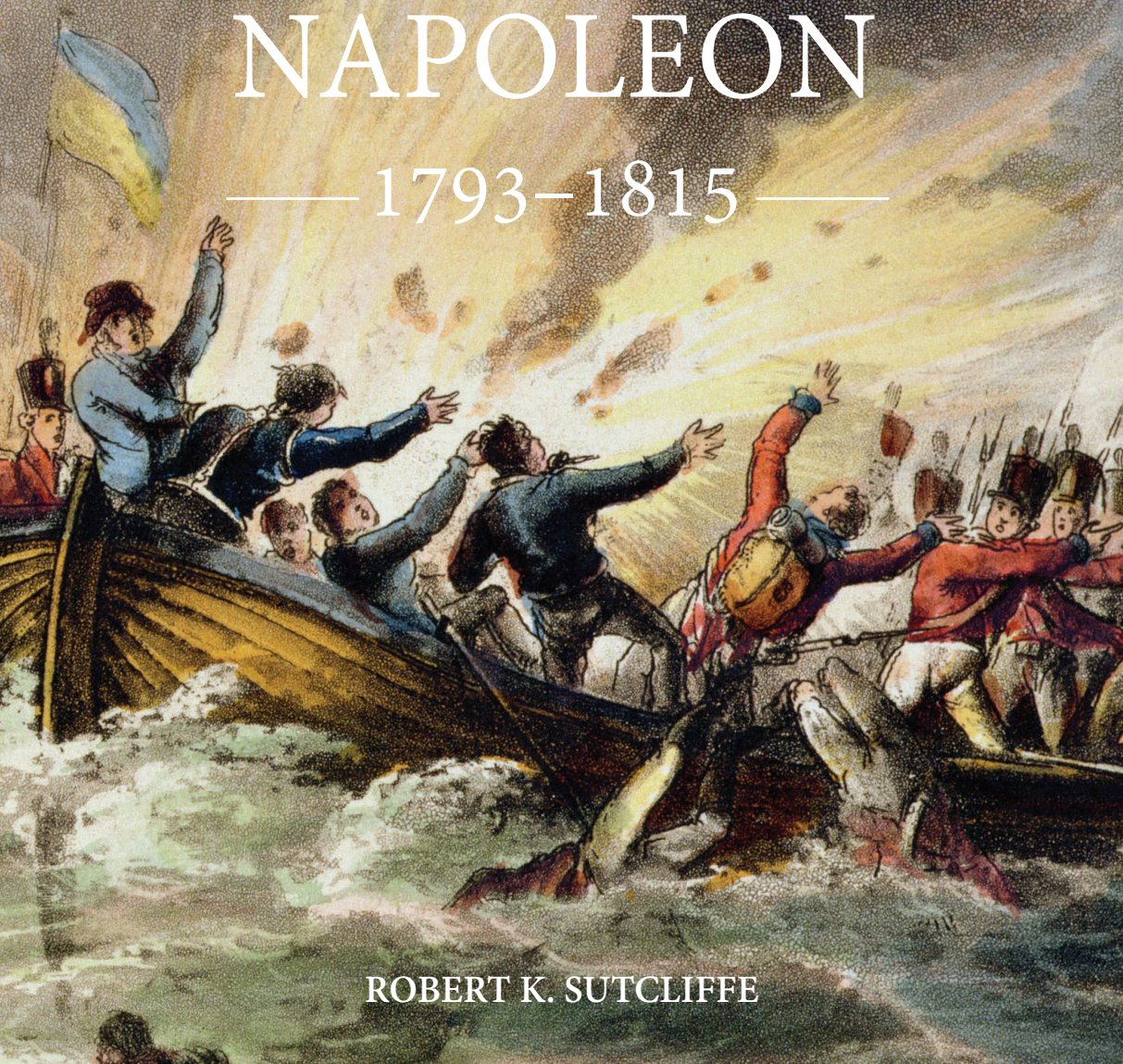


BRITISH EXPEDITIONARY WARFARE AND THE DEFEAT OF NAPOLEON

— 1793–1815 —



ROBERT K. SUTCLIFFE

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NAPOLEON, 1793–1815

Robert K. Sutcliffe

THE BOYDELL PRESS

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Foreword

The workings of many parts of the British government 200 years ago are still unfamiliar to us today and this book has uncovered several mysteries. It is an original contribution to the study of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars in several ways. Firstly, it looks not only at the navy, but right across the rapidly changing Whitehall government machine, as well as the City and the merchant shipping community. Secondly, it examines the continual process by which the British government solved the problem of transporting provisions and stores to warships on foreign stations, and troops, stores and provisions across the sea to confront the seemingly overwhelming land power of France and its conquered states.

The government was a customer in the shipping market and the Transport Office, headed by its Board, did not requisition merchant vessels, as happened in twentieth-century conflicts. Scholars have hitherto treated the Transport Board as part of the navy, but in fact it was a central procurement organisation, set up by William Pitt's administration in 1794. In the previous war, that of the American Revolution, the Navy Board, the army and the Board of Ordnance hired their own merchant ships, and frequently found themselves in competition when hiring merchant ships as government transports, much to the financial advantage of ship owners. After 1794 the three services were provided with transports by the Transport Board. Under the chairmanship of Sir Rupert George, who had the tricky job of taking orders from the three services, the Treasury and other government ministers, the Transport Board and department performed well, and the award of a baronetcy to George in the middle of a war was a strong indication of the success of his department.

