

'We Sail the Ocean Blue': British sailors, imperialism, identity, pride and patriotism c.1890 to 1939

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Whilst registered as a candidate for the above degree, I have not been registered for any other research award. The results and conclusions embodied in this thesis are the work of the named candidate and have not been submitted for any other academic award.

Abstract

In terms of studies of British imperialism, the Royal Navy, and more particularly its sailors during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, has remained a neglected topic. Historical studies of the navy continue to be dominated by naval historians, who are primarily concerned with the technical and strategic aspects of the Royal Navy. In the past 10 years there has been a gradual intrusion upon this and a number of socio-cultural and gender historians have turned their attention in this direction. Therefore, this thesis continues this development and examines the relationship that the lower deck had with imperialism by examining the testimony of sailors through unpublished diaries held in museum collections. It charts the period chronologically and thematically through events of naval pageantry and war, which reveals the complexities of the sailor's character particularly around the concepts of imperialism, identity, pride and patriotism.

By examining sailors as they experienced imperialism through both peace and war, it reveals that the Empire was a vital aspect of their lives and also their own identity. As a significant part of the imperial construct within British culture, sailors consequently viewed their experiences through an imperialistic prism. However, it reveals that sailors were not simply passive recipients of imperial inculcation and demonstrated a level of independence to this. Thus it is argued that their relationship with imperialism was part of a wider independent sailor culture, which competed with individual beliefs, differing loyalties, and could mean different things at different times.

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List of Abbreviations

ADM	Admiralty
AS	Able Seaman
CPO	Chief Petty Officer
CSA	Continuous Service Act
HOs	"Hostilities Only" rating
IWM	Imperial War Museum
LSA	Leading Sick-berth Attendant
NA	National Archives
NDA	Naval Discipline Act
NLS	National Library of Scotland
NMM	National Maritime Museum
NMRN	National Museum of the Royal Navy
OS	Ordinary Seaman
PO	Petty Officer
RFR	Royal Fleet Reserve
RN	Royal Navy
RNR	Royal Naval Reserve
RNVR	Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve

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Chapter One

Sailors and the Empire: Voices from the Lower Deck

Introduction

On attending the funeral service of a young sailor killed at the Dardanelles in 1915, Seaman William Abbott heard his captain say: 'there is nothing better than to fight and die for your country'.¹ Later, confiding in his diary, Abbott proudly wrote: 'I agree with him'.² Such displays of patriotism are not uncommon for this period. In particular, historians such as Niall Ferguson, Adrian Gregory, Gerard DeGroot and David Silbey have considered the influencing effect of patriotism on men volunteering for the army during the First World War.³ However, Abbott did not volunteer to join the navy out of patriotism generated by the declaration of war; for him, as with the majority of sailors who served during the conflict, the navy was his career.⁴ Studies of patriotism amongst British sailors remains a relatively ignored area of research for two key reasons: firstly, because sailors were not volunteers they have been excluded from studies which have focused specifically on the relationship between volunteering, imperialism and society. Secondly, and perhaps more seriously, the maritime sphere has received significantly less consideration from socio-cultural historians. This point has been readily acknowledged by Brian Lavery who has said 'Traditional naval history has tended to ignore the "common seaman"'.⁵ Instead, sailors and the Royal Navy as a topic remains the preserve of naval historians like Nicholas Rodger who have been critical of more recent approaches.⁶

This lack of engagement is striking especially considering the continued interest in the relationship between imperialism and British popular culture. As a topic, imperialism and society continues to be a contested area of historical research with strong arguments voiced on both sides. On the one hand, there are those such as John M. Mackenzie who have argued that British culture was strongly influenced by imperial sentiment and his pioneering research has led to the successful *Studies in Imperialism* series.⁷ In particular, Mackenzie argued that imperialism created 'for the British a world view which was central to their perceptions of

¹ RNM 2004/103/5: Diary of William Thomas Abbott

² RNM 2004/103/5: Diary of William Thomas Abbott

³ Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, (London: Penguin, 1999 [first edition 1998]); Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British society and the First World War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Gerard DeGroot, *Blighty: British society in the era of the great war*, (London: Longman, 1996); David Silbey, *The British working class and enthusiasm for war*, (London: Frank Cass, 2005)

⁴ Although volunteers in the form of "Hostilities Only" ratings did serve with the Royal Navy during the Great War, and this point will be considered in more detail below.

⁵ This point has been well made and is a recurring comment in recent historiography. See Brian Lavery, *Able Seamen: The Lower Deck of the Royal Navy, 1850-1939*, (London: Conway, 2011); p. 9; Mary A. Conley, *From Jack Tar to Union Jack: Representing naval manhood in the British Empire, 1870-1918*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009); p. 11

⁶ Nicholas Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: a naval history of Britain, 1649-1815*, (London: Penguin, 2006); Don Leggett, 'Navy, nation and identity in the long nineteenth century', *Journal for Maritime Research*, 13, 2, 2011; pp. 151-163, p. 152

⁷ The series was founded by John M. Mackenzie and is published by the Manchester University Press. For further information about this project see <http://www.manchesteruniversitypress.co.uk/series/studies-in-imperialism/>.

themselves'.⁸ He posited that 'Even if they knew little and cared less about imperial philosophies or colonial territories, nonetheless imperial status set them apart'.⁹ Whilst on the other side of the argument are those such as Bernard Porter, who has argued that although present in popular culture, imperialism meant little to the working classes. Porter has argued that although the face presented by Britain to the world was its imperial one, 'All the while, however, she was presenting an entirely different self-image to most of her own people'.¹⁰ As such he has downplayed the impact of imperialism on British society and culture, suggesting that 'All that was required was a minimum of apathy'.¹¹

However, recent approaches have argued the importance of the nuances of British imperialism. For instance, Andrew Thompson has countered Porter's interpretation and analysis, stating that there has been a 'failure to recognise how diverse and pluralistic that empire was: it is not sufficient simply to assess the "amount" of imperialism in Britain'.¹² He has criticized these approaches noting 'it was always highly improbable that a single or monolithic "imperial culture" would emerge in Britain'.¹³ In itself, imperialism is a complicated concept to define and there is merit to Mackenzie's argument that it 'meant different things to different people at different times'.¹⁴ However, broadly speaking, it drew together three key tenets: tones of militarism, loyalty to the monarchy, and racial beliefs propagated by theories of Social Darwinism.¹⁵ Imperial culture could then be disseminated via sermons, school, advertisements, songs, theatre, leisure, and many other cultural forms.¹⁶ More recently Brad Beaven has added to the importance of this individuality of imperial culture by examining the 'process of dissemination of imperialism, the form it took and its consumption'.¹⁷ Beaven concludes that 'Imperial culture was neither generic nor unimportant but was instead multi-layered and recast to capture the concerns of a locality'.¹⁸ Therefore, the nuances of imperial culture and the concepts contained within it form a key focus of this thesis.

Whether or not the British public was overtly imperialistic (however they interpreted it and associated with it), certain symbols became central to the Empire and the way it was portrayed in popular culture. This imagery occupied a prominent place in the public sphere, and formed a keystone of Government, commercial and leisure outreach. In particular, the Royal Navy became a prominent feature in British popular culture and has been called 'a powerful cultural

⁸ John M. Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003 [first edition 1984]); p. 2

⁹ Mackenzie, *Propaganda*, p. 2

¹⁰ Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006 [first published 2004]); p. 306

¹¹ Porter, *Absent-Minded*, p. 307

¹² Andrew Thompson, *The Empire Strikes Back? The impact of imperialism on Britain from the mid-nineteenth century*, (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2005); p. xiv

¹³ Thompson, *Empire*, p. xiv

¹⁴ Mackenzie, *Propaganda*, p. 1

¹⁵ Mackenzie, *Propaganda*, p. 2

¹⁶ Brad Beaven, *Visions of Empire: Patriotism, popular culture and the city, 1870-1939*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012); pp. 2-3

¹⁷ Beaven, *Visions*, p. 1

¹⁸ Beaven, *Visions*, p. 208

symbol' by Jan Rüger.¹⁹ The Royal Navy was the premier British military force, policing the oceans, protecting trade routes and enforcing *Pax Britannica*. The importance of naval tradition within British culture has been noted by Mackenzie, who for example considered its popularity as a theatre topic in the nineteenth century where 'Nelson was idolized, and the myth of the archetypal simple and heroic British tar developed'.²⁰ Thus the importance of the navy to the Empire and its position within imperial culture has been acknowledged, however these studies have not considered the navy as a distinct and separate element, or engaged with this relationship. It is only more recent historiography which has begun to redress this omission. In particular, there has been a growing interest in the character and identity of sailors, and also in the relationship between empire, the navy and masculinity in British society, spurred on by social and gender historians.²¹

Whilst welcome additions, which have drawn together considerations of the relationship between the Royal Navy and imperial culture, there remains a lack of engagement with the sailor as an individual in terms of his relationship with imperialism and how he viewed himself within the imperial world he was a part of. Therefore, this thesis continues these developments by examining the relationship between sailors and imperialism by means of their own testimony, primarily in the form of unpublished diaries. It considers sailors from the late nineteenth century to the start of the Second World War. As Lavery has noted, 'much of the period from 1850 to the present is a clean sheet as far as the historian is concerned'.²² Examining the vicissitudes through which the British Empire went at this time allows for a range of sailors' experiences to be considered. What is clearly shown is that sailors became, in the eyes of the British public, brave servants of the Empire, in the words of contemporaries: the "handyman" of Empire.²³ However, this image is not "one size fits all" and it is argued that it is vital for sailors to be considered on both an individual and collective basis in order to examine the nuances of this relationship in detail. In doing this it engages with recent historiographical trends and considers the specific themes of imperialism, identity and masculinity, pride and patriotism to show how these came together as part of a collective sailor culture. An understanding of these concepts is fundamental to any consideration of this topic, and it will be demonstrated how they can be both disassociated from each other and viewed separately, yet also be viewed as having an interdependency and being mutually reinforcing.

Closely linked to this are concepts of race and the belief in white racial superiority over indigenous races who were increasingly viewed as backward and inferior.²⁴ At the same time there existed a hierarchy of race which differentiated between perceptions of black and Asiatic

¹⁹ Jan Rüger, *The Great Naval Game: Britain and Germany in the Age of Empire*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009 [first edition 2007]); p. 1

²⁰ Mackenzie, *Propaganda*, p. 47

²¹ See for example Isaac Land, *War, Nationalism, and the British Sailor, 1750-1850*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) and Conley, *From Jack*.

²² Brian Lavery, *Able*, p. 9

²³ Archibald Hurd, *How our Navy is Run: A Description of Life in the King's Fleet*, (London: C. Arthur Pearson Ltd, 1902); p. 187

²⁴ See for example Thompson, *Empire*, p. 65

cultures, for example.²⁵ It will be demonstrated that sailors both absorbed and displayed these cultural norms, whilst also assisting in their propagation. In particular, it will examine the perceived idea of the 'other' and the 'exotic' alongside ideas of racial superiority. It will also consider ideas of racial superiority over other European nations and the concept of racial hierarchy amongst white races, and how this sat alongside ideas of national superiority with fluid terms of understanding. In doing so, it will be argued that sailors fully embraced existing concepts of superiority as part of their identity.

Its secondary aim is to produce a socio-cultural study of the lower deck using its own words, which situates it within the construct of imperialist studies and bridges the gap between existing research. As will be demonstrated, the "common seaman", can be easily fitted within existing investigatory frameworks used in imperial and gender studies. Whilst some notable works have considered the history of British seamen, the lack of the sailors' voice is self-evident. An important reason for this, as highlighted by Don Leggett, Mary A. Conley and Isaac Land, is that the voice of British sailors has been 'almost entirely lost'.²⁶ As such, Leggett has argued, the 'relative silence of Jack Tar meant that others often spoke for him'.²⁷ However, during the period considered by this thesis, lower-deck literacy had markedly improved as a result of Education Acts such as Forster's Education Act of 1870 and the further Education Act of 1880. As Charles Beresford proudly stated in *The Times*, the 'children of Nelson are not degenerate'.²⁸ Consequently, museum collections hold a wealth of personal testimonies in the form of diaries, scrap books and letters.

In addition, this study adds to recent literature that has countered the widespread perception of the period that sailors were naïve and child-like, unsophisticated and unintellectual.²⁹ Whilst not doubting the skill and bravery of sailors, these views fostered the belief amongst many contemporaries that sailors were unlikely to ruminate seriously on such complex issues as patriotism or imperialism. Therefore, considering their testimony augments the arguments of Mary Conley and Jan Rüger and demonstrates that sailors were not passive recipients of imperialist ideas; they were active in their interactions with these concepts and used them to shape their own identity. Whilst this study groups sailors as an homogenous body of men in order to demonstrate the lower deck relationship with imperialism, it should be emphasized that the lower deck was instead highly stratified and cross-cut. Therefore, individually sailors' understanding may have been more varied and, in particular, influenced by length of service, experiences, and age.

This chapter sets out the fundamental purpose of this thesis and the premise for its arguments. It also set out the methodology for the study and explains the reasoning behind the sources

²⁵ Porter, *Absent-minded*, p. 76; Daniel Owen Spence, *Colonial naval culture and British imperialism, 1922-67*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015); p. 81

²⁶ Leggett, 'Navy', p. 153; See also Conley, *From Jack and Land, War*.

²⁷ Leggett, 'Navy', p. 155

²⁸ *The Times*, 31 July 1909

²⁹ This point regarding sailor character ties in with identity and as such will be discussed in further detail throughout this thesis but it is important to raise this common perception at this stage.

used to ensure that robust arguments can be adequately supported. By synthesizing the existing literature it demonstrates the position of lower-deck social history within wider historical studies. Furthermore, it argues that as a result of modernization the image of the Royal Navy and its sailors became vital to British imperial culture and became a means by which sailors identified themselves. As such, imperialism became an integral part of a developed, independent lower-deck culture which drew together sailors' key ideas, customs, and understanding of their image and the world.³⁰

Historiography of the lower deck

By the second half of the nineteenth century, the Royal Navy was undergoing significant changes. Industrialization brought advances in technology and fundamental changes in ship design, however it also brought dramatic changes to the navy's social structure and its relationship with British society. To investigate these changes and the interrelationship between the Royal Navy, sailors and British imperialism, this chapter considers a number of historiographies of the lower deck.

An early attempt to produce a social history of the lower deck was made by Peter Kemp in 1970.³¹ The primary aim of Kemp's study was to demonstrate the changing social conscience of sailors from the Tudor period until the beginning of the twentieth century. In order to do this Kemp drew on a number of sources available at that time, which consisted mainly of official papers and admiralty letters.³² Kemp argued that although the image of the pre-Elizabethan sailor has been lost, as the Empire took shape 'The seaman began to emerge as an entity in his own right, a necessary and desirable member of a growing community'.³³ However, Kemp was aware of the limitations presented by this approach and drew a line in the sand at the First World War. Although he acknowledged the importance of the Great War and inter-war years on the lower deck, he argued that 'We are still too near these events to see them in a proper perspective'.³⁴

On the other hand, Henry Baynham approached the lower deck from the point of view of the sailors themselves.³⁵ Baynham was instrumental in creating an oral history collection of sailor testimony held by the Imperial War Museum and in particular, his book *Men from the Dreadnoughts*, published in 1976, documented the history of the lower deck using sailors' testimony in the form of interviews and diaries alongside official sources. Baynham's methodology is relatively primitive, and he explained his criteria for selection as: 'All joined the Lower Deck of the Royal Navy before the First World War; this, indeed, was my qualification for interview'.³⁶ He does not detail how his interviews were conducted or explain the basis of

³⁰ This independent lower-deck culture is hereafter referred to as "sailor culture" for shorthand.

³¹ See Peter Kemp, *The British Sailor: A Social History of the Lower Deck*, (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1970).

³² Kemp, *British*, p. xiv

³³ Kemp, *British*, p. x

³⁴ Kemp, *British*, p. xiv

³⁵ See Henry Baynham, *Men from the Dreadnoughts*, (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1976).

³⁶ Baynham, *Men*, p. 15

the questions he posed to sailors. Furthermore, Baynham admits the limitations of his study: 'I have doubted the accuracy of some of the seamen's observations... but generally I have left it unanswered, preferring rather to give others a chance of pondering on the problem'.³⁷ Therefore, there is little evaluation or engagement with the source material other than to situate it within the background history. In addition, he edited the testimony he collected for publication from oral interviews. Nevertheless, as a social history of the lower deck it remains vital, drawing upon life in the changing navy, the different branches, experiences ashore and afloat, and the First World War. As such, it has set the tone for such studies which draw together background history interspersed with sailor testimony such as those by Max Arthur and to some extent Brian Lavery and Christopher McKee.³⁸

Interest continued during the 1980s, most notably by Anthony Carew who approached the lower deck from an industrial relations perspective. Carew directed his study towards political and economic themes, focusing on the politicization of the lower deck, charting the progression of naval rights and pay culminating in the mutiny at Invergordon in 1931.³⁹ In conducting this study, Carew drew on a number of archive collections including the personal collections of Harry Pursey and Stephen Roskill, as well as official papers, lower deck newspapers and oral testimony.⁴⁰ It presents a detailed study of the various reforms introduced and the growth of industrial activity on the lower deck alongside attempts by the Admiralty to resist such grievances. Consequently, Carew's study remains the key text on the politics of the lower deck from 1900 to 1931.⁴¹ However, Carew clearly approaches the topic from his industrial relations background and at times it is questionable whether this is an appropriate framework for analysis.

Nevertheless, despite these investigations, between the 1980s through to the 2000s, social histories of the lower deck have been significantly outweighed by more traditionalist naval historians such as Nicholas Rodger.⁴² Therefore, Christopher McKee's approach in 2002 was a welcome addition. In particular, McKee focused on the 'voice' of sailors using both diaries and letters, and also oral testimony, with the purpose of questioning the stereotype of Jack Tar.⁴³ McKee noted: 'I decided to ask those who know naval sailors best – the ratings themselves'.⁴⁴ Drawing on key aspects of their lives, McKee has explored sailors' own views on their backgrounds and reasons for joining the navy, travelling the world, and experiences in battle.

³⁷ Baynham, *Men*, p. 16

³⁸ See Max Arthur, *True Glory: the Royal Navy, 1914-1939*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1996); Lavery, *Able*; Christopher McKee, *Sober Men and True: Sailor Lives in the Royal Navy, 1900-1945*, (London: Harvard University Press, 2002).

³⁹ See Anthony Carew, *The Lower Deck of the Royal Navy, 1900-39: Invergordon in Perspective*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981).

⁴⁰ Carew, *The Lower Deck*, pp. viii-xi

⁴¹ McKee calls Carew's study the 'superlative book'. McKee, *Sober Men*, p. 5

⁴² Nicholas Rodger has written extensively on the Royal Navy. See for example Rodger, *Command*.

⁴³ McKee, *Sober Men*, p. 1

⁴⁴ McKee, *Sober Men*, p. 1

In doing so he has demonstrated the complexities of sailors rather than conforming simply to the stereotype, and their dual image as rogues and defenders of empire.⁴⁵

Furthermore, McKee has shied away from heavy overdependence on published memoirs which other studies have used, citing the key danger of conscious/subconscious editing, and has argued that they often only 'focus on major happenings which the old sailor thinks were important'.⁴⁶ In particular, one published autobiography which has been heavily used by others such as Brian Lavery is *Aye, Aye, Sir* by Clinker Knocker.⁴⁷ The authenticity of this memoir has been questioned by Chris Henry who suggests that it was actually written by an officer and conforms to perceptions of the lower deck rather than give an honest view.⁴⁸ This point has also been well made by Tony Chamberlain in his social history of the stoker branch.⁴⁹

The most recent social history of the lower deck has been produced by Brian Lavery. In *Able Seamen*, the second part of his trilogy of the history of the lower deck, he examines the lower deck chronologically between 1850 and 1939, investigating the key technological changes, imperialism and war, and the effect upon sailors. Lavery continues to demonstrate the complexities of the sailor's character. In particular, he has argued that, 'Despite his highly controlled environment, the sailor developed his own very strong culture'.⁵⁰ This is an important observation, but one that Lavery does not capitalize on. Furthermore, it continues to draw upon a range of official sources as well as published autobiographies and personal papers rather than sailor testimony as McKee did. This is a broad study but one that has nevertheless done much to update the historiography of the lower deck. Importantly, Lavery raises the issue of sailor loyalty noting that 'Sailors have at least as much loyalty to their messmates, their ship, the navy as a whole and their country'.⁵¹

However, in recent years there has been a growing interest from socio-cultural and gender historians who have begun to consider the lower deck through these themes.⁵² Although not specifically social histories of the lower deck in themselves, importantly they have introduced wider trends in historical discourse to studies of sailors. For example Quintin Colville has considered the navy from a gender perspective, examining masculine identities through the medium of naval uniforms. Naval uniforms have become ubiquitous as part of the imperial image. In a highly stratified naval society, Colville argued that the 'uniform was of crucial significance in defining the understanding of class and masculinity held by all ranks' and in

⁴⁵ McKee, *Sober Men*, p. 227

⁴⁶ McKee, *Sober Men*, pp. 7-8

⁴⁷ Clinker Knocker, *Aye, Aye, Sir*, (London: Rich & Cowan, 1938)

⁴⁸ Chris Henry, *Depth Charge!: royal naval mines, depth charges and underwater weapons, 1914-1945*, (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2005), p. 191

⁴⁹ Tony Chamberlain, 'Stokers – the lowest of the low?' *A Social History of Royal Navy Stokers 1850-1950*, Unpublished Dissertation, Exeter, 2013; pp. 16-17

⁵⁰ Lavery, *Able*, p. 306

⁵¹ Lavery, *Able*, p. 11

⁵² See for example Mary A. Conley who comments on the lack of historical study from a social perspective. Conley, *From Jack*, p. 5

shaping their image and identity.⁵³ Tailored and made their own, the importance of Colville's argument is that 'Jack Tar... was consequently not just imposed from above; it was also inhabited and exploited by working-class men as a source of social kudos and esteem'.⁵⁴

The concept of the sailor stereotype and relationship between his image and imperial culture has been further developed by Mary A. Conley. Conley stated her study 'is not a social history of the lives of the non-commissioned men who formed the lower deck of the navy, but more a cultural history'.⁵⁵ Approaching the topic from a gender perspective, Conley thus provides a refreshing investigation into the links between the navy, empire and manhood in British society. In doing so she has investigated how the image of the Royal Navy was re-constructed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and expanded the discourse within the construct of imperialist studies. In particular, she has considered the masculinity of sailors and investigated the construction of the masculine bluejacket image: a reliable, honest and brave man who was ready to serve the Empire.⁵⁶ By framing this alongside the changing nature of the navy, and the effect of imperial scares and anxieties, Conley has demonstrated how the modern image of the navy was engendered and constructed during this time. Furthermore, by drawing on the work of Joanna Bourke, Conley has suggested the transferability of similar gender studies.⁵⁷ Whilst Lavery and McKee have alluded to the crisis of masculinity created by wartime conditions, this is an insightful approach to the topic.⁵⁸ As Conley has demonstrated, heroic masculinity in the navy struck a chord with the British public. In particular, the significance of the death of Jack Cornwell at Jutland, held a key place in the "popular" memory of the war, and was an important part of the national struggle.⁵⁹

Introducing sailors to studies of British imperialism has been an important step forward, especially given the role of the Royal Navy's image in imperial culture. Approaching this theme from a cultural perspective, Jan R ger has considered the interplay between politics and ritual, the public and the navy. In recognizing that the navy was 'a powerful cultural symbol', R ger has demonstrated the importance of large-scale naval displays and ship launches, and how they served as a means of promoting the Empire by putting the navy on 'the public stage'.⁶⁰ Primarily, R ger's study focuses on the relationship between the navy and the public: how the spectacle of naval pageantry reinforced imperialistic beliefs. In particular, the possibility for feelings to co-exist, suggesting that 'conflict was hidden, consensus was staged'.⁶¹ However, R ger also noted that this was the same for sailors and that 'there did not have to be a

⁵³ Quintin Colville, 'Jack Tar and the Gentleman Officer: The role of uniform in shaping the class- and gender-related identities of British naval personnel, 1930-1939', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 13, 2003; pp. 105-129, p. 106

⁵⁴ Colville, 'Jack Tar', p. 119

⁵⁵ Conley, *From Jack*, p. 11

⁵⁶ Conley, *From Jack*, p. 3

⁵⁷ Conley, *From Jack*, pp. 165-167; Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: face-to-face killing in twentieth-century warfare*, (London: Granta, 1999); See also Gail Braybon, *Evidence, history, and the Great War: historians and the impact of 1914-18*, (Oxford: Berghahn, 2003); Sue Bruley, *Women in Britain since 1900*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999).

⁵⁸ Lavery, *Able*, pp. 215-220; McKee, *Sober Men*, pp. 107-114

⁵⁹ Conley, *From Jack*, p. 165

⁶⁰ R ger, *Great Naval*, p. 1

⁶¹ R ger, *Great Naval*, p. 122

contradiction between being proud of the show that the navy put on, and feeling profound dissatisfaction with those who most seemed to benefit from it'.⁶² Thus sailors could draw a sense of pride in the navy and their role without getting drawn into the wider imperial message.

Singling out the sailor himself, Isaac Land has produced an illuminating study which has situated Jack Tar into the discourse of national identity. Although considering an earlier timeframe than this thesis (1750-1850), this study has done much to develop the idea of examining sailors in the wider cultural context. Importantly, Land argues that his study 'is not a work of maritime history', rather it considers 'the nation-state itself as the problem that sailors confronted'.⁶³ In examining how sailors responded, it sets the tone for the direction in which historiography needs to travel and be approached by those outside traditional naval history. In particular to this thesis, Land has argued that the loyalty of sailors needs to be addressed and that historians need to move beyond the 'not very plausible, but still influential, assumption... that a degree of nationalist fervour in the context of military service is self-explanatory'.⁶⁴ Furthermore, Land supports Conley and Colville in arguing that sailors had their own minds and interpretation of their identity, and noted that 'their ultimate relationship to British nationalism was, predictably, complex and ambivalent'.⁶⁵ Consequently, Land has argued the importance of the sailor's voice, and that amongst the extant material there is a 'diversity of voices' demonstrating that sailors did not have to conform to stereotypes.⁶⁶ What sailors said differed 'as the situation required, and assumed roles that they thought would best suit their purposes of the moment'.⁶⁷

A further welcome study is that of Daniel Owen Spence who has examined the history of the Royal Navy specifically from the viewpoint of empire and imperialism. This study charts the navy through 500 years of history, beginning with the Tudors and continuing to de-colonization. In particular, he argues that the 'Mental valuations of prestige were vital to Britain's imperial and "Great Power" status, and as Britain's most visible and persuasive global ambassadors, the Royal Navy played a front-line role in its cultivation'.⁶⁸ That the navy could do this was due to 'a symbiotic relationship where the colonies materially strengthened the senior service so that it could strengthen the empire further'.⁶⁹ Following a chronological approach, this is not a history of the lower deck, nor is it a strict naval history, but it examines key aspects of the Royal Navy. However, it considers the navy over a very broad time frame and is not an extensive study. Nevertheless, this should not detract from what is a remarkable addition to the historiography and highlights a number of areas where more research needs to be done, especially in relation to the Empire from a colonial point of view.

⁶² Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 123

⁶³ Land, *War*, p. 10

⁶⁴ Land, *War*, p. 1

⁶⁵ Land, *War*, p. 10

⁶⁶ Land, *War*, p. 27

⁶⁷ Land, *War*, p. 27

⁶⁸ Daniel Owen Spence, *A History of the Royal Navy: Empire and Imperialism*, (London: I. B. Tauris, 2015); p. 2

⁶⁹ Spence, *A History*, p. 1

A further two studies are worthy of consideration at this point. Although not social histories or specifically focused on the lower deck, both examine the naval brigades who served ashore in a number of conflicts during the second half of the nineteenth century. The first by Tony Bridgland, a journalist and amateur historian, was a study specifically focusing on the naval brigades landed during the Boer War. Bridgland charted the war as it developed and produced an excellent account of the actions of the naval brigades ashore throughout the war. Although a greater emphasis is placed on the story of the officers who served as members of the brigades, such as Captain Percy Scott of HMS *Terrible* who devised the mountings that allowed the naval guns to go ashore, he also provided anecdotal information from sailors.⁷⁰ In particular, the hardships they endured whilst at Ladysmith and in the relief columns. Thus this allows some further insight to be gained and also sits alongside the official reports of War Correspondents such as Donald McDonald and H. H. S. Pearce.⁷¹ However, the source of Bridgland's material is not always clear and it is uncertain whether it is second-hand information. Similarly Arthur Bleby is a retired naval officer who approached the subject because he 'could find no single book recording the efforts and adventures of these Naval Brigades'.⁷² Bleby's work is primarily an account of the different engagements the naval brigades served in during 'eleven of the Wars of the Empire' and recounts these with limited wider historical context or engagement with historical debates.⁷³ Nevertheless, he wrote that in conducting this study: 'I should like to add something of what the men were like'.⁷⁴ In doing so Bleby produced a brief examination of sailors serving in the naval brigades. Although his methodology was primitive and shows no advance from other generalists such as Max Arthur, it is an important study of an area of the Royal Navy which has been almost completely ignored.⁷⁵

From reviewing this literature, it is evident that the majority of studies focusing simply on lower-deck social history have followed a set methodological pattern: overreliance on autobiographies, collating sailor testimony alongside official information and setting this against the key developments of the lower deck. In particular, many of these studies deploy limited engagement with historiography and, more importantly, wider historical themes. Furthermore, the continued reliance on lower-deck autobiographies without additional information in support is problematic. For this reason Christopher McKee has taken a step in the right direction by attempting to curtail their usage and seek out the sailor's voice, extrapolating a number of individual diaries to demonstrate key arguments. In addition, McKee and Lavery have noted the complexity of the sailor's identity. The recent contributions of Conley and Rüger have therefore broken new ground in introducing and developing the navy within the constructs of

⁷⁰ Tony Bridgland, *Field Gun Jack Versus the Boers: The Royal Navy in South Africa, 1899-1900*, (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 1998); p. 7

⁷¹ Donald McDonald, *How We Kept the Flag Flying: the story of the siege of Ladysmith*, (London: Ward, Lock and Co., 1900); H. H. S. Pearce, *Four Months Besieged: the story of Ladysmith*, (London: Macmillan and Co., 1900)

⁷² Arthur Bleby, *The Victorian Naval Brigades*, (Dunbeath: Whittles Publishing, 2006); p. vi

⁷³ Bleby, *Victorian*, p. vi

⁷⁴ Bleby, *Victorian*, p. vii

⁷⁵ See for example Arthur, *True Glory*.

imperialism and gender. By arguing the importance of the navy in society, Rüger has drawn a key link between sailors and naval pageantry. Although not the focus of his study, this demonstrates a significant gap in the historiography as to how they related to pageantry as it became an increasingly important aspect of their lives. Similarly, Conley has revealed how the imperial character of the sailor was adopted and that they took pride in their reputation and image of respectability. Together they demonstrate the need for a socio-cultural study of the lower deck focusing on sailors and their relationship to the Empire.

Creating the modern navy and the sailor's image

During the second half of the nineteenth century the Royal Navy entered a period of significant modernization, which culminated in the Anglo-German Arms race in the early twentieth century. In particular, the last quarter of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century took on particular importance as New Imperialism gained momentum, and European imperial powers expanded and consolidated their holdings overseas. Concepts of imperialism, identity, pride and patriotism were increasingly bound together through the prism of British imperial prestige and influenced sailor culture. Therefore, it is necessary to briefly examine both the modernization of the navy and creation of the sailor's image to examine issues of change and continuity over the period considered by this thesis.

In his study of the lower deck, Peter Kemp argued that the 'great turning point' in its social history was the Crimean War, because it highlighted the urgent need for reform.⁷⁶ This resulted in the Continuous Service Act (CSA) of 1853, which Anthony Carew has argued led to the birth of the modern navy, and modern sailors.⁷⁷ The Act replaced the 'deeply unpopular' practice of pressganging sailors at times of high demand and the economical, but impractical, hire-and-discharge system.⁷⁸ Furthermore, it shifted the responsibility for crewing ships to the Admiralty rather than ship's captains.⁷⁹ This meant that men and boys no longer joined a ship based upon its or its captain's reputation: they joined the Royal Navy and would be assigned to any ship in the fleet.⁸⁰ As such, the Admiralty became responsible for actively encouraging men and boys to join the navy. Therefore, reform was not only necessary, it was vital to ensure that the navy remained adequately manned.⁸¹

The CSA was followed by the Naval Discipline Act of 1860 which reformed the naval regulations and, as Kemp noted, removed the 'ferocious charter' by which the navy was governed.⁸² Conley further argued the importance of this Act, recognizing it as an attempt to change the popular

⁷⁶ Kemp, *British*, p. 200

⁷⁷ Carew, *Lower Deck*, p. xiv

⁷⁸ Conley, *From Jack*, pp. 32-33. For further information on pressganging and the navy see Denver Brunsmann, *The evil necessity: British naval impressment in the eighteenth-century Atlantic world*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013).

⁷⁹ Conley, *From Jack*, p. 33

⁸⁰ Carew, *Lower Deck*, p. xiv

⁸¹ Kemp, *British*, p. 201; Conley, *From Jack*, p. 19

⁸² Kemp, *British*, p. 208

belief that the Royal Navy was little more than a 'prison afloat'.⁸³ Although Kemp noted that many punishments were still 'harsh', they 'were no longer mandatory and could be relaxed at discretion'.⁸⁴ Similarly, Conley argued that the NDA 'was particularly ground-breaking because it reduced the number of offences that either called for or required a death sentence'.⁸⁵ This was a significant step towards increasing the appeal of the navy to the British public and paved the way for the development of sailor culture as the navy re-established its image. In particular, Conley has noted that it was hoped this would counter the appeal of the navy's chief competitor: the Merchant Marine.⁸⁶ The Merchant Marine operated under far less draconian rules and regulations, and afforded better rates of pay, thus it was often more appealing for skilled seamen.⁸⁷

Through the CSA and NDA, with the increase in pay and removal of the strict and often brutal punishments, the Royal Navy began to be more attractive as a profession. Consequently, Brian Lavery has argued that the navy's attempt to improve the situation should be viewed as 'a success'.⁸⁸ In particular, he highlighted a report from the First Sea Lord to the House of Commons which stated:

It is worthy of note that, simultaneously with the growing popularity of the Navy with parents as a career for their sons, there exists a dread of dismissal from the Service which previously did not exist.⁸⁹

Although the First Sea Lord would wish to give a success story to the Commons so as to secure the Royal Navy's budget, the respectability of the Royal Navy was on the rise. Whether from a middle-class or working-class background, the man or boy in question would have a secure position, a respectable wage and clear career progression.⁹⁰

Career progression was certainly an improving factor, especially as ships became more technologically advanced and sail was abandoned, and the need for skilled men increased.⁹¹ For example, the engine rooms of coal-fired ships required an army of engineers and stokers to operate them, and by the mid-1870s this demand was increasing.⁹² Engineer officers were better trained and earned higher wages, engine room artificers did the majority of the more

⁸³ Conley, *From Jack*, p. 35

⁸⁴ Kemp, *British*, p. 208

⁸⁵ Conley, *From Jack*, p. 37

⁸⁶ Conley, *From Jack*, p. 35

⁸⁷ Sailors in the merchant marine were better paid and they did not have the barbaric punishment system of the Royal Navy; See Conley, *From Jack*, p. 35.

⁸⁸ Lavery, *Able*, p. 91

⁸⁹ *Brassey's Naval Annual*, 1887; p. 531 quoted in Lavery, *Able*, p. 91

⁹⁰ A middle-class boy was more likely to have had the belief of duty and honour instilled within him by schooling and social circumstance whilst a working-class boy would have been in need of a profession to contribute to the family's finances. See also Kemp, *British*, p. 202

⁹¹ By 1880s sails were no longer needed in case of emergency and stoking 'was no longer a part-time activity'. Lavery, *Able*, p. 126; A fascinating study which appeared too late to be considered in this thesis is the recent contribution by Dr Steven Gray. See Steven Gray, *Steam Power and Sea Power: Coal, the Royal Navy, and the British Empire, c. 1870-1914*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017).

⁹² Lavery, *Able*, p. 104; This led to an increased diversity of men on the lower deck, especially as these men were usually older and had not joined the navy as boys. See Baynham, *Men*, p. 164; Although distinct from sailors, stokers are considered briefly and used for wider contextual analysis particularly in Chapter Two.

menial work and stokers kept the fires burning. Similarly sailors had opportunities for promotion and the creation of the new ratings of chief petty officer and leading seaman offered improved benefits and wages.⁹³

By 1880 recruitment propaganda portrayed the Royal Navy 'as an honourable and respectable career for a young man'.⁹⁴ The importance of an "honourable" career may be negligible but "respectable" and secure employment would have been desirable.⁹⁵ As Conley rightly states, working-class children were required to contribute to the family finances and the navy must have seemed more exotic than the mill as it had the potential to offer exciting adventures in far-off lands.⁹⁶ Carew had also made this point, saying that 'most [were] seeking adventure', although he also noted that 'some simply [wanted] escape from an unhappy home life'.⁹⁷ However, Conley wisely caveated this point by revealing that nationally the level of exotic appeal appears to have been limited.⁹⁸ It is understandable that locales should be intrinsically linked to this, and those living near the coast or in port towns would have been far more likely to become sailors. Firstly, this is because historically the sea would have provided one of the main sources of employment in these towns, and other family members were likely to be employed in similar roles. Secondly, as recent historiography has shown, the importance of growing local and civic pride in these locales and their firm association with the Royal Navy should not be underestimated.⁹⁹ The heightened sense of local, civic and imperial culture may also have influenced sailors, who by necessity regularly found themselves in these environments, and influenced their own understanding of these concepts.

As the public image of the sailor became increasingly respectable, it has become an area of consideration in trying to deconstruct the stereotype and uncover the reality behind the man. Christopher McKee has summed up the enduring image of Jack Tar rather succinctly:

He is a globe-wandering adventurer, dressed in distinctive and attractive costume, short on shoreside personal responsibilities, who flexes the national muscle at enemies, would-be and real, beyond or on the seas. His dark side is a strong part of his appeal; with prodigious appetite for alcohol and sex, he delights in anti-social behaviour which is held in check only by the fear of harsh punishment.¹⁰⁰

As McKee pointed out, this 'traditional image of the sailor comes from information historians have collected from elite sources: officers, journalists, and social reformers'.¹⁰¹ He argued that

⁹³ Conley, *From Jack*, p. 34

⁹⁴ Conley, *From Jack*, p. 42

⁹⁵ Whilst 'honourable' was a tenet of idealized imperial imagery, the pervasiveness of this in society is open to debate. However, the concept of 'duty' is important to this study and will be considered throughout the thesis.

⁹⁶ Conley, *From Jack*, p. 42; Similarly Colville supports this view. See Colville, 'Jack Tar', p. 119.

⁹⁷ Carew, *Lower Deck*, p. xviii

⁹⁸ The majority of boys were 'drawn from the southwest and south of England (especially London, Plymouth and Portsmouth)'. Conley, *From Jack*, p. 43

⁹⁹ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 98; See also Beaven, *Visions*.

¹⁰⁰ McKee, *Sober Men*, p. 1

¹⁰¹ McKee, *Sober Men*, p. 2

these groups, particularly the officers, 'had a vested interest in portraying naval ratings as the *other*' in order to augment 'their own elite status'.¹⁰² In particular, McKee has suggested that the majority of evidence consists of 'colourful disciplinary records', drawing a comparison with those who end up on prison records: a *cause célèbre*, not an accurate cross-section of society.¹⁰³

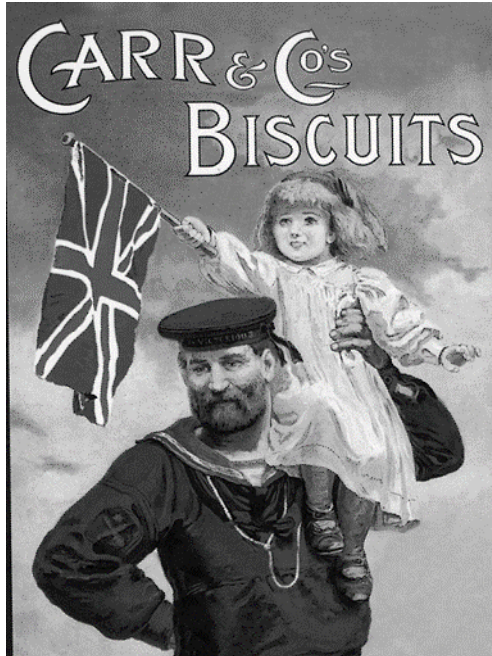


Figure 1 Carr and Co. Biscuits, 1899
(The National Archives)

More recently, Conley has studied in detail the evolution of the sailor's image during the nineteenth century to become the masculine hero of the Empire. This has developed further the arguments of Kemp who noted that the sailor became 'the darling of the people, [and] his life was glamorized', however he did not develop this point.¹⁰⁴ Yet Conley has argued that by 1870 the image of naval men had been reconstructed: navy men were now seen 'as both patriotic defender and dutiful husband and father' which, as Conley noted, 'stood in sharp contrast to the image of the brave but bawdy tar of the Georgian navy whose bravery afloat was only matched by his licentiousness ashore'.¹⁰⁵ In particular, Conley has shown 'the interconnectedness of empire, naval manhood and British society' through imagery and culture.¹⁰⁶ Highlighting the use of the sailor's image in

advertising such as for Carr & Co. Biscuits, Conley has demonstrated how the modern, respectable sailor was a part of everyday culture.¹⁰⁷ In the advertisement the respectable, manly bluejacket stands with his daughter sat on his shoulder, waving a Union Flag, and shows a clear link to Britain and the Empire. More importantly, many sailors keenly embraced this image of respectability which fostered pride in the navy as an institution and pride in themselves.

Central to this was the sailor's iconic uniform. The effect of this on British society can be seen in its popularity especially amongst the upper and middle classes, who regularly dressed their children in sailor suits.¹⁰⁸ George Orwell reflected on this and noted the Edwardian period as the 'great days of the navy's popularity. Small boys wore sailor suits and everyone belonged to something called the Navy League'.¹⁰⁹ Introduced in 1857, naval uniform was an aspect of

¹⁰² McKee, *Sober Men*, p. 2

¹⁰³ McKee, *Sober Men*, p. 3

¹⁰⁴ Kemp, *British*, p. 208

¹⁰⁵ Conley, *From Jack*, p. 3

¹⁰⁶ Conley, *From Jack*, p. 1; See also Maureen M. Martin, 'From Jack Tar to Union Jack: Representing Naval Manhood in the British Empire, 1870-1918, by Mary A. Conley', *Victorian Studies*, 53, 1, 2010; pp.175-177.

¹⁰⁷ Carr & Co. Biscuits, 1899; Conley, *From Jack*, pp. 125-126; See Figure 1.

¹⁰⁸ Conley, *From Jack*, p. 9

¹⁰⁹ Conley, *From Jack*, p. 9; George Orwell quoted in Conley, *From Jack*, p. 9

the progressive phase upon which the Admiralty was embarking, and as Conley has said, 'signalled the professionalism of the fleet'.¹¹⁰ Kemp also noted the importance of this introduction and called it an 'important milestone', although he did not consider the wider effects of this.¹¹¹ However, Conley has argued that the uniform was essential to the creation of the 'British Bluejacket' as a brand.¹¹²

A slightly different approach has been conducted by Quintin Colville who broke new ground with his investigation of the role of the naval uniform 'in shaping the class- and gender-related identities of British naval personnel' during the 1930s.¹¹³ Colville has argued that the uniform was 'crucial' to naval personnel's 'understanding of class and masculinity'.¹¹⁴ In particular, uniforms 'associated their wearers with specific clusters of stereotyped qualities and characteristics'.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, he recognized that its close resemblance to civilian clothing styles allowed the uniform 'to communicate socio-cultural information' to all ranks.¹¹⁶ In addition, this was a period of increased militarization and, as Philipp Blom has said, 'whole societies were in the thrall of uniforms and military strength'.¹¹⁷ It is unsurprising, therefore, that Colville noted that sailors in uniform were 'consciously employed... to maintain the cultural visibility of Jack Tar'.¹¹⁸

However, whilst iconic within society, Colville has demonstrated the importance of uniform to sailors and examined their relationship with it. In particular, he has argued that the otherwise commonplace act of boxing up and posting home of a new rating's civilian clothes took on a far more profound meaning.¹¹⁹ It was an act designed to remove the rating from the civilian world and then the process of moulding them into the new Jack Tar persona could begin. Although this would be predominantly inculcated by the enforced navy-culture and training regimes, Colville also considered and highlighted the importance of the more mundane acts of new recruits. For instance, he draws attention to the banal act of sailors sewing their names into their kit, suggesting that this was 'symbolising the sublimation of his [the sailor's] personal identity within the stereotyped cultural identity of Jack Tar'.¹²⁰

Therefore, it is also important to consider how sailors responded to this top-down attempt at social identity construction. The consideration of uniform allows a useful platform from which to do this. On the one hand, historians such as McKee have pointed out that until the inter-war period sailors were mainly conservative in nature and likely to follow the strict traditions of the navy.¹²¹ Colville also recognized that sailors 'frequently displayed great attachment to the

¹¹⁰ Conley, *From Jack*, p. 34

¹¹¹ Kemp, *British*, p. 203

¹¹² Conley, *From Jack*, p. 19; p. 34

¹¹³ Colville, 'Jack Tar', p. 105

¹¹⁴ Colville, 'Jack Tar', p. 106

¹¹⁵ Colville, 'Jack Tar', p. 106

¹¹⁶ Colville, 'Jack Tar', p. 106

¹¹⁷ Philipp Blom, *The Vertigo Years: Change and Culture in the West, 1900-1914*, (London: Phoenix, 2009 [first edition 2008]); p. 156

¹¹⁸ Colville, 'Jack Tar', p. 125

¹¹⁹ Colville, 'Jack Tar', p.123

¹²⁰ Colville, 'Jack Tar', p.123

¹²¹ McKee, *Sober Men*, p. 62

navy's ordered, secure and conservative socio-cultural world'.¹²² However, he is cognizant that ratings should not be viewed 'as simply the passive victims', especially when it came to uniforms and the social constrictions they imposed.¹²³ This point was also made by Lavery who, despite his more general history of lower-deck life, raised several valid points regarding the importance of naval uniform. In particular, both Colville and Lavery have argued that by modifying their uniforms to suit their own tastes, seamen were consciously stamping their own mark on the image.¹²⁴ Furthermore, Lavery argued that sailors felt it was their 'moral right' to alter the uniform as they saw fit because they were required to purchase all kit themselves.¹²⁵ It is due to their personal modifications, argued Lavery, that 'the uniform became increasingly beloved by the public'.¹²⁶ Consequently, it is argued that the uniform became a vital part of their identity and a means by how they understood themselves.

Professionalizing the Royal Navy was crucial and yet, despite cleaning up the image of Jack Tar, Colville has suggested that the Admiralty continued to perpetuate the image 'of the bawdy, womanising rating'.¹²⁷ The reason for this, Colville argued, was that being distinct from gentlemanly officers, sailors 'were associated with feminised qualities such as a love of domesticity, sentimentality, emotional spontaneity and immaturity'.¹²⁸ The bawdy image alongside the image of the masculine hero of empire countered any issues of femininity. Nevertheless, Colville does not investigate this point fully, concentrating on the impact rather than the reasoning. It was, however, accepted as popular belief that sailors were naïve and child-like in temperament.¹²⁹ Thus by keeping elements of the older image alive, it allowed the Jack Tar persona to support both popular images, and allowed sailors to utilize the benefits of both.

