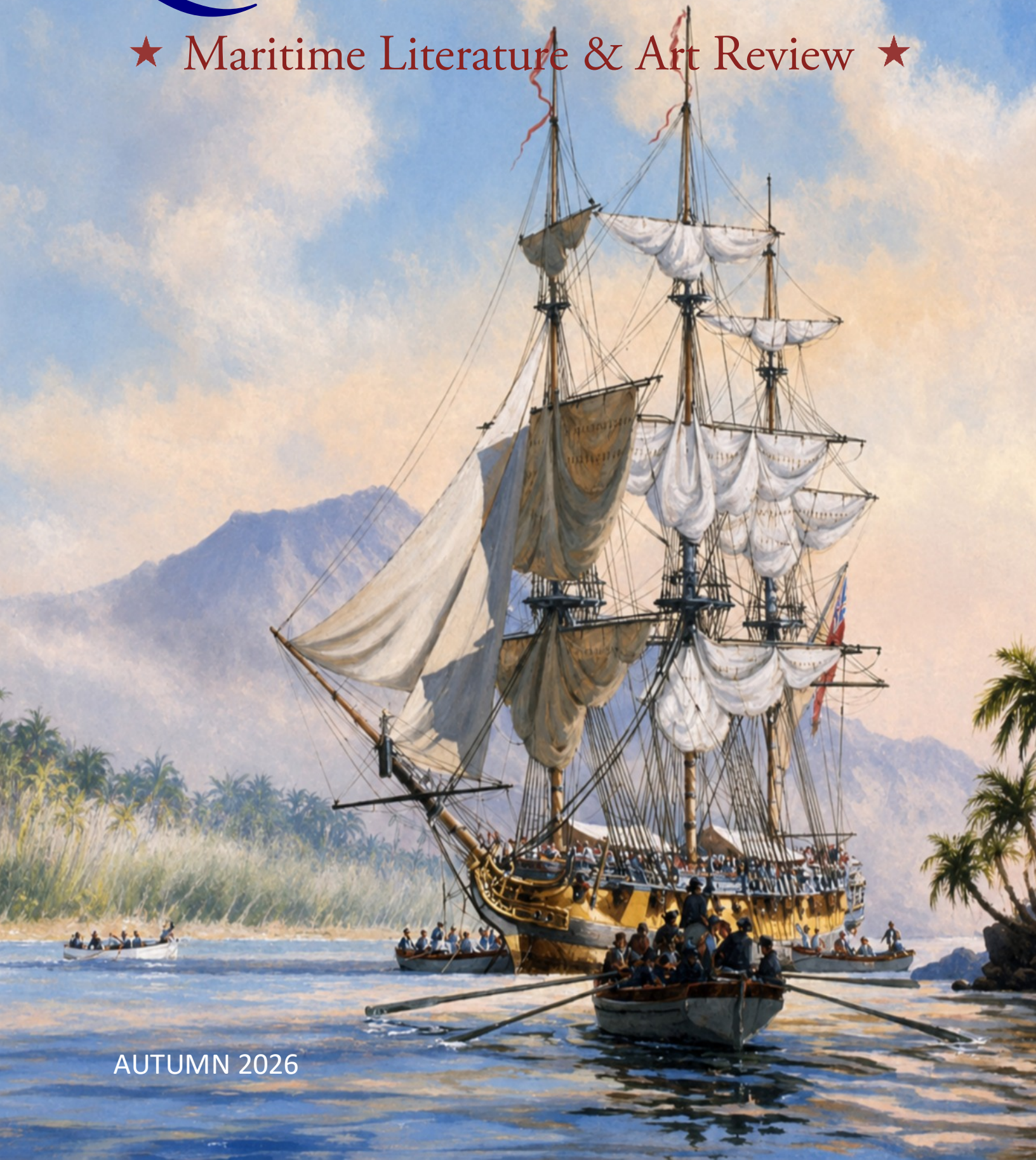
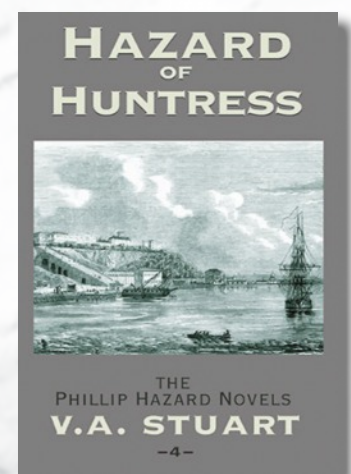
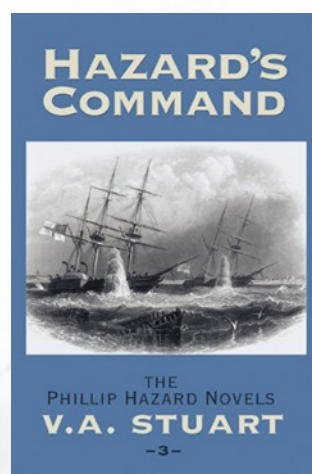
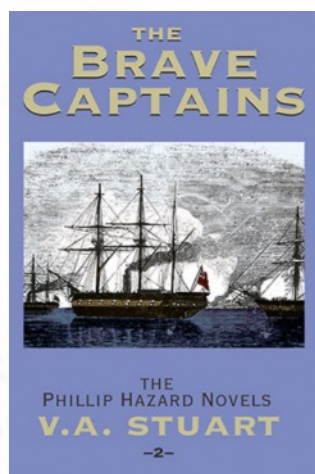
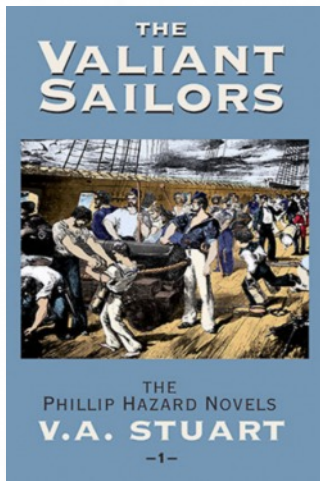


QUARTERDECK

★ Maritime Literature & Art Review ★



AUTUMN 2026

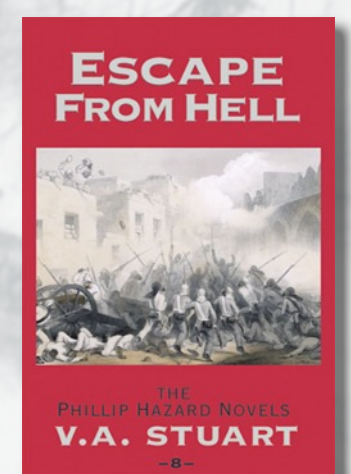
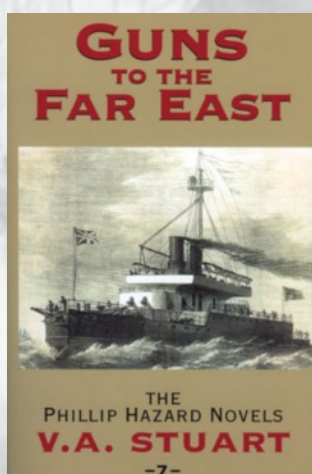
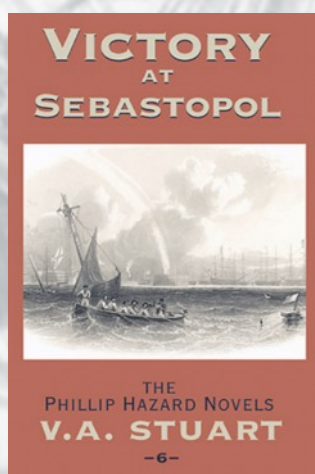
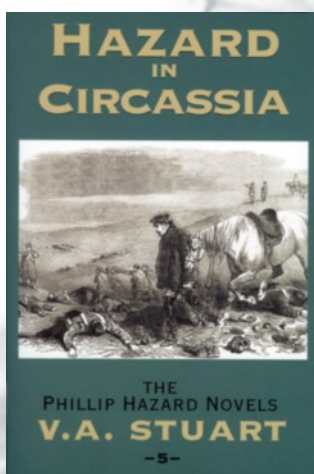


THE PHILLIP HAZARD NOVELS

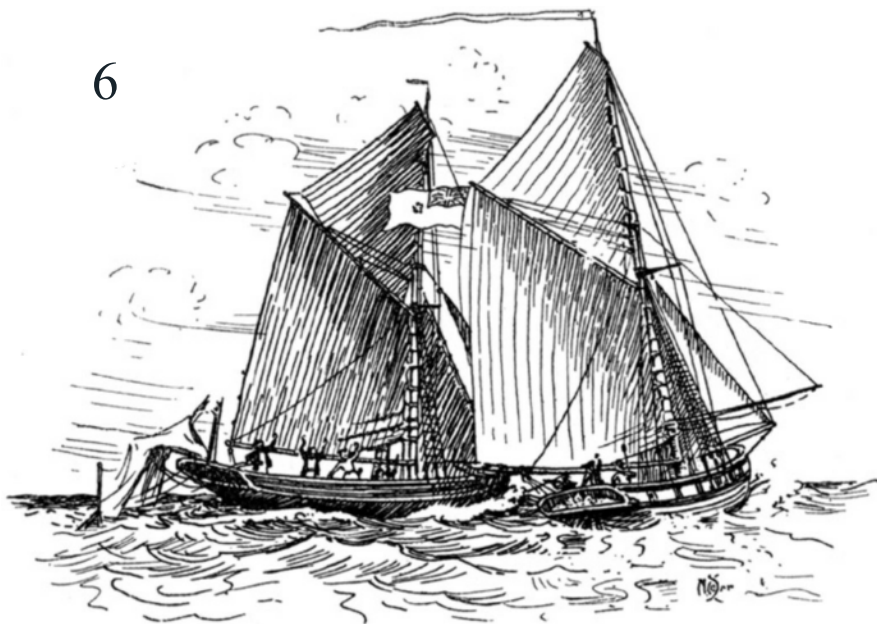
BY V. A. Stuart

“[Hazard] is a worthy successor to the Horatio Hornblower series, and make no bones about it.”

—*Publishers Weekly*



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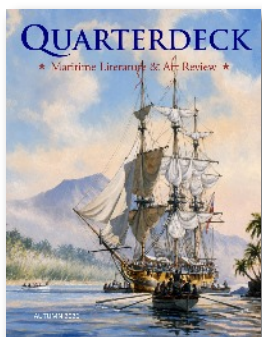
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EDITOR'S LETTER

Autumn leaves are falling outside our windows at *Quarterdeck*. The evenings are drawing in, and logs are crackling on the hearth as we contemplate a new stack of books for the coming months.

Our author interview is with Robin Burnage (page 19), seen above at the double wheels aboard HMS *Victory* in Portsmouth, England. Robin has taken the helm of *The Merriman Chronicles*, paying homage to his late father Roger. The photo was taken by English marine artist Colin Baxter, who creates paintings for *The Chronicles'* covers, when the pair met recently at the Portsmouth Historic Dockyard.

By George! (page 6) recalls a visit to picturesque Prussia Cove in Cornwall, once the stronghold of the Carter family smugglers, and the impact free trade has had on literary fiction. Yours truly also writes about former Royal Navy officer Frederick Marryat (page 10), whose career stretched from midshipman to celebrated author.

Julian Stockwin, author of the Thomas Kydd novels and *Injured Honour*, the first Harry Wilde adventure to be published next June, writes about "The Real Jack Tar" (page 15). We preview the forthcoming naval history, *Ambush at Vella Gulf: The Destroyer Battle that Changed the Course of World War II in the Pacific* by Rex A. Knight (page 27).

Our art highlight in this issue is *American Armed Brig, c. 1778, in a glass cylinder* by Bernd J. Braatz (page 30). We review English novelist Chris Durbin's latest Carlisle & Holbrooke adventure, *Straits of Aníán* (page 31). Finally, we offer a selection of recent and soon-to-be published titles.

George

George Jepson, Editor

SCUTTLEBUTT

Maritime literature, art, and museum news



Julian Stockwin

© Kathy Stockwin.

Julian Stockwin Introduces Harry Wylde

In the spring, Julian Stockwin brings his unique writing style to the new Harry Wylde novels, which contrast with his best-selling Kydd novels, where vivid characterizations and dramatic fighting scenes are set against a backdrop of a world in revolution.

Hodder & Stoughton will release *Injured Honour*, the opening title in the series, in June 2027, in both the United Kingdom and the United States.

In 1791, Royal Navy Lieutenant Harry Wylde must claw his way back from disgrace to redemption. Falsely incriminated by a bitter rival, Wylde is dismissed from the Navy and disowned by his father.

With nowhere left to turn, he is forced to descend into the hellish Georgian underworld, learning lessons of life, loyalty, and leadership in a bitter fight for survival.

Grueling encounters in cutthroat alleys and the prize-fighting ring will lead him back to his rival, now a despised renegade, on distant shores.

Through it all, can Wylde seize the means to restore his honor? ■

Chris Durbin Jumps Ahead to Revolution

Chris Durbin tells *Quarterdeck* that the next Carlisle & Holbrooke naval adventure jumps ahead by nine years to 1775, when the British Empire is about to be tested in the white heat of revolution. The young Joshua Carlisle finds himself in New England where the talk is of war and separation from the mother country. When an old friend of his father's offers him a berth in a colonial man-of-war, he jumps at the chance. How will he break the news to his father who still holds a King's commission? Well, that's a problem for another day, for now his sloop *Katy* is slipping cautiously down the Providence River with adventure on the horizon. ■



Chris Durbin

Photo courtesy of Chris Durbin.



National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London, Caird Collection.

As HMS *Victory* undergoes a critical £45m restoration in the Portsmouth Historic Dockyard in England, it recalls an earlier effort. On 12 January 1922, Nelson's flagship at Trafalgar was moored in her present drydock before being restored to her 1805 glory. English maritime artist and engraver William Lionel Wyllie served on the *Victory* Technical Committee, and was closely involved with the project. He produced paintings, drawings and prints of various stages of the restoration. This watercolor shows a later phase of the project. In 1910 Wyllie was a founder member of the Society for Nautical Research. One of the organization's aims was *Victory's* restoration, along with the establishment of a National Maritime Museum).



Alamy

Smuggling in Fiction

On a peaceful autumn morning some years ago, I stood on a rocky cliff overlooking Prussia Cove in Mount's Bay, Cornwall, gazing toward France over the horizon.

Accompanying me was our friend, marine artist Geoffrey Huband, who resides with his family along the Cornish coast in nearby Marazion.

The calm sea sparkled like a gazillion diamonds in the brilliant sunshine under an azure sky scattered with white puffy clouds. Lizard Point, where countless ships have foundered over the centuries, was barely visible through a fine haze further down the coast.

The lone sound came from below the craggy rock face, gentle waves lapping on the cove's sand-and-shingle beach, creating a soothing rhythm.

The notorious smugglers, the Carters, were central figures in this trade, carrying out their illicit operations from this lovely natural harbor between 1770 and 1807, shaping the cove's reputation.

By George!



It took little imagination to envision John and Harry Carter, fine seamen by all accounts, on a dimly lit night in the cove over two centuries earlier. Under a "smuggler's moon," their gang would have been at work unloading illicit contraband from small boats.

Offshore, the Carters' large cutter would have anchored, after eluding the King's Revenue agents one more time, while carrying goods from the Continent.

Descending a steep path, Geoffrey and I were soon on the beach, where the Carter free traders unloaded small boats laden with barrels of French wine, brandy, bolts ➤

ABOVE Prussia Cove in Cornwall was once the stronghold of Cornish smugglers, the Carters, between 1770 and 1807. Wagon wheel tracks worn into the rock formations as contraband was carried inland are visible.

of lace, tea, salt for curing pilchards, tobacco and other wares. Horse-drawn carts carried the booty inland, thus escaping paying duty.

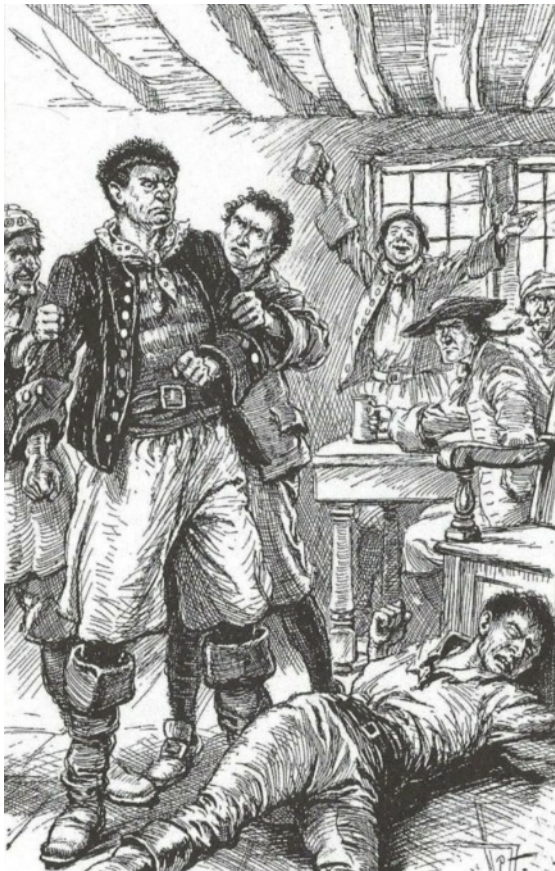
Crunching across the shingle and sand beach, caves were visible where shipments were often stored under the cliffs. More compellingly, wheel tracks worn into the rock formations served as silent witnesses to the centuries-old illicit activity and the cove's hidden past.

