

MASTER & COMMANDER



On 14 July 1789, angry at their poverty and at the wealth and ineffectuality of the ruling classes, masses of French Revolutionaries stormed the Bastille in Paris and France was declared a republic. Three years later the king, Louis XVI was put on trial and executed. In 1792, disturbed by what they saw as a dangerous precedent and an unsettling force in Europe, Austria and Prussia formed a Coalition against the new Republic and mobilised their troops. They were joined the next year by Britain, Spain and Holland. This started a war that was to last 22 years.

Throughout the next two decades, both Britain with its Coalition allies and the French allied forces all experienced both victory and defeat. But these years also saw the steady rise of one man: Napoleon Bonaparte. From early success commanding the French army in Italy and in Egypt, Napoleon arrived unexpectedly in Paris in 1799 and forced a coup d'état, making himself one of three consuls who were to govern France. In just a few months he became First Consul, and sole ruler of France, with ambitions to conquer and rule all Europe. Over the next fifteen years, he was to invade Spain, Russia, Austria and Portugal and even attempt to invade Britain, being defeated famously at the 'Battle of Trafalgar' in 1805.

In these years, the size of the British Navy and the skill and experience of its sailors was crucial in turning the tide from the French victories on land to the eventual defeat of the Napoleonic regime. British commanders, particularly Admiral Horatio Nelson, used unconventional tactics to defeat the French and their allies, as may be seen from the 'Battle of the Nile' and later in the crucial victory at 'Trafalgar'. The urgent need for sailors to man these warships also exacerbated the tension between Britain and apparently neutral America. Ships were so significant a part of a countries' power, both naval and economic, that control of the seas became perhaps the most important factor for all sides in the Napoleonic Wars.

Introduction

Ship navigation was mainly based on being able to deduce fairly accurately the direction and speed of travel, thereby working out the distance travelled, and in what direction. This system is called 'dead reckoning', a corruption of 'deduced reckoning'. Every half-hour the speed, sailing course, wind direction and wind strength were entered in the ships records.

Getting Information

The 'direction', or 'course', was measured by a compass that measured in 'points', not degrees.

The 'wind direction' was significant in gauging the direction of travel. If the wind was directly on the stern (the front of the ship), the ship would travel dead straight. If the wind was coming from any other direction, the ship would also move slightly sideways, a movement called 'leeway'.

The 'speed' of the ship was measured using a method called the 'log' system, a name originating in the old practice of throwing a log from the bow of the ship and measuring the pace at which the navigator had to walk to follow it to the bow. Around the early nineteenth century a more accurate system was devised, consisting of a 'log ship', a weighted piece of wood attached to a long rope which had marks or knots every 48 feet. As the first knot was reached a sand timer that ran for 2 seconds was turned over, and the number of marks passed in this time was counted. If precisely one knot was passed the ship was travelling at one nautical mile/hour or one 'knot'. This is still the unit of speed used to measure ship and aircraft speed today.



The ship's overall change in latitude and longitude over each half-hour was calculated using a set of 'traverse tables'. These figures were entered into the ship's record book (known as the 'log book') and at the end of the day the overall change was calculated.

Checking and Accuracy

Although these systems were fairly well-tested, errors and inaccuracies were inevitable. Therefore the information calculated by 'dead reckoning' was checked by direct observation of latitude and longitude. This was usually done by noting the height of the sun at noon and, also taking into account the season and the earth's atmosphere. The latitude could be determined to an accuracy of around 5 miles. The sun's height was measured using an angle-measuring device called a 'sextant'. The longitude could also be measured by comparing the local noon time with noon as measured by an accurate clock set to Greenwich Mean Time. This could also be done at night, using the position of the moon and stars.

Rated Ships

WARSHIPS

Warships were rated according to the number of cannons they carried. A 'First Rate' ship carried more than 100 heavy guns and had three decks. On the lowest deck there were 32 pounder guns, on the next deck 18 pounders and on the top, or 'weather' deck, 12 pounders. It was crewed by around 850 men. 'Second Rate' ships carried 90 or 98 guns also on three decks, crewed by around 750 men. 'First' and 'Second Rate' ships were usually used in the centre of the line of battle. Both rates of ship also carried carronades. 'Third Rate' ships had only two gun decks (carrying between 64 and 80 guns) and were the most common ships used in the line of battle. 'Fourth Rate' ships were only occasionally used in the line of battle, having only 50 to 60 guns, and were often used to escort convoys and for troop transport.



