



British Naval Captains  
*of the Seven Years' War*

*The View from the Quarterdeck*

A. B. M<sup>C</sup>LEOD

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A.B. McLeod

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To Magnus,  
who endowed me with so much more  
than his interesting ancestors



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## *Abbreviations*

NMM	National Maritime Museum
<i>R&amp;I</i>	<i>Regulations and Instructions</i>
SNR	Society for Nautical Research

## Introduction

The Seven Years' War was fought on four continents. There were few set-piece naval battles, but the Navy's ability to impose itself and deliver the waterborne transport of men and supplies abroad and far inland both in Germany and North America was decisive. The outcome of the war was determined by Britain's superiority on water.

*British Naval Captains of the Seven Years' War* explores the operation of the Navy during the Seven Years' War through the correspondence with the Admiralty of a sample of captains. Thirty-six men, referred to hereafter as 'the cohort', were made post captains in 1757 during the expansion of the Navy for the war and their names and careers are summarised in the Appendix.<sup>1</sup> These men constituted about 16 per cent of the active captains in the Navy in 1757.<sup>2</sup> Although they had achieved independent command in sloops at the rank of master and commander, being 'made post' signalled the transition to 'rated' ships of at least twenty guns.<sup>3</sup> This study examines the working relationship between the Admiralty and the captains in the cohort, and particularly those holding commissions affording them independent commands. In addition the

<sup>1</sup> John Charnock, *Biographia Navalis: or Impartial Memoirs of the Lives and Characters of Officers of the Navy of Great Britain from the Year 1660 to the Present Time*, 6 vols (R. Faulder 1798, facsimile repr. N&M Press 2002). ADM 6/15–22 Commissions and Warrants Books 1735–82; David Syrett, ed., *The Commissioned Sea Officers of the Royal Navy 1660–1815* (Navy Records Society 1994). Syrett's mammoth study has to be used with caution as some names, such as that of William Tucker posted in 1757, have been omitted altogether, some spelled differently, with some inaccurate dates; Charles Consolvo, 'A Career in the Royal Navy in the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars: Progress, Promotion and Interest. Based on a Sample of Officers.' Unpublished MA dissertation, Greenwich Maritime Institute 2003. Syrett was used as a source by N.A.M. Rodger in his study of commissioned officers' careers, and he lists the caveats necessary early in the century when information was not consistently gathered or recorded: N.A.M. Rodger, 'Commissioned Sea Officers' Careers in the Royal Navy, 1690–1815', *e-Journal for Maritime Research* (NMM June 2001).

<sup>2</sup> Using Glete's figures for the size of the British fleet in 1755 and 1760, an average figure for 1757 gives approximately 220 vessels needing captains, 16 per cent of whom were members of the cohort. Jan Glete, *Navies and Nations: Warships, Navies and State Building in Europe and America 1500–1860* (Almqvist & Wiksell International 1993), Vol. 1, 268.

<sup>3</sup> The smallest of which were 6th or 5th rate frigates, but which increased in importance up to the 1st rates of 100 guns.

study compares the careers of the men in the cohort, as each of them had ostensibly the same opportunities of professional advancement resulting from the war.<sup>4</sup>

The study is founded on The National Archives series ADM 1, Captains' Letters, which contains every letter written to the Admiralty by captains during the eighteenth century once they achieved independent command until their death or retirement from the service. This correspondence comprised 2,312 letters from the thirty-six men in the cohort during the eight years between 1756 and 1763, and when quoted they are referred to by name and date. The Secretary, to whom all correspondence was addressed during the Seven Years' War, was the very experienced John Cleveland, who had been in post since 1751 and was succeeded by Philip Stephens in 1762. The captains' letters carry the Secretary's response, or for the most important letters that of the Lords Commissioners, on the 'turn-back', the reverse of the lower right-hand corner of the page. These scribbled notes provided the basis for the resulting replies written by the clerks and any associated investigation or correspondence with the subordinate Boards. The full copies of the Lords' correspondence with captains are held in the series ADM2 and these records were drawn on when necessary.

Baugh's history, *The Global Seven Years War 1754–1763*, is essential reading, dealing systematically and chronologically with all the military and naval actions, and with the politics on both British and French sides.<sup>5</sup> Baugh's writing has lifted the burden of recounting the events and the politics of the Seven Years' War from this volume, which limits its perspective to that of the cohort.<sup>6</sup>

The initial engagements of the war took place as early as 1754 in North America where the French attacked British trading posts. George II was persuaded by his son, the bellicose Duke of Cumberland, to take the attacks seriously, and naval belligerence began in 1755 when Admiral Boscawen failed to destroy a French squadron in the St Lawrence which was re-supplying French forces in North America. The French did not respond by declaring war for another year, preoccupied as they were with diplomacy in Europe and

<sup>4</sup> The preliminary work for this study followed from the author's chance discovery that her husband's seven-times great grandfather was Captain Thomas Burnett RN, about whom nothing more was known. It resulted in a PhD thesis. The frequency with which his name will be encountered in the following pages is a measure of the material available in The National Archives.