Furthermore, although Colville suggested that sailors embraced the image of respectability, they also contributed to the continuation of the bawdy persona. He noted that many were 'convinced of the sexual attractiveness of their uniform to women, and were pleased with the roguish quality it conferred'.¹³⁰ This is a rather different view to that proposed by Anthony Carew in his landmark study of the lower deck. Carew argued that 'This new generation of ratings rejected the popular caricature of naval personnel. They resented the image of the jolly drunken sailor'.¹³¹ The difference in these interpretations is interesting. It is not possible to argue that their differences stem from the period covered; indeed both overlap significantly. However, Carew is noticeably protective of his lower-deck subjects and his approach from an industrial relations background possibly creates this slant on the serious-mindedness of the

¹²² Colville, 'Jack Tar', p. 119

¹²³ Colville, 'Jack Tar', p. 119

¹²⁴ Lavery, *Able*, p. 97; Colville, 'Jack Tar', p. 121

¹²⁵ Lavery, *Able*, p. 97

¹²⁶ Lavery, *Able*, p. 97

¹²⁷ Colville, 'Jack Tar', p. 127

¹²⁸ Colville, 'Jack Tar', p. 127

¹²⁹ Lavery, *Able*, p. 97

¹³⁰ Colville, 'Jack Tar', p. 127

¹³¹ Carew, *Lower Deck*, p. xix

lower deck.¹³² On the other hand, Conley has also considered this point and concurs with Colville that sailors were not completely against the image but that the drunken image was becoming increasingly resented by sailors. In particular, this is highlighted by the anger expressed towards an element of Agnes Weston's temperance campaign.¹³³ The cartoon, 'A Sad Hobby', published in *Ashore and Afloat* in 1901 depicted a sailor riding a hobby horse constructed from a barrel, looking dishevelled and with an empty bottle in his hand whilst his family suffered in

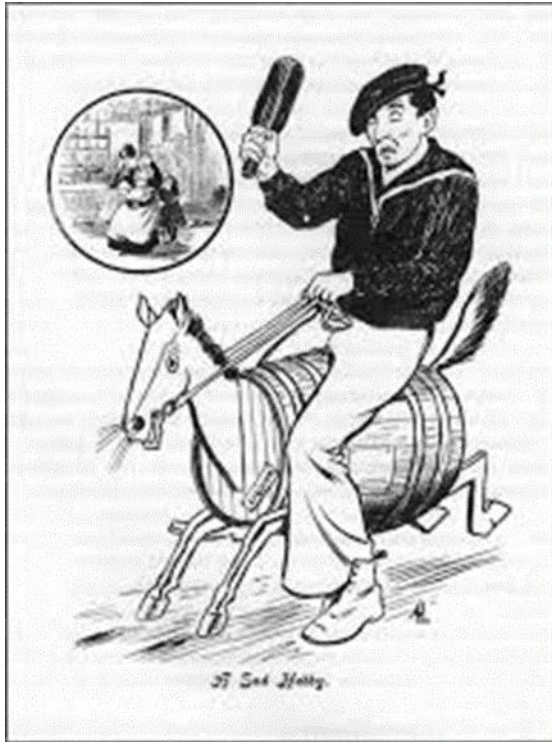


Figure 2 'A Sad Hobby', *Ashore and Afloat*, XXV, 2, 1901

the background.¹³⁴ It drew immediate criticism from sailors and Conley has argued they resented the implication that they were all drunkards, and furthermore it 'emasculated him by portraying him as a dishonourable husband and irresponsible father'.¹³⁵ As one sailor, Sidney Knock explained, they did not like being made a mockery or condescended to.¹³⁶ Rather, they embraced the image when it suited them but it was not the basis of their identity. This is supported by Linda Colley who noted, 'Identities are not like hats. Human beings can and do put on several at a time'.¹³⁷

Nevertheless, despite this growing respectability, McKee has argued that aside from the technological changes, sailors from 1850 had much in common with a sailor from 1939, suggesting little change.¹³⁸ However, Conley calls this 'a playful argument'.¹³⁹ Although Conley

recognized, 'there is some truth in this statement', the navy had 'made marked changes' and increasingly sailors viewed themselves as professionals and 'differently from their predecessors'.¹⁴⁰ Conley says that 'Naval seamen represented themselves as an intelligent professional body of men who resented attempts to dishonour their character by accusations, however crudely designed, which impugned their roles as husbands, fathers and seamen'.¹⁴¹ Kemp had noted this in the 1970s stating that the 'social standing of the sailor had never been higher... he held a place in the public heart'.¹⁴² Furthermore, Colville has argued that their

¹³² Anthony Carew was a lecturer in industrial relations at the University of Manchester.

¹³³ Agnes Weston was a philanthropist who ran various charitable interests for the benefit of sailors and in particular ran lodging houses where they could stay relatively inexpensively.

¹³⁴ 'A Sad Hobby', *Ashore and Afloat*, XXV, 2, February 1901; See Figure 2.

¹³⁵ Conley, *From Jack*, p. 87

¹³⁶ Sidney Knock, *Clear Lower Deck: An intimate study of the men of the Royal Navy*, (London: Philip Allan & Co, 1932); p. 131

¹³⁷ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837*, Second Edition, (London: Yale University Press, 2005 [first edition 1992]); p. 6

¹³⁸ McKee, *Sober Men*, p. 5; Conley, *From Jack*, p. 194

¹³⁹ Conley, *From Jack*, p. 194

¹⁴⁰ Conley, *From Jack*, p. 194

¹⁴¹ Conley, *From Jack*, pp. 90-91

¹⁴² Kemp, *British*, pp. xiii-xiv

respectability was firmly established amongst their own working-class communities, where they received 'considerable regard'.¹⁴³

Therefore, although some sailors enjoyed the roguish image of jolly Jack Tar, by wearing the uniform they were part of the socio-cultural construct of the sailor. Their uniform 'reflected the cultural status of the navy, and its global profile... and associated these qualities with the wearer'.¹⁴⁴ Consequently, it is evident that the uniform was an influencing factor both in professionalizing the sailor and constructing their image within specific class- and gender-defined stereotypes, and British imperial culture. However, it was equally important to sailors themselves and their own interpretation of their identity. As Colville has argued, sailors were not passive and used the uniform to implement their own individualism.¹⁴⁵

As the Royal Navy and the image of the sailor increasingly became symbols of the Empire, Jan R ger has argued that the navy became an important cultural image.¹⁴⁶ Through a comparative study of the Anglo-German naval race, R ger examined the increasingly theatrical nature of the 'the naval game' and the development of the navy as a popular icon in British culture.¹⁴⁷ R ger stated:

This was a public theatre in which the domestic and the foreign intersected, where the modern mass market of media and consumerism collided with politics and international, and where identity and conflict were acted out between the nations.¹⁴⁸

Whilst Carew noted the importance of Anglo-German rivalry and how this 'was to increase the British public's sense of dependence on the navy', R ger's study reflects the first real engagement and development of this theme within wider cultural studies.¹⁴⁹ Although Kemp noted the changing position of the navy in British society he stated that it was 'An odd phenomenon of the second half of the nineteenth century'.¹⁵⁰ By considering naval theatre, particularly ship launches and fleet reviews, R ger has demonstrated the importance of popular culture and its relationship with imperial culture. In doing so this has moved the debate into the wider historical discourse away from the more local focus of K. Lunn and R. Thomas, who examined imperialism in Portsmouth through ship launches.¹⁵¹

However, a further direction in which to take this argument is the involvement of sailors themselves in naval pageantry. As has been demonstrated, the sailor was an iconic image in

¹⁴³ Colville, 'Jack Tar', p.121; Kemp, *British*, p. 208

¹⁴⁴ Colville, 'Jack Tar', p. 119

¹⁴⁵ Colville, 'Jack Tar', p. 119

¹⁴⁶ R ger, *Great Naval*, p. 1

¹⁴⁷ R ger, *Great Naval*, p. 1

¹⁴⁸ R ger, *Great Naval*, p. 1

¹⁴⁹ Carew, *Lower Deck*, pp. 188-189

¹⁵⁰ Kemp, *British*, p. 208

¹⁵¹ K. Lunn and R. Thomas, 'Naval Imperialism in Portsmouth, 1905 to 1914', *Southern History*, 10, 1988; pp. 142-159; For other general accounts see for example see Blom, *Vertigo Years*, who comments on the launch of HMS *Dreadnought*. Blom's work, although a general sojourn through western culture, demonstrates a good overview of the period.

his own right, and intrinsically linked to British imperial culture. Importantly, Rüger has suggested that the navy is a useful means by which to examine notions of national identity.¹⁵² In particular, he is critical of historians such as Linda Colley who have overlooked the navy's role and consequently has argued that: 'The Royal Navy became one of the most important metaphors of Britishness in the nineteenth century'.¹⁵³ Therefore, it is important to question the relationship sailors had with imperial culture. They were at once an integral part of the imperial image on display to the public and yet also participants in events of pageantry. What this meant to them and how they understood as part of their image and identity needs to be considered.

This point regarding national identity has also been considered by Isaac Land who similarly noted Colley's failure to consider sailors 'in her searching analysis of British patriotism'.¹⁵⁴ In particular, Land noted the importance of the issue of their loyalty.¹⁵⁵ Although Land was primarily concerned with sailors and impressment, this theme is one that is equally important for the period under consideration in this thesis. This is complex and historians such as Lavery and McKee have accepted that there existed multiple loyalties: to the Empire, to the navy, to the ship, to crewmates.¹⁵⁶ However, they have not specifically engaged with it nor approached this theme through the wider prism of imperialism, gender and cultural studies. Similar studies of the army on the other hand have used the Boer War and the First World War as a means to examine British society in particular to test levels of imperial sentiment.¹⁵⁷

Both the Boer War and the First World War involved British sailors and the Royal Navy in a number of roles. At the time of the Boer War for instance, the sailor's image was intertwined with symbols of imperialism and he was held out as the 'handyman' of Empire and praised as such by social commentators like Bullen, Hurd and Kipling, and indeed by sailors themselves.¹⁵⁸ As Conley wrote: 'His adaptability for fighting afloat or ashore had not only made the modern sailor a "handyman" but also made him a more valuable defender of empire than an army soldier'.¹⁵⁹ Furthermore, the wider implications of battle on the sailor's character needs to be considered. The concept of masculinity was clearly defined by the Victorians and Edwardians and has been demonstrated to be a key aspect of sailors' identity. In her examination of the death of Boy Seaman Jack Cornwell at Jutland in 1916 and the creation of 'his heroic legend', Conley noted that despite some historians suggesting the horror of the conflict destroyed the romantic idyll of war, a strong sense of patriotic duty and Christian sacrifice remained.¹⁶⁰ In

¹⁵² Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 3

¹⁵³ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 3

¹⁵⁴ Land, *War*, p. 2

¹⁵⁵ Land, *War*, p. 2

¹⁵⁶ Lavery, *Able*, p. 11; McKee, *Sober Men*, p. 67

¹⁵⁷ For examples of this see Gregory, *The last*; Silbey, *British*; Miller, *Volunteers*; Beaven, *Visions*.

¹⁵⁸ Conley *From Jack*, p. 147; RNM 2001/6/1: Diary of Frank Ottaway

¹⁵⁹ Conley, *From Jack*, pp. 149-150

¹⁶⁰ Conley, *From Jack*, pp. 164-166; See for example Mark Girouard, *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981).

doing so she supports the arguments of both Jay Winter and Joanna Bourke.¹⁶¹ This was a boy who dutifully stood by his gun and sacrificed his life for the Empire, fulfilling the 'Victorian models of heroism defined by duty, honour and sacrifice'.¹⁶² Conley argued that Jack Cornwell's death 'rescued British manhood from the experiences of unimaginable brutality in the trenches of France'.¹⁶³

Therefore, how war affected sailors and their sense of identity, bound up in imperial imagery, is a point that needs consideration. This has been considered in some detail by historians of gender since the 1990s and in particular Joanna Bourke has analysed the 'experiences of intimate killing' and how these experiences revealed them 'as individuals transformed by a range of conflicting emotions'.¹⁶⁴ Using the construct of gender studies like Bourke's allows an examination of the lower deck and masculinity during wartime and determines the experience of sailors alongside their masculine image. As Conley, Colville and R uger have shown, sailors were individuals with their own thoughts and agendas, constantly conforming and resisting different facets of the imposed social and military norms, and these combined within a distinct sailor culture.

Thus, considering the sailor's experience of war is a useful way in which to examine their relationship with imperialism as it allows both their expressions of imperial sentiment and imperial masculine image to be deconstructed. Henry Baynham considered sailors on the outbreak of the Great War, arguing that they had 'no particular hostility against the Germans'.¹⁶⁵ The testimony he collected suggests that sailors were nevertheless enthusiastic about going to war, however this enthusiasm requires analysis. Likewise, studies by Max Arthur similarly fail to engage with these wider themes.¹⁶⁶ These studies have done little more than combine the basic background of the conflict with selected sailor testimony to tell the story. Consequently, the experience of sailors on the outbreak of war will be considered in Chapters Three and Four.

The recent work of the historians considered above has shown that there is a pressing need for further socio-cultural research on the Royal Navy in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. In particular, the approach from a gender perspective has provided an excellent means of deconstructing the character of Jack Tar. Recent historiography has provided a nuanced view of British sailors and developed this beyond the socio-political spectrum of earlier historians such as Carew and Kemp, whose work was specifically aimed at exploring the socio-political aspect of sailors and their struggle towards better pay and conditions. Conley's work has done much to bring together the themes of gender and imperialism in the Royal Navy and

¹⁶¹ Conley, *From Jack*, p. 165; See also Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) and Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War*, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1996).

¹⁶² Conley, *From Jack*, p. 163

¹⁶³ Conley, *From Jack*, pp. 165-166

¹⁶⁴ Bourke, *An intimate history*, p. 1

¹⁶⁵ Baynham, *Men*, p. 213

¹⁶⁶ For example see Arthur, *True Glory*.

provided a useful analysis of how the masculine imperial image of Jack Tar was constructed. Similarly Colville's work is especially insightful as it demonstrates the ways in which sailors responded to the changing image of Jack Tar. Demonstrating that sailors were not simply passive but could think for themselves, these approaches have shown the importance of sailors' independence and the need to consider them alongside wider historical themes. The following chapters will draw together this line of reasoning and demonstrate the ways in which sailors used their understanding of imperialism to shape their identity, how they embraced and served the Empire, but at the same time remained individuals and interpreted their identity in their own way. In particular, it will argue that there existed a sailor culture that was heavily influenced by imperialism but also contained a number of beliefs and ideologies. This culture enabled sailors to be patriotic and dutiful servants of the Empire but also allowed other competing sentiments to take precedence when necessary.

Methodology

This thesis primarily draws upon unpublished sailor testimony, particularly the collection held by the National Museum of the Royal Navy in Portsmouth (NMRN). The material most utilized by this study is that of diaries kept by those on the lower deck during the late nineteenth and twentieth century. The reasons for this are twofold: firstly, the collections held at the NMRN have been underused by other historians, those who have used lower deck testimony have instead relied upon the collections at the Imperial War Museum (IWM) and the National Maritime Museum (NMM); secondly, by using sailor diaries it allows this thesis to frame the question of sailor's relationship with imperialism through their own words. In particular, the use of unpublished diaries allows for a greater understanding of the character of the men who served on the lower deck between 1890 and 1939. A number of existing studies are primarily weighted towards using published diaries and officers' accounts, which continue to mask lower-deck views. Furthermore, studies of sailors such as those by Brian Lavery and Christopher McKee have recycled testimony previously collected by Henry Baynham. Although memoirs and autobiographies are beneficial sources contextually, they present a number of problems for historians. As John Tosh has argued, 'Autobiographies may be very revealing of mentality and values, but as a record of events they are often inaccurate and selective to the point of distortion'.¹⁶⁷ Furthermore, often written sometime after the event, they are subject to self-censorship in order to present the picture as the author sees it and may also 'recount only what people found worthy of note'.¹⁶⁸

Nevertheless, this is not to suggest that unpublished diaries are free from these limitations. They are also subject to what the writer deemed important or interesting, and can demonstrate self-censorship. Although Tosh has argued that 'the vast majority... were written without thought of a wider readership', many sailor diaries were written with the knowledge or intention

¹⁶⁷ John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, Revised Third Edition, (London: Pearson, 2002 [first edition 1984]); p. 96

¹⁶⁸ Tosh, *Pursuit*, p. 94

that they would be read by the writer's family.¹⁶⁹ However, Nancy Martin has succinctly summarized diaries as a source, demonstrating the importance of their difference: 'As a genre, the diary defies the traditional structural forms of narrative. Focusing generally on the immediate present, it is serial, open-ended, often repetitive and contradictory. Diaries often display a reshaping and revising of an individual's experiences and perceptions'.¹⁷⁰ Similarly Michael Roper has postulated that diaries allow for 'the behaviour and emotional dispositions of individual men'.¹⁷¹ Sailor diaries were written up a short time after the experiences, usually on a daily basis and thus although not negating the dangers associated with autobiographies, allow greater circumspection of their thought process as it developed.

However, in order to utilize this material effectively a number of methodological parameters have been set. Firstly, a sample size of approximately 45 diaries was chosen. This is on the basis of existing studies and a need to use a comprehensive yet manageable number. These were further selected based upon the timeframes of the chapters and the quality of the material available. Holdings that were simply ships' logs with little or no personal information were discounted from the sample. The sample of diaries collected and analysed is composed of diaries drawn from the lower deck. This was a varied strata of ranks and throughout this thesis when the term "lower deck" or "sailor" is used, it refers to those who were not officers. Therefore, the diaries used include those written by men from a variety of ranks such as Ordinary, Able, Leading Seamen, and Petty Officers.¹⁷² Stokers are also considered as a point of comparison because, although technically distinct from seamen, they also inhabited the same space on the lower deck. The purpose of selecting and analysing this variation of ranks was to determine a wide range of testimony for men with a shared social identity, and examine on an individual basis their personal experiences through the key themes of imperialism, gender and identity.

In addition, the unpublished diaries are supplemented by published memoirs from the lower deck. This is to enable points of comparison and determine whether any silences exist on certain topics. However, the use of officer diaries has been kept to a minimum except to provide further contextual information and highlight any similar or differing viewpoints. Alongside this, additional material such as newspapers (national and local and overseas), letters, Admiralty records and oral history collections have been reviewed in order to contextualize and demonstrate contrasting information. This material has also been approached from an analytical viewpoint to determine its suitability and usefulness to this study.

¹⁶⁹ Tosh, *Pursuit*, p. 108; This was especially so during wartime where they could be self-censored as a means of coping with stress and this is discussed in Chapters Three and Four.

¹⁷⁰ Nancy Martin, "'And all because it is war!': First World War diaries, authenticity and combatant identity", *Textual Practice*, 29, 7, 2015; pp. 1245-1263, p. 1248

¹⁷¹ Martin, "'And all'", p. 1245; Michael Roper, 'Between Manliness and Masculinity: the "War Generation" and the Psychology of Fear in Britain, 1914-1950', *Journal of British Studies*, 44, 2, 2005; pp. 343-362, p. 345

¹⁷² Some diaries, particularly those of Edwin Fletcher, span numerous commissions and document the sailor's progression through the ranks.

Whilst the majority of the material has been drawn from the National Museum of the Royal Navy, this study also includes material from the collections held at the Imperial War Museum, National Archives and the National Maritime Museum in order to gain a wider understanding and give greater context.

The ethics of this study have been considered and due to all the material being in the public domain and approximately over 80 years old, no further permissions have been sought other than by the museums to reproduce images from their holdings and comply with copyright laws.

Structure of the thesis

By examining the topic within the constructs of social, cultural and gender studies, this thesis considers the men of the lower deck and their relationship with the Empire they served. It places sailors within imperial studies and moves beyond simply demonstrating their importance to the popular image of the Empire, but rather it considers the Empire's importance to them. In their everyday life the Empire was ever-present. As the navy began to occupy an increasingly visual status in the public mind, sailors were exposed to imperial imagery and symbolism. Furthermore, abroad the navy was the premier instrument of British imperialism and was used to defend and further the Empire on a global level. Thus this thesis examines the nuances of lower deck imperialism and argues that they embraced the Empire as a significant part of their culture, shaping their identity, and using it to frame their understanding of experiences. However, they were also independent and not simply passive recipients of imperial teachings. As such they exhibited a level of independence and deserve a far greater level of consideration than has so far been allowed.

There are a further five archival chapters which broadly follow a chronological order from c.1890 through to 1939, and examine the key aims of this thesis in context with the changing international situation through these years to provide a framework to examine sailors' relationship to the Empire.

Chapter Two examines the rise of naval pageantry prior to the First World War and the repositioning of the Royal Navy in British popular culture. In particular, it builds upon the work of Jan Rüger who has argued that the navy was a key symbol of the Empire and subsequently occupied a very prominent place in society. Examining the background changes and the use of invented traditions it considers how the spectacle of naval pageantry was implemented. In contrast to Rüger, it turns the focus from the public to the sailors who took part in these events of pageantry. It thus proposes that sailors were the forgotten participants of naval pageantry: they were at once a vital part of the spectacle designed for consumption by the public and also participants, similarly observing the imperial themes and symbolism being propounded. Through this they demonstrated their own ideas and reveal their relationship with the Empire. In addition, this influenced their own impression of their identity. In considering this, it is argued that multiple feelings were created by being part of these imperial spectacles rather

than a single deep relationship: pride in the service and the Empire but also a dislike of the effort required whilst friends and other crewmates could enjoy themselves. Therefore, as with the public, both sentiments of enjoyment and animosity towards the spectacle could co-exist.

Chapter Three considers sailors within the framework of war as a key part of their imperial duty. During Britain's late imperial wars the Royal Navy and its sailors were repeatedly called upon to protect the Empire's interests. This chapter pays specific attention to the Boer War as the last great imperial war prior to the experience of total war in the First World War. As with many of Britain's imperial wars, the navy played a prominent role and in particular sailors served in naval brigades ashore alongside the army and endured the hardships of siege warfare at Ladysmith. The Boer War has been widely used as a case study by many socio-cultural studies of British imperialism to examine levels of patriotism within society. By examining sailors in this respect, it considers their involvement and reactions, and their perceptions of imperial sentiment. Furthermore, it allows further examination of their imperial identity juxtaposing the popular image of the steadfast "handyman" of the Empire with their experience through the medium of masculinity. By approaching the topic in this way it demonstrates the importance of their imperial identity and expressions of imperial sentiment.

Chapter Four is a natural progression from the themes of Chapter Three and investigates sailors during the First World War. As a conflict, the Great War is an important topic for studies of the Royal Navy. Due to the Anglo-German arms race during the early twentieth century, naval tradition, pageantry and rhetoric had become increasingly powerful as Chapter Two has demonstrated. Consequently, the British public went to war in 1914 believing that the navy would soon meet the Germans at sea and, in a battle worthy of Nelson, defeat them. The belief in a "second Trafalgar" was therefore a strong element within society. However, this chapter demonstrates that many sailors equally believed in their ability and as the war dragged on without such decisive victories taking place this impacted upon their perceptions of their imperial identity. By drawing comparisons with existing gender and cultural studies of the army and society during the First World War, this chapter demonstrates how the stress and uncertainty of serving at sea, engaging in battle, and everyday boredom challenged sailors' sense of masculinity and their imperial identity as they tried to do their bit and live up to their public image.

Chapter Five investigates sailors in the post-war setting, particularly the contrast caused by a society concerned with disarmament treaties, and the impact this had upon the image and prestige of the Royal Navy. Examining the wider impact of disarmament and the Washington Treaty, it positions this alongside the gradual re-introduction of naval pageantry. In particular, it considers the Empire Cruise of the Special Service Squadron between 1923 and 1924. Designed to strengthen links between Britain and the colonies whilst also attracting economic investment in British dockyards, it reasserted the Royal Navy's position on the world stage. To the sailors who took part in the cruise, it provided an opportunity to visit many of the Empire's

colonies and experience the "other". Examination of this allows an insight into their interactions with the colonies and their expectations. This chapter demonstrates that pride in the Empire and the navy as *the* symbol of British power remained an integral part of sailor culture despite the challenges faced by the Royal Navy during the decade.

Chapter Six continues these investigations into the 1930s and considers sailors and imperialism within the framework of economic uncertainty and deteriorating international situations. In particular, it questions sailors' loyalty against the backdrop of the Invergordon Mutiny in 1931, which threatened the prestige of the Royal Navy and its sailors in the world's eyes. It demonstrates that their loyalty was never in question, rather it was considered the only option left open to them to voice their grievances. In addition, as the international political situation worsened, it demonstrates the rivalry between British sailors and the rising navies of Italy and the USA who threatened their dominance and consequently their identity. Furthermore, it reveals the difficulty in continuing the Royal Navy's age-old role as policeman of the seas in a decade fraught by rising challenges in the form of the Abyssinian Crisis and the Spanish Civil War and the navy's role in both conflicts. In doing so it reveals that sailors continued to believe in their superiority and that it was Britain's duty to continue its age-old role.

Chapter Seven draws together the themes considered in the previous chapters in order to argue that many sailors were imperialistic. In particular, examining sailor diaries reveals that the Empire was an important part of their lives and how they identified themselves. However, the Empire could mean different things to them depending upon the circumstances and influencing factors at the relevant time, and there was no universal feeling consistently present. Too often they have been viewed as simple and passive respondents to British imperial culture. Sailors did not simply absorb top-down imperial teachings and imagery. The sailor's character was more complex than this with a range of aspects creating his identity. Nevertheless, it was a significant element of their lives and it is therefore argued that imperialism formed a key part of a distinct independent sailor culture which existed on the lower deck. Consequently, imperialism served as a means to frame their experiences and shape their understandings but it was one of a number of competing beliefs, sometimes taking precedence, sometimes becoming subservient, depending on the circumstances.

Chapter Two

'I name this ship...': Pageantry in the Royal Navy and the forgotten participants before the First World War

There are few acts more poetical than that of launching a great ship, few spectacles more moving and more thrilling than that of the vessel in which so many hopes are centred gliding with swanlike grace into the water which is henceforth to be her element.¹

During the second half of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, naval pageantry became an essential method by which to disseminate imperial propaganda and propagate imperialistic values. A maritime empire, built upon trade with overseas colonies, by 1914 the imperial power and prestige of Britain was approaching its zenith and the Royal Navy had secured its position in British society as the Senior Service: the epitome of British imperial power. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, the public image of the Royal Navy had been carefully re-positioned to fit in with and promote Britain's imperial image both at home and internationally. Naval pageantry became a vital part of this, a key facet of British imperial culture combining Victorian and Edwardian militarism with developing imperial culture and leisure. Yet despite the acceptance of the prominent position of the Royal Navy within British imperial culture, historians have paid naval pageantry limited attention.² This failing was poignantly demonstrated by Jan R ger in his ground-breaking thesis, and by deconstructing the public spectacle of naval theatre he produced a much needed study for British cultural and imperial history which opened the field for further socio-cultural research.³

Nevertheless, the specific consideration of sailors and their participation in naval pageantry and wider imperial sentiment remains relatively ignored. Although R ger has commented on their involvement it is only a brief engagement to demonstrate how consensus was staged, and how feelings of pride and antipathy could co-exist.⁴ Likewise recent studies concerned with the history of the lower deck, such as those by Christopher McKee and Brian Lavery, have not engaged with sailor testimony in the wider sense of imperial studies either.⁵ Therefore, this chapter builds upon recent historical trends which have considered the Royal Navy alongside socio-cultural studies of British imperialism by expanding the debate beyond the interrelationship between the British public and their Empire, to examine the relationship

¹ *The Times*, 12 February 1906

² Jan R ger, *The Great Naval Game: Britain and Germany in the Age of Empire*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009 [first edition 2007]); pp. 2-5

³ R ger, *Great Naval*, p. 32; Although R ger overlooked the work of Ken Lunn and Roger Thomas on imperialism and naval pageantry. For further recent research and a more in-depth discussion of this debate see Chapter One.

⁴ R ger, *Great Naval*, pp. 123-124

⁵ See Christopher McKee, *Sober Men and True: Sailor Lives in the Royal Navy, 1900-1945*, (London: Harvard University Press, 2002); Brian Lavery, *Able Seamen: The Lower Deck of the Royal Navy, 1850-1939*, (London: Conway, 2011).

between naval pageantry and British sailors: the “forgotten” participants. As Don Leggett has recently opined, ‘sailors were at the forefront of the nation-forging process’.⁶ They were at once servants of the Empire and part of the imperial image carefully crafted for public consumption, therefore greater consideration needs to be given to their thoughts and impressions regarding the Empire they served.

In opening up this debate, this chapter will investigate the development of naval pageantry in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. It will then consider and situate within this the sailors who took part, and examine their relationship with imperialism, pride and patriotism. In order to do this it will examine the main aspects of naval pageantry, which was primarily displayed in the form of ship launches and fleet reviews. However, it will also examine pageantry overseas in the Empire in order to determine how sailors were at the forefront of the imperial spectacle for subjects of the Empire. Consequently, it will argue that imperialism became a prism through which they experienced “otherness”.⁷

The Royal Navy in British imperial culture and the expansion of naval pageantry

Whilst the level of imperial sentiment amongst the British public remains contested by historians, as John M. Mackenzie has argued, British culture was undeniably consciously manipulated to prominently feature the Empire during this period.⁸ This empire, built on trade and dependant on maritime security, allowed the Royal Navy a unique opportunity to position itself within the cultural iconography of the Empire. In addition, these themes were propounded by social commentators and were heavily embraced by commercialism.⁹ This was aided by the Royal Navy’s long and successful history, for instance its historic victories over the Spanish Armada and the French at Trafalgar, which helped cement pride in the minds of the British public. Contemporaries often drew upon these former naval victories and the shared naval heritage of Britain when discussing the power of the Royal Navy.¹⁰

However, as discussed in Chapter One, although the Royal Navy had a long and prestigious heritage, it had to work hard to reconstruct its image, and in particular the image of those men who served. For instance, Nicholas Rodger highlighted the public perception of the eighteenth century sailor succinctly: ‘The sailor on a run ashore, probably drunk and riotous, was a popular image’.¹¹ There existed a dual ashore and afloat image which portrayed the negative

⁶ Don Leggett, ‘Navy, nation and identity in the long nineteenth century’, *Journal for Maritime Research*, 13, 2, 2011; pp. 151-163, p. 5

⁷ This is discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.

⁸ This debate is discussed in more detail in Chapter One but for more information see the arguments of John Mackenzie, Bernard Porter and Andrew Thompson in particular.

⁹ For example Archibald Hurd and Rudyard Kipling; See also advertisements such as Coleman’s Starch 1900, Carr & Co. biscuits, 1899; See also Mary A. Conley, *From Jack Tar to Union Jack: Representing naval manhood in the British Empire, 1870-1918*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009).

¹⁰ For instance R ger noted the growth of games in popular culture that demonstrated victory over the French at Trafalgar. Furthermore, on the fleet’s visit to London in 1909, many links were drawn to Nelson and Nelson’s Column. See R ger, *Great Naval*, p. 61; p.101; The importance of these victories in shaping both popular opinion and naval opinion is also discussed in Chapter Four.

¹¹ Nicholas Rodger, *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy*, (London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1996 [first edition 1986]); p. 15

characteristics of the sailor: a man who was a public menace.¹² However, by the nineteenth century much had been done to alter this impression, and Mary A. Conley has argued that the image of the bawdy Jack Tar of the Georgian navy was replaced with an image of 'cohesive masculinity that was endowed with self-restraint, respectability and bravery'.¹³ This strong, masculine stalwart of the Empire was an image that readily lent itself to be used in all manner of advertisements, such as Carr & Co biscuits and the face of Players Cigarettes, with the iconic image of the sailor with HMS *Hero* on his cap tally.¹⁴ Consequently, sailors became an integral part of imperial symbolism, and the manner in which it was presented to the British public and to the world. Thus by the early twentieth century this new image of the sailor had been firmly embedded in British culture.

The most overt and visible way in which the Royal Navy put itself on public display was through events of naval pageantry. Pageantry increasingly afforded the greatest opportunity for the Royal Navy to popularize its aims and position itself within the increasingly militaristic imperial culture of Britain.¹⁵ As Anne Summers argued in her seminal study on popular militarism, it:

was, perhaps, an integral part of the liberal political culture of the country; it was also integral to much of Anglican and Nonconformist Christianity. For these reasons it became a popular cause, and a peculiarly British one.¹⁶

This period witnessed the development of a number of para-military organizations, which espoused Christian beliefs, such as the Salvation Army and youth movements like the Scouts and The Boys' Brigade.¹⁷ Similarly, Mackenzie has argued there was a crossover between war and religion with 'The language of war entering into hymns, tracts, and sermons'.¹⁸ Furthermore, Mackenzie and David Cannadine have argued that Britain's imperial culture increased dramatically from 1877 when Queen Victoria was made Empress of India, which led to a substantial growth in the number of imperial celebrations being conducted.¹⁹ As Mackenzie eloquently argued, 'imperialism made spectacular theatre, with the monarchy its gorgeous opulent centrepiece'.²⁰ The manner in which pageantry enabled the navy to do this was twofold: firstly it allowed it to position itself within the constructed imperial image perceived by the

¹² Although this image continued and was often played up to by sailors. See Chapter One for a greater discussion of this point. See for instance RNM 1976/65/1: Diary of William Williams.

¹³ Conley, *From Jack*, p. 3

¹⁴ Conley, *From Jack*, p. 126; See also Figure 1; Appendix 1.1.

¹⁵ This was a time of increased militarism in Britain with para-military organizations and the presence of uniforms readily accepted. For an insight into British militarism generally see Anne Summers, 'Militarism in Britain before the Great War', *History Workshop Journal*, 1976; pp. 104-123.

¹⁶ Summers, 'Militarism', p. 105

¹⁷ For further information see John Springhall, *Youth, empire and society: British youth movements, 1883-1940*, (London: Croom Helm, 1977).

¹⁸ John M. Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The manipulation of British public opinion, 1880-1960*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003 [first edition 1984]); p. 5

¹⁹ Mackenzie, *Propaganda*, p. 5; David Cannadine, 'The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the "Invention of Tradition", c.1820-1977', in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (ed.), *The Invention of Tradition*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013 [first edition 1983]); pp. 101-164, p. 108

²⁰ Mackenzie, *Propaganda*, p. 5

public, and secondly it reinforced its power to both British society and the world. Together this allowed the navy to become, in the words of Rüger, 'a powerful cultural symbol'.²¹

Naval pageantry was not a new creation, suddenly developed and accepted by the British people, yet it was not firmly-established tradition either. Whilst the Admiralty, the press and many social commentators tried to give the impression it was firmly established tradition, 'only very few observers pointed out that there was no such tradition'.²² Although certain aspects of naval pageantry were established customs developed over time, this period witnessed the application of "invented traditions" which created carefully orchestrated pageantry designed to make the most impact, and display the navy on both the national and international stage.²³ "Invented tradition" is a concept propounded by Eric Hobsbawm, Terence Ranger and David Cannadine in the 1980s.²⁴ The main principle of this is the use of idealized ceremony as a means of establishing hegemony.²⁵ This principle has been previously applied to the study of commemorations such as jubilees, particularly by Cannadine and Elizabeth Hammerton, and Rüger has used this construct as a means of studying naval pageantry.²⁶

The scale by which naval pageantry increased demonstrates its fundamental importance and growing popularity. Rüger produced an interesting statistic stating: 'if one compares the 114 years between 1773 and 1887 with the 28 years between 1887 and 1914, this was an increase in frequency [of events of naval pageantry] of 714 per cent'.²⁷ Therefore, as previously mentioned, it is difficult to understand how the role of something as culturally significant as the Royal Navy has been ignored for so long.²⁸ This chapter will now firstly consider the two key forms of naval pageantry, ship launches and fleet reviews as these were the most overt form of imperialistic ritual the navy adopted, and will then turn its attention to overseas pageantry prior to the Great War.

Ship Launches

One of the most important ship launches that took place during this period was the launch of HMS *Dreadnought* in 1906, which demonstrated British engineering and naval power to the world. As Robert J. Blyth has argued, 'there can be little doubt that *Dreadnought*, as the first of this new class of weapon, made a singular impression... around the world'.²⁹ Launched from

²¹ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 1

²² Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 19; For example, the contemporary John Leyland noted this point. See John Leyland, 'The Navy and the Coronation', *Mariner's Mirror*, 1, 1911; pp. 165-167, p. 165.

²³ Rüger, *Great Naval*, pp. 198-199

²⁴ See the work of Eric Hobsbawm, Terence Ranger and David Cannadine. In particular, see Hobsbawm and Ranger (ed.), *The Invention of Tradition*.

²⁵ "Invented tradition" is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by reputation, which automatically implies continuity with the past'. Eric Hobsbawm, 'Introduction: Inventing traditions', in Hobsbawm and Ranger, *Invention*; pp. 1-14, p. 1

²⁶ See for example Elizabeth Hammerton and David Cannadine, 'Conflict and Consensus on a Ceremonial Occasion: The Diamond Jubilee in Cambridge in 1897', *The Historical Journal*, 24, 1, 1981; pp. 111-146; Jan Morris, *Pax Britannica: the climax of an Empire*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1968); Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 3.

²⁷ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 21

²⁸ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 3

²⁹ Robert J. Blyth, 'Introduction: The *Dreadnought* and the Edwardian Age', in Robert J. Blyth, Andrew Lambert and Jan Rüger (ed.) *The Dreadnought and the Edwardian Age*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011); pp. 1-8, p. 2

the slipways less than a year after being laid down, the ceremony 'was intricately choreographed to extract the greatest impact from the event. The crowd, the press, the fledgling medium of cinema and the Royal family were all exploited in different ways to amplify the spectacle'.³⁰ The death of Queen Alexandra's father prevented some of the more grandiose pageantry being undertaken on the day of the launch but the level of planning reveals that the navy was determined to put *Dreadnought* firmly on public display.³¹ Grand displays of idealized imperialism such as this played a vital role in the development of British imperial culture prior to the First World War.

The act of launching a warship down the slipways was understandably an important aspect of the public's perception of the Royal Navy. As Mark Connelly has argued, they 'were enormously significant for local pride' whilst at the same time 'linking the local to the national and imperial'.³² As such, launches provided fertile ground for the development of ritual specifically aimed at imparting imperial themes to the public and impressing upon them the sheer monstrous power of the Royal Navy. The ritual of a ship launch had its roots in the late eighteenth century, and it was this which arguably strengthened the navy's ability to use it as a means of impressing upon the public the power and imperial themes that the Royal Navy embodied.³³

The tradition of launching warships from the slipways began due to dockyard pressures during the Seven Years' War.³⁴ Prior to 1770, warships were typically built in dock and floated out upon completion with small launching ceremonies conducted aboard.³⁵ Silvia Rogers has argued that launching from the slipways assisted in altering the focus of the ceremony 'from the ship itself to the shore', and paved the way for more public-focused ceremonies to be conducted.³⁶ By moving the ceremony on to the shore, it allowed a far greater number of people to be involved in the launch and enabled the ritualization of the ceremony. This arguably made it an easier task for launch ceremonies to take on greater significance and became truly public events. Similarly Margarett Lincoln noted that despite the existing ritual of ship launches, 'significant changes' were taking place.³⁷ One key change was the manner of "christening" the ship.³⁸ Whereas previously patrons had drunk to the "success" of the ship aboard the vessel once it had been floated out, this now took place from the safety of the quayside where a bottle was thrown to smash on the bow.³⁹ Although one nineteenth-century commentator wrote that

³⁰ Blyth, 'Introduction', p. 2

³¹ Rüger, 'The Symbolic Value of the *Dreadnought*', in Blyth et al. (ed.), *The Dreadnought and the Edwardian Age*; pp. 9-18, p. 12

³² Mark Connelly, 'Battleships and British Society, 1920-1960', *International Journal of Naval History*, 3, 2004; p. 10

³³ Margarett Lincoln, 'Naval Ship Launches as Public Spectacle 1773-1854', *Mariner's Mirror*, 83, 4, 1997; pp. 466-472, p. 466

³⁴ Lincoln, 'Naval', p. 466

³⁵ Lincoln, 'Naval', p. 466

³⁶ Sylvia Rogers, 'The Symbolism of Ship Launching in the Royal Navy', Unpublished Dissertation, Oxford, 1983, p. 238

³⁷ Lincoln, 'Naval', p. 466

³⁸ The word "christening" was often used to describe this part of the ceremony and, although the use of the term predates the wider religious evolution of launch ceremonies, its repeated use reinforces the importance of the religious aspect of the ceremony and the importance of the ceremony itself. For examples of this see *Illustrated London News*, 20 May 1854 and *Hampshire Telegraph*, 19 November 1898.

³⁹ Lincoln, 'Naval', p. 466; Edward Fraser, *Bellerophon: the bravest of the brave*, (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1909); p. 6

the patron would still drink to the "success" of the ship before re-corking the bottle and hurling it at the bows.⁴⁰

Thus by the late eighteenth century, ship launching ceremonies were transported from ship to shore and, as the level of ceremony increased, began to receive increased coverage in the press.⁴¹ Therefore, before the period considered by this chapter, ship launches had been steadily changing and attracting increased public attention. In her study of launches as public spectacle, Lincoln argued that by the late eighteenth century a 'ship launch was an exciting event, capable of bringing all social classes together'.⁴² In particular, she opined that 'the navy, like the army, was becoming exciting as a spectacle, as a source of media events, displays and entertainment'.⁴³ To support this assertion Lincoln commented upon the launch of HMS *Queen Charlotte* in 1810 for which a 'temporary grandstand' had to be built and, due to the number of people attending, 'guards had been stationed around the dockyard to control the crowd'.⁴⁴

In addition, a nineteenth century observer, Edward Fraser, produced a comparative account of the launch of two warships called HMS *Bellerophon*, one launched in 1786 and the other in 1907.⁴⁵ Fraser's description of the launch in 1786 demonstrates that even in the eighteenth century events of naval pageantry were very public:

Rural England in those days, within reach of a ship launch, particularly a man-of-war launch, was always ready for a jaunt to the scene and a display of joviality in honour of the occasion.⁴⁶

According to Fraser, a variety of transportation was available 'to carry eager spectators on the appointed day' and the public would travel from within a radius of approximately 12 miles.⁴⁷ Fraser suggested that these launches were a 'great occasion for the neighbourhood' and therefore evoked a great deal of local pride.⁴⁸ Although he does not elaborate and examine divisions of pride in detail, it is likely that he would have shared the views of many contemporaries recognizing expressions of both local and national pride as one.⁴⁹

The technological advances of the nineteenth century allowed geographical boundaries to be reduced still further and enabled these events to become far more national in outlook. In

⁴⁰ Fraser, *Bellerophon*, p. 6

⁴¹ Lincoln, 'Naval', p. 466

⁴² Lincoln, 'Naval', p. 466

⁴³ Lincoln, 'Naval', p. 472; However, even though the navy was becoming exciting as a spectacle, it did not mean that sailors were viewed favourably ashore. Although the changing image of sailors has been briefly mentioned above, see Conley, *From Jack* for further information generally.

⁴⁴ Lincoln, 'Naval', p. 469

⁴⁵ Fraser is actually describing a scene at a private dockyard rather than a royal dockyard but it should be noted this was not an uncommon occurrence. Indeed, private shipyards continued to win contracts for warships during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, although they did not have the skills to build larger and more complex warships. I am grateful for Nick Hewitt's paper 'Portsmouth Dockyard at War 1914-1945' given at the Port Towns and Urban Cultures conference 2013 for information on this subject; See also Margarett Lincoln who said that this was a similar practice as early as the eighteenth century. Lincoln, 'Naval', p. 468

⁴⁶ Fraser, *Bellerophon*, p. 2

⁴⁷ Fraser, *Bellerophon*, p. 2

⁴⁸ Fraser, *Bellerophon*, p. 1

⁴⁹ Mark Connelly's comments on this union of loyalties has already been considered above.

particular, this was aided by the creation and then expansion of the railways. Furthermore, as launches became increasingly commercialized, railway companies recognized the public appetite for ship launches and other events of naval pageantry, and introduced cheap day excursions.⁵⁰ Similarly there were special steamers provided by tourist companies, such as Thomas Cook, which catered for the public and could carry them closer to the "action". Consequently, there was scope for a much greater and more varied social demographic attendance at ship launches (and also fleet reviews) during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁵¹

Therefore, the changes to naval pageantry during the eighteenth century had placed the navy in an excellent position and enabled increasingly imperialistic ritualization of naval pageantry. However, Rüger has recognized that during the nineteenth century there were 'three major changes' which fundamentally altered the way warships were launched and helped to foster a greater sense of imperial splendour.⁵² These were: women becoming patrons of launching ceremonies, royalty taking an active role and patronage at launches, and the introduction of a religious service as a key part of the ceremony.⁵³ Firstly, the introduction of women as the patron at the launch ceremony was of particular importance in an established patriarchal society with 'rigid gender roles'.⁵⁴ As Fraser noted of the eighteenth century ship launch, men 'invariably' performed the ceremony, usually 'some personage of note, some official or local celebrity'.⁵⁵ The first recorded ship launched by a female patron was in 1803 and The Prince Regent is credited with this change.⁵⁶ Between 1811 and 1818 female patrons 'became the rule'.⁵⁷ The introduction of women to the ceremony was important as it reinforced the ideal image of women as maternal, and caused launch ceremonies to gain 'new momentum and generated greater public attraction'.⁵⁸

Addressing Rüger's second point, although there are records of monarchs being present since Henry VIII, they 'never played an active role' in the launch ceremony itself.⁵⁹ Lincoln suggested that the royal family began to be more involved during the mid-eighteenth century and a number of lesser royals launched ships from the 1770s.⁶⁰ However, Rüger argued that the precedent set by Queen Victoria when she launched the *Royal Albert* in 1854 was 'crucial'.⁶¹ Therefore, as the first British monarch to launch a warship, Queen Victoria's involvement was

⁵⁰ Between 1849 and 1870 the number of third-class passengers increased six times. See Asa Briggs, *A Social History of England*, Third Edition, (London: Penguin, 1999 [first edition 1983]); pp. 240-242; Colin Matthew, 'Public Life and Politics', in Colin Matthew (ed.), *Short Oxford History of The British Isles: The Nineteenth Century*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); pp. 85-135, pp. 85-88; Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 56; For an example of such advertisements see *The Times*, 29 July 1907.

⁵¹ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 57

⁵² Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 31

⁵³ Rüger, *Great Naval*, pp. 31-33

⁵⁴ John Tosh, 'Masculinities in an Industrializing Society: Britain, 1800-1914', *Journal of British Studies*, 44, 2, 2005; pp. 330-342; See also Aşkın Haluk Yildirim, 'The Woman Question and the Victorian Literature on Gender', *Ekev Academic Review*, 16, 52, 2012; pp. 45-54, p. 46.

⁵⁵ Fraser, *Bellerophon*, pp. 6-7; Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 31

⁵⁶ Lincoln, 'Naval', p. 470; 'Answers', *Mariners Mirror*, 71, 1986; pp. 91-96, p. 92

⁵⁷ Lincoln, 'Naval', p. 470; Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 32

⁵⁸ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 32

⁵⁹ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 33

⁶⁰ Lincoln, 'Naval', p. 468

⁶¹ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 33

undeniably important for expanding naval pageantry and popularizing of the spectacle.⁶² The press recognized the importance of the monarch's role and for example *The Times* reported in 1907 how 'The presence of Royalty' added to the crowds, which has been supported by Mackenzie.⁶³ The steady increase in events of naval pageantry from the mid-1870s therefore mirrors the Queen's increasingly ceremonial role within British culture.

Finally, the introduction of a religious service at the launching ceremony was a specific creation of the 1870s drawn up between Queen Victoria, the Admiralty and the Church.⁶⁴ In January 1875 the *Army and Navy Gazette* proclaimed that 'the launches of Her Majesty's ships are to be no longer a mere secular ceremony'.⁶⁵ This ordained the specific format of the launch and intrinsically linked a Christian ethos with the navy and the Empire. Again, this was a further extension of muscular Christianity which formed a cornerstone of imperial thinking and British militarism.⁶⁶ By making a Christian ceremony a significant part of the launch, it affirmed the moral rights and duties of the Empire to its subjects.