FRIGATES

Frigates did not serve in the main line of battle, and were classified 'Fifth' and 'Sixth Rate'. They had a single gun deck that carried between twenty-four and thirty-eight guns. They were often used as raiding ships or to protect merchant vessels. Frigates therefore often gained large prize money. Because of their manoeuvrability and usefulness to gain information about the enemy, Nelson called frigates the 'eyes' of a fleet. Following merchant vessels, frigates would be able to count foreign ships and evaluate their seaworthiness, as well as make observations on ports and coastal defences.

Construction of a Ship

In 1805 the British Navy had 949 ships. There was a large industry that made and repaired these ships, and Britain was renowned for its dockyards, such as Chatham, in Kent. In the late eighteenth century, ships were made with copper bottoms to resist the growth of barnacles and weeds that would slow them down.

All rated ships were 'ship rigged', which meant square rigged on three masts. On a 'First Rate' ship the sails could total two acres in area and weigh around ten tons. All rated ships carried several smaller boats that would be used for landing troops. The largest of these, the Launch, was 34 feet and carried stores and landing parties and could either be sailed or rowed.

WEAPONS & ARTILLERY

Care and Organisation of Guns

The Gunner occupied an elevated and respected position on board a ship. He made his own arrangements for eating and had a cabin to himself. He was responsible for the maintenance of all the ship's cannons and smaller arms, shot and powder magazines (to which the Captain held the key). During battle he looked after the magazines and supervised the filling and distribution of cartridges to the soldiers with guns. His Mate would stand on the gun deck ready to assist if there were any problems with guns. Quarter gunners were responsible for four guns each. However, in a battle, the guns were directly commanded by Midshipmen and Lieutenants.





The Armourer (a junior warrant officer) was responsible for the maintenance of the ship's small arms, using a forge and a set of tools issued to him.

Training in firearms was carried out by the Master-at-Arms and his assistants.



Guns

The general aim was to destroy the enemy's ships at a distance before having to resort to close-quarter fighting.

-  The main weapon of warships in the early nineteenth century was the 'long-gun', a cannon which required a crew of eight men. The 'long-gun' fired a cannonball using a charge of gunpowder. Cannonballs could weigh around 40lbs and could travel up to a mile.
-  'Carronades', shorter range guns, were also used. They were considerably lighter than cannons and therefore required fewer men to man them. They fired lead 'shot', such as grape-shot, which was about 1 inch in diameter.
-  'Mortars' were even shorter guns that were used for shore bombardment.
-  Cannons and the smaller carronades (carronades were not originally counted in the number of cannon a ship is said to have).

Small Arms

'Small arms' were used for close-quarters fighting and included guns such as pistols and muskets. Large ships would carry up to 400 muskets. Often, in close-quarters combat when a ship was boarded, muskets and pistols were used as weapons as much for hitting with as for firing. Ships also carried 'blunderbusses', which were mainly effective in combating enemy boarding parties, as they sprayed small shot over a large area. Guns had brass fittings to minimise the rusting that was likely in sea air. Swords such as the short, broad-bladed cutlasses and 'hangers' became standard issue at the beginning of the nineteenth century and boarding weapons such as pikes and axes were also issued, to cut the rigging of an enemy ship.



Ships!

Sometimes merchant ships were filled with flammable material, sailed as close to a target as possible and then lit, as the small crew abandoned ship. This was in the hope that they would cause enemy ships to catch fire.

UNIFORM & CLOTHING

The Introduction of Uniform

The first regulations for naval officers' uniform were issued in 1748. Until this time, officers had worn what they liked, often the same clothes that they would have worn in civilian life on shore. All officers had to wear a dark blue coat, a white shirt, white breeches, white stockings and buckled shoes. In 1793, a large amount of embroidery was added to officers' uniforms. All officers had both more formal, more elaborate 'dress' uniforms, and less ornate 'undress' uniforms.