However, in spite of the very large number of merchant ships registered in Britain, it was not easy to find suitable merchant ships at the right time. Setting the Transport Board's chartering rates, per ton per month, required constant and delicate decision-making. It was given the task of assembling thousands of tons of shipping for very large amphibious expeditions, often at short notice, which lay beyond the resources available. Every one of these operations against the near continent failed, none more so than the Walcheren expedition of 1809, perhaps the nearest parallel to the D-Day operation of June 1944. Late in sailing, badly led, Walcheren was a major disaster, and a sickly, decimated army struggled back to Britain. But where British transports really came into their own from 1808 was to the south of Europe in the long, year-round task of supplying Wellington's army

in Portugal and Spain. Thousands of voyages, sailing in convoy from Britain to the Peninsula, ensured a supply train which the French armies could not match. Furthermore, the transports, and the warships which protected them, afforded tactical and military support for the British, Portuguese and Spanish armies which slowly forced the French northwards and over the Pyrenees.

Such was the length and difficulties of the 22-year war against Revolutionary and Napoleonic France that the British government had to improve its methods and administration and the Transport Office was one of the most efficient departments. In the end Britain survived, its economy and financial systems performing better and outlasting the French system of requisition and confiscation across Europe. But transports also provided the means by which Britain supplied specie, credit and munitions to her allies Russia, Prussia and Austria, countries which had the manpower to defeat the great armies which Napoleon put into the field. Dr Sutcliffe's book will ensure that the vital role of merchant ships hired by government is now better understood and appreciated.

Roger Knight
Institute of Historical Research
London University
May 2015

Preface

‘All military campaigns begin with a conveyance by ship to the theatre of war.’¹

Most military studies of British expeditionary warfare in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries focus on the political context, military leadership, regiments, equipment, tactics and manoeuvres, the preparation and the battles themselves, generally without reference to the complex task of transporting the army to the foreign shores. Likewise most naval history books relating to the same period tend to focus on similar issues from the naval perspective including the sea battles, naval leadership, the political and administrative processes, ships and technology. There is a gap in the current literature that this book attempts to fill. The naval and maritime contribution to expeditionary warfare has not been fully appreciated, nor has the mode of conveying troops and sustaining the British army overseas been adequately addressed. The navy’s role was essential: by achieving significant victories in famous fleet battles and less well known actions, together with the establishment of effective blockades, it achieved virtual, but not total, control of the oceans, where the main enemy was inclement weather. In addition it provided strong convoy protection for thousands of individual ship voyages, allowing trade to flourish and armies overseas to be sustained. This encouraged the Duke of Wellington to write in September 1813:

If anyone wishes to know the history of this war, I will tell them that it is our maritime superiority that gives me the power to maintain my army while the enemy is unable to do so.²

Whereas the British launched more than fifty major seaborne expeditions during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars involving hundreds of thousands

¹ Philip J. Haythornthwaite, *The Armies of Wellington* (London, 1998), 194.

² Christopher D. Hall, *Wellington’s Navy: Sea Power and the Peninsular War 1807–1814* (London, 2004), 111 and Michael Duffy, ‘Festering the Spanish Ulcer: The Royal Navy and the Peninsula War 1806–1814’, in Bruce A. Elleman and S.C.M Paine (eds), *Naval Power and Expeditionary Warfare: Peripheral Campaigns and New Theatres of Naval Warfare* (New York, 2012), 28, both quoting Sir R.V. Hamilton (ed.), *Letters and Papers of Admiral of the Fleet Sir T. Byam Martin*, vol. 2 (London, 1898), 409.

of troop voyages to Africa, India, the West Indies, America and the European mainland from the Baltic to the Mediterranean, the French army generally marched across national boundaries. In contrast to Britain, France launched few major seaborne expeditions involving large numbers of men – the two larger ones being the shipping of the Army of the Orient to Egypt in 1798, when 224 chartered merchantmen convoyed by thirteen ships of the line plus six frigates and other smaller vessels conveyed 24,000 infantry, 4,000 cavalry and 3,000 artillerymen to Aboukir Bay. There were smaller French colonial expeditions to the Caribbean; an unsuccessful attempted invasion of Ireland in 1798 in support of the Irish rebellion; and in the Mediterranean a more successful landing of 2,000 troops from sixty transports in Capri in 1808, followed by two failed attempts to take Sicily in early 1809 and then again in 1810.³

By 1811 the worldwide movement of British troops in the Napoleonic war achieved such success that France and its allies did not possess a single oversea territory.⁴ This book is not about the battles at sea or on land; rather it is the study of this herculean task of moving large armies together with their essential support infrastructure by sea, to distant shores, and then of ensuring that such armies were adequately resupplied so that campaigns might be sustained.