The picturesque setting and gulls overhead evoked a romantic image. Still, smuggling was a serious, often deadly business, with risks that could cost lives during the Napoleonic Wars and beyond.

Although novelists such as John Meade Falkner, in his classic *Moonfleet*, and filmmakers often romanticized the trade, it was fundamentally a criminal pursuit. Unlawful goods smuggled into Cornwall alone in 1770 cost the British Exchequer £150,000.

Clashes between free traders and British Revenue agents often turned violent and bloody, including murder.

History recalls a winter night in 1798



ABOVE An artist's rendering of Prussia Cove.

BELOW LEFT A sketch of Harry Carter purported to be in a French prison by an unknown artist.

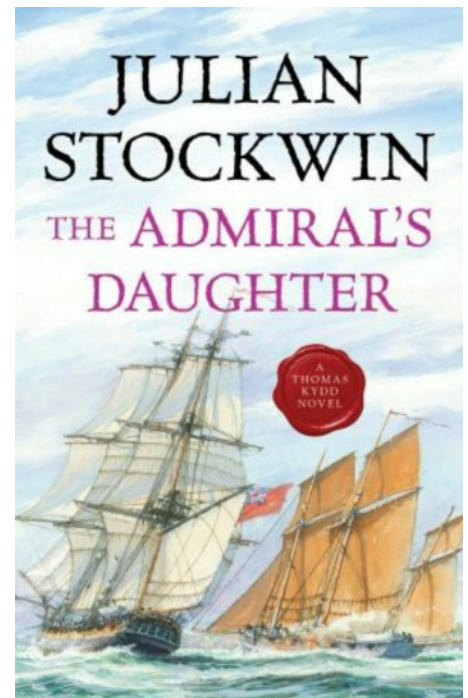
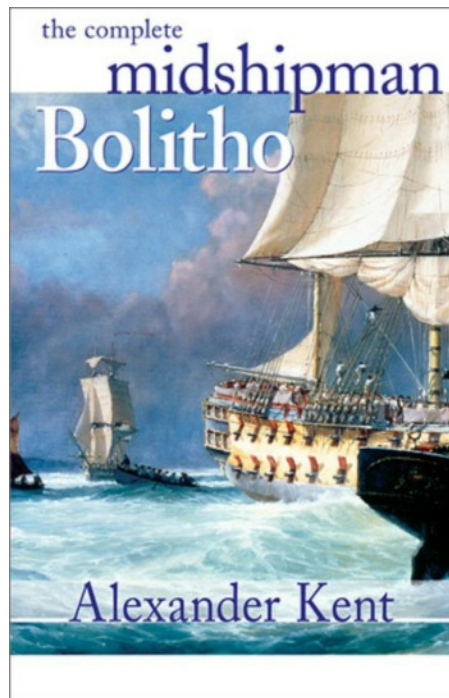
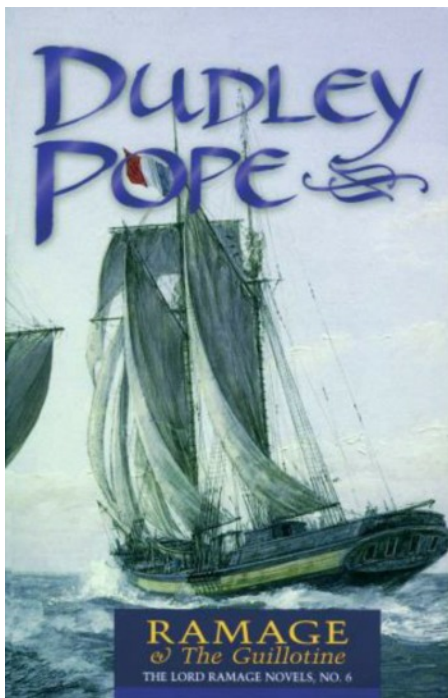
when the large cutter *Lottery*, carrying contraband spirits and tobacco, anchored in Cawsand Bay on the southeastern Cornish coast.

A customs boat with four men at the oars approached the *Lottery*, as her crew prepared to unload her cargo. The Revenuers called out that they were a King's boat. Men on board the cutter threatened to shoot and then fired their guns. A customs oarsman was struck in the head and killed. The smugglers quickly cut the *Lottery's* cable and sailed away, escaping until their luck ran out off Land's End the following spring.

England's eighteenth-century wars with France drove up duties and prices, particularly on luxury goods like brandy, gin, tea and tobacco, to pay for the conflicts. This, in turn, made smuggling a profitable enterprise around the British Isles.

Unsurprisingly, the intrigue surrounding smuggling inspired writers and became a captivating literary subject, reflected in works like Falkner's *Moonfleet*, which highlights its deep cultural impact despite its criminal nature.

In 1793, English novelist and poet Charlotte Turner Smith published *The Old Manor House* in which smuggling plays a surprisingly important role in the atmosphere and plot. Irish dramatist James Sheridan Knowles' 1810 poem *The Smuggler* focused ➤



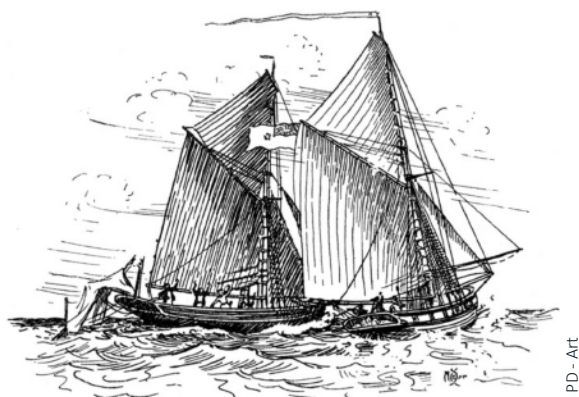
BELOW The Revenue cutter *Badger* overtaking a smuggler's cutter by an unknown artist.

on the trade's dangers and enigmas. Scottish novelist and poet Samuel Rutherford Crockett wrote about smuggling gangs in his 1894 novel *The Raiders*. Falkner's *Moonfleet* was published in 1898.

In the twentieth century, smuggling stories such as Daphne du Maurier's *Jamaica Inn*, published in 1936, captivated readers. And in the years ahead, British naval fiction authors incorporated smuggling into their plots set during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars.

Naval fiction authors also added smuggling to their repertoire as muses for their heroes, except C. S. Forester and his Horatio Hornblower novels.

Captain Frederick Marryat included



smuggling in his novels, including *The King's Own* (1830), *The Three Cutters* (1836), and *Snarleygown or the Dog Fiend* (1837).

Dudley Pope's *Ramage and the Guillotine*, published in 1975, focuses on Captain Nicholas Ramage's collaboration with English and French smugglers. Under secret orders from Lords St Vincent and Nelson, Ramage uses a criminal network to slip into France to observe Napoleon's invasion fleet and determine its readiness.

The second and third novellas in Alexander Kent's *The Complete Midshipman Bolitho* trilogy feature young Cornish naval officer Richard Bolitho pitted against smugglers and shipwreckers.

In *Midshipman Bolitho and the Avenger*, first published in 1978, Bolitho returns home to Falmouth for Christmas with his friend Martyn Dancer. But a murdered revenue officer, a smuggling gang, and its mysterious leader send the midshipmen back to sea aboard the Royal Navy cutter *Avenger*. *Band of Brothers*, published in 2005, continues the story, as Bolitho faces "vicious smugglers" in the Channel Islands.

Julian Stockwin offered another view of smuggling in 2007, with the publication of *The Admiral's Daughter*. Thomas Kydd, ►



Alamy

commanding the brig-sloop HMS *Teazer*, sails along the Channel off England's western counties to crack down on the free traders.

On a naval patrol along the rugged Cornish and Devon coasts, Kydd and *Teazer* encounter smugglers and French privateers. Polperro, the secluded fishing village in Cornwall, once known as a smuggling stronghold, plays a prominent role in Stockwin's story.

In 2012, Roger Burnage launched The Merriman Chronicles with *A Certain Threat* (see page 19). His hero, then Lieutenant James Merriman, tangles with smugglers in the Irish Sea off Wales.

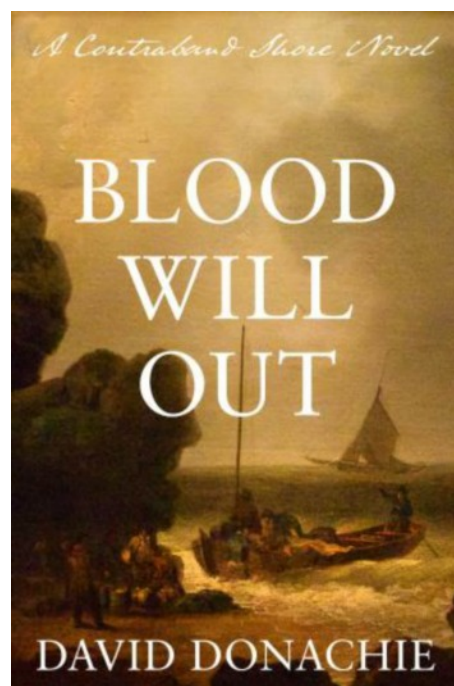
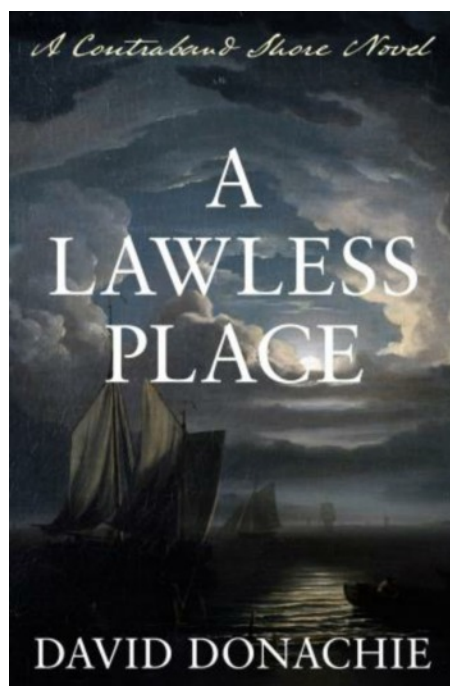
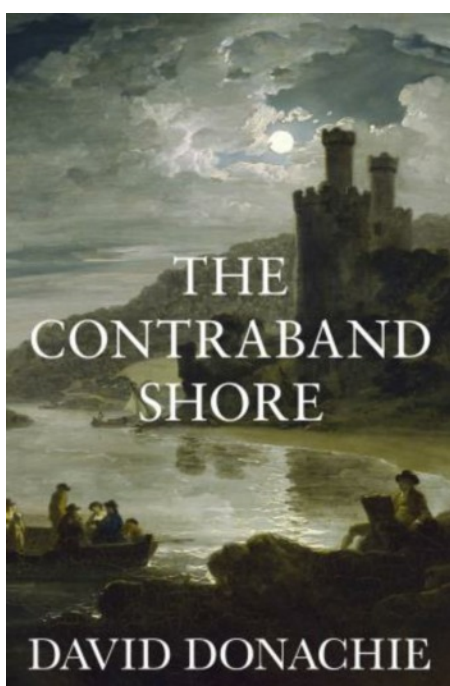
ABOVE An aerial view of Polperro, the once secluded fishing village and smuggling stronghold.

David Donachie's Contraband Shore trilogy—*The Contraband Shore* (2018), *A Lawless Place* (2019), and *Blood Will Out* (2019)—features Royal Navy Captain Edward Brazier, who faces a smuggling gang in Deal where the English Channel and the North Sea converge.

On our travels to England, Amy and I have followed American writer and historian David McCullough's advice that visiting sites where history happened helps us connect more deeply with the past.

Over the years, this has taken us to charming Polperro in Cornwall, where schoolmaster Zephaniah Job masterminded a prosperous contraband trade during the Napoleonic wars. In Deal, we walked the Georgian streets and the shingle beach overlooking the Downs. On clear days, we could see France across the Channel, where contraband goods originated.

But when my mind drifts to smuggling's impact in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in the United Kingdom, I always think of beautiful Prussia Cove, a key hub for the illicit trade and clandestine activities during that era. ■





AI-generated illustration created with OpenAI ChatGPT from the editor's historical specifications.

Frederick Marryat

From Royal Navy midshipman to celebrated author

BY GEORGE D. JEPSON

Arriving at Plymouth by coach on 22 September 1806, young Frederick Marryat, rigged in his crisp new blue naval uniform, presented himself to Captain Lord Thomas Cochrane at the inn where he was staying while his new command, the 38-gun frigate *Imperieuse*, refitted. Satisfied with the lad's appearance, Cochrane instructed him to report directly on board to the first lieutenant. Bursting with pride, the fourteen-year-old Marryat sent his sea chest ahead and set off on foot toward Mutton Cove to hire a boat to row him out to the frigate. At the sally port, ➤

ABOVE A romanticized conception of a Royal Navy midshipman waiting with his sea chest to join his first ship.



Both images this page © National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London.

he engaged a wherry with two women at the oars. “*Imperieuse*, if you please,” he said.

Clapping on his cocked hat, he settled in the sternsheets as the small craft dipped into the slight chop and swirling Hamoaze waters. Pointing the bow seaward under gray scudding clouds threatening rain, the women strained at their oars.

Rounding the point, Marryat spied the *Imperieuse* at anchor off the King’s Dockyard, riding the river’s current, surrounded by tenders and bum boats. As the wherry neared the ship, his heart quickened.

It had been nearly a year since the British Royal Navy’s historic victory over the combined French and Spanish fleets off Cape Trafalgar and Lord Nelson’s death. Nine months earlier, young Marryat and his father, Joseph, had watched Nelson’s funeral procession pass along Ludgate Hill in London on its journey from Greenwich to St Paul’s Cathedral.

With a sturdy build and nearing fourteen, the boy had increasingly displayed disinterest in school, longing for a life at sea. The Royal Navy’s victories during his formative years—Camperdown, Copenhagen, Cape St Vincent, the Nile, and Trafalgar—and Lord Nelson were inspirations.

So, that summer, his father, well-connected in London, relented and had a word with



PD - Art

TOP British caricaturist George Cruikshank (1792 - 1878) illustrated a cramped midshipmen’s berth with *Master B Finding Things Not Exactly What He Expected*. Young Marryat would have found similar accommodations in *Imperieuse*.

ABOVE Captain Thomas Cochrane in 1807 portrayed in an engraving by Charles Turner (1774 - 1857) based on a portrait by Peter Edward Stroehling (1768-1826).

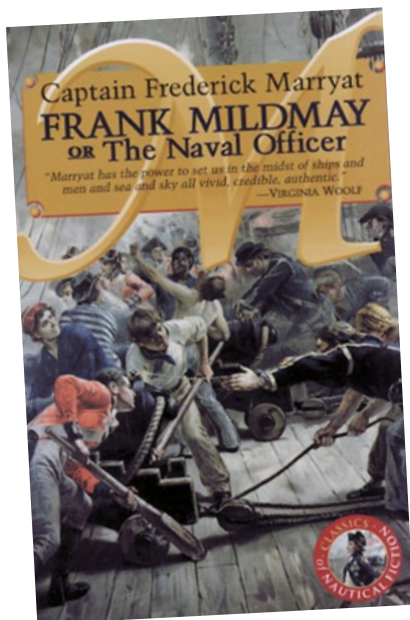
Thomas, Lord Cochrane, 10th Earl of Dundonald. The famous fighting captain agreed to take Frederick to sea as a “First-Class Volunteer” aboard HMS *Imperieuse*, a Spanish prize captured in 1804, then fitting out at Plymouth.

Serving under Cochrane, with his reputation for fighting brilliant single-ship actions, was an exceptional opportunity. As captain of the sloop *Speedy* in 1801, he had captured the much larger Spanish frigate *El Gamo* off Barcelona by running his ship alongside, locking yards, and attacking with a boarding party. And with the frigate *Pallas*, his command before *Imperieuse*, he famously engaged the French frigate *Minerve*.

Reaching the ship, Marryat thrust a shilling into one woman’s hand, grasped the man-rope, and clambered up the tumble-home while seamen hoisted his chest aboard. On the quarterdeck, the boy observed “a sweet mess,” quickly dispelling any romantic notions he may have harbored before coming aboard.

Writing years later in *The Naval Officer or Scenes and Adventures in the Life of Frank Mildmay* (1829), his autobiographical first novel, Marryat recalled being met at the gangway “by a midshipman in a round jacket and trousers, a shirt none of the cleanest, and a black silk handkerchief tied loosely around his neck . . . the decks were covered with fresh pitch poured in the seams, the caulkers were sitting on their boxes, ready to renew their noisy labours once the dinner hour had expired.”

Led below by a midshipman, he discovered the conditions between decks to be no better, navigating through “casks and cases, and chests, and bags, and hammocks . . . the stench of bilge-water, combining with the smoke of tobacco, the effluvia of gin and beer, the frying of beef-steaks and onions, and red herrings—the pressure of a dark atmosphere and a heavy shower of rain, all conspired to oppress my spirits, and render me the most ➤



miserable dog that ever lived.”

In the vessel’s deeper recesses, Marryat found “his future residence—a small hole, which they called a berth; it was ten feet long by six and about five feet, four inches high; a small aperture, about nine inches square, admitted a very scanty portion of that which we most needed, namely, fresh air and daylight.”