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Baugh, *The Global Seven Years War 1754–1763* (Pearson 2011).

<sup>6</sup> The administrative systems of the Admiralty and the Navy Board in the age of Walpole have also been described by Baugh although he did not use the captains' letters of his period. Daniel Baugh, *British Naval Administration in the Age of Walpole* (Princeton University Press 1965), 535.

the shifting balance of power between France, Prussia, Austria and Russia. To entice Spain to enter the war France offered to capture Minorca and cede it to Spain. The unfortunate Admiral Byng was not in time to prevent the French landing or to reinforce the British garrison and was eventually executed for his lack of aggression against the French fleet a year earlier. It is possible that the only lasting effect on the Navy of the political manoeuvres of the war was the outcome of the Byng trial.

Despite being at war since 18 May 1756, the British government did not survive the public outcry at the loss of Minorca. The Duke of Newcastle resigned, and with him the Lord Chancellor the Earl of Hardwicke, Lord Anson's father-in-law, and of course the First Lord Anson himself. Pitt came in unfettered by previous alliances and, with parliamentary support, immediately raised the necessary money to focus on fighting the French in America. This did not satisfy the Duke of Cumberland and Pitt was dismissed on 5 April 1757. For three months there was effectively no government at all, but on 29 June Pitt returned as Secretary of State, together with Newcastle as First Lord of the Treasury and Anson as First Lord of the Admiralty. Pitt set about counteracting the depressing news of another naval failure at Louisburg and poor leadership of the army in North America by Cumberland's appointee, Lord Loudoun. The abortive British attack on the French coast at Rochefort was never more than a diversion, but it reassured the Prussians.

Good news came in 1758 from successes in India. The new ships ordered in 1755 began to be commissioned. Strong naval protection for trade convoys ensured continued financial support for the government, while the French finances, starved of tax revenue, began to run out. Loudoun was replaced by Sir John Ligonier who in turn appointed Jeffrey Amherst. Louisburg now fell to a strong combined amphibious force. The sugar colonies Guadeloupe and Marie Galante, captured in January 1759, were valuable bargaining counters. A magnificent naval enterprise enabled the capture of Quebec. The close inshore naval blockade of Brest foiled the French attempt to undermine English confidence by landing troops in Scotland to support a Jacobite rebellion, in southern England to destroy Portsmouth and in Ireland to foment unrest. The French fleet at Toulon was defeated at Lagos, and that at Brest was destroyed or bottled up after the battle of Quiberon Bay.

Bankrupted by being cut off from their income from trade and with huge military commitments in Europe, the French needed peace. Mediation through the new king in Spain failed. When George II died, his 22-year-old grandson and his supporters, in particular his tutor, Lord Bute, began to negotiate a peace agreement on extremely favourable terms. George III was able to purge the government of all those who had held positions of power before his accession, with Pitt being forced to resign in October 1761 and Newcastle in May 1762.

The taking of Belle Isle underlined Britain's ability to go on fighting on sea and land, and further weakened the naval position of the French. In 1762 France succeeded in persuading Spain to declare war on Britain and attack Portugal. Britain went to Portugal's aid and the Spanish fortresses of Havana and Manila were captured.

Throughout the political turmoil of these years, naval activity was the key to Britain's successes. The earls of Temple (1756) and Winchelsea (1757) briefly held the position of First Lord, but once Lord Anson returned to the Admiralty, the changes in government were not reflected in changes in Lords Commissioners until 1762 when Anson died.<sup>7</sup>

The cohort includes a wide range of experiences. For example, there is not one letter signed by Shurmur, who was invalided home from the West Indies in 1757. Rewarded for his service there with promotion to post captain, Shurmur never served again, thus demonstrating the baleful influence of ill-health. Man was killed in action, Craig was crippled by a musket ball, and Burnett and his crew only avoided being drowned by the most extraordinary good luck. Some captains such as Elliot, Harrison, Hotham and Kennedy were fortunate in making the most of the opportunity they were granted of some years of independent command in a frigate, with the chance to win large sums in prize money and bring themselves to the attention of the Lords. Other captains were less fortunate; Burnett, Cornewall, Kempenfelt and Peyton were promoted from sloops to flag ships. They were therefore denied independent commands and direct correspondence with the Admiralty. Just as their Lordships lost sight of those who were flag captains, in due course they lost sight of those who joined a fleet unless the Commander-in-Chief on their station thought highly enough of their actions or of the 'interest' they enjoyed to report them. Hence, for some captains, a return from stations such as Gibraltar or New York explained the absence of letters for months or years.<sup>8</sup> The Half Pay books also revealed any periods during the war when the captains were out of commission.

Each of the 2,312 captains' letters was photographed, transcribed and analysed, initially by being coded with one or more 'keywords' related to

<sup>7</sup> From 26 September 1757 until 19 March 1761 the Commissioners were: Lord Anson, the Hon. Edward Boscawen, George Hay, Thomas Orby Hunter, Gilbert Elliot, the Hon. John Forbes and Hans Stanley. J.C. Sainty, compiler, *Admiralty Officers 1660-1870* (Institute of Historical Research 1975), 81-141.