The navy did not have the capacity for these tasks. Merchant ships were required. The government's *laissez-faire* approach meant that requisitioning the necessary vessels was not an option. Ships were procured through the market and managed by the Transport Board and the transport service was fulfilled by merchant seamen with great skill and courage, often in very challenging and dangerous conditions and frequently at a high personal cost.

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³ Philip J. Haythornthwaite, *Napoleon's Military Machine* (Staplehurst, Kent, 1995), 173.

⁴ Roger Knight, *Britain Against Napoleon: The Organization of Victory 1793–1815* (London, 2013), 189.

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It is impossible to complete a book such as this without a huge amount of encouragement and support from others. In this instance their generosity has been unbounded. In particular, I have to thank Dr Roger Knight for his guidance, skilled advice and encouragement, provided at a time when he was heavily committed to other major academic projects. He contributed significantly to making this research a very enjoyable project. Sim Comfort kindly allowed me to review documents relating to the proposed Brest expedition from his remarkable collection of naval papers. Joanna Ellis was particularly helpful in providing copies of correspondence between Spencer Perceval and Lord Mulgrave from the Mulgrave Papers and I am grateful to the Marquess of Normanby for allowing me to consult and quote from those papers. In addition I must thank the staff at the National Maritime Museum Caird Library and The National Archives for their assistance and support and for dealing with my enquiries in a timely manner.

I must also thank my editor Peter Sowden of Boydell & Brewer for his infinite patience and support throughout the process of preparing this book, Nick Bingham who patiently steered this book through the production stage, Cath D'Alton for her skillful preparation of the maps and finally Sarah Bryce, who painstakingly read every word, correcting and improving the text enormously. Of course any errors or omissions remain the responsibility of the author alone.

However, those who carry the heaviest burden throughout the preparation of a book such as this are those closest to us, and I will be eternally grateful to my wife Zena for her unwavering support throughout but in particular during the more testing periods. To her I dedicate this book.

Abbreviations

BL	British Library
Castlereagh, <i>Correspondence</i>	Second Marquess of Londonderry, <i>Memoirs and Correspondence of Viscount Castlereagh</i> , vols I–VIII (London, 1851)
Commission on Fees (5 th)	Fifth Report of the Commissioners appointed to Inquire into the Fees, Gratuities, Perquisites and Emoluments which have lately been received in the Several Public Offices 1802–03 (111), 249
Commission on Fees (6 th)	Sixth Report of the Commissioners appointed to Inquire into the Fees, Gratuities, Perquisites and Emoluments which have lately been received in the Several Public Offices 1803–04 (11), 1
Commission on Fees (8 th)	Eighth Report of the Commissioners appointed to Inquire into the Fees, Gratuities, Perquisites and Emoluments which have lately been received in the Several Public Offices 1803–04 (11), 637
Commission for Revision (9 th)	Ninth Report of the Commissioners for Revising and Digesting the Civil Affairs of His Majesty's Navy 1807, 73e of 1809, XXV, 354
Commission for Revision (13 th)	Thirteenth Report of the Commissioners for Revising and Digesting the Civil Affairs of His Majesty's Navy 1809, 73e of 1809, XXV, 530
Committee on Finance (18 th)	Eighteenth Report from the Select Committee on Finance 1798 (119), 191, 206
Committee on Finance (31 st)	Thirty-First Report from the Select Committee on Finance 1798 (113), 03, 74
Committee on Finance (18 th +31 st) Further Proceedings	Further Proceedings on the 18 th and 31 st Report from the Select Committee on Finance 1715–1800 (114), 24

Condon, 'Transport Service'	Mary Ellen Condon, 'The Administration of the Transport Service during the War against Revolutionary France 1793–1802' (unpublished University of London Ph.D. thesis, 1968)
Dalley Evidence	House of Lords Sessional Papers 1802–03, 174, IV.327, Fifth Report of the Commissioners of Naval Enquiry into the Sixpenny Office, Appendix 7 – Examination of John Dalley
Gurwood, <i>Dispatches</i>	John Gurwood, <i>Dispatches of Field Marshal the Duke of Wellington</i> (reprinted, Cambridge, 2010)
HL	Huntington Library
HM	His Majesty King George III
HoCPP	House of Commons Parliamentary Papers (found on parlipapers.proquest.com)
IHR	Institute of Historical Research
Melville <i>Speech</i>	<i>Substance of the speech of Viscount Lord Melville in the House of Peers, Monday 21 May 1810 on the subject of Troop Ships</i> (London, 1810), BL, 8807.c.6
NMM	National Maritime Museum, Caird Library
Scheldt Inquiry	HoCPP, 1810 (12) VIII.1, Minutes of Evidence taken before the Committee of the Whole House, appointed to consider the policy and conduct of the late expedition to the Scheldt (Session 23, January–June 1810)
TB	The Transport Board
The Board	The Transport Board
TNA	The National Archives
VB	Victualling Board
Wars	The Revolutionary War of 1793 to 1801 and the Napoleonic War 1803 to 1815

Notes and Conventions

Arthur Wellesley, 1st Duke of Wellington (1769–1852) has been referred to as the Duke of Wellington or Wellington throughout this book although the title was not bestowed upon him until 11 May 1814. However, he was elevated to viscount following the battle of Talavera in 1809 after the fall of Napoleon. From 1808 his military ranks were lieutenant-general 1808, general 1811, field marshal 1813, commander-in-chief of the army in occupied France, until 1818.