In addition to these points, further ceremonial aspects were added to increase the theatricality of the spectacle but, more importantly, also demonstrate strong links with the Dominions and display a united Empire. For instance, a further aspect of the "christening" that was improved upon was the ceremonial importance of the bottle used. This was noted by contemporaries such as Fraser who recorded that it became common to decorate it with flowers and ribbons.⁶⁷ This decoration served no practical purpose and often cushioned the bottle against the bows, hindering the exercise.⁶⁸ However, these decorations could be used to portray emblems of imperial unity. For example, the *Illustrated London News* described the bottle used by Queen Victoria in 1854 as: 'decorated at either end with the rose, shamrock and thistle' thereby adding an image of unity to the launching ceremony.⁶⁹

Similarly, the origin of the bottle used is important. There was a calculated shift from using Port wine, from Portugal, to wine produced by British dominions, in an attempt to increase imperial unity.⁷⁰ This was noted by contemporary newspapers, such as the *Evening News* (Portsmouth), which on one occasion remarked on the gift of wine by Australia: '[it was] one of those little incidents that go so far to show what a bond or real union there is between the Mother Country and her Colonies'.⁷¹ Whether imperial unity was stronger than the excellent marketing opportunity this presented for the wine companies is another matter, however this commercialism enabled an increase in imperial ties. Furthermore, the importance of naming

⁶² Lincoln, 'Naval', p. 471; Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 33

⁶³ *The Times*, 29 July 1907; Mackenzie, *Propaganda*, p. 5; Sailors were also interested when royals were involved in pageantry and recorded events. For example see RNM 1976/65: Diary of William Williams, RNM 1979/100: Diary of J. Dicks.

⁶⁴ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 33

⁶⁵ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 33; *Army and Navy Gazette*, 16 January 1875

⁶⁶ Mackenzie, *Propaganda*, p. 5; See also Summers, 'Militarism'.

⁶⁷ Fraser, *Bellerophon*, p. 7

⁶⁸ *The Times*, 12 February 1906

⁶⁹ *Illustrated London News*, 20 May 1854; although this point was not stressed by the *Illustrated London News*.

⁷⁰ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 176; ADM 12/1369: Colonial Wine for Use at Launches of HM ships, 11 January 1901

⁷¹ *Evening News* (Portsmouth), 6 March 1901

ships after places to increase loyalty and imperial sentiment has been recognized by Daniel Owen Spence. For instance, Spence noted that this tradition began with the launch of the cruiser HMS *Good Hope* in February 1901.⁷² This was important because *Good Hope* was 'originally christened *Africa*, [and] the change in name was a public show of gratitude to Britain's Cape colonies' due to the Boer War.⁷³ In addition, Spence has argued that 'The dedication of new vessels to key parts of the empire was an attempt to strengthen the ties of sentiment by aligning colonial identity with that of the Royal Navy'.⁷⁴ Furthermore, ships were also given names that linked them to the four nations of Great Britain, and thus conjoined imperial, local and national sentiment.⁷⁵ Therefore, by carefully selecting names, the Royal Navy was further able to attempt to foster imperial sentiment throughout the colonies.

However, despite this period being one of increased imperialism within British society, not all ship launches were grand theatrical displays capable of drawing large crowds of people together. Reporting on the launch of HMS *Pandora* in 1900, the *Evening News* (Portsmouth) described the challenges that came with trying to make a launch exciting for the public:

Whether it is a small cruiser or a big battle-ship, the ceremony of floating a ship out of dock is a dull, tame affair when compared with the excitement attending a launch from the building slip. Taking a ship out of dock is, in fact, such an everyday occurrence that some ingenuity is required to give it anything like the semblance of a ceremony.⁷⁶

It is not clear why *Pandora* was launched in this fashion rather than from a slipway with more pageantry. The *Evening News* (Portsmouth) suggests that this sort of launch was not atypical, otherwise it might have made more of the oddity of the launch. Yet, as discussed above, it is likely that this was not such a common occurrence by the turn of the century especially as the ships became bigger by the 1900s and required being built on the slipways. Nevertheless, it is strange given the timing of the launch – the middle of the Boer War – that the vessel did not attract more attention. It is also revealing that the *Evening News* (Portsmouth) described the warship as being 'a kind of "stand by" on which the workmen could be employed when not required elsewhere'.⁷⁷ This suggests that *Pandora* was not a ship which could attract much attention and one that the navy was not concerned with publicizing. Indeed, she belonged to the ill-fated Pelorus Class which served overseas rather than with the main battle fleets and were deemed poorly designed and outdated following their launch.⁷⁸ However, in other respects the ceremony followed the usual procedure with a female patron conducting the naming

⁷² Daniel Owen Spence, *A History of the Royal Navy: Empire and Imperialism*, (London: I. B. Tauris, 2015); pp. 112-113

⁷³ Spence, *History*, pp. 112-113

⁷⁴ Spence, *History*, p. 113

⁷⁵ Rüger, *Great Naval*, pp. 166-167

⁷⁶ *Evening News* (Portsmouth), 17 January 1900

⁷⁷ *Evening News* (Portsmouth), 17 January 1900

⁷⁸ Several reports in the press indicate that the Pelorus Class had quickly been superseded. See for example *Yorkshire Telegraph and Star*, 24 Jan 1902 and *Devon and Exeter Daily Gazette*, 9 November 1915.

ceremony and a short religious service followed by the singing of the national anthem as the patron released the ship from the dock basin.⁷⁹

Importantly, this episode demonstrates the difficulty posed in trying to make spectacles of all ship launches. For instance, the *Evening News* (Portsmouth) reveals it was not well attended, noting 'the cheers of the few spectators' present at the launch.⁸⁰ This suggests that putting the navy on the public stage brought with it the challenge of trying to create pageantry out of nothing, and above all make it interesting, and this was not always possible. Roger Thomas has argued that ship launches were 'the site of pre-planned expectancies', and that those present would very likely have seen other ship launches which had followed the same procedures.⁸¹ Consequently, repeatedly seeing similar events had the potential to be a dull experience unless the vessel was particularly important or of a new class, and suggests an element of launch fatigue affecting the public. Yet Thomas also suggested that 'people were thrilled and affected by the predictable aspects of the ceremony, though each occasion had its own spontaneous moments'.⁸² Therefore, the case of the *Pandora* may simply demonstrate that naval pageantry needed to be publicized.

Nevertheless, despite the unremarkable launch of HMS *Pandora*, in the main ship launches were popular and appealed to a wide age range and level of society. For instance, Brad Beaven has noted that school attendance in Portsmouth 'would dramatically fall' due to 'events such as ship launches, regattas or visits from dignitaries', as children were also caught up in the 'industrial and social life' of the town.⁸³ In addition, school log books also record children being absent without leave when warships returned to port.⁸⁴ In particular, the return of HMS *Powerful* with the Naval Brigade from Ladysmith resulted in 116 boys being absent from Albert Road School.⁸⁵ Thus these returning ships had the potential to draw large crowds who wanted to experience the excitement of these occasions, increased by the heroic exploits of the naval brigade in the war in South Africa, but also to see friends and family return.

However, a key reason why launching a ship down the slipway was far more popular with the public was that it had the potential to be both dangerous and thrilling. As Rodgers has argued, the element of uncertainty and danger over what the ship might do at a launch was one of the chief draws.⁸⁶ Launches were dangerous affairs and during the eighteenth century both Lincoln and Rodgers noted that attendance at launch ceremonies was often poor and not well publicized 'partly because the likelihood of accidents made large crowds undesirable'.⁸⁷ This danger-factor continued into the nineteenth century and the inherent dangers were demonstrated at the

⁷⁹ *Evening News* (Portsmouth), 17 January 1900

⁸⁰ *Evening News* (Portsmouth), 17 January 1900

⁸¹ Roger Thomas, 'Empire, Naval Pageantry and Public Spectacle', *Mariner's Mirror*, 88, 2, 2002; pp. 202-213, p. 206

⁸² Thomas, 'Empire', p.206

⁸³ Brad Beaven, *Visions of Empire: Patriotism, popular culture and the city, 1870-1939*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012; p. 129

⁸⁴ See for example PRO: 22/7/2010 Log Book of Albert Road School 1899-1914.

⁸⁵ PRO: 22/7/2010 Log Book of Albert Road School 1899-1914; The naval brigades will be considered in more detail in Chapter Three.

⁸⁶ Rodgers, 'Symbolism', p. 239; p. 252

⁸⁷ Lincoln, 'Naval', p. 466; Rodgers, 'Symbolism', p. 239; p. 252

launch of HMS *Albion* in 1898 where an incident marred the proceedings and resulted in the deaths of 50 spectators.⁸⁸ Thus Rüger argued: 'this sense of risk, excitement and visual fascination was at the heart of what made naval theatre so "seductive and intoxicating"'.⁸⁹

However, as the importance of launches grew by the second half of the nineteenth century, improving health and safety at the dockyards was paramount; repeated accidents would generate bad press and be counter-productive to imperial propaganda in the long run. For instance, on the launch of HMS *Formidable* in 1898 the *Hampshire Telegraph*, noted the improvements made at the dockyards to allow spectators a better and safer view of the launch-ways: 'the little dock at the north corner has been so far filled in as to provide considerable additional space for the accommodation of spectators'.⁹⁰ Further examples include the added safety precautions around the christening bottle which was no longer simply hurled at the bows of the vessel being launched. An incident whereby one female patron accidentally released the bottle into the crowd where it promptly hit an observer on the head demonstrated that safety measures were needed.⁹¹ Instead the bottle was secured to a rope in order to bring some control to breaking it.⁹²

Yet, despite the increase in health and safety measures, the public continued to be reminded of the possible dangers at a ship launch. For example the *Evening News* (Portsmouth), reporting on the launch of a new warship in 1891, reminded its readers of an accident in 1825 at the launch of *Princess Charlotte*, the largest ship of that time built in Portsmouth. The basin gates were forced inwards due to pressure and overcrowding resulting in the collapse of the plank bridges over the basin gates and causing the deaths of sixteen people.⁹³ Similarly whilst remarking on the 'exceptional' double launch of HMS *Royal Arthur* and *Royal Sovereign* in 1891, the *Evening News* (Portsmouth) recalled the launch of HMS *Marlborough* in 1855 which 'on being released, heeled over to starboard, and stuck on the ways right over the Royal platform, an accident which so startled Her Majesty that she has never been present at a similar function until now'.⁹⁴ The press liked to remind readers of previous ship launches for two reasons: firstly it provided an opportunity to demonstrate the long-standing tradition of launch ceremonies; secondly it continued to act as a draw, reminding the public that launches could be dangerous and thrilling. That the Queen had been put off until now was excellent publicity. Therefore, intrigue at how a ship would behave on being launched continued to attract the public to the launching ceremony. For example, the launch of HMS *Kent* in 1901 was postponed for a day due to bad weather and the *Evening News* (Portsmouth) reported that the 'postponement of a

⁸⁸ *The Times*, 21 June 1898

⁸⁹ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 113

⁹⁰ *Hampshire Telegraph*, 19 November 1898

⁹¹ Lincoln, 'Naval', p. 470

⁹² Lincoln, 'Naval', p. 470

⁹³ *Evening News* (Portsmouth), 26 February 1891

⁹⁴ *Evening News* (Portsmouth), 26 February 1891; Double launches were uncommon events and therefore the *Evening News* (Portsmouth) suggested it had the power to draw greater crowds.

launch is such a rare event that public curiosity had been aroused as to how the Kent would behave herself, so that there was a large crowd of spectators'.⁹⁵

However, despite being the chief target, it was not just members of the public and dockyard workers who attended launch ceremonies. Another innovation, which added 'to the growing theatricality of these occasions', was the Admiralty's decision that naval officers and sailors should regularly attend ship launches; their attendance being recognized as necessary to create the image of a smart, united navy.⁹⁶ This continued to reinforce their position as part of imperial symbolism and popular culture. Therefore, it is not surprising that this period witnessed the popularity of the middle and upper classes dressing their children in sailor suits. In addition, the Admiralty issued orders to ensure that 'ships and installations were routinely "dressed" on launch days' to add to the spectacle.⁹⁷ This was first introduced in 1912 for the launch of HMS *Iron Duke*.⁹⁸ *The Times* reported 'the harbour presented a gay appearance, the warships being dressed overall'.⁹⁹ Thomas has suggested that this was due to the launch coinciding with 'intense rivalry' between Great Britain and Imperial Germany, which 'was reaching a feverish climax' by 1912.¹⁰⁰ Both of these orders caused more sailors to be involved in ship launches either directly or indirectly as both part of the spectacle and as spectators. For instance, again at the launch of *Iron Duke*, there was a guard of honour comprising bluejackets from the naval barracks.¹⁰¹ Thomas also argued the importance of this in that 'imperial and navalist ideology was expressed predominantly in visual terms, in the lines of assembled sailors and marines'.¹⁰² The press estimated that the crowds were approximately 60,000 and therefore the scale of the ceremony was clear to see.¹⁰³

Thus sailors were becoming more involved in naval pageantry during this period and this chapter will now explore this more fully. However, gathering sailor testimony on specific launches is challenging due to a number of variables. The first is the location of the launch, and diaries are needed which cover the dates of launches and from sailors who were stationed in that particular port. The key issue is that many diaries held in archive collections are from sailors serving overseas who wanted to record their memories and experiences. Whether this is because more diaries were kept by sailors overseas generally or have just survived as curiosities is unknown. On the other hand, as will be demonstrated below, more diaries are extant which describe fleet reviews. This is because they involved a much greater number of ships and men from the different British fleets, and thus more sailors were actually taking part.

⁹⁵ *Evening News* (Portsmouth), 6 March 1901

⁹⁶ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 35

⁹⁷ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 35

⁹⁸ Thomas, 'Empire', p. 204; Although CPO Edwin Fletcher noted this occurring in 1909. RNM 1980/115: Diary of Edwin Fletcher

⁹⁹ *The Times*, 14 October 1912

¹⁰⁰ Thomas, 'Empire', p. 208

¹⁰¹ Thomas, 'Empire', p. 204; Although this was not new, sailors had often formed part of a guard of honour. See for example *Illustrated London News*, 1854; *The Times*, 29 July 1907.

¹⁰² Thomas, 'Empire', p. 210

¹⁰³ *The Times*, 14 October 1912

Therefore, whilst sailor testimony discussing ship launches exists, it is more limited. Furthermore, published memoirs are also relatively silent on this subject.¹⁰⁴

However, one sailor who diligently kept a private diary during his time in the service, Edwin Fletcher, allows some examination of this point.¹⁰⁵ Fletcher was based for a lengthy period at Whale Island in Portsmouth and thus was present at the launch of HMS *Bellerophon* (a Dreadnought Class Battleship) by 'Princess Henry of Battenbourg [sic]'.¹⁰⁶ Fletcher's diary entry is brief but he noted that 'she took the water lovely'.¹⁰⁷ In comparison, *The Times* is full of detail and talks of it being the largest ship to date launched at the Royal Dockyard.¹⁰⁸ As expected there was an 'enormous crowd' and 'as she glided down the well-greased ways, plunged into the water, the band playing "God Save the King" and "Rule Britannia"'.¹⁰⁹ Considering the grandness of launch ceremonies, Fletcher's brevity might suggest he was uninterested. However, what is interesting is that Fletcher was not concerned with the ritual, the crowds who were present, or the organization of the day; Fletcher chose to record the ship itself as it took to the water.

In slight contrast, Geoffrey Chandler provides the point of view of a young midshipman and was present at the launch of HMS *Orion* (a Super Dreadnought). He recorded:

The marchioness christened the ship in the usual manner and cut the rope. The *Orion* immediately commenced her journey down the slip. The band played Rule Britannia and God Save the King and a crowd of 30,000 cheered. The ship seemed to slide down very fast, in fact it was reported that she attained a speed of 12 knots.¹¹⁰

Whilst a more detailed description, this account lacks the heartfelt down-to-earth clarity of Fletcher's but nevertheless shows interest and excitement in the launch itself. Chandler also referred to newspaper reports of the launch for further details, such as the speed at which the vessel moved down the slipway. This suggests that Chandler had a good level of interest in the event and a desire to record the memory in detail.

The brevity of sailor's accounts could suggest that ship launches had become routine to them as naval pageantry increasingly became part of their daily lives, and thus not particularly interesting unless something specific occurred. However, it is sensible to reconsider Thomas' suggestion that despite the routine, the spontaneity of the imperial message could create excitement and interest. Although Thomas was examining the effect of ship launches on the

¹⁰⁴ Whether this is because they were not present or other memories were deemed more important by them or their editors is open to debate but for further analysis of this point see the arguments of Christopher McKee discussed in Chapter One.

¹⁰⁵ Fletcher eventually rose to the rank of Chief Petty Officer and he documents a long but not always happy time in the service.

¹⁰⁶ RNM 1980/115: Diary of Edwin Fletcher; This is the same ship described by Edward Fraser's comparative study which has been discussed above.

¹⁰⁷ RNM 1980/115: Diary of Edwin Fletcher

¹⁰⁸ *The Times*, 29 July 1907

¹⁰⁹ *The Times*, 29 July 1907

¹¹⁰ RNM 2004/21/1: Diary of Geoffrey Chandler

general public, sailors should not be excluded as they were also participants. The testimony of Fletcher, and also Chandler, does not suggest that they were ambivalent to these events. Rather, what both accounts demonstrate is that sailors were interested in new additions to the fleet but took from it what they wanted. Above all as both McKee and Lavery have argued, there existed a keen bond between sailors and warships.¹¹¹ Simply because sailors such as Fletcher did not embrace the imperial imagery of it did not mean that it did not resonate on other levels such as appreciation and pride in the ship.

Therefore, launching ceremonies could be particularly poignant moments. This suggests that watching or taking part in acts of pageantry would trigger some emotion in addition to feelings of imperial pride generated by the spectacle. Furthermore, the history of the ships in which they commissioned was important to sailors, and upon joining a ship their diaries often gave a brief history setting out where it was launched and by whom. Whilst this may have been just factual information recorded as an aide memoir, it is suggestive of something deeper. In particular, sailors would sometimes draw ornate decorations around the opening pages where they had written down this information, combining an image of the ship or its emblem.¹¹² This suggests a deep-seated loyalty and affection towards the ship, and furthermore that such feelings were part of a collective sailor culture.

Fleet reviews

The second salient component of naval pageantry was the fleet review. These were significantly altered from their original format during this period, becoming jingoistic, stupendous rituals where loyalty to the Crown and Empire was proclaimed. For instance, *Punch* conjured up a vivid image of the review in 1897:

“Over!” cried Mr Punch, removing his sailor cap and mopping his manly brow, moist with sea-spray, and the perspiration produced by many Jubilee toasts and much loyal shouting.¹¹³

This extract shows the stalwart Mr Punch wearing a sailor cap, linking him clearly with the navy; his “manly brow” demonstrating the masculinity of the British sailor; and “much loyal shouting” which was the duty of all spectators, proclaiming their belief in the Empire. Whilst ship launches served primarily to introduce new technological advances to the public, fleet reviews provided the ultimate opportunity for imperial imagery on a colossal scale where the key focus was on demonstrating power and prestige to the public and propagating imperial sentiment.

¹¹¹ McKee, *Sober Men*, p. 67; Brian Lavery, *In Which They Served: The Royal Navy Officer Experience in the Second World War*, (London: Conway, 2008); p. 163

¹¹² For examples of this see Appendix 1.2, Appendix 1.3 Appendix 1.4.

¹¹³ See for example *Punch, or the London charivari's* coverage of the Jubilee fleet review in 1897. *Punch, or the London Charivari*, 3 July 1897

Originally reviews had, in the full sense of the word, constituted an inspection of warships and their crews; an inspection of *materiel* and *personnel*.¹¹⁴ This formed the basis for early royal fleet reviews, in particular the reviews conducted by George III in 1773 and 1781.¹¹⁵ Although, as late as 1814 the Prince Regent and the Duke of Clarence visited the flagship, HMS *Impregnable*, for an inspection during the review.¹¹⁶ The vital change was that after 1850 no British monarch boarded a warship for the purpose of carrying out an inspection.¹¹⁷ Now, instead of boarding warships and inspecting the ship's crew, the fleet was assembled and organized into distinct lines such as the "gridiron", described by Rüger as 'an elaborate maritime ballet'; the royal yacht entered the lines of battleships and upon entry a royal salute was fired; sailors lined the ships' sides in order to cheer the monarch as the yacht passed each vessel.¹¹⁸ This acclamation was now the key aim of fleet reviews.¹¹⁹ When the review was "completed" the monarch issued a general salute to the fleet along the lines of: "His majesty is greatly pleased with the efficient condition of the Home fleet".¹²⁰ The royal salute was entirely standard and effectively meaningless: it was a 'rhetorical gesture', however it was important for the theatrical illusion.¹²¹ The display was at once one of national power, displaying the prestige of Britain as the leading global power, and as a cultural 'symbol that celebrated monarchy, empire and the nation'.¹²²

By comparison, fleet reviews prior to 1850 had been overtly political on the part of the monarch, as demonstrated by George III and his use of 'gratuity' payments to sailors following the Battle of Barfleurl.¹²³ On one occasion he paid as much as 10s to each sailor.¹²⁴ *The Times* also noted that he gave money to the poor of Portsea and Gosport.¹²⁵ This was an opportunity for the monarch to promote loyalty amongst the navy and the port town.¹²⁶ However, by the second half of the nineteenth century the political power of the monarchy was decreasing. As historians such as Hobsbawm opined, this is the reason why invented tradition became such an important aspect of British society in order 'to display [the monarch's] continuing relevance and power'.¹²⁷ But, as Cannadine rightly pointed out, this was only possible due to the increased popularity of the monarchy that eclipsed the indifferent or more often negative public attitude that had existed since George III.¹²⁸ Queen Victoria's role as a ceremonial figure was carefully re-constructed to increase her popularity and position her as the ceremonial figurehead of the Empire. Fleet reviews became an essential part of public ritual, more so than at ship launches because they allowed a far grander spectacle; this was where the monarch was on display to

¹¹⁴ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 16

¹¹⁵ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 16

¹¹⁶ *The Times*, 31 July 1909

¹¹⁷ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 16

¹¹⁸ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 26; p. 18; See Appendix 1.5.

¹¹⁹ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 17; p. 21

¹²⁰ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 18

¹²¹ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 18

¹²² Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 49

¹²³ *The Times*, 31 July 1909

¹²⁴ *The Times*, 31 July 1909

¹²⁵ *The Times*, 31 July 1909

¹²⁶ See Cannadine's point below.

¹²⁷ Hobsbawm, 'Introduction', pp. 4-5

¹²⁸ Cannadine, 'Context', p. 121

the nation and to the world. This was particularly so by the Edwardian era where Edward VII was popularly known as 'the sailor king'.¹²⁹

The repositioning of the monarchy and the recognition of the importance of public ritual by the second half of the nineteenth century, and its potential power, was therefore vital to the success of naval pageantry. In contrast, at a review in 1814 the Prince Regent and his guests, the Emperor of Russia and the King of Prussia, 'arrived... much to the disappointment of the many thousands who had gone out to welcome them, after dark'.¹³⁰ The public was not the target of this review as they would later become and so the authorities displayed an ambivalent attitude towards them, they were simply spectators to what was a deeply political exercise. They would accommodate them but the potential propaganda opportunity was not recognized. Although the following day at the review ceremony the monarchs did receive a salute from the fleet and cheers from the sailors and crowds assembled, a precursor to later reviews, this was not the public spectacle it had become by the beginning of the twentieth century.¹³¹ In the years leading up to the First World War the level of planning, and the concerted effort that was made in order to make fleet reviews and ship launches such a spectacle, is readily apparent, and the Admiralty took a firm hand in this. For example, after 1911 if royalty or VIPs were to be present then dockyards were required to submit plans and estimates of costs for the event in order to get permission to proceed.¹³² As has already been mentioned above, from 1912 onwards ships were dressed and sailors ordered to be present.

As the public became the 'real subject of these rituals', it poses the question of whether there was consensus around naval pageantry.¹³³ Again Rüger went some way to bringing consideration of "consensus" into the naval sphere, and questioned whether these events demonstrate fervent royalist sentiment.¹³⁴ National and local newspapers noted the large crowds who turned out to witness fleet reviews and ship launches and described scenes of joyous celebration.¹³⁵ As one contemporary, Percival Hislam, noted, 'there are few spectacles that delight the average landsman more than an assembly of warships'.¹³⁶ But, although tempting to take at face value, large crowds do not necessarily imply consensus. It should be noted that crowd control mechanisms were put in place and the presence of the military and the police force made the opportunity to protest minimal.¹³⁷ Although there were spontaneous gestures of loyalty which were honest, the working classes may simply have enjoyed it as a grand day out with plenty of opportunity for excitement and distraction.¹³⁸

¹²⁹ Thomas, 'Empire', pp. 211-212

¹³⁰ *The Times*, 31 July 1909; Again, this is a newspaper publishing old reports alongside current material to give a greater sense of continuity.

¹³¹ *The Times*, 31 July 1909

¹³² Rüger, *Great Naval*, 35; ADM 12/1493

¹³³ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 21

¹³⁴ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 118

¹³⁵ For examples of this see both local and national newspapers where it was common to note the size of the crowd.

¹³⁶ Percival A. Hislam, *The Navy of Today*, (London: Jack Dodge Publishing Co., 1914); p. 77; Sailors also remarked upon this and it will be considered in more detail below.

¹³⁷ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 119

¹³⁸ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 118

Therefore, Rüger has argued that 'conflict was hidden, consensus staged'.¹³⁹ In addition there was the interaction between the state and the public, and the growth of consumerism which competed with the state's efforts to inculcate its ideology.¹⁴⁰ For instance, the growth of civic power in Portsmouth began to challenge the Admiralty, who could not exercise complete control, and even though it disliked civilian intrusion, recognized it had to accept it. This is further reinforced by Elizabeth Hammerton and David Cannadine who examined conflict and consensus but caveated their argument by stating that considering the ceremony itself is not enough: the planning, local politics, all these things in the run up, including the day needed to be taken into account. Therefore, as Cannadine and Hammerton's study of Queen Victoria's Jubilee celebrations demonstrated, it is perhaps best to look at this as 'conflict and consensus co-existing'.¹⁴¹

This sets the basis for considering the dual role of sailors in these review ceremonies. Unlike the public, they did not have the luxury of choice and had no option but to obey orders. Yet, as well as being participants, sailors were also spectators to these events. For example, whilst stationed at HMS *Excellent*, the Gunnery School, Edwin Fletcher was present for the review in honour of the King's birthday on 28th June 1907. Fletcher recorded: 'all ships dressed various fashions and fired a Royal Salute of 21 guns at noon'.¹⁴² Furthermore, Fletcher had an active role in the celebrations as he was one of a number of sailors who paraded from the docks to Southsea Common during the morning.¹⁴³ Yet, he recorded nothing about taking part in the parade. Similarly to his account of the launch of HMS *Bellerophon*, he does not record the spectacle he witnessed. Although usually reticent, it is worth noting that the King was not present for these celebrations as he was in London for the Trooping of the Colours, and it is possible that Fletcher's was less interested because of the King's absence.¹⁴⁴

Again, Fletcher was similarly reticent about the fleet review during the Imperial Press Conference in 1909. This was the first such press conference designed to create greater knowledge and collaboration between the British and Dominion press and thus cement imperial ties.¹⁴⁵ Amongst a variety of specially organized imperially-themed displays, it included a grand display of the Royal Navy off Spithead. However, the diary entry for the event is brief. He wrote: 'They came round at 3.30pm in the tug... They then went on the Dreadnought and witnessed an attack on that ship'.¹⁴⁶ He recorded no further observations of the event. Yet this was a large and well-publicized incident of naval pageantry. National papers such as *The Times* had been working hard to publicize the event throughout the previous year. In early 1908 *The Times* had stated that the Royal Navy's involvement would be a major part of the press

¹³⁹ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 122

¹⁴⁰ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 50

¹⁴¹ Hammerton and Cannadine, 'Conflict', p. 142

¹⁴² RNM 1980/115: Diary of Edwin Fletcher

¹⁴³ RNM 1980/115: Diary of Edwin Fletcher

¹⁴⁴ *The Times*, 29 June 1907

¹⁴⁵ For further information see Simon Potter, *News and the British World: The Emergence of an Imperial Press System, 1876-1922*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

¹⁴⁶ RNM 1981/151/3: Diary of Edwin Fletcher

conference, stating that the delegates 'will be given an opportunity of inspecting a great naval base, and seeing some of the most recent additions to the fleet'.¹⁴⁷ Following the review, a reporter for *The Times* compared it to all the reviews he had seen since Queen Victoria's Jubilee review in 1887 and boldly stated that he had 'never seen a more impressive spectacle'.¹⁴⁸ This was a large-scale and important event of naval pageantry watched by the reporters of the world's press.

Furthermore, it is worth considering that HMS *Dreadnought* was still a relatively new and technologically advanced ship in 1909, and it is perhaps curious that the event elicited no expression of pride or other sentiment from Fletcher. In comparison, a young midshipman named James Colville noted only a year later: 'I suppose it is safe to say that no ship, not even the "Victory", will have such wide world fame as the "Dreadnought"'.¹⁴⁹ Likewise Fletcher was brief in his recollection of the Empire Day celebrations in 1907 when the Prince of Wales visited the fleet. He simply noted: 'The Prince went back to Admiralty House about 6pm last night and left for London about 9am, Ships being dressed all over and undressed half an hour after he left'.¹⁵⁰ That Fletcher specifically mentioned the short space of time between dressing and undressing the ships suggests that he was making a subtle reference to the effort being a waste of their time.

Fletcher regularly demonstrated that he was not interested in the intimate details of naval pageantry. Although he recorded many examples of naval pageantry he either witnessed or participated in, he is more talkative about day-to-day routine and his own grumbles.¹⁵¹ For example on one occasion he recorded, 'After dinner we "passed out" of "Drill" but I believe we done none to grand at that'.¹⁵² In comparison, officer diaries are usually more detailed both in their descriptions and in their experiences. For instance, James Colville was impressed by what he saw at the review on 24 June 1910, writing in his diary: 'It was a pretty day and the ships dressed and the smoke of the salute made a very fine sight'.¹⁵³ To Colville this was a display of prestige in which he took evident pride. Furthermore, on attending another review he gives a light-hearted account of his experience, noting when the royal yacht arrived and a 21 gun salute was fired, 'there was one 4" [gun] fired just over my head and it nearly slew me'.¹⁵⁴ Nevertheless, Fletcher's repeated brevity does not render his recollections unimportant. Although he recorded naval pageantry in the same off-hand way he jotted down many of his daily activities, it is important simply because he went to the trouble of recording it. Therefore, on some level there existed an interest in the events and he considered it noteworthy and this supports the argument that it was an accepted part of sailor culture.

¹⁴⁷ *The Times*, 19 November 1908

¹⁴⁸ *The Times*, 12 June 1909

¹⁴⁹ RNM 1997/43/1: Diary of James Colville

¹⁵⁰ RNM 1980/115: Diary of Edwin Fletcher

¹⁵¹ Sailors liked to grumble, although this did not necessarily mean anything more serious, and this point is considered throughout this thesis. For further information see Lavery, *Able*, p. 237.

¹⁵² RNM 1980/115: Diary of Edwin Fletcher

¹⁵³ RNM 1997/43/1: Diary of James Colville

¹⁵⁴ RNM 1997/43/1: Diary of James Colville

However, both Fletcher's and Colville's diaries stand in marked contrast to that of Robert Percival, a stoker. Whilst technically a distinct and separate group from sailors, stokers provide an interesting point of comparison. They also lived on the lower deck and, perhaps more importantly, often bore the brunt of the hardship of naval pageantry but without the respected public image of sailors.¹⁵⁵ Percival was very candid regarding his thoughts and negative experiences of the Royal Navy.¹⁵⁶ For instance, regarding the manner in which fleet reviews were reported in the press he made the following comment: 'the great thing about Naval manoeuvres is that the press and people ashore know far more about them than the actual people taking part'.¹⁵⁷ In addition, he believed the admirals had no idea what they were doing 'and consequently keep the ships' companies in the dark!'.¹⁵⁸

However, by 1900 accusing the Admiralty of lack of organization was not justifiable: a great deal of planning was put into all events of naval pageantry.¹⁵⁹ It was in the Admiralty's interest to make sure that naval manoeuvres were carried out as carefully as possible; this was a navy on the world stage. Therefore, this account is revealing of Percival's own agenda. True, the press were undeniably well-informed about naval pageantry so that they could publicize events.¹⁶⁰ Nevertheless, his suggestion that the press knew more about what was happening than those taking part is telling of how little faith he had in the officer elite of the Royal Navy. Whilst men of the lower deck might not have been given explicit instructions regarding the running order for the day, it is sensible to recognize that officers were and had this not been the case more accidents would have occurred during these events. When the eyes of the world was upon them this could not have been allowed to happen. In addition, as pageantry within the navy increased, sailors would have familiarized themselves with how events were to be conducted and have known what to expect.

It is also interesting to note that Percival lambasts the naval authorities in quite such elegant fashion. As previously mentioned, Percival is a stoker, part of the relatively new influx of naval personnel who had not joined the service during boyhood; stokers 'were recruited almost exclusively over the age of eighteen'.¹⁶¹ The key consequence of this was that these men usually came from a much wider age and geographic background and were, therefore, less likely to accept the navy's discipline and customs which was instilled in those brought up in the bosom of the navy.¹⁶² For instance, Percival made no secret of the fact he joined the navy for pecuniary reasons rather than any deep-seated longing to serve with the Senior Service, stating he was 'driven by Economic pressure [and] was forced to adopt it as a means of livelihood'.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁵ For further information on stokers see Lavery, *Able*; McKee, *Sober Men*; Tony Chamberlain, "'Stokers - the lowest of the low?" A Social History of Royal Navy Stokers 1850-1950', Unpublished Dissertation, Exeter, 2013.

¹⁵⁶ RNM 1988/294: Memoir of Robert Percival; However, this was also common amongst sailors for example see RNM 1990/95: Diary of A. C. East; RNM 1976/65/1: Diary of William Williams. Percival's attitude is considered in more detail below.

¹⁵⁷ RNM 1988/294: Memoir of Robert Percival

¹⁵⁸ RNM 1988/294: Memoir of Robert Percival

¹⁵⁹ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 35

¹⁶⁰ Rüger, *Great Naval*, pp. 72-82

¹⁶¹ Henry Baynham, *Men from the Dreadnoughts*, (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1976); p. 164

¹⁶² See amongst others Lavery, *Able*, p. 150.

¹⁶³ RNM 1988/294: Memoir of Robert Percival

This attitude is further displayed in numerous scathing remarks concerning naval customs, in particular those that impede his own comforts.¹⁶⁴ Percival was evidently a reasonably well-educated man and had a specific agenda with his writing.¹⁶⁵

As a stoker, Percival would have been below deck and not a spectator. However, sailors manning the deck rails were not guaranteed to see much of the review either, although this work was obviously less demanding. For instance, Midshipman John Southby's diary demonstrates the spacial difficulties caused by the large number of ships present at fleet reviews. Southby noted that at the coronation review of 1911 the monarch was only visible by means of a telescope; this was not an instrument that everyone on board would have had access to.¹⁶⁶ There were 10 lines of warships in 1911 and it took the royal yacht 2 hours to go around the fleet.¹⁶⁷ The vast distance between sailors and the focal point is made even clearer by another Midshipman, James Colville, who commented on the review in 1910 and, in particular, on what sailors' saw of the royal yacht as it inspected the fleet. Colville noted:

the cheering was mostly excellent from the ships... but the whole 2nd Flotilla had to cheer together. When the time came the yacht was almost out of sight from us and the men had nothing to cheer for and they didn't let themselves go.¹⁶⁸

Whilst this demonstrates an organizational flaw in how the review was conducted, it also shows that sailors would not simply cheer on demand. This suggests that they were capable of thinking for themselves and would only do certain things if they recognized there was a point to it. This supports the recent arguments of Isaac Land, who by studying nationalism and British sailors has suggested that sailors had their own 'agency'.¹⁶⁹ As the following chapters will demonstrate, sailors were conscious of their own thoughts but often curtailed by the strict discipline of the navy and it was when there was an impasse between the two that serious issues occurred.

Another important aspect of naval pageantry that all ranks commented on was the mock battle, which sometimes formed part of the review. This provided an additional opportunity for the Royal Navy to demonstrate its awesome firepower to the assembled masses. Sham fights were not a modern creation and, as the contemporary John Leyland noted, the Royal Navy had used them as early as 1778 at a Royal Review at Spithead, to entertain the public whilst demonstrating superior firepower.¹⁷⁰ Nevertheless, despite their popularity, mock battles 'had little practical value in terms of training and... scarcely gave an accurate picture of the fleet's condition'.¹⁷¹ Officers also commonly 'made fun' of mock battles and for instance Admiral Sir

¹⁶⁴ For an example of this see RNM 1988/294: Memoir of Robert Percival

¹⁶⁵ The memoirs of Robert Percival is unpublished but the copy held by the National Museum of the Royal Navy is a photocopied reproduction and so it is likely that it was purposefully preserved for posterity.

¹⁶⁶ RNM 1986/422: Diary of John H.P. Southby

¹⁶⁷ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 21; RNM 1982/1716: Diary of John Cardew

¹⁶⁸ RNM 1997/43/1: Diary of James Colville

¹⁶⁹ Leggett, 'Navy', p. 154; See also Isaac Land, *War, Nationalism, and the British Sailor, 1750-1850*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); pp. 1-12.

¹⁷⁰ Leyland, 'The Navy', p. 165

¹⁷¹ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 26

Louis Hamilton referred to them as 'show exercises'.¹⁷² This is supported by Midshipman Edward Blake who was present at the mock battle organized for the Imperial Press Conference delegates in 1909. Blake recorded it was 'a fine spectacle, but practically, of course, absurd'.¹⁷³ As already noted above, Fletcher – who witnessed the same attack – made no substantive comment.¹⁷⁴ However, James Colville rather enjoyed taking part and recorded that 'it was rather a fine sight, seeing a big fleet like that come together'.¹⁷⁵

Again, this contrasts strongly with Percival who was nothing short of damning about mock battles. He wrote that on steaming around during a mock battle, the popular image of 'brave, fearless men with... nerves of steel' should be forgotten, and that men were 'generally nervous wrecks and the courage they possess is generally of the Dutch order'.¹⁷⁶ As a stoker, a mock battle would have meant additional work for no perceivable benefit other than the amusement of those ashore. However, if one compares this with the testimony of a stoker serving during the Battle of Jutland there is a marked difference with a variety of emotions becoming apparent. Jack Cotterell noted 'as the guns went off you could feel the ships go down and rise up, which would shake the dust out of the crevices, creating clouds of smoke'.¹⁷⁷ He further noted how the stokers 'helped in the magazine with the shells. We wouldn't normally do that, but as the battle went on we all pulled together'.¹⁷⁸ Comparing a mock battle with real one is fraught with difficulties, not least because the life-threatening seriousness of a real battle has the power to change all preconceived ideas. However, it suggests that genuine action may have incited patriotism and bravery unlike anything created during a mock battle and this will be considered further in Chapters Three and Four. Nevertheless, considering evidence from other stokers and engine room artificers suggests that Percival was generally more vitriolic.¹⁷⁹

Overseas Pageantry

A further aspect of naval pageantry that needs to be considered is that which took place overseas. This theme has not been examined by Rüger and yet with the global reach of the British Empire, events of naval pageantry did not only occur in home waters. Bernard Porter made the comment that for foreigners, 'Britain was *defined* by her empire... This was because the face Britain usually presented to them, *as* foreigners, was her imperial one'.¹⁸⁰ Leaving aside other elements of Porter's argument, this is a valid point. Abroad in the Empire images

¹⁷² Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 26; NMM, HTN/202a: Admiral Sir Louis Henry Hamilton, private diary, 29 July 1914

¹⁷³ IWM 85/11/1: Edward W. H. Blake

¹⁷⁴ RNM 1981/151: Diary of Edwin Fletcher

¹⁷⁵ RNM 1997/43/1: Diary of James Colville

¹⁷⁶ RNM 1988/294: Memoir of Robert Percival

¹⁷⁷ Jack Cotterell quoted in Max Arthur, *True Glory: the Royal Navy 1914-1939*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1996); p. 83

¹⁷⁸ Cotterell quoted in Arthur, *True Glory*, p. 83

¹⁷⁹ For example see RNM 1998/22: Letters of Eric Marshall; RNM 1982/189: Diary of J. Payne; RNM 1988/290: Diary of Richard King. Percival seems to have an agenda behind this, the exact cause of which is unclear but it may be influenced by his Scottish background and financial motives, both of which he repeatedly mentions.

¹⁸⁰ Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006 [first edition 2004]); p. 306

of imperialism were regularly used for political and social control.¹⁸¹ Consequently, as a readily identifiable symbol, naval pageantry on varying scales occurred across the Empire in order to assert British power and strength to the people under its control.

As such, in his recent study Daniel Owen Spence argued that:

Beyond Britain, the Royal Navy was a crucial cultural adhesive for binding the empire's young settler societies together with the mother country. Wherever a British naval base or warship was present, the service occupied a prominent position in the social life of the colony and in disseminating British imperial culture.¹⁸²

There were a great many activities that demanded acts of naval pageantry and served to disseminate British imperial imagery to the colonies. The majority of these were particularly ordinary and nothing more than day-to-day activities such as gun salutes for the monarch's birthday or greeting a British or foreign admiral and celebrations of Empire Day or events specific to the colony. However, the demonstration of power to the colonies that these activities stimulated should not be under-estimated. Gun salutes in particular reinforced the colossal strength of British warships to the indigenous inhabitants of the colonies.¹⁸³ For instance one sailor, Harry Price, noted on one occasion: 'The noise now became deafening as over forty men of war began to salute'.¹⁸⁴ Thus, for sailors serving overseas, naval pageantry was a regular aspect of life abroad and the final part of this chapter will briefly consider sailors' experience of this pageantry prior to the Great War, and examine their involvement and its effect upon them.

In particular, the political situation of the Boer War (which will be considered further in the following chapter) necessitated increased events of naval pageantry 'that reinforced the bonds between the Royal Navy and the colonies'.¹⁸⁵ Consequently, South Africa was included as part of the Royal Tour of the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall in 1901. In itself this was a great event of naval pageantry and Spence has argued that this 'was the most extensive royal tour attempted at this time' and important because the navy played a significant role.¹⁸⁶ This has also been suggested by Phillip Buckner who argued that 'one of the key reasons why the tour took place at all was because of the war in South Africa'.¹⁸⁷ Both Joseph Chamberlain and Sir Alfred Milner believed that the royal visit "would encourage the loyal party in S. Africa" and pushed the idea with the monarchy.¹⁸⁸ Thus as Buckner has argued, as the war became unpopular and enthusiasm waned, the tour 'took on much greater significance'.¹⁸⁹ Similarly

¹⁸¹ This point will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five where the nuances of displaying the navy to the colonies will be considered more fully.

¹⁸² Spence, *History*, p. 92

¹⁸³ This point will be discussed further in Chapter Five.

¹⁸⁴ Harry Price, *The Royal Tour, or the Cruise of HMS Orphir: Being a lower deck account of their Royal Highnesses, The Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York's voyage around the British Empire*, (Exeter: Webb and Bower, 1980)

¹⁸⁵ Spence, *History*, p. 109

¹⁸⁶ Spence, *History*, p. 110

¹⁸⁷ Phillip Buckner, 'The Royal Tour of 1901 and the Construction of an Imperial Identity in South Africa', *South African Historical Journal*, 41, 1, 1999; pp. 324-348, p. 324

¹⁸⁸ RA, W6/3, Letter from Chamberlain to Knollys, 10 January 1901 quoted in Buckner, 'Royal Tour', p. 326

¹⁸⁹ Buckner 'Royal Tour', p. 329

Spence has posited that the struggle of the British Empire to defeat the Boers required a concerted effort and the Royal Tour was to 'stir up jingoism, [and] project a unified imperial front'.¹⁹⁰

The tour involved the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall traversing the Empire aboard HMS *Ophir* and visiting key cities throughout the colonies. Due to the ongoing war in South Africa, both Durban and Capetown were high on the agenda. In particular, the *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* reported: 'The visit is undertaken at the express desire of their Royal Highnesses, who fully appreciate the sacrifice made by the King's loyal subjects at those ports [Durban and Capetown]'.¹⁹¹ However, in his biography of George V published in 1936 after the death of the King, W. J. Makin said of the visit: 'Of all the Dominions visited by the future King George on that first official Empire tour, it may be said that South Africa was to prove the most difficult problem of all'.¹⁹² The political sensitivities of the conflict meant that the visit was far more complicated and required a grand display in order to encourage patriotism. Therefore, this was a visit that demanded a significant level of participation on behalf of the sailors in order to gain the most publicity for the Empire from the visit. In particular, these visits brought the royals into contact not only with colonial subjects but also those sailors who accompanied them and sailors stationed overseas.

One sailor serving aboard the royal yacht HMS *Ophir*, Petty Officer Harry Price, provides a detailed account of the pageantry that took place during the royal visit to South Africa.¹⁹³ Upon the arrival of the royal party at Simonstown, Price recorded:

As they where [sic] pulled ashore all the ships saluted, the noise of the guns echoing and re echoing amongst the lofty hills, which surrounded the town; As their "Royal Highnesses" landed an interesting affair was, that they where [sic] drawn in their carriage by bluejackets, instead of horses, all the way to the station.¹⁹⁴

Also present were a number of ships belonging to the Cape Squadron and Price noted that they were there 'to take part in the ceremonies'.¹⁹⁵ This included HMS *Barracouta*, upon which William Williams was serving. Williams' diary also describes the naval pageantry for the royals, although he does not mention the "interesting affair" of bluejackets pulling the royals' carriage as described by Price. However, Williams noted the effort that they had gone to in dressing all the ships ready to receive the Duke and Duchess.¹⁹⁶ Nevertheless, he remained enthusiastic

¹⁹⁰ Spence, *History*, p. 110

¹⁹¹ *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 22 February 1901; Although the visit was driven by the political situation and instigated by Milner and Chamberlain, Buckner has suggested that the Duke and Duchess were sympathetic and genuinely wanted to show their appreciation. Buckner, 'Royal Tour', p. 329

¹⁹² W. J. Makin, *The Life of King George the Fifth*, (London: George Newnes, 1936); p. 98

¹⁹³ However, unlike many published memoirs, this account is a facsimile rather than an account written up expressly for publication.