<sup>8</sup> A study of the logs of each ship revealed the exact location and actions of individual captains, material that fell outside the scope of this book. Letters written by the Commanders-in-Chief from various stations were checked for information about the individuals who disappeared from the Admiralty's correspondence, with almost universally disappointing results. The Commissions and Warrant Books were consulted for the professional progress of the men themselves and the officers mentioned in their letters.

the issues raised. These issues were subsequently grouped into the themes that determined the content of Chapters 1 to 5. The main editorial selection consisted of choosing the spokesman on each issue raised. Many were written in the 'clerkly hand', the beautiful, curlicued script required of a secretary. Despite the formality of their superficially formulaic and repetitive correspondence, when dozens of letters on the same subject were compared, differences in tone and intention were clearly distinguished, allowing individual voices to emerge with great clarity. Where possible the captains' words are echoed in this text, for example in the use or omission of the definite article before ships' names.

Chapter 1 summarises the available evidence on the cohort's first years at sea in terms of the influences and 'interest' present at the outset of their careers, and their route to promotion to the rank of post captain. Chapters 2 and 3 highlight the many practical issues and challenges facing the post captains, relating to their responsibilities for the 'people' and the ships to which they were commissioned. The cohort's experiences at sea are explored in Chapter 4: the circumstances of the war which provided them with opportunities for professional achievement and personal reward, and some of the reasons why some captains were more successful than others. Chapter 5 focuses on the relationship between the captains and the Admiralty. Some of the available material relevant to the rest of their subsequent careers after the war, in a few instances to the end of the century and beyond, is presented in Chapter 6. Conclusions are summarised in Chapter 7.

The correspondence of the cohort of captains with the Admiralty during the Seven Years' War reveals the extent to which successful captains had to excel across a range of domains, from mastering the very considerable administrative burdens associated with recruiting their crews and attending to their subsequent welfare, and equipping their ships and maintaining their seaworthiness for prolonged periods, to maximising their command's fighting capability by demonstrating both seamanship and personal bravery in action. The captains' abilities across these diverse spheres are clearly discernible in their correspondence with the Admiralty.

Following the execution of Byng, the captains would have been ever conscious of their having to be seen to be aggressive in their actions. Above all, however, the captains had to comply precisely with the detailed official *Regulations* on each aspect of their responsibilities in order to maintain their reputation and remuneration, or gain their Lordships' explicit approval for any apparent transgression.<sup>9</sup> The picture that emerges is one of close control

<sup>9</sup> *Regulations and Instructions relating to his Majesty's Service at Sea*, issued by the Admiralty throughout the century to all captains and printed as needed, and hereafter

of the captains by the Admiralty, despite the very considerable independence and responsibilities afforded the captains when holding commissions.

Until Rodger's *The Wooden World*, the ground-breaking social study of the mid-eighteenth-century Navy, there was little in print about the captains' perspective during the Seven Years' War.<sup>10</sup> By focusing on the issues raised in the cohort's correspondence, this study adds weight to much evidence found in *The Wooden World*, while differing from it in certain respects, such as the nature of the control exerted by the Admiralty over the captains. This study is limited to a sample of post captains who were embarking on their careers in positions of command at the beginning of the war. Twenty years later as senior captains they described different experiences, but their concerns are shown to be generic and shared by their peers.<sup>11</sup>

At times fragmentary clues in the letters forced research elsewhere for elucidation.<sup>12</sup> In addition to the Captains' Letters, The National Archives contain other relevant records, such as letters written to the Victualling Board or the Sick and Hurt Board, which have not been used although they are rich sources of information. Similarly, there was not space in this study to systematically establish the financial rewards of the captains' prize taking discussed in Chapter 4.

The letters provided many insights into the day-to-day concerns of captains, who were not responsible for political decisions, but were held accountable for the way in which such decisions played out on the oceans. After reading the cohort's correspondence, the modern historian has the same information

referred to as *R&I*. An image of the entire book is available online, through Google's most praiseworthy generosity and desire to propagate knowledge.

<sup>10</sup> The contemporary historian Charnock gave the names and a short biography of all post captains. Charnock, *Biographia Navalis*. Beatson's contemporary history mentioned some of them. Beatson wrote to the Admiralty for information. His letters were catalogued in ADM 1/5118/21 but have since disappeared. Robert Beatson, *Naval and Military Memoirs of Great Britain from 1727 to 1783*, 6 vols (London 1804). N.A.M. Rodger, *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy* (Fontana Press 1986).

<sup>11</sup> Once the initial cohort study had been completed, a selection was taken from the seventy-nine men who were made post in each of the years immediately before and after 1757. Thirteen men, eleven of whom achieved flag rank, were chosen on the basis of their long careers, anticipating that they might add to the range of issues voiced by the initial cohort, while sharing with them the experiences of the Navy at war. When analysed, the letters written by the wider cohort confirmed the insights and conclusions derived from the initial cohort study, although the additional voices are heard where appropriate.