Badges of Rank

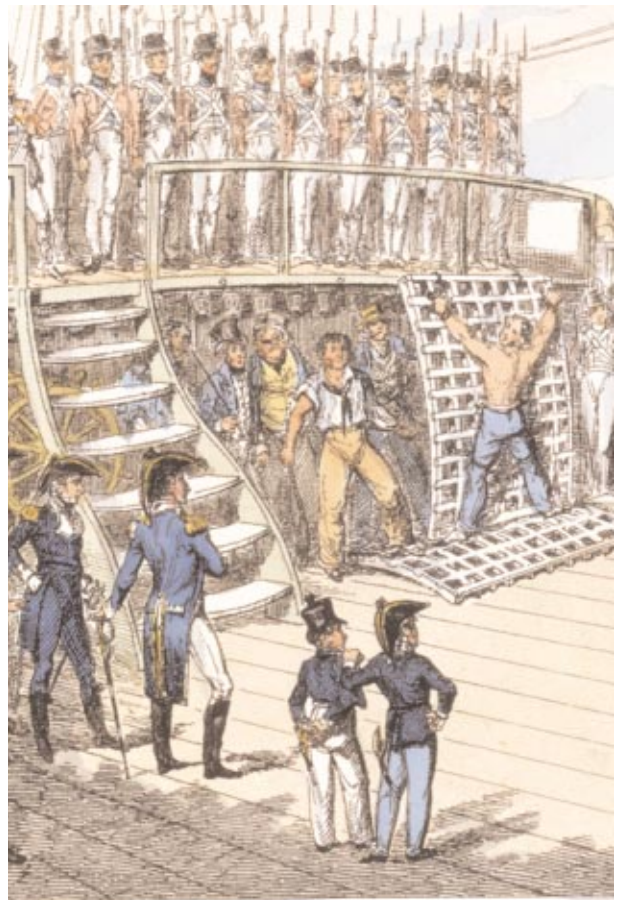
In 1748, different ranks could be distinguished by variations in number or design of buttons, braid, lace and hat. There was no distinction between different 'undress' coats. However, changes to the regulation uniforms were introduced in 1795. For the first time, epaulettes were worn on coats. The rank of a sailor could be told from his epaulettes:

Admiral	Three silver stars on his epaulettes Three rows of lace on his sleeve
Vice-Admiral	Two silver stars Two rows of lace
Rear-Admiral	One silver star One row of lace

This applied to both 'dress' uniform and 'undress' uniform. Captains also had epaulettes, but without stars. A Captain with less than three years seniority wore a single epaulette on the right shoulder. A Commander wore a single epaulette on the left shoulder.

Other ranks, without epaulettes, were still distinguished by variations in the cut, colour and embellishment of their uniforms. A few examples are given here:

A Captain's 'undress' uniform had a row of gold lace around the tails and pocket flaps. The coat lining was white, and it was worn with a plain hat, a white waistcoat, and breeches. In 'undress', epaulettes were only sometimes worn. The 'dress' uniform was the same, but gold lace on the hat, and with additional lace around the lapels and pockets, as well as two extra rows on the cuffs.



A Flag Officer's 'undress' uniform was similar, but also had lace around the buttonholes, a single row of lace on the cuffs, and a gold laced hat. They had no epaulettes.

Physicians and Surgeons also had a special uniform, that was mainly blue. Masters and Purser wore the same uniform, also in blue and white. However, they could be distinguished by the devices on their coat buttons, Masters' bearing the arms of the Navy Office, and Purser of the Victualling Office.

Seamen

Common seamen had no official uniform and this remained the case until 1857. Sailors could buy either cloth or clothes on board ship from the Purser, who had purchased them from the Navy. Generally they would wear simple trousers and a jacket, a shirt, stockings and a waistcoat.



Command Structure

LANDSMEN, ORDINARY SEAMEN AND ABLE SEAMEN

When sailors were registered in a ship's books they were given a 'rating' according to experience. Those new to sailing were called 'landsmen', those with some limited experience 'ordinary seamen' and those experienced and knowledgeable 'able seamen'. As well as fighting when necessary, seamen would take four-hour shifts known as 'watches' in which they would man the sails and lookout and perform menial tasks around the ship. The men on each watch were then divided up into different 'divisions' which determined which job they were to do for that watch, for example, what sails they were to man and which areas of the ship they were to clean.

PETTY OFFICERS

Petty Officers (or Warrant Officers) were non-commissioned officers, able seamen who were allocated some greater responsibility for specific duties. These included master-at-arms, chaplain, surgeon, carpenter, gunner's mate, quartermaster and bosun.