¹⁹⁴ Price, *Royal Tour*; *The Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 24 August 1901; *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 24 August 1901

¹⁹⁵ Price, *Royal Tour*

¹⁹⁶ RNM 1976/65/1: Diary of William Williams

about the visit and proudly recorded that 'the Bluejackets and marines lining the sides of each ship presented a fine spectacle'.¹⁹⁷

In addition, Williams provided an insight into his feelings towards the monarchy and the Empire, and clearly expressed feelings of patriotism. Furthermore, he demonstrated his interpretation of the interactions between the colony and the monarchy. Williams saw a good proportion of the celebrations at Simonstown during the royal tour and described going ashore that day 'to view the decorations which made one feel proud of the good feeling that existed between this colony and our future King and Queen'.¹⁹⁸ The decorations during the tour's visit to South Africa were certainly impressive. For instance, as Buckner has noted, in Pietermaritzburg 'over 8000 flags were distributed to school children and another 25000 used to decorate the streets'.¹⁹⁹ Buckner also suggested that despite bad weather disrupting the proceedings, 'it did little to dampen the enthusiasm of the vast crowds – estimated at 50000 people who lined the harbour and the streets'.²⁰⁰ Therefore, Williams' diary suggests that he thought the visit was a success and took great pride in the wider imperial celebrations and the navy's role within this. In particular, he suggests a genuine appreciation of how the Duke and Duchess were welcomed in the colony. A similar account was given by A. C. East who accompanied the royals to India in 1911 for the King's coronation. East wrote that the visit to India was 'a most fitting one as it was the first time a white King and Queen had been crowned in India'.²⁰¹

Therefore, the royal tour's visit to South Africa should be viewed with a degree of success and Buckner has argued in support of this, noting:

The Natal Mercury believed that the visit 'has been successful beyond anticipation' and 'will ever be remembered as an historic landmark'. The Duke and Duchess, it declared, have won 'the love and loyal esteem of the Colonists of Natal' and the tour would have lasting value in 'making the Colonists realise more than ever they have done before their position as citizens of the great Empire, centred around the Throne of Great Britain and the Empire'.²⁰²

Nevertheless, Williams' diary suggests that it was successful and that *he* believed the colonial appreciation was sincere, and that there was a large degree of enthusiasm and excitement towards the royals. As such, he enjoyed what he viewed as the colony's display of loyalty to the monarchy and to the Empire, and that he believed such displays were right and proper. However, whether sailors were fully aware of the deeper political importance of this display of loyalty is open to debate. As this thesis will argue, sailors were not apolitical and would pick up

¹⁹⁷ RNM 1976/65/1: Diary of William Williams

¹⁹⁸ RNM 1976/65/1: Diary of William Williams

¹⁹⁹ Buckner, 'Royal Tour', p. 333

²⁰⁰ Buckner, 'Royal Tour', p. 333

²⁰¹ RNM 1990/95: Diary of A. C. East

²⁰² Buckner, 'Royal Tour', p. 335; *The Natal Mercury*, 16 August 1901

on any atmosphere in the places they visited.²⁰³ To suggest that they were incapable of this does them a disservice.

Similarly Harry Price also gave an account of the interactions with locals and noted that as part of the celebrations, the ships of the Cape squadron were open to visitors. He wrote that:

a large number of native chiefs, sent by "His Royal Highness, the Duke", went on board the "Monarch", and there witnessed the firing of the big guns, outrigger charges, submarine mines etc; and they went away, I reckon, more impressed than ever, with the great nation, under whose protection they lived.²⁰⁴

Yet this is not something he witnessed first-hand; his idea and interpretation is based upon his expectation. It is unlikely that the immense technological power of the navy, and by extension the Empire, was lost on the indigenous population.²⁰⁵ Whether it increased their loyalty to the Empire is a different matter, yet it is not the paramount point of this account. What is important is that Price clearly assumed this was the likely outcome, and this demonstrates his own relationship to imperialism, colonials, and his interpretation of their relationship.

Such engagement in events of pageantry by colonials and indigenous inhabitants was viewed unquestioningly by sailors such as Williams and Price as unfaltering patriotism and support for the Empire. Price recorded a number of similar accounts during the tour. For instance as the tour arrived in Malta he wrote that there were:

banners and flags by the hundreds flying in the breeze, beautiful triumphal arches, pavements thronged with a loyal picturesque an enthusiastic crowd, the roadway lined with soldiers in khaki and Bluejackets in straw hats.²⁰⁶

Summing up the visit he wrote: 'it was a splendid welcome and showed that the Maltese are quite happy under the Union Jack'.²⁰⁷

This image of loyal colonials is further strengthened by the lack of any reported anti-imperial sentiment. In particular, given the war in South Africa an element of this might have been expected. However, it is evident that a great deal of effort went into controlling the royal visit and preventing any outbursts of anti-imperial sentiment which could have threatened the British mission in South Africa. For instance, it had been arranged that 'suspicious characters would be arrested and kept "in custody on some charge or other" until after the visit'.²⁰⁸ Therefore, the level of anti-imperial sentiment in the colony was being firmly controlled. Yet, being stationed in South Africa, Williams would have had a greater understanding of the political

²⁰³ Baynham, *Men*, p. 193

²⁰⁴ Price, *Royal Tour*

²⁰⁵ This point will be considered in more detail in Chapter Five.

²⁰⁶ Price, *Royal Tour*

²⁰⁷ Price, *Royal Tour*

²⁰⁸ Buckner, 'Royal Tour', p. 328

situation and that he does not suggest or allude to any disloyalty suggests he did not believe there were any significant issues.²⁰⁹ On the other hand, Price wrote that 'we have seen so very little of the shore' and therefore his descriptions are primarily based upon what he did see coupled with his expectations.²¹⁰ Furthermore, he did not rate the experience in South Africa as highly as other colonies visited by the Royal Tour, particularly Australia. He stated that 'in leaving "South Africa" none of the feelings like we experienced when leaving "Australia" affected us'.²¹¹

However, again sailors demonstrate that ceremonial occasions of pageantry were not always enjoyable experiences. For instance, Able Seaman Dicks was serving in the East Indies at the time of the coronation of King George V in 1911. The Governor of Ceylon, as his majesty's representative, marked the occasion of the coronation with a grand ceremony. Dicks was present at the celebrations and he, and a contingent from his ship, were ordered to line the streets for the procession. Dicks remarked, 'there was nothing to do only stand to attention until 11 o'clock. It was no cop being as the remainder of the ship's company were standing off'.²¹² Dicks was evidently jealous of the freedom of his fellow crewmates to enjoy the celebrations and clearly would be far rather be enjoying himself than being part of the pageantry. Again, sailors were liable to grumble and it is important to recognize that Dicks' account does not suggest anything more serious than this.²¹³ Rather, it reinforces the point that sailors interpreted things for themselves, and did not simply absorb their imperial duties.

Yet sailors clearly took pride in the grand spectacle that these events of pageantry occasioned. For example, as he approached Malta with the Royal Tour, Price wrote:

we perceived a number of craft approaching, which proved to be destroyers painted white; and they made a splendid spectacle as they bounded over the dark blue waters, thundering out a royal salute with their 12pdr.²¹⁴

Similarly A. C. East was with the warships escorting the royal yacht in 1911 and evidently enjoyed himself, writing of their visit to India: 'All Bombay brilliantly illuminated as well as the ships in harbour, the spectacle was very grand indeed'.²¹⁵ East clearly enjoyed the spectacle that the harbour and ships made, and was proud. This was also demonstrated by Williams who observed a ceremonial march through the port of Simonstown and reveals pride in both the appearance of the sailors and the reception that they received. He declared: 'without exaggeration I must admit the Bluejackets were the most popular and in the march past the cheers and ovation was tremendous'.²¹⁶ Therefore, Williams evidenced a clear feeling of pride

²⁰⁹ RNM 1976/65/1: Diary of William Williams

²¹⁰ Price, *Royal Tour*

²¹¹ Price, *Royal Tour*; This suggests an element of the expectation of the colony and the experiences sailors could have. This point is discussed in further detail in Chapters Five and Six.

²¹² RNM 1979/100: Diary of J. Dicks

²¹³ Lavery, *Able*, p. 237

²¹⁴ Price, *Royal Tour*

²¹⁵ RNM 1990/95: Diary of A. C. East

²¹⁶ RNM 1976/65/1: Diary of William Williams

towards the sailors created by these occasions which also suggests that he felt proud to be counted amongst them. Likewise, even Percival demonstrated similar thought, in contrast to his usual tone. After witnessing some soldiers perform a march past at Gibraltar he recorded: 'In a moment there came to us a vision of the Empire. From East to West in half a dozen British stations... those lean, brown English faces... were grinning their saucy, good humoured cynical English grin'.²¹⁷

The coronation of Edward VII in 1901 was a further event that elicited pageantry overseas, and this chapter has already noted Edwin Fletcher's experiences in Portsmouth. Williams also noted that the navy was to play a role in the pageantry in Simonstown. He wrote in his diary:

Turning back to our day work we find ourselves busily preparing for the Coronation in the way of decorations and illuminations but after work leave was freely given to those desired it... we received the sad news of His Majesty's illness which came as a shock as no news had yet been received of the King's illness. This postponed a greater part of the displays on shore as well as on board.²¹⁸

Therefore, despite the effort that such naval pageantry put them to, Williams was evidently saddened to hear that the King was unwell and as such the Coronation would be delayed. Whether this reflected concern simply because Williams was patriotic or because it meant that the excitement, which was to be expected as part of the celebrations, would be cancelled is open to question. It is not possible to easily gauge this and it is likely that both elements played a role. Williams did record that it had nonetheless been announced that a day of holiday would be granted, and this perhaps demonstrates that even on a subconscious level both elements existed.

Conclusion

This chapter has built upon recent trends within socio-cultural studies which have considered the wider interactions between the Royal Navy, its sailors and imperialism, particularly the imagery of sailors and the navy as representations of imperial power. In particular, it has developed and advanced the themes drawn by Jan R uger between the navy, pageantry and British imperial culture by examining the construct of naval pageantry and sailors' experience of imperial culture through it. By examining these "forgotten" participants through the use of unpublished sailor diaries, it has demonstrated that pageantry was a key means by which they experienced imperialism, and important in shaping their image and identity as this aligned with public perceptions during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Furthermore, by extending the examination to pageantry overseas, it has demonstrated the relationship sailors had with the colonies and, more importantly, how imperialism shaped their expectations and

²¹⁷ RNM 1988/294: Memoir of Robert Percival

²¹⁸ RNM 1976/65/1: Diary of William Williams

understanding of the world around them. The Empire gave sailors a shared sense of community and a means to process their identity.

Yet, sailors' testimony also demonstrates that they were equally proud of their role, and proud of the reputation and public image of the service, as well as exhibiting local and national pride. The interrelationship between these themes is difficult to untangle and concepts of pride and patriotism must also be viewed as distinct factors; however, together they were all bound-up with some level of latent pride in the Empire and the monarchy. Therefore, it is argued that imperialism was a key aspect of sailor life and consequently an important part of their culture, heightened by their interactions with monarchy, cultural imperialism, and the colonies through naval pageantry. However, there was a level of independence within this. Sailors would grumble and there were aspects of their daily lives which were tedious, demanding, and often deemed pointless. Thus analysing lower-deck testimony reveals the complexity of sailors and that, although working in a deeply regimented environment, they exhibited a level of independence, even if their opportunities for exercising it were often limited.

Chapter Three

Bluejackets in Britain's late imperial wars: imperially-minded soldiers of the Empire?

Sailors are the best comrades in rough times; nothing puts them out; I suppose because the ship is their home, and a run ashore is always in any circumstances a holiday to them.¹

By the late nineteenth century the Royal Navy's position of power and prestige was firmly established in Britain, and the world. As discussed in Chapter Two, the Royal Navy was becoming the embodiment of British imperial power: 'a cultural symbol'.² In particular, this was accentuated during wartime where imagery of sailors was increasingly portrayed in imperialistic terms to the public. Because of its small standing army, additional duties came under the aegis of the Royal Navy, and therefore British sailors were expected to do their duty in matters of imperial defence. Thus British sailors saw action as frontline troops in many of the imperial campaigns during the second half of the nineteenth century, such as in the Crimea, the Gordon Relief Expedition in Egypt, the Boer War, and the Boxer Rebellion in China.³ This chapter examines their cultural portrayal alongside their own experiences with particular consideration of those who served in the Boer War, a conflict that continues to excite historical interest in regard to the imperial sentiment debate and has been called the 'litmus test for popular imperialism' by Brad Beaven.⁴ The Boer War arguably had a significant impact on Britain and provides an illuminating case study. The paramount reason for this focus is to develop the key themes of this thesis: putting sailors into the imperial discourse, and to examine the wider implications of their involvement in Britain's imperial wars; to determine how they related to the empire they were fighting for. In doing so it will firstly put sailors back into the socio-cultural discourse of the war, from which they have been omitted; and secondly demonstrate both the public and personal representations of the British sailor, allowing for deconstruction of their experiences. In doing so it will examine how, through war, imperialistic themes such as patriotism and duty remained key elements of sailor culture.

In recent years, the historiography of the Boer War has changed with a shift away from military and political studies. Revisionist approaches have focused on the advent of the citizen soldier

¹ Major General W. C. F. Molyneux quoted in Arthur Bleby, *The Victorian Naval Brigades*, (Dunbeath: Whittles Publishing, 2006); p. vii

² Jan Rüger, *The Great Naval Game: Britain and Germany in the Age of Empire*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); p. 1; See also Chapter Two for further information.

³ This thesis uses the term "Boer War" rather than the "South African War" or "Anglo-Boer War". References to the Boer War mean the second conflict which took place between 1899 and 1902 rather than the earlier conflict which took place between 1880 and 1881.

⁴ See for example the work of John M. Mackenzie, Bernard Porter, and Andrew Thompson as discussed in Chapter One; Brad Beaven, *Visions of Empire: Patriotism, popular culture and the city, 1870-1939*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012); p. 2

and the public's interaction with imperialism through popular culture. In particular, the work of Stephen M. Miller who has investigated these volunteers and examined their experiences using diaries, letters and other personal papers.⁵ Miller successfully countered the economic arguments of volunteerism put forward by Richard Price in his classic defence of the working class.⁶ However, Miller's methodology has been questioned by Beaven, who is cautious of Miller's use of autobiographies and his failure to consider individuality sufficiently.⁷ Nevertheless, these studies have been a welcome addition to existing approaches such as those by Denis Judd, Peter Warwick, and Thomas Pakenham, whose primary focus during the 1970s and 1980s was on the military situation: the reasons for the outbreak of the war; the impact of the war on the British army and the British public; the reforms that were put in place before the First World War broke out, and the parallels between the two conflicts.⁸

However, despite this continued interest, the role played by British sailors and the naval brigades has remained of little interest to scholars. For instance, although Keith Jeffrey noted that in its imperial wars Britain proved that it did have 'the ships, the men and the money too', his study has almost no mention of "the ships" or the men that served in them, and their activities during the war.⁹ Indeed, there is a paucity of studies specifically about the naval brigades, and the two most widely available were written by amateur historians: one a retired naval officer and the other a journalist.¹⁰ This is somewhat surprising given the public acclaim the brigades received at the time. For instance, the crew of HMS *Powerful* were feted upon their return from the war in both Portsmouth and London. The involvement of the navy and the brigades were well reported in the newspapers, and evidently interesting topics to contemporaries. Furthermore, there were numerous publications from those who had served with or seen the Naval Brigades in action, such as those by George Crowe and T. T. Jeans.¹¹ Thus it is evident that contemporaries recognized sailors' contributions to the war. Instead, the focus on citizen soldiers, such as by Miller, has been aimed at determining the popular mood. This begs the question as to whether it has therefore been assumed that sailors were imperially-minded servants of empire because they chose the navy as a career. Yet despite this they

⁵ See Stephen M. Miller, *Volunteers on the Veldt*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 2007).

⁶ Miller, *Volunteers*, pp. 63-64; See Richard Price, *An Imperial War and the British Working Class: working-class attitudes and reactions to the Boer War, 1899-1902*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972).

⁷ Miller, *Volunteers*; Beaven, *Visions*, pp. 72-73

⁸ See Denis Judd, *The Boer War*, (London: Granada, 1977); Peter Warwick, *The South African War: the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902*, (Harlow: Longman, 1980); Thomas Pakenham, *The Boer War*, (London: Abacus, 1992).

⁹ Keith Jeffrey, 'Kruger's farmers, Strathcona's Horse, Sir George Clarke's camels and the Kaiser's battleships: the impact of the South African War on imperial defence', in Donal Lowry (ed.), *The South African War reappraised*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 188-202; p. 192; Jeffrey is alluding to the song by George William Hunt written about the Russo-Turkish War of 1878 but became an imperialistic anthem. Jeffrey studied the impact of the Boer War on British imperial debate, investigating how it was perceived by contemporaries and commenting on the treaties drawn up in the aftermath to ease the burden of imperial defence abroad.

¹⁰ Bleby who himself said he produced the study because of the lack of interest amongst historians. See Bleby, *Victorians*, p. vi; See also Tony Bridgland, *Field Gun Jack versus The Boers: the Royal Navy in South Africa, 1899-1900*, (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 1998). Bridgland did his national service in the Royal Navy and had a continuing interest in its history.

¹¹ See George Crowe, *HMS Terrible & Her Naval Brigades: a cruiser & her campaigns during the Boer War and Boxer Rebellion*, (London: Leonaur, 2013 [first edition 1902]); T. T. Jeans (ed.), *Naval Brigades in the South African War, 1899-1900*, Second Edition, (London: Sampson Low, Marston, 1902); Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Great Boer War*, (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1900).

volunteered to serve ashore in the naval brigades during the war, beyond the remit of their usual day-to-day lives.

Sailors as soldiers of the Empire: the naval brigades in the public eye

As mentioned above, there was nothing new in the formation of naval brigades in South Africa in 1899; it was part of a conscious strengthening of British forces in the Cape as tensions worsened and war looked inevitable. Sailors represent an interesting case as, unlike their counterparts in the army, it was not their primary function to serve on land and fight prolonged land wars. Although the men who made up the main naval brigades (which comprised the crews of HMS *Terrible* and HMS *Powerful*) were on "active service" and pursuing their imperial duties, these were men who were suddenly thrown into a land-based war which may have taken them out of their comfort zone.¹² The excavation of sailor testimony allows for a better understanding of sailors' personal thoughts to demonstrate this. In order to analyse this further, this chapter will briefly consider the public perception of sailors' roles in the conflict to allow a greater understanding of their image and how they fitted within imperial culture.

It is important to note that the Boer War was widely reported and in great detail compared with previous imperial engagements. This was in part, as Simon Popple has stated, due to technological changes and 'culminated in the almost instantaneous transmission of news and opinion'.¹³ Popple neatly summarized it thus:

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, imperial conflict was a predominantly retrospective cultural imagining, a time-lagged secondhand series of events often dislocated from a predominantly non-metropolitan audience. By its end, the communications revolution had diminished the temporal and spatial separation of people and events in the far-flung reaches of the British Empire.¹⁴

Therefore, this was a war which generated a good deal of interest and demand for war news, and this was recognized and exploited by the press. Cheap daily papers meant the war could be followed by everyone and there was growing demand from the public hungry for news.¹⁵

By the conclusion of the war, the Royal Navy and its sailors were held out to the general public as having had a vital role in the securing of the British victory, and throughout the conflict the press had praised their achievements. This was continued in contemporary literature, for instance, in his introduction to T. T. Jeans' work, Commander Chas N. Robinson said:

¹² HMS *Terrible* was on her way to the China Station when she was diverted and HMS *Powerful* was returning home, having spent three years pursuing imperial missions in China.

¹³ Simon Popple, "Fresh From the Front": Performance, war news and popular culture during the Boer War, *Early Popular Visual Culture*, 8, 4, 2010; pp. 401-418, p. 402

¹⁴ Popple, "Fresh", p. 402

¹⁵ Popple, "Fresh", p. 405

It is the story of how, at a time when their comrades of the land service were in dire need of help, the seamen hastened to place their ships' guns on improvised carriages, took them ashore, and in the nick of time enabled our military forces to cope on equal terms with the Boer artillery.¹⁶

Similarly Agnes Weston, another contemporary who had the ability to reach a wide public audience, wrote in *My Life Among the Bluejackets*:

How many deeds of heroism have been chronicled about our Naval Brigade in the terrible South African war, how they marched shoulder to shoulder with our soldiers, how the Royal Marines earned the title at Graspan of the "bravest of the brave", and Jack that of the "Saviour of the Empire" at Ladysmith.¹⁷

As discussed in the previous two chapters, during the nineteenth century the public image of the sailor was being consciously moulded into a brave, strong, defender of the Empire. In the course of her study on masculinity and imperialism in the Royal Navy, Mary A. Conley has argued that the navy 'escaped much derision' unlike the army which was heavily criticized for its incompetency and inability to beat "a bunch of farmers".¹⁸ Conley supports this by suggesting that the defeats suffered by the British Army facilitated health commentators to encourage men to volunteer for service with the navy as the army's reputation was 'tarnished'.¹⁹ The Boer War was a conflict that shook Britain's imperial prestige, and historians have long been cognizant of the impact that the defeats inflicted upon Britain's image. For instance, Judd argued that: 'the Boer War of 1899-1902 symbolized Britain's towering imperial status and at the same time exposed potentially crippling weaknesses in her military machine'.²⁰

In support of this, it is evident that many contemporaries were under no illusion about the navy's ability to be of assistance to the British Army in South Africa, and vocal naval commentators took the opportunity to drum up support for the navy. For instance, Archibald Hurd, one of the foremost proponents of the navy at the time, described sailors as the 'handyman' of the Empire.²¹ More recently, Conley has recognized the importance of the arguments put forward by Hurd, noting that 'the naval man has proved himself as an imperial soldier' able to fight on both land and at sea.²² Specifically, however, Conley is not drawn into evaluating Hurd's belief; she simply noted the importance of contemporary opinion. Yet, this view is not shared by Arthur Bleby who was rather more negative in his appraisal:

¹⁶ Chas N. Robinson, 'Introduction', in Jeans (ed.), *Naval Brigades*, pp. xv-xx; p. xv

¹⁷ Agnes Weston, *My Life Among the Bluejackets*, Second Edition, (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1909); p. 198

¹⁸ Mary A. Conley, *From Jack Tar to Union Jack: representing naval manhood in the British Empire, 1870-1918*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009); p. 144

¹⁹ Conley, *From Jack*, p. 144

²⁰ Judd, *Boer War*, p. 11

²¹ Archibald Hurd, *How our Navy is Run: a description of life in the King's fleet*, (London: Pearson, 1909); p. 42; Conley, *From Jack*, p. 149

²² Conley, *From Jack*, p. 149

It cannot be said that the seamen of the Naval Brigades were well trained in land warfare... The standard of marksmanship was not high. Those that had not passed through Whale Island were even less accomplished.²³

As a retired officer specifically focusing on sailors' training, it is possible that Bleby is nearer the mark insofar as the naval brigade's abilities ashore. Nevertheless, Frank Ottaway, a young rating at the turn of the century, referred to himself as 'one of our "Handy Men"' suggesting that sailors were adopting the epithet with some pride.²⁴

These "handy men" were engaged in many of the key battles during the early months of the conflict.²⁵ Their presence at Ladysmith was to be of particular importance, becoming famous in the heady imperialist atmosphere in Britain, especially due to the 117 day siege they had to endure, and the horrific conditions they experienced.²⁶ However, it was the manner and timing of the naval brigade's arrival at Ladysmith that was seized upon by the press and bolstered the bluejackets' heroic image. Arriving in the midst of battle, they immediately sprang into action and entered the fray. This was taken up with enthusiasm not only by the national papers but also by the local press in Britain who quickly picked up on the brigade arriving at the opportune moment. In particular, the local press organizations of Portsmouth, as the home of the navy, proudly boasted of the naval brigade's exploits. For example, the *Evening News* (Portsmouth) reported with the following headlines: 'Naval Brigade to the Rescue', "'Long Tom" Silenced', and the 'Sailors Magnificent Shots'.²⁷ Over the following weeks similar headlines were commonplace such as 'Sailors save the situation', and 'How the Naval Guns Saved Ladysmith'.²⁸

Similarly the tone of the national papers can be examined through their representatives at Ladysmith during the siege, who later published their recollections of siege-life for their respective papers. Their anecdotal evidence of the naval brigade further contributes to this heroic image and painted the naval brigade as the saviours of the town, whose arrival boosted morale. H. H. S. Pearse and G. W. Steevens both noted the demoralizing effect of enemy shell fire whilst they lacked the ability to respond.²⁹ Pearse stated: 'let men try to disguise the fact as they may, it gets on the nerves of the most courageous among us'.³⁰ Likewise Steevens wrote: 'yet, if they never hit a man, this handful of sailors have been the saving of Ladysmith'.³¹ Although they were writing for an audience who wanted to hear this, the arrival of the naval guns meant that the British could reach the Boers which had, until that moment, been impossible to do. The importance of this is demonstrated by Bleby who has argued that: 'the

²³ Bleby, *Victorian*, p. vii; Whale Island was part of the naval training camp in Portsmouth and home to the gunnery school.

²⁴ RNM 2001/6/1: Diary of Frank Ottaway

²⁵ Ladysmith, Modder River, Graspan, Bloemfontein, and Spion Kop to name but a few.

²⁶ Bleby, *Victorian*, p. 135

²⁷ *Evening News* (Portsmouth), 31 October 1899

²⁸ *Evening News* (Portsmouth), 2 November, 1899; *Evening News* (Portsmouth) 7 December 1899

²⁹ H. H. S. Pearse, *Four Months Besieged: the story of Ladysmith*, (London: Macmillan, 1900), p. 30-31; G. W. Steevens, *From Cape Town to Ladysmith: an unfinished record of the South African War*, Third Edition, (London: William Blackwood, 1900) p. 141; It is also worth noting the manner in which correspondents wrote home. For example Steevens adopted a suitably nautical tone to his description to create a more artistic picture for his audience.

³⁰ Pearse, *Four Months*, pp. 30-31

³¹ Steevens, *From Cape Town*, p. 141

unexpected intervention of the Naval Brigade and the silencing of the Long Tom checked the Boer advance and raised the morale of the British forces'.³²

Thus whether they made a significant tactical impact is less important. It is Conley's point regarding the sailors' image that holds far greater poignancy: the naval brigades returned from the war as heroes before the long guerrilla war began, allowing for an untarnished heroic image to be created. This also lends support to Rüger's argument for the development of the navy as a key British cultural icon.³³ To give some sense of context, the naval brigades featured in a variety of popular entertainment such as the play entitled *The Absent-minded Beggar, or for Queen and Country* written by Arthur Shirley.³⁴ There was also the popular Alfred West's *Our Navy*, shown nationally but with a run at The Victoria Hall in Southsea and proudly reported by the *Evening News* (Portsmouth) with reference to the guns at Ladysmith alongside 'our gallant Jack Tars'.³⁵ The importance of the transmission of news events into music halls and other outlets has been highlighted by Popple, and the link with imperialism has also been reinforced by Miller, who has argued that themes of "'Tommy Atkins", "Jack Tar," and the empire' was not a coincidence.³⁶ Therefore, the attention given to the bluejackets represents the increasing popularity and position of sailors and the navy in Britain as they formed part of a combined imperialistic and civic celebration, bringing together the cultural and imperial spheres in celebration of British power.³⁷ A discernible example of this is demonstrated by Beaven who compared the naval brigade's return from the Indian Mutiny with their return from the Boer War about 50 years later. There was a dramatic difference in the popular enthusiasm towards the naval brigade on the latter occasion and they received a hero's welcome with a grand civic reception.³⁸ The returning sailors paraded their guns through the streets of Portsmouth and London in an orchestrated display of imperial power to enthusiastic crowds, reinforcing their place in the popular imperialistic sentiment of the time.³⁹

Devoted servants of Empire? Sailors and enthusiasm for war

Since sailors were being portrayed as an important element of the imperial image, it is vital to consider how they viewed their actions, and how this corresponds with the manner in which they were portrayed to the British public. This will be considered in two ways: firstly in sailors' attitudes to fighting, and secondly the level of their engagement with imperialism. There is little evidence to suggest that, on an individual level at least, sailors overtly viewed their actions as heroic, or widely embraced the heroic image being propounded by the press. British sailors were typically self-effacing and were more likely to record a grumble in detail than eulogize their own actions and put themselves forward as being heroes of the Empire.⁴⁰ However, when

³² Bleby, *Victorian*, p. 134

³³ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 1

³⁴ *Evening News* (Portsmouth), 3 April 1900

³⁵ *Evening News* (Portsmouth), 3 April 1900

³⁶ Popple, "'Fresh'", p. 404; Miller, *Volunteers*, p. 189

³⁷ For further information on this point see Beaven, *Visions*.

³⁸ Beaven, *Visions*, p. 70

³⁹ Bleby, *Victorian*, p. 184

⁴⁰ This is discussed in the previous chapter but see also Lavery, *Able*, p. 237

discussing their actions collectively, sailors were more likely to view their achievements with pride. For instance, Joseph Withercombe noted that if anyone doubted the brigade's ability to uphold the navy's reputation then they had only to look at 'what work our men did at Modder River, Graspan and many other places'.⁴¹

It would be understandable, *a priori*, that sailors had little idea of what they would encounter fighting ashore. Such ideas are predicated on the primarily peaceful role of the Royal Navy during the Victorian and Edwardian eras, without any naval battles being fought at sea such as those which had dominated the eighteenth century.⁴² Recent studies of war have also suggested the importance of imperialist novelists such as G. A. Henty and the inculcation of British youths, meaning that men did not appreciate the actualities of war.⁴³ Whilst the impact of this inculcation on British culture is a debate in itself, it is one that cannot be assigned wholesale to men serving in the Royal Navy.⁴⁴ There were a number of British sailors in South Africa who had seen service previously in other imperial campaigns.⁴⁵ For example, Bleby noted the presence of Fleet Paymaster Kay, who served at Ladysmith and 'was a veteran, serving in his fourth Naval Brigade'.⁴⁶ Furthermore, the close fraternity of the mess deck meant that it is likely that older sailors shared their experiences with the younger hands who would, therefore, not be wholly ignorant of all battle experiences.⁴⁷

Further countering this hypothesis, the consideration of testimony from sailors preparing to go ashore suggests that they were under no illusion as to what they would be facing. Joseph Withercombe observed the following as the men of HMS *Powerful* made preparations for disembarking the naval brigade:

Pale but resolute faces were observed amongst those... of the *Powerful* for who at the thought of battle would or could feel unmoved. Even amongst the 400 troops which we were carrying (many of whom had seen active service on the Indian Frontier there was to be seen the same pale complexion telling the same tale that the thoughts of the future were not in the least comforting [sic].⁴⁸

⁴¹ RNM 1989/252: Diary of Joseph Withercombe

⁴² James Daly, *Portsmouth's World War One Heroes: Stories of the Fallen Men and Women*, (Stroud: The History Press, 2013); p. 96

⁴³ G. A. Henty was a popular author of adventure stories, usually with an imperialist theme. See for example Conley, *From Jack*, pp. 106-107 for her consideration of the impact of boy's adventure stories. See also John M. Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003 [first edition 1984]); Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006 [first edition 2004]).

⁴⁴ For more on this debate see Mackenzie, *Propaganda*, pp. 199-227; Porter, *Absent-Minded*, pp. 138-163. However, at this time many sailors were still joining the navy at a young age, and whilst this is not the place to debate sailor's reasons for joining the service, it is important to be aware that they were not volunteering to fight for the war and the impact of inculcation is therefore different.

⁴⁵ For instance naval brigades had been landed for the Gordon Relief Expedition and in the Benin Expedition.

⁴⁶ Bleby, *Victorian*, p. 136

⁴⁷ For a background on the social basis of the mess see Christopher McKee, *Sober Men and True: Sailor Lives in the Royal Navy, 1900-1945*, (London: Harvard University Press, 2002) p. 81; p. 91. McKee also lists the topics that were usually forbidden to be discussed such as politics, women and religion, see pp. 99-100. It is also worth noting the exposure to danger and death that sailors faced whilst at sea which would have meant they were not necessarily naïve.

⁴⁸ RNM 1989/252: Diary of Joseph Withercombe; Emphasis by the author.

Whilst “resolute” denotes a sense of duty and determination, this extract demonstrates that this was not a picture of whole-hearted war enthusiasm. Rather, this suggests men ready to do their duty but acutely aware of the dangers they faced.

Yet, some sailors were evidently eager to volunteer for active service ashore.⁴⁹ However, whether this reflects imperial beliefs or a desire for adventure deserves consideration. One such sailor was Arthur Knight: an older sailor serving aboard HMS *Powerful*. Knight desperately wanted to be part of the naval brigade being formed. He recorded that his application was originally denied due to his age, his Captain saying ‘No Knight you will be one of the last told off as you are so close to your pension and a married man’.⁵⁰ However, Knight was not so easily deterred and after applying to another officer for assistance in persuading the Captain was told ‘if I could get ready in half an hour I should land with the Captain and act as ADC’.⁵¹ Knight then had to scramble to get ready and join the brigade ashore. In an excited tone he wrote: ‘I had to find my hammock, get the gear out of my bag, get my khaki suit, put buttons in it, take up a pair of boots, fill my bandoliers, make my will out, make out half pay, and write a letter to my wife’.⁵²

This episode reveals several interesting points. Firstly, it demonstrates the clear desire of a sailor to be part of the naval brigade. However, the reasons behind this are less clear: was it blind patriotism and eagerness to do their duty, or merely because it was their job and they knew it was expected of them? The latter argument is supported by Christopher McKee who has argued a similar line, and warned not to disregard ‘the perceived cultural demands of Edwardian masculinity’.⁵³ Conley discussed this further highlighting the case of Jack Cornwell’s death at Jutland during the First World War, and noted the perceived importance of chivalry in warfare and the desire to die for the Empire.⁵⁴ Evidently men were not blind to the dangers, as Withercombe’s testimony demonstrates, but it is a factor that should not be underestimated and must be considered alongside other factors such as loyalty to the service, to friends, and individuals’ perceptions of masculinity. Secondly, it reveals either a paternalistic side to the ship’s captain in wanting to protect older seamen or a desire to take only younger, fitter, men ashore. Paternalism was the mark of a good officer, and it was set out that they should be caring towards the men under their command.⁵⁵ Both Withercombe and Knight describe in detail the officers they served under in the naval brigades, describing the good and the bad amongst them.⁵⁶ Sailors would quickly form their own opinions of officers they served under

⁴⁹ Brigland suggested that ‘There had never been any shortage of volunteers to join the various naval brigades ashore’. Brigland, *Field Gun Jack*, p. 98

⁵⁰ RNM 2012/37/4: Diary of Arthur Sidney Knight

⁵¹ RNM 2012/37/4: Diary of Arthur Sidney Knight

⁵² RNM 2012/37/4: Diary of Arthur Sidney Knight

⁵³ McKee, *Sober Men*, p. 126; See also Joanne Begiato, ‘Tears and the manly sailor in England, c. 1760–1860’, *Journal for Maritime Research*, 17, 2, 2015; pp. 117–133.

⁵⁴ Conley, *From Jack*, p. 165

⁵⁵ See for example Ellen Gill, ‘“Children of the Service”: paternalism, patronage and friendship in the Georgian Navy’, *Journal for Maritime Research*, 15, 2, 2013; pp. 149–165, p. 152; As late as 1944 the Officer Handbook set out guidelines for how officers should behave and treat their men. See Brian Lavery, *The Royal Navy Officer’s Pocket Handbook, 1944*, (London: Conway, 2006).

⁵⁶ RNM 1989/252: Diary of Joseph Withercombe; RNM 2012/37/4: Diary of Arthur Sidney Knight

and decide which sort they were.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, both are likely to have been influencing factors for the captain as he put together the naval brigade, wanting loyal and healthy younger men who did not have dependents at home.

Now that he had permission, Knight was excited to be going ashore and gave a vivid description of their departure:

the scene on board [was] indescribable and much better imagined than described what with the guns, ammunition, provisions, dirty stokers fresh from the stokehole, men trying to fit into khaki, soldier fashion, men filling bandoliers, others rolling up their chums blanket with all their gear in it. Add to this the filthy deck, coal dust and raining hard into the bargain and you have the scene on board HMS Powerful... never to be forgotten.⁵⁸

Although this reveals the unpleasant and rushed conditions in which they had to get ready, it also presents something that could easily have come from an imperialist adventure story by Henty.

Knight continued in this vein and as they left the ship behind noted: 'we had now started for the front and not a man was there among us but who was eager to get at the throats of the enemy to avenge Majuba Hill'.⁵⁹ Majuba Hill was the site of a decisive loss for British troops, including a naval brigade, during the First Boer War and this remark suggests Knight and possibly others were influenced by this.⁶⁰ Indeed, Bridgland has argued that the memory of Majuba Hill 'had a very special significance'.⁶¹ It is understandable that old memories and tensions might have risen to the surface in the weeks leading up to the declaration of war, and it was certainly a theme discussed prominently in the press and amongst politicians.⁶² On the other hand, many were keen to deny such suggestions. For example, Lord Stanley MP countered this, declaring it was not 'revenge for Mujaba'.⁶³ Nevertheless, an article in *The Advocate of Peace* similarly suggested that:

As the naval transports, carrying the army of relief, leave the shores of England for the distant field of conflict, "Remember Mujaba!" is the hoarse cry of revenge that speeds them on their way.⁶⁴

By making reference to it here, Knight is clearly suggestive of his desire to get revenge on the Boers for the previous defeat. Although his views cannot be taken as indicative of his fellow sailors' views, it suggests that such thoughts were present. Newspapers were certainly

⁵⁷ McKee, *Sober Men*, p. 47; See also RNM 1980/115: Diary of Edwin Fletcher.

⁵⁸ RNM 2012/37/4: Diary of Arthur Sidney Knight

⁵⁹ RNM 2012/37/4: Diary of Arthur Sidney Knight

⁶⁰ The First Anglo-Boer War was fought between 1880 and 1881.

⁶¹ Bridgland, *Field Gun Jack*, p. 131

⁶² See for example: *Lloyd's Illustrated Newspaper*, 4 March 1900; *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, 11 July 1899; *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel (Milwaukee, WI, United States)*, 21 October 1899; *Graphic*, 7 July 1900; *Daily Mail*, 26 February 1900

⁶³ *The Times*, 2 October 1899; See also *The Times*, 23 September 1899 and the letter published under the title "The Mujaba Policy" in *The Times*, 7 December 1899; See also Muriel M. Chamberlain, *Pax Britannica?: British Foreign Policy 1789-1914*, (London: Routledge, 1989).

⁶⁴ Josiah W. Leeds, 'Remember Mujaba Hill', *The Advocate of Peace*, 64, 1, 1900; pp. 19-20, p. 19

presenting this view as were more vitriolic public speakers at home, therefore there is scope for this to have become lower-deck sentiment.⁶⁵ Whether this was encouraged by the officers is also worthy of consideration. For instance, A. E. Marchant, an officer with the Royal Marines, made a reference to this in his contribution to T. T. Jean's account of the war, as too did George Crowe who composed a song especially for HMS *Terrible's* crossing the line ceremony with the verse:

If your men should land to fight, for England, home and beauty,
Their Captain, I am sure, expects, that they will do their duty,
And emulate past naval deeds, and not return until –
Like Britain's sons, they've fought their guns, and avenged Mujaba Hill.⁶⁶

However, it is important to note that other sailors were not openly making reference to this desire for revenge.⁶⁷ Furthermore, it is unclear whether sailors were seeking revenge for the Empire or for the lost naval brigade.

Nevertheless, despite Knight's initial enthusiasm, his diary records a sharp wake-up call to the brutalities of war as he arrived on the battle front 'to the tune of shot and shell from all quarters'.⁶⁸ In stark contrast to earlier entries, Knight noted: it 'was a fearful sad sight that met our eyes as soon as we got out of the train'.⁶⁹ Knight's account stands in contrast to descriptions in the press which were trying to make light of the situation and maintain morale. Although the reality was not what he expected, Knight commented on what the press were calling the 'General Retirement'.⁷⁰ Dispelling any sense of the calmness suggested by "General Retirement", Knight wrote: 'all of our troops were what the papers said retiring but what Jack and Tommy puts into a harder and more serious word retreating'.⁷¹ As Knight recorded: 'the crowd of retreating soldiers was so dense we had to fairly grope our way through them on the way up to the front'.⁷²

Although Knight's enthusiasm may have been short lived, there was a degree of envy amongst sailors who were not in the brigades, which suggests that Knight was not alone in being eager to serve on the frontline. For instance, William Williams was another sailor at the Cape but did not get the chance to serve with the naval brigades, and thus provides an interesting counterpoint. Williams was initially occupied with the unloading of supplies from the ships in the harbour. He recorded:

looking back to our shipmates on shore we find them busily engaged escorting envoys, guarding prisoners... As for ourselves we were engaged in lumbering

⁶⁵ Naval officers also put forward this view. See A. E. Marchant, 'Chapter I', in Jeans (ed.), *Naval Brigades*, pp. 1-10; pp. 1-2

⁶⁶ Marchant, 'Chapter I', p. 2; Crowe, *HMS Terrible*, p. 41; Bridgland, *Field Gun Jack*, p. 4; Crowe was the Master-at-Arms aboard HMS *Terrible*.

⁶⁷ This point is lacking in the diaries of other sailors in the sample considered by this thesis.

⁶⁸ RNM 2012/37/4: Diary of Arthur Sidney Knight

⁶⁹ RNM 2012/37/4: Diary of Arthur Sidney Knight

⁷⁰ *Evening News* (Portsmouth), 31 October 1899; *The Times*, 19 December 1899; *The Times*, 17 January 1900

⁷¹ RNM 2012/37/4: Diary of Arthur Sidney Knight

⁷² RNM 2012/37/4: Diary of Arthur Sidney Knight

cargo from ship to shore thus gradually becoming merchant seamen and getting the hump of the life which is none too bright.⁷³

He later undertook other roles such as police work and guarding prisoners but even this did not meet with much enthusiasm: 'I must state that we are more soldiers than sailors only they do the fighting and we the work but we much prefer the former'.⁷⁴ Williams evidently wanted to do more than the role allotted to him and he regularly recorded rumours of an impending attack by the Boers for which they were mustered yet came to nothing. He wrote: 'An attack was expected but that was all. But I can admit that if they had a come they would have had a very warm reception'.⁷⁵ Bleby has also noted that sailors serving ashore outside of the naval brigades felt unhappy about their tasks. He examined the case of a sailor who had spent a day helping to construct a road and remarked 'how about the blooming sappers now?'.⁷⁶ Furthermore, Bridgland has argued that sailors serving in the brigades 'were enjoying a welcome diversion from shipboard life' without the usual spit and polish routine and was thus an exciting opportunity.⁷⁷

Consideration of the view from officers supports the enthusiasm of Knight and Williams. For instance, Marchant noted the disappointment of the men when they were ordered to retire: '[t]his disappointment was awful to us, as we quite thought that all our chances of being in action had gone'.⁷⁸ Although this was the view presented to the public, it appears that few bluejackets openly countered it. The diaries suggest that there existed a general degree of enthusiasm amongst sailors, firstly to serve ashore in the brigades and secondly even when battle was joined there was a desire to do their duty.

However, this does not mean that all sailors were eager to fight. This is demonstrated by Joseph Withercombe, who wrote in detail about the lead-up to the war. In particular, he recorded that all thoughts 'of spending xmas with loved ones were tarnished and many expected the same fate as those who never return to tell the tale from the field of glory'.⁷⁹ This demonstrates that some sailors would rather have been at home with their families.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, his use of "field of glory" is suggestive and excoitation of his diary reveals that Withercombe was prone to using poetic language. This repetition could mean an underlying belief in the phrases he used and suggests that he picked up this language from British imperial culture.⁸¹ Nevertheless, Withercombe further demonstrates a less-than-enthusiastic-attitude to the war. For instance, he recorded a statement from the captain with evident relief:

⁷³ RNM 1976/19065: Diary of William Williams

⁷⁴ RNM 1976/19065: Diary of William Williams; Similarly Bridgland noted guard duty 'had resulted in considerable boredom'. Bridgland, *Field Gun Jack*, p. 98

⁷⁵ RNM 1976/19065: Diary of William Williams

⁷⁶ Bleby, *Victorian*, p. 156

⁷⁷ Bridgland, *Field Gun Jack*, p. 81

⁷⁸ A. E. Marchant, 'Chapter II', in Jeans (ed.), *Naval Brigades*; pp. 11-15, p. 13

⁷⁹ RNM 1989/252: Diary of Joseph Withercombe

⁸⁰ Although counter to the masculine war-ready stereotype, this does support the "family man" image.

⁸¹ The saturation of culture with imperial themes has been argued by Mackenzie. See Mackenzie, *Propaganda*.

the Boers had refused to fight & President Kruger had accepted British demands to the extreme. What a load of anxiety seemed to have been lifted off each mind.⁸²

This was then followed by: 'The brighter hopes raised were dashed to the ground again' when they reached Cape Town and heard more up-to-date news.⁸³

Withercombe's most heart-wrenching memory was of a tragic account of a young marine who committed suicide by jumping overboard. He recorded:

it was a sad termination to his young career; he was the only support of a widowed mother; better had he met his death on the battle field a thousand times by Boer bullets than to have taken his own life.⁸⁴

This episode neatly summarizes the incredible fear and pressure put upon British sailors in the course of their imperial duties. As Withercombe continued, the event 'for a short time tended to alleviate our minds from the terrible conflict which we fully expected to follow'.⁸⁵ Withercombe evidently frowned on the actual act of suicide, stating that it would have been better if he had died "on the battle field".⁸⁶ This could stem from the general religious view that suicide was a sin but it could also demonstrate the close fraternity that existed on the lower deck, where you went where your fellows went, and obeyed orders. As McKee noted: 'the unwritten rule was that sailors were to be strong and uncomplaining'.⁸⁷

This death was also mentioned in a letter published in the *Evening News* (Portsmouth) from a sailor to his parents. The sailor initially stated that 'everybody was terribly excited, as all thought we had got to go up to the front'.⁸⁸ But just before they reached Durban where they were to disembark 'we heard the shout up on deck "Man overboard"'.⁸⁹ There is no mention of suicide and all attention is paid to the futile search of looking for the Marine in heavy seas.⁹⁰ That this was an act of suicide may have been omitted from the letter as the sailor did not wish to worry his parents. Then again it may have been edited by the editor of the paper to fit the imperialistic atmosphere and image of the brave bluejackets the local press were creating.

Thus, the diaries suggest that not all sailors were eager for action, which lends strength to the argument that they were aware of the dangers they faced ashore and were not blinded by imperialistic heroics. Yet, the diaries also suggest that there was a strong sense of duty amongst sailors who wanted to "do their bit", suggesting it was a strong part of their image and culture. Furthermore, in addition to simply following orders, they were drawn into the

⁸² RNM 1989/252: Diary of Joseph Withercombe

⁸³ RNM 1989/252: Diary of Joseph Withercombe

⁸⁴ RNM 1989/252: Diary of Joseph Withercombe

⁸⁵ RNM 1989/252: Diary of Joseph Withercombe; The importance of accidents aboard ship as distractions is discussed further in the following chapter.

⁸⁶ RNM 1989/252: Diary of Joseph Withercombe

⁸⁷ McKee, *Sober Men*, p. 126

⁸⁸ *Evening News* (Portsmouth), 24 November 1899

⁸⁹ *Evening News* (Portsmouth), 24 November 1899

⁹⁰ *Evening News* (Portsmouth), 24 November 1899

excitement of the war by the naval brigades. Nevertheless, few demonstrate the unswerving patriotic image presented by Agnes Weston, who gave an account of a Royal Marine who said 'I am very anxious to go to the seat of war and fight manfully for my Queen and country'.⁹¹ Therefore, although the image presented to the public was of a unified imperial-minded navy, the reality was far more complicated.

More than a tool: an icon of British imperial power - bluejackets and their guns

An important aspect of the imperial image of sailors projected during the war was of the bluejackets and their guns. The naval guns formed a distinct part of the grand imperialistic displays that took place when the brigades returned to Britain.⁹² Furthermore, analysis of contemporary accounts suggests that the guns themselves were of interest to the general public. Lengthy descriptions of their improvised transport from the ships to the front form key points of both contemporary publications by Jeans and Crowe.⁹³ Although the readership of these may well have been more likely drawn from the middle classes, the press also reported on the guns and demonstrates public interest.⁹⁴ Therefore, this chapter suggests that the relationship was more than simply one that a man has with the tools of his trade. It suggests that the image of the guns was intertwined with sailors' sense of honour, and established masculinity. In other words, the guns were not simply weapons by which sailors helped to enforce British imperial power. Rather, naval guns represented the confluence of sailor pride and a wider sense of imperial duty: as an icon of power, a tool, and as a humanized comrade. Understanding sailors' relationship with their guns is therefore relatively complex, and further demonstrates the difficulty of placing sailors within the socio-cultural imperial sphere.

