



Men-of-War: Life in Nelson's Navy

Patrick O'Brian

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This book is a companion to Patrick O'Brian's sea novels, a straightforward exploration of what daily life in Nelson's navy was really like, for everyone from the captain down to the rawest recruit. What did they eat? What songs did they sing? What was the schedule of watches? How were the officers and crew paid, and what was the division of prize-money?

These questions and many more are answered in Patrick O'Brian's elegant narrative, which includes wonderful anecdotal material on the battles and commanders that established Britain's naval supremacy. Line drawings and charts help us to understand the construction and rigging of the great ships, the types and disposition of the guns, and how they were operated in battle. A number of contemporary drawings and cartoons illustrate aspects of naval life from the press gang to the scullery. Finally, a generous selection of full-color paintings render the majesty and the excitement of fleet actions in the age of fighting sail.

Men-of-War: Life in Nelson's Navy Details

Date : Published November 17th 1995 by W. W. Norton Company (first published January 1st 1995)

ISBN : 9780393038583

Author : Patrick O'Brian

Format : Hardcover 96 pages

Genre : History, Nonfiction, Military History, Naval History, War, Military Fiction, Historical, European History

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Richard says

This book is not generally as well known as the series of books written by Patrick O'Brian under the heading of the "Aubrey-Maturin" canon. That series took off in the early 1970's, and was less than half-way completed when O'Brian wrote this book. It pointedly doesn't reference his fictional sea-captain hero, Jack Aubrey, being subtitled instead as "Life in Nelson's Navy". This references the historically factual navy that O'Brian uses as a backdrop for the exploits of his fictional characters and emphasizes the tribute aspect of his best-selling series of novels as being dedicated to the real, great hero of the Royal Navy in the Napoleonic era, Admiral Horatio Nelson. We all know Nelson as the leader who gave his life while leading the Royal Navy to victory against Napoleon's French-Spanish armada at Trafalgar in October, 1805, making him a worshipped figure in Great Britain since that time. During the next ten years after his death, the Royal Navy and its wooden sailing ships would still be accurately described as "Nelson's Navy."

Patrick O'Brian did a service to the rapidly growing legions of readers of his expanding numbers of "Nelson's Navy" titles by producing this slim, but nicely detailed book. It contains chapters on the construction of the wooden ships, the methods of gunnery used in battles, the various types of sailors and their skills, and the type of life they led at sea. There is even a short section devoted to sea songs. Lots of useful illustrations are included, and the writing is not technical. All in all, this is a book that can be read rather quickly in order to get a solid orientation to understanding books on early-nineteenth century sea war, whether written by O'Brian or someone else. The downside is that the pleasure of reading about this subject passes quickly due to the book's shortness, but that leaves more time to pick up and read the next novel in the twenty-book series.

Satine Dali says

...If nautical nonsense be something you wish..

"Success to all brave sailors that enter now on board;
A health to Captain Pellew, and all his sailors bold,
Who value more their honour than misers do their gold."

- excerpt from a song about the action between HMS Nympe and the French frigate Cléopâtre in June 1793.

This book is highly rated and recommended based on it's conciseness (it's a short one), the beauty of it's art (high quality prints of paintings displaying the ships and their battles), and the fact that it is packed with nautical knowledge and insight on battle ships before the Industrial Age (pertaining to the Royal Navy).

Nancy Dobson Bennett says

I just used this for research. Quick read, quite a few pictures and diagrams. Good information.

Rebecca says

Haven't read any of O'Brian's fiction yet, but I can already tell he knows his way around a story. He has an easy, narrative style even as he lays out the minutia of the ships, the sails, the officers, the seamen, the guns, the watches, etc. He obviously has such expertise and passion for this period, and I was impressed by what detail he's able to pick out of the art selections. It's worth just paging through this book for the art and the anecdotes in the captions.

I read straight through this nifty guide and will keep it at hand while I listen to the audiobooks for the Aubrey-Maturin series.

Geoff says

If you've read the Aubrey/Maturin books, you've already learned most everything in here.

Robert Fenske says

As someone who's only exposure to seafaring life has been a handful of pirate movies this is a quick introduction filled with nuggets of great information. Within the pages you'll learn about the ships, guns, crew, their lifestyles, and even their songs.

Although I did feel overwhelmed at times with so much terminology.

Scott says

A look at real life aboard a British Man of War in the Napoleonic wars and the War of 1812. It is a quick read but gives good insight into the real life that is part of the novels that the author wrote.

Conrad says

The way the author brought you back into the time period by making up a character on the spot and bring you through the journey of him becoming a member of the ship was really cool and fun to read. He also wrote about the advantages and disadvantages of the French and British ships. He told the reader about what the weapons were but also about how they were used and what purposes. He also explained the similarities and differences of the ships and maneuverability. The book was so fascinating in this way that it was one of

my favorite books and I was able to read it without ever getting bored because of all the facts of the ships that there was to offer.

Jason Koivu says

Cast off thy lubberly ways, matey! *Men-of-War*'ll wet yer swab, unfurl yer sailorly grey matter and have ya shipshape and toppin' it the Age o' Sail scholar!

I can't keep that shit up...

Patrick O'Brian spent much of his life writing about the English Navy during the Napoleonic Wars. You may know him from his Aubrey/Maturin series, especially from the movie "Master & Commander". The book series lasts 20 volumes, in each of which O'Brian spends plenty of time describing seamanship. However, so much jargon and period-appropriate language (details that are positives for the reading experience) is used that readers are often bogged down and bored. One need not understand all that stuff to enjoy the broader scope of the books, however if you wish to have an even better grasp of what's going on, *Men-of-War* can help. It's like a Cliffs Notes or Wikipedia of information at your fingertips. I read the whole series through twice before I read this and still I found it useful!

Herb Hastings says

This is an excellent companion to the Aubrey/Maturin novels. It is better described as a quick reference guide than as a historical text. That is not to say that it isn't packed with information about the rules and regulations, the armament, nautical terms, and the living quarters of the crew and the officers. To anyone with an interest in British Naval History, I highly recommend this book.

Numidica says

Excellent history of how the British kept Napoleon at bay on the oceans, but really this is the nuts and bolts of how men lived and died on board in that period.

Gabriel Greenlee says

this is the tiniest coffee table book ever. I mean it does include quite a bit about the royal navy but is really a quick guide to help with the reading of his other books. I really enjoyed the cutaway drawings and diagrams, they were a big help in giving a mental picture to his books. I thought I knew the basics of a ship but now I definitely do.

Scott says

Interesting details of British Navy of the early 19th century, along with some great art and drawings depicting naval battles and life at sea.

Lewis M says

For a short book it gives a good account of the time of Nelson and the world that the author writes about in the Aubrey Maturin series.

Edward Fenner says

Short but interesting read. Very informative. I learned a great deal about ship types, configurations, crew ranks, pay, meals, duties, etc. Fascinating.