Sir Rupert George Bart (1749–1823), Chairman of the Transport Board. Born in Ireland, son of Dennis George. He became a naval lieutenant in September 1770 serving on the *Rose*, then, in 1775, on the *Enterprise* as second then first lieutenant. In 1779 he joined the *Robust* as first lieutenant. He became commander of the *Charleston* in 1781. In this ship he served on the North American station in the American war, possibly under Samuel, Viscount Hood, and whilst there he met and married Margaret Cochran in June 1782. She was also of Irish origin, daughter of an influential family from Halifax, Nova Scotia.¹ He commanded the sloop *Vulture*. He made captain in November 1781. In 1790 he joined the *Thistle* and in 1792 the *Hussar*, in which he was again in North American waters in 1793. He succeeded Admiral Hugh Christian as Chairman of the Transport Board in 1795. However it is not clear why an apparently undistinguished naval captain came to the attention of the Commissioners of the Treasury. It is noteworthy that his first son, born in 1789, was named Samuel Hood George; he may have been named after Samuel, Viscount Hood. George may have benefited from the patronage of Hood with whom he had served on the American station in the latter stages of the American war and who was a Lord of the Admiralty from 1788 to 1795. Hood was renowned for looking after his following and his position at the Admiralty made him well placed to promote George's interests.²

It proved to be an auspicious appointment. George was to serve twenty-two years, throughout seven administrations, surviving the consequent changes in policies, personalities and interdepartmental relationships and the rivalries of

¹ Rev. A.W.H. Eaton, *The Cochran-Inglis Family of Halifax Nova Scotia* (Halifax, N.S. 1899), 8. George and his wife had two sons and six daughters.

² Michael Duffy, 'Samuel Hood, First Viscount Hood', in Peter LeFevre and Richard Harding (eds), *Precursors of Nelson: British Admirals of the Eighteenth Century* (London, 2000), 249–77.

other departments until the Board's dissolution in 1817.³ This must rank amongst the longer civil service tenures of the period. By comparison Evan Nepean served as first secretary to the Admiralty for almost nine years.⁴ Captain Sir Andrew Snape Hamond was Comptroller of the Navy for almost twelve years, followed, in 1806, by Captain Sir Thomas Boulden Thompson who was in post for just less than ten years. To have retained his position for such an extensive period, George must have possessed some likeable and remarkable qualities. He was obviously very competent, a very able administrator and a shrewd political operator.⁵ In 1800 he declined promotion to flag rank, so that he could remain with the Board.⁶ He was knighted in 1803 and created baronet in August 1809. George died in 1823 and was buried in the family crypt at St Mary's Church, Battersea, London. His title became extinct on the death of his son Rupert Denis George in 1856.

King's German Legion (KGL). This was effectively the Hanoverian Army in exile, founded in England in 1803 when thousands of Hanoverians arrived following the French invasion of Hanover. The regiments became British army units paid by the British government. They included artillery, infantry, cavalry and engineers. They served with great distinction in the Peninsula.

Austrian Netherlands were the provinces located in the southern part of the Low Countries, roughly comprising present Belgium and Luxembourg. On 1 October 1795 the Austrian Netherlands were annexed to France. In 1815 after the Napoleonic war, the Congress of Vienna merged the area with the Dutch provinces to become the Kingdom of the Netherlands. An independent Belgium was established in 1831.

Monetary values quoted are the original historic values; those over ten pounds have been rounded to the nearest pound rather than quoting the shillings and pence.

Relating the historic value of money to modern values continues to be the subject of much academic research because of its complexity.⁷ However, based on

³ TNA, ADM, 1/ 3770, Sir Rupert George was still employed at the Transport Office on 3 April 1817 where he was preparing to hand over to Commissioner Boyle who was to complete the settlement of all outstanding accounts assisted by the secretary, Mr McLeay, and Mr Harding, the general accountant. On 25 March George was notified that the Commissioners of the Admiralty to the Navy and Victualling Boards would begin 'to execute duties now taken up within the TB'.

⁴ Evan Nepean, Secretary at the Admiralty, 3 March 1795 to January 1804.

⁵ Knight, *Britain Against Napoleon*, 178: 'witness his advice to Thomas Grenville, first Lord of the Admiralty in the cost-conscious Ministry of All the Talents, when stating the estimate for transports in 1806 in Grenville's first Naval Estimates: the sum could be reduced, "but perhaps it would be more convenient to Government, to have money in hand, than to run the risk of a deficiency, which might require a pre-mature calling of Parliament next year. I hope that you will excuse the liberty I take in making these observations"'.
⁶ A. Aspinall (ed.), *The Later Correspondence of George III* (Cambridge, 1966–67), Earl Spencer to HM King George, 31 December 1800.