If the man-of-war’s state was initially jarring, it soon gave way to the excitement of sailing aboard a crack frigate under a brilliant captain. Cochrane didn’t arrive aboard until 16 November, and by then, Marryat was adapting to shipboard life. Although he signed on as a “First-Class Volunteer,” he likely served as a midshipman until officially promoted.

Life in the frigate’s gunroom proved easygoing compared to other ships, where bullying was common. Cochrane had carefully selected his young gentlemen from among friends, including the Honorable William Napier, who came from a stately naval and military family. A Trafalgar veteran at twenty, he was the ship’s master’s mate, whom Marryat also came to admire.

After Trafalgar, fleet battles between ships of the line became a thing of the past. Britannia ruled the seas even while war with Napoleonic France continued. The quicker,

ABOVE George Cruikshank created *Master B mastheaded, or enjoying the fresh air for the 304th time* after a sketch by Marryat. This was a common punishment for midshipman. “When I was a midshipman, it was extremely difficult to avoid the mast-head,” wrote Marryat later in life. “Yes, though I *never* deserved it, I derived much future advantage from my repeated punishments. The mast-head, for want of something worse to do, became my study; And I believe it is to this mode of punishment adopted by my rigid superiors that the world is indebted for all the pretty books which I am writing. Volumes after volumes were perused to while away the tedious hours . . .”

more agile frigates carried the fight, increasing chances for prize money and promotion for the Jack Tars aboard. Cochrane wrote: “. . . prize money formed then, as it will ever form, the principal motive of seamen to encounter the perils of war.”

Over the next three years, Marryat participated in more than fifty engagements, was wounded three times, and performed with honor aboard *Imperieuse*. Looking back on this period, he described the *Imperieuse* cruises as “periods of continual excitement, from the hour in which she hove up her anchor till she dropped it again in port; the day that passed without a shot being fired in anger was with us a blank day . . . the rapidity of the frigate’s movements night and day; the hasty sleep, snatched at all hours . . . the beautiful precision of our fire, obtained by constant practice; the coolness and courage of our captain . . . my pulse beats more quickly with the reminiscence.”

Brief entries in his private log documented incidents that frequently occurred under Cochrane’s command, including this series of events in 1808: “1 April. —Detained an American brig . . . 2 April. —Took a Spanish tower and blew it up . . . 5 April. —Cut a brig out from under a battery . . . 8 April. —Took a brig laden with wine—went in her to Gibraltar.” Though Marryat doesn’t ➤

mention it, the last action turned into his first command as a prize master; the episode appears in *Frank Mildmay*. Similar incidents occur in *Peter Simple*, *Mr Midshipman Easy*, and *The King's Own*.

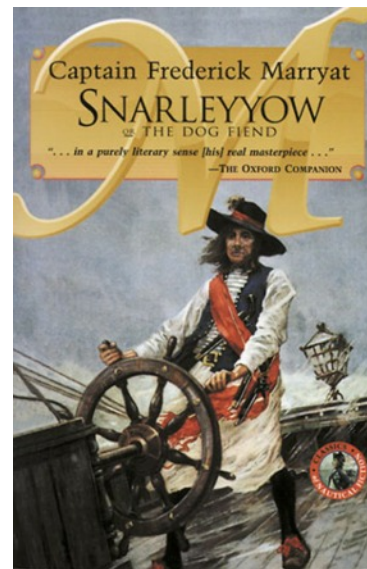
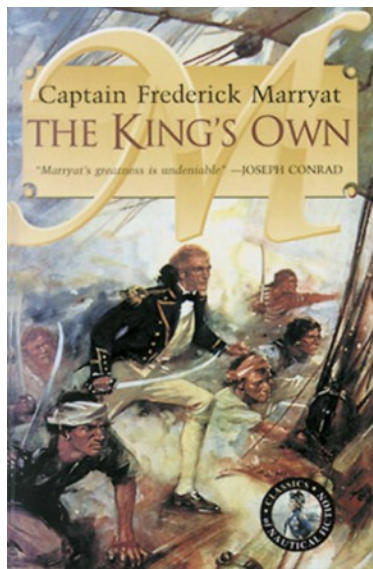
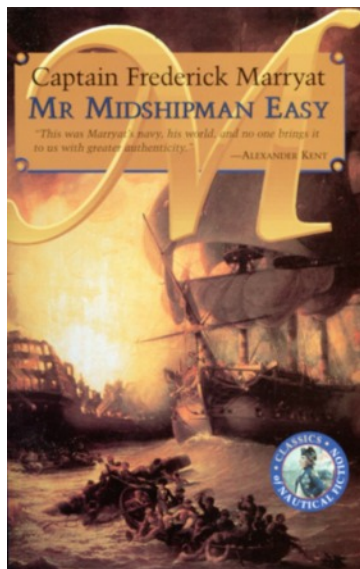
In April 1809, during the Battle of the Basque Roads, seventeen-year-old Midshipman Marryat volunteered with three others to man a “bomb vessel.”

Loaded with explosives, the brig sailed toward the anchored French fleet to set the ships afire. As the brig drew near the enemy, Marryat lit a line of gunpowder to ignite the explosives. Then, leaping into a gig at the stern, he and three others rowed with abandon. They made it two hundred yards away before the brig blew up, with debris falling around them.

Two months later, Cochrane left *Imperieuse* for good, called to attend Admiral Lord Gambier’s court-martial aboard *Gladiator*, permanently anchored in Portsmouth Harbour. After Marryat’s three years under his command, Cochrane described his midshipman as “brave, zealous, intelligent and even thoughtful, yet active in the performance of his duties.”

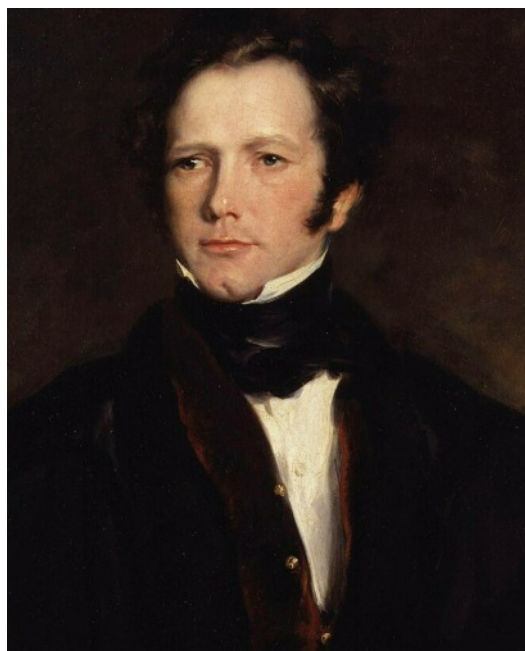
And indeed, it is his experiences serving under Cochrane—a remarkable chapter in Marryat’s life—that would play out again and again on the pages of his novels and influence future generations of writers.

Marryat went on to spend another twenty-one years at sea.



“Marryat lit a line of gunpowder to ignite the explosives. Then, leaping into a gig at the stern, he and three others rowed with abandon.”

BELOW Captain Frederick Marryat in 1826 by John Philip Simpson (1782 - 1847), an English painter who specialized in portrait painting.



National Portrait Gallery, London.

While serving in the West Indies in the autumn of 1812, Midshipman Marryat returned to England aboard the sloop *Indian* to “pass for lieutenant” aboard the *Gladiator* in Portsmouth Harbour.

On 19 December 1814, stationed in *Newcastle*, a 50-gun spar-decked frigate, he led a raid on Orleans, Massachusetts in a sleet blizzard, cutting out two American ships. A year later, he became commander as the war ended.

Unfortunately, over the next five years, he found himself shore-bound along with many other officers who lacked influence within the Admiralty and were without commissions during a time of peace.

In 1820, Marryat assumed his first command, hoisting his pennant aboard the 10-gun brig *Beaver*. His orders were to cruise from Madeira Island in the North Atlantic to St. Helena Island and Tristan d’Acunha Island in the South Atlantic to protect them against privateers. ➤

Napoleon Bonaparte was in forced exile on St. Helena. On 5 May, the Emperor died with *Beaver* anchored off the island. The following morning, Marryat was among a party attending his lying-in-state.

On 16 May, Marryat transferred his command to the 10-gun brig *Rosario* at St. Helena. The ship set sail for England and Spithead, carrying dispatches announcing Napoleon's death. By late autumn 1820, *Rosario* engaged with Revenue cutters to repress widespread smuggling in the English Channel. During this period, he penned a report to the Admiralty citing his thoughts on curbing the free traders.

Dramatic smuggling scenes are abundant in his novels, including *Snarleyyow*, including *Snarleyyow or the Dog Fiend*, and *The King's Own*. In particular, Marryat based *The Three Cutters* on his time commanding *Rosario*.

Later, commanding the 20-gun sloop of war, *Larne*, Marryat fought the King of Ava in Burma in 1824 and 1825, earning the Companion of the Order of Bath from King George IV. On 20 April 1825, he was promoted to post-captain in the 26-gun sloop *Tees*.

In March 1829, while he commanded the 28-gun sloop, *Ariadne*, his first novel, *The Naval Officer or Scenes and Adventures in the Life of Frank Mildmay*, was published anonymously in England, following fellow English novelist Tobias Smollett (1721–1771). The autobiographical account describes his life in the Royal Navy up to 1821. Marryat's second novel, *The King's Own*, was published in 1830, the same year he resigned from the Royal Navy.

By then, Frederick Marryat was thirty-eight and was well along on his writing career. Between 1832 and 1835, he edited *The*



ABOVE A sketch by Captain Frederick Marryat depicting Napoleon Bonaparte as he appeared on Sunday morning of 6 May 1820, fourteen hours after his death, lying upon the bed in which he died.

National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London.

Metropolitan Magazine while continuing to write novels. Moving to London in 1839, he traded his nautical band of brothers for the literary circle of Charles Dickens and others.

Drawing on his personal experiences in the navy, Marryat set the standard for the nautical fiction genre by presenting an intimate and rare, unique look at the life and times of the British Royal Navy during the Age of Fighting Sail. “Marryat’s adventures are enthralling; the rapidity of his action fascinates . . . his greatness is undeniable,” wrote Joseph Conrad.

While Marryat is far from the only nautical author to have experienced life and service at sea, he is unique in that he lived firsthand in the period of early naval history he so vividly describes. Marryat’s life and works have inspired authors such as C. S. Forester, Alexander Kent, C. Northcote Parkinson, Dudley Pope, Patrick O’Brian, Julian Stockwin, and Seth Hunter, writing in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

“This was Marryat’s navy, his world, and no one brings it to us with greater authenticity,” said Kent, author of the Richard Bolitho novels.

“Many authors, to a lesser or greater degree, ride on the back of giants,” said Julian Stockwin, author of the Thomas Kydd naval adventures. “I am privileged to be among writers who draw their inspiration from the Great Age of Fighting Sail—C. S. Forester, Patrick O’Brian, and Alexander Kent to name just a few. At the same time we all have to tip our hat to the originator of this genre, Captain Frederick Marryat, a British naval officer who saw service in a half a hundred sea battles.”

Frederick Marryat died on 9 August 1848 at his home in Langham, Norfolk. ■



AI-generated illustration created with OpenAI ChatGPT from the editor's historical specifications.

The Real Jack Tar

Thomas Kydd's creator looks at the myths and realities surrounding the men who manned Britain's "Wooden Walls."

BY JULIAN STOCKWIN

The zenith of the Age of Sail (1793-1815) coincided with the monumental struggle for empire between Britain and Napoleonic France. From as early as the Battle of the Nile in 1798, Napoleon was confined to the continent of Europe until the Royal Navy's domination at sea forced him to surrender, winning all the major battles and most of the minor ones.

The legendary heroes of the quarterdeck—Nelson, Howe and Pellew—are deservedly famous, but what of the men of the fo'c'sle? Why is it that 99 percent of every ship's company has been overlooked to such a degree that today it is exceptional to be able to bring to mind the name of any of that band of heroes hailing from before the mast? And why is the common sailor such a universally one-dimensional walk-on stereotype in modern cinema and other treatments?

Jolly Jack Tar has been a stock figure in theatre since

before Johnson's day, known for his over-the-top salty wit and direct speaking, loved by all and instantly recognizable with his pigtail and sea rig, including those exotic "trousers." The general populace, grateful for their deliverance from the French and others, sentimentalized him, transforming him into a quaint caricature—not that this stopped them at the end of the wars turning him by the thousands onto the streets to starve.

Only single figure numbers of autobiographical works have survived, but these must be taken with caution; many were edited by polemics for reform, and fed the early Victorian appetite for moralizing and scandal. To put it kindly, most were losers, who did not take to the life and remained lowly and bitter—but all have been accepted unquestioningly as an authentic picture of mainstream life at sea. This view raises awkward questions. How can a crew of brutalized jailbirds have operated a ship-of-the-line, the most complex machine on ➤

ABOVE A Georgian-era Jack Tar with a British frigate in the background.



AI-generated illustration created with OpenAI ChatGPT from the editor's specifications.

the planet at the time? Why would “mere cyphers” fight like tigers for such a way of life? With such brutal conditions, who then would volunteer for a life on the ocean wave, as the majority did?

The renewed attention this period of maritime history is receiving is throwing fresh light on these conundrums and illuminating a fascinating sea world.

To appreciate the real Jack Tar you have to understand who he was not. He was not the landlubber, the quota-man, the jailbird—they came mainly from ill-conceived political measures to meet the chronic shortage of men, and were shipped aboard with no training whatsoever to be heartily despised by all true seamen. Their presence was primarily to provide brute labor for the decks of guns that gave a man-o'-war her purpose. Few did well; they had little to offer and there was little incentive to rise above themselves to break into the larger community. In store for them, therefore, would be a life of unrelenting and uncomprehending misery.

A pressed man was a different matter. Legally the only ones who could be pressed off the street were those “who used the sea.” This reflected the notion that merchant ships were a kind of floating reserve for the Navy, for a skilled seaman could easily pass between them and often did, but even so the press-gang was loathed. There were often spirited fights ashore before

ABOVE Legally press-gangs were authorized to seize men “who used the sea.” But as Julian Stockwin wrote in his first novel, *Kydd*, landsmen like Thomas Kydd, a wig-maker, were frequently taken.

RIGHT A view of the HMS *Pallas*'s fo'c'sle at sea, looking forward over one of her chase guns, with the starboard clew of her fore-course visible above her bowsprit. The artist, Gabriel Bray (1750-1823), was second lieutenant of the 44-gun *Pallas* under Captain William Cornwallis (1744-1819).

sympathetic bystanders, and magistrates could convict the lieutenant of a press-gang if injuries resulted. However, before we condemn, it is worth considering how unfair is this really, compared to more recent times when wholesale conscription and the lottery of the draft were tolerated.

It is true that many Navy men deserted, but this was probably not so much as a result of brutal conditions as a desire to see if the grass was greener, and the simple fact that the odds against recapture were so low. Moreover, savage penalties were usually set aside in a captain's eagerness to retain the seaman's services. The merchant service paid wages up to four times those on offer in the Navy and without the prospect of a battle, but there was a down-side; ship-owners were tight-fisted and with small crews sailors had to work harder, and if ever they came up against a predator they were virtually defenseless.

It is important as well to take account of the historical context in which Jar Tar lived. Conditions aboard were hard, but for the times by no means extreme. On the land there was no real security for the working man; a full belly at the ➤



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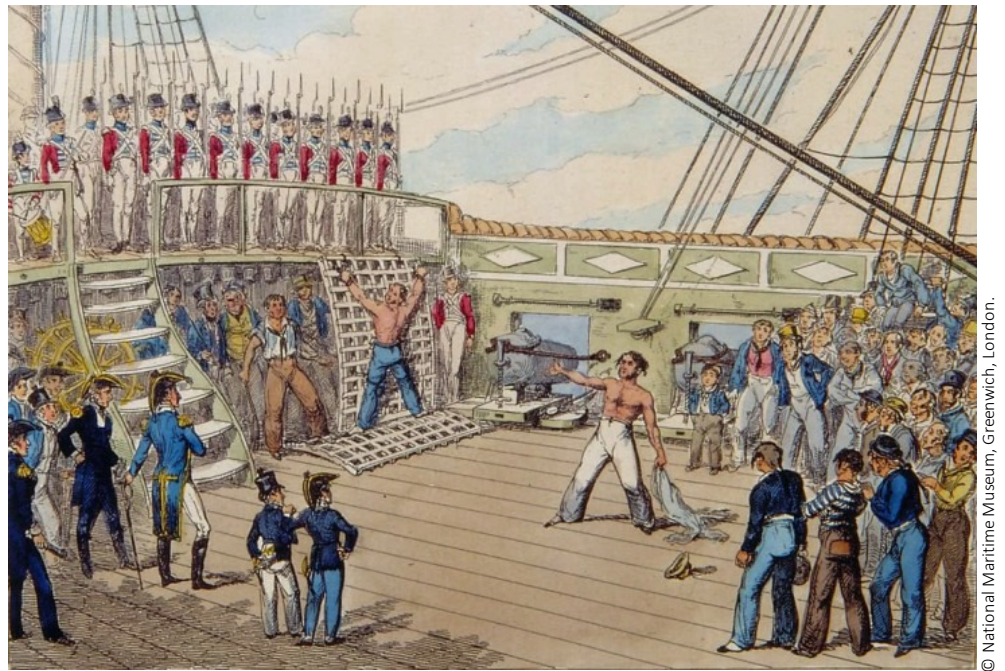
end of a hard day was never certain, and food was generally of poor quality. At sea, the meanest hand could rely on three square meals a day regularly and grog twice—and free of charge, something a ploughman in the field or red-coat on the march could only dream about.