<sup>12</sup> Chapter 4 describes the amphibious landings, and at St Malo the one quoted sentence from Ourry was the only evidence of a notable amphibious success. Paston's role at Cherbourg was also established following one sentence in his letter.

## INTRODUCTION

about the captains' conduct as did their Lordships. Their words speak vividly across the centuries. Looking over the captains' shoulders and getting to know their personalities, their strengths and weaknesses, contributes to our understanding of how the Navy made its decisive impact on this, the first global war.



*'Interest' and Ability:  
The Route to Post Captain*

**'Young gentlemen who walk the quarterdeck'**

The professional lives of the captains of the Seven Years' War began decades earlier, when they were taken to sea as 'young gentlemen' by serving captains of rated ships to begin their time at sea. Taking to sea the son of a gentleman was one link in the chain of patronage, and in some cases it is possible to discern the levers which made this first step possible. About a third of the cohort benefited from naval connections: Commodore Henry Harrison, later Admiral, took his son Thomas to sea aboard the *Mary Galley* in 1740; Henry John Phillips was taken to sea by his uncle, later Commissioner Towry; Richard Hughes was taken to sea in the *Feversham* by his father, also one of a dynasty of naval commissioners. Political patronage at the highest level ensured that John Lindsay was taken to sea: his uncle was Lord Mansfield, Attorney General and later Lord Chief Justice. Royal patronage supported John Bentinck: his grandfather had been William III's court favourite, Lord Portland. Charles Medows was heir to the Duke of Kingston. The Hon. Robert Boyle's father was the first Earl of Shannon. John Elliot began his naval career earlier than most at the age of 8 as a 'captain's servant' in the *Augusta*. His father Sir Gilbert Elliot's connections with the Duke of Argyll would have provided the 'interest' necessary to persuade Captain Hamilton to take on the boy.<sup>1</sup> Chance took the Hood brothers (13-year-old Alexander and 15-year-old Samuel) to sea. In 1741 Captain Thomas Smith had been given hospitality by the local vicar, the boys' father, when Smith's carriage broke down while he was travelling from Plymouth to London, a debt he repaid by entering them as his 'servants'.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This patronage lasted a lifetime. The Duke of Argyll asked Sandwich for a ship for John Elliot in 1772. NMM SAN/2 7.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Duffy, 'Samuel Hood, First Viscount Hood 1724–1816', in Peter Le Fevre and Richard Harding, eds, *Precursors of Nelson: British Admirals of the Eighteenth Century* (Chatham Publishing 2000), 249; Maud Wyndham, *Chronicles of the Eighteenth*

Young men like Christopher Bassett, Henry Martin and Samuel Wallis, all of whom were protégés of Admiral Boscawen, formed 'the little navy of your making'.<sup>3</sup> The web of interest and patronage extended by men such as Boscawen and Smith began when the 'young gentlemen' were taken to sea to prove themselves. Once they had shown their potential, promotion from their ships was assured.

For other men the reasons are less obvious. The 12-year-old Thomas Burnett was taken to sea in 1736 by Captain Matthew Norris in the 6th rate *Tartar*.<sup>4</sup> Their families were linked through New York, where Thomas Burnett was born, during his father's tenure as Governor. Matthew Norris was the son of Sir John Norris, already Admiral of the Fleet and Commander-in-Chief, with a long association with North America.<sup>5</sup> Appointed to the New York station, Matthew Norris had been a Freeman of the City since 1734, and was married to Euphemia Morris, daughter of Lewis Morris, Governor of New Jersey. Morris became acting Governor of New York only three years after William Burnet's death in 1728, having worked with him on the governor's council for New Jersey. It is likely that the Morris family sympathised with the plight of Governor Burnet's orphaned boys.

It was customary for a rated ship to have several young gentlemen on the books: their captains were permitted to take four 'gentlemen' for every 100 of the ship's complement. A young gentleman was expected to spend at least six years at sea, literally 'learning the ropes' and acquiring professional skills such as navigation. During this period he could be entered on the books as secretary, servant, ordinary or able seaman or midshipman, at the captain's discretion and as vacancies occurred in the ship's complement.<sup>6</sup> The reality of his position was that, still only in his teens, he was an apprentice until he had learned his craft and earned the right to his first commission. For two of

*Century*, Vol. 2 ( Hodder and Stoughton 1924), 84; Dorothy Hood, *The Admirals Hood* (Hutchinson and Co. 1942), 11–12.

<sup>3</sup> Cecil Aspinall-Oglander, *Admiral's Wife: The Life and Letters of Mrs Edward Boscawen 1719–1761* (Longmans 1940), 218.

<sup>4</sup> ADM 36/4176, *Tartar* pay book 176/7.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew Norris was made post in 1724. He succeeded his father Sir John and brother John as MP for Rye 1733–1734. Matthew Norris was elected a Freeman of New York on the grounds of his marriage there and his vehement opposition to the bill in favour of the sugar colonies. Romney Sedgwick, ed., *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1715–1754*, Vols. 1–2 (HMSO 1970), Vol. 2, 298–299.