⁷ N.A.M. Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain 1649–1815* (London, 2004), xxv and E. Victor Morgan, *The Study of Prices and the Value of Money* (London, 1950).

research by Jim O'Donoghue, Louise Goulding and Graham Allen, 'Consumer Price Inflation Since 1750' (ISSN 0013-0400, Economic Trends No. 604), 38–46, a Historical UK Inflation and Price Conversion calculator can be found on www.safalra.com which indicates the following approximate values of £100 in 2013:

Year	Approximate value of £100
1793	£13,000
1800	£9,700
1815	£6,800

Introduction

'Expeditionary warfare entails the deployment of forces far from their normal base of operations. Execution requires enormous logistical capabilities to transport, land and sustain forces, often at great distances.'¹

Although Britain emerged from Trafalgar as the dominant naval power, that alone was not going to defeat Napoleonic France. Napoleon had to be defeated on land and in particular on the European mainland; this was only finally accomplished when Britain operated in conjunction with its principal allies. Over fifty amphibious expeditions were launched during the wars. Despite this, the British army did not achieve meaningful success in the mainland European theatre until 1807 at Copenhagen, 1808 to 1814 in the Peninsula and 1815 at Waterloo. In addition there were numerous modest successes but there were also some monumental failures.

To accomplish these adventures large numbers of British troops and an immense support system had to be transported overseas, often at relatively short notice. This was generally followed by a constant relief and reinforcement programme to convey the seriously injured and prisoners of war back to England, to ship out fresh recruits to replace those killed and injured, and to replenish supplies. In 1793 the British army abroad numbered only 18,194 men, but between 1793 and 1801 at least 89,000 rank-and-file troops were shipped to the West Indies alone, and thousands more were shipped to the Netherlands, France, the Mediterranean and Egypt.² In January 1805 there 144,500 rank and file overseas, rising to 180,991 in December 1813. These numbers increase by about 12½ per cent when sergeants and officers are included and possibly up to 30 per cent when officers' staff, drummers, artillerymen, artificers, engineers, medical and commissariat staff and women followers are included.³ Of course horses, wagons, materiel, including ordnance

¹ Bruce A. Elleman and S.C.M. Paine (eds), *Naval Power and Expeditionary Warfare: Peripheral Campaigns and New Theatres of Naval Warfare* (New York, 2012), 1.

² Knight, *Britain Against Napoleon*, 76–7.

³ Haythornthwaite, *Armies of Wellington*, 21, suggests an increase of one eighth to include sergeants and officers. Army strength numbers from: HoCPP, 1814–15 (195) IX.321, 14 Mar. 1815, which is a summary of reports issued in June and December each year by the Adjutant-General's Office. These totals include British cavalry, foot guards, British

and camping equipment, and provisions also had to be shipped to support the troops. Then when the theatre of war changed or evacuation was required the troops and equipment had to be repatriated.

These tasks were mainly accomplished by merchant ships. Thousands of them were essential to support the government's military operations. However, there were rarely enough transports readily available for government service, particularly at very short notice; rather than resorting to requisitioning ships, the government competed with the demands of trade by chartering ships on the open market. There the availability of shipping was already restricted by a shortage of seamen: throughout the wars there were never enough experienced sailors to meet the demands of both the navy and the rapidly expanding merchant fleet.⁴ Despite this the government spent more than £42 million on hiring transports between 1794 and 1815. Morriss suggests that 'Britain's overseas achievements [during this period] reflected the marriage between key maritime resources and the state's bureaucracy.'⁵ This sums up the achievement of the Transport Board, which was established by Prime Minister William Pitt in 1794 to manage this service.

Sir Charles Oman refers to naval operations in his *History of the Peninsular War* but otherwise, with few exceptions, military historians have not acknowledged the significance of the naval and maritime contribution in these conflicts.⁶ Rather they have naturally tended to focus on events ashore. However, Christopher Hall's *Wellington's Navy* provides a comprehensive review of the role of sea power during the Peninsular war. It demonstrates the way that control of the sea influenced the outcome of events on land, as does Michael Duffy's *Soldiers, Sugar and Seapower: The British Expeditions to the West Indies and the War against Revolutionary France* and 'Festering the Spanish Ulcer: The Royal Navy and the Peninsular War, 1808–1814'.⁷ David Syrett's *Shipping and the American War* and *Shipping and Military Power in the Seven Years War: The Sails of Victory* are considered to be the seminal works on the transport service, providing a detailed account of the successes and failures of the service during the earlier

infantry, foreign cavalry and foreign infantry. The split between those troops at home and those abroad is not shown in these reports until 1808. Generally these numbers are for rank-and-file men and do not include officers. Neither do they include the numbers of the Royal Regiment of Artillery, the artillery of the King's German Legion or foreign artillery. See appendix 3. See also chapter 1, planning for Brest expedition (p. 13) where the proposed force of 60,000 rank and file expanded to 83,620 individuals, an increase of 30 per cent.