Accommodation at sea was far cleaner than the crowded bothies and stews of the city and with half the men on watch it has been remarked that the 28 inches of hammock space per man compares favorably with that of a modern double bed. While in absolute terms it is not a life we could tolerate today, for the eighteenth century in general it was not horrific—and as modern ocean yachtsmen and mountaineers have found, a lot of hardships can be borne if you believe you are achieving something.

Brutality in discipline is often cited to imply a cowed crew; but in reality the captain was like a country justice-of-the-peace at sea, and had broadly similar powers—never life and death. Ashore there were the stocks and the local bridewell, but at sea there was no provision for the idleness of incarceration—the punishment must deter, but also be summary in effect; the man must be quickly returned to duty.

At a time when a woman could be “whipped at the cart’s tail” up the town’s High Street for a misdemeanor, flogging was the sea alternative. Captains varied in its use; statistical examination shows both extremes, but if repeat offenders and hard-case quota men are excluded it is clear that the larger majority of seamen never did receive a “red checked shirt at the gangway.”

One thing is emerging; the men of the fo’c’sle were not faceless nonentities going through rote drills, as on a parade ground. A 74-gun ship-of-the-line at sea had only a single commissioned officer on watch; the whole subsequent complexity of operations with hundreds of men could only be possible if the men had the initiative and intelli-



© National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London.

ABOVE George Cruikshank’s *The Point of Honor* depicts a naval flogging.

BELOW A British Royal Navy boatswain in the early 1800s. Boatswain is the oldest rate in the Royal Navy.



PD - Art

gence to work individually out there on the yard or any one of the huge number of everyday technical tasks. Under the tiny officer corps, a well-trying hierarchy of merit existed—the petty officers and warrant officers—who were “the backbone of the Navy.” It was highly successful, and it remains effective to this day. It ensured work-place excellence at all levels, and could only be achieved with sea skills won in a culture of pride and work satisfaction.

In general, officers were no fools—they knew that in management terms it was better to lead a well-conditioned and motivated team than drive a sullen and unreliable rabble. A recently discovered Royal Navy ship’s order-book dating from the desperate situation of the later 1790s shows well over half the entries concerned measures for the welfare of ship’s companies. This was appreciated by the seamen, who, as any serviceman will testify, can put up with much if officers are seen to be trying their best. It is worth pointing out that the grievances of the great fleet mutiny of 1797 at Spithead were not about the system, but abuses.

The world of the lower deck was a unique, colorful and deeply traditional way of life, carrying customs and attitudes hallowed over the ➤

centuries. A young sailor learned many things along with his sea skills: handi-crafts ranging from scrimshaw to ships-in-a-bottle, well-honed yarns whose ancestry is lost in mists of superstition, and most valuable, the social aptitudes to get on with his fellow man under sustained hard conditions.

Individualism—a trait shared by all nations in a universal sea ethos—made for strong characters and sturdy views and makes a nonsense of portrayals that have them otherwise. There could be no doubts about the man next to you on the yard or standing by your side to repel boarders, they were your ship-mates, and a tight and supportive sense of community arose which only deepened on a long commission, far waters and shared danger. Then, as now, the sea was a place to find resources of courage and endurance from within yourself, to discover the limits, both in you and in others.

Prize money was an obvious incentive to Jack Tar, and with reason—all seamen would have before them the example of the capture of the Spanish *Hermione*, which left the humblest seaman with forty years' pay for just a few hours work. In 1779 Lieutenant Trollope was in command of the cutter *Kite* when he took two enemy prizes laden with seasoned ship timber. He was awarded 3/8ths—£30,000 – so in one hour he had earned the equivalent of 300 years' worth of pay. As no other ship was present and he was not a member of any particular Admiral's Fleet he was able to secure the full amount.

Such riches were rare, but by no means unknown—yet this does not explain why the blockading squadrons, storm-tossed and lonely with never a chance of a prize, still performed their sea duties to a level that has rarely been seen, leagues out to sea and out of sight, executing complex maneuvers without ever an admiring audience.

A more universal reason is perhaps the fact that there was a simple and sturdy patriotism at work; in the years since Drake, the seamen had evolved a contempt for those foreigners who



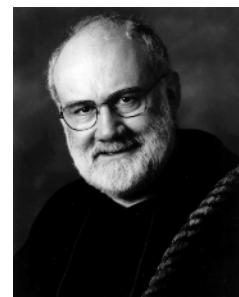
AI-generated illustration created with OpenAI ChatGPT from the editor's specifications

dared a challenge at sea, and in the years of success that followed, it became a given that the Royal Navy would prevail, whatever the odds. In the century up to Nelson this became a “habit of victory” that gave an unshakeable confidence in battle, every man aware that he was a member of an elite with a splendid past that it would be unthinkable to betray, a spirit that in truth has endured to this day.

This habit of victory produced some incredible results. I'll mention just one extraordinary fact. In the whole 22 years of war the Navy lost 166 ships to the enemy. In the same period no less than 1204 of the enemy hauled down their colors in return—seven times their number!

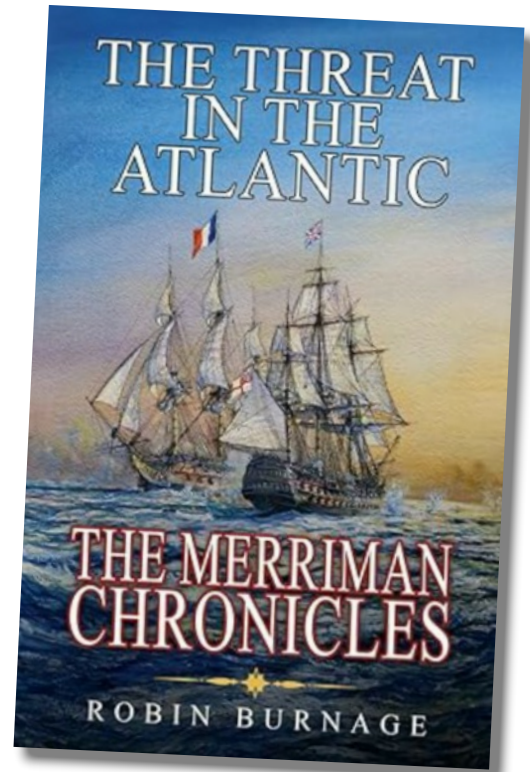
The men on the lower deck who helped achieve these odds were exceptional seamen, tough and loyal characters who have contributed to a sea culture that has flowered and endured over the centuries. But there is still much we do not know about Jack Tar. It is time for the real men to step out from the shadows and take their place among the heroes of the age. Nelson was adamant, and I have his words as the dedication to my first book, *Kydd*, speaking of the officers aft on the quarterdeck and the men forward in the fo'c'sle; “Aft the more honour, forward the better man!” ■

ABOVE Jack Tars found creative ways to pass their limited spare time fashioning scrimshaw, ship models and fancy rope work.



© Julian Stockwin.

Visit Julian Stockwin, author of the Thomas Kydd naval adventures, online: julianstockwin.com.



Robin Burnage

The British novelist honors his father's legacy

Overlooking the Irish Sea in Wales, British novelist Robin Burnage plots the next adventure in *The Merriman Chronicles*. Burnage's late father, Roger, launched the series in 2012.

A Certain Threat introduced the Royal Navy's then-Lieutenant James Merriman in 1792. French Revolutionary agents were at large and England was on the cusp of war with France. Roger wrote six additional novels featuring Merriman.

Sadly, Roger crossed the bar in December 2015 after a short illness. Today, his legacy lives on through his writing and *The Chronicles*, which

Continue through Robin's pen.

Robin's initial involvement with *The Chronicles* was to shepherd the novels through the publishing process. At about the same time, "more drawn to boats than boardrooms," he left his position, purchased a sailing yacht, and went to sea for five years. An extended road trip through Europe in a "battered old Land Rover, and later a motor home" followed.

At Roger's request, Robin agreed to continue *The Chronicles*. In 2022, Robin published Roger's seventh and final book in *The Chronicles*, *The Fateful Voyage*. At this point, he assumed the ➤

ABOVE British author Robin Burnage assumed the helm of the *Merriman Chronicles* at his father's request. All images illustrating this article are courtesy of Robin Burnage unless otherwise designated.

Series' helm. Robin's first book, *The Threat in the Atlantic*, picked up where *The Fateful Voyage* ended in 2024, followed by *The Canadian Mission* in 2025.

At the same time, Robin has produced new, updated editions of his father's novels, featuring cover art by English marine artist Colin Baxter depicting scenes from the books. Dramatic audio editions with accompanying sound effects narrated by British actor Nigel Peever are also in production.

Quarterdeck recently caught up with Robin Burnage to learn more about him and The Merriman Chronicles:

—George Jepson



Have you always been a reader? Did you read naval fiction prior to your father launching *The Merriman Chronicles*?

I've always loved reading. As a child I was always devouring books, particularly anything involving adventure. Enid Blyton's *Famous Five* and *Secret Seven*, together with Arthur Ransome's *Swallows and Amazons* stories, were early favorites. Looking back, they all had common threads: exploration, danger, and quite often, boats and messing about on the water. My first real taste of "grown-up" adventure came through Clive Cussler and his character Dirk Pitt. I was probably twelve or thirteen when I discovered *Raise the Titanic!*, and I quickly worked my way through his novels. They had everything I wanted from a book: adventure, mystery, history and larger-than-life characters. Historical naval fiction didn't come until much later.

Although I wasn't actually reading naval fiction at that stage, I was already developing a fascination with



Roger Burnage published his debut novel in the Merriman Chronicles, *A Certain Threat*, in 2012.

the sea that has never left me. It even led me to spend several years living aboard and sailing my own yacht. It also gave me experiences I still draw on today when writing The Merriman Chronicles.

These days my reading has changed. I still use reference books for research, but for pleasure I've become a great fan of audiobooks. I listen far more than I physically read now, but I'm still discovering great



stories, and I can listen while I'm driving or out walking.

Was there any question in your mind about carrying on the series for your father?

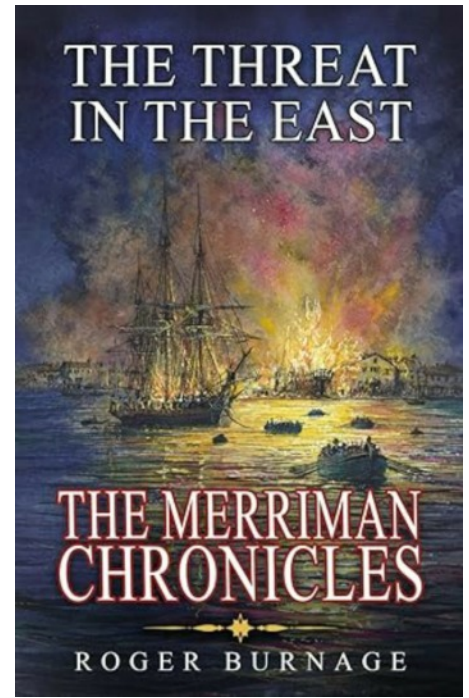
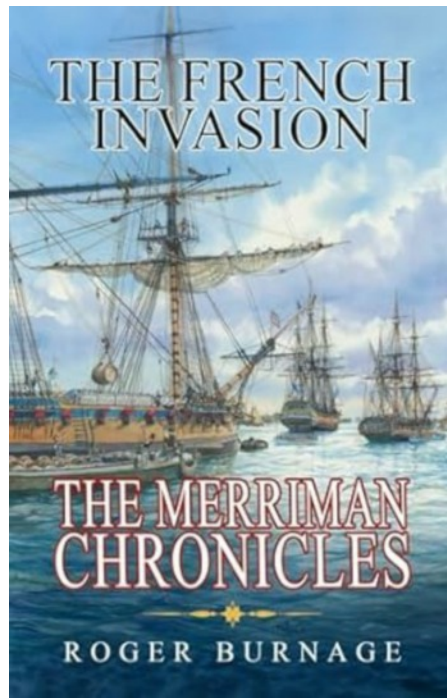
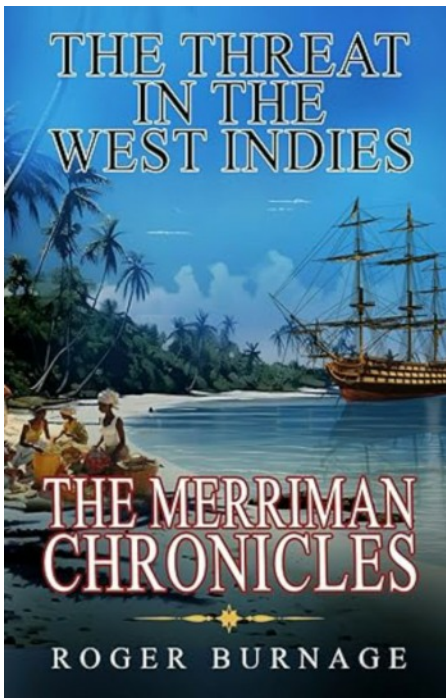
During my father's final weeks, we talked about what would happen to The Merriman Chronicles. He knew his cancer was terminal and one of his greatest disappointments was that he wouldn't be able to continue writing the series. He asked if I would keep it going. I said I would, but I was honest with him too. I didn't know whether I was up to the job.

Writing for yourself and developing your own fictional world is one thing. Taking responsibility for characters that readers already know seemed quite a leap. Going from publisher to author felt like a huge challenge. Once I'd made that promise, I knew I had to do it properly. I wanted it to continue with the same feel and tone, but never set out to imitate Dad's writing because that simply wouldn't work. The storytelling is inevitably my own, and I hope readers feel it's a natural continuation, not something glaringly different.

What had you written before *The Threat in the Atlantic*?

I'd already been writing fiction for some time, although none of it has yet been published. I made a conscious decision not to publish that early work because it wasn't ready. It served its purpose by helping me learn how to craft a novel, and I'm glad I gave myself that time rather than rushing into publication.

Having been closely involved in publishing Dad's novels, by the time I came to *The Threat in the Atlantic*, I already understood much more of the writing process, as well as the practical side of preparing and publish- ➤



ing a novel. Looking back, none of that writing was wasted. It prepared me for *The Merriman Chronicles*. It wasn't a sudden leap to become an author, but the next step in something I'd already been working towards for several years.

What was your most significant challenge in assuming stewardship of the *Chronicles*?

I thought the biggest challenge would be persuading readers to come back after such a long break. It had been nearly a decade since Dad's last novel in the main series, *The Threat in the Adriatic*, and I knew readers would naturally wonder whether the series could continue without him. My aim was to make sure that when readers opened the next Merriman novel, James and the other familiar characters still felt like old friends. Readers become invested in characters, and I wanted them to feel there was genuine continuity.

Authenticity is equally important. When I'm writing a battle or a sailing scene, I write way more detail than ever appears in the finished novel. I'll work out how the ship tacks or wears, what the wind and sea are doing, how that affects the gunnery, which ship has the weather advantage and even which sails are likely to be set.

"Readers have picked up an adventure novel, not a manual on how to sail a warship."

Once I'm satisfied it all works, I start taking detail away until what's left serves the story rather than the seamanship. Readers have picked up an adventure novel, not a manual on how to sail a warship. The reaction from readers to *The Threat in the Atlantic* has been hugely encouraging. I think I can say I pulled it off, and I'm now confident that James Merriman's story can continue.

Was there a single thing you learned from your father that carried over

into your writing?

Not in the traditional sense. My father was actually quite private about his writing. I was busy with work and, for the last few years of his life, I was living aboard my own yacht, so I wasn't closely involved in his day-to-day writing and probably didn't appreciate just how much

work was going into *The Merriman Chronicles*.

My original involvement came about because he

became increasingly frustrated at not being able to find a publisher or literary agent. Seeing how disappointed he was, I offered to help, and that eventually led to me publishing *A Certain Threat*. Looking back, neither the launch process nor the finished product had the polish we'd expect today. Despite those early weaknesses, readers connected with James Merriman and his story, and that gave Dad the encouragement to continue writing the series.

What I learned initially wasn't ➤

so much about writing as it was about publishing. I found myself learning about self-publishing, e-books, print layouts, marketing and everything involved in getting books into readers' hands. Those were all things that were completely new to both of us, although I enjoyed getting to grips with the publishing side much more than Dad did.

It's only since writing the series myself that I've fully appreciated just how much historical knowledge sat behind every novel. Dad made it all seem effortless, but I now know it wasn't. His characters feel authentic, his dialogue is comfortable for a modern audience, but sounds true to the period without ever feeling forced or overly flowery, and that's something that really resonates with me.

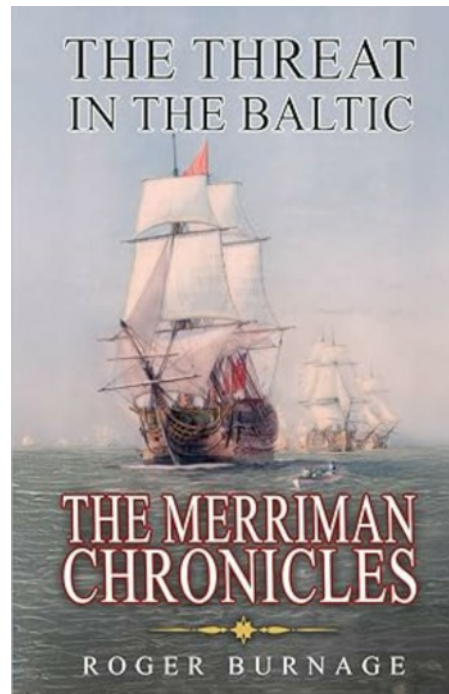
Outside of your father and his work, what has been your greatest influence as an author?