MIDSHIPMEN

Midshipmen were usually fairly well-off young men whose job was to help lieutenants control the crew, as well as take control of small boats. They slept and ate separately from the ordinary seamen. After an apprenticeship of six years, they could also be promoted to lieutenant after taking an examination.

LIEUTENANTS

This was the lowest rank of commissioned officer on board a ship, and did most of the direct command of the crew. They oversaw gun divisions in battle, watches and also led boarding parties. A sailor could only become a lieutenant after six years of sea duty, with at least two years as a Master's Mate or a Midshipman. There were usually up to eight Lieutenants on a ship.

COMMANDER

A Commander was more similar in his duties to a captain than a lieutenant, commanding remotely.

CAPTAIN

The Captain had final command and responsibility for his ship. It was the Captain's job to ensure that the ship was fully-crewed and ready for service.

COMMODORE

Commodores were in charge of a naval squadron and were captains, temporarily promoted for this duty.

ADMIRAL

An Admiral was the overall military commander of a fleet and led battles in flagships.

Jobs on Board

MASTER

The Master was the senior warrant officer and was responsible for the maintenance of a ship, preserving provisions, checking ballast, inspecting stores and signing expense books. He was also in charge of supervising the readings taken for the navigation of the ship.

PURSER

The Purser played a crucial part of all sailors' lives. Having served a year's apprenticeship as clerk to a captain, he would purchase goods from the Navy before a voyage, a kind of franchise agreement, and then be responsible for their distribution throughout the voyage. The Purser made his profit by collecting the money that the sailors were forced to hand over for their provisions, there being nowhere else to get them! Therefore he was in charge of distributing food, beer, rum, bedding, clothes, candles and tobacco. The purser was often held in suspicion by a crew due to his ample opportunity for embezzlement and corruption.

SURGEON

Responsible for the treatment of all minor ailments, diseases and wounds. See 'Food and Hygiene' for more detail about surgery and disease on board ship.

Pay and Prizes

PAY

The Captain of a ship was, predictably, the highest paid, receiving some £16 or £17 per month. A Lieutenant would receive half this amount, slightly more than a Master who might receive £7 or £8. A Gunner and a Purser would receive around £3, a Midshipman or Master-at-Arms £2, an Able Seaman £1, 13 shillings, and a Landsman just over £1. Professional skills were also recognised in pay: an experienced Surgeon might receive as much as £14, and a Carpenter £3. Officers were also given an allowance for servants which they could use if they wished: 8 servants for a Captain, 2 for a First Lieutenant and 1 for the Cook, Surgeon, Master and Chaplain.

PRIZES

When enemy ships were captured, prize money was distributed amongst the officers and crew, according to a standardised system. The Captain would gain 3/8, the Master, Captains of Marines and Physician would share 1/8, as would Lieutenants of Marines and Principal Warrant Officers and Midshipmen and Inferior Warrant Officers. The rest of the crew would share 2/8 between them.

IN THE NAVY

Joining The Navy

Many men volunteered for the Navy, receiving two months wages in advance (although they were obliged to buy their hammock and clothes out of this money). However, the Navy was still desperately short of men and resorted to forcibly recruiting them.

THE IMPRESS SERVICE

This organisation was employed by the Navy in every port in Britain. They would set out to find men who were or had been seamen and to present them with a warrant obliging them to enlist. They were paid £1 for each man that they enlisted. They would often hire local thugs to form 'Press Gangs' who would search the surrounding district for recruits. They often targeted merchant ships to strip them of their men, whom merchant captains sometimes tried to hide to keep them from being pressed into military service. For obvious reasons, the 'Press Gangs' were generally hated and men were often ingenious in avoiding them. The Admiralty could issue 'protections' which freed a man from being impressed, (except in a time of great need), and had to be carried at all times.

QUOTA ACTS

The 'Quota Acts' were passed in 1795, and stated that each county had to provide a certain number of men for the Navy, depending on its population and number of seaports. Often men convicted of small offences were offered the option of enlisting instead of a jail sentence.

Living Conditions

Officers and Midshipmen had separate quarters, but all regular sailors shared the same cramped area. Sailors slept in hammocks, slung close together amongst the guns on the gun deck. Each sailor was permitted a fourteen inch wide space for his hammock. Each morning the hammocks would be taken down for the normal business of the day to take place. The decks where the seamen were accommodated were completely enclosed and were only ventilated by hatches and gunports which had to be closed in bad weather. In such storms, there were often leaks in the cabins, where water dripped onto sailors' hammocks. Water in the bottom of the ship stagnated. Rats were also common. The cabins were lit by candle.