⁴ For further consideration of the shortage of seamen, see Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 443–53; Roger Morriss, *The Foundations of British Maritime Ascendancy: Resources: Logistics and the State, 1755 to 1815* (Cambridge, 2011), 321, and J. Ross Dancy, *The Myth of the Press Gang: Volunteers, Impressment and the Naval Manpower Problem in the Late Eighteenth Century* (Woodbridge, 2015), 223–70.

⁵ Morriss, *British Maritime Ascendancy*, 321.

⁶ Sir Charles Oman, *A History of the Peninsula War*, 7 vols (Oxford, 1902–30).

⁷ Hall, *Wellington's Navy*, 15–28; Michael Duffy, *Soldiers, Sugar and Seapower: The British Expeditions to the West Indies and the War against Revolutionary France* (Oxford, 1987); Duffy, 'Festering the Spanish Ulcer'.

American war (1775–1783).⁸ In addition, in 1968 Mary Ellen Condon produced an unpublished Ph.D. on the Transport Board in the Revolutionary war.⁹

It is only recently that the role of the transport service has been recognised by naval historians, particularly Knight in *Britain Against Napoleon*; Davey in *The Transformation of British Naval Strategy*; Mackesy in *War in the Mediterranean 1803–1810*; Morriss in three publications – *Naval Power and British Culture 1760–1850: Public Trust and Government Ideology*, ‘Colonization, Conquest and the Supply of Food and Transport: The Reorganization of Logistics Management 1780–1795’ and *The Foundation of British Maritime Ascendancy: Resources, Logistics and the State, 1755–1815*;¹⁰ Hall in *British Strategy in the Napoleonic War and Wellington’s Navy*;¹¹ and Cole in *Arming the Royal Navy, 1793–1815: The Office of Ordnance and the State*.¹² In contrast there are volumes of publications on the navy and the army, on sea and land battles, on the political and economic context, and on specific subjects referred to in this work such as the various trade protection measures: the Navigation Acts, the Continental System and the Licence Trade.¹³ Unfortunately the history of the merchant fleet in the period 1790 to 1820 has received limited attention. This is possibly due to the destruction of considerable volumes of records in the various Custom House fires, most notably that of 1814. This loss is exacerbated by the absence of surviving shipping company records, with the notable exception of the archive of Michael Henley & Son, London-based ship-owners and providers of transports, which survives at the National Maritime Museum. The history of the company has been well documented by Simon Ville in *English Shipowning during the Industrial Revolution: Michael Henley & Son, London Shipowners 1770–1830*.¹⁴ Ralph Davis’s important work *The Rise of the English Shipping Industry in the 17th and 18th Centuries* ends just before the start of the period, while Hope devotes only one chapter to the whole period in *A New*

⁸ David Syrett, *Shipping and the American War 1775–83: A Study of British Transport Organization* (London, 1970) and *Shipping and Military Power in the Seven Years War: The Sails of Victory* (Exeter, 2008).

⁹ Mary Ellen Condon, ‘The Administration of the Transport Service during the War against Revolutionary France, 1793–1802’ (University of London Ph.D. thesis, 1968).

¹⁰ Duffy, *Soldiers, Sugar and Seapower*; James Davey, *The Transformation of British Naval Strategy: Seapower and Supply in Northern Europe 1808–1812* (Woodbridge, 2012); Piers Mackesy, *The War in the Mediterranean 1803–1810* (Cambridge, MA, 1957); Roger Morriss, *Naval Power and British Culture 1760–1850: Public Trust and Government Ideology* (Aldershot, 2004); Morriss, ‘Colonization, Conquest and the Supply of Food and Transport: The Reorganization of Logistics Management 1780–1795’, *War in History* 14 (2007), 310–24; Morriss, *British Maritime Ascendancy*.

¹¹ Christopher D. Hall, *British Strategy in the Napoleonic War 1803–1815* (Manchester, 1992) and *Wellington’s Navy*.

¹² Gareth Cole, *Arming the Royal Navy, 1793–1815: The Office of Ordnance and the State* (London, 2012).

¹³ Sarah Palmer, *Politics, Shipping and the Repeal of the Navigation Laws* (Manchester, 1990).

¹⁴ Simon P. Ville, *English Shipowning during the Industrial Revolution: Michael Henley & Son, London Shipowners 1770–1830* (Manchester, 1987).

History of British Shipping.¹⁵ Probably one of the more comprehensive studies of the period was *The Trade Winds*, edited by Northcote Parkinson in 1948.¹⁶ All of these historians, including Creswell in his paper 'British Shipping at the End of the Eighteenth Century', explain the difficulty of defining the number and tonnage of British shipping involved in the overseas trade during the period.¹⁷ These ships formed the pool from which transports were generally hired. More recently Woodman has published a comprehensive five-volume history of the merchant shipping fleet; the second volume relates to this period.¹⁸