In terms of literature, I'm going to stick with Clive Cussler. I suspect that admission is enough to get me keelhaunched in some naval fiction circles, but his books

were my introduction to big adventure stories.

They were exciting, fast-paced and

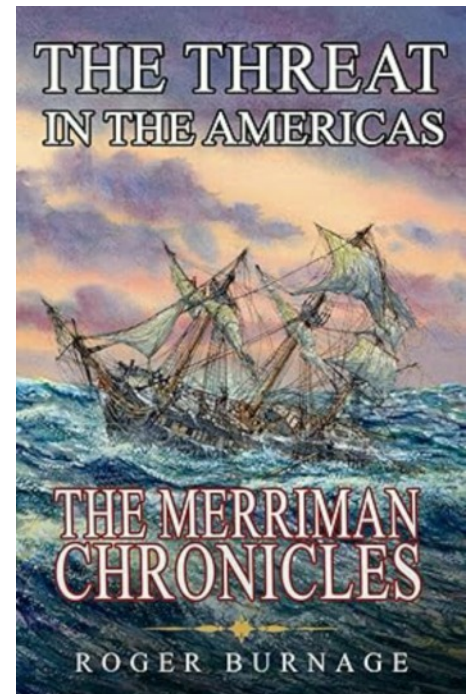
always left me wanting to read just one more chapter. Beyond that, it has to be my own time at sea. Spending years living aboard and sailing my own yacht taught me things that no history book ever could. It gave me an instinctive feel for wind, weather, tides and the way a boat behaves, and I draw on those experiences whenever I'm writing. Historical research is obviously essential, but it's my own sailing experience that helps me imagine how those ships behaved and how the men aboard them might have experienced life at sea. The



research gives me the facts; sailing helps me bring them to life.

Where does your process begin when you start a new novel?

Given the chronological nature of the series, it must start with the end of the previous novel. That gives me a starting point, and from there I look



head before I write anything down. Sometimes I'm James, sometimes another member of the crew, trying to work out how they'd react in a situation. I often find myself thinking or writing something that sounds exactly like my dad. I guess some of his mannerisms and language have rubbed off on me.

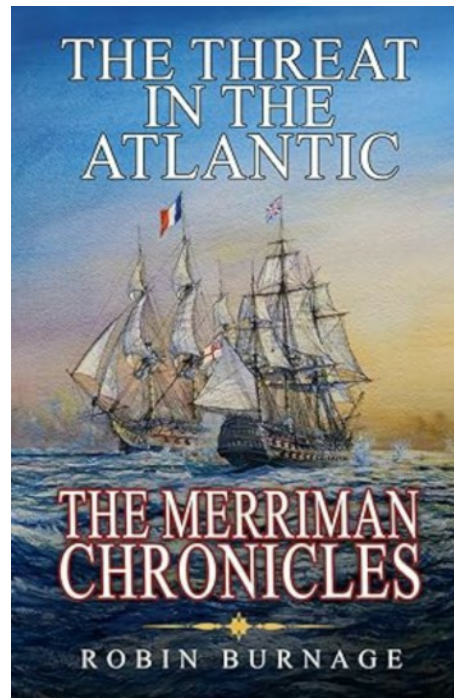
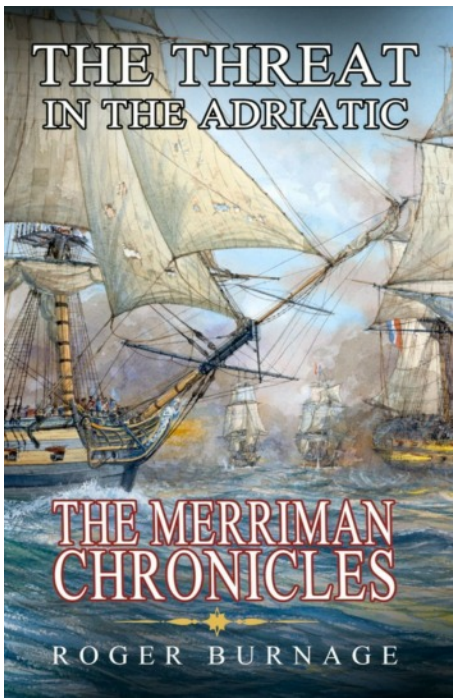
“... it's my own sailing experience that helps me imagine how those ships behaved...”

Do you plot out your novels before beginning to write?

Yes, absolutely.

I'm very much a planner, something that probably comes from my career. I'm very different from Dad in that respect. He seemed quite happy to sit down and let the story unfold as he wrote. I need a framework before I can really get going. I like to know roughly how many chapters there will be, what needs to happen in each one and, most importantly, how the story is going to end. That doesn't mean everything is set in stone. Once I start writing, the characters often take a scene in a direction I hadn't expected, and I'm quite happy to ➤

at what was happening around the world. I also have the notes Dad left behind, including a rough timeline for Merriman's career, and a handwritten list of around fifty possible titles for future novels. From there, I take a blank sheet of paper and start making notes. I jot down the year, where the story will take place, how we can get the ship and her crew from the end of the previous novel to where the new action will take place and, crucially, why they've been sent there. I tend to daydream quite a bit, playing scenes out in my



follow them if it improves the story. But having that framework means I always know where I'm heading. For me, the planning is simply the groundwork. Once that's done, I can get to the really interesting bit: dreaming up what trouble Merriman can get into.

Where are you most comfortable writing?

I use both a desktop PC and a laptop, but they serve very different purposes. I have a home office where I do most of the research, planning and structure for a new novel. It's also where I deal with the less glamorous side of life, accounts and paperwork for my day job, so it feels more like a professional workspace than somewhere to be creative.

The laptop is a different story. It gives me the freedom to write wherever the mood takes me, while still having access to the Internet for checking dates, places and historical facts. Everything is backed up in the cloud, something that would prob-

ably have completely baffled Dad.

If I'm honest, though, my favorite place to write is on holiday. Being away from the day-to-day distractions lets me disappear into James Merriman's world for hours at a time. That's when I seem to make the biggest strides with a novel. I'd just love to have more time to do it.

"If I'm honest, though, my favorite place to write is on holiday."

Do you have a regular writing routine?

Not really. I tend to write when the ideas are there. I don't want it to feel like I'm clocking on for work and have to produce a certain word count. Sometimes that means sitting down for a couple of hours, while other times I'll suddenly realize it's well past midnight because I've become completely absorbed in the story. My day job has to come first, so writing fits around that rather than the other way round. I don't think I'd ever be comfortable forcing myself into a

routine. I've learned to make the most of those moments when the story is flow-ing, because that's usually when the best chapters get written.

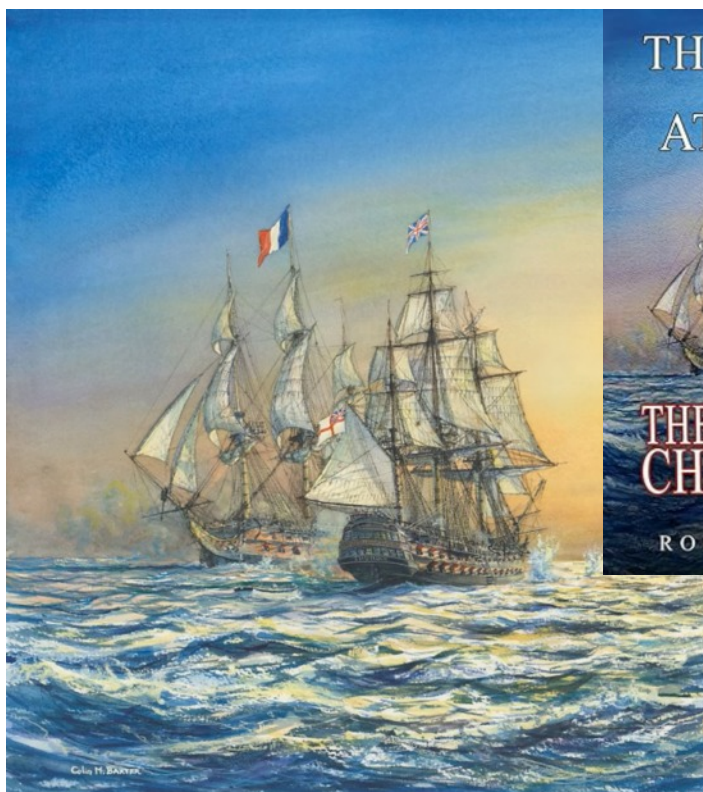
For readers new to the Chronicles, how would you describe James Merriman and his journey in the Royal Navy?

First and foremost, he's a professional Royal Navy officer from a distinguished family, although not without a few skeletons in the closet. Like many young officers of the period, he's ambitious, but not at any cost. He wants to earn promotion through experience and ability, although he has to acknowledge that his entry into the Navy came from privilege. He's driven by a strong sense of duty to his ship, his crew and the Royal Navy. What sets James apart from many notable captains of the period is his style of leadership. He understands that a successful ship depends on the people serving aboard her. He listens, encourages initiative and recognizes talent

wherever he finds it.

He's never afraid to let others shine if it makes the ship and crew stronger. His career

doesn't always follow the straightforward path he might have hoped for. Time and again he finds himself drawn into situations well away from the usual theatres of war, and some-times outside the scope of his orders. He's the sort of officer who finds it difficult to look the other way simply because some-thing isn't his responsibility. That strong moral compass often leaves him choosing between doing what's right and doing what's best for his career, and those choices are a strong thread throughout the series. Above all, I hope readers enjoy spending time ➤



ABOVE English marine artist Colin Baxter (right) painted the engagement between the French ship *Hercule* and Merriman's HMS *Thunder*, a scene from *The Threat in the Atlantic* for the novel's cover.

with James because he feels like some-one who could genuinely have served during the Age of Sail. He's a fictional character living in a very real world, and that's always been at the heart of *The Merriman Chronicles*.

How far into history have you planned the *Chronicles*?

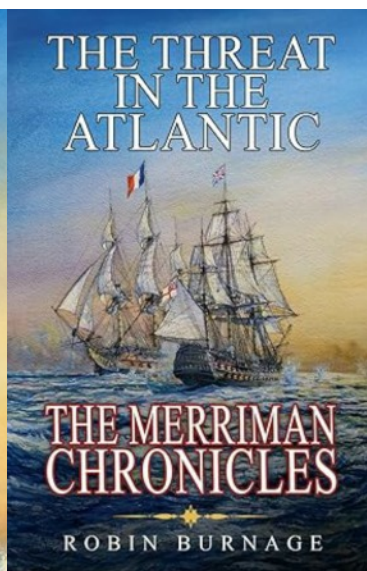
Dad certainly wasn't short of ideas. The notes he left behind make it clear that his original vision for *The Merriman Chronicles* went far beyond the novels he was able to write. I'm in the unusual position of having that roadmap left for me. Realistically, I don't know how much of it I can actually follow. There are probably more stories there than I could ever write, and I don't feel any need to commit myself to all of them. For now, I'm concentrating on James and seeing where his story takes me. There are plenty of possibilities, including looking back at his earlier career or eventually following another

generation of the Merriman family. I don't think I need to

decide exactly where it ends just yet. What's next for James Merriman following the second novel in the nine-book series to date?

The Canadian Mission is my second Merriman novel and the ninth in the main series overall. It leaves James firmly in the War of 1812, so that's where the next story will begin. It's still at a very early stage, but I'm looking closely at the Great Lakes. Control of the lakes was hugely important to both sides, which led to a rapid expansion in shipbuilding as Britain and America tried to gain the upper hand. That gives me plenty of possibilities for the next story.

I'm also beginning to think it's time James had a few more setbacks. He's generally managed to come



© Colin Baxter.

through everything rather well so far, and perhaps it's time to knock some of the shine off him. Whether that's a serious defeat, capture or something else, I haven't decided yet, but I'd like to test him a little more. Beyond that, I'm keeping quiet, partly because I don't want to give too much away and partly because I haven't decided myself!

How did your collaboration with marine artist Colin M. Baxter come about?

It was really part of my decision to bring the whole series up to a better standard and give the stories the presentation I felt they deserved. I didn't take the conventional route with the covers. Rather than starting with a cover design and commissioning artwork to fit around it, I wanted original paintings that could stand on their own and then use those

paintings for the books. The originals now hang at home, and I still find myself standing in front of them looking at the detail. I really did drop lucky with Colin. I'd looked at several marine artists, but Colin's work stood out as the best fit. If I'm honest, I was actually quite nervous about contacting him in case he simply said no. I eventually got up the courage and emailed him about a painting for *The Threat in the Atlantic*. To my surprise, he already knew *The Merriman Chronicles* and said he'd be delighted to work with me.

That first painting depicts a scene from the novel, the engagement between the French ship *Hercule* and

Merriman's HMS *Thunder*. Colin also produced a drawing of *Thunder*, showing the ship and her sail plan, ➤



ABOVE Robin Burnage's *Miss Chips*, a 46-foot Beneteau Oceanis 461 sailing in the Ionian Sea. **RIGHT** Burnage at the helm of *Miss Chips* on the same voyage.



which I used inside the book. I was so pleased with the results that I asked him to produce paintings for the rest of the series. His knowledge and attention to detail still amazes me. When he was working on *The Canadian Mission*, he asked for the exact date of the scene because USS *President* had undergone a refit and some of the sail plan had changed. He wanted to make sure he painted the ship as she actually appeared at that point in 1812. That probably tells you more about Colin's approach than I ever could. He's incredibly professional, but he's also just a really nice chap to work with. We still have a couple of paintings to do, but all in good time.

[What can you tell us about your sailing experience and how it contributes to your storytelling?](#)

My sailing experience goes back much further than those five years. Dad taught me to sail when I was a child, and I've been around boats for most of my life. Living aboard my

own yacht for an extended period simply took that experience much further. I learned a lot about the predictability of tides and the unpredictability of the sea and weather. Even with modern forecasting and electronic navigation, the ocean can still be terrifying, particularly at night when you're cold, wet and tired. I've dragged anchor onto a lee shore and gone aground, lost steering in heavy weather, been hit by sudden katabatic winds that have pulled the anchor out of the seabed, and experienced big seas and just about every form of rain, sleet and hail imaginable. I think the only things I've missed so far are sea monsters and sirens. Turning those experiences into scenes is actually quite straightforward. I usually start by about what

would happen to a modern yacht and how I would deal with it as skipper. Then I start taking things away. No engine to get you out of trouble, no GPS to easily check your location, no radio to call for help. Strip all that away and you're back to canvas, cordage and seamanship, aboard a large wooden sailing ship that certainly isn't going to point to windward like a modern yacht. I also tend to work a scene backwards. If I know where I need the ships to be at a particular time, I can use the tides and navigation to work out where they must have been several hours ➤

earlier. In *The Canadian Mission*, I knew the state of the tide around Brier Island on the day of the scene, so I could work backwards to where Merriman needed to be when he took the deck. From there the ships could tack, become becalmed and then be carried by the spring tide into the Bay of Fundy. Merriman putting men into the boats to row HMS *Mercury* towards the enemy felt like a practical response rather than simply waiting for the wind to return.

That's something my own experience has taught me. If you're in trouble at sea, particularly when things could get worse, you need a plan. I've used a dinghy to carry an anchor into deeper water and then winched the yacht towards it, inch by inch. You use what you have and calmly work through the options. Quite often at sea there is nobody else around to help. There certainly wasn't for Merriman. His ship and crew had to be self-reliant, and that makes the strength of the crew every bit as important as the ability of the captain. Ultimately, their success, and sometimes their survival, depends upon it.

[Are there other historical periods or subjects you would like to explore?](#)

Definitely. Dad's original idea for The Merriman Chronicles was so much more than James and the Royal Navy of the Napoleonic era. One idea he left behind was a Merriman aboard the *Titanic*, and that's something I'd love to explore. Like many people, I've always been fascinated by the ship and the tragedy, but I'd be equally interested in discovering how a Merriman came to be aboard in the first place. Perhaps there's a family connection that has been lost or forgotten, an inheritance, an old will or something nobody knew about. That could become as much a part of the

story as the historical event itself. I don't necessarily see the Chronicles continuing as one unbroken family saga. I'd rather have the freedom to jump forward decades if there's a good story to tell, with some connection back to the Merriman family. That could take the books into completely different periods of history while still keeping a thread running through them.

[Has the success and longevity of The Merriman Chronicles surprised you?](#)

Absolutely. When we published the first book, I genuinely thought it might amount to a few paperback copies that Dad could put on the coffee table or give away to friends. I certainly didn't expect it to develop the following it has.

In those early days I did everything other than the writing myself. Editing, publishing, marketing, covers, social media, the lot. I was learning as I went along and, looking back, some of it was pretty haphazard. Thankfully, readers saw past the rough edges and connected with James Merriman. After Dad died, I still had one unpublished novel of his, *The Fateful Voyage*, a related Merriman story set nearly a century later. I always intended to publish it, but for a long time I just didn't have the heart to do it. Every time I tried, it didn't feel right. Seven years passed before I finally decided the time had come. This time I brought in a professional editor and we got the book ready properly.

The response completely surprised me. It didn't just sell well itself. It gave the whole series a huge boost and brought in a lot of new readers. That gave me the push to go back and improve the earlier books. I brought the same editor in to work through the series and later commissioned new artwork for the covers. So,

am I surprised we're still going strong all these years later? Hell yes. The readers have stuck with Merriman and kept the series going. Without them, I certainly wouldn't be writing new Merriman novels today.