The background for this stems from the intense loyalty that existed within sailor culture: firstly, to the ship and secondly to the rest of the crew; secondly, it rests on the power of naval imagery within British culture.⁹⁵ Ships were at once a sailor's home and a source of immense pride to belong to, and also icons of British imperial power which drew them from the military into the public sphere.⁹⁶ But it was not simply ships that were icons. Sailors were also icons and, as this chapter suggests, naval guns were also capable of being icons. Whilst this could be accused of stretching Rüger's work on cultural imagery, it is nevertheless an interesting proposal. Naval guns were a further symbol of power that augmented the sailors' image, and served to further embed their position within British imperial culture; they were a further extension of imperial imagery that was seized upon by the popular press, and thus important to the consideration of sailors within British imperial culture.

⁹¹ Weston, *My Life*, p. 199

⁹² Bleby, *Victorian*, p. 184

⁹³ See for example C. C. Sheen, 'Chapter I', in Jeans (ed.), *Naval Brigades*, pp. 186-189; p. 187 and Crowe, *HMS Terrible*, pp. 67-74

⁹⁴ *Morning Post*, 2 May 1900; *Leicester Chronicle*, 4 November 1899; *Daily Mail*, 1 November 1899; *Sheffield Independent*, 1 November 1899; *Western Times*, 22 November 1899

⁹⁵ Lavery, *Able*, p. 11

⁹⁶ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 1

Furthermore, sailors had a distinctly personal relationship with their guns. This can be seen in the level of personalization of the guns by the bluejackets. In particular, it was common for the crews to name their guns, thus humanizing them.⁹⁷ The significance of this has been realized by Charles Kauffman who opined that when men kill 'they often place responsibility for their acts on their weapons by giving the weapon a name which explains and justifies violence and distances the actor from the act.'⁹⁸ By being able to, in Kauffman's words, 'mediate the act of killing', sailors were transplanting their actions on to their guns.⁹⁹ This also included the guns of the enemy and the besieged at Ladysmith named the Boer's Long Tom 'Silent Susan' as it was 'regarded as quite a gentlemanly monster' due to the visible puff of smoke that warned of an approaching shell.¹⁰⁰ Whilst this may indeed have been a significant coping mechanism, this chapter also places emphasis on the importance of the names chosen for the guns as an expression of imperial sentiment. For example, the naval brigade's guns at Ladysmith were called Lady Anne and Princess Victoria. When Princess Victoria was named, Pearse noted: 'Captain Lambton christened his new pet... but the bluejackets called it by another name, to indicate their faith in its destructive effect'.¹⁰¹ Pearse does not mention what this name was but Steevens wrote that it was commonly called 'Bloody Mary'.¹⁰² Another contemporary, Clement H. Stott, further noted that the 'names were appropriate and suggestive'.¹⁰³ Whilst officers might have been more likely to openly demonstrate overtly imperialistic beliefs, it also demonstrates the down-to-earth candour of sailors who chose a more suitable name, recognizing the destructive firepower of the gun.

However, this chapter suggests that the personalization of the guns was not just to "mediate" but was also a conscious act of affection and pride in ownership. An example of this is demonstrated by Joseph Withercombe who referred to a gun they were forced to abandon outside Ladysmith as 'our lost comrade'.¹⁰⁴ The sailors had debated what was to be done: 'British pluck says not [to abandon her] whilst she is of service, so we accepted the only alternative and disabled her to the enemy's use'.¹⁰⁵ Consideration of an officer's account reveals similar sentiments. Marchant recorded the sadness at the order to abandon the guns: 'to return without their guns was an exceedingly great blow to our men'.¹⁰⁶ Marchant also recounted a story overheard between a rating and an officer in the Royal Garrison Artillery: 'seeing as how we can't take 'em back ourselves, we don't want 'em to fall into the hands of nobody else'.¹⁰⁷ Similarly, an account from another officer, C. C. Sheen, also suggests that the chief reason

⁹⁷ See for example *Evening News* (Portsmouth), 31 October 1899; *Evening News* (Portsmouth), 3 November 1899; *Evening News* (Portsmouth), 24 January 1900.

⁹⁸ Charles Kauffman, 'Names and Weapons', *Communication Monograph*, 56, 1989; pp. 173-285, p. 173; This will be considered in further detail in Chapter Four.

⁹⁹ Kauffman, 'Names', p. 274

¹⁰⁰ Pearse, *Four Months*, p. 49

¹⁰¹ Pearse, *Four Months*, p. 56

¹⁰² Steevens, *From Capetown*, p. 141

¹⁰³ Clement H. Stott, *The Boer Invasion of Natal*, (London: S. W. Partridge & Co., 1900) cited <http://www.angloboerwar.com/books/46-stott-the-boer-invasion-of-natal/1048-stott-chapter-ix-the-siege-of-ladysmith>

¹⁰⁴ RNM 1989/252: Diary of Joseph Withercombe

¹⁰⁵ RNM 1989/252: Diary of Joseph Withercombe

¹⁰⁶ Marchant, 'Chapter II', p. 13

¹⁰⁷ Marchant, 'Chapter II', p. 13

behind the bluejackets' unwillingness to leave their guns behind was because they were viewed with particular pride. Sheen noted that when the men of HMS *Powerful* left Ladysmith they handed over their guns to the Royal Garrison Artillery 'with many a fond word of farewell from their crews, so sad were they at parting with them'.¹⁰⁸

It is not clear from Withercombe, Marchant or Sheen whether sailors believed that the loss of their equipment brought dishonour upon them. Withercombe's diary gives no further indication other than the disappointment in having to leave the gun and the determination to disable it first.¹⁰⁹ However, given the carefully crafted Victorian image of the masculine sailor, the threat to their masculinity is a possibility. Therefore, the loss of their guns could have been emasculating to some extent, similar to a defeat in battle. In an environment where the press was busy re-enforcing the belief that Britannia ruled the waves, and British sailors "were the salt of the earth", this has some currency.¹¹⁰ In addition, as well as defending their masculinity, sailors were also defending their position on an individual level amongst their crewmates and also the name of their ship in the public eye. As Conley has noted, sailors increasingly 'saw themselves as professional', and aware of their contribution to the country.¹¹¹ They were therefore quick to counter any criticism that dispelled this image.¹¹²

Nevertheless, it should also be questioned whether there existed a degree of fear of punishment for the loss of their guns. This would appear logical in a service where discipline remained exceptionally strict and somewhat archaic.¹¹³ For example, the loss of a ship was a court martial offence, and although the two are not comparable it does highlight the threat of punishment that would no doubt have occurred to sailors.¹¹⁴ However, sailor diaries adduce nothing to suggest that they feared being charged with dereliction of duty. Yet, it is plausible that there would have been concern at having to abandon the guns, and the repercussions this might have on sailors, both from their superiors and also on their reputations amongst their contemporaries. However, this cannot be seen simply through a prism of their imperial image; this chapter has demonstrated that there are complex issues, both individual and collective as well as national.

Brothers in arms: men with a common bond of imperial duty?

Serving ashore in naval brigades brought sailors into close proximity with soldiers and, given the focus on this chapter on sailors as soldiers of empire, it is therefore important to be cognizant of the relationship between the two forces as they undertook the same imperial mission. Although there has been a long history of sailors and soldiers working alongside each

¹⁰⁸ Sheen, 'Chapter I', p. 202

¹⁰⁹ RNM 1989/252: Diary of Joseph Withercombe

¹¹⁰ Steevens, *From Capetown*, p. 143

¹¹¹ Conley, *From Jack*, pp. 194-195

¹¹² For instance Agnes Weston's 'A Sad Hobby' published in *Ashore and Afloat*, 25, 2, February 1901, p. 25; This was met with anger on the lower deck. See Figure 2.

¹¹³ See for example McKee, *Sober Men*, pp. 34-47 and Lavery, *Able*, pp. 168-171.

¹¹⁴ Punishments were handed out for the loss of kit. See for instance *Uniform Regulations*, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1879.

other, the increased literacy by the time of the Boer War allows for a good degree of examination from sailors and soldiers' viewpoints.¹¹⁵ In order to better examine this topic, some pertinent remarks from army sources have been considered to gauge relations and see if they shared a common bond of imperial duty.

It is apparent from looking at sailor diaries that during the war relations with soldiers were often cordial. This is in contrast to their typical relations where disagreements could break out regularly when they were in close proximity for lengthy periods. This was an historic problem and, as Eric Gruber noted in his study of the Anglo-Dutch Wars, relations were 'poor'.¹¹⁶ However, Williams noted that they became 'fast friends' with some of the regiments.¹¹⁷ Similarly, Withercombe was aboard HMS *Powerful*, which transported 400 soldiers from India, and recorded: 'hearty cheers were exchanged which assured one of the good feeling and well wishes existing between "Our Land and Sea Forces" especially when we have a foe to subdue'.¹¹⁸ This suggests a conscious allusion to their joint imperial duty. However, Withercombe is one of the few diarists who specifically referred to their shared imperial task. Nevertheless, the diaries demonstrate that a healthy respect existed between the two forces. For example, Withercombe supports Williams and later said admiringly of the soldiers he witnessed in action at Ladysmith: 'Tommy Atkins can manoeuvre an enemy in the field better than the Boer imagined'.¹¹⁹ He also noted: 'a general retirement [is] the only order a soldier attempts to disobey at times'.¹²⁰ Whilst hyperbolic, this is a clear reference to the perceived bravery and masculinity of British soldiers.

It is also evident that a good deal of sympathy existed towards British soldiers following their experiences in battle. For instance, Thomas Mear was present at the Battles of Belmont and Graspan, and recorded the 'terrible slaughter' he witnessed.¹²¹ He continued, 'the Bearer Company goes into the Boer lines to bring out our sick and wounded, some pitiful sights to see'.¹²² Furthermore, Knight demonstrates similar expressive sentiment:

What is to my thinking the most sad sight one can witness the Indian Dhooley
Lancers each Dhooley containing what was but a few hours before a strong

¹¹⁵ The navy has long served as a means of conveying soldiers as troopships but also in naval brigades in earlier Victorian wars such as in The Crimea, the Gordon Relief Expedition etc. See Bleby, *Victorian* for further details. See also Eric Gruber, 'Soldiers at Sea and Inter-service Relations during the First Dutch War', *The Mariner's Mirror*, 87,4, 2001; pp.406-419, p. 407

¹¹⁶ Gruber, 'Soldiers at Sea', p.412, p. 418. See also B. Capp, *Cromwell's Navy*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); p. 274; Clive Emsley, *Soldier, Sailor, Beggerman, Thief: Crime and the British Armed Services since 1914*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); p. 63

¹¹⁷ RNM 1976/19065: Diary of William Williams; Bridgland noted they became 'firm friends' possibly due to the similarity of role. See Bridgland, *Field Gun Jack*, p. 117.

¹¹⁸ RNM 1989/252: Diary of Joseph Withercombe

¹¹⁹ RNM 1989/252: Diary of Joseph Withercombe

¹²⁰ RNM 1989/252: Diary of Joseph Withercombe

¹²¹ RNM 1986/470/5: Diary of Thomas Mear; Thomas Mear arrived in South Africa in early December 1899 as a volunteer with the Stretcher Bearer Corps. However, he gave no indication of his feelings on arrival or the reason for his enlisting. Although a naval man, it is evident that he volunteered to go out as a stretcher bearer and is therefore surprising that he left no record of this in his diary. See the tribute to Mears in the *Evening News* (Portsmouth), 23 May 1967 which gives a chronology of his life.

¹²² RNM 1986/470/5: Diary of Thomas Mear

hearty man in the flush of health strength and spirits but now what? A mangled mass of humanity.¹²³

This is not simply a remark on “heavy losses” or a “terrible scene” but a candid account of what Knight witnessed and an indication of how the experience affected him.

Further evidence for cordial relations and respect between sailors and soldiers is demonstrated by the social activities engaged in whilst ashore. One popular leisure pursuit was football with, as Williams noted, ‘the game being freely indulged in’.¹²⁴ However, he added: ‘I must admit the soldiers were much better at the game than we were’.¹²⁵ Although aimed at improving morale, interactions such as this were well appreciated by the sailors nonetheless. On another occasion, Thomas Mear recorded: ‘Lord Kitchener gives the company 12 bottles of whiskey for a sing song and says that he wants to hear some rattling good choruses with his compliments, and we have a rare turn out’.¹²⁶ Although the gift of whisky might have lessened any tensions, it is likely that had relations been poor this sort of interaction would have been avoided by commanders in an attempt to keep disturbances to a minimum.

However, elements of rivalry continued and there is evidence to suggest that sailors were proud when they could do things that soldiers could not. In particular, the naval brigade serving with the relief columns made a name for themselves for their ability to control their oxen teams and traverse the rather difficult terrain.¹²⁷ When their abilities were recognized was certainly a matter of pride amongst the sailors. For instance, Williams recorded in his diary:

assisting in the unloading of these monster vessels which had on board several thousand mules some of them had never been broken in but the Bluejackets managed them much to the astonishment of the soldiers who at times looked on amazed.¹²⁸

Nevertheless, the diaries do not suggest any feelings of apparent superiority over their sister service. This might be supposed given the predominant position of the Royal Navy in British culture but it is evident that for the most part sailors were well aware of the hardships endured by soldiers and shared a common bond with them in this respect. However, Bridgland has suggested that sailors were desirous of equal footing in battle with the army and that because the naval brigade was not shelled at Modder River it ‘apparently caused Jack Tar to take offence’.¹²⁹

Yet there were occasions when relations between sailors and soldiers became more strained. These occurrences were relatively few and far between and for the most part this was typically demonstrated when sailors came up against army authorities, whom they viewed as having no

¹²³ RNM 2012/37/4: Diary of Arthur Sidney Knight

¹²⁴ RNM 1976/19065: Diary of William Williams

¹²⁵ RNM 1976/19065: Diary of William Williams

¹²⁶ RNM 1986/470/5: Diary of Thomas Mear

¹²⁷ Bleby, *Victorian*, p. 144

¹²⁸ RNM 1976/19065: Diary of William Williams

¹²⁹ Bridgland, *Field Gun Jack*, p. 119

authority over them. In particular, there are numerous accounts of sailors running into trouble with the Provost Marshals in the relief columns and this will be considered in more detail below. One poignant example, however, is given by Knight, who was generally on good terms with soldiers whilst at Ladysmith. Knight recorded: 'I myself had not tasted food for 28 hours and the worst of it was the Infantry stole our water while we were mounting the guns, but never mind it is past & gone now'.¹³⁰ Despite saying "never mind" he evidently cared enough to record the incident in a lengthy letter to his brother, which he wrote during the course of the siege and perhaps served a cathartic purpose.¹³¹ However, there are no records of any serious disturbances between sailors and soldiers on the frontline either in diaries or other reports.¹³²

One further point worth noting is the use of khaki uniforms in the naval brigades. This was a new development during the Boer War whereas previously naval uniform had been worn by those in the brigades and this could have had the effect of creating a homogenous group of sailor-soldiers.¹³³ However, the adoption of khaki did not sit well with sailors. On the one hand Tony Bridgland has argued it was deeply uncomfortable in comparison to their own uniform and thus a source of irritation.¹³⁴ However, there were deeper reasons for discontent. For instance, Williams remarked on taking part in a field day where 'we were continually being asked what regiment we belonged to; this being very annoying'.¹³⁵ As discussed in Chapter One, a sailor's uniform was an important part of his identity and part of sailor culture; as McKee noted, 'ratings took real pride in wearing the naval uniform'.¹³⁶ Sailors purchased it themselves and altered it to their own style: the psychological importance of this should not be underestimated. Bleby noted that sailors readily sewed their own badges on the new uniforms which undoubtedly gave some sense of independence, although whether this was simply a continuation of their usual care-free attitude to their uniform or a conscious act of visibly differentiating themselves is harder to fathom.¹³⁷ Consequently this remark by Williams is telling: it was not simple annoyance at being repeatedly asked to which regiment he belonged, but stemmed from the temporary loss of his own identity. Therefore, despite eagerness from some quarters to fight ashore, they were not soldiers. Sailors resented that which took away their established identity or caused it to be impaired.

¹³⁰ RNM 2012/37/3: Letter of Arthur Sidney Knight

¹³¹ Importantly, letters during the Boer War were not censored as they were during the First World War so soldiers and sailors enjoyed more freedom in what they could write. Furthermore, Anthony Fletcher has argued that keeping links with home was important as it helped men cope with the difficulties of war. See Anthony Fletcher, *Life, Death and Growing Up on the Western Front*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014) quoted in Nancy Martin, "'And all because it is war!': First World War diaries, authenticity and combatant identity", *Textual Practice*, 29,7, 2015; pp. 1245-1263, p. 1247

¹³² Having considered diaries, the press and official reports beyond clashes with military authorities already discussed above.

¹³³ Belby, *Victorian*, p. vi

¹³⁴ Bridgland, *Field Gun Jack*, p. 16

¹³⁵ RNM 1976/19065: Diary of William Williams

¹³⁶ See Chapter One and the discussion of Mary A. Conley and Quintin Coleville's work; McKee, *Sober Men*, p. 67

¹³⁷ Bleby, *Victorian*, p. 130

The imperial stereotype: Jack Tar, cheerful under pressure!

This thesis has recognized that the image of the sailor as an heroic stalwart of the Empire was well-established by the end of the nineteenth century.¹³⁸ Brave, strong, and doing their duty with a smile was the carefully crafted persona presented to the public. This chapter now considers the stereotype further by examining in-depth the portrayal of sailors as cheerful, despite privations at the front, drawing on their own reflections in comparison to how they were represented by the press. Due to the series of embarrassing defeats inflicted upon Britain, it is understandable that the press made a concerted effort to portray sailors as cheerful fellows who "just got on with the job at hand". For instance, the *Evening News* (Portsmouth) reported: 'They are splendidly brave in the face of a heavy fire, and seem to bear a charmed life'.¹³⁹ The *Evening News* (Portsmouth) continued: the Bluejackets are the 'most popular men in camp... they have been a revelation to our men'.¹⁴⁰ Indeed, sailors became important for propaganda purposes and this was picked up by war correspondents such as Steevens and Pearse. Steevens wrote of them:

under the big canvas of the ward-room, with its table piled with stuff to read. Trust the sailor to make himself at home. As we passed through the camp the bluejackets rose to a man and lined up trimly on either side. Trust the sailor to keep his self-respect, even in five weeks' beleaguered Ladysmith.¹⁴¹

However, Bleby casts doubt on the cheerful, homely image put forward by Steevens and Pearse, dispelling the propaganda and in particular noting that reading material was actually scarce in Ladysmith.¹⁴² Nevertheless, Bleby conceded that the naval brigades' stores were well-stocked and that they subsequently enjoyed a better level of comfort to many others present in Ladysmith for a longer period, and thus morale may have remained higher.¹⁴³ Likewise Bridgland noted that as the siege wore on and rationing and sickness took its toll, the men's patience 'was becoming a little frayed'.¹⁴⁴ Similarly Pearse eulogized the bluejackets, and reasserted the stereotype: 'everybody in besieged Ladysmith appreciates the bluejackets, who are always cheery, always ready for duty, and whose good shooting has done so much'.¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, Steevens also played upon the popular image and referred to their stint in Ladysmith as 'their holiday'.¹⁴⁶ He recorded sailors commenting "'of course, we enjoy it," they say, almost apologising for saving us; "we so seldom get a chance"'.¹⁴⁷

Sailor testimony on the other hand dispels this propaganda and reveals a more realistic image. For example, this "holiday" is countered by the diary of Withercombe who began his story on

¹³⁸ See Conley, *From Jack*.

¹³⁹ *Evening News* (Portsmouth), 2 November 1899

¹⁴⁰ *Evening News* (Portsmouth), 2 November 1899

¹⁴¹ Steevens, *From Capetown*, p. 135

¹⁴² Bleby, *Victorian*, p. 136

¹⁴³ Bleby, *Victorian*, p. 136

¹⁴⁴ Bridgland, *Field Gun Jack*, p. 134

¹⁴⁵ Pearse, *Four Months*, p. 92

¹⁴⁶ Steevens, *From Capetown*, p. 143

¹⁴⁷ Steevens, *From Capetown*, p. 143

their leaving Hong Kong and recorded that the crew of HMS *Powerful* were 'chiefly men who had been over 3 years on the China Station although many could count 4 summers out there'.¹⁴⁸ These were men who had spent several years overseas only to be diverted to a warzone on their way home. Withercombe is portraying a crew eager to be home and with their families and wrote that 'All previous orders were countermanded... The general opinion was the Government were aware of this fact [that *Powerful* might be needed in South Africa] before we left Hong Kong'.¹⁴⁹ Nevertheless, there is no record of any resistance and suggests that even though they were unhappy at the orders there were no thoughts of disobeying them.

Clearly the writings of war-correspondents deserve caution and the case presented by sailors is understandably more muted. Nevertheless, sailors were not necessarily negative. Having landed ashore from HMS *Powerful*, Arthur Knight recorded 'a bit of a fuss' as he and the others in the naval brigade boarded their train to the front; in typical British fashion for understatement.¹⁵⁰ They were travelling in coal trucks: 'but the men treat it as a joke and said the coal trucks were quite equal to some of the carriages on the L.C.D.R. in England'.¹⁵¹ On the other hand, Withercombe's record of the same journey was less humorous, commenting on the coal trucks as 'the only means of conveyance the railway authorities could provide... without even removing their trade marks'.¹⁵² Therefore, Withercombe felt annoyance at this transport where the trucks had likely been hastily commandeered and were not suited to the purpose.

However, a further example of their cheery attitude and disregard for the rules is shown by repeated clashes with army officials. In particular, sailors' uncanny knack of bypassing official channels of supply. Bleby noted sailors' abilities in this regard and recognized that there were many reported incidents between the Provost Marshall and the men of the naval brigade describing it as becoming a 'vendetta'.¹⁵³ Sailors saw themselves as separate from the military police and beyond the initial remit of the Provost Marshall. Furthermore, this is supported by their desire to preserve their own identity as much as possible.

Bleby further commented on their notoriety, examining the accounts of army officers, one of whom wrote:

The guileless bluejackets (the stokers – good luck to them! – were the most successful criminals) seldom returned without one [sheep]. Their invariable explanation was that "it had followed them into camp".¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁸ RNM 1989/252: Diary of Joseph Withercombe; McKee has noted that long commissions were 'By far the single most common complaint about naval life'. See McKee, *Sober Men*, p. 221

¹⁴⁹ See also Conley who has argued that family devotion increased. Conley, *From Jack*, pp. 87-91

¹⁵⁰ RNM 2012/37/4: Diary of Arthur Sidney Knight; For a detailed analysis of English understatement see Kate Fox, *Watching the English: the hidden rules of English behaviour*, (London: Hodder, 2004); p. 66.

¹⁵¹ RNM 2012/37/4: Diary of Arthur Sidney Knight; Knight is referring to the London, Chatham and Dover Railway with which many sailors would have been familiar. Further attempts at light-heartedness can be seen in a further comment by Knight: '100 rounds of Lyddite shell. These shell the Naval Brigade nicknamed P.P.P.P. viz Powerful Pills for Paul's People'. RNM 2012/37/4: Diary of Arthur Sidney Knight

¹⁵² RNM 1989/252: Diary of Joseph Withercombe

¹⁵³ Bleby, *Victorian*, p. 156; Archibald Hurd also noted this. See Hurd, *How Our Navy is Run*, p. 62.

¹⁵⁴ Bleby, *Victorian*, p. 156

The tone of this officer's observation suggests he felt a degree of respect for the bluejackets' actions. Consideration of Mear's diary reveals that the practice of helping themselves was not simply officers reporting stories. Mear recorded he 'pinched ½ dozen ducks at Kronstant'.¹⁵⁵ It is also important to be cognizant of the fact that Mear was a stretcher bearer – a group comprised primarily of stokers, although he was not one himself.¹⁵⁶ Williams also recorded being aware of the practice.¹⁵⁷ However, Bleby has argued that the 'quick eyes and light fingers' of the naval brigade was a well-known phenomenon.¹⁵⁸ Indeed, because of one naval brigade passing through an abandoned Boer Laager the catchphrase 'I picked that up in the Laager' quickly caught on amongst sailors to determine "acquisitions" of a certain type'.¹⁵⁹

Nevertheless, despite how the bluejackets were displayed to the British public and their own recollections, it is evident that they were not immune to the common hardships encountered by men serving on the frontline. As the war dragged on and deprivations increased, the bluejackets became more frank. Mear did not hesitate to record his continuing complaints. On 15th October 1900 he noted: 'Birthday. Can't get a wet...'.¹⁶⁰ A birthday was an occasion where sailors would be allowed an extra rum ration and so not being able to get a drink at all would have gone against naval tradition, and thus caused further annoyance.¹⁶¹ Further, on 20th December he wrote 'we are not allowed to buy anything from the farmers as the officers wants it all (we are waiting for a move)'.¹⁶² The social situation within the navy was long-established and this further reinforces the 'they were officers and we were not' aspect of life on the lower deck.¹⁶³ Later at Klip Drift, Mear recorded that they had to dig holes in which to shelter from the rain as they had no form of cover and spent three days soaking.¹⁶⁴ Two months later the experience was remarkably similar:

wet through, no sleep, and no food, we started out on the march, with ½ lb of biscuit and ½ pint of coffee to do 14 miles to Brands-Valla, on starvation diet.¹⁶⁵

It is not clear whether Mear is attempting levity with his final quip of "on starvation diet" but it is evident that he is feeling disheartened by the whole affair. Despite the lack of supplies they were allowed a half ration of rum on the Queen's Birthday, a treat likely to be welcomed by many sailors. With supplies in short supply, it is unlikely that there would have been much alcohol available. However, Mear's testimony suggests that even this did not raise their spirits. Mear wrote they received the rum 'that was owing to us, no excitement in camp'.¹⁶⁶ Therefore,

¹⁵⁵ RNM 1986/470/5: Diary of Thomas Mear

¹⁵⁶ Stokers were looked down on as the lowest within the Royal Navy. See for example Peter Kemp, *The British Sailor: A Social History of the Lower Deck*, (London, Dent, 1970); p. 198; Lavery, *Able*, p. 128; For an in-depth study of stokers see Tony Chamberlain, "Stokers - the lowest of the low?" *A Social History of Royal Navy Stokers 1850-1950*, Unpublished Dissertation, University of Exeter, 2013.

¹⁵⁷ RNM 1976/19065: Diary of William Williams

¹⁵⁸ Bleby, *Victorian*, p. 156

¹⁵⁹ Bleby, *Victorian*, p. 156

¹⁶⁰ RNM 1986/470/5: Diary of Thomas Mear. The word "wet" in this context is slang for an alcoholic beverage.

¹⁶¹ McKee, *Sober Men*, p. 148, p. 155

¹⁶² RNM 1986/470/5: Diary of Thomas Mear

¹⁶³ McKee, *Sober Men*, pp. 47-49

¹⁶⁴ RNM 1986/470/5: Diary of Thomas Mear

¹⁶⁵ RNM 1986/470/5: Diary of Thomas Mear

¹⁶⁶ RNM 1986/470/5: Diary of Thomas Mear

he is suggesting that the general attitude amongst the men was one of unhappiness, rather than any imperialistic celebrations for the Queen's birthday and not even the allowance of rum improved the situation or heightened imperial sentiment.

Bleby on the other hand has suggested that despite privations at Ladysmith, there was still an air of defiance and that, although unhappy, sailors knew their duty. On 9th November 1899 the naval guns opened fire in what was described by commentators as 'a curiously impressive incident' which 'astonished many of us in camp'.¹⁶⁷

When twenty-one rounds had been counted everybody knew it was a Royal Salute, in celebration of the Prince of Wales's birthday. Then loud cheers, begun as a right by the bluejackets, representing the senior service, ran round.¹⁶⁸

The decision to conduct this gun salute will have come from officers cognizant of the propaganda purpose. It was clearly designed to show continued unity and defiance, and the reason it was recorded by commentators is self-evident.¹⁶⁹ However, it should be noted that marking Royal birthdays was a matter of procedure in the Royal Navy and something with which the bluejackets would have been familiar.¹⁷⁰ Regrettably both Withercombe and Knight's diaries cease a few days before this event took place.¹⁷¹ Paper was at a premium during the siege and it may be that they were unable to obtain enough to keep writing or wished to conserve what they had.¹⁷² In addition, Bridgland suggested that as the war took its toll the act of writing cheerful thoughts became 'more difficult'.¹⁷³

A further revealing point about the impact of the hardships sailors faced is demonstrated by Mear who records two accounts of being penalized for bad conduct: 'Gets fined 5s for fighting' and 'got fined for swearing in the ranks'.¹⁷⁴ He does not embellish the details and it is not known what caused him to perpetrate these misdemeanours but it comes at a time of heavy hardship with lack of food and equipment where he undoubtedly felt at a low ebb and morale was low. This does not necessarily relate to disloyalty to the service and the Empire but may have related to attempts to vent his frustration. The importance of being able to do this through grumbling has been considered elsewhere in this thesis but it is pertinent to mention Knight who raises this point in a letter home to his brother.¹⁷⁵ Knight stated: 'Well old man, I have had a sailors' privilege, a good grumble, so will knock off'.¹⁷⁶ Similarly Williams wrote: 'I had found out that a Naval lot is not a very happy one'.¹⁷⁷ However he later added, 'But these thoughts came to me at a time when I was against the service. I had anything but a pleasant

¹⁶⁷ Pearse, *Four Months*, p. 64; Bleby, *Victorian*, p. 135

¹⁶⁸ Pearse, *Four Months*, p. 64

¹⁶⁹ See also reports in *The Times*, 20 November and *The Times*, 29 December 1899 presenting it as an example of British pluck.

¹⁷⁰ See Chapter Two.

¹⁷¹ Although sailors typically recorded events such as this in a matter-of-fact way just to mark the occasion.

¹⁷² Bridgland, *Field Gun Jack*, p. 85; This also affected officers and so was a widespread problem.

¹⁷³ Bridgland, *Field Gun Jack*, p. 123

¹⁷⁴ RNM 1986/470/5: Diary of Thomas Mear

¹⁷⁵ Lavery, *Able*, p. 237

¹⁷⁶ RNM 2012/37/3: Letter from Arthur Sidney Knight

¹⁷⁷ RNM 1976/19065: Diary of William Williams

time up to then'.¹⁷⁸ This grumbling demonstrates that in addition to many other factors, comfort was of vital importance to sailors. As long as they had supplies and the comforts they were used to, they were relatively happy to get on with things.¹⁷⁹ A further point of interest is recorded by Williams and supports this view. He wrote that due to the outbreak of 'bubonic plague' ashore, the captain opened 'a wet canteen aboard' which was understandably popular with the crew.¹⁸⁰ However, there was almost a disaster when the cutter delivering the beer barrels nearly sank. Williams happily recorded: 'but you may be sure that the beer was not lost.'¹⁸¹

Furthermore, examining their grumbling is revealing of what sailors deemed important. For example, Knight bemoans the fact that 'malt is unobtainable' and that 'Whisky last sold for eleven pounds a bottle'.¹⁸² His underlining adding strength to the comment. In addition, in a letter to his brother written over a number of weeks, he hints at the worsening conditions. He describes the rationing and the diet of horsemeat to which they were forced to resort. However, Knight does at least allow himself the joke 'they (the horses) are all knackers as all the decent ones are running about in our tummies'.¹⁸³ Humour was an important outlet and similarly Withercombe, in discussing transporting the naval guns across country, recorded: 'hauling the guns up the hills or what we would term mountains'.¹⁸⁴ Here he is evidently trying to make light of their hardships but also make a point at the same time. Yet these accounts are not out of character with British sailors and demonstrates how grumbling and humour were combined as a means of coping with a difficult way of life, and not necessarily anything more.

Importantly, due to the wide reporting of the war by the press, negative comments were also published, especially as the British suffered further defeats. For example the *Evening News* (Portsmouth) published one such article under the headline 'Bitter British Grumbling': 'There is a strong feeling here against the dilatoriness of the Imperial Government, which, knowing what was coming, failed to place an adequate force in South Africa'.¹⁸⁵ This concurs with Arthur Knight who, in a letter home to his brother, wrote of the War Office being 'rotten to the core' and accusing them of 'criminal neglect' for leaving them so long in 'this degrading position'.¹⁸⁶ Yet there is no sense of mutiny from any of these sailors. Mear even discusses the mutinies of some army units but makes no allusion to any sort of action occurring within the naval brigades.¹⁸⁷ Williams did however record a large increase in the desertion rate and blames the

¹⁷⁸ RNM 1976/19065: Diary of William Williams; This shows a conscious consideration of this event and he had later gone back on his original thoughts, suggesting a degree of honesty at the time.

¹⁷⁹ See also Bleby, *Victorians*, p. 159.

¹⁸⁰ RNM 1976/19065: Diary of William Williams; Although stereotypical, sailors relationship with alcohol is well document. For further information see McKee, *Sober Men*.

¹⁸¹ RNM 1976/19065: Diary of William Williams

¹⁸² RNM 2012/37/3: Letter from Arthur Sidney Knight; Emphasis by the author.

¹⁸³ RNM 2012/37/3: Letter from Arthur Sidney Knight

¹⁸⁴ RNM 1989/252: Diary of Joseph Withercombe

¹⁸⁵ *Evening News* (Portsmouth), 1 November 1899; Note here that the press was not censored and as Popple has noted there was a keen difference between 'conscious, state-orientated, ideologically positioned and censored war culture' seen during the First World War and 'fluid, satirical... representation' which took place before the First World War. See Popple, "Fresh", p. 406.

¹⁸⁶ RNM 2012/37/3: Letter from Arthur Sidney Knight

¹⁸⁷ RNM 1986/470/5: Diary of Thomas Mear

war for this. Nevertheless, it was still common at this time for sailors to desert when the opportunity presented itself.¹⁸⁸ As Williams noted in his diary, 'all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy'.¹⁸⁹ Bridgland has also commented on the boredom endured by sailors during the war who were stuck with menial tasks to do day after day.¹⁹⁰

A further means of considering the cheerful-under-pressure stereotype is by looking at how sailors dealt with injury and death. This can be considered from several positions. Firstly, by considering the death of Lieutenant Egerton at Ladysmith, which was deemed particularly newsworthy as an heroic death in the service of the country and of the Empire. Egerton's injury and eventual death at Ladysmith was well-reported in the Press. Both local and national papers reproduced the official bulletin: 'Lieut. Egerton... dangerously wounded this morning by a shell, left knee, right foot. Life not in danger at present'.¹⁹¹ In the days following his death, further reports are evident showing the projection of Egerton as the embodiment of British masculinity and a martyr for the Empire. *The Times* reported:

It is extremely sad to learn that the dangerous wounds received by Lieutenant Egerton... necessitated in the amputation of both the gallant officer's legs. The brilliant service rendered by the contingent which owes its proficiency to Lieutenant Egerton's training will accentuate the public sympathy with him in his honourable misfortune.¹⁹²

This was then followed by:

Lieutenant Frederick Greville Egerton has died from the effect of his wounds sustained in action at Ladysmith on Monday... [his] promotion to the rank of commander in her Majesty's Fleet for special service with the force in South Africa, to date from November 3, was officially announced on Saturday.¹⁹³

In a further account *The Times*, reporting on a dinner where John Broderick MP was speaking, noted: 'the whole country grieved for that life prematurely cut short.'¹⁹⁴

However, the incident of Egerton's death is especially interesting because Arthur Knight was present when he was wounded and recorded what happened, allowing a level of comparative analysis between both public and private account. For example, Pearse the war correspondent claimed to be present as Egerton was removed to the hospital, and wrote: "'My cricketing days are over now,'" he said, with a plucky attempt to make light of his agony'.¹⁹⁵ Knight recorded

¹⁸⁸ RNM 1976/19065: Diary of William Williams; Interestingly Williams notes that officers were also deserting. Desertion had been a much more serious problem during the eighteenth century but Lavery has argued that this declined following the abolishment of impressment. Furthermore, service ashore provided an opportunity for men to desert which was one reason why shore establishments had not been previously been popular. See Lavery, *Able*, p. 133. In addition, in some South African ports there had been a policy of keeping ships away from the shore to discourage desertion and I am grateful to Jonathan Hyslop and his contribution at the Port Towns and Urban Cultures Conference, Portsmouth 2013.

¹⁸⁹ RNM 1976/19065: Diary of William Williams

¹⁹⁰ Brigland, *Field Gun Jack*, p. 98

¹⁹¹ *Evening News* (Portsmouth), 2 November 1899; Reported verbatim in *The Times*, 3 November 1899

¹⁹² *The Times*, 4 November 1899

¹⁹³ *The Times*, 6 November 1899

¹⁹⁴ *The Times*, 8 November 1899

¹⁹⁵ Pearse, *Four Months*, p. 25

this almost verbatim in his diary, although he suggested the words were addressed to him: 'Ah Knight, I am afraid my cricketing days are over'.¹⁹⁶ How much of this account was fabricated is not the issue here; what is important is that the event was recorded first in a sailor diary and then published by Pearse and in both cases suggests support for the sailor's plucky image.

No doubt Knight profited from the story on the mess deck, and he could have sought to capitalize on his involvement in the action.¹⁹⁷ Yet he gives a detailed account in both his diary and letters from besieged Ladysmith, suggesting an in-depth knowledge of the event. Knight wrote:

I heard the first cry for help I had heard in the war and turning round my eyes met a fearful sight. Poor Lt Egerton had his left leg blown right off from about 21 inches above the knee with a great wound 2 or 3 inches above the right knee and the sole of his right foot cut nearly off and hanging by the toes.¹⁹⁸

Egerton asked where he was wounded and Knight replied: 'below the knee not thinking it would do him any good to tell him the extent of his injuries'.¹⁹⁹

Sailor diaries also reveal the less newsworthy accounts and anecdotes of sailors' gallantry which lend support to the stereotype. For example, after an encounter with some wounded bluejackets, William Williams remarked:

one could not help feeling proud of how they bore their sickness. One fellow who had been shot four times coolly remarked on being asked how he was progressing said he felt alright only it was his pipe they had broke was troubling him the most.²⁰⁰

Williams wrote that this was 'one of many such stories' he heard and whilst this suggests generalization, the frankness of most diarists brought on during the war suggests that Williams did genuinely feel "proud".²⁰¹ However, this did not detract from the sad necessity of dealing with the dead and the wounded, and Williams recalled that loading the wounded on to troop ships was a 'painful duty'.²⁰² Similarly around this time Williams was wrecked off the South African coast whilst aboard HMS *Sybille* and his diary reveals neither heroics nor valour but instead a harrowing ordeal. The crew were forced to secure themselves in the rigging and wait to be rescued. Williams wrote: 'The most pitiful sight was our dead shipmate being knocked about by the wreckage'.²⁰³ Although sailors would make light of accidents and deaths aboard, ship wrecking, like battle, was a particularly traumatic experience.

¹⁹⁶ RNM 2012/37/4: Diary of Arthur Sidney Knight

¹⁹⁷ The mess deck was at the centre of lower-deck life. For further information see McKee, *Sober Men*, pp. 84-106.

¹⁹⁸ RNM 2012/37/4: Diary of Arthur Sidney Knight; RNM 2012/37/3: Letters of Arthur Sidney Knight

¹⁹⁹ RNM 2012/37/4: Diary of Arthur Sidney Knight

²⁰⁰ RNM 1976/19065: Diary of William Williams; This also further suggests the importance of comforts.

²⁰¹ RNM 1976/19065: Diary of William Williams

²⁰² RNM 1976/19065: Diary of William Williams

²⁰³ RNM 1976/19065: Diary of William Williams

Nevertheless, as demonstrated by Mear, despite the public image and evident adoption of it at times, sailors were not blinded by their imperial duty. In sharp contrast to his earlier enthusiasm, and most likely influenced by his experiences at Ladysmith, Knight wrote to his brother: 'I am looking forward to the end of the war and coming home'.²⁰⁴ He also wrote of the things he wanted to do when he returned home and the places he wanted to visit with his family.²⁰⁵ Under siege there was limited scope to send the letter, although officers might have been able to afford a runner to brave the journey to deliver the missive, this was beyond the pocket of sailors.²⁰⁶ Therefore, it may be that the letter's cathartic quality was more important at this time and it perhaps provides a clearer insight into what Knight was actually feeling than he was willing to confide in his diary.

Expressions of imperialism and patriotism in South Africa – the experience of the bluejackets

Whereas this chapter has previously paid particular attention to the stereotypical image of sailors and examined their diaries to give an indication of the validity of this, this final section will investigate sailors' expressions of patriotism and also how they responded to expressions of imperial sentiment abroad. In particular, it will consider the belief in British superiority and how this fitted within sailor culture. In his classic study, Henry Baynham argued that sailors' attitudes in the 1880s and 1890s:

was one of confident superiority. When they were off some foreign coast – South America, Africa or the Southern Sea Isles – they... add as an aside how glad they are to be British.²⁰⁷

An example of this perceived superiority is clearly demonstrated by Arthur Knight, who made a revealing comment as he travelled to the front line.²⁰⁸ He displayed his scorn of the Dutch Boer enemy, combined with an amusing joke, in a comment regarding the gifts given to the naval brigade from the crowds waiting to see them pass. Amongst food and other gifts they were given 'beer & spirits' and Knight recorded 'not that the N.B. required Dutch courage, they had too much English to find room for Dutch'.²⁰⁹ Joke aside, this is a specific comparison between English and Dutch, and shows a belief that English courage is superior.²¹⁰ This is important as Mackenzie has argued that racial beliefs were part of the greater imperialistic

²⁰⁴ RNM 2012/37/3: Letter from Arthur Sidney Knight

²⁰⁵ Kate Hunter has suggested that this was common of men at war and that they 'imagined their futures vividly and in doing so dreamed of the men they wanted to be'. Kate Hunter, 'More than an Archive of War: Intimacy and Manliness in the Letters of a Great War Soldier to the Woman He Loved, 1915–1919', *Gender & History*, 25, 2, August 2013; pp. 339–354, p. 346

²⁰⁶ Brigland, *Field Gun Jack*, p. 125

²⁰⁷ Henry Baynham, *Men from the Dreadnoughts*, (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1976); p. 44; Further aspects of this in general will be considered in Chapter Five.

²⁰⁸ Although sailors discussed patriotism they encountered, they were less likely to record in detail their own feelings. In his study of the Soldiers and the Great War, Fletcher has suggested that many men did not discuss their patriotism as they travelled to war as 'Life was too exhausting and too absorbing'. Anthony Fletcher, 'Patriotism, the Great War and the decline of Victorian Manliness', *Historical Association*, 99, 334, 2014; pp. 40–72, p. 47

²⁰⁹ RNM 2012/37/4: Diary of Arthur Sidney Knight

²¹⁰ England or English being synonymous with Britain or British at this time.

culture prevalent in Britain at this time.²¹¹ Porter on the other hand has noted that xenophobia was common but many just valued their country above others.²¹² Thus, it could be posited that this was fighting talk, and undoubtedly some of this aspect is present, but given the deep-rooted nationalistic and xenophobic beliefs ingrained in Britain at this time it is likely that Knight is portraying some element of underlying beliefs.

Other slightly more innocuous forms of expressing British superiority (both national and racial) are also evident amongst sailors.²¹³ For example, Williams recorded various meetings with other nations in port in South Africa. In particular, sport formed a key form of idealized friendly competition. Williams noted: 'Several fine boat races indulged in whilst here between Portuguese, French, German and ourselves and I am pleased to say on an average we came off victorious'.²¹⁴ Although friendly in tone, Williams' pride could be synonymous with latent feelings of superiority over other European races. In a further entry he remarked: 'an exciting boat race between our ship and the Portuguese warship. The race from start to finish was in our favour we keeping the lead all the way'.²¹⁵

However, Williams gives a clearer indication of his feelings in a further comment which, aside from highlighting the unpopularity of the Boer War abroad, demonstrates his belief in British superiority over the Portuguese:

The Portuguese struck me as being strange that this nation "Portugal" should have demonstrations at Lisbon in favour of war with England and act so insolently to our flag in South Africa, when everything connected with them seems so insignificant it is quite laughable to see...²¹⁶

Williams' sense of superiority is evident in his final words. However, whether this was based on deep-rooted patriotism, pride in the service, or aspects of both, is open to interpretation. This thesis argues that all these factors were present within sailor culture, and thus they could exist simultaneously whilst having slightly different meanings at different times.²¹⁷ The complexity of these issues is further highlighted by feelings of respect that could exist towards the enemy. Sailor testimony reveals a degree of respect for the Dutch Boers. Whenever Williams landed ashore with a party to investigate some rumour of attack, he would record that the locals 'treated us very kindly'.²¹⁸ He also gladly recorded: 'a Dutch family promised us they would look after it [the grave of their drowned friend]'.²¹⁹ Similarly, the Boers also fired Christmas puddings into besieged Ladysmith with their compliments, demonstrating that respect went

²¹¹ Mackenzie, *Propaganda*, p. 2

²¹² Porter, *Absent-minded*, p. 214

²¹³ This was not always a question of colour. See Thompson, *The Empire Strikes Back?: The impact of imperialism on Britain from the mid-nineteenth century*, (Harlow: Pearson, 2005); pp. 39-40

²¹⁴ RNM 1976/19065: Diary of William Williams

²¹⁵ RNM 1976/19065: Diary of William Williams

²¹⁶ RNM 1976/19065: Diary of William Williams

²¹⁷ See also Andrew Thompson who has argued that people would 'read into imperialism what they wanted and then moulded its image to fit their concerns'. Thompson, *Empire*, p. 44

²¹⁸ RNM 1976/19065: Diary of William Williams

²¹⁹ RNM 1976/19065: Diary of William Williams

both ways.²²⁰ Furthermore, Daniel Owen Spence noted that the Boers' respected the abilities of the naval brigade. One Boer allegedly said: 'I think there will be much blood spilt before they surrender as Mr Englishman and his damned sailors fight hard'.²²¹ Thus despite feelings of superiority, there existed a sense of mutual respect.

Nevertheless, sailors were not oblivious to the imperialistic sentiment they experienced and spoke openly of patriotism they encountered, and were thus a part of, as they made their way to the front. Withercombe, for example, noted: 'full speed ahead to Ladysmith cheered by the British colonials many thousands of whom were refugees singing patriotic songs such as an Englishman loves to revel in', suggesting he enjoyed himself and the treatment they received.²²² Similarly Knight described huge crowds lining the railway tracks to see them pass on their way towards Ladysmith.²²³ Thomas Mear also recorded displays of patriotism when he was part of a march past for Lord Roberts at Johannesburg: 'great excitement of the people in town never seen such sights before the Union Jacks flying everywhere'.²²⁴

In the early days of the war before the British suffered serious losses there was indeed much cause for celebration, in what was expected to be a short war. The *Evening News* (Portsmouth) reported of the popular celebrations at Cape Town following initial victories:

There is the wildest enthusiasm here to-night. Crowds are parading the streets, cheering and singing. Men seem almost delirious. Occasionally "God save the Queen" is sung, and everyone joins in with patriotic fervour, all hats being raised.²²⁵

This mood was similarly reflected in the national press and other local newspapers, which reported on the 'Great enthusiasm displayed by the inhabitants'.²²⁶ A particularly articulate account was recorded by Withercombe:

The grandest specimen of patriotism witnessed by our men on this eventful night and which was a simple effort on the part of its originators as it appeared to themselves but it proved mightier than the greatest effort put forth by any British subject showing how loyal their hearts were when from of the gentler sex held the "Flag that braved a thousand years the battle and the breeze", whilst others held aloft blazing torches was this not the strongest appeal which could possibly be made. It seemed to speak individually and very few the hearts were who responded not to that call. Could these women know today that their gallant actions had contributed to the war more than the world is aware of.²²⁷

²²⁰ Pearse, *Four Months*, p. 160

²²¹ Daniel Owen Spence, *A History of the Royal Navy: Empire and Imperialism*, (London: I. B. Tauris, 2015); pp. 79-80

²²² RNM 1989/252: Diary of Joseph Withercombe

²²³ RNM 2012/37/4: Diary of Arthur Sidney Knight

²²⁴ RNM 1986/470/5: Diary of Thomas Mear

²²⁵ *Evening News* (Portsmouth), 21 October 1899

²²⁶ *The Times*, 2 October 1899; *Evening News* (Portsmouth), 21 October 1899; *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 17 February 1900

²²⁷ RNM 1989/252: Diary of Joseph Withercombe

That sailors spoke about events of patriotism with such enthusiasm suggests they felt a degree of affinity towards it. They would otherwise have omitted it entirely or recorded it more briefly.