Punishment

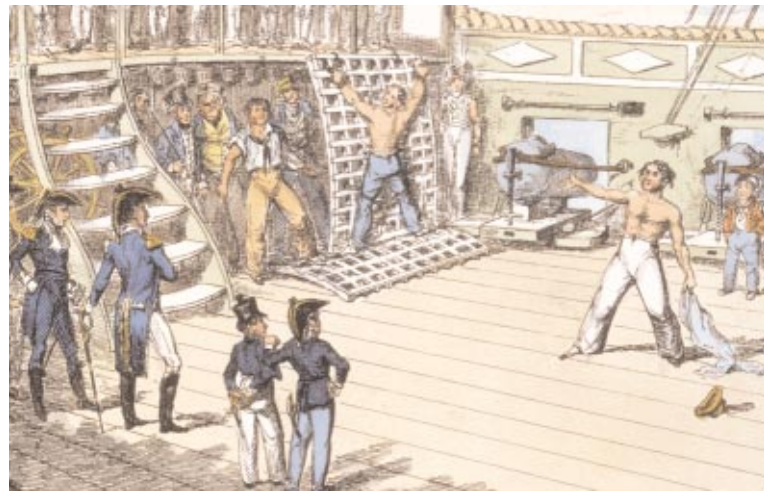
The code for punishment that the Navy followed was called the 'Articles of War'. However, these apparently cruel punishments must be seen in the context of a comparatively harsh penal system on land.

STARTING

This least severe of punishments was often used as a warning to work faster, and could be disposed arbitrarily upon the whim of the Captain. It involved hitting a sailor across the back with a length of rope or a cane. 'Starting' was banned by the Admiralty in 1809.

FLOGGING

This could be ordered by the Captain for more serious offences but in reality could be for whatever he wanted. Officially, a Captain could only give a maximum of 12 lashes but this was frequently, and openly, broken. Flogging was carried out by the bosun's mate, using a cat o' nine tails, consisting of a heavy rope handle to which nine 'tails' of line, about two feet long, were attached. All men were called up to the deck to witness each punishment and the officers lined up to observe the flogging. For very severe offences, a seaman could be 'flogged round the fleet', where he would be taken round several ships in a small boat, to be flogged on each one and watched by each ship's company.



HANGING

For mutiny, treason or desertion a man could be hanged. However, perhaps because it would reduce the number of valuable crewmen, this was rarely done.

Facing Each Other

Generally in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries different sides in a naval battle manoeuvred into two parallel lines, the cannons of the opposing fleets, (which were ranked along the sides of the ships, the 'broadside'), standing opposite each other and firing at the ship facing them in the enemy line. The line was divided into three, the Van division at the front, the Centre division (where the Commander in Chief was usually stationed) and the Rear division. However, this way of staging battles usually resulted in high casualties for both sides, and rarely an outright victory.

Breaking The Line

A different tactic was for an Admiral to try to break through the enemy's line of battle and then line up parallel with one part of the fleet, and thus destroy that part before the other part could tack round to bring its guns to bear on the attacking ships. Nelson used this tactic in the 'Battle of Trafalgar' in 1805. Sailing through enemy lines also allowed for 'raking', the most devastating possible attack on an enemy ship. This advantageous position was achieved by manoeuvring so that a ship's broadside was facing the bow or stern of the enemy ship, thus allowing the cannons to fire down the length of the enemy ship without the enemy guns being able to return fire (as they would be pointing 90 degrees in the wrong direction).

However, this tactic of breaking through a line also exposed the first ship in the column to the broadside of enemy fire and therefore a large, three-decker ship was usually selected for the lead position.

Timing

The exact moment at which the guns fired was also tactically significant. As the ship sat in the water, it would roll from side to side, and therefore the cannons pointed up or down at various moments. French commanders ordered fire usually at the up point of the roll, so the shot fell on the masts and rigging of British ships. This tactic was effective for disabling ships, but caused few casualties. Conversely, British commanders ordered fire at the bottom of the roll, firing into the hull of the enemy ships, thus killing or wounding many gun crews. If a ship was sufficiently damaged, it would 'founder' (sink).