[Anything else you'd like to share with our readers?](#)

I've mentioned Dad quite a lot throughout this interview, and I make no apology for that. The Merriman Chronicles simply wouldn't exist without him. The amount of research behind the books still amazes me, particularly when I think about how he did it. There were no quick Google searches. It was books, letters, libraries, museums and years of accumulating knowledge. One of the unexpected pleasures for me has been hearing the books brought to life as audiobooks. Just as I dropped lucky finding Colin for the artwork, I think I dropped lucky again with Nigel Peever. He's not simply a narrator, he's a very talented voice actor and producer. He uses music and sound effects as part of the production, which gives the audiobooks a character of their own. That's a personal choice, and I know some listeners prefer a straight narration, but I love what Nigel has done with them. There are scenes that still bring a tear to my eye when I listen. Partly because of just how good Nigel's performance is, partly because Dad never got the chance to hear them, and partly because sometimes I find myself listening and thinking, actually, Merriman really is rather good. I reckon Dad would have been enormously proud of them. ■

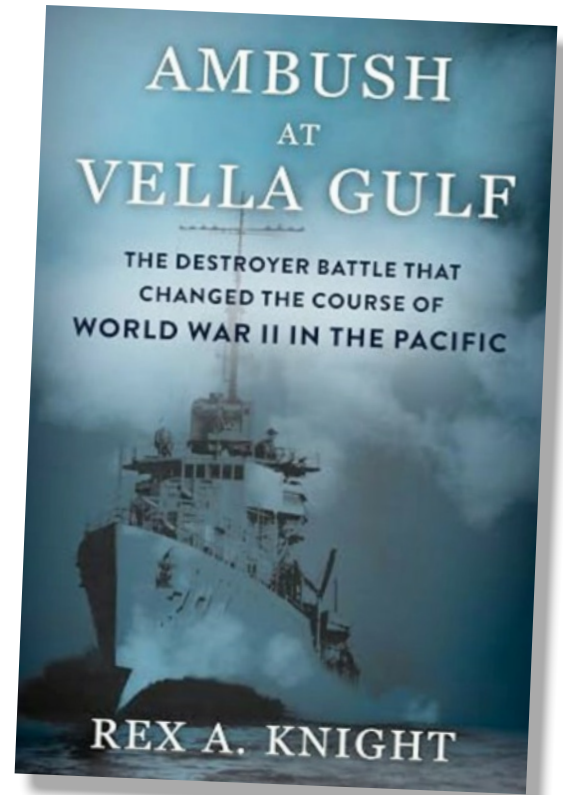
[Visit The Merriman Chronicles online at **merriman-chronicles.com**](#)

Ambush at Vella Gulf

The Destroyer Battle that Changed the Course of World War II in the Pacific

BY REX A. KNIGHT

On the night of August 6–7, 1943, six American destroyers steamed into Vella Gulf two hundred miles northwest of Guadalcanal and laid an ambush for the Japanese destroyers that nightly ferried reinforcements into the Solomon Islands. Within thirty-five minutes, three enemy ships were on their way to the bottom of the gulf, a fourth limped away, and the US Navy's tin cans scored what was hailed as "an attack that every destroyer sailor dreams about," "a little classic of naval warfare," "a perfect American victory." This is an excerpt from Chapter 9.



CHAPTER NINE

Commence Fire *Finishing the Deed*

Simpson wasted no time at delivering his command to fire. Only moments before, he and his lethal band of destroyers—all patiently poised for action and eager to claim a piece of the victory—stood slyly in the darkness and completely hidden from the enemy. Having now clearly witnessed the first blow, and determined to provide a proper and prompt dispatch of the Japanese adversary, at 11:46 p.m. the commander gave his order. “Commence fire!” he sternly pronounced.

The responding reports of the 5-inch guns were immediate. The simultaneous blasts of *Lang*’s main batteries instantly jarred the flagship sideways, notifying all aboard that they were indeed entered into the fray. The eruption of the guns was with such profound unison that their cumulative blast nearly deafened every unprotected ear, and their joint concussion painfully jarred the bones of every man stationed nearby. The intensity of the rapid-fire that followed sounded remarkably comparable to that of machine guns. The reoccurring patterns of the blasts were so quick it heated

the gun barrels to a glowing deep red and blistered the thick gray paint used to protect them from the elements. The surrounding air was soon consumed with the putrid odor of sulfur and filled with a black expanse of smoke, originating from the flashless powder ignitions and growing heavier with each explosive discharge. Shell casings quickly littered the outer gun decks, left to roll freely with each sway of the ship and either forced into one another with a heavy brassy clang or sent reeling past the gunnels to a silent departure into the sea. With each motion of the destroyer there was heard the shrill sing ing of electric motors and hydraulics, as continuous efforts at keeping each gun on target were rigorously maintained. All the while, round after round blasted outward to arch its way on a destructive course, intent at delivering death to any unfortunate soul standing in their path. The duel of the cannonade had begun.

The most obvious target was the second enemy ship, the heavily damaged and terribly burning “cruiser.” ➤

Stackpole Books, Hardback / e-book

\$34.95 / \$22.99

October 6, 2026

Under radar control, *Lang*'s 5-inch guns were drawn to focus their first volley here. *Lang*'s gunners, as expected, were at the top of their game—notable hits aboard the opposing ship were almost instantaneous, as new fires and explosions were quickly observed. *Sterett*'s main batteries followed suit, firing volley after volley into this same burning hulk.

The distant pyrotechnics initially started by Moosbrugger's torpedoes were now intensified even further, as flaring eruptions shot brilliantly into the distant sky. Observers readily reported additional hits with additional explosions, yet the stub-born enemy vessel refused to sink.

From *Lang*'s 5-inch mount #3, Chuck Lee worked with as much deliberate haste as physically possible, yet he was barely able to shove one round into his gun's breech when it was ready for the next. There was little time to observe the true results of his weapon's accuracy, and even then the growing concentration of smoke from the firing obscured the better part of his view. Only occasionally did he catch a good glimpse of the explosions and fires erupting against the distant backdrop of darkness. For the moment, his sole duty was to perform his job to the perfection of his training, effected through all those many accumulated hours of continuous drilling that had been so loathed. Now those drills were paying dividends. With each additional round fired, his confidence grew all the more, ever so thankful for those individuals, like Chief Leonard Wood, who had taught him so well.

Mitchell Sang, the muscular coxswain feeding the heavy 54-pound projectiles onto Lee's ramming tray, was equally unending with motion and devotion to duty. There was no cessation to his efforts—even despite his painful injury. Indeed, the darkness, smoke, and excitement hid the grimace on his face and the blood pouring from his crushed right hand. The wound had occurred just as the gun's second salvo released and Sang reached for the next shell being elevated by the hoist from the handling room below. This hoist mechanism had a notorious reputation on all ships and had claimed a number of hands and fingers over its lifetime. Lack of good vision combined with the rush of effort and the motion of the ship once



Official US Navy Photo.

USS *Sterett*

again brought injury to another of its victims. In his haste, Sang grasped for the shell just a bit too early, briefly catching his right hand between the hoist and its guide. The excruciating pain was instantaneous, as was his reaction to pull away. His powerful jerk released his hand but ripped a 1-inch gash between his first and middle fingers. All of his fingers were badly mashed and blood gushed from the wound, menaced even more by an acute throbbing that increased with each beat of his heart. He risked further injury by continuing, but he did not hesitate. He did not slow the speed of his motions at all, and none of the others working with him would know of his injury till long after the gunnery ceased. He would report to sickbay only after the ship departed the area, over two hours later.

Two minutes into the barrage, the firing suddenly paused. Observers on *Lang*'s bridge had noticed sporadic gun flashes, believed to be originating from two twin-mount guns of another of the enemy ships, projecting from the darkness just to the left of the burning "cruiser." Simpson immediately ordered his destroyers' guns to "Cease fire" and for fire control to search for the new target. Within seconds the radar had locked onto the belligerent opposition and all four 5-inch guns adjusted to the coordinates. At 11:49 p.m., Simpson again gave the "commence fire" order, and the successive volleys resumed.

As before, *Sterett*'s gunnery quickly followed suit, adjusting to the new target and joining *Lang* with pinpoint accuracy. The targeted ship was identified as a destroyer (*Kawakaze*), and hits from both were immediately observed to impact the region of the enemy vessel about amidships. Small explosions were noted, and fires were soon seen to spread all along the vessel's main ➤

outer deck. Sporadic—though terribly ineffective—gunfire from the enemy destroyer continued, as brave gunners did their best to ward away their attackers, even in spite of their ship's doomed state.

On board *Stack*—though two minutes into the opening of the gunnery—Captain Newton had yet to order his main batteries to open fire. His gunners were impatiently waiting, hoping to add to the enemy destruction, but the order they were expecting was not readily forthcoming. The ship's torpedo officer had reported a “good target near the burning enemy ship.” Though this target was not immediately identified, Newton elected first to allow his torpedomen their chance. He ordered the starboard torpedo battery to fire on the new target. The response was met with great expediency, as all four starboard tubes instantly released their menacing missiles into the darkened sea. The ship immediately lurched noticeably to port in acknowledgment of the discharged weight. A spread of four foaming trails was then observed to disappear into the infinity beyond.

With his torpedoes now successfully sent stealing toward their mark, Captain Newton finally gave the order for his 5-inch guns to “open fire.” The initial target, as with *Lang* and *Sterett*, was the burning “cruiser,” and *Stack*'s gunners responded with all able haste. But, realizing that the other two division destroyers had since diverted to a new target, Newton quickly ordered his batteries to the same adjustment. *Stack*'s gunners were just as quick with this response, and so the woes of the second enemy ship (*Kawakaze*) increased.

The effect of this gunnery was unprecedented. From high atop his director's perch, *Sterett*'s gunnery officer, Lieutenant Jeffrey, had the ideal view and was totally awestruck by the sight. The distant spectacle, the expanding fires, series of dramatic explosions, and constant cascading of red-hot shrapnel, was incomparable to any of his previous experiences. The destruction was even more intense than any of what he had witnessed at the Battle of Guadalcanal and far more one-sided. At Guadalcanal, the confusion of the actions and the enemy's deadly response



Official US Navy Photo.

The *Lang* on August 28, 1943, right after Vella Gulf, while returning home.

had been a fearful contest. Here, however, everything was working just as it had been planned. This was so unbelievable. He wanted to cheer at the top of his lungs, but the shock of the success imprisoned his voice. He was so energized, so emotionally charged, but there was no time to accurately display it. Furthermore, Jeffrey thought better of jinxing the operation with any premature accolades of celebration. He rightly knew that this action was not yet concluded.

Indeed, pursuant of the surprised enemy, all three destroyers kept up their steady barrage of high-explosive 5-inch shells, sending each and every round arching outward to their targets with the highest degree of accuracy. To the bitter shock of their opposition, the precision of the American gunnery was phenomenal, as few rounds were to land without adding some misery to the stymied Japanese ships. Furthering the woes of the enemy even more, from deep within the flaming mass another large explosion was suddenly noted, believed to have been a direct hit from one of *Stack*'s four previously launched torpedoes. So far, this action was being executed with complete perfection and just as it had been planned. The only glitch came at 11:51 p.m., when at the firing of its ninth volley's No. 1 gun had its breech jam, ending its usefulness for the duration of the operation—though this would prove to be of no negative effect to the impending outcome. If the enemy was to escape this night it was to take far more than a single misfire to advance the miracle. ■



Courtesy of J. Russell Jinishian.

American Armed Brig, c. 1778 in a glass cylinder

by Bernd J. Braatz

Hand-Built Scale Waterline Ship Model/Diorama

Basswood, Birch Plywood, Bamboo

Scale: 1:300 - Encased: 4" W x 8" L

Bernd J. Braatz, is a world-class artist and master model builder. Born in Berlin in 1954, he always showed an interest in boats and water. As a child, he was given his own kayak and became interested in many water sports from paddling and rowing to windsurfing and sailing. So this fascination of boats and water carried through to learning the skill of ship-building. For many years he built kayaks and rowboats in a shipyard in Germany. Then in 1980 he built his first ship model and the passion took hold. Since then he has built many models in bottles as well as in showcases, in 1:150 or 1:200 scale. He's participated in many competitions and exhibitions, and became the German champion and vice world champion in ships-in-bottle-building. He is a member of the Ships in Bottles Association of America (SIBAA) and the Dutch Ships in Bottles Association (EASIB). ■



Bernd J. Braatz

Courtesy of J. Russell Jinishian.

This piece is available and on display at the J. Russell Jinishian Gallery in Stonington, Connecticut.
www.jrusselljinishiangallery.com

STRAITS OF ANIAN

BY CHRIS DURBIN

The Seven Years' War ends with the Treaty of Paris in February 1763. Under Admiralty orders, George Holbrooke decommissions his frigate *Argonaut* at Portsmouth. And just like that, he's on the beach, on half-pay, a free man with no ship.

Over a year later, he is entrenched at Mulberry House in Wickham, Hampshire. Now serving as justice of the peace, he deals primarily with "drunkenness and disorderly behavior . . . and minor theft," not unlike the cases he faced while commanding a King's ship.

However, that's where any semblance with his naval career ends. Holbrooke's life at sea, which began when he was seventeen, is slowly receding into the past—until a courier appears at his door with a summons to the Admiralty in London.

While Britain is not at war in 1764, Chris Durbin reaches into a pivotal period of colonial conflicts involving Britain, France, and Spain, shaping the world's balance of power.

At the Admiralty, Holbrooke meets with Philip Stephens, the First Secretary, and the Naval Lord, Augustus Keppel, the latter offering him a ship: "A fifth rate in fact. Would that suit you?" Heedful that turning down a ship could end his career, Holbrooke cautiously accepts command of the frigate *Orion*, even before receiving his orders.

Holbrooke's mission is to seek Commodore John Byron—colorfully known as "Foul Weather Jack"—and his small squadron in the South Atlantic. Troubling news from the British embassy in Paris makes it imperative

that Holbrooke reach Byron.

The French have established a small settlement in Falkland's Land, challenging Britain's sovereignty over the strategically important islands. They are also fitting out a new expedition to the South Atlantic to reinforce their claim and settlement.

Holbrooke's charge: deliver new orders to Byron "to formally restate King George's claim to the islands" and bolster the commodore's squadron. The challenge: locate the British ships, who may have already rounded Cape Horn into the Great South Sea.

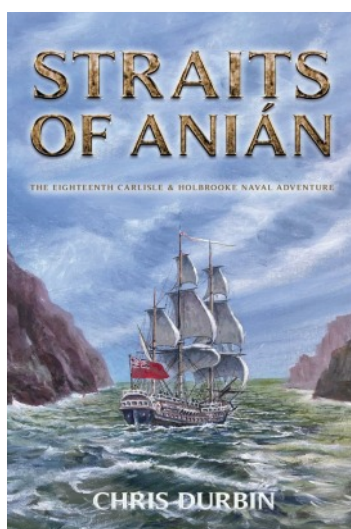
The *Straits of Anian* is Durbin's skillful transition in the Carlisle & Holbrooke Adventures, turning to contentious times when Britain competed with France and Spain to claim still unexplored parts of the world, including a northern passage from the Pacific to Hudson's Bay.

Muddling Holbrooke's mission, the Royal Society sends along a "natural philosopher," and his assistant, a mysterious pair that are not what they seem as *Orion* sails deeper into the Atlantic and Pacific.

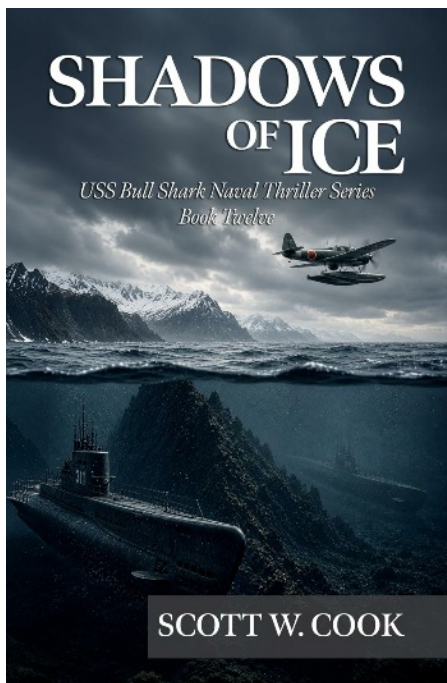
Durbin's vivid storytelling, based on thorough research, invites readers into realistic interactions between fictional and historical characters, perhaps reflecting his own time as a serving naval officer. It is not until the final pages that an enigma unravels and a shocking discovery brings the story full circle.