However, as the war dragged on and hardships took their toll, Mear noted a different attitude: 'all the white people in Jacobsdal were afraid of the troops especially the women, all the places is full of wounded, both British and Boers'.²²⁸ This betrays the age-old problem of soldiers and war. The presence of large numbers of war-weary foreign men undoubtedly was of concern to towns full of women.²²⁹ However, it is understandable to see a reversal in popular expression of enthusiasm as the war dragged on and increasingly effected them.²³⁰ Suggestions of ungentlemanly behaviour would have proved detrimental to morale both abroad and at home, and were less likely to be published by the press despite the evident publishing of criticism.²³¹ This account of Jacobsdal demonstrates that popular expressions of patriotism invariably go hand in hand with victory rather than defeat; when one is winning and faces less hardships, one is more likely to be patriotic and celebratory.²³² This is evident in both the brief consideration of the general public and also the more in-depth consideration of sailors. It does not necessarily follow that either the public or the sailors lose their patriotic sentiment, but they will often have less reason to celebrate it and more reason to fear what is happening around them. When this danger has passed, feelings of patriotism and imperial sentiment may once more be displayed, in hand with other issues such as relief at survival and general emotions of victory.

Thus, having spent 117 days besieged at Ladysmith enduring severe deprivations, Knight did not record many details of the lifting of the siege. In noticeably weak handwriting he wrote: 'first part of relief column arrived in Ladysmith town gone mad, too ill to write more'.²³³ His words "town gone mad" have to remain open to interpretation but the similarly besieged war correspondents noted that 'Ladysmith gave itself away with wild enthusiasm at the sight of troops so long expected'.²³⁴ However, Denis Judd noted that 'the citizens did not greet the relieving forces... with wild enthusiasm'.²³⁵ Instead he argued it was 'a dutiful welcome' due to

²²⁸ RNM 1986/470/5: Diary of Thomas Mear

²²⁹ See for example John Boje's illuminating study of sexual relations between British soldiers and Boer women, John Boje, 'Sexual Relations between British Soldiers and Boer Women: A Methodological Approach', *South African Historical Journal*, 68, 2, 2016; pp. 195-212. Although Boje has noted that during the early stages of the war there was limited contact between the British and Boer women and therefore this fits with Conley's arguments regarding the navy's ability to preserve its reputation as the brigades had returned home by this point. Conley, *From Jack*, p. 144

²³⁰ In particular, Jacobsdal was near the border between Cape Colony and the Orange Free State and thus saw a lot of action during the war. Furthermore, as the war turned into a guerrilla-style conflict, Bill Nasson has noted how it became 'a lacerating episode which reached deep into the social layers of colonial South African Society. See Bill Nasson, 'Black Communities in Natal and the Cape', in David E. Omissi and Andrew S. Thompson (ed.), *The Impact of the South African War*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002); pp.38-55, p. 38; The British public became war-weary. See Miller, *Volunteers*, p. 148; See also Denis Judd and Keith Sturridge, *The Boer War: A History*, (London: I. B. Tauris, 2013); p. 193 discussing the farm burning techniques which turned many against the British.

²³¹ For instance contemporaries such as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle believed 'the British soldier was chivalrous by nature and therefore incapable of offences against women'. See Paula Krebs, *Gender, Race, and the Writing of Empire: Public Discourse and the Boer War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); p. 81; C. Staunton, *Contextualizing the "Other": Parliamentary Discourses on Genocide and Race in the Late Nineteenth and Late Twentieth Century in Britain*, Unpublished MA thesis National University of Ireland, Galway, 2013; pp. 156-157 quoted in Boje, 'Sexual Relations'.

²³² For instance the enthusiasm of Mafeking Night and also the relief of Ladysmith. See Porter, *Absent-minded*, pp. 195-196; Judd and Sturridge, *The Boer War*, p. 182

²³³ RNM 2012/37/5: Diary of Arthur Sidney Knight

²³⁴ Pearse, *Four Months*, p. 239

²³⁵ Judd and Sturridge, *Boer War*, p. 133

the poor condition the inhabitants were in by this time.²³⁶ Although Judd specifically referred to the citizens, this stands in stark contrast to Knight and Pearse. Rather, Judd suggested that the welcome was made because it was expected. However, he does raise the valid point that the inhabitants were too far gone to be in a celebratory mood, and Knight's testimony supports this. Therefore, despite General White's patriotic declaration, 'I thank God we have kept the flag flying', the extent of patriotic celebration is questionable, and the celebration that did take place cannot be viewed solely in terms of imperial sentiment.²³⁷

However, the surrender of the Boer army several months later was met with joyous celebration and many sailors recorded the event with enthusiasm. In particular, Williams wrote:

On Sunday May 21st at midnight we received the welcome news of Peace amidst loud cheers. The next day the Captain held Church service and made a fine patriotic speech. The ship was gaily dressed at noon and loud hearty cheers was given in honour of the news for no one was more pleased to hear of it than the Barracouta's ship's company.²³⁸

The line "no one was more pleased" than his ship's company is understandable hyperbole; it is typical language of celebration. What is more interesting is Williams' reference to the captain's "fine patriotic speech". This suggests that Williams was receptive to it and enjoyed its patriotic message.

Nevertheless, it is clear that events such as the one described by Williams cannot simply be viewed as celebration of national victory. These celebrations did have patriotic overtones, which some could ignore and others could celebrate. But they also represented an end to the conflict and everything this meant to those sailors who had fought. Their duty was done and, more importantly, they had survived. The diaries considered here do not comment specifically on this but the end of the war meant the ability to go home and see their families, as has been noted by Knight and Withercombe.²³⁹

Conclusion

This chapter has drawn upon recent developments in the socio-cultural historiography of the Boer War, in addition to the limited studies on the role of the naval brigades, in order to consider the experience of British sailors during the conflict. Although encompassing all naval sailors serving in South Africa during the war, in particular it has examined the bluejackets who volunteered for the naval brigades and fought ashore alongside the army. The late nineteenth century was a period of heightened imperial imagery and, spurred on by the press who built upon their success during the conflict, the public image of British sailors became increasingly imperialistic. Described as "handy men" and "servants of empire", this view was central to

²³⁶ Judd and Sturridge, *Boer War*, p. 133

²³⁷ Pearse, *Four Months*, p. 241

²³⁸ RNM 1976/19065: Diary of William Williams

²³⁹ RNM 2012/37/3: Letter from Arthur Sidney Knight; RNM 1989/252: Diary of Joseph Withercombe

Victorian and Edwardian imperial imagery and notions of masculinity. This chapter has considered this in depth and argued that this was an important part of sailor culture and an image that they embraced.

However, considering sailors at war allows analysis of their imperialistic public image versus the reality of their experience and it has broken new ground in its investigation of sailors themselves: examining how they viewed their actions, dealt with the hardships they faced, and also their own expressions of imperial sentiment. In examining these themes against the backdrop of their public image, it has demonstrated that during the Boer War, sailors exhibited a range of imperialistic beliefs and sentiments. Furthermore, there existed a sense of superiority and pride based upon Britain's position on the world stage. Yet, more importantly, it has also shown that the situation was far more complex than this. Although many sailors were eager to fight ashore in the brigades this was not simply a display of blind imperial duty, and stands contrary to the Victorian and Edwardian sense of noble sacrifice. Many of those who volunteered were cognizant of the dangers they would face ashore but were nevertheless prepared to do what was expected of them, whilst others recognized it as an opportunity to explore the country, have an adventure and also as a break from the monotony of day-to-day life aboard ship. Generalizing their feelings as simply imperialistic risks concealing the nuanced character of British sailors. Consequently, this chapter has highlighted the importance of pride and patriotism alongside imperialism. In particular, the difficulty in determining between loyalty to nation, ship and crewmates, and has posited that all were present factors, and a part of sailor culture. Within this culture, these sentiments could be appropriated as circumstance dictated but imperial sentiment and personal desires could remain independent of one another. What this has shown is that duty remained a mainstay of this culture, capable of holding other elements together.

Chapter Four

Killing, Dying and Duty: British sailors in the First World War

At this grave moment in our national history I send to you, and through you to the officers and men of the Fleets of which you have assumed command, the assurance of my confidence that under your direction they will revive and renew the old glories of the Royal Navy, and prove once again the sure shield of Britain and of her Empire in the hour of trial.¹

The Royal Navy entered the First World War as the pre-eminent military force of the British Empire and, due to its dominant position in British culture, the public was geared towards the idea an early clash with the German fleet and a resounding British victory.² The reality was far different, with the primary sphere of conflict being instead the land war in Europe resulting in the stalemate of trench warfare and terrible loss of life. The imagery of these horrors has left an indelible mark upon British popular memory. As such, public interest in this topic continues to grow and the recent centenary of the Great War has provided an outlet for additional studies. Feeding and facilitating this public interest are numerous local initiatives, such as digitization projects of soldiers' letters and diaries.³ However, whilst commendable, the majority of studies remain soldier-centric rather than sailor-centric. Furthermore, many socio-cultural studies of the war such as those undertaken by Adrian Gregory, Gerard DeGroot and David Silbey hardly mention the Royal Navy, focusing primarily on the army and British culture during the conflict.⁴ The reason for this interest, understandably, lies in the catastrophic scale of deaths suffered by what was an army of volunteers from amongst the British public, and what this reveals about British culture. Yet this overlooks the role of the Royal Navy in the defeat of Germany and its allies, and has much to offer socio-cultural studies given its cultural significance prior to the conflict.

This chapter redresses this and considers the experience of sailors during the Great War.⁵ In particular, it examines sailors at the outbreak of war and their response to this, everyday life

¹ *The Times*, 5 August 1914

² Jan R ger, *Great Naval Game: Britain and Germany in the Age of Empire*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009 [first edition 2007]); p. 1

³ In particular, The Imperial War Museum and The National Archives, the Hear My Story Exhibition at NMRN and the Gateways To The First World War project.

⁴ See Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British society and the First World War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Gerard DeGroot, *Blighty: British society in the era of the Great War*, (London: Longman, 1996); David Silbey, *The British working class and enthusiasm for war, 1914-1916*, (London: Frank Cass, 2005). These studies have considered the image of the "Rush to the Colours" in 1914, and the relationship between British imperialism and volunteering.

⁵ See also Simon Smith, "'Never mind the trenches!': Experiences of British Sailors during the First World War", *North American Conference on British Studies* <http://www.nacbs.org/blog/never-mind-the-trenches-experiences-of-british-sailors-during-the-first-world-war-by-simon-smith/> retrieved 13 September 2016.

at sea, killing and dealing with death, and their interaction with soldiers. Again, as discussed in Chapter Three, sailors were in a unique position because they were not volunteers and thus have avoided serious consideration by socio-cultural historians.⁶ However, sailors had a key relationship with British imperialism, with it forming a distinct element of their culture, and by considering these themes, this chapter situates sailors within the wider imperial and First World War studies. Furthermore, although the largest military force in Britain when war was declared, the Admiralty also mobilized the men of the Royal Fleet Reserve and naval pensioners, and as manpower was needed on an unprecedented scale, the war opened up the Royal Navy as never before to volunteers without a naval background.⁷ Apart from stokers, those who served in the navy were, as a general rule, men who had entered the navy at a young age and therefore this gives an opportunity to consider how sailors responded to this additional challenge to their own perceived identity.

British sailors on the outbreak of war

Writing in the 1970s, Henry Baynham argued: 'As far as the causes of the war were concerned few sailors had anything significant to say. There was certainly no particular hostility against the Germans'.⁸ Consideration of diaries from the lower deck lends some credence to this statement. Politics rarely found its way on to the pages of sailors' diaries and McKee has noted that the subject was often banned on the lower deck, which may account for their reticence on the subject.⁹ In contrast, officers' diaries demonstrate a greater engagement with the political situation. For instance, Midshipman James Colville documented well the arms race with Germany prior to the Great War and his views upon this perceived threat.¹⁰ Yet, as Rüger has argued, the growing threat of Germany, particularly its naval power, was a cause for anxiety amongst the British public.¹¹ In addition, the popularization of invasion stories during the early twentieth century publicized German militarism, making them "the enemy", and the arms race between the two countries became a source of British national pride.¹² "We want eight and we won't wait" was the popular cry regarding naval shipbuilding.¹³ Therefore, whether the lower

⁶ Although the First World War did mark the beginning of volunteering in the form of 'Hostilities Only' Ratings, and this will be considered in further detail below.

⁷ Brian Lavery, *Able Seamen: The Lower Deck of the Royal Navy, 1850-1939*, (London: Conway, 2011); p. 185; p. 204; James Daly, *Portsmouth's World War One Heroes: Stories of the Fallen Men and Women*, (Stroud: The History Press, 2013); p. 23; *The Times*, 3 August 1914; Contrary to popular thought, the Royal Navy had always been against unskilled men serving aboard its ships. Even during the Eighteenth Century when the pressgang was used regularly, the men who had been targeted were already skilled sailors. See also Denver Brunsman, *The Evil Necessity: British naval impressment in the eighteenth-century Atlantic world*, (London: University of Virginia Press, 2013).

⁸ Henry Baynham, *Men from the Dreadnoughts*, (London: Hutchinson, 1976), p. 213; Studying the politicization of sailors in detail is beyond the scope of this study, suffice it to demonstrate the position of sailors on the eve of war. For further information see Anthony Carew, *The Lower Deck of the Royal Navy 1900-39: Invergordon in perspective*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981). In fact, there existed a degree of friendliness between British and German sailors. This is discussed further in Chapters Five and Six.

⁹ Christopher McKee, *Sober Men and True: Sailor Lives in the Royal Navy, 1900-1945*, (London: Harvard University Press, 2002); p. 98; One exception being Stoker Robert Percival. For further information, see RNM 1988/294: Memoirs of Robert Percival.

¹⁰ See for example RNM 1997/43/1: Diary of James Colville.

¹¹ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 1

¹² For an example of the invasion story genre see George Chesney, *The Battle of Dorking*, (London: Grant Richards, 1914).

¹³ T. G. Otte, 'Grey Ambassador: The *Dreadnought* and British Foreign Policy' in Robert J. Blyth, Andrew Lambert and Jan Rüger (ed.), *The Dreadnought and the Edwardian Age*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011); pp. 51-78, p. 63

deck was so far divorced from popular opinion given the cultural positioning of the navy at this time is debatable, and this thesis will argue that this created a heightened sense of pressure on sailors to conform to their public image once war had been declared. An article in *The Times* on 6th August 1914 made this image clear:

The process of military mobilization, of which there were glimpses at many important centres, did not divert the minds of Englishmen from the fleets which have sailed out of view. The anxiety for news was natural, but the public must be prepared for a possibly long period of silence regarding the more vital naval aspects of the war.¹⁴

This excerpt suggests that the British public's thoughts were with the navy. In particular, *The Times* warned that 'the public must not be too ready to credit wild rumours' and that reported rumours of action in the North Sea were as yet unfounded.¹⁵ This warning implies that it was believed such rumours could quickly take root and spread because the British public believed, in the early months, that the navy would be the prominent military force.¹⁶

Therefore, sailors' views when war was declared are rather more complex than Baynham postulated. As Anthony Carew has demonstrated, sailors were not apolitical and politicization of the lower deck had actually increased in the run-up to the First World War. However, this was chiefly in terms of better conditions and wages rather than European politics and the exclusion of this from their diaries may have been for their own protection in case the diaries were read by prying eyes.¹⁷ More importantly, this suggests that a number of factors were at work, in particular that on an everyday basis, unless prompted by events, sailors had more important things on their mind than rivalry with the Germans.

However, whilst sailors may not have been overtly anti-German, this did not exclude them from the bellicose atmosphere in Britain after war was declared.¹⁸ Instead, this chapter argues that sailors exhibited patriotic and imperial sentiment in line with a proportion of the British public. This advances the debate and moves beyond the studies of historians such as McKee and Lavery who, although referring to the outbreak of the war, have not investigated in detail sailors' attitudes in connection with wider historical debates. Although Lavery has discussed enthusiasm in a general manner, for instance younger age requirements influencing boys to volunteer for the navy over the army, this attention is brief.¹⁹ Similarly, although Carew has recognized the significance of war enthusiasm and noted that 'the lower deck, like most other sections of the community, were caught up in the wave of enthusiasm that swept the country',

¹⁴ *The Times*, 6 August 1914

¹⁵ *The Times*, 6 August 1914; *The Times*, 7 August 1914

¹⁶ Daly, *Portsmouth's*, p. 29

¹⁷ Carew, *Lower Deck*, p. 72

¹⁸ See for example Gregory, *The Last*.

¹⁹ Lavery, *Able*, p. 199; Lavery refers to Stan Smith who joined as a boy but makes it clear that he had preferred the army and only joined the navy because of the lower age restriction. Whilst this shows enthusiasm to be involved in the war, it does not suggest deep-seated desire to serve in the navy. However, in the early days of the war, the navy promised quick action and to those fearful it would all be over before they had a chance this must have been a powerful incentive. See Stan Smith, *Sea of Memories*, (Tunbridge Wells, 1985); pp. 9-13 quoted in Lavery, *Able*, p. 199

he did not expand upon this point.²⁰ Examination of lower-deck diaries suggests that there was a level of complexity to sailors' war enthusiasm. In particular, whether enthusiasm meant support for the Empire and stemmed from imperial sentiment, feelings of moral duty, adventurism, or elements of all.

Consideration of press reports demonstrates that newspapers were naturally keen to build upon the public image of the sailor and portray an image of enthusiasm amongst British seamen. For instance, an article in the *Daily Mail* described demonstrations at Piccadilly Circus and showed sailors participating in imperialistic displays of war enthusiasm:

A bluejacket began to climb up the pedestal of the statue. Amid thundering cheers, the police looked on admiringly, the sailor scaled right up to the figure of the winged cupid... The sailor placed his Union Jack in cupid's hand, and immediately other flags were passed up to him.²¹

Unsurprisingly, a large number of the newspaper reports focusing specifically on sailors paid greater attention to Reservists rather than regular ratings. On the one hand, Reservists would have been far more visible to the public than regulars, the majority of whom were already at sea or at their naval bases.²² In addition, however, Reservists also had a greater link to the civilian world and thus, like volunteer soldiers, would have been a group to which the majority of the public could relate. For instance, the *Daily Mail* ran personal stories and in one case reported on a Reservist who was called up on his wedding day.²³ The *Hampshire Telegraph* meanwhile recorded the scene at London Euston where the Reservists were arriving to take the train to Portsmouth: 'at the great London railway terminus there were almost unprecedented scenes of patriotism'.²⁴

Reports such as these were designed to encourage enthusiasm and shape the popular mood, and sailor diaries lend support to this enthusiasm. For example, Walter Dennis recorded the feelings of the crew aboard HMS *Vengeance* when their Captain read the King's announcement on the declaration of war: 'the reading of this message was received by everyone with enthusiastic cheers'.²⁵ Other diaries show similar enthusiasm. For instance, a sailor named Wood noted as his ship put to sea after war was declared that they were 'cheered by *Dido* and *Ganges II*'.²⁶ This suggests that war enthusiasm was present amongst sailors, particularly the younger recruits who were aboard *Ganges II*.²⁷ Similar patriotic sentiment was displayed by another sailor, Thomas Hinshaw, who wrote: 'War declared against Germany. God Save the

²⁰ Carew, *Lower Deck*, p. 72

²¹ *Daily Mail*, 6 August 1914

²² The Fleet had been on alert to mobilize since the Review in June 1914.

²³ *Daily Mail*, 4 August 1914

²⁴ *Hampshire Telegraph*, 7 August 1914

²⁵ Diary of Walter Dennis; Diary digitized by McMaster University, Ontario Canada and available at <http://pw20c.mcmaster.ca>

²⁶ RNM 1984/467: Diary of Wood; Able Seaman Clinker Knocker also referred to the cheers from the boys aboard *Ganges II*. See Clinker Knocker, *Aye, Aye, Sir*, (London: Rich & Cowan, 1938), p. 139.

²⁷ HMS *Ganges II* was a training ship and HMS *Dido* was at this time a depot ship.

King'.²⁸ However, as this thesis argues, sailors were also independent thinkers and Dennis demonstrated how different feelings could come together with his next observation: 'CPO Smith speaking on behalf of the Lower Deck, expressed our confidence in our captain, which, personally I think was quite unnecessary'.²⁹ This suggests that Dennis considered such sentiment uncalled for and that it pandered to the officers.

However, Lavery rightly noted that not all sailors were caught up in war fever. One sailor, named Clinker Knocker, recorded seeing a 'tearful sailor who was due to be discharged the next day [day after war was declared] and knew it would be postponed'.³⁰ Similarly, William Jenkins declared he was recalled after what he described as 'twelve months of bliss' since he had left the navy.³¹ In addition, other sailors greeted the announcement with their usual reticence. For example, although otherwise enthusiastic, upon hearing of the declaration of war Wood simply noted 'war declared midnight'.³² Newspapers also provide some further insight into sailors' attitudes on the outbreak of war, and the *Daily Mail* reported of a group of Reservists: 'all the men seemed anxious to know at once where they had to go, but one declared, "I don't care where I have to go as I am on pay"'.³³ This does not present an image of brave patriotic men ready for adventure and to protect the Empire but rather a more realistic view of the range of different reasons motivating individuals.

Nevertheless, existing studies examining the British public and the Great War suggest that patriotism was an important element of war enthusiasm. Specifically, George Robb and Andrew August have both argued that the British working class were patriotic and generally exhibited war enthusiasm. Similarly, David Silbey has supported this and argued it is important to understand that the working class were capable of their own decisions. Meanwhile Brad Beaven has recently added to this, arguing the 'importance of localism' as well as national patriotism.³⁴ Thus sailors were not excluded from patriotism towards the Empire. For instance, at the start of his war diary, William Brooman composed a patriotic poem about sailors and the duty they undertake, which combined their public and personal image:

These brave protectors of the State
Our Empire guard from jealous hate,
We rest at night, in peaceful sleep
While they patrol & watch the deep...

²⁸ RNM 2014/31: Diary of Thomas Hinshaw; Emphasis by the author.

²⁹ See also Chapter Two which has considered sailors and their own independency on ceremonial occasions; Diary of Walter Dennis

³⁰ Knocker, *Aye, Aye* quoted in Lavery, *Able*, p. 188; There is a level of uncertainty over the veracity of Knocker as a source. See Chapter One where this is discussed in more detail.

³¹ IMW: W A Jenkins 03/14/1 quoted in Lavery, *Able*, p. 185

³² RNM 1984/467: Diary of Wood

³³ *Daily Mail*, 3 August 1914

³⁴ Brad Beaven, *Visions of empire: Patriotism, popular culture and the city, 1870-1939*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012); pp. 92-95

We never heard, we never shall
Jack forgot his duty, or a pal
And should our country stand in need,
We are sure that Jack will always lead.³⁵

Meanwhile others, such as Edwin Fletcher, record Empire Day being celebrated aboard during the war.³⁶ The testimony considered above suggests that sailors were imperialistic, but that it was multi-faceted and competed with other elements of sailor culture.

Relations between active service and hostilities only ratings, and soldiers

The introduction of volunteers, known as “Hostilities Only” ratings (HOs) and Reservists to the navy was not without problems.³⁷ Overall, approximately 74,000 men and boys joined the Royal Navy as HOs during the course of the war, which was a fairly substantial number in terms of naval recruitment.³⁸ However, this was a service where many joined at a young age and lived a good portion of their lives by long-standing naval customs. Consequently, relations were not necessarily easy between HOs and active-service ratings. In addition, James Daly has suggested that those from Reservist backgrounds were not always viewed as ‘proper sailors’.³⁹ This point is particularly important as pride in the service and its efficiency was a fundamental part of the sailor character and a key aspect of sailor culture, which at times could be equally as important as feelings towards the Empire. This was evidently an issue, and newspapers sought to allay public fears by portraying them as the embodiment of Jack Tar. For instance, one reporter noted that HOs were ‘wiry, hard-looking sailors... their Jack Tar garments quite at home on their forms’.⁴⁰ However, this did not hold much ground with sailors who instead thought they failed to match their own professional standards.⁴¹

Similarly, Lavery suggested that they did not mix well with other ratings and he argued there existed a distinct separation between them stating: ‘HO men... tended to be seated at the opposite end of the mess table from the regulars’.⁴² Furthermore, these men were sometimes

³⁵ RNM 2013/100/1: Diary of William Brooman; For the complete poem see Appendix 1.6.

³⁶ RNM1980/115: Diary of Edwin Fletcher

³⁷ Although this practice was more common in the Second World War, it was an important part of the wartime Royal Navy and is worthy of consideration here, especially their interaction with active-service ratings. Although Lavery has examined HOs during the Second World War there is yet to be a detailed study of volunteers for the Royal Navy during the First World War. See Brian Lavery, *Hostilities Only: Training the Wartime Royal Navy*, (London: National Maritime Museum, 2004). *The Times* commented on support from the Empire and that a group of Australian yachtsmen were turned down due to the Royal Navy having sufficient numbers; *The Times*, 9 October, 1914. However, William Gates who wrote for the *Evening News* (Portsmouth) and also compiled the official history of the town during the Great War had been critical in 1914 for the lack of men willing to enlist in the army. Beaven has commented on this in comparison to Gates’ later work but it is unclear whether Portsmouth men (Portsmouth being an area of typical recruitment) would have been more enthusiastic about joining the RN. See Beaven, *Visions*, p. 115.

³⁸ Lavery, *Able*, p. 204

³⁹ Daly, *Portsmouth's*, p. 75

⁴⁰ *Daily Mail*, 3 August 1914

⁴¹ That HOs did not adhere to the strict rules and traditions of the navy caused a number of issues but one sailor, Edward Pullen, also suggests that it allowed disreputable people into the service and noted that cases of theft increased with the introduction of HOs. IWM 692: Edward Pullen

⁴² Lavery, *Able*, p. 206

known by the derogatory term 'Cuthberts', which gives some indication of how they were regarded by the regulars.⁴³ Both Lavery and Carew note the use of this term, with some sailors believing that HOs were shirkers of more unpleasant duties.⁴⁴ Carew gives a particular insight into the impact of HOs on sailor life, citing a key reason for discord as being the 'structure of pay and pensions'.⁴⁵ It transpired that some HOs were paid higher wages than regulars and some 'were fortunate enough to be receiving full or half-pay from their civilian employer as well'.⁴⁶ Pay and service conditions had long been at the heart of lower-deck grievances and the fact that HOs were possibly earning more must have rankled.⁴⁷ Therefore, it is likely that a combination of factors including perceived better pay, not being career sailors, and lacking the ingrained loyalty to the service, ship and crew had an impact.

On the other hand, diaries make few direct references to any disharmony between active-service ratings and HOs. There are a number of possible reasons for this: firstly, as with politics, this was something that was not committed to paper (and possibly sensible in order to maintain secrecy aboard); secondly it may demonstrate how unimportant HOs were to regular ratings, that they did not consider them a worthy topic in their diaries; and thirdly that the diaries held in collections are from ships without large HO compliments. The latter is unlikely as following the declaration of war many ships' crews were compiled of a mixture of Royal Naval Reserve (RNR), Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve (RNVR) and Royal Fleet Reserve (RFR) men and boys under training, and many vessels came into contact with HOs.⁴⁸ One sailor who did comment was Walter Dennis, and he noted an increase in gun practice as the 'Royal Fleet Reserve men... of course require a certain amount of drill, firing etc. to bring them up to the efficient state they were in before joining the Fleet Reserve'.⁴⁹ This does not suggest any particular hostility to RFR men, rather he is accepting of their need to retrain. However, the following year he made this comment upon encountering HMS *Tiger* and HMS *Indomitable*:

Communications with these ships are to be made slow on account of their untrained signalmen... These are the two ships first seen last Saturday [and] have been the cause of much discussion on the Lower Deck.⁵⁰

Note here that Dennis is talking of "untrained" signalmen rather than Reservists who might simply have become a little rusty since they left active service. Exactly what the content of this "discussion" was did not get recorded by Dennis. However, Lavery noted that *Tiger* was a

⁴³ 'A name coined by "Poy", the cartoonist of the *Evening News* (Portsmouth), during World War I for the fit men of military age, especially in Government offices, who were not called for military service, or who positively avoided it. These civilians were depicted as frightened-looking rabbits'. *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase & Fable*, Fourteenth Edition, (London: Cassell, 1991 [first edition 1870]), p. 299

⁴⁴ Lavery, *Able*, p. 206; Carew, *Lower Deck*, p. 76

⁴⁵ Carew, *Lower Deck*, p. 72

⁴⁶ Carew, *Lower Deck*, p. 73

⁴⁷ For example see Letters to the Editor of *The Times* discussing pay; *The Times*, 28 December 1918; *The Times*, 31 December 1918.

⁴⁸ Lavery, *Able*, p. 188

⁴⁹ Diary of Walter Dennis

⁵⁰ Diary of Walter Dennis

hurriedly manned ship which also included a number of recovered deserters.⁵¹ The situation was evidently a problem and Admiral Beatty complained that for a ship with at least a quarter of men untrained, 'the same efficiency could not be expected from the *Tiger* as from the other ships'.⁵² Consequently, it is possible that other ships in the fleet were aware of this, hence the subtle remark by Dennis.

However, interactions between regulars and HOs was considered by Baynham and he noted a number of interesting accounts of the discord between regulars and HOs. In particular, he discussed the Royal Marine and Naval Brigade contingents serving on the Western Front.⁵³ Baynham suggested that by 'the later stages these groups were hardly distinguishable from the Army' and as such naval customs 'went for very little'.⁵⁴ This may have further contributed to poor relations as naval culture was eroded. *The Times* reported in 1916 that 'there is a world of difference between the trim order... kept within the narrow limits of a ship and the improvisation of affairs in the trenches'.⁵⁵ One of Baynham's informants, a Royal Marine, recalled, 'the lax discipline' and recounted a story of a stand-off between a lance corporal and a colour sergeant, the latter of whom jumped the queue in the mess believing it to be his prerogative.⁵⁶ The colour sergeant 'was told in no uncertain language to get back in the blankity queue or else he would get none'.⁵⁷

On the other hand, one HO Able Seaman, Trystram Edwards, suggested that despite the influx of volunteers, this was not the case aboard ship. Edwards believed that the navy was unlike the army in this respect where volunteers 'cleaved to its traditions'.⁵⁸ As a published memoir written by a public-school educated volunteer this should be treated with caution, however it is likely that aboard ship, where there were officers and men brought up in naval tradition, it was harder for HOs to dispense with established practices.⁵⁹ Complaints from sailors aboard larger warships, for example, hint at rigid rules remaining in place.⁶⁰ In addition, McKee recognized that feelings could go both ways and noted the views of one HO on joining a ship.⁶¹ This HO summarized the situation thus: 'a poor crowd of active-service ratings who, I'm afraid, turned me against naval life and I [was]... morally and physically disgusted with the majority of them'.⁶²

⁵¹ Lavery, *Able*, p. 198; See also Jim Crossley who discusses the poor training and shooting of *Tiger* and other ships at Dogger Bank. Jim Crossley, *Voices From Jutland: A Centenary Commemoration*, (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2016); pp. 54-55

⁵² Navy Records Society, *The Beatty Papers*, Vol 128; pp. 260-261 quoted in Lavery, *Able*, p. 198

⁵³ Interaction with soldiers will be considered separately below.

⁵⁴ Baynham, *Men*, p. 223

⁵⁵ *The Times*, 6 January 1916; Note this is discussing sailors visiting soldiers rather than naval divisions but demonstrates the differences between life at the front and at sea succinctly.

⁵⁶ Baynham, *Men*, p. 223

⁵⁷ Baynham, *Men*, p. 223

⁵⁸ A. Trystram Edwards, *Three Rows of Tape*, (London: William Heinemann, 1929), p. 4; See also Lavery, *Able*, pp. 206-207.

⁵⁹ Although Edwards suggests that even though the balance of HOs to regulars had shifted by the end of the war, this did not happen. Lavery, *Able*, p. 207

⁶⁰ RNM 1980/115: Diary of Edwin Fletcher; Baynham, *Men*, p. 217

⁶¹ McKee, *Sober Men*, p. 2

⁶² McKee, *Sober Men*, p. 2

These personnel challenges caused by the war also extended to relations between the different services as well. For example, one sailor noted that a sergeant in the marines had to resort to enforcing his will at rifle point after first being laughed at by some soldiers and then accused of 'skulking behind the armour of ships'.⁶³ This assertion was detrimental to the sailor's masculine character and a key part of their image. Inter-service relations will be considered in more detail below but even newspapers such as *The Times* were reporting that 'Tommy has the harder time of it', and therefore it is understandable that sailors might have had a difficult relationship with them.⁶⁴ Yet, by necessity the Great War caused a good deal of interaction between sailors and soldiers, as the navy often served as transport and support ships for the army.⁶⁵ In addition, sailors and soldiers shared a common bond, united against the enemy. Both had to endure the terrible strain of combat and it appears that, despite the jokes of wartime cartoons, sailors had a great deal of respect for their counterparts.⁶⁶ *The Times* quoted sailors as saying soldiers were 'splendid fellows' and that their skills were 'the admiration of the sailor'.⁶⁷ Furthermore, when they encountered each other cheers were usually exchanged by both sides. For instance, Fletcher noted cheering a troopship in the Irish Sea.⁶⁸

However, this did not remove the competitiveness and long-established inter-service rivalry existing between the two forces.⁶⁹ As Walter Dennis reveals, his shipmates were pleased with their 1-0 victory over the Westminster Battalion.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, sailors had some level of understanding for what soldiers were going through. This is demonstrated by acts of kindness when in close proximity to one another, suggesting that sailors were cognizant of the hardships faced by soldiers. For example, Jack Gearing noted of transporting soldiers for the Gallipoli landings:

We gave them our hammocks, made sure they ate well and gave them our rum. You see, we knew that where they were going would be like Hell on earth, so we gave them all the love we could, because they were going to need it.⁷¹

Dennis recorded a similar show of respect to soldiers whilst HMS *Vengeance* was ferrying men to France in the August 1914: 'I willingly gave up my hammock to him for the night as did nearly all our fellows to the Expeditionary Force'.⁷² On a more mundane level, Wood noted dryly: 'it's pouring with rain now; I pity the poor fellows on shore now'.⁷³ Similarly, Max Arthur has argued that some soldiers reciprocated the understanding and respect, for example he noted that they recognized the bravery of teenage midshipmen who manned the boats carrying

⁶³ Baynham, *Men*, p. 224; This has previously been discussed in Chapter Three but sailors were conscious of their image and the desire to prove themselves will be considered further below.

⁶⁴ *The Times*, 6 January 1916

⁶⁵ The diary of Walter Dennis gives a good description of being a troopship in the early months of the war.

⁶⁶ See for example 'The Blockader', *Sea Pie*, June 1917; Figure 3.

⁶⁷ *The Times*, 6 January 1916

⁶⁸ RNM 1980/115: Diary of Edwin Fletcher

⁶⁹ Again see Chapter Three where this issue is discussed in more detail.

⁷⁰ Diary of Walter Dennis

⁷¹ Able Seaman Jack Gearing quoted in Arthur, *True Glory*, p.17

⁷² Diary of Walter Dennis

⁷³ RNM 1984/467: Diary of Wood

them ashore at Gallipoli.⁷⁴ However, inter-service rivalry continued and the importance of upholding the image of the navy and not letting the side down is demonstrated by Dawson who recorded at Gallipoli: 'our troops had started well, and the supporters in Navy blue did not mean to fail them'.⁷⁵

Cordial relations were required, and to help sailors and soldiers get a better idea of what the other service was doing an exchange programme was instigated.⁷⁶ *The Times* reported a visit of '50 Navy men' to the trenches in 1916 and declared that their visit had given them 'a good survey of the work and difficulties of the soldier in the trenches'.⁷⁷ In addition, Baynham considered the diary of Stoker Petty Officer Edward Markquick who visited soldiers serving on the Western Front.⁷⁸ Baynham appeared to suggest that this was another means of relieving the monotony of life at Scapa Flow but conspicuously he made no comment on how this programme may have affected morale.⁷⁹ Markquick described being shown various aspects of daily life in the trenches under the care of two officers. He was given the chance to strafe the German lines with a Lewis gun, and went out to a listening trench in no-mans-land where the young officers he was with offered to take a German trench.⁸⁰ In particular, he described a wiring party:

it is dangerous work and rather exciting, although it is looked on, like all other phases of trench life, as a huge joke, some of the party going as far as crawling over to the enemy's line and stealing his wire.⁸¹

Baynham noted that Markquick recorded the visit so that he might tell his shipmates about it when he returned.⁸² However, he also noted that Markquick appeared not to have left any record of what he in fact told his friends when he returned or indeed their reaction.⁸³ Similarly, soldiers had the opportunity to visit ships in port and Fletcher recorded one such visit: 'a few Scottish soldiers came on board in the afternoon to have a look round'.⁸⁴ Whether any serious disagreements between sailors and soldiers took place on occasions such as this (as experienced by the marines and naval brigade on the Western Front) is unclear.⁸⁵

⁷⁴ Arthur, *True Glory*, pp. 5-6

⁷⁵ RNM 1980/82: Diary of W. Dawson

⁷⁶ See also *The Times*, 6 January 1916 for a report on one such visit.

⁷⁷ *The Times*, 6 January 1916

⁷⁸ MS JOD/63: Journal of E. C. Markquick quoted in Baynham, *Men*, pp. 219-223

⁷⁹ Baynham, *Men*, p. 219

⁸⁰ MS JOD/63: Journal of E. C. Markquick quoted in Baynham, *Men*, p. 220

⁸¹ MS JOD/63: Journal of E. C. Markquick quoted in Baynham, *Men*, p. 220

⁸² Baynham, *Men*, p. 219

⁸³ Baynham, *Men*, p. 223

⁸⁴ RNM 1980/115: Diary of Edwin Fletcher

⁸⁵ See testimony of Sergeant Frederick Brookes quoted in Baynham, *Men*, p. 224; Diaries do not suggest this and a cursory glance at the newspapers reveals nothing although it is unlikely that negative accounts would have been published by the press.

The reality of everyday life in the navy during war

The expected clash of British and German fleets, the anticipated "second Trafalgar", failed to materialize in the months immediately after war was declared.⁸⁶ Indeed the navy suffered several blows in the coming months: the defeat of a naval squadron at the Battle of Coronel in November 1914 and the German raids upon Yarmouth, Hartlepool and Scarborough which surprised and shocked the British public.⁸⁷ Despite a number of initial small engagements, the Grand Fleet was primarily consigned to Scapa Flow whilst the navy put into effect a blockade of German shipping. This did little to satisfy the British public, brought up on a diet of naval superiority, and sailors also eager to fight. Therefore, as mentioned above, the sailor's image as the masculine hero of the Empire was under threat. Given their public image developed before the war and the importance of this to their own pride and identity, this had the potential to cause serious problems.

Nevertheless, whilst lacking the glory, sailor's contributions were important and it has been recognized that enforcing the blockade of Germany whilst keeping the sea lanes open to British and allied shipping was a vital task which ensured the economic stranglehold upon Germany.⁸⁸ A vital part of the blockade was the stopping and searching of shipping on a routine basis. Walter Dennis served on the Channel blockade from September to November 1914 and his diary is reminiscent of Napoleonic blockades: intercepting ships, boarding them and putting prize crews aboard.⁸⁹ This could often prove to be a dangerous task, as Dennis explained: 'the duty on which we are at present engaged entails a lot of hard work, loss of rest and, in examining ships, a great deal of risk especially if the weather is at all bad'.⁹⁰ Stopping and boarding other vessels could happen numerous times a day. Dennis noted the lowering of boats '4 or 5 times between sunset and sunrise' and that it was particularly unpleasant for lookouts and gun crews who may have only just turned in as all hands were required to assist.⁹¹ Sailors never knew what to expect when they boarded ships and it was one of the constant dangers that they faced. On one occasion Dennis' ship intercepted a Dutch vessel carrying supplies and German reservists.⁹²

However, enforcing the blockade was not without its rewards. Fishing ships often gave up a portion of their catch to warships patrolling the Channel, and other ships' stores were acquired.⁹³ Such gratitude may have gone some way towards alleviating feelings of not doing their bit. For instance, Dennis recorded receiving a large catch from a French trawler which was 'gladly accepted, greatly appreciated'.⁹⁴ According to Dennis gifts such as this were usually paid

⁸⁶ Crossley, *Voices*, p. 140; Daly, *Portsmouth's*, p. 98; When the largescale engagement at Jutland did take place it was not the victory equal to Nelson's that the British people and sailors expected.

⁸⁷ The Battle of Coronel will be considered in more detail below; Crossley, *Voices*, pp. 47-48

⁸⁸ Crossley, *Voices*, p. 1

⁸⁹ Diary of Walter Dennis; See also the *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 5 August 1914 which proudly reported the first prize of the war captured. *The Western Times*, 7 August 1914; *Devon and Exeter Daily Gazette*, 27 August 1914 also reported captured enemy shipping, showing public interest in the taking of war prizes.

⁹⁰ Diary of Walter Dennis

⁹¹ Diary of Walter Dennis

⁹² Diary of Walter Dennis

⁹³ Joseph Bamber reported getting bacon, wine and other gifts; RNM 1998/43: Diary of Joseph Bamber

⁹⁴ Diary of Walter Dennis

for and sailors parted with 'money, tobacco etc.' to say thank you.⁹⁵ On the other hand, it is evident that these gifts were not always widely distributed aboard and this brought about its own issues. For instance, Dennis recorded on one such occasion that the fish was 'much liked, apparently, by those who got some'.⁹⁶ It transpired that the fish did not make it further than the officers' dining table.⁹⁷

Keeping ships adequately supplied with victuals was a problem for the Royal Navy, especially in those ships serving overseas. As Joseph Bamber aboard HMS *Canopus* recalled whilst in the Canary Islands: 'getting very short of food. Practically living on one meal a day'.⁹⁸ He also stated that there were problems in getting supplies from ashore 'as they wanted all for themselves', although he does not elaborate on who "they" were.⁹⁹ It is likely that he is echoing Dennis' views on officer prerogatives, but corruption amongst naval canteens was also rife and there were often difficulties within the canteen organization.¹⁰⁰ His irritation with the situation is further demonstrated in an entry where he recounts a visit by a stoker whom he knew to the ship's doctor:

A stoker seeing the doctor with pains internally is politely informed that he has overloaded his stomach. Taking [into] consideration the fact that there is no food in the ship excepting biscuits the diagnosis must have been made by an overloaded imagination.¹⁰¹

Making sure that men are fed and watered has always been a vital part of military life. Although in the early months of the war continuing enthusiasm no doubt helped keep the men in check, this was undoubtedly a source of grievance on the lower deck and led to the Admiralty taking over control of the canteens in 1917 in an attempt to centralize the way they were run and control the situation.¹⁰²

The sustained loss of everyday comforts was certain to lead to grumbling on the lower deck and as hardships took their toll, sailors were less likely to exhibit imperial sentiment and enthusiasm for the war.¹⁰³ Consequently, attempts were made to improve conditions and ensure that sailors were kept active.¹⁰⁴ One of the most serious obstacles was that the Grand Fleet was consigned to Scapa Flow for the duration of the war. As Michael W. Williams commented, 'Scapa Flow is a very remote location with little to occupy an off-watch sailor'.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁵ Diary of Walter Dennis

⁹⁶ Diary of Walter Dennis; Emphasis by the author.

⁹⁷ See also Chapter Three for further information on the differences between upper and lower decks; See McKee, *Sober Men*, pp. 47-64.

⁹⁸ RNM 1998/43: Diary of Joseph Bamber; Although those stationed at Scapa Flow and other ports had a regular supply of provisions. See Carew, *Lower Deck*, p. 76.

⁹⁹ RNM 1998/43: Diary of Joseph Bamber

¹⁰⁰ Carew, *Lower Deck*, p. 19

¹⁰¹ RNM 1998/43: Diary of Joseph Bamber

¹⁰² RNM 1980/115: Diary of Edwin Fletcher

¹⁰³ However, this does not mean that they became disloyal. See Chapter Three where the impact of hardships is discussed in some detail.

¹⁰⁴ For further information see Carew, *Lower Deck* as he provided an excellent study of activism on the lower deck at this time.

¹⁰⁵ Michael W. Williams, *A Brief History of the Royal Navy: Its People, Places and Pets*, (London: The London Press, 2006), p. 114

Similarly, Baynham noted sailors' remarks on the 'endless grey days at Scapa Flow'.¹⁰⁶ Shore leave was rare until later in the war and there was only one canteen ashore that served beer, and it closed at 8.30pm.¹⁰⁷ As Lavery noted, going ashore was 'hardly worth the bother'.¹⁰⁸ Although a relatively safe-haven for the Fleet, the danger posed by large numbers of bored and sometimes disillusioned sailors was not lost on the Admiralty. To put this into perspective, there were between 60,000 and 100,000 sailors stationed at Scapa Flow during the war.¹⁰⁹ Although Brown and Meehan have noted sailors found ways to cope with the monotony, it was a tedious time for all.¹¹⁰

Recognizing the potential threat, the Admiralty and officers realized more needed to be done to keep their men occupied, either at work or at play. In the first instance training exercises, which were already a key part of daily life in the navy, were increased during wartime.¹¹¹ This served the dual purpose of keeping sailors busy and also well-practised and ready for action. However, the success of these exercises is questionable and sailors suggest that on a technical level they were often hampered by bad weather and primitive technology, whilst the repeated training did little to reduce boredom and frustration. For instance, Fletcher recorded: 'Battle practise. This ship fired 56 rounds. 2 hits. It was a very bad day for firing'.¹¹² Similarly, J. E. Attrill recorded a typical day's practise and how they had to stop 'on account of the target being obscured through smoke'.¹¹³ Another activity that kept the men occupied was painting their ships, a recurring activity in lower-deck diaries.¹¹⁴ The importance of this has been highlighted by Michael W. Williams who argued that 'cleaning ship and painting ship were frequent duties – a matter of safety as well as time filling'.¹¹⁵ Due to the size of ships this could be a particularly onerous job, often lasting days or even weeks and becoming more tedious as the days progressed.¹¹⁶

However, it was not all work for sailors during the war. Although there was precious little for an off-duty sailor to do at Scapa Flow, entertainment in various forms was provided in an attempt to keep the men occupied. One way of entertaining the men was the provision of theatre ships, although treats such as this were limited.¹¹⁷ Nevertheless, they proved a welcome reprieve showing some of the latest films available. Fletcher certainly enjoyed them and recorded watching 'the famous film: "The Battle of the Somme". It was a most excellent film'.¹¹⁸ The film was indeed popular with a calculated 20m people seeing it in the first six

¹⁰⁶ Baynham, *Men*, p. 236

¹⁰⁷ Malcolm Brown and Patricia Meehan, *Scapa Flow*, (London: Allen Lane, 1968); p. 59; See also RNM 1980/115: Diary of Edwin Fletcher who shows an increase in shore leave after 1917.

¹⁰⁸ Lavery, *Able*, p. 191

¹⁰⁹ Daly, *Portsmouth's*, p. 27

¹¹⁰ Brown and Meehan, *Scapa Flow*, p. 59

¹¹¹ Lavery, *Able*, p. 214

¹¹² RNM 1980/115: Diary of Edwin Fletcher; Emphasis by the author.

¹¹³ Lavery, *Able*, p. 214; IWM 87/20/1: Papers of J. E. Attrill; RNM 1980/115: Diary of Edwin Fletcher

¹¹⁴ During Fletcher's war-time diaries he records painting the ship every few weeks.

