courier was a natural conversationalist and had many interesting stories to tell. He was a cavalryman and he exulted in his stories and exploits on horseback. The Englishmen listened with relish and admiration. Miranda obviously not enjoying what he was listening to but making the best of it nonetheless.

After some time the courier started to yawn copiously and asked if his hosts would excuse him.

'You have heard from my adventures that I am a Cavalryman but I have to admit you are now looking at a very tired Cavalryman. These roads are abominable I long for sleep. Will you be so kind as to forgive me if I make for my bed. Sirs, will you forgive me if I take the liberty of locking my bed chamber door, for it has been impressed upon me, and I have given my word as an Officer and Gentleman, to keep my secret orders very, very safe and under lock and key.'

The deep sleep for which the courier yearned was readily available, Guishard had seen to that, for his drinks had been liberally spiked. Heavy snoring assured that it was now suitable for Weeks to begin his work. Elias

Weeks was a good locksmith. The London underworld had upon many occasions relied upon his skill, little knowing that the man whose nimble fingers and probing tools snapped open the locks and opened the doors of vaults, was the man who was as much responsible for their forthcoming dance upon the gibbet, as the Hangman. Elias plied his trade stealthily, knowing that to be found out would merit instant death from those that took him for a criminal.

Entering the room, Hornblower strode to the sleeping man's bed and there in a pouch, secured about his waist was the letter. The Imperial seal, the address, the orders. It took but seconds to transfer the letters, drafted in London, composed by a Frenchman, written by Claudius in ink, obtained in Chancery Lane, upon paper identical to the original which the cunning of the Rev. Doctor had speedily obtained. Everything was now in place.

Next morning the courier was slow in arising.

'Gentlemen, a thousand pardons,' he remarked sleepily as he rubbed his eyes.

'I was tired but I did not realise I was oh! So very tired. Assuredly I slept very soundly and now thankfully I am fully refreshed and look forward to a brisk ride south, for as I said, I am a Cavalryman and I yearn for the open road. Let us be upon the road to Cadiz.'

Setting out, Hornblower, Miranda and the two Royal Marines on borrowed horses accompanied the courier. The long day was closing in when the shots rang out.

Clutching his throat Miranda fell lifeless to the roadway. Dismounting, the Marines sought shelter behind some rocks and Hornblower, shielding the courier with his body, flung him into a ditch. Spurts of flame betrayed from whence the ambush by the Spanish guerrillas had come. With deadly accuracy the young Marines fired, re-loaded and fired round after round. Guttural shrieks proved the merit of their musketry. Six Spaniards lay dead or dying amidst the wayside scrub.

'Ride Sir', yelled Hornblower. 'There is a town a shot way ahead, there you will find reinforcements, leave us to deal with this vermin.'

'You Sir, saved my life.' The courier spoke with gratitude. 'Our beloved Napoleon will learn of this.'

His horses clattering hooves beat a brisk tattoo upon the roadway as he galloped for the safety of the town. The dead Miranda's body was slung across a horse's back and Hornblower and his men headed back the long road to the Inn. Then, having rejoined the others who had been passed off to the courier as persons staying the night in the Inn, they made their way down the cliff path and thence to the shore. The Frenchman, Jules, followed, his pockets jingling with coin. During the night his men had put silks and brandy kegs on board Pengelly's ship, and now he wishes to see the Englishmen depart. That they carry a dead body is strange, even more so the presence of a man fleetingly known to him, albeit under another name, who is a physician. His cunning brain hatches a plan. He will inform the authorities about the landing, perhaps even get a reward. Money from both sides, he chuckled at the thought. He died with a smile on his face, for Legros mercilessly slid an upthrust blade into his back. Never trust a Frog, he callously muttered to himself.

Kneeling in the boat, Hornblower produced a length of chain, twined it to the body and announced that they would sink it in deep water. A shaded lantern signalled to Pengelly and Dinsford and, crunching down the beach the intruders boarded the small boat which was to bring them to their ship. Leaving the coast behind, they headed for the hoped-for safety. Several miles out patrolling Frigates could be seen, and yet even further out were the line of battle ships 'Guardians' of the vital blockade.

Some days later Hornblower wrote again to Maria.

"My dearest love, life is very dull indeed here on *Fencible* duty. I long to see you and our dear little Horatio. Soon I can return and what think you of a journey to Gloucester? I dearly long to see more of our beloved country. Perchance we will travel a part of the way by canal-boat. I am so long absent from the sea, I long for travel by water, albeit it will not be salt. Beloved, I will join you and our son as soon as possible at Plymouth. I so long for an adventure with my family, for I, as you know have been long deprived of action."

Sanded, addressed and sealed, the letter was sent. Wryly scratching his head, Hornblower remarked inwardly, I am not only a spy for I am a base deceiver.

Orders reached Villeneuve, Trafalgar followed, Nelson died.

Maria read the letter, her face illuminated by a smile of happiness. Her Horry was coming. They were going to have a really lovely time together and she would try to bring a little excitement into his life which of late, had been so desperately dull. He was a man of action, her Horry. He deserved better. Well, she would see that he got better. They would really have a lovely time, little Horatio, her Darling and herself.

Passing through London, Hornblower called to the Admiralty. He was warmly welcomed by Marsden and Barrow. Sitting comfortably, a glass of wine at his elbow, the events were recounted and listened to by these far-seeing and perceptive men.

'You have helped to bring this about, Captain', Marsden remarked. 'To you our thanks are due. Unfortunately it cannot be made known what has taken place, in fact this venture has never been committed to paper, or it never shall be, and I ask your ward as a Gentleman never to speak of it again. Goodbye Sir, and thank you, you will shortly receive word of your future posting.'

Pleased, Hornblower left the Admiralty. He had received thanks from very high Officials. The world would not know what he had helped to bring about, but he knew. It was then the blow fell. He knew, but what did he know? He knew that he was a deceiver. He had deceived the one person in the world who gave him unquestionable love. That he could not return that love was a small thing, but she trusted him and what had he done. He had deceived her. Verily, Horatio Hornblower had come through a Crisis.

EDITOR'S NOTE

A bumper newsletter for this edition – but then it should be, given the long interval since the last. The time has been spent partly in revising and adding to the newsletter as more and more material appeared, until finally we had to say that the time had come to stop fiddling and print what was then ready.

I hope that the result pleases. There is a mixture of reports from our last meeting, a glimpse of the new TV mini-series, the quiz, book reviews and articles relating to C S Forester and his works. Perhaps the most important is the first published review of John Forester's biography of his father. The task of writing that wasn't easily assigned since the biography gives a view of CSF which may disturb his fans (who previously had only read *Long before Forty* and *The Hornblower Companion* to give insight into the author's personal life). All that now has to be viewed in a different light, but as with all light, new shadows appear too. Your views will be welcomed in the newsletter.

Colin Blogg
Editor, August 2001

Next meeting will be on Saturday 22nd September 2001

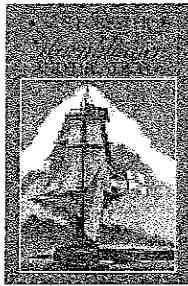
A film show –

Brown on Resolution (Forever England, Born for Glory)
and

The African Queen



Possible future meeting – March 2002
trip through the Sapperton Tunnel



(as in Hornblower and the Atropos)