<sup>6</sup> Baugh suggests that it was only the 'incompetent or ill-favoured boys' who were rated as servants, and that officer material was favoured with the higher rates, but this is not the case with the cohort. Baugh, *British Naval Administration*, 97; boys who really were servants were supplied from mid-century by the Marine Society. ADM 2/90, 7 April 1758.

these years he needed to be rated as midshipman or mate before being examined for his passing certificate.<sup>7</sup> During these years the young man depended on his parents for necessities such as clothes, as he was not paid until he was commissioned: the £12 a year allowance given by the Admiralty for 'servants' went to the captain.<sup>8</sup> It was also at the captain's discretion that at some stage the allowance, payable to the captain, became income to the young man instead. In addition to clothes, his parents would also have to provide an octant, for instance, so that he could practise navigation. The young Thomas Burnett was lent £200 by his uncle Sir Thomas Burnet (family members were idiosyncratic in the spelling of their name) and it is likely that this would have been spent on his clothes, equipment and subsistence when he entered the Navy, a huge sum for this period when an able seaman earned £14 a year.<sup>9</sup>

Many of the boys who had entered at 12 or 13 years of age had had little formal education.<sup>10</sup> It was possible for them to catch up on academic skills at Watt's Academy in Portsmouth, where for a few guineas they could be usefully occupied while their ship was being docked.<sup>11</sup> Not every ship with young gentlemen on board would have carried a school master, who in some cases would have had a hard task to turn boys into gentlemen who could write with style and polish.

At Pepys's instigation Charles II established in 1676 a system of 'volunteers' to encourage 'families of better quality ... to breed up their younger sons to the art and practice of navigation.'<sup>12</sup> This scheme was modified by the foundation of the Royal Naval Academy at Portsmouth in 1730. Established by the King to educate forty young gentlemen as future officers, the Academy taught mathematics and navigation as well as fencing and dancing, and it may have seemed to concerned parents that it offered a more sheltered environment in

<sup>7</sup> Rodger, *Wooden World*, 263.

<sup>8</sup> NMM ELL/400, John Elliot, letter to his father, 4 December 1745.

<sup>9</sup> There were twenty shillings in a pound, and twelve pennies in a shilling: £1 = 20s = 240d. It is not easy to arrive at a comparative value of money then and now, but one source, using the Retail Prices Index, gives comparative figures which translate £1 in 1757 into £113 in 2009, while using average earnings suggests that £1 in 1757 is worth £1,490 in 2009. Lawrence H. Officer, 'Purchasing Power of British Pounds from 1264 to Present', *MeasuringWorth*, 2011. [www.measuringworth.com/ppoweruk/](http://www.measuringworth.com/ppoweruk/). The discrepancy between these values underlines Adam Smith's conclusion that the only useful unit of value is the number of worked days which were required to earn it. Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (Penguin 1987), 291.

<sup>10</sup> The *Regulations* stipulated 13 years as the minimum age for 'young gentlemen' signing on as servants. It is likely that many boys were younger. *R&I, Of the Number of Men or Servants Allowed to Officers*, Article VI.

<sup>11</sup> NMM ELL/400, John Elliot, letter to his father, 19 July 1747.

<sup>12</sup> John Ehrman, *The Navy in the War of William III 1689–1697* (Cambridge 1953), 141.

which two years of sea time could be accumulated. Time at the Academy was calculated down to the day, with three weeks off at Christmas being the only leave allowed.<sup>13</sup> The rating of 'volunteer' did not immediately disappear. With space for only forty boys, and rarely full, during the eighteenth century the Royal Naval Academy was not seen as the essential stepping stone to a life at sea. Passing certificates show that a proportion of future officer entrants to the Navy were 'volunteers' for part of their sea time, sometimes combined with time at the Academy. The potential officer had the privilege of 'walking the quarterdeck' but was not accorded the privacy of a cabin. When the ship in which a graduate of the Academy was serving returned to Portsmouth, he had to show his journal to the mathematical master 'to represent to us how he has improved himself'.<sup>14</sup>

A few passing certificates (5/24) show service in the East India trade as well as Mediterranean and West Indian service. Later in their careers, the Half Pay books show that many commissioned officers were granted permission to take cruises in the merchant service during years of peace.

### The 'passing certificate' for lieutenant

From the time of the restoration of Charles II in 1660, Samuel Pepys and subsequent administrators of the Navy were concerned about the quality of officers. No longer commanded by army officers, the vessels of the Navy needed a professional officer class. For effective command these men needed to have the right background and aptitude, while being able to replace the competent mariners who had been the masters under the Commonwealth. Pepys was determined to create a professional officer corps in the Restoration Navy. He wanted to make the sea service attractive not only to younger sons but also to the first-born sons of gentry, hoping that they 'might esteem it for the dignity of it, no diminution to their qualities or estates', not just for a

<sup>13</sup> Paul Henry Ourry had a 'large and expensive family' of sons, and asked for a place for his son George Treby Ourry. The Hon. Robert Boyle Walsingham wrote on behalf of another applicant and once his age and religion were proved the 'usual letter' was sent. Walsingham, 7 and 28 December 1768. H.W. Dickinson, *Educating the Royal Navy* (Routledge 2007). It is of interest that the French 'garde de la marine' were on a much more professional basis: the boys were taught fencing, drawing, mathematics, fortification, hydrography, the use of navigational instruments, gunnery practice, military drill, field manoeuvres, and ship construction. F.B. Sullivan, 'The Royal Academy at Portsmouth 1729–1806', *The Mariner's Mirror* 63 (SNR 1977), 311.