Secrecy

Another method of attack was a 'cutting out raid'. In this method, small boats called 'cutters' rowed out to stationary enemy ships during the night and the sailors on board, armed with small arms and cutlasses, would storm the boat. However, this would only succeed if the surprise was complete, as the boarding party would be heavily outnumbered by the crew of the enemy ship.

Food and Drink

RATIONS

Food supplies for the Navy were controlled by the Victualing Board, and then distributed by the Purser on board a ship. Most food had to be preserved for the long voyages: the meat was salted and many other foods were dried. Butter and sugar were also provided, although the staple food was dry ship's biscuit or 'hard tack'. The sailors ate in messes of about eight men, each taking it in turn to cook, collecting all the rations for the mess and, in the case of meat, taking it to the cook to be boiled.



Officers were officially entitled to the same rations as the common sailors, but usually contributed from their own pockets to a quantity of extra provisions bought en-masse at the beginning of a voyage for the use of the officers only. Sometimes they paid for live animals to be kept on board ship, usually pigs and chickens. The officers were waited on by other sailors and the captain had his own cook and servants.

WATER

The provision of fresh water on a long sea voyage was always a difficulty. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, ships began to carry a still and condenser that would distil sea water to render it drinkable. Various other purification methods were used, such as filtration through sand. Wooden butts were also replaced by iron tanks, which could keep water fresher for longer.

LIQUOR

Each sailor was generally entitled to a gallon of beer and half a pint of rum per day. The rum was mixed with water to make 'grog' that was served out twice a day. Drunkenness was a widespread problem in the Navy and was often punished by flogging. It could also be responsible for the large number of injuries and even death through accidents.

Disease

SCURVY

Scurvy was a very common and widespread problem on board ship until the end of the eighteenth century, when greater understanding was spread of the cause and measures were taken to prevent it. Due to a deficiency in Vitamin C, caused by a lack of fresh fruit or vegetables, scurvy was particularly common in long sea voyages or long blockades in wartime, when no fresh supplies could be reached for a very long time. Officers, who had their own private supplies, were generally less affected than the common sailors who had to subsist on standard rations. On long voyages, sometimes over half the crew perished from this disease.

The cause of scurvy had in fact been suspected long before the late 1700's and lemon juice had been used as early as 1601 as a preventative. In 1747 Naval surgeon James Lind, aboard the 74-gun ship 'Salisbury', conducted a controlled experiment that demonstrated conclusively that citrus juice was effective in the prevention of scurvy. He also advised on methods of preserving fruits for long voyages. In 1794, the Admiralty took measures to put his recommendations into general practice. It was the English sailors' practice of eating limes that led to the American nickname for the British of 'limey'.

PULMONARY TUBERCULOSIS

This disease was extremely common throughout the Navy in the early nineteenth century. Inflamed lungs and consumption (coughing up blood) were caused by the very overcrowded, poorly ventilated and often dirty living conditions of the sailors.

TYPHUS

Typhus fever was another disease whose spread was facilitated by the cramped, enclosed conditions below deck. Known as 'gaol fever' it was often carried on board by 'Quota Men' who had opted for enlistment in place of a jail sentence. Scores of men could die from the disease on a single voyage as it spread throughout the crew. Impure air was thought to be the cause of scurvy and although in the 1700's a connection had been made between the disease and lack of personal cleanliness, the actual transmission from person to person by lice was not discovered until 1904. Even the provision of soap for all sailors made a considerable difference in preventing disease.

VACCINATION

Vaccinations were used for some sailors as early as 1798, under the direction of Edward Jenner, the first pioneer of vaccinations. These were made compulsory in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Surgery

Although generally not a qualified physician, the surgeon would act as general ship's doctor and as well as performing operations would treat all minor ailments and diseases during a voyage. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, this profession was more respected and regulated than the notorious drunken doctors of previous decades. A ship's surgeon operated under warrant from the Sick and Hurt Board and if his skill was found wanting from the records he produced at the end of a voyage, he lost his warrant to practice. The operating skill of surgeons was often called upon at sea, to aid those wounded in sea battles. Undergoing surgery was both extremely painful (as there were no anaesthetics) and also hazardous, as septicaemia was little understood and wound infection was almost inevitable. In a warm climate, tetanus (lockjaw) would often develop, and was treated in various ways from warm baths to opium. Amputation was often necessary. Broken bones, fractures, and burns from guns and cannons were also common in battles.