Nevertheless, a comprehensive history of the logistics of expeditionary warfare, and the central role that the Transport Board played in most military expeditions launched between 1794 and 1815, has not yet been published. This book will seek to address this by demonstrating how the Board engaged with the shipping market to secure transports and by considering the impact of their diversion from trade. It will examine the role of the transport service, particularly between 1805 and 1815 when a significant number of large military forces were transported overseas to mount critical expeditions. Chapter 1 will review the various elements of expeditionary warfare during the period, particularly the planning of a campaign and the landing of military forces. Chapter 2 will consider how transports were procured and, by interpreting the output of a database of over 2,000 charter contracts, determine when, in what quantities and under what terms transports were brought forward. Chapter 3 will show that the transport demands were far more considerable than has previously been perceived and will assess the availability of shipping to support the combined demands of both government and trade. It will demonstrate that the transport service supported the British shipping industry during the earlier part of the wars when its activity was restricted because British shipping was prohibited from entering enemy-controlled ports. That trade was lost to licensed foreign ships. It will also explain the intensely competitive demand for the limited number of ocean-going ships. Chapter 4 will consider the impact on operational efficiency of the government's determination to contain the expense of war by attempting to minimise the costs of the transport service. This chapter also demonstrates that the preparation for major expeditions required co-ordinated activity from many departments of state and in consequence delays invariably occurred. The causes of these delays will be illustrated but the research has demonstrated that, contrary to current thinking, the preparation of transports rarely consumed time beyond that which might reasonably have been contemplated. This raises the question of whether there were practical limitations on the size of expeditions that the various services

¹⁵ Ralph Davis, *The Rise of the English Shipping Industry in the 17th and 18th Centuries* (Newton Abbott, 1962); Ronald Hope, *A New History of British Shipping* (London, 1990), 235–63.

¹⁶ Northcote Parkinson (ed.), *The Trade Winds: A Study of British Overseas Trade during the French Wars 1793–1815* (Leicester, 1948).

¹⁷ J. Creswell, 'British Shipping at the End of the Eighteenth Century', *Mariner's Mirror* 25 (2 Apr. 1939), 197–207.

¹⁸ Richard Woodman, *A History of the British Merchant Navy: Vol. 2 Britannia's Realm: In Support of the State, 1763–1815* (Stroud, 2009).

could deal with effectively, particularly when considering the provision of horse transports for cavalry regiments, of horses and artillery equipment, and of horses, mules and wagons for commissariat transport facilities. The shortage of heavy artillery, horses and wagons created constant dilemmas for military commanders, particularly the Duke of Wellington in the Peninsula and at Waterloo. Chapter 5 will consider the important role of the navy in supporting expeditionary warfare, demonstrating that achieving dominance of the seas was vital to ensuring that trading and military maritime activity could progress with limited interference from enemy navies and privateers. It will also illustrate the transformation of naval involvement in the war and the evolution of amphibious warfare, particularly during the Peninsular war and the war against America (1812–14). Chapter 6 will review the Admiralty's decision to resist the use of naval vessels as troop transports instead of smaller merchant ships. Chapter 7 will demonstrate the effectiveness of the military shipping involved in Castlereagh's European expeditions between 1805 and 1808. Chapter 8 will consider the Transport Board's performance during the most difficult year of the war, 1809, described by N.A.M. Rodger as 'a year of military disappointments', including the evacuation from Corunna and the Walcheren campaign.¹⁹ Finally chapter 9 will review the transport service during the later years of the Napoleonic war, which witnessed huge transfers of manpower as Britain and her allies paved the way to ultimate victory over Napoleon in 1815.

By 1792 Britain had the largest merchant fleet in the world.²⁰ Its growth had been supported by the protectionist policies of succeeding governments who were anxious to protect international trade, which was critical to the economic survival of the nation. During the wars this trade provided markets for the output of the burgeoning industrial revolution and funded the increasing national debt which expanded from £273 million in 1792 to £792 million in 1816.²¹ It also secured the country's survival when the corn harvests failed, as in 1795, between 1799 and 1801 and between 1805 and 1813, and generated funds to provide substantial subsidies to the nation's allies. Equally importantly, it supported the operational effectiveness of the navy, which was heavily dependent on imported supplies of iron, timber, flax and hemp.

During the period 1792 to 1815 imports rose by 83 per cent and exports grew by 172 per cent. This expansion in international trade combined with the shipping demands of the government fuelled the growth of the merchant shipping fleet. The number of registered ships increased during the period from 16,079 of 1,540,145 tons in 1792 to 25,864 of 2,783,000 tons in 1815, representing an 80 per cent growth in tonnage.²² This rate of growth was unsustainable; there was a serious

¹⁹ Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 556.

²⁰ B.R. Mitchell and Phyllis Deane, *British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge, 1962), 217; Duffy *Soldiers, Sugar and Seapower*, 387.

²¹ Glyn Davies, *A History of Money* (Cardiff, 2002), 172.

²² Inclusive of ships registered in England, Scotland, Ireland, plantations in America and the West Indies, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man. Only ships over 15 tons were registered. For a table of the number and tonnage of ships registered between 1799 and 1817, see appendix 1.

overcapacity when peace was finally declared in 1815 and the government no longer needed to charter significant amounts of shipping.