<sup>14</sup> ADM 2/83, Admiralty to Hotham, 27 February 1760.

voyage or two, but would make it 'a principal (if not a necessary) step towards their advancement to the greatest offices of State and Court.'<sup>15</sup>

As part of the process of creating an officer corps, in 1677 Pepys initiated the 'passing certificate' which required the applicants to demonstrate a minimum standard of professional competence, to rid the Navy of 'volunteers, who having passed some time superficially at sea, and being related to families of interest at court, do obtain lieutenancies before they are fitted for it.'<sup>16</sup> Potential officers had to show sufficient knowledge of maritime skills, and they had to be of an appropriate age and to have had a reasonable length of sea service. In 1702, when the decision was also made that some instruction should be given before the test, a minimum age of 20 years, which prevented immature candidates, was specified and by this age the candidate was expected to show evidence of six years' sea service.<sup>17</sup> Two-thirds (24/36) of the passing certificates issued to the cohort have been found, and in them the examiners have covered themselves over the question of minimum age by using the words 'appears to be' instead of a precise age. It has been suggested that baptismal certificates had to be supplied to the Navy Board, and that this requirement was seldom waived.<sup>18</sup> However, this was apparently not a requirement that concerned the men in the cohort, and must have been brought in later in the eighteenth century. Despite the form of words, some candidates were less than 20 years old, but perhaps these were the men with most influence behind them, such as Charles Medows who took his passing certificate in 1755 at 18, or Joseph Peyton who was commissioned in 1743, also at 18. Thomas Burnett was certainly only 17 or 18 when he took his passing certificate.

The verbal examination, conducted by three captains, tested a range of necessary knowledge, amongst which was: being able to 'work a ships way by plain sailing and mercator, observe by sun or star, find the direction of the compass.'<sup>19</sup> If possible the candidates were examined at the Navy Board in London, where dockyard commissioners and retired captains or even Admirals could form the panel.<sup>20</sup> If London was out of reach and more than three ships were on station, a panel of three captains would be made up.

<sup>15</sup> J.R. Tanner, ed., *Samuel Pepys's Naval Minutes* (Navy Records Society 1926), 406.

<sup>16</sup> Baugh, *British Naval Administration*, 100.

<sup>17</sup> Dickinson, *Educating the Royal Navy*, 11.

<sup>18</sup> Baugh, *British Naval Administration*, 100.

<sup>19</sup> ADM 6/86/218, Passing Certificate Joshua Loring, 25 September 1745.

<sup>20</sup> Kennedy, 24 October 1760; ADM6/86/253, William McCleverty was examined by Anson and Saumarez; ADM 107/4/14, Thomas Taylor.

### Commissioned status

The stiff cream paper on which a commission was printed told the individual which ship he was to join, his status within the ship, and the date on which his new responsibility began. From the youngest lieutenant coming into the smallest sloop as the only lieutenant to the most senior Admiral joining a 1st rate flag ship, seniority in the Navy depended on the date of commission.

Passing the examination did not in itself result in a commission. Only if a vacancy occurred in a ship on the active list was a commission issued to fill it. The Admiralty took note of professional ability, and it was rewarded in suitable candidates as soon as an opportunity presented itself. William McCleverty had been round the world with Anson, returning as mate in *Centurion's Prize*. Anson and Saumarez must have told this young man of proven ability that they would do their best for him and McCleverty's first commission followed six days after he was examined for his passing certificate.<sup>21</sup> For the individuals in the cohort, the average wait after passing the examinations was just over two years. Some men were able to take advantage of naval battles or the outbreak of hostilities to shorten their wait to days rather than years.

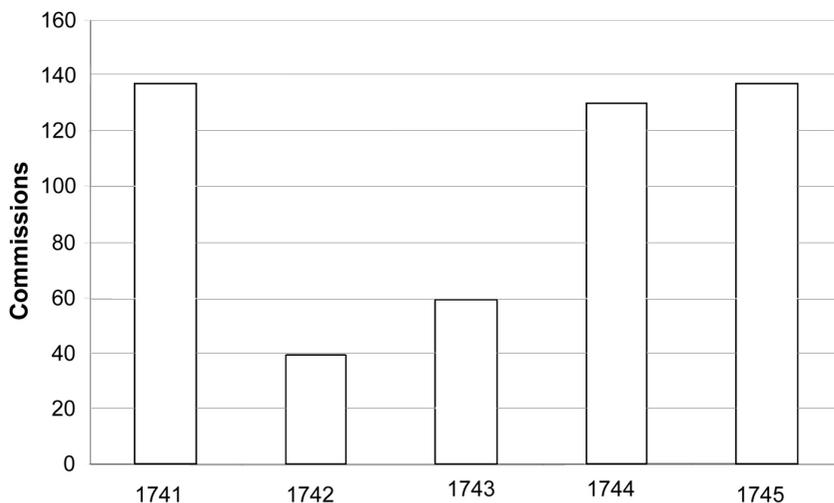


Figure 1. Lieutenants commissioned between 1741 and 1745<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> William McCleverty, Passing Certificate, 11 July 1756, ADM 6/86/253; L. 17 July 1745; Syrett, *Commissioned Sea Officers*, 288.