LONG DRAG CHANTY

Long Drag Chanty

Around Cape Horn we've got to go,
To me way, hay, o-hio!
Around Cape Horn to Calleao
A long time ago!

'Round Cape Horn where the stiff winds blow,
To me way, hay, o-hio!
'Round Cape Horn where there's sleet and snow.
A long time ago!

I wish to God I'd never been born
To me way, hay, o-hio!
To drag my carcass around Cape Horn.
A long time ago!

ROUNDING CAPE HORN

Rounding Cape Horn

'From now, and every day henceforth, there will be fires lit below and attended by the people on watch.' I ordered. This was to counter the unhealthy dampness that was beginning to cover everything. I also made a roster so every afternoon the men listed will pump fresh water down to the bilges then pump it up again until it is clear. The officers of the watch will determine this.'

The 20th. March - we struck the first southern gales between Cape Virgin Mary at the eastern entrance to Magellan Straites and the Falkland Islands. It is exactly what I feared!

The violent squalls caught us entirely by surprise and gave me little time to bring the ship under the mizzen main sail. I decided to sail nearer the coast, and headed towards Tierra del Fuego.

The 23rd. March - fortunately the gale died and at two this morning and a coastline loomed out of the darkness. We had sighted land - the first since the Canaries! Although I knew the greatest test was yet to come I immediately ordered a sheep killed to celebrate the event.

Rounding the horn at the beginning of winter was ahead of us - and a fearsome prospect. I went below and began to study my charts. Eventually I decided that the safest course was to go as far south of Staten Island as I dared in order to avoid the powerful currents that run near the land. The choice was between the cold and the ice, or the currents. The Straites of Magellan I determined too dangerous and totally out of the question in these conditions.

It is the 24th. of March and I keep a constant vigil. The weather remains clear, but now in the afternoon, the sky is much streaked with high wind. I fear the worst.....

...It is the next morning and I have ordered the ship to be cleaned and dried and the top hamper to be brought down in preparation for bad weather.

Midday and thick cloud ... 8pm. Now comes the fog. I am becoming watchful and time allows me to write only snatches!

Morning again and a strange calm with a clinging wet mist surrounds us ...

...Later in the day now and we experience fresh breezes alternately with banks of freezing fog...

Finally the wind has got up, the fog cleared and the sea starting to run. I order double reefs then close reefs.

...Midday and the wind is tearing through the rigging and whipping the shrouds; we are surrounded by wind streaked foam.

The night, the 28th. of March and our ordeal has truly begun. The westerly gale is bringing strong slanting rain striking our arms and faces as if it were shot from a musket, with the seas breaking completely over the deck. I have never experienced worse conditions. It is with great difficulty that I write my log and these few words!

HMS. 'BOUNTY' ROUNDS CAPE HORN 1788

April the 23rd - three days later. It is difficult to write my log as I am thrown all about the cabin ... then possibly the worst moment of all!... This morning I just managed to struggle up on deck following a futile attempt to sleep. I could hardly fail but observe the terrible conditions. A huge sea that was white, as drunken foam and boiling milk mixed together, and we were caught in its grip. I cast my gaze up searching for a break in the greyness above. Nothing! For us in 'Bounty' ... no sun, no sky and little hope, just a grey, semi-darkness of angry clouds and an infuriated sea. I felt terrible but still I was more useful than my officers.

I struggled hand over hand along the rail and looked up. I could not believe my eyes. Someone had set an extra sail. Men were balanced on yard arms, reefing wet canvas, clutching at wet rope. I looked around and spied a huddled figure emerging from a quarter deck hatch. 'Mr Fryer' I yelled above the wind, 'your report!' I stared furiously at the man, as a result of his incompetence, eagerness, or plain desperation to get around the Cape, it was his judgement to carry the extra sail, and in so doing he showed no patience, and a total lack of regard for the lives of all ... in particular the men he ordered aloft. I was even more put out by the fact he waited for me to go below before making his decision! Any competent officer should have known better, much better than to risk the ship so!

I glanced up and saw a sailor miraculously hanging in the rigging ... grimly clutching at swaying yards. I yelled at Fryer above the roaring sea, 'order the men down instantly.'