The *Straits of Anian* is another crackerjack Carlisle & Holbrooke adventure from Chris Durbin's masterful pen. ■

—George Jepson



Independent, Paperback /
e-book
\$17.62 / \$6.77



12 - *Shadows of Ice*

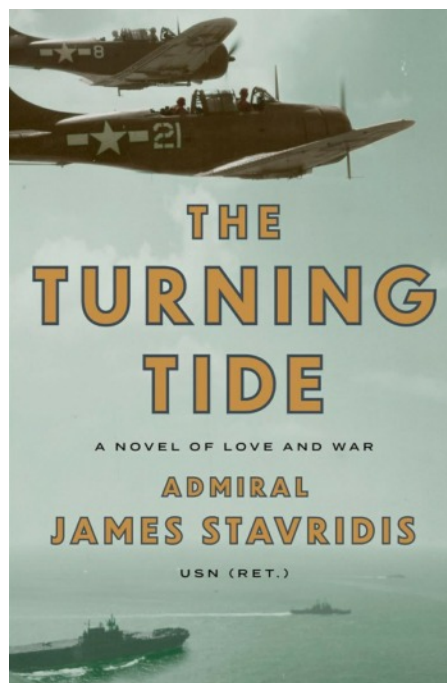
by Scott W. Cook

Independent, Paperback / e-book

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Available Now

Near the end of the bitter Aleutian winter, a Soviet weather aircraft is shot down over the Japanese-held island of Attu. What few realize is that the five crew members aboard are not ordinary airmen, but members of a crack Soviet intelligence team carrying information vital to the coming Allied offensive. The Japanese know something is different, and they're determined to find the survivors before anyone else. Captain Art Turner and USS *Bull Shark* arrive in the Aleutians on a secret mission of their own—to harass Japanese forces, gather intelligence, and disrupt enemy plans before the Americans return in force. Instead, Turner receives unexpected orders: find the missing Soviets and bring them home. With Soviet Naval Intelligence commander Andrei Reznikov and a hand-picked landing party aboard, *Bull Shark* slips into some of the most dangerous waters in the Pacific. Japanese patrols scour the islands. Enemy aircraft search the skies. And somewhere beneath the icy seas, a relentless Japanese submarine waits patiently for the perfect opportunity to strike.



2 - *The Turning Tide*

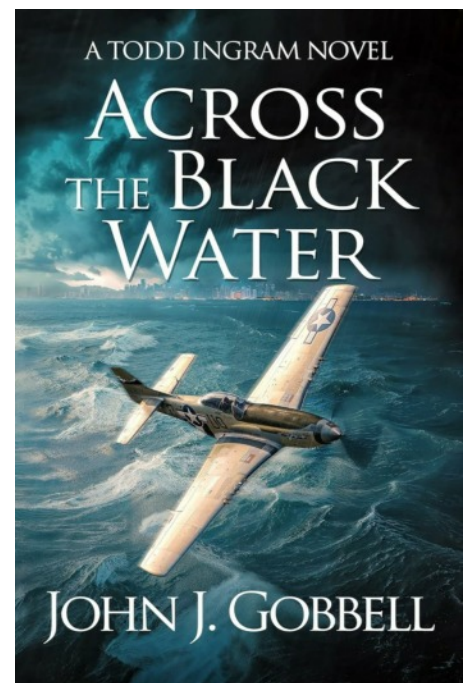
by Admiral James Stavridis

Penguin Press, Hardback / e-book

~~\$30.00~~ / ~~\$14.99~~

November 10, 2026

Scott Bradley James, like the US Navy in which he serves, is uncertain of the course he sails, both in war and love. While the threat of defeat that loomed over the first half of America's war against Japan is behind him, much danger lies ahead. Disastrous mistakes can still be made—and they will be. For James and his comrades, their cost will be high indeed—both at sea against a fanatic foe, and on the home front in relations of the heart. Reminiscent of Herman Wouk's *War and Remembrance*, *The Turning Tide* fuses disparate elements into a masterpiece of historical fiction. It is a riveting account of some of the US military's most iconic battles, from the Leyte Gulf to Iwo Jima, and on to Okinawa and the dropping of the atomic bomb. It is also a meditation on command. But what distinguishes this lyrical novel is its power to capture the forces at work on those caught in the whirlwind of war: their courage, fear, and loyalty to friend and country in contrast to the pettiness of vanity and personal ambition.



9 - *Across the Black Water*

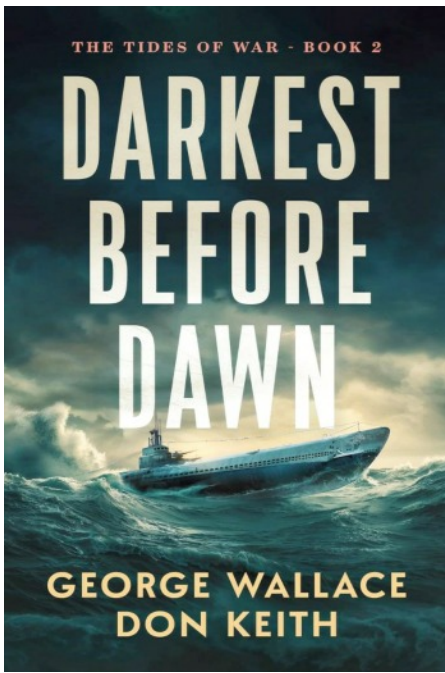
by John J. Gobbell

Seyvern River, Paperback / e-book

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December 1, 2026

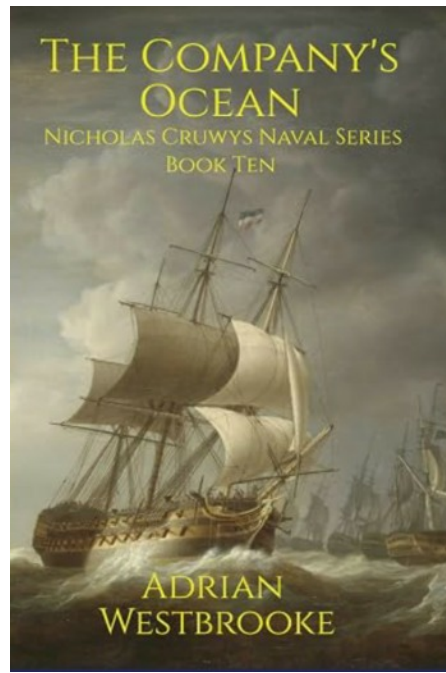
Lieutenant Commander Noah Ingram, grandson of the legendary Todd Ingram, commands a P-3 Orion patrol bomber hunting submarines across the South China Sea. When he discovers a secret Russian submarine hidden aboard a Chinese cargo ship, enemy fighters blow his aircraft from the sky. Dragged to a mainland prison and facing brutal interrogation, Noah's only escape is a desperate gamble: steal a fully fueled World War II P-51 Mustang and fly seven hundred miles across hostile ocean toward freedom. Half a world away, the woman Noah loves harbors a deadly secret. Marika Dráva—nightclub singer and engineer—has just assassinated the Russian GRU sniper who murdered her mother during their escape from Communist Hungary. Now Kapitán Pyotr Sokolov, a disgraced military intelligence officer, has traced the killing back to Marika through a single spent cartridge. As he closes in for the kill, Chinese operative Charlie Wu hunts Noah across the Pacific.



2 - *Darkest Before Dawn*

by George Wallace and Don Keith
Severn River, Paperback / e-book
\$25.99 / \$5.99
Available Now

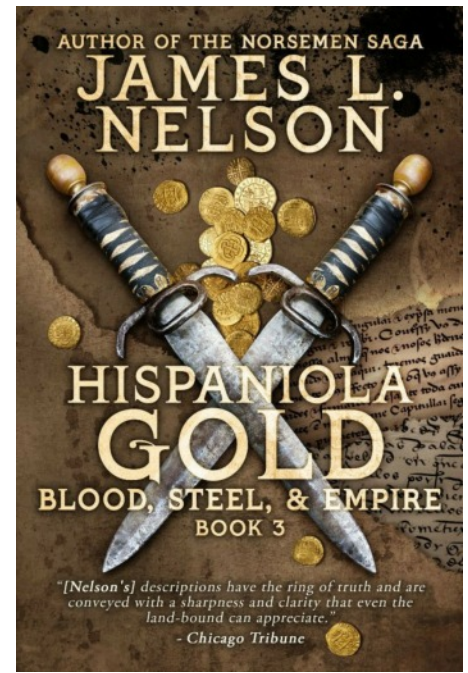
December 7, 1941. Pearl Harbor lies in ruins, the US Pacific Fleet is crippled, and Japan sweeps unopposed across the Pacific. America, no longer able to stand aside, rests its hope on rust-covered submarines manned by young, untested officers and crew. Four friends, newly commissioned from the US Naval Academy, are thrust into the heart of the conflict. Alistair, a rich, entitled playboy, becomes a reluctant leader after his boat is sunk. Stranded on a remote tropical island, he and his crew wage a desperate guerrilla war against overwhelming odds. Stan, sidelined by a devastating injury, is pulled into the depths of naval intelligence. With cunning and perseverance, he struggles to unravel the Japanese naval code JP-25 and feed the vital knowledge to the sailors while staying one step ahead of the onrushing Japanese Army. Meanwhile, Fred and Brad fight the war onboard America's latest submarines, pioneering deadly tactics beneath the waves to halt the enemy advance and rewrite the rules of warfare. Amidst the brutal reality of naval combat, these young sailors must overcome impossible odds.



10 - *The Company's Ocean*

by Adrian Westbrooke
Independent, Hardback / Paperback / e-book
\$27.00 / \$21.00 / \$9.00
Available Now

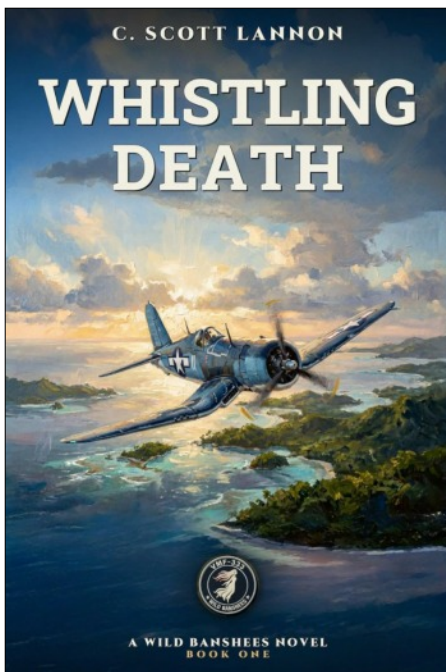
In the year 1794, an East Indiaman is taken in the Strait of Sunda by French warships that knew her name, and knew exactly where to wait. The war of the French Revolution has reached the farthest ocean. Fresh from the Glorious First of June, Captain Nicholas Cruwys of the Royal Navy and the frigate Topaze are ordered east—to waters he last sailed as a young officer bound for Canton, a decade and a war ago. The harbours are the ones he remembers. Nothing else is. For this is the Company's ocean now: the East India Company, a power greater than most kingdoms, with its own armies, its own courts, its own justice. Somewhere inside its vast machinery, something rotten enough to feed French cruisers that are never quite where chance alone would put them. From Bombay to Madras to the coasts beyond, Nicholas must fight the King's war in an ocean where the King's writ runs thin, with the woman he loves and a daughter he has never seen half the world astern in Lisbon.



3 - *Hispaniola Gold*

by James L. Nelson
Fore Topsail Press, Paperback / e-book
\$14.99 / \$4.99
Available Now

Pushed out of Hispaniola, driven from the island of Tortuga, Jean-Baptiste LeBoeuf and the buccaneers under his command find a new home on the north coast of Cuba. There, LeBoeuf and his men turn to the work they do best, the work that most satisfies their need for vengeance: plundering the Spanish. But with his wealth and his fame increasing, the massive, enigmatic buccaneer is a threat that cannot be ignored by those who hope to maintain Spain's grip on the New World. And no one has more reason to hate and fear LeBoeuf than Don Alonso Menéndez. Having nearly been killed by LeBoeuf, Alonso now finds both his livelihood and his marriage under threat. Desperate for a solution to his mounting problems, he turns to Hendrick van Lauwersoog, LeBoeuf's former shipmate, a man as eager as Alonso to see LeBoeuf dead. Catching LeBoeuf and his men at their most vulnerable, Van Lauwersoog's bold attack sets off a desperate race between death and a fortune in Hispaniola gold.



1 - *Whistling Death*

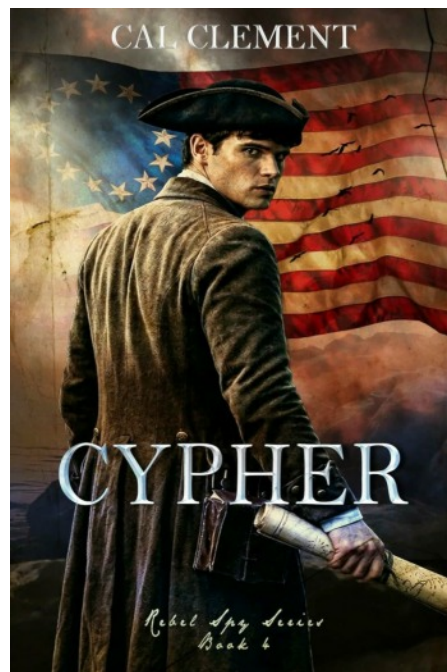
by C. Scott Lannon

ProfitLab-AI, Paperback / e-book

\$16.49 / \$5.99

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Solomon Islands, February 1943. Major Declan' Mick' Corrigan takes command of a squadron of Marine Corps orphans nobody else wanted, a handful of borrowed Corsairs, and a dirt strip carved out of a coconut grove. Professionals fly the Japanese Zeros. Kids fly the Corsair missions. And Corrigan, who still carries the names of two students he lost in a training accident at Jacksonville, has promised himself he will bring every man on his roster home. Then the incidents begin. A woman's voice on an empty frequency at 20,000 feet. The scent of turf smoke and wild roses in a sealed cockpit. A line chief who traces twenty-seven bullet holes on a fuselage, finds none of them in a critical system, and writes in his ledger: That ain't right. The flight surgeon has explanations for all of it: combat stress, hypoxia, atabrine, exhaustion. The explanations keep working. They keep working until the night a captured Japanese pilot describes a shadow in his rearview mirror in words an American pilot used on a different frequency a week earlier.



4 - *Cypher*

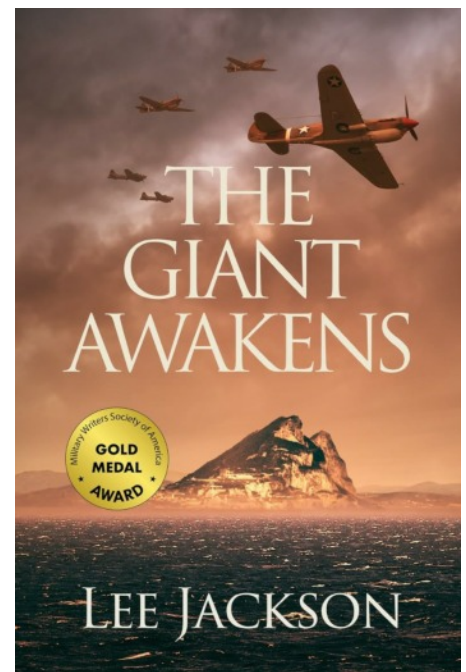
by Cal Clement

Independent, Paperback / e-book

\$14.99 / \$4.99

December 2, 2026

When the night is quiet enough, secrets make the loudest noise. A covert operative staggers into the dark with an encoded message meant only for Ian Blackwell. Before Ian can break the first symbol, the man dies from a poison that works fast and leaves nothing behind. The message becomes a countdown. British agents close in. A traitor hides in plain sight. Every second Ian spends cracking the code pulls him closer to a plot that could gut the Revolution from the inside. The operative carried a warning. The cipher holds the truth. Ian Blackwell has one chance to stop what's coming.



4 - *The Giant Awakens*

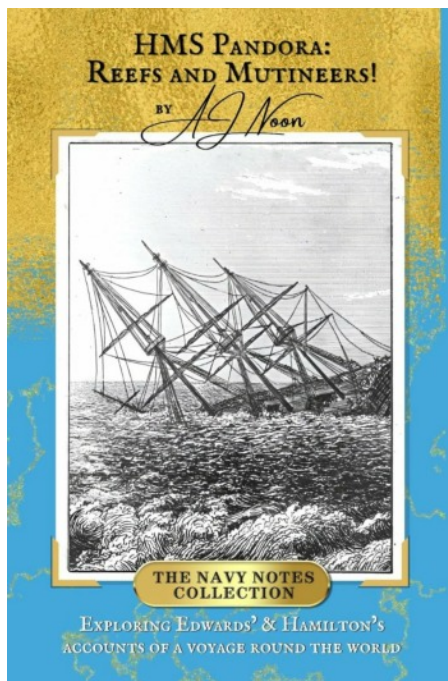
by Lee Jackson

Severn River, Paperback / e-book

\$19.99 / \$9.99

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Japan has just attacked Pearl Harbor. In London, Prime Minister Churchill disappears. In Washington, President Roosevelt faces an alliance with conflicting objectives. In the Soviet Union, dictator Joseph Stalin watches a Nazi onslaught maul his country. From their isolated perch on Sark Island, feudal rulers Dame Marian Littlefield and her husband oppose their German occupiers in the only way left to them—through a battle of wits. They wonder about the location and well-being of their offspring, Paul, Claire, Lance, and Jeremy. Meanwhile, Paul engages in intelligence operations in Manhattan and Washington, DC. Claire works with Americans decoding enemy messages. Lance conspires to escape with other POWs at Oflag IV-C within the walls of Colditz Castle. Jeremy leaves his heart with Amélie in France to join the British commandos for the greatest raid in history. And in Moscow, the Russian winter has just set in.