It has been said that 'By any standards, the achievements of the transport service during the American war of 1776 to 1783 rank among the greatest military and administrative feats of the eighteenth century.'²³ However, there remained some real weaknesses in the co-ordination of chartering and utilising transports. Charles Middleton (later Lord Barham), Comptroller of the Navy Board 1778–90, was very critical of the way the government brought forward merchant shipping during the American war. The crux of the matter was that during the American war, merchant ships were hired by three boards – the Navy Board, the Victualling Board and the Ordnance Board – acting independently and often in competition. This competition impacted the freight rates but more importantly the availability and effective use of transports. Middleton wanted the Navy Board to assume responsibility for controlling the chartering of all shipping because he thought that this was the only way to have 'a rational policy for the procurement of shipping for government service'.²⁴ He was also, no doubt, mindful of the opportunity to expand both his and the Navy Board's influence. He continued to voice his opinions on this matter and his influence on the 1788 Parliamentary Commission appointed to 'Inquire into the Fees, Gratuities, Perquisites and Emoluments which have been lately received in the several Public Offices' became obvious when his views were reflected in the published recommendations.

The commissioners commented on issues relating to transports in their fifth report on the Commissioners of the Navy, in their sixth report on dockyards and in their eighth report on the Victualling Office. In the sixth report they determined that 'the practice of purchasing or hiring ships and vessels, when required for public service, by different Boards, has been found by experience very expensive, inconvenient and detrimental to the other services carried out in the dockyards'.²⁵

One of the commissioners' criticisms was that, despite the immense care taken to ensure that the ships taken up were fit for service, lack of seafaring skills on the various boards, combined with the competition between the boards for tonnage, had often led to the hiring of some vessels that were unfit for service. They agreed with Middleton's proposal that the Navy Board should manage the process.²⁶ They also highlighted that some dockyard officers spent over 200 days a year on transport activities, which severely impeded the performance of their main tasks.²⁷ These officials were involved in surveying, measuring, valuing and reporting upon all ships tendered as transports. It was a very complex process which generally took at least a week when the tides were favourable and often much longer if they were not.²⁸

²³ Syrett, *Shipping and the American War*, 248.

²⁴ Syrett, *Shipping and the American War*, 23, citing The Shelburne Papers, Middleton to Shelburne, 28 Jun. 1782.

²⁵ Commission on Fees (6th), 305.

²⁶ Commission on Fees (5th), 103.

²⁷ Commission on Fees (6th), 139.

²⁸ Commission for Revision (9th), 14.

A survey of a potential transport was instigated by an order from the Navy Board to the agent and dockyard officials; usually this occurred on the river Thames. A small armada of boats was involved: the Board's agent at Deptford accompanied the dockyard's master attendant and clerk of survey in one boat, the master shipwright's assistant was in another and the foreman afloat was with the ship's agent in the third boat. If a ship was found to be fit for the service, the master was directed to put her into dock or on the ways so that her bottom might be inspected and her dimensions taken. When she was ready for the second examination, the same officers and the agent were again involved. If she was approved, the master was ordered to take provisions and stores on board and proceed to Deptford. There the same officers – with the addition of the master mast-maker, foreman of the riggers, clerk of the surveys, clerk of the master sail-maker and some of his people, the master joiner for marking out the cabins and the clerk of the cheque for mustering the crew – were involved in the third inspection. After the calculation of the value of the ship and stores had been made in the clerk of the survey's office, the Navy Board was advised that she was ready to enter into pay and the agent commenced the fitting out to hasten her departure for the service to which she was appointed.²⁹

Finally, in the eighth report on the Victualling Office, the commissioners exposed abuses promulgated by the hoy taker, the official who supervised all the shipping for the Victualling Board. He had received payment to favour some owners with charters and had also had an interest in some of the ships hired. They recommended that the duties of the hoy taker should be restricted to 'the hiring, superintendence and employment of lighters, barges and small craft on the River Thames and to loading or unloading vessels employed in the conveyance of provisions or victualling stores'.³⁰ The commissioners also referred, in the eighth report, to practices which in their view led to the government overpaying for transport services. Firstly, the Victualling Office had generally hired 'on freight', which tended to be more expensive than ships hired by the month that could usually carry a greater tonnage of supplies.³¹ They noted that the Commissioners for Stating the Public Accounts, in their twelfth report dated 1784, had made similar comments in respect of the Ordnance Board.³² Secondly, ships had been overvalued, causing the government to be defrauded when these ships were subsequently captured by the enemy and the owners reimbursed at the inflated rate. They did suggest that it might be more economical to pay an increased hire rate if the owner agreed to bear the responsibility for any loss but there is no indication that this suggestion was considered further. They also restated the view that competition between boards had caused the greatest detriment

²⁹ Commission for Revision (9th), 14.

³⁰ Commission on Fees (8th), 210.

³¹ Hire 'on freight': by this method payment was based on the weight of the supplies to be shipped rather than on the tonnage of the vessel.

³² Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Examine, Take and State the Public Accounts of the Kingdom. Twelfth Report Relative to Passing the Accounts of the Treasurer of Ordnance, in the Office of the Auditor of the Impress, (1784), 11–12, 43.