Then I observed the sail and gulped. Second yard main mast, close reefed and stretched to breaking. Clutching a safety rope I leaned out over the ship's gunwale and peered into Neptune's black depths. Waves were ripping past. Bows down we were ploughing along before the wind with a reckless speed certain to destroy us all. Only the merest change in the wind direction, a sudden shift, a gust to turn us just one or two degrees either way and we were done for. I yelled to the nearest seaman, 'Get me an axe - make haste man!' The tenor of my voice did little to hide my concern and the man jumped to it. I eased my body towards the stays; now humming like strung cat-gut under their great load. I looked aloft The sail they retained seemed like a solid object, not canvas - such was its tautness I thought ... if I could only part the stays before...

I sensed it before I felt it. Too late by God! Too late the wind shifted. An axe materialised in my hands and I swung wildly at the rope, again, and again ... but alas, too late! She swung, she turned as a top caught in the fullness of its spin. We broached! The rope snapped, it cracked like a released bowstring and whipped by my face stinging my frozen cheek - but I could not care less! All I felt was the vertigo as I was pitched against the rail. We turned side on to the raging inferno, our masts now almost horizontal - if one were able to rule a line across that raging fury of green, black and white . Then we turned full circle, anti...clockwise I think, and were lent over, our starboard keel out of the sea.... like a virgin's thigh it was never supposed to be bared to the elements Would we go under? Now I thought for the moment of truth. I clung on as I felt the cold sea enveloping me. Freezing but not too painful - I felt some relief as I closed my eyes to make the dying easier.... but in the blackness of that despair, I realised, it was my imagination - and my mind struggled as I fought a way back to reality. I opened my eyes. Remarkably we were still afloat. The bows had swung back away from the wind, clockwise, away from danger. My arms were still locked square into the rails as she righted herself. I looked around to where terrified sailors clung to various parts of the ship as a clutch of frightened monkeys would cling to a fleeing parent. I raced across the deck and released the remaining stay. The sail was destroyed but thankfully we were saved.

I praised God - and my relief was so tangible I almost felt I could hug it.

At last all the men were down and HMS.'Bounty' brought under the smallest stay and mizzen sails without losing way. Yes, today was by far the greatest peril I have ever experienced.

...I have decided that it would be improper and too dangerous to continue any longer. The wind has changed yet again and in just two days we have been forced back to a position we passed some three weeks ago. Heavy winds and snow falls are so violent that I have been forced to 'lay to'. The wind is backing to the west and the sea running high. What choice do I have? I decided we must turn back.

...William Bligh in a letter to Duncan Campbell and from the log of HMS.'Bounty'

ROUNDING THE HORN

Rounding the Horn

The gallant frigate, Amphitrite, she lay in Plymouth Sound,
Blue Peter at the foremast head for she was outward bound;
We were waiting there for orders to send us far from home;
Our orders came for Rio, and thence around Cape Horn.
Next day, we weighed our anchor, boys, and waved goodbye all round,
And some of us we knew would never more see Plymouth Sound;
But still our hearts were light and gay, and when all was taut and snug
We foraged out the bumboat grog and each man filled his mug.
We drank success to Plymouth girls, to Kate and Poll and Sue,
And arguing o'er their various charms struck up a fight or two.
Jim Crab he landed Bonny Nodge a clout that made him snort,
And to this day his nose has got a heavy list to port.
When we arrived at Rio we prepared for heavy gales;
We set up all our rigging, boys, and bent on all new sails.
From ship to ship they cheered us as we did sail along,
And wished us pleasant weather in rounding of Cape Horn.
While beating off Magellan Strait it blew exceeding hard;
Whilst shortening sail two gallant tars fell from the topsail yard.
By angry seas the ropes we threw from their poor hands were torn
And we were forced to leave them to the sharks that prowl around Cape Horn.
When we got round the Horn, my boys, we had some glorious days
And very soon our killick dropped in Valparaiso Bay.
The pretty girls came down to us; I solemnly declare
They are far before the Plymouth girls with their long and curly hair.
They love a jolly sailor when he spends his money free;
They'll laugh and sing and merry, merry be, and have a jovial spree.
And when our money is all gone they won't on you impose,
They are not like the Plymouth girls that'll pawn and sell your clothes.
Farewell to Valparaiso, farewell for a while,
Likewise to all the Spanish girls all on the coast of Chile;
And if ever I live to be paid off I'll sit and sing this song:
"God bless those pretty Spanish girls we left around Cape Horn."

From Oxford Book of Sea Songs, Palmer
Recorded by Killen, Lloyd