<sup>22</sup> Compiled from data in Syrett, *Commissioned Sea Officers*.

As shown in Figure 1, it seems that there was a close relationship between supply and demand, with more men being first commissioned close to the outbreak of the war of Austrian Succession.<sup>23</sup> Many of those first commissioned in the 1740s languished on half pay until the next mobilisation in the 1750s. Some men never made the transition to the next rank, either from lack of ability or from lack of opportunity. There were always many hopefuls waiting for promotion further up the ladder to clear a space for them at the bottom. Thursday's traditional wardroom toast was: 'A bloody war or a sickly season!'

Not even the recommendation of a near relative by a serving captain could guarantee a commission. Benjamin Marlow wrote in glowing terms about his nephew William Cragg who had his passing certificate and many years of experience at sea, but was apparently never commissioned.<sup>24</sup> Samuel Hood wrote persuasively on behalf of his family members in 1762, but John Linzee had to wait five years for his commission.<sup>25</sup> Seventeen years after his own first commission, William McCleverty sent his son up to London with Admiral Rodney's despatches in 1762. He asked the Secretary, Philip Stephens, 'to move their Lordships for an order to the Navy Board for passing his examination as he has served more than his time in the Navy if their Lordships would favour me with him as one of my lieutenants will greatly oblige me'. It was not to be. George Anson McCleverty was not commissioned until 1777, and perhaps this is evidence that the Navy Board could not be brow-beaten.<sup>26</sup>

Whenever a lieutenant was commissioned into his first command, he cleared the way for a chain of promotions which would spread its ramifications over many ranks. After the naval battle off Toulon in 1744, John Russell, flag captain of the *Namur*, died of his wounds in Port Mahon. The resulting chain of promotions amongst just the captains went: Lieutenant Bentley appointed Captain of the 4th rate *Sutherland*; Lord Colvill moved to the 6th rate *Dursley*; Captain Vanburgh to the 5th rate *Feversham*; Captain Watkins to the 4th rate *Newcastle*; Captain Fox to the 5th rate *Chichester*; and Captain Dilke to the 2nd rate *Namur*.<sup>27</sup> Promoting Bentley from first lieutenant would have meant as many changes amongst lieutenants, with promotions

<sup>23</sup> Rodger, 'Commissioned Sea Officers' Careers', 1.

<sup>24</sup> Marlow, 3 March 1758; this William Cragg's name does not appear in Syrett, *Commissioned Sea Officers*.

<sup>25</sup> S. Hood, 18 May, 3 June 1762; John Linzee commissioned 13 October 1768. Syrett *Commissioned Sea Officers*, 277.

<sup>26</sup> McCleverty, 17 July 1762.

<sup>27</sup> Anon., *A Narrative of the Proceedings of His Majesty's Fleet in the Mediterranean and the combined fleets of France and Spain from the year 1741 to March 1744* (J. Millan 1744).

from small to larger ships a possibility, even if no change in rank from junior to senior lieutenant occurred.

During the war the number of lieutenants carried in the 3rd rates was increased by one, an instant window of promotion for dozens of young hopefuls. They were needed on board to assist with the complements which had been increased by fifty to 650. Although the Admiralty supplied the lieutenants, the captain of the ship had to make up his own complement through the press.<sup>28</sup>

### **The change in status for a newly commissioned lieutenant**

The first indication in the official records that life had changed for a newly commissioned lieutenant can be seen in the muster book, which records his servant. Becoming a lieutenant, even one as lowly as a fourth, meant status. He no longer lived in the gun room, at the after end of the gun deck, but in a cabin off the wardroom. He had a tiny private space of his own to which his servant would bring shaving water and in which he could tend to his master's clothes. In addition to his uniform, navigational instruments and tables, he would now have to furnish his cabin, and would need money for bedding, plates, cutlery, glasses and all the other items, as if he were 'setting up house'. An indulgent father or sponsor would have been essential. The newly commissioned lieutenant would now be entitled to pay, although it would not be forthcoming for at least a year, leading to real hardship in some cases.<sup>29</sup> Lieutenants had to produce logs as evidence of their time at sea. Most of these were copies of the master's log, but they were checked by the clerks at the Navy Board before orders that they should be paid were made. The only acceptable reasons for a lieutenant's having lost his log were the complete loss of the ship or its clearance for a successful action at sea.

