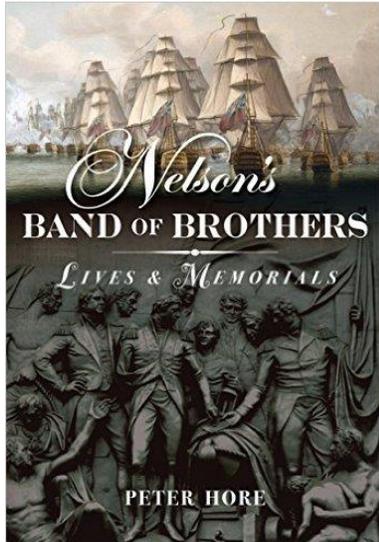


Napoleon Series Reviews

Hore, Peter (ed.) *Nelson's Band of Brothers: Lives & Memorials*. Barnsley (UK): Seaforth, 2015. 207 pages. ISBN# 978184832779-5 £25 / \$50



Much has already been written about Admiral Horatio Nelson and the Royal Navy of the Napoleonic Era. I have a few books on it, mostly about the famous battles and the ships. So when I received a copy of *Nelson's Band of Brothers* I was happy to see it was about the officers who commanded those ships and not just a recap of Nelson's battles and campaigns. It is a biographical dictionary and instead of covering all the famous admirals and captains of the era, it focuses on the 79 captains who commanded ship under Nelson at his three most important battles: the Nile, Copenhagen, and Trafalgar.

The book has a unique organization. Unlike most biographical dictionaries, which have the individuals listed in alphabetical order, *Nelson's Band of Brothers* entries are grouped by the battle in which they commanded under Nelson. Each section begins with a brief overview of the major events of the battle. Then it begins with the biographical entries. Each entry was written by a different individual, some of whom have spent many years studying their topic, while at least one author was a distant relative. Some of the captains' names will be familiar, such as Thomas Hardy, Edward Codrington, Cuthbert Collingwood, James de Saumarez, and Israel Pellew. Yet at least one name surprised me. . . William Bligh of the Mutiny on the *Bounty* fame.

I have read many of the great novels about the Royal Navy of the era, such as C. S. Forester's *Hornblower*, Alexander Kent's *Bolitho*, Dewey Lambdin's *Lewrie*, and Julian Stockwin's *Kydd*. So I was curious to see how similar these fictional heroes' careers were to those in *Nelson's Band of Brothers*. There were some similarities. Like their army counter-parts, many of Nelson's captains were from the middle class and not from the nobility. Not surprisingly, a good number came from naval families. Although some had relatives or family friends that took an interest in their advancement, many climbed the ranks on their own merit. Some rose quickly, but most did not; while others would wait years for promotion. Some started as seamen, but all were midshipmen before they were commissioned. Most were teenagers when they became midshipmen and regardless of their skill or connections, all had at least six years sea experience before they were commissioned.

Yet despite their origins, as Peter Hore wrote in the introduction "They formed an elite, so much so that when Lord Barham, First Lord of the Admiralty in 1805, invited Nelson

to choose his captains, Nelson is alleged to have replied, "Choose yourself, my lord. The same spirit actuates the whole profession; you cannot choose wrong."¹

Nelson's Band of Brothers closes with two "appendices". The first is "North Americans in Nelson's Navy". The editor examines the Ayshford Trafalgar Roll and discovered a large number of Americans who fought alongside their British cousins. Given that impressment of American sailors was one of the causes of the War of 1812, a large number of those who fought in the battle were volunteers! The editor also looks at the Canadians, who served. The second is "The Class of Captains". During World War II, the United States built the *Captain* Class of frigates for the British under the Lend Lease Act. The original plan was to name the ships after captains who served under Nelson at Trafalgar, but this was scraped when more ships were built than captains who fought there. So the names included captains who fought with him at Copenhagen and the Nile, plus other famous naval battles from the Napoleonic and Seven Years Wars. In an effort to avoid alienating the Americans, the British did not name any ships after captains who fought in the American Revolution! One ship was quickly renamed when someone realized that the HMS *Cockburn* was named for the man who burned the White House in 1814!

Nelson's Band of Brothers is well organized and each of the biographical entries contains an overview of the captain's career, with information on each ship he served on and the battles he fought in. It also provides information on the role he and his ship had under Nelson. It is lavishly illustrated with many color images of the captains and their ships in those battles. The subtitle of the book is *Lives & Memorials*. This is not a misnomer, for there are numerous color photographs of the captains' graves and memorials that were built in their honor by a grateful nation,

Nelson's Band of Brothers a very useful reference for those who study the Napoleonic History. Although its main appeal will be to those who focus on the Royal Navy during the era, those who are interested in the campaigns and battles of the British Army will turn to it frequently. For after Trafalgar, many of the captains in the book went on to support British military operations in the Mediterranean and the Baltic, the Low Countries, and the Peninsular War. And of course, their names would crop up again in the War of 1812.

Reviewed by [Robert Burnham](#)

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