¹¹⁵ Williams, *Brief History*, p. 115; See also Simon Smith "'Painting for Empire": sailors and ship-board banalities', Port Towns and Urban Cultures, 2013 <http://porttowns.port.ac.uk/painting4empire/> retrieved 21 January 2017.

¹¹⁶ Smith, "'Painting'"

¹¹⁷ Baynham, *Men*, p. 217; *Hampshire Telegraph*, 18 February 1916; There was a tragic occurrence when one ship, HMS *Natal*, blew up in the Cromarty Firth during a film showing killing a party of civilians who had been invited aboard.

¹¹⁸ RNM 1980/115: Diary of Edwin Fletcher

weeks and *The Times* stated that audiences: 'were interested and thrilled to have the realities of war brought so vividly before them'.¹¹⁹ However, films such as this served several purposes. On the one hand they provided a welcome escape for the audience; they also gave sailors a better understanding of what was happening in the other service. Yet, as Nicholas Reeves has argued, in reality they were propaganda pieces, commissioned and shot by official propaganda departments, designed to show the 'authentic' story of the war and to promote enthusiasm for the war and foster feelings of pride.¹²⁰

Similarly, concert parties were a further way to relieve the monotony of life at sea.¹²¹ When ships were grouped together it was common to give concerts for other ships. Likewise on quiet days at sea sailors were also able to have short informal concerts to give them a break from their work. Walter Dennis recorded one such occasion:

an impromptu concert was arranged and with the assistance of ship's band, Ward Room officers' gramophone, banjos, mandolins, and a few songs from the ship's company an enjoyable half hour was passed.¹²²

Other opportunities were readily taken advantage of, such as a concert given ashore at Calloa by the British residents and provided a chance for them to show their support to the navy and the sailors. For instance, Stoker J. W. Payne of HMS *Kent* recorded that they 'sent two pints of beer a man aboard' which was met with enthusiasm.¹²³ Opportunities such as this allowed the display of patriotism on behalf of the locals, and allowed sailors to share in this whilst providing enjoyment and a sense of appreciation for what they were doing.¹²⁴

Nevertheless, as the war dragged on and wartime conditions continued, the level of sailor "grumbles" increased, especially by 1917. Although this mirrors sentiment in British society generally and within the Army, there are a number of factors which played heavily on sailors' minds. In particular, Carew has suggested that 'war-weariness began to set in' after the Battle of Jutland.¹²⁵ Certainly the scale of British losses and the poor handling by the press did little to capitalize on the battle and it lay heavy on sailors and the British public.¹²⁶ Jutland resulted in the greatest number of deaths of any naval engagement during the war with 6,094 British and Empire sailors killed.¹²⁷ The loss of life and loss of ships, even in peacetime, was capable of casting a pall over the navy and thus Jutland was to have a sustained effect upon many sailors. More importantly, the debate over who won did not help matters and this was compounded by the press. Although the outcome is still a divisive issue, the failure of the

¹¹⁹ Nicholas Reeves, *The Power of Film Propaganda: Myth or Reality*, (London: Continuum, 2003); p. 27; *The Times*, 22 August 1916

¹²⁰ Reeves, *Power*, pp. 22-23

¹²¹ Able Seaman Arthur Sawyer quoted in Arthur, *True Glory*, p. 80

¹²² Diary of Walter Dennis

¹²³ RNM 1982/189/82: Diary of J. W. Payne

¹²⁴ Although sailors did not always enjoy being made a fuss of in large pageantry events, they enjoyed a good welcome that showed appreciation. This theme will be considered further in Chapter Five. See also Sidney Knock, *Clear Lower Deck: An intimate study of the men of the Royal Navy*, (London: Philip Allan & Co, 1932); p. 131.

¹²⁵ Carew, *Lower Deck*, p. 72

¹²⁶ Daly, *Portsmouth's*, p. 105

¹²⁷ Daly, *Portsmouth's*, p. 105

Germans to break out of the North Sea is commonly seen as at least a 'strategic victory' for Britain.¹²⁸ However, as Daly has suggested, 'public opinion and the traditions of the Royal Navy, somewhat unfairly, demanded more than a tactical victory'.¹²⁹ Consequently, Jutland was a serious challenge to sailor culture.

However, whilst correct in asserting that Jutland contributed to feelings of war-weariness, Carew's approach was limited to focusing upon the economic factors influencing sailors at this time. Yet, there were other important factors at work and Carew overlooks the importance of the human element and impact upon sailors. For instance, Edwin Fletcher recorded: 'getting "sad" aboard this "hook pot" now'.¹³⁰ Fletcher also became far more home-centred during the war, something which Anthony Fletcher and Nancy Martin have argued happened to many servicemen as it helped them cope with their experiences.¹³¹ Fletcher was a married seaman with a young daughter, and his diaries reflect the hardships of long periods of separation.¹³² He dutifully recorded their birthdays, his wedding anniversaries, and his language suggests that he was unhappy he was not able to be there to enjoy the day with them.¹³³ Furthermore, whenever he did go home on leave his diary became much more energetic than his usual day to day recordings.¹³⁴ On more than one occasion he recorded seeing the captain to request leave.¹³⁵ Like many other sailors, by 1917 Fletcher was making use of the special trains laid on to transport men from Thurso to Portsmouth.¹³⁶ Nevertheless, Fletcher did not openly criticize the service or Britain's role in the conflict, nor did he enter into a discussion of the financial hardships that Carew argued were the primary grievances at this time.

As well as leave, sporting activities provided a cost-effective diversion for sailors and sport was viewed as excellent for morale.¹³⁷ Tony Mason and Eliza Riedi have considered the benefit of sport during the war and argued that the outcome of the Battle of Jutland had a significant effect upon this, and as a consequence Admiral Jellicoe 'encouraged the development of sports facilities' at Scapa Flow after Jutland.¹³⁸ Thus whilst at Scapa Flow, Edward Fletcher recorded plenty of opportunity for events to be organized between ships. Boxing and football were popular favourites and by 1917 the men would often be permitted to go ashore for games.

¹²⁸ Daly, *Portsmouth's*, p. 110

¹²⁹ Daly, *Portsmouth's*, p. 110

¹³⁰ RNM 1980/115: Diary of Edwin Fletcher; The expression "hook pot" is unclear but he may have been referring to a pot hook, a hook which hangs a pot over a stove, and therefore meaning that life aboard ship was unpleasant.

¹³¹ This is similar to experiences of sailors in the naval brigade during the Boer War considered in Chapter Three. Sailor's minds often turned to home life and what they would do when they eventually got home. Anthony Fletcher, *Life, Death and Growing Up on the Western Front*, (New Haven CT: Yale University Press: 2014); Nancy Martin, "And all because it is war!": First World War diaries, authenticity and combatant identity', *Textual Practice*, 29, 7, pp. 1245-1263; p. 1247

¹³² He is a sailor considered by this thesis who regularly mentions that he has a wife. This was a period when seamen's marital status was finally recognized and reflected in the Separation Allowance. For more information see Lavery, *Able*, p. 197.

¹³³ For example see RNM 1980/115: Diary of Edwin Fletcher.

¹³⁴ RNM 1980/115: Diary of Edwin Fletcher

¹³⁵ RNM 1980/115: Diary of Edwin Fletcher

¹³⁶ This service was created as enthusiasm for war reached an all-time low and the amount of leave granted increased significantly. Daly, *Portsmouth's*, p. 27; R.C. Riley, "Railways and Portsmouth Society, 1847-1947", *The Portsmouth Papers*, 70, (2000), p. 16; Lavery, *Able*, p. 197

¹³⁷ Lavery, *Able*, p. 279; Sport was already a key part of naval life in the peacetime fleet and the benefits were widely recognized.

¹³⁸ Tony Mason and Eliza Riedi, *Sport and the Military: The British Armed Forces 1880-1960*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); p. 91

Fletcher's diaries suggests that this was especially common after several days of naval exercises or painting the ship and was eagerly welcomed.¹³⁹ However, Baynham suggested the amenities did not sufficiently improve. He recorded Able Seaman William Hales who said: 'they tried to make a football pitch but it was all bog land. We used to put in for leave ashore – "Fossil Hunting"!'.¹⁴⁰ Nevertheless, Hales' account suggests a level of humour. Pulling was also popular and organized regattas continued during the war years.¹⁴¹ For instance, the *Hampshire Telegraph* reported that 'raft races between the various crews were frequent'.¹⁴² In particular, Fletcher thought these events 'good sport' and on 4th August 1916 recorded, 'bit of a sea on but otherwise a lovely day for the job'.¹⁴³ However, alongside this he noted it was two years to the day since the start of the conflict.¹⁴⁴ Whether the regatta was held purposefully on that date to detract from any disillusionment with the war is unclear but sailors were not ignorant of how long the war was lasting.

Sailors at war: killing, dying and enthusiasm for war

As Joanna Bourke argued in her landmark study, 'the characteristic act of men at war is not dying, it is killing'.¹⁴⁵ Although this is perhaps not the immediate image of the Royal Navy during the First World War, more recently Michael Williams has remarked that a ship was meant to 'fight'.¹⁴⁶ Although the much anticipated "second Trafalgar" did not materialize, there were several notable clashes between the British and German navies.¹⁴⁷ This chapter has previously argued that there was enthusiasm on the outbreak of the war, and in his study of Portsmouth during the Great War, James Daly has argued that sailors 'keenly awaited battle'.¹⁴⁸ Furthermore, sailor diaries demonstrate that they were aware of detriment to their image and thus they were concerned with "doing their bit", and also being seen to have done so. For instance, sailors often commented on the time they spent waiting for action, with statements such as: 'business as usual', 'nothing doing' and hoping for 'the long awaited scrap'.¹⁴⁹ This is suggestive both of how they thought they were viewed by the public and their own view of their image. For instance, a cartoon in *Sea Pie* entitled 'The Blockader' demonstrates the possible animosity that could exist between soldiers and sailors, who were afraid they looked to be having an easier war.¹⁵⁰ In this cartoon the sailor says to the smirking soldier: 'Orl right,

¹³⁹ RNM 1980/115: Diary of Edwin Fletcher

¹⁴⁰ Baynham, *Men*, p. 217

¹⁴¹ In the navy rowing is known as "pulling".

¹⁴² *Hampshire Telegraph*, 18 February 1916

¹⁴³ RNM 1980/115: Diary of Edwin Fletcher

¹⁴⁴ RNM 1980/115: Diary of Edwin Fletcher

¹⁴⁵ Joanna Bourke, *An intimate history of killing: face to face killing in twentieth-century warfare*, (London: Granta Books, 1999); p. 1

¹⁴⁶ Williams, *Brief History*, p. 120

¹⁴⁷ The belief in the early months of the war that a "second Trafalgar" would lead to a decisive victory at sea over the German fleet is not only clearly evident in contemporary British popular opinion but also within the ranks of the navy as well. See for example an article on the anniversary of Trafalgar Day in the *Daily Express*, 22 October 1914; Daly, *Portsmouth's*, p. 23.

¹⁴⁸ Daly, *Portsmouth's*, p. 97

¹⁴⁹ RNM 1980/115: Diary of Edwin Fletcher; RNM 1984/467: Diary of Wood; RNM 1980/82: Diary of W. Dawson; Diary of Walter Dennis

¹⁵⁰ *Sea Pie* was created to raise funds for naval charities. See holdings at National Library of Scotland <http://digital.nls.uk/blighty-and-sea-pie/pageturner.cfm?id=75253031> retrieved 21 January 2017. See Figure 3.

Cocky, if you do get most of the scrapping, you needn't swank'.¹⁵¹ This also extended to other

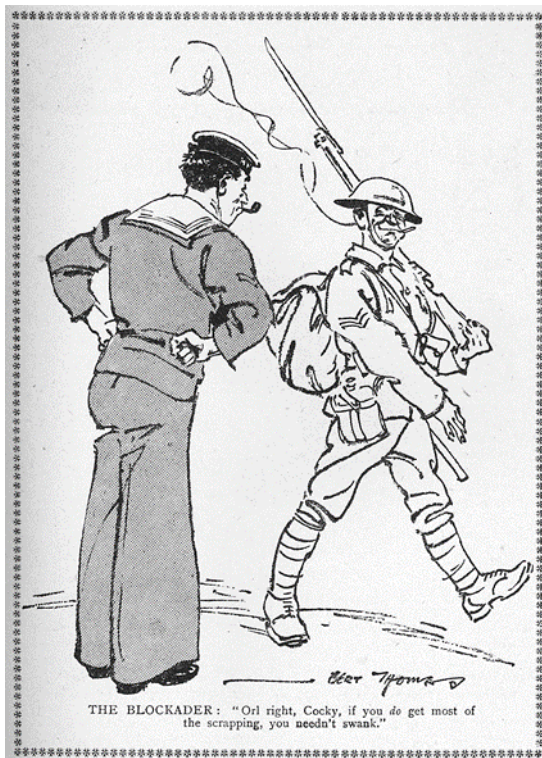


Figure 3 'The Blockader', *Sea Pie*, June 1917 (National Library of Scotland)

ships and rivalry between warships that had been seen to have done their bit was common. For instance, at the Dardanelles, after seeing HMS *Triumph* heavily engaged, Dawson wrote: 'perhaps the *Triumph* can swank now'.¹⁵² Similarly, Abbott was clearly jealous that a friend aboard HMS *Archeron* had seen multiple actions: 'The *Archeron* has been in nearly every fight at sea since the war broke out including the "Blucher" action'.¹⁵³

In addition, because of the global role of the Royal Navy, ships were often at remote locations around the globe and, as *The Times* noted all too clearly, out of sight was out of mind.¹⁵⁴ For example, after patrolling home waters for almost three months HMS *Vengeance* was sent to West Africa and St Vincent. Aboard HMS *Vengeance* Dennis recorded:

life is getting very dull and monotonous here now. Everyone, almost, hoping that we were elsewhere where there is something doing. The only consolation being that we are going where we're sent and that we've done our bit although, to us, it doesn't look much.¹⁵⁵

Although Dennis cannot speak for all the crew, and in fact this extract alludes to some sailors being happy to be out of danger, his account suggests that sailors were concerned about how they would be viewed at home because of the relative safety of certain foreign stations. As Daly has rightly argued, the British public 'had been brought up on a diet of British naval supremacy' and consequently their 'expectations were sky high'.¹⁵⁶ However, it also suggests that sailors were eager to be where the action was, not simply because of the tedium of war-time duties but because they wanted to fight and were concerned how they would be viewed by others. For instance, William T. Abbott wrote:

all there was to record day after day was that we had been ploughing up salt water in the Channel... and if any other person had chanced to see what was

¹⁵¹ 'The Blockader', *Sea Pie*, June 1917

¹⁵² RNM 1980/82: Diary of W. Dawson

¹⁵³ RNM 2004/103/5: Diary of William Thomas Abbott

¹⁵⁴ *The Times*, 6 August 1914

¹⁵⁵ Diary of Walter Dennis; Emphasis by the author.

¹⁵⁶ Daly, *Portsmouth's*, p. 97

written would have exclaimed – is that all you have done? I thought you went out to fight Germans!!¹⁵⁷

The sample of diarists considered by this thesis has not located any sailors who expressed overt happiness to be away from the fighting, although some may well have felt this in private. As demonstrated above and noted elsewhere in this thesis, sailors would have been aware that their diaries may well have been read and thus anti-war sentiment or distinct expression of feelings against the perceived popular mood are unlikely. Nevertheless, Abbott suggests that despite the dangers, sailors were eager to volunteer for tasks that gave them an opportunity to see action. He noted there was a call for men to join the minesweepers and wrote: 'A risky job perhaps... however volunteers are not lacking'.¹⁵⁸ He confessed to being: 'a wee bit disappointed' when his application was rejected.¹⁵⁹ This is comparable to the desire of sailors to volunteer for action in the naval brigades, especially during the Boer War.¹⁶⁰

However, Thomas Hinshaw of HMS *Canopus*, suggests that a level of realism existed and that sailors were afraid, especially when the odds were stacked against them; eagerness to fight did not overcome knowledge of certain defeat. For instance, upon hearing the news of the loss of HMS *Monmouth* and HMS *Good Hope* at Coronel, Hinshaw recorded:

Glasgow signal sad news, "Turn back with all speed – enemy too much for us 'Good Hope' going & 'Monmouth' in bad way. I am retiring at 25 knots. Our Skipper still carries on, but other officers request him to turn back as we will suffer the same as the poor Good Hope and Monmouth. ¹⁶¹

As *Canopus* made her escape and for safety adopted radio silence, the crew were on edge for a number of days: 'We are all weary getting very little sleep. Never had our clothes off since Sunday morning'.¹⁶² As they approached the Straits of Magellan, which Hinshaw had found rather scenic on the outward voyage, he noted: 'The scenery holds nothing for us this voyage'.¹⁶³ Nevertheless, although Hinshaw was aware that *Canopus* was no match for the German ships in the area, when they were ordered to return to the Falklands to protect them, he accepted it was their duty and noted: 'Its got to be done'.¹⁶⁴ Similarly, Joseph Bamber (also aboard *Canopus*), wrote: 'The inhabitants of FI [Falkland Islands] are all British people'.¹⁶⁵ This episode suggests a human element to the stereotype of the British sailor whereby they were loyal to the Empire and steadfastly obeyed orders because it was their duty whilst at the same time being scared of what they would have to do.

¹⁵⁷ RNM 2004/103/5: Diary of William Thomas Abbott

¹⁵⁸ RNM 2004/103/5: Diary of William Thomas Abbott

¹⁵⁹ RNM 2004/103/5: Diary of William Thomas Abbott

¹⁶⁰ See Chapter Three for further information about volunteering for the naval brigades.

¹⁶¹ RNM 2014/31: Diary of Thomas J. Hinshaw

¹⁶² RNM 2014/31: Diary of Thomas J. Hinshaw

¹⁶³ RNM 2014/31: Diary of Thomas J. Hinshaw

¹⁶⁴ RNM 2014/31: Diary of Thomas J. Hinshaw

¹⁶⁵ RNM 1998/43: Joseph Bamber

Nevertheless, as previously noted, a level of bellicosity amongst sailors was not uncommon. For instance, there is an air of excitement in Dennis' tone when he recorded his ship was finally ordered eastwards in February 1915. He recorded: 'the hands were mustered on deck and informed that we were bound for the East (the Dardanelles I think)... and that we must expect, from now, hardships, hard work, and plenty of courage. This message was received by a display of lively satisfaction'.¹⁶⁶ This belligerent attitude continued during the campaign and he grumbled at the bad weather disrupting plans for a bombardment at the Dardanelles: 'the operations were again postponed, much to our annoyance'.¹⁶⁷ Similarly, Abbott also found himself being ordered to the Dardanelles, noting: 'to the delight of the whole ships company [the Dardanelles] is the place we are bound'.¹⁶⁸ He followed this with: 'Mild excitement prevails on board. At last we are going to fire an angry shot'.¹⁶⁹

In addition, diaries give no indication that sailors doubted their or the Royal Navy's ability to face the Germans and defeat them.¹⁷⁰ For example, Wood put to sea the day after war was declared and by 10.30am recorded that they had sighted an enemy vessel, 'chased her [and] fired on her [and] she went down'.¹⁷¹ A few weeks later he recorded another encounter with enemy destroyers commenting that 'their shooting was very bad... [and] they soon showed her the way to shoot and very soon put her to the bottom'.¹⁷² Likewise, Abbott eagerly recounted the engagement with SMS *Blucher* told to him by a friend who had witnessed it. The story went that German survivors 'said our shellfire was so terrific that they preferred death by drowning than the terrible effect of Lyddite shell'.¹⁷³ Furthermore, Abbott recorded: 'All the British Fleet returned... and a few hours afterwards every ship was ready to answer the Country's call'.¹⁷⁴ Both accounts demonstrate pride in their ship and the navy's ability.¹⁷⁵ British sailors' sense of superiority ran deep and another sailor, C. P. Blunt, who served at Jutland was shocked by seeing men scrambling up the sinking ships. He noted it had not occurred to them that they would lose ships and recalled thinking: 'this is all wrong'.¹⁷⁶

Viewed alongside the constructed image of the sailor and the Royal Navy within British society, it is clear that underlying pride and belief in the superiority of the Royal Navy was very much a part of sailors' identity; it was at the bedrock of the sailor's culture and one that could take precedence over their feelings regarding the Empire. However, sailors often demonstrated pride in themselves, other crew members, their ship and the service. For instance, Signalman W. Dawson revealed that there was a level of competitiveness between ships' crews in their ability

¹⁶⁶ Diary of Walter Dennis; This also suggests that he has some understanding of the different spheres of the conflict and is expecting that they will be sent to the Dardanelles; Emphasis by the author.

¹⁶⁷ Diary of Walter Dennis

¹⁶⁸ RNM 2004/103/5: Diary of William Thomas Abbott

¹⁶⁹ RNM 2004/103/5: Diary of William Thomas Abbott

¹⁷⁰ Although after the defeat at Coronel sailors agreed with official observations that the fleet under Craddock had been thoroughly outmatched. RNM 2004/103.5: Diary of William Thomas Abbott; Daly, *Portsmouth's*, p. 23

¹⁷¹ RNM 1984/467: Diary of Wood

¹⁷² RNM 1984/467: Diary of Wood

¹⁷³ RNM 2004/103/5: Diary of William Thomas Abbott

¹⁷⁴ RNM 2004/103/5: Diary of William Thomas Abbott

¹⁷⁵ This point has also been made in Chapter Two but see also Crossley, *Voices*, p. 83.

¹⁷⁶ IWM 10722: Charles Percival Blunt

to hit their target and inflict maximum damage: 'each ship seemed to be vying with the next as to who should fire the most rounds'.¹⁷⁷ Likewise Abbott's diary repeatedly notes a desire to record his own ship's achievements rather than those of other vessels. He wrote candidly: 'When I started to write my log it was not my intention to record what other ships were doing, it was what the Lord Nelson had done'.¹⁷⁸ Similarly, Dennis wrote: 'I hope & trust that before its conclusion, we, in the "Vengeance", will have performed our duty during the war with credit to the navy and distinction to ourselves'.¹⁷⁹ When battle had come and sailors reflected on their engagements they were able to take pride in what they had done for themselves, for the service and for the Empire as Hinshaw demonstrated: 'Admiral Sturdee came on board to congratulate us for our work & said it would be long remembered by the Empire'.¹⁸⁰

Therefore, given the excitement and eagerness displayed by a number of sailors to take part in the action, it is prudent to question whether this excitement equated to enjoyment of killing. Again, to draw a comparison to the Army, the relationship between soldiers and killing has been well discussed by historians such as Joanna Bourke, Niall Ferguson, and Edgar Jones.¹⁸¹ They have argued that killing became a pleasurable experience; as Jones explained: 'letters, diaries and memoirs written by soldiers lie at the heart of the case for an excitement of killing'.¹⁸² Similarly, Ferguson has examined the letters of an officer, Julian Grenfell, who stated: 'I adore war. It is like a big picnic without the objectlessness of a picnic. I've never been so well or so happy'.¹⁸³ Ferguson argued that these feelings were 'widespread' and adduced a variety of sources from all ranks to support this.¹⁸⁴

On the one hand, if killing was exciting for soldiers then it is arguable that this should not be a unique experience, and sailors may have experienced similar feelings. Although this transplants one argument simply from soldiers to sailors, they were also serving their country and the Empire's interests, and in addition a great number of whom were career sailors who had grown up with the navy's cultural-imperial image. On the other hand, the experience of most sailors was markedly different.¹⁸⁵ Sailors were removed from intimacy with their enemy, sometimes by a large expanse of water, and it was those in control of the guns who were ultimately responsible for firing at enemy targets. Nevertheless, Bourke has highlighted the importance of men's pride in killing their enemy and this chapter has previously noted sailors' feelings of pride in defeating their enemy.¹⁸⁶ Again, diaries provide an interesting insight into the sailor's mind. For instance, in the Dardanelles on board HMS *Ark Royal* (an aircraft carrier and

¹⁷⁷ RNM 1980/82: Diary of W. Dawson; This is also seen in sports contests.

¹⁷⁸ RNM 2004/103/5: Diary of William Thomas Abbott

¹⁷⁹ Diary of Walter Dennis

¹⁸⁰ RNM 2014/31: Diary of Thomas J. Hinshaw

¹⁸¹ See Bourke, *Intimate*; Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, (London: Penguin, 1999); Edgar Jones, 'The Psychology of Killing: The Combat Experience of British Soldiers during the First World War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 41, 2, 2006; pp. 229-246.

¹⁸² Jones, 'Psychology', p. 233

¹⁸³ Ferguson, *Pity*, p. 360; Samuel Hynes, *Soldier's Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War*, (London: Penguin, 1998); p. 39; Jones, 'Psychology', p. 233

¹⁸⁴ Ferguson, *Pity*, pp. 360-361

¹⁸⁵ Excepting in particular the naval brigade that served on the Western Front.

¹⁸⁶ Bourke, *Intimate*, p. 35

consequently not a ship conducting the bombardment), Wood was obviously interested in the attack on the Turkish forts. As the fleet repeatedly shelled the forts he noted it was 'very amusing to see the Turks nipping out of the way' and described it as 'very exciting'.¹⁸⁷ Meanwhile, in the same campaign, but actually in the line of fire aboard HMS *Vengeance*, Dennis recorded that the bombardment was a 'most appalling and magnificent spectacle'.¹⁸⁸ Similarly, Abbott gave a particularly vivid account of his part in the bombardment:

2nd shot followed quickly and penetrated the hole made by the first shot and carried through the village with the speed of an express train & by the clouds of dust raised one would have imagined the whole village had collapsed... What became of the Turks I can only guess but I don't think there was enough left to make a decent sandwich.¹⁸⁹

Henry Welch, on the other hand, gave a franker view of being part of a battle at sea. He was present at the Battle of the Falkland Islands and wrote the following:

It is hard to describe my feelings at this time. Thoughts of danger found no room, owing to the exciting interest of it all. No one, I think, seemed to give danger a thought. Every man and boy looked like a lot of schoolboys going away for an outing...¹⁹⁰

Welch's account could be straight from the pages of the *Boys Own Paper*, painting an image of brave, excited sailors who were unperturbed by the dangers of battle. Similarly, W. Dawson thought himself and others 'fortunate' to be in battle.¹⁹¹ Likewise, Abbott demonstrated a keen sense of imperialistic fervour in his diary following the death of a young sailor ashore at Gallipoli, noting that the Captain said: 'there could not be a more noble end to a British seaman than to be killed in "Action" fighting for his Country and to be buried at sea. I agree with him'.¹⁹² Furthermore, the press sought to reaffirm the sailor stereotype during battle and a sailor quoted by *The Times* stated: 'for about five hours we were at it hammer and tongs', recalling that the 'noise of the firing must have been tremendous, but I don't remember that I noticed it particularly at the time. I suppose I was too much engrossed in fighting my own gun'.¹⁹³ Although the press' agenda was to support the war effort, diaries suggest that certainly a number of sailors did find the experience of battle exciting. Jones concurs with Bourke and Ferguson on this point regarding the 'highs of battle' and likened it to what would today be called 'an "adrenalin rush"'.¹⁹⁴ Of these accounts, although excitement at being in battle is clearly evident, only Abbott made specific reference to the enemy being killed. This is delivered in a light-hearted manner, downplaying the act of death with humour and suggests a

¹⁸⁷ RNM 1984/467: Diary of Wood

¹⁸⁸ Diary of Walter Dennis

¹⁸⁹ RNM 2004/103/5: Diary of William Thomas Abbott

¹⁹⁰ DOC: Diary of Henry Welch

¹⁹¹ RNM 1980/82 Diary of W. Dawson

¹⁹² RNM 2004/103/5: Diary of William Thomas Abbott

¹⁹³ *The Times*, 5 June 1916

¹⁹⁴ Jones, 'Psychology', p. 243

subconscious act of distancing himself from the enemy. Many sailors did not describe killing in detail because for the majority of any action they were below deck, unable to see, and instead talked in terms of hits scored and damage done as a gun team rather than individual observations.

Yet the regular collection of souvenirs or curios suggests that sailors embraced the realities of battle. This practice was very common amongst soldiers and Simon Harrison has noted that 'petty looting' occurred regularly despite being illegal.¹⁹⁵ In particular, Harrison has opined that the taking of trophies was usual in societies where hunting was recognized as normal.¹⁹⁶ Souvenirs could range from commonplace items to far more grisly collections amongst soldiers, and Harrison has paid special attention to the taking of human remains, arguing that there was a spectrum of curios from expended bullets at one end to human remains at the other with a nebulous middle section of everything else.¹⁹⁷ The practice of collecting curios can be seen as an important part of life during war, and they formed a visible expression of the war and a tangible memory of the experience. As such, Bourke suggested that they helped to bolster the stories of returning combatants.¹⁹⁸ Harrison agreed with this hypothesis but added that the majority of souvenirs were in fact bartered with other soldiers for alcohol and other supplies behind the lines.¹⁹⁹

However, sailors are an interesting case as they had limited access to battle grounds and the ability to collect curios. On the other hand, they were a group of people who during peacetime eagerly acquired curios and mementos from their trips abroad.²⁰⁰ Thus there existed a certain level of normality in the practice of collecting tangible reminders of their experiences. No separate study has been specifically carried out regarding sailors and the collection of war-time souvenirs but sailor diaries reveal that the practice did occur in the Royal Navy. The taking of curios is mentioned very casually, with no shame attached, and this is reinforced by newspapers reporting on the practice.²⁰¹ For instance, Dennis recorded seeing sailors at Gallipoli returning aboard 'having plenty of curios from ashore consisting mainly of Turkish rifles, German ammunition etc. etc.'²⁰²

Sailors' souvenirs more commonly took the form described by Wood, who noted the collection of shell fragments from a bomb dropped on his ship by a German pilot: 'pieces of the bomb were picked up everywhere on the ship. I have one piece for a curio'.²⁰³ Other sailors support this, for instance Abbott wrote: 'immediately... all hands were stumbling over one another to

¹⁹⁵ Simon Harrison, 'War mementos and the souls of missing soldiers: returning effects of the battlefield dead', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 14, 2008; pp. 774–790, p. 775

¹⁹⁶ Simon Harrison, 'Skull Trophies of the Pacific War: transgressive objects of remembrance', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 12, 2006; pp. 817–836, p. 819

¹⁹⁷ Harrison, 'War', p. 775

¹⁹⁸ Bourke, *Intimate*, p. 34

¹⁹⁹ Harrison, 'War', p. 778

²⁰⁰ This habit is commonly discussed in their diaries.

²⁰¹ *Hampshire Telegraph*, 16 June 1916

²⁰² Diary of Walter Dennis

²⁰³ RNM 1984/467: Diary of Wood

pick up some souvenirs... anything that looked like a piece of a projectile was eagerly claimed.²⁰⁴ In addition, an article in *The Times* further reveals that sailors who visited the trenches were apparently amazed to see so much scrap metal lying about until it was mentioned that it was simply too dangerous to go out and collect it.²⁰⁵ Therefore, it is argued that sailors embraced the practice and supports the findings of Bourke and Harrison, although the type of objects open to sailors were more limited and did not exist on the same dehumanized scale that has been noted to occur in the trenches. As with peacetime curios, they provided a tangible memory capable of being taken home on leave and shown to friends and families as Bourke has suggested.²⁰⁶ However, at the same time sailors were seeking reminders of their experiences and therefore demonstrate a level of acceptance of what they were doing and the realities of war.

Nevertheless, despite the excitement recorded by sailors and a level of acceptance of the brutality of war, sailors were not desensitized to the horrors nor removed from the trauma associated with engaging the enemy. By the end of the First World War, 38,515 naval men had been killed.²⁰⁷ This was a significant number by naval reckoning, and in particular the close relationship between port towns and naval establishments meant that many had friends or families who had been in action.²⁰⁸ Although a number of sailors remained enthusiastic about their experiences in battle during the war years, similarly to soldiers, men found the experience horrifying and terrifying. Their descriptions of the awful scenes they witnessed stands contrary to the Victorian stereotype of masculinity which was embedded in the British culture prior to the Great War.²⁰⁹ For example, Edwin Fletcher's diary entry following the Battle of Jutland recorded that: 'the noise was terrific, the flashes from the guns were awful'.²¹⁰ Another sailor, W. Dawson stated: 'All the horrors of warfare seemed to be blended together in one common inferno'.²¹¹ He concluded by saying 'the slaughter was appalling [and] sickening'.²¹² Although lacking wider analysis, the testimony collated by Max Arthur also suggests that sailors were affected by traumatic experiences. For example, Arthur quotes a sailor named Jack Gearing, who was at Gallipoli, and recorded a British aircraft ditching in the sea: 'we put the boats out, reached her before she sank and kept her up, but when we got the pilot and observer out, they were both dead. That upset us. They had been too long in the water'.²¹³ Similarly, testimony collected by Baynham suggests that the deaths of German sailors could equally affect British sailors. He noted one sailor who remarked upon seeing German sailors: 'floating in the water

²⁰⁴ RNM 2004/103/5: Diary of William Thomas Abbott; *Hampshire Telegraph*, 16 June 1916

²⁰⁵ *The Times*, 6 January 1916

²⁰⁶ Bourke, *Intimate*, p. 34

²⁰⁷ Daly, *Portsmouth's*, p. 28

²⁰⁸ Daly, *Portsmouth's*, p. 28

²⁰⁹ For an analysis of the sailor and masculinity together with British culture see Mary A. Conley, *From Jack Tar to Union Jack: Representing naval manhood in the British Empire, 1870-1918*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009).

²¹⁰ RNM 1980/115: Diary of Edwin Fletcher

²¹¹ RNM 1980/82: Diary of W. Dawson

²¹² RNM 1980/82: Diary of W. Dawson

²¹³ Able Seaman Jack Gearing quoted in Arthur, *True Glory*, p. 17

– they looked like a crowd of footballs. Occasionally you'd see a hand go up – singing out for help'.²¹⁴

It was especially traumatic leaving men in the water to drown as one sailor, Charles Blunt, noted.²¹⁵ However, it was dangerous to attempt to rescue survivors and if ships were ordered to stand off there was little else to be done. The loss of HMS *Aboukir*, HMS *Cressy* and HMS *Hogue*, sunk by a single U-Boat in the early days of the war, demonstrated the danger in stopping to pick up survivors.²¹⁶ William Brooman was aboard HMS *Audacious* when she struck a mine and wrote: 'I think the seriousness of the disaster to our ship came home to us when we saw the remainder of the squadron turn & leave us, but this was the safest thing to do'.²¹⁷ Although British sailors would try and rescue defeated German sailors, safety of their own ships and crew was paramount and at the Battle of Heligoland Bight, attempts to rescue German survivors were abandoned when Zeppelins started dropping bombs on the rescuers.²¹⁸ This earned the condemnation of one rating who stated: 'I don't think much of the German airmen. They dropped bombs, and I believe they drowned many of their own men by doing so'.²¹⁹ There was also particular condemnation of the German ship SMS *Nurnberg* which had finished off the sinking *Monmouth* at Coronel and failed to pick up any survivors after the battle.²²⁰ After hearing of Dogger Bank, Abbott praised British sailors for rescuing 234 German sailors and comparing them to the Germans at Coronel who 'sailed away and left them [the British] to drown and then said the sea was too rough, no real sailor would have said that or even thought it'.²²¹ Although this could simply be a criticism easily made because it was not him who did it, it could also suggest that this stood contrary to his own interpretation of sailors' duties and culture.

Although sailors were used to the dangerous working conditions of the Edwardian navy, where accidental death was common, they exhibited a large degree of compassion for other vessels and their crews (including enemy sailors). Often they had friends aboard other ships or knew the vessels, but in addition they could relate to those people and knew that it could just as easily be them. For instance, Dennis noted after news of the sinking of HMS *Hawke* 'I have a close friend serving on board the "Hawke". George Oakley who belongs to St Albans. Has a wife and 1 child. Am rather concerned as to his fate'.²²² Similarly, Edwin Fletcher recorded the loss of HMS *Vanguard* at Scapa Flow: 'the "Vanguard" has blown up with all hands. All the fleet sent boats but I fancy there were not many survivors'.²²³ Over the next couple of days he noted

²¹⁴ Baynham, *Men*, p. 217

²¹⁵ IWM 10722: Charles Percival Blunt; Baynham, *Men*, p. 215

²¹⁶ Baynham remarked that 'the lesson had to be learnt the hard way'. Baynham, *Men*, p. 215

²¹⁷ RNM 2013/100/1: Diary of William Brooman

²¹⁸ Baynham, *Men*, p. 217; When possible all attempts were made and sailors were glad when they were able to save German sailors. This view was also shared by the press and *The Times* wrote following the rescue of 9 German officers and 81 ratings at Heligoland that 'there is reason to hope that this is not a complete list of German survivors'. *The Times*, 29 August 1914

²¹⁹ *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 29 January 1915

²²⁰ See DOC: Diary of Henry Welch.

²²¹ RNM 2004/103/5: Diary of William Thomas Abbott

²²² Diary of Walter Dennis

²²³ RNM 1980/115: Diary of Edwin Fletcher

that the navy divers were recovering the bodies and said: 'There were about 5 men saved from the "Vanguard" but in addition there were about 200 men out of the ship at the time'.²²⁴ Likewise at the Battle of Coronel, Bamber recorded: 'loss of Good Hope practically confirmed. She carried about 900 hands, most reservists, about 700 being married men'.²²⁵ Sailors were well aware of the hardship naval families faced when a man died at sea and this stirred a particular sense of pathos with the men. In particular, sailors had a history of helping those in need as demonstrated by the tradition of subscriptions on board whenever men died unexpectedly so as to send something home to a widow and any children.²²⁶

The careful noting down of the numbers of men believed lost when a ship was sunk, and the futility of searching for survivors comes across poignantly despite only being briefly recorded in diaries. However, real joy was felt whenever men were rescued and sailors did not begrudge sharing supplies with those in need, as Walter Dennis noted:

Warm clothing which had been sent to this ship by the Women's Emergency Committee of the Navy League was distributed to the survivors of the "Irresistible", what remained being given to our own fellows, this idea receiving the unanimous approval of the Lower Deck.²²⁷

Just how keenly sailors felt the loss of friends and comrades is perhaps shown by the desire for revenge that some sailors exhibited. For example, after the loss of the Battle of Coronel, *Canopus* and *Glasgow* planned to head for Montevideo, in the words of Thomas Hinshaw: 'to pick up more of our ships then – to strike back'.²²⁸ However, *Canopus* was ordered to return to the Falkland Islands and protect them. Nevertheless, a few days later a bellicose Hinshaw recorded: 'Mine-field finished should like the "Sharnhorst" to bump it'.²²⁹ He did not have to wait long for his chance for revenge. The victory of the Royal Navy at the Battle of the Falkland Islands the following month was viewed by many as revenge for the losses at Coronel.²³⁰ Hinshaw's diary reveals excitement and a level of amusement in their victory: 'Smoke forms itself into a German Squadron there will be some sport to-day & We won't forget the Good Hope & Monmouth. They are steaming up unconcerned they can't know what ships are here'.²³¹ This was followed by '4-45pm "Sharnhorst" quits... 6pm Goodnight "Gneisnau". 8pm seas coming up Leipzig dips after putting up a grand fight'.²³² Similarly, Henry Welch of HMS *Kent* was also present and described his pleasure in sinking SMS *Nurnberg*: 'So, truly, we have

²²⁴ RNM 1980/115: Diary of Edwin Fletcher

²²⁵ RNM 1998/43: Diary of Joseph Bamber; See also RNM 2014/31: Diary of Thomas J. Hinshaw.

²²⁶ Diary of Walter Dennis; Naval wives were not recognized and thus not entitled to a pension if the sailor died at sea. See Carew, *Lower Deck*, p. xix; See also Lavery, *Able*, p. 246; For an example of collections such as this see RNM 1976/65/1: Diary of William Williams.

²²⁷ Diary of Walter Dennis

²²⁸ RNM 2014/31: Diary of Thomas J. Hinshaw

²²⁹ RNM 2014/31: Diary of Thomas J. Hinshaw

²³⁰ Arthur, *True Glory*, p. 5; *The Times*, 10 December 1914; *The Times*, 11 December 1914

²³¹ RNM 2014/31: Diary of Thomas J. Hinshaw

²³² RNM 2014/31: Diary of Thomas J. Hinshaw

avenged the *Monmouth*'.²³³ Niall Ferguson has noted a similar experience amongst soldiers, and has suggested that it could become so powerful that men felt no regard for personal safety.²³⁴ Although individual acts are far less likely aboard a warship where there is greater distance to the enemy and men served far more as part of a weapon-body rather than individuals, the desire for revenge could nevertheless become very powerful.

Sailors' language of these experiences is further revealing and there is a strange convergence of feelings present in their descriptions of battle with diaries revealing that it was not uncommon for men to see beauty amongst the carnage. For example, Wood recorded: 'it is very nice to lay here & watch the ships firing & hear the loveable rumbling noise as the shells pass over the hills and valleys'.²³⁵ Similarly, Dennis described 'a perfect hail of shrapnel' fired by HMS *Vengeance*.²³⁶ Welch demonstrates still further the conflicting approach to beauty and near-death experiences. 'One shell burst on the water's edge... Ye gods! it was lovely – only a trifle further and there would have been a few gaps among us'.²³⁷ Bourke has recognized this phenomenon amongst soldiers, and posited that 'the emphasis on the beauty of war – the colour of napalm, the shine of steel, the maternal bulk of the tank – distracted from the smell of burning flesh, gaping wounds and dismemberment'.²³⁸ This served as a coping mechanism that combatants employed to deal with the emotional and mental stress they experienced.²³⁹ Nevertheless, some sailors struggled to find the words to describe what they witnessed. For instance, watching the landing of troops at Gallipoli, W. Dawson stated: 'the scene that followed cannot be put into words'.²⁴⁰ This problem has been noted by Paul Fussell, who argued that 'the presumed inadequacy of language' was a reason why many soldiers did not talk or write in detail about the war.²⁴¹

However, there is the danger that diaries were consciously sanitized by their authors.²⁴² In particular, Simon Jones has argued of the importance of diaries as a way in which men could leave a record of their lives for their families in the event of their death.²⁴³ It is common to find at the start of a sailor diary some note to say that it was being kept for the benefit of a family member.²⁴⁴ Therefore, although sailors may have believed that someone would be interested in hearing about their experiences, as Jones rightly points out, there is the danger that men gave an edited view of events, knowing that their diaries would be read by family members if

²³³ DOC: Diary of Henry Welch; HMS *Kent* was a sister ship to HMS *Monmouth* and this thesis has previously argued about the bonds of loyalty to ships and shipmates. Ships with close or shared connections thus had greater links to one another.

²³⁴ Ferguson, *Pity*, p. 363

²³⁵ RNM 1984/467: Diary of Wood

²³⁶ Diary of Walter Dennis

²³⁷ DOC: Diary of Henry Welch

²³⁸ Bourke, *Intimate*, p. 42

²³⁹ Coping mechanisms employed by sailors will be considered in more detail below.

²⁴⁰ RNM 1980/82: Diary of W. Dawson

²⁴¹ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000 [first edition 1975]); p. 170

²⁴² See Chapter One; See also John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, Revised Third Edition, (London: Longman, 2002 [first edition 1984]).

²⁴³ Jones, 'Psychology', p. 233

²⁴⁴ For example see Diary of Walter Dennis; See also RNM 1990/160: Diary of A. J. Bull.

they died.²⁴⁵ Yet this does not negate from their usefulness. Although the view presented by their diaries sometimes lacked specific detail, both the thrill and fear of battle comes across clearly. Again, this points to the neglected complexity of the sailor's character. Diaries demonstrate that ratings experienced a range of emotions during battle. As Bourke has argued, men 'reveal[ed] themselves as individuals transformed by a range of conflicting emotions – fear as well as empathy, rage as well as exhilaration'.²⁴⁶ A range of emotions could co-exist but at the same time there is a visible sense of duty, whether or not they were afraid. Their sense of duty and loyalty, in itself a complex issue divided between ship, shipmates, service and Empire, is one that they did not question.

Whether eager and excited or apprehensive at the prospect of battle, sailors lived in a stressful environment where witnessing death and living with the constant threat of danger formed a key facet of naval life. This was especially so when ships were at sea with the threat from enemy shipping, particularly enemy mines and U-Boats. As one sailor quoted by the *Hampshire Telegraph* reminded the public, those below deck stood 'little chance of escape should their ship be sunk'.²⁴⁷ Although Brooman played down the danger when his ship struck a mine, he did confide to his diary: 'it is not at all a pleasant feeling to be in a vessel with a huge hole in the side'.²⁴⁸ Living on the edge of their nerves on a daily basis whilst at sea, the need to cope with stress was vital, inability to do so could otherwise be acutely debilitating. Dennis demonstrated this point noting three cases of what he termed "insanity" within a year aboard *Vengeance* due to the pressures of war.²⁴⁹ An article in *The Times* commented on the possible dangers associated with living in war-time conditions within the first few weeks of the war:

It must be almost impossible for landsmen to realize the nerve tension of those at sea who, night after night and day after day, have been waiting and watching for the expected blow to fall... But to live for nearly a fortnight with every faculty wound up to the highest pitch is an ordeal to which one cannot be subjected for very long without some loss of efficiency.²⁵⁰

This recognition is particularly important especially in light of the studies conducted regarding soldiers and the effect of shell shock and the crisis of masculinity during the First World War.

Again, this is an area where sailors have been neglected by historians. Whilst not downplaying the danger soldiers faced daily, they were cycled out of the frontline trenches on a regular basis and would have been unlucky if they spent more than 5 to 8 days in the forward lines.²⁵¹ Although it should be noted that the reserve trenches were also dangerous, nevertheless the ability for leave and being rotated away from action provided a distraction that allowed some

²⁴⁵ See Fussell, *Great War*, p. 170; Jones, "Psychology", p. 234

²⁴⁶ Bourke, *Intimate*, p. 1

²⁴⁷ *Hampshire Telegraph*, 16 June 1916

²⁴⁸ RNM 2013/100/1: Diary of William Brooman

²⁴⁹ Diary of Walter Dennis

²⁵⁰ *The Times*, 19 August 1914

²⁵¹ I am grateful to Aimee Fox-Godden and Jonathan Boff of the University of Birmingham for their assistance with this information.

respite. Stress and mental debilitation was similarly an issue for sailors. For instance, Dennis recorded that a sailor by the name of Hutchins 'was a tile loose, a sentry was placed over him to look after him. May do himself, or someone else, some harm?'.²⁵² He wrote again a few weeks later that Hutchins and another were being sent back to England, 'both these men having developed signs of insanity?'.²⁵³ He records one final account during the Gallipoli campaign, 'our Captain Cook developed signs of insanity to day, and was immediately placed under the guard of a marine. This is the 3rd case of this description on board here since the war started'.²⁵⁴ In 1915 these symptoms were still not fully understood or recognized by British forces. Officers and psychiatrists believed that men suffered nerves or shell shock because they had not been 'hardened'.²⁵⁵ Dennis was evidently interested in what was happening to these men but whether he was sympathetic to their plight or thought them weak is unclear. The use of the question mark, a rare use of expression in sailor diaries, suggests that he is questioning of the situation and unsure what to make of it.

However, such apparent weakness stood at odds with the Victorian and Edwardian perception of masculinity that was a key part of the image of British sailors. Therefore, faced with these problems, sailors employed a number of coping mechanisms (both consciously and subconsciously) in order to deal with their experiences. Again, historians such as Bourke, Ferguson and Jones have considered the ways in which soldiers dealt with stress, and these can be readily transferred to sailors. For instance, discussing their experiences with other sailors was one way of dealing with stress. As Bourke posited, stories often served a 'cathartic and consolatory function rather than simply as an objective recital of "experience"'.²⁵⁶ Dennis recorded one such occurrence when he met 'an "old ship" from "HMS Sydney" who gave an interesting account of their scrap with the "Emden"'.²⁵⁷ Whilst the retelling of this served a number of functions including demonstrating pride in his and his ship's ability, and perhaps an element of boasting, it was also a conversation with a friend who would be able to understand certain aspects of the story and the experience the sailor had gone through.