Each successive rung up the ladder of commissions took lieutenants closer to the aftermost cabin on the starboard side, occupied by the first lieutenant.<sup>30</sup> In a ship of the line this cabin had a door which gave access to the starboard quarter gallery, giving the first lieutenant exclusive use of the head therein, a real mark of status. This demonstrated his standing *vis-à-vis* the master, who had to share the port-side head with all the other officers berthed in the wardroom.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup> ADM 2/83, Admiralty Out letter to all captains of 3rd rate and above, 7 March 1760.

<sup>29</sup> John Elliot was still being subsidised by his family when he was made post, the pay due to him from the East India service and his year as lieutenant not yet having been paid. NMM ELL/400, 5 February 1757.

<sup>30</sup> Brian Lavery, *The Arming and Fitting of Ships of War 1600–1815* (Conway 1987), 203.

<sup>31</sup> Social standing as well as naval status determined the use of heads in the roundhouses

A few lieutenants with private incomes managed to marry during these years, but without financial support that would have been impossible. Paul Henry Ourry's wife was Charity Treby, whose mother was a member of the influential Hele family, based in Devon, and whose aunt was the Duchess of Portmore. Charity was a landowner in her own right who looked after her farms while Paul Henry was away at sea. Samuel Hood's wife was Susannah Linzee, daughter of a substantial Portsmouth family which would have supported them while he drew only a lieutenant's half pay.

Once the young lieutenant had a few years' seniority he became entitled to half pay when not employed by the Admiralty, and this entitlement was for life. There was no certainty of employment. The years of peace brought an abrupt reduction in the number of ships in commission, and almost all the cohort found themselves on half pay until remobilisation brought them back into service, the number of lieutenants on half pay rising to over 600 in 1752.<sup>32</sup> The question of pay and half pay is examined in Chapter 5.

### **The pattern of first commissions issued during the inter-war years**

#### **Lieutenants commissioned in the years 1741–1745**

When Walpole fell from government in 1742 the role of the Navy was reduced. Sir Charles Wager was replaced as head of the Admiralty by a civilian, under whom Sir John Norris, Admiral of the Fleet since 1734, refused to serve.<sup>33</sup> It is possible to see the lack of direction at the top being reflected in the lack of activity at the bottom of the naval profession. New ships were not being commissioned, and, as shown in Figure 1, the number of new lieutenants dropped from 137 in 1741 to forty in 1742 and sixty in 1743. Young men tried to secure their passing certificates as soon as they had the requisite number of years of sea time. They then had to wait for a vacancy before they were commissioned. The fact that so few commissions were being issued explains why the older members of the original cohort, those commissioned during the years of peace, waited an average of two years for a commission after their passing certificates were obtained. When the pace of mobilisation picked up at the outbreak of the Seven Years' War, the younger members of the cohort benefited from the increased number of vacancies, and waited only days or weeks.

as opposed to those in the wardroom quarter galleries, and Rodger quotes the unhappy chaplain who was debarred from the privilege of the wardroom head. *Wooden World*, 67.

<sup>32</sup> Half Pay books, ADM 25/33–50, 1745–1756.

<sup>33</sup> N.A.M. Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain*, Vol. 2 1649–1815 (Allen Lane 2004), 242.

### The influences and 'interest' behind promotion

The Admiralty relied upon a system of sifting and sorting to bring to the top of the pyramid enough men with experience and ability to take independent command in due course. The average length of time spent as lieutenant before being made post was thirteen years. There were always exceptions: the Hon. Augustus Keppel waited less than a year after his first commission before being made post.

It is impossible to overstate the importance of 'interest' in the eighteenth century. There was a profound distinction between ordinary seamen who could aspire to being petty officers, and 'volunteers' who were aspirant officers. Potential officers were reliant upon the power and prestige of an individual in authority who was prepared to make a personal recommendation. Once the young men were commissioned they were expected to prove themselves, and just as being taken to sea reflected the patronage exerted on behalf of the supplicant, their personal merit as officers was linked to the reputation of their patron, with a complex web of interdependence binding juniors to their seniors. Men in positions of authority were accustomed to receiving requests for patronage, and were also accustomed to asking for positions for their protégés. It was accepted that to stay in power, men in authority strengthened their positions by placing supporters into positions of consequence.

Purely political patronage is exemplified by the following exchange between the Duke of Newcastle, who as Secretary of State distributed more patronage in England than anyone else, and his First Lord, Anson. Newcastle was himself the supplicant when he attempted to pass on to the Navy the applications he had received from local politicians begging favours for their candidates, explaining the gravity of his situation:

The King expects that I should keep up his interest in Boroughs. I can't do it unless I have the assistance of several branches of the Government. Lieutenant Hunt (whom I formerly recommended to your Lordship) is so strongly insisted upon, that the Corporation is lost, and with it perhaps one or two members. I state the case as it is.

He met implacable resistance from Anson, who refused to allow political promotions in the Navy. Replying the next day, Anson begged Newcastle to reflect on what would happen to the fleet if he were to comply with 'these Borough recommendations'. He continued:

My constant method, since I have had the honour of serving the King in the station I am in, has been to promote the lieutenants to command whose ships have been successfully engaged on equal terms with the enemy, without having any friend or recommendation, and in preference to all others – and