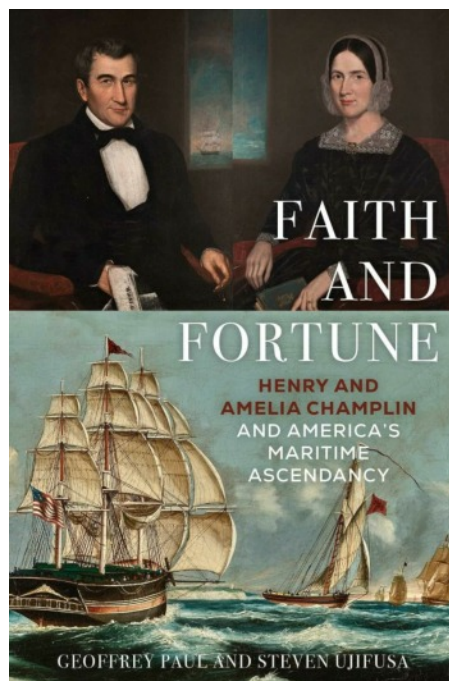


HMS Pandora: Reefs and Mutineers!

by AJ Noon

Redvark Publishing, Paperback / e-book
\$12.75 / \$10.00
Available Now

When Captain Bligh arrived back in England in 1790, after the events onboard the *Bounty* the previous year, the Admiralty decided to do something about the mutineers. They sent *HMS Pandora*, under the command of Captain Edward Edwards, to the South Seas to track them down and bring them back to face justice. What happened on *Pandora's* voyage is almost as remarkable as that of the original mutiny, with *Pandora* striking a reef, causing the ship to sink, and the surviving crew—and some of the original mutineers—setting sail in two boats, almost replicating the journey taken by Bligh to reach safety. The enclosed accounts, by Captain Edwards and the ship's surgeon George Hamilton, give their take on the events and their quest to survive, and have been annotated, indexed, and enhanced by contemporary material of the time. This is the fourth book in the Navy Notes "Blue Series," which are accounts from the period, with Captain Bligh's account of the mutiny on the *Bounty* the third book in the series.



Faith and Fortune

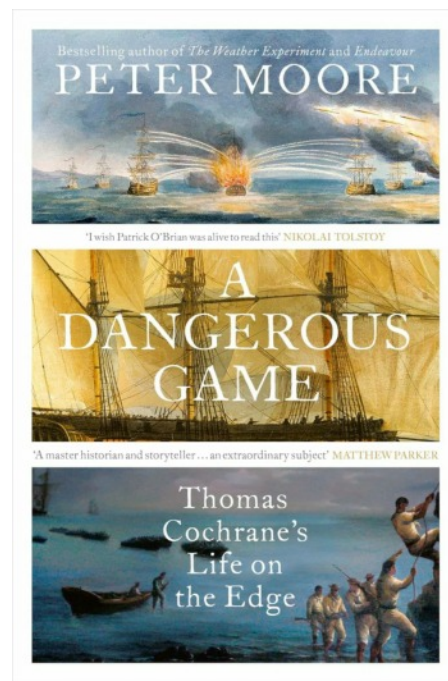
by Geoffrey Paul and Steven Ujifusa

Lyons Press, Hardback / e-book

\$45.00 / \$29.99

November 17, 2026

Faith and Fortune is a history of the United States of America between 1780 and 1880. Using the love story of Captain Henry Champlin and his wife Amelia as the narrative vehicle, this book illuminates a remarkable yet forgotten story of the transatlantic packet ships that sailed between New York and London transporting raw cotton, finished textiles, mail, artwork, bills of exchange, and gold bullion in their holds; and immigrants and wealthy travelers in their passenger quarters. The narrative begins with the births of Henry and Amelia Champlin in the Connecticut shipbuilding town of Pettipaug (renamed Essex in 1823). It continues through the War of 1812, the construction and vast economic impact of the Erie Canal, the establishment of regularly-scheduled shipping service between New York and Great Britain, the Champlins' family life in Essex and New York, the development of the transatlantic steamship, the turmoil of Civil War, and the decline of the American merchant marine (and seafaring families like the Champlins) during the Gilded Age.



A Dangerous Game

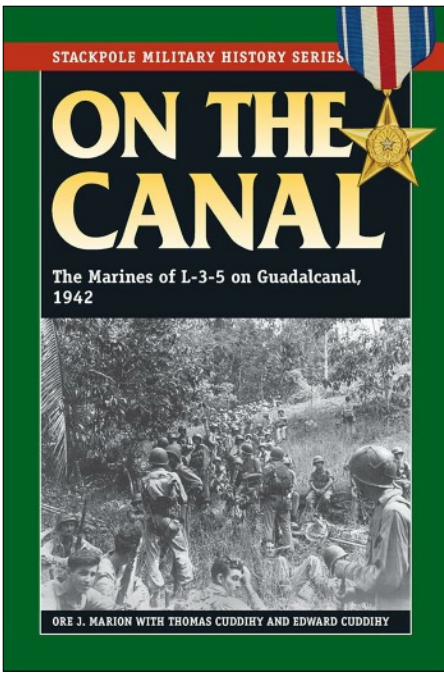
by Peter Moore

Chatto & Windus, Hardback / e-book

\$31.88 / \$23.00

Available Now

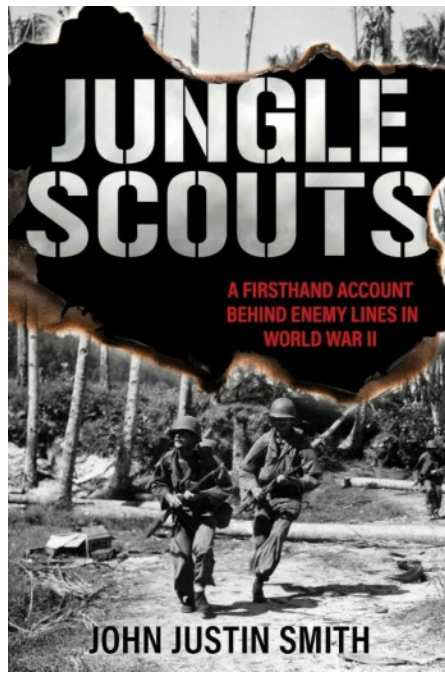
The astonishing true story of Thomas Cochrane—naval hero, political radical and inspiration for Patrick O'Brian's Jack Aubrey—whose audacity at sea, scandals on land and battles across empires make for a tale as thrilling as any novel. Cochrane's life was even more remarkable than the fiction it inspired. A hero of the Napoleonic Wars, known for destroying the French Atlantic fleet in one explosive attack, he was an equally aggressive force in British politics as the radical MP for Westminster. Cochrane's fortunes turned in 1814, when he was convicted of a fraud on the Stock Exchange. After escaping from prison, he later reinvented himself as a revolutionary admiral, helping the Chileans, Peruvians, Brazilians and Greeks in their struggles for independence. In *A Dangerous Game*, the *Sunday Times* best selling historian Peter Moore draws on newly uncovered materials to bring Cochrane vividly to life. Bold, rebellious and uncompromising, he saw the world as a contest to be won—at sea, in politics, even in scandal—and played it more dangerously than any man of his era.



On the Canal

by Ore J. Marion and Edward Cuddihy
Stackpole Books, Paperback / e-book
\$25.95 / \$18.99
Available Now

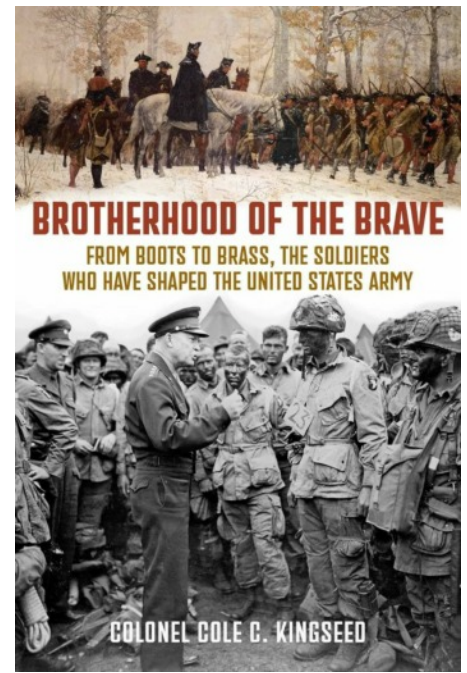
A gripping true story of the WWII Guadalcanal Campaign—told with no-holds-barred honesty and humor by a Marine who was there. In August of 1942, Allied forces led by US Marines came ashore on Guadalcanal, launching the first major land offensive against Imperial Japan. M. Sgt. Ore J. Marion of L Company, 3rd Battalion, 5th Regiment was among them. Here, Marion and other men of L-3-5 share a personal account of their experiences over the course of this grueling and protracted campaign. The stories contained in these pages are harrowing, profane, heartbreaking, irreverent, and deeply human. As with many personal accounts, some memories recorded here are at odds with the official accounts in Washington's archives. Rather than presenting a clean and consistent narrative, *On the Canal* reflects the messy business of warfare and human memory.



Jungle Scouts

by John Justin Smith
Stackpole Books, Paperback / e-book
\$21.95 / \$15.99
November 3, 2026

They were a platoon of misfits—and proud of it, rebellious young men who bristled at military authority, who had a chip on their shoulder and something to prove. Among them were a Chicago cop, a Los Angeles milkman, a Pennsylvania coal miner—and a budding reporter, John Justin Smith, who joined them in a handpicked US Army Intelligence & Reconnaissance Platoon that acted as their regiment's eyes and ears in the jungles of New Guinea in World War II. They didn't always get along, but they got the job done. In this vivid, punchy memoir, Smith remembers the campaign for New Guinea—one of World War II's longest and most brutal—as experienced by this unit of free spirits and malcontents who rejected army discipline and just wanted to have a go at the Japanese. Recruited for their unmilitary demeanor and trained in commando-style warfare, Smith and his brothers-in-arms were infantry scouts—isolated and alone—out in front of the main body of American forces. In the unforgiving jungles of New Guinea, they lived in slime and squalor and often lacked food, proper clothing, and medical care.



Brotherhood of the Brave

by Colonel Cole C. Kingseed
Stackpole Books, Paperback / e-book
\$25.95 / \$18.99
Available Now

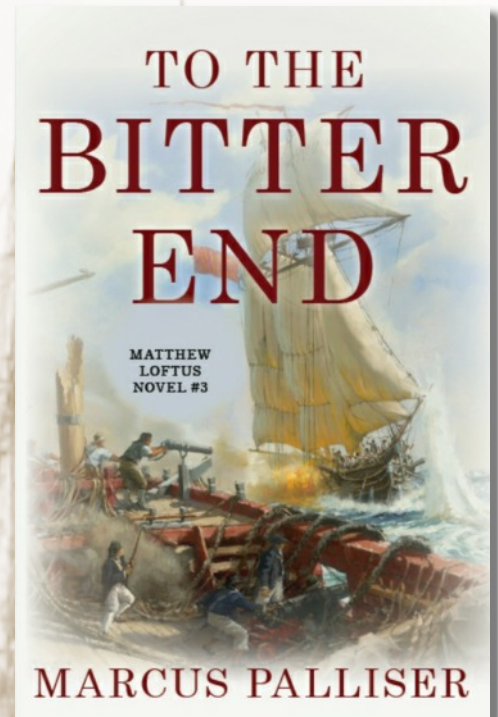
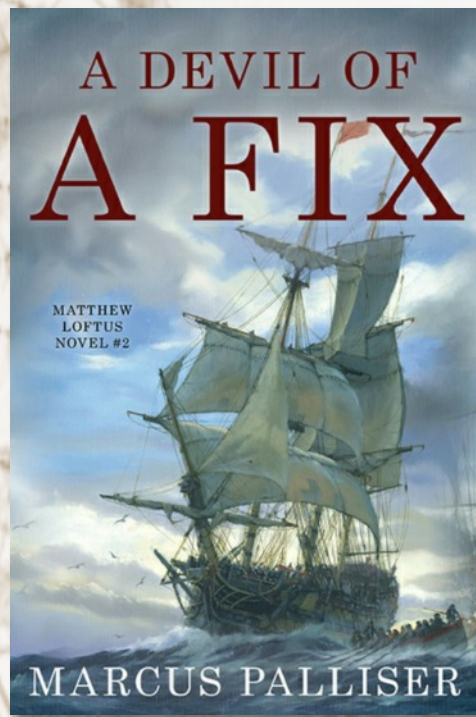
In these colorful, insightful profiles, Colonel Cole Kingseed, former chief of military history at West Point, tells the stirring history of the US Army through the soldiers, who have fought, led, bled, and died for their country since 1775.

Highlights include:

- Washington and the strategy that won the Revolutionary War;
- Alexander Hamilton's indispensable role as aide to Washington;
- Grant's against-the-odds emergence as Union general-in-chief;
- Pershing and the Doughboys in France during World War I;
- Patton's three-year tour in Hawaii;
- Eisenhower and MacArthur in the Philippines;
- Eisenhower's greatest decisions of World War II;
- George Marshall and his knack for finding leaders;
- The 2nd Ranger Battalion on D-Day;
- Vernon J. Baker, among the first African-Americans awarded the Medal of Honor;
- Hal Moore and the Battle of Ia Drang of *We Were Soldiers Once* fame.

Matthew Loftus Novels

BY MARCUS PALLISER

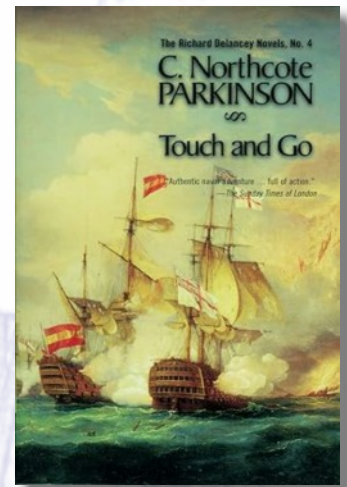
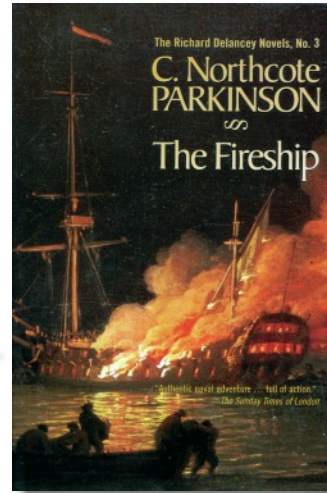
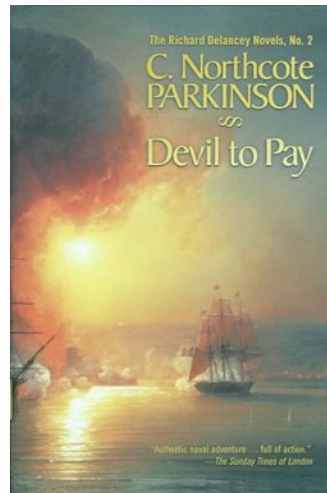
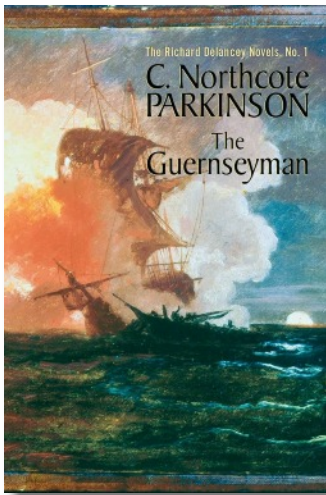


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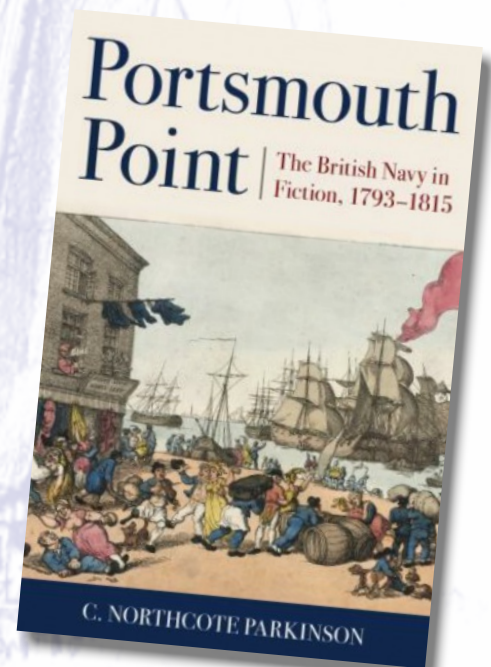
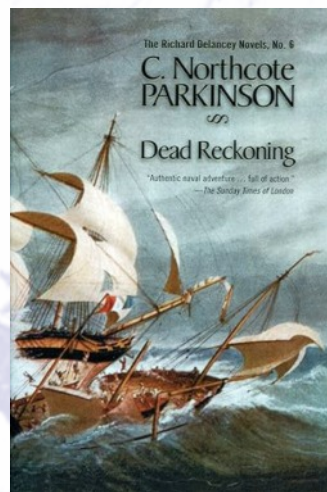
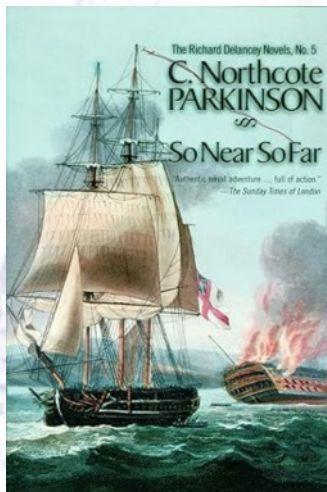


RICHARD DELANCEY NOVELS

BY C. Northcote Parkinson

“Most fictional heroes of the Napoleonic Wars at sea are as wooden as their ships, a generalisation from which Patrick O'Brian's Jack Aubrey and Professor Parkinson's Richard Delancey can be exempted.”

—THE OBSERVER



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