Similarly, Jones has argued that diaries and letters 'formed part of the soldier's attempt to make sense of what he had gone through'.²⁵⁸ It is important to note that a number of sailors became far less reticent with their diaries during the war years.²⁵⁹ For example, by 1915 Wood was aboard HMS *Ark Royal* and was particularly detailed in his diary of the Dardanelles campaign in comparison to his earlier commissions.²⁶⁰ Instead of a few lines per entry, he

²⁵² Diary of Walter Dennis

²⁵³ Diary of Walter Dennis

²⁵⁴ Diary of Walter Dennis; It is assumed that he is referring to the cook of his mess at this time rather than the captain of the vessel who was Bertram Hornsby Smith. See *The Navy List*, April, 1915.

²⁵⁵ Jones, 'Psychology', p. 231; For further information generally see Bourke, 'Effeminacy, Ethnicity and the End of Trauma: The Sufferings of 'Shell-Shocked' Men in Great Britain and Ireland, 1914-39', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 35, 1, 2000; pp. 57-69.

²⁵⁶ Bourke, *Intimate*, p. 4. This point has been considered in Chapter Three.

²⁵⁷ Diary of Walter Dennis; See also RNM 2004/103/5: Diary of William Thomas Abbott.

²⁵⁸ Jones, 'Psychology', p. 233

²⁵⁹ Although this chapter has demonstrated there were other reasons sailors kept diaries, it was common practice and thus those who had previously kept diaries also became more detailed as well as those who had started primarily to record their experiences of war.

²⁶⁰ See RNM 1984/467: Diary of Wood.

began to open up and record more personal views. Furthermore, diaries were not written during actual engagements, which would have been impossible, but were instead written during quiet periods or off-duty time.²⁶¹ As such they enabled sailors to have the ability to reflect. Again, Jones has argued that diaries, 'may have been a rationalization of what they had done or thought that they should have done'.²⁶² This would have allowed some level of absolution from blame and set their minds at ease.

A further element to be aware of is the importance of the pronouns used by sailors to describe themselves in their diaries. As Bourke has argued, it was common for men to use "we" rather than "I" when describing their actions in battle in an attempt to distance themselves from the experience.²⁶³ Sailor diaries reveal regular use of the pronoun "we" or "our" rather than "I" on the lower deck when referring to engagements. For example, at Jutland Fletcher noted: 'we could see both sides firing away at one another'.²⁶⁴ Likewise Bamber wrote: 'we opened fire from our fore turret but the first salvos fell short'.²⁶⁵ Whilst this use of pronouns is undoubtedly similar in relation to sailors, it is likely that the use of "we" also reflects the fact that sailors were part of a ship and viewed themselves as such; part of a weapon but not necessarily the ones that fired the guns.²⁶⁶ Yet physical distance and detachment from killing did not necessarily mean that sailors were unaffected. They were now undoubtedly at a greater distance to their enemy but Bourke has suggested that 'combatants insisted upon emotional relationships and responsibility, despite the distancing effect of much technology'.²⁶⁷ It is evident that sailors did not distance themselves from the enemy and accepted responsibility for them, and this can be seen in attempts to rescue them if it were possible. Although sailors were naturally proud of their victory and the sinking of enemy ships, there is an element of humanizing present in the diaries and a demonstration of empathy. In particular, Thomas Hinshaw noted: 'We have saved about 200 Germans, we have about 12 off the Leipzig and they say it was terrible yesterday'.²⁶⁸

This stands in contrast to Jones' assertions regarding the importance of combatants dehumanizing the enemy. Jones has posited that faced with the order to kill, men often turned to dehumanizing the enemy and promoting their own righteousness in an attempt to come to terms with their actions: 'a way of bypassing inhibitions about killing'.²⁶⁹ This also served to incite hatred and encouraged acts of revenge killing.²⁷⁰ Terms such as "Hun" and "Bosche", with their associated barbaric images, were therefore used by many soldiers to describe their enemy. However, sailor diaries do not suggest a high level of dehumanizing the enemy.²⁷¹

²⁶¹ Jones, "Psychology", p. 233

²⁶² Jones, "Psychology", p. 233

²⁶³ Bourke, *Intimate*, p. 35

²⁶⁴ RNM 1980/115: Diary of Edwin Fletcher

²⁶⁵ RNM 1998/43: Diary of Joseph Bamber

²⁶⁶ For more information on the changing technology of gunnery on ships see Lavery, *Able*, pp. 212-214.

²⁶⁷ Bourke, *Intimate*, p. 7

²⁶⁸ RNM 2014/31: Diary of Thomas J. Hinshaw

²⁶⁹ Jones, "Psychology", p. 244

²⁷⁰ Anthony Beevor, *Berlin: the downfall 1945*, (London: Viking, 2002), p. 170

²⁷¹ Similarly, accounts in the *Hampshire Telegraph* following the Battle of Jutland suggest terms such as these were not in common usage. See *Hampshire Telegraph*, 16 June 1916. This point is also made by A. Trystan Edwards who said

Instead the enemy is often referred to either as "them", or by nationality.²⁷² In addition, there is an element of respect and admiration for the enemy. For instance, Wood demonstrated the personalization that could take place. He described a bombing raid on their ships off the Dardanelles by a German aeroplane: 'He was flying splendid [and] very steady... It was a splendid hit [and] credit is due to him whoever he was'.²⁷³ There is evidently a degree of appreciation for the skill of the enemy pilot, and Wood refers to the pilot himself rather than simply a German aircraft. Contrary to Jones' argument, Bourke has argued that men also commonly personalized the enemy as a means of coping with stress and that this 'formed a buffer against numbing brutality'.²⁷⁴ Nevertheless, Dennis did record a story he heard from some ratings regarding a marine who had been found 'terribly mutilated, the head smashed and the stomach & legs hacked about, probably some result of German teaching in *Kultur*'.²⁷⁵ Sailors were not therefore ignorant of the media and propaganda images published during the war but it is not evident that pejorative terms were common currency within the navy.²⁷⁶

Another vitally important coping mechanism was humour and sailors adopted a distinct form of downplaying the danger and the pressure they were under.²⁷⁷ In particular, the Royal Navy, like the army, published its own magazines which poked fun at various elements of the war and masked some of its true horrors.²⁷⁸ Humour was a way of coping that could be employed every day and was not restricted unlike some of the other forms of stress relief considered here. Again, diaries reveal the common use of humour by sailors and their accounts are peppered with humorous comments. For example, Wood recorded: 'several small guns fired at Queen E [HMS *Queen Elizabeth*] & she was hit 16 times but it was like throwing a flea at her anchor'.²⁷⁹ Similarly, Dennis reported his gun crew took out a Turkish gun believed to have been the one that gave Prince George a 'smack' the day before.²⁸⁰ These accounts downplay the seriousness of the situation and present shells hitting the ships as almost trivial. However, the shore-based batteries often managed to return heavy fire before they were silenced and there were near misses and damage done to the Royal Navy. Importantly what this also demonstrates, aside from a coping mechanism, is their underlying pride in the strength and superiority of British ships.²⁸¹ The power of the Royal Navy was not going to be threatened by a lesser power firing a few shells.

that when it came to war, sailors 'instinctively adopted towards the war an attitude of dignity and composure. They did not even indulge in the habit so common among civilians of describing the Germans as Huns'. Edwards, *Three Rows*, pp. 131-132

²⁷² See for example RNM 1984/467: Diary of Wood; Diary of Walter Dennis.

²⁷³ RNM 1984/467: Diary of Wood

²⁷⁴ Jones, "Psychology", p. 244; Bourke, *Intimate*, p. 7

²⁷⁵ Diary of Walter Dennis

²⁷⁶ For instance the propaganda published following the execution of the nurse, Edith Cavell. Importantly, these terms are not present in published memoirs either.

²⁷⁷ This has also been considered in Chapter Three.

²⁷⁸ Compare for example *The Wipers Times*, *Sea Pie*, and *Blighty*.

²⁷⁹ RNM 1984/467: Diary of Wood

²⁸⁰ Diary of Walter Dennis

²⁸¹ This is considered further in Chapters Five and Six but a degree of superiority over other nations and navies had long been part of the service. For instance, at the Dardanelles Abbott was unimpressed by the French and Russian ships. Writing about a Russian cruiser he remarked: 'nothing very startling about her except she has five funnels'. See RNM 2004.103/5: Diary of William Thomas Abbott.

In addition, enemy batteries were given names such as 'Kaiser Bill II, Kier Hardy and Aunt Sally', in an attempt to humanize and reduce the fear-factor of the enemy.²⁸² Therefore, faced with the danger and knowing they had come through it, sailors were often flippant about engagements with the enemy. After a brush with an enemy destroyer in the opening days of the war, Wood noted that the enemy had 'done no damage, only knocked paint off'.²⁸³ Again, this could be masking the truth in typical stiff-upper lip fashion but this demonstrates how sailors coped with pressure. However, Abbott suggested that sailors became used to the dangers, noting: 'how soon one adapts themselves to circumstance and the disregard one has for danger'.²⁸⁴ Nevertheless, despite downplaying the seriousness of the situation, sailors needed time to rest and a break from the dangers by visiting a port for a few days. For instance, when leave was finally granted, Dennis recorded that it was 'very welcome... everyone has had a very busy & trying time'.²⁸⁵

A further mechanism was suggested by Baynham, who argued that disasters and accidents acted as a sort of 'relief' from the stresses of daily life at sea.²⁸⁶ In other words, Baynham argued, the regular accidents that occurred aboard and losses of other ships such as HMS *Hampshire* carrying Lord Kitchener, took sailors' minds off the everyday threats that they faced at sea. The regularity with which sailors made a note of such accidents, which could often span a few days as further information filtered down, supports this hypothesis.²⁸⁷ Accidents and deaths on board are a common theme amongst the sample of diaries considered by this thesis. For example, Dennis described a 'regrettable incident... a tube in C1 boiler burst, badly scalding 5 stokers... All 5 men were suffering terribly, the flesh of their bodies peeling off'.²⁸⁸ W. Dawson aboard HMS *Albion* recorded hearing of the accident aboard *Vengeance*: 'it was believed she had had an accident in her engine room'.²⁸⁹ This demonstrates that individual incidents aboard ships were interesting news to the crew of other vessels. Although it could also be argued that the regularity of these incidents reinforced the possible dangers that sailors faced as well, sailors accepted that their jobs were dangerous and accidents could easily happen.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated the complexities of the lower deck during the First World War. In particular, it has considered sailors alongside existing research on the Great War and placed them firmly within the historical narrative of socio-cultural studies, examining the competing ideologies and identities that made up their lower-deck culture. By specifically focusing on sailor diaries, it has enabled analysis of lower-deck testimony and presented a more nuanced

²⁸² Diary of Walter Dennis; RNM 1980/82: Diary of W. Dawson; This has been considered in detail in Chapter Three and can be seen as a similar coping mechanism.

²⁸³ RNM 1984/467: Diary of Wood

²⁸⁴ RNM 2004/103/5: Diary of William Thomas Abbott

²⁸⁵ Diary of Walter Dennis

²⁸⁶ Baynham, *Men*, p. 218

²⁸⁷ See also RNM 1980/82: Diary of W. Dawson; RNM 1998/43: Diary of Joseph Bamber; RNM 1980/115: Diary of Edwin Fletcher.

²⁸⁸ Diary of Walter Dennis

²⁸⁹ RNM 1980/82: Diary of W. Dawson

perspective. Importantly, it has shown that many sailors exhibited enthusiasm for war, despite the navy being a unique case which did not necessitate the same rush to the colours as the army. In addition, it has argued that sailor culture was intertwined with the public perception, which had been carefully crafted in the years leading up to the war. Sailors were conscious of how they would be viewed and determined to do their duty as was expected both by the public and their fellow sailors. Nevertheless, there was no universal feeling that existed for every sailor at the same time and this chapter supports the views of this thesis that the lower deck should be considered on an individual basis as well as collectively. Although sailors were enthusiastic for war, there were multiple reasons for this. On the one hand, it demonstrated imperial sentiment which formed part of the latent identity of sailors and was a key facet of their culture. Yet, it also demonstrated patriotism, both national and local, in addition to pride in the service itself and pride in individual ships and personal glory. As this thesis has argued, these were equally important concepts, distinct but also symbiotic. Therefore, whilst the boredom of stalemate naval war and the hardships endured resulted in negativity and the adoption of coping mechanisms, sailors did not lose their underlying imperialistic beliefs but took it on their own terms and allowed it to be subservient to other aspects as necessary.

Furthermore, this chapter has advanced the historiography by considering the effect that killing and death had upon sailors, and has demonstrated that the Edwardian imperial image of noble sacrifice could be in conflict with other aspects of the sailor's character. By drawing comparisons to the army, it has revealed sailors' acceptance and involvement in the act of killing, and that they experienced similar nervous tensions to soldiers with the potential threat of mental breakdown. Likewise, sailors could exhibit feelings of both enjoyment and horror in killing the enemy, despite the distancing effect of modern technology. In order to deal with this they employed a variety of coping mechanisms, which allowed them to come to terms with their actions and protect themselves. Nevertheless, their testimony reveals that despite a level of enjoyment in battle they were affected by the death of friends, and also of their enemy. Importantly there was a degree of respect for their enemy, and sailors exhibited empathy towards those they had defeated because they, as fellow sailors, appreciated the inherent dangers of serving at sea.

Chapter Five

Showing the Flag: sailors and the experience of naval propaganda in the 1920s

Whereon, under the good Providence of God, the wealth, safety, and strength of the Kingdom chiefly depend....¹

After the First World War, the British Empire was increasingly challenged as the world's premier power; *Pax Britannica* was effectively at an end.² This was keenly felt by the Royal Navy which had, since the beginning of the twentieth century, been portrayed to the British public and the colonies as the most powerful navy afloat, and the shield of the Empire.³ However, the horrors of the Great War led to growing calls for universal disarmament, and the financial cost of winning the war resulted in an urgent need to "balance the books". Consequently, as with Britain's other military services, the navy's numbers were to be cut dramatically. The navy's cultural position and prestigious image was under threat. This was to stand in sharp contrast to the image constructed through carefully orchestrated naval theatre that has been considered in previous chapters.⁴ As such this was a turbulent time and this period witnessed the navy in flux as it sought to re-establish its position both in British culture and the world. Therefore, the 1920s witnessed the continuation of naval pageantry and a number of important diplomatic overseas missions, known as "showing the flag".⁵ However, despite the challenges presented by this period of the Royal Navy's history, little attention has been paid to the socio-cultural implications of the reduction in size and power, and threat to prestige. Although historians such as Christopher M. Bell and Jon Wise have considered the economic and political implications alongside the Royal Navy's position during the inter-war years, few have considered what effect this had on British sailors who were proud of the navy and its position in the world.⁶

This chapter will reposition the cultural aspect of naval history during this period, and consider the challenges the Royal Navy faced at this time and the changes this brought. In particular, it will examine British sailors and their involvement with the diplomatic missions the navy undertook: their views on the Empire and the colonies, their experiences of pride, patriotism,

¹ The Naval Discipline Act, 1866 quoted on the title page of V. C. Scott O'Connor, *The Empire Cruise*, (London: Riddle, Smith and Duffus, 1925).

² *Pax Britannica* is Latin for "British peace" and was based upon *Pax Romana*.

³ Jan Rüger, *The Great Naval Game: Britain and Germany in the Age of Empire*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009 [first edition 2007]); p. 1; Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery*, (London: Penguin, 2017 [first edition 1983]); pp. 267-268

⁴ See Chapter Two for further information.

⁵ For the purpose of this chapter, the term "showing the flag" is defined in its broadest form as an event that showed the British flag abroad, but particularly as an officially organized visit to a foreign port. Jon Wise has called the term 'a euphemism frequently applied to the appearance of the White Ensign in seaports around the world' and has wisely warned of the dangers in the terms 'generic nature'. Jon Wise, *The role of the Royal Navy in South America, 1920-1970*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2014); p. 3

⁶ See the work of Jon Wise and also Christopher M. Bell, *The Royal Navy, Seapower and Strategy between the wars*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000).

and their relationship with imperialism.⁷ In so doing it explores the existing debate surrounding imperial sentiment. In order to do this, the practice of “showing the flag” will be considered with special attention being paid to the cruise of the Special Service Squadron, which traversed the globe between 1923 and 1924, and its visit to Australia especially. By examining the testimony of sailors who took part, it will suggest that sailors exhibited latent imperial sentiment. In particular, their expected experiences of “otherness” in the colonies were influenced by imperial perceptions and demonstrates the influence of imperial propaganda on sailor culture.⁸ However, it also argues that this was not universal and sailors continued to demonstrate independence particularly in their personal enjoyment.

The Royal Navy in the 1920s

Despite victory in 1918, the end of the First World War did not mark an end to hostilities for the Royal Navy. In particular, the navy played a role in the Baltic sphere of the Russian Civil War, the breakdown of the Ottoman Empire and Greek Independence.⁹ This period also witnessed the British Empire reach the zenith of its territorial extent, with increased demands being put upon Britain’s military resources.¹⁰ However, the financial cost of winning the war and the drastic changes in European politics meant that the post-war situation had a significant influence upon Britain and in turn the Royal Navy, and its sailors. The socio-economic situation in Britain during the inter-war period has been well considered by historians, and in this instance the navy has not been completely ignored.¹¹ In particular, the rise of political activism on the lower deck culminating in the mutiny at Invergordon in 1931 has attracted scholarly interest.¹² Nevertheless, it has not been examined in detail alongside studies of British culture, which is strange given the navy’s pre-war position and growing threat to its prestige, but this mirrors general trends of neglect already considered.

The Government was understandably pragmatic about military costs and dramatically reduced the navy lists, although the naval budget was not curtailed with the same severity as that of the army.¹³ Bell has suggested that this was, in some part, due to the respect that was still

⁷ Although an important aspect of sailors’ interaction with the colonies, the “run ashore” is not considered in detail by this chapter. In its own terms, the “run ashore” deserves far greater consideration than can be done justice at this juncture, particularly its sexual, racial and imperial dimensions. Therefore, it has been omitted so as to not detract from the central investigations of the study. Instead, interactions are viewed through a generic prism specifically focused on sailors’

⁸ The importance of “otherness” in shaping British national identity has been argued in recent years by historians such as Linda Colley. Whilst Andrew Thompson has warned against viewing matters so simply, he argued that there was a ‘feeling of “otherness” that the colonies helped to create’. Andrew Thompson, *Empire Strikes Back? The impact of imperialism on Britain from the mid-nineteenth century*, (Harlow: Pearson, 2012 [first edition 2005]); p. 201

⁹ James Daly, *Portsmouth’s World War One Heroes*, (Stroud: The History Press, 2013); p. 183; Augustus Agar, *Showing the Flag: the role of the Royal Navy between the wars*, (London: Evans Brothers Ltd, 1962); pp. 131-143; Max Arthur, *True Glory: The Royal Navy, 1914-39, 1918-39*, (London: Hodder and Stroughton, 1996); p. 155

¹⁰ Ralph Harrington, “The Mighty Hood”: Navy, Empire, War at Sea and the British National Imagination, 1920-60’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 2003, 38, pp. 171-185; p. 175; Arthur, *True Glory*, p. 155

¹¹ For more information on the British socio-economic situation generally see Keith Laybourn, *Britain on the Breadline: A Social and Political History of Britain, 1918-39*, (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1990); Martin Pugh, *We danced all night: a social history of Britain between the wars*, (London: Bodley Head, 2008).

¹² See for example Anthony Carew, *Lower Deck of the Royal Navy, 1900-39: Invergordon Mutiny in Perspective*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981) which is recognized as a key text. The importance of Invergordon will be considered in more detail in Chapter Six.

¹³ Harrington, “Mighty”, p. 175; Kennedy, *Rise*, pp. 270-273

paid to the Senior Service and the acknowledgement that the navy remained necessary to protect the Empire.¹⁴ On the other hand, Kennedy has argued that whilst it was inevitable for all the services to be cut, the army was hit worst because of the horror of the trenches.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the changing diplomatic situation placed Britain under further pressure. The two-power standard, never really viable, was now unmanageable and acceptance of the United States of America's growing power was recognized as necessary. The British Empire simply could not afford an arms race with the USA along the lines of Anglo-German competition pre-1914. Consequently, Britain adopted diplomatic pacifist measures such as the Washington Treaty in 1922, which limited the number and tonnage of ships nations could build.¹⁶ Adoption of the "Ten Year Rule" further curtailed the navy, hindering planning and the building of new ships by effectively ruling out the chance of the British Empire entering any significant war for ten years.¹⁷ This was met with criticism by many and as Captain Augustus Agar candidly wrote, 'it was obvious when looking ten years ahead that by 1932 our battle fleet would be obsolete and out of date'.¹⁸

In addition to the financial challenges, the changing public attitude to popular militarism post-war was to leave a conspicuous gap in the navy's cultural image.¹⁹ The last event of British naval pageantry had been the Review in July 1914, which had followed the now established traditions of naval pageantry whilst also serving the additional purpose of reminding the European powers of British naval supremacy.²⁰ However, the post-war situation was drastically different. Whilst the declaration of war witnessed the Fleet assembled at Spithead to tremendous crowds, the Armistice saw the Grand Fleet escort the defeated German ships to Scapa Flow without the cheering crowds and also to a location far removed from the majority of the British public, without royalty or any other semblance of the pageantry that had gone before.²¹ Although a correspondent from *The Times* referred to the German navy's surrender as a 'pageant', it resembled pre-war naval theatre in very few ways.²² This was no victory parade for the Royal Navy.

This absence of pageantry might appear strange given that the image of the Royal Navy had been carefully constructed and became a 'cultural symbol' prior to the First World War.²³ However, as Rüger and Wise have argued, this was the price ultimately paid by the navy for

¹⁴ Bell, *Royal Navy*, p. xv

¹⁵ Kennedy, *Rise*, p. 273; Parallels can also be drawn with the military experience following the Napoleonic wars where both the army and navy were drastically reduced.

¹⁶ The Washington Treaty was designed to 'contribute to the maintenance of the general peace, and to reduce the burdens of competition in armament' and involved the United States of America, the British Empire, France, Italy and Japan. John Jordan, *Warships after Washington: the development of the five major fleets, 1922-1930*, (Barnsley: Seaforth, 2011); p. xi; See also Kennedy, *Rise*, p. 272; Bell, *Royal Navy*, p. xv. Bell has questioned how powerful anti-naval thought was with the British public.

¹⁷ Kennedy, *Rise*, p. 273; Agar, *Showing*, p. 158; *Daily Mail*, 16 December 1921; *The Times*, 3 September 1925

¹⁸ Agar, *Showing*, p. 159

¹⁹ For British militarism see Anne Summers, 'Militarism in Britain before the Great War', *History Workshop Journal*, 2, 1, 1976; pp. 104-123; Michael Paris, *Warrior nation: images of war in British popular culture, 1850-2000*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2000); The 1920s saw the growth of anti-militarism particularly in the form of literature from those who had served during the Great War. See Rüger, *Great Naval*, pp. 260-261.

²⁰ Rüger, *Great Naval*, pp. 251-257

²¹ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 257

²² *The Times*, 22 November 1918

²³ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 1

its failure to defeat the Germans in an heroic naval battle worthy of Trafalgar.²⁴ The importance of Trafalgar in both popular culture and naval circles should not be overlooked.²⁵ For example, Adam Nicholson has argued that 'the received idea of Trafalgar' was the heroic ideal in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.²⁶ Furthermore, Trafalgar 'played itself out in the mind of Englishmen as a near-perfect example of violent moral theatre'.²⁷ This is what the public had gone to war expecting. Yet following the war, collective public thought focused on the men of the army who had served and died in the trenches, and this was plainly reflected by the navy's 'conspicuously small' part in the Peace Celebrations of 1919.²⁸ However, sailors' views on the matter have been overlooked and is where this study breaks new ground. Given the sense of superiority that the navy and its sailors had enjoyed in British pre-war culture, it is important to question whether the challenges to the Royal Navy's prestige affected sailors as it was intrinsically linked to their culture.

On the face of it, British newspapers sought to portray the surrender of the German Fleet and the Royal Navy's role in a positive light, and highlighted the pride of the victorious sailors. For instance, one correspondent wrote: 'the justifiable pleasure of the Fleet in a work well done was shown unmistakably by the cheers of the ships'.²⁹ However, the same correspondent also wrote, 'there was deep satisfaction that the tedious task of the Navy had been fulfilled'.³⁰ This is an interesting comment. Either the correspondent is referring to the monotonous experience of those sailors present at Scapa Flow, or is suggesting that the task of keeping the German Navy contained in the North Sea was beneath them.³¹ If the latter then he may have been attempting to demonstrate that the navy had done its duty even if it had not covered itself in glory. Meanwhile, another correspondent wrote: 'British seamen... cannot understand this abject handing over of a fleet'; it was against the honour of the British sailor.³² Whilst this fits with the established heroic masculine image, sailors' views on the subject are less clear. For example, on witnessing the surrender Edwin Fletcher made no mention of this apparent disgrace. He was relieved it was over whilst also proud of their accomplishment and wrote: 'The Germans surrendering their capital ships, brings the war practically to a close... it has been a good job well done. Thank God it is over'.³³

Officers' diaries on the other hand suggest a different story. A number of naval officers, including Admiral Sir David Beatty, recorded a sense of 'bitter disappointment' amongst sailors

²⁴ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 257; Wise, *The role*, p. 19-20; This point is considered further in Chapter Four.

²⁵ Although sailor diaries do not make the direct link to Trafalgar, they did draw links to Nelson and the age of sail. Not only would they have been aware of this core belief in British society but, as this chapter will argue, it formed part of their image and sailor culture.

²⁶ Adam Nicholson, *Men of Honour: Trafalgar and the making of the English hero*, (London: Harper Collins, 2005); p. 317

²⁷ Nicholson, *Men*, p. 316

²⁸ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 258

²⁹ *The Times*, 22 November 1918

³⁰ *The Times*, 22 November 1918

³¹ For further information on sailors' experiences at Scapa Flow and analysis of the sailor image see Chapter Four.

³² *The Times*, 23 November 1918

³³ RNM 1980/115: Diary of Edwin Fletcher

that their chance had not come.³⁴ However, sailor testimony reveals that they were more likely to record jubilation that the war was over rather than disappointment and a belief that they had failed to play their part. Again, Edwin Fletcher contrasts starkly. Upon hearing of the cessation of hostilities he wrote:

Hurrah... Hostilities ceased at 11AM. So I hope this finishes the war. Admiral gave a speech on the QD congratulating everyone. Order to "splice the mainbrace" tonight at 7. Boys also to have a tot of Rum... Everyone had a jolly time tonight.³⁵

This testimony demonstrates relief and celebration at the news, not a questioning of their duty, and again suggests that other elements of their culture could easily take precedence. Yet whether sailors did this after the initial relief had worn off is not reflected by their diaries.

Therefore, there was an evident distancing from previous policy and aversion to acts of naval pageantry continued into the early 1920s in line with a critical re-evaluation of war and the militarism perceived to have led to the First World War.³⁶ Jon Wise has said that, given this prevailing and understandable atmosphere, there could be 'no return to the vast international naval spectacles of the pre-war years'.³⁷ This changing atmosphere was demonstrated by the growth of anti-war literature, such as Ford Madox Ford's *Parade's End* (1924-1928) and Robert Graves' *Goodbye to all that* (1929) which mirrored a society struggling to come to terms with what it had suffered.³⁸ However, despite this negative attitude, naval pageantry was re-established in 1924 when the Reserve Fleet was mobilized for the first time since 1914.³⁹ Although this was not without controversy.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, the scale of the display was far smaller than the one 10 years before: losses in the number of ships both from the war and disarmament meant that the scale of the event had dramatically decreased.⁴¹ The navy had to rely on numbers being made up 'by destroyers and minesweepers and a number of older vessels that were propped up for the display'.⁴² Consequently, any doubts about the continued importance and power of the Royal Navy was 'not meant to show in its public celebration'.⁴³

As such, the re-introduction of naval pageantry remained an important development and allowed for the 're-opening of the naval theatre'.⁴⁴ Certainly the navy still occupied a prominent position in British culture and, for example, was celebrated at the Wembley Exhibition of the

³⁴ Agar, *Showing*, p. 14; Bryan Ranft (ed.), *The Beatty Papers*, (London: Scholar Press, 1989); p.7; Midshipman Ian Sanderson letter to his father quoted in Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 258; Malcolm Brown, *The Imperial War Museum book of 1918: Year of Victory*, (London: Pan, 1999); p. 171

³⁵ RNM 1980/115: Diary of Edwin Fletcher

³⁶ For further information on the shift towards remembrance rather than celebration see Jay Winter, *Sites of memory, sites of mourning: the Great War in European cultural history*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

³⁷ Wise, *The role*, p. 20

³⁸ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 260; Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, (London: Penguin, 1999); pp. 449-450; Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); p. 3

³⁹ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 259

⁴⁰ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 260

⁴¹ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 259

⁴² Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 259

⁴³ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 259; ADM 179/61

⁴⁴ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 259; However, Rüger does not comment on the Empire Cruise and whether the success of this had any effect on the re-introduction of naval pageantry.

same year, demonstrating that it remained a visual symbol to the public.⁴⁵ Billed as 'Wembley's Battle Fleet', there was a display of model fleets celebrating great naval victories including The Armada, Trafalgar and Zeebrugge.⁴⁶ This allowed some celebration of three key stages of British naval history. However, Jutland was conspicuous by its absence. The *Devon and Exeter Daily Gazette* suggested that as a subject Jutland was deemed too difficult to display due to 'the extremely complicated conditions of modern warfare'.⁴⁷ This unobtrusively sidestepped the issue of which side was really victorious and was typical of the way in which contemporaries viewed it. Similarly, Brian Lavery has noted the importance of putting HMS *Victory* in dry dock in 1922, stating that 'For many [it was] the greatest naval event of the 1920s'.⁴⁸ This initiative followed a public appeal to save the iconic vessel.⁴⁹ Therefore, continued attempts were made to celebrate British naval heritage by drawing links between old navy heroes of the age of sail and the modern navy in the minds of the British public, and popularizing great naval victories.⁵⁰

Furthermore, other aspects of pre-war naval pageantry were re-introduced regardless of the growing aversion towards militarism. This included public ship launches as early as 1920 with the traditional ceremony, giving some "normality" to the proceedings.⁵¹ Once again these launches were well publicized in the press. For example, HMS *Frobisher* was launched in 1920 and the *Daily Mail* proudly reported: 'the ship has cost (exclusive of armament) nearly £1,250,000'.⁵² However, what stands out is that there were now noticeably fewer launches being conducted. Thus the opportunity for naval spectacles was substantially reduced. The impact of this is difficult to measure. However, when HMS *Rodney* and HMS *Nelson* were launched in 1925, the press were eager to report the events as the newest post-Washington ships and the first launched in nine years.⁵³ Therefore, this suggests that there remained a public appetite for grand ship launches.

In addition, as naval pageantry began to increase once more, one event that became an annual calendar fixture in the late 1920s was the introduction of Navy Days. Bell has argued that these were 'the most overtly propagandistic of the navy's activities between the wars'.⁵⁴ Lavery has also commented on their importance, saying it was 'one answer to the navy's declining prestige'.⁵⁵ In particular, Lavery added that size and scale was important and suggested that Plymouth and Chatham 'suffered because of the lack of facilities for the biggest battleships'.⁵⁶

⁴⁵ Brown, 1918, p. 113; John M. Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: the manipulation of British public opinion, 1880-1960*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984); p. 110

⁴⁶ *Devon and Exeter Daily Gazette*, 31 January 1924

⁴⁷ *Devon and Exeter Daily Gazette*, 31 January 1924

⁴⁸ Lavery, *Able*, p. 271

⁴⁹ *Mariner's Mirror*, May 1926; I am also grateful to Sarah Westbury for her paper 'The shrine of manly virtues: heroic masculinity and HMS *Victory* in the 1920s' given at the Maritime Masculinities Conference in December 2016.

⁵⁰ In particular, authors continued in this vein and O'Connor made this link in his documentary of the Empire Cruise, noting the link to Drake and Hawkins. O'Connor, *Empire Cruise*, p. 16

⁵¹ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 261

⁵² *Daily Mail*, 22 March 1920

⁵³ *The Times*, 3 September 1925; *The Times*, 4 September 1925; *The Times*, 17 December 1925; *The Times*, 18 December 1925; Despite its impressive size and position in inter-war culture, *Hood* was launched during the war and therefore was a relatively secret affair. See Bruce Taylor, *The End of Glory: War and Peace in HMS Hood, 1916-1941*, (Barnsley: Seaforth, 2012); p. 6.

⁵⁴ Bell, *Royal Navy*, p. 175

⁵⁵ Lavery, *Able*, p. 270

⁵⁶ Lavery, *Able*, p. 270; The importance of the size of ships for attracting crowds is discussed in more detail below.

Nevertheless, Lavery argued that Navy Days were successful in popularizing the Royal Navy and cited sailor Bob Tilburn who stated that attending a Navy Day prompted his 'one ambition to join the Royal Navy'.⁵⁷ In Lavery's words: 'Navy Days certainly worked for Bob Tilburn'.⁵⁸ In addition to Navy Days, Bell argued that the navy 'found greater scope' with the Navy Weeks which were held annually between 1927 and 1938, stating that their popularity 'is attested to by contemporary press reports and the size of the crowds they attracted'.⁵⁹ Thus despite the challenging situation, the navy continued to be a visual element of British imperial power and one increasingly utilized for publicity after the mid-1920s.

"Showing the flag"

Within the complex political and economic situation of the inter-war years, the Royal Navy was initially slow to reassert its place in the post-war world. In addition, the need to popularize the navy and reinforce its position overseas was not immediately recognized. The war-time propaganda machine was quickly dispensed with at the end of the war, regarded by many in authority as an abhorrent necessity that could now be abolished along with many other war-time protocols.⁶⁰ In particular, Wise has noted the unwillingness of the Admiralty to send a naval mission to Poland in 1920; when forced, the mission lasted a year before being summoned home due to Treasury pressures and continued lack of interest by the Admiralty.⁶¹ Bell has noted that such overseas missions were initially viewed as 'worthwhile' by the Admiralty but of greater importance to 'diplomats and statesmen'.⁶² Therefore, overt propaganda continued to be frowned upon by naval elites and, as Bell has argued, the belief that the navy should be the 'silent service' remained deeply entrenched.⁶³

Yet, by the mid-1920s this view was changing. In particular, it was strongly argued that "showing the flag" would demonstrate the continued power of the Royal Navy whilst providing economic benefits to Britain's flagging economy. It was believed that it would help to secure orders for British yards in foreign markets, aid British economic prosperity and reassert Britain's imperial position in a difficult political environment.⁶⁴ Bell has argued that the Royal Navy should be credited with a degree of success for its attempt, stating that the 'low cost of the programs' made showing the flag 'at least cost effective'.⁶⁵ This success is predicated on the acceptance that the Royal Navy remained a powerful symbol and a useful propaganda tool. Bell has thus argued that the 'navy was the most visible symbol of British power and prestige abroad

⁵⁷ Lavery, *Able*, p. 271

⁵⁸ Lavery, *Able*, p. 271

⁵⁹ Bell, *Royal Navy*, pp. 174-175

⁶⁰ Bell, *Royal Navy*, p. 163; Agar, *Showing*, p. 17

⁶¹ Wise, *The role*, p. 28

⁶² Bell, *Royal Navy*, p. 160

⁶³ Navy Days were specifically to raise money for sailor charities not to promote the navy as such and in the eyes of naval elites this was acceptable. Bell, *Royal Navy*, p. 163

⁶⁴ Bell, *Royal Navy*, p. 150

⁶⁵ Bell, *Royal Navy*, p. 161

during the interwar period, and the Admiralty never questioned the link between naval strength and national influence'.⁶⁶

Certainly officers like Captain Augustus Agar did not doubt the importance of showing the flag.⁶⁷ Agar wrote that:

When it became known that the flag worn by the ship was the White Ensign of the Royal Navy... any apprehension which those ashore may have previously felt were at once allayed. Instead of fear there was confidence and goodwill, because the White Ensign signified authority in support of law and order.⁶⁸

Agar's imperialistic tone demonstrates his belief in Britain's civilizing mission and reveals the reasoning of naval elites. This was similarly demonstrated by sailors, although rarely couched in quite so openly imperialistic terms. Whether other nations actually felt reassured is beside the point; what is important is that the navy, officers, and sailors thought this was the case.⁶⁹ Agar's account of the Royal Navy between the wars is understandably biased, but nevertheless it provides an interesting description of the navy's role as a tool of political and imperial propaganda. The ultimate adoption of a showing-the-flag policy demonstrates that naval elites and the British Government believed in its ability to promote and support the Empire.

Consequently, during the 1920s and 1930s a number of showing-the-flag missions were undertaken. As Wise has stated, these made use of 'the best-known and most powerful warships in the Royal Navy' in order to create the greatest impact.⁷⁰ HMS *Renown* conveyed the Prince of Wales across the globe between 1919 and 1922, and the Duke and Duchess of York in 1927; HMS *Repulse* took the Prince of Wales to South Africa, West Africa, and South America in 1925.⁷¹ However, Bell has raised an interesting point. Evaluating the success of showing-the-flag missions is a secondary issue; it is more important that the naval elites believed this to be true and thus whether this was an holistic belief amongst sailors generally should be queried. Wise makes the salient point that there were important 'diplomatic subtleties' present when showing the flag.⁷² In addition, there were carefully planned elements designed to generate the most propaganda from the visit, such as 'the pre-arranged itinerary, the timing, [and] the type of vessel employed'.⁷³ Nevertheless, as Wise noted, port visits have elicited very little interest from historians except as part of a chronology of other events.⁷⁴ Again, this thesis builds upon this by considering sailors ashore during these visits especially as part of the Empire Cruise and seeks to move beyond the work of historians such as Spence

⁶⁶ Bell, *Royal Navy*, p. 138; Taylor, *End*, p. 12

⁶⁷ Agar, *Showing*, p. 24

⁶⁸ Agar, *Showing*, p. 25

⁶⁹ It should be noted that besides being a highly decorated naval officer, his book was published in the early 1960s as de-colonization was taking place and he undoubtedly wished to voice a defence for British actions which were coming under considerable scrutiny.

⁷⁰ Wise, *The role*, p. 20

⁷¹ Wise, *The role*, p. 20

⁷² Wise, *The role*, p. 16

⁷³ Wise, *The role*, p. 16

⁷⁴ Wise, *The role*, p. 16

and Buckner.⁷⁵ The Empire Cruise was the most notable of the navy's attempts to "show the flag" and involved a large-scale round-the-world cruise of the Special Service Squadron from 1923 to 1924. This cruise has been called 'a new undertaking' by Ralph Harrington as it was 'specifically a demonstration of naval power' rather than simply a royal tour.⁷⁶ This extensive enterprise will form a case study in this chapter and consider testimony from sailors who took part. In particular, it examines their attitude to the Empire Cruise juxtaposed to the inter-war situation.

From the start, the imperial element was very visible, as Wise has argued:

The stated purpose of this major undertaking was to emphasize the link between these far-distant lands and the Crown and to remind those countries of their dependence on British sea power.⁷⁷

For instance, the Admiralty records relating to the cruise note the desire for:

sending a really representative Squadron of our most modern ships round the Empire... in order to follow up any agreements for co-operation at the Imperial Conference by creating Dominion interest and enthusiasm so that such agreements may be really carried out.⁷⁸

Similarly the official reporter who accompanied the cruise, noted journalist and author V. C. Scott O'Connor, wrote that the purpose was expressly declared: 'to meet our kinsmen overseas, to carry to them a message of peace and goodwill, and to revive in their hearts and in ours the ties that bind them to us, and bind us to them'.⁷⁹ This was a propaganda drive *par excellence*. Wise has argued that officers were certainly aware of this and openly discussed the point, citing one midshipman who noted in his diary 'the propaganda purposes of the enterprise'.⁸⁰

The Admiralty attempted to promote imperial links still further by arranging for HMAS *Adelaide* to accompany the Special Service Squadron on the return voyage from Australia.⁸¹ Ostensibly this was for the purpose of training exercises, but was recognized by the Admiralty as a useful show of imperial unity at a time when it was coming under increased pressure.⁸² In effect this meant that the best British ships were touring the world accompanied by the best of one of its chief Dominions. This was picked up by Australian newspapers, and *The Telegraph* (Brisbane)

⁷⁵ Whilst both consider the importance of royal tours, Phillip Buckner did not consider the role of the navy in detail and Daniel Owen Spence did not focus on the views of the lower deck. See Chapter Two for further information.

⁷⁶ Harrington, "Mighty", p. 176; Harrington argued that it was different to the navy's previous round-the-world tours in that it was specifically not a royal tour but the navy (and her sailors) on display to the Empire. See also Taylor, *End*, p. 22.

⁷⁷ Wise, *The role*, p. 20

⁷⁸ ADM 116/2219

⁷⁹ O'Connor, *Empire Cruise*, p. 13; O'Connor's recollections of the cruise were published privately upon his return under the title: *The Empire Cruise*. A 106-minute film was also produced to commemorate the cruise, made by British Instructional Films Ltd. See also Harrington, "Mighty", p. 177.

⁸⁰ Wise, *The role*, p. 20; W.R. Gordon, 'Special Service Squadron World Cruise, November 1923 to September 1924. Being extracts from the diary of Midshipman W.R. Gordon', *The Naval Review*, 13, 1, 1925; pp. 108-114

⁸¹ ADM 116/2219

⁸² ADM 116/2219

boldly stated it was 'a matter of pride'.⁸³ Nevertheless, the importance of this was ignored by both sailors and O'Connor who made only fleeting reference to HMS *Adelaide*.⁸⁴

However, the aims of the cruise were clear: to strengthen links between colonies and the mother country. It was billed as a success by the Royal Navy and received popular support in both British and overseas newspapers. For example, upon its return *The Times* declared: 'The Squadron has done a great work, a work of which none living may measure the scope and the full consequence. It has been on a mission; it has sown the seed of Empire loyalty'.⁸⁵ Nonetheless, its enduring legacy is less certain. For example, the film commissioned to document the cruise, *Britain's Birthright*, was described by Bell as a 'commercial failure'.⁸⁶ Firstly, the navy struggled to find a film maker prepared to support the venture, suggesting that both the enterprise and the navy as a subject were not deemed popular topics. Bell highlighted this point and argued that a key reason for this was that new technologies, such as aeroplanes, were drawing public attention away from the navy.⁸⁷ Secondly, the film was not popular abroad, and *The Times* reported that the film was 'refused by all the Dominions' and only shown by private enterprise.⁸⁸ This is particularly thought-provoking given the interest the ships received abroad, and suggests that the novelty factor was an important draw rather than imperial sentiment or links to the mother country. *The Times* also suggested that a key reason for this failure lay in the Americanization of the film industry and stated that 'in some Dominions the theatres are very largely in the control of American interests'.⁸⁹ Similarly, this loss of market share by Britain was noticed in other ways. For instance, in Australia, one sailor noted that 'English motor firms were not adapting to the Australian market and needs thus losing out to America'.⁹⁰

The success of showing the flag therefore depended upon imagery and the ability to appeal to the public. In particular, as Wise highlighted, the type of warship selected was important.⁹¹ There was a great deal of complexity behind the choice of ships to be sent depending upon the particular politics of the mission. This is evident from the Admiralty records documenting the planning process for the Special Service Squadron, and there was some debate over which ships should be chosen to go.⁹² Whilst it was proposed that "the best" ships should be sent, it

⁸³ *The Telegraph* (Brisbane), 29 November 1923; Nevertheless, this show of imperial co-operation was not always present and Australia refused to send its flagship to participate in the proposed coronation review in 1937, although it had participated in the Review in 1935. As Rüger noted, 'Canberra believed that the Australian navy had more important things to do'. Rüger, *Great Naval*, pp. 268-269; NAA, CP4/2, 5: Prime Minister, Canberra, to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, London, 30 January 1937; This demonstrates the change in imperial priorities and reflects increased Dominion independence during the 1930s.

⁸⁴ The diaries considered are silent on this issue and even published diaries like C. R. Benstead's do not discuss this. O'Connor is also silent on this issue which is surprising given his lengthy discussion of HMS *Malaya* but this could be because *Malaya* was a British warship and a victor of Jutland and thus would have been known to the British public.

⁸⁵ *The Times*, 27 September 1924

⁸⁶ Bell, *Royal Navy*, p. 168

⁸⁷ Bell, *Royal Navy*, p. 162

⁸⁸ *The Times*, 24 May 1926

⁸⁹ *The Times*, 24 May 1926; *The Times* also suggests that this was a recognized issue and had been previously discussed.

⁹⁰ RNM 2004/55/1: Diary of Frederick Bushell; O'Connor also noted the Americanization of Sydney, stating that 'the tradition of following British examples is dying away'. O'Connor, *Empire*, p. 197

⁹¹ Wise, *The role*, p. 16

⁹² ADM 116/2219; This included those that were available of the most modern class that were not scheduled for refits during the year away, those with sufficient draught to allow entry to the harbours selected and other logistical issues.

was thought by some within the Admiralty that this show of strength would be counter-productive at a time when the Dominion navies were being encouraged to contribute more towards imperial defence.⁹³ Nevertheless, it was strongly argued that the benefits of sending “the best” outweighed the concerns, and it was decided that those ships most capable of projecting the image of imperial power should make up the squadron. However, logistical factors were also important such as the size of the harbours and the fleet’s refit schedule so that ships selected would be available to go and there would be no detrimental effects.

In the Admiralty’s opinion, HMS *Hood* was the natural choice to lead the squadron as the most modern and powerful battlecruiser afloat and the largest warship in the world.⁹⁴ Although a widely studied vessel, few historians have specifically considered the cultural impact of HMS *Hood*. Ralph Harrington has bridged this void and demonstrated the links between the inter-war navy and British culture and how, like HMS *Dreadnought*, *Hood* became so iconic. Harrington has called *Hood*’s selection for the Special Service Squadron ‘a necessity’, arguing that she was one of the most visible elements of British naval prestige between the wars.⁹⁵ As the greatest of the British battlecruisers, *Hood* was ‘referred to almost routinely as “the pride of the navy”’.⁹⁶ Harrington argued that, ‘in many ways the fact that the Royal Navy could still claim to have the largest, fastest, most costly warship afloat was a significant element of *Hood*’s particular status’.⁹⁷ *Hood*’s position in British popular culture was reinforced by a strong propaganda drive following its commissioning in 1920 as part of a concerted attempt to counter the perceived challenge to British naval prestige.⁹⁸

For instance, Harrington argued the reasoning behind sending HMS *Hood* was that: ‘The appearance of the biggest warship in the world off the shores of imperial cities across the globe was naturally intended to provoke awe in those who beheld her’.⁹⁹ This is supported by sailor testimony which suggests that British seamen were also very aware of the imposing power that their ships represented. For example, on their arrival at Cape Town in heavy fog, Arthur Russell recorded:

Great disappointment was felt by all through the existence of the bad weather – because nothing looks more inspiring and beautiful than to watch from the shore Britain’s two largest warships and four powerful cruisers slowly steaming into harbour, the decks of each ship lined with bluejackets and the bands playing a “march”.¹⁰⁰

⁹³ ADM 116/2219

⁹⁴ Wise, *The role*, p. 21; Harrington, “Mighty”, p. 179; See also ADM 116/2219.

⁹⁵ Harrington, “Mighty”, p. 179

⁹⁶ Harrington, “Mighty”, p. 171; Richard Hough, *The Longest Battle: the war at sea 1939-45*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1986); p. 89 quoted in Harrington, “Mighty”, p. 171

⁹⁷ Harrington, “Mighty”, p. 174

⁹⁸ Harrington, “Mighty”, pp. 173-174; *Hood*’s prominent position in the Special Service Squadron further assisted in cementing its image as the symbol of British naval power in the inter-war years. Just how deeply this image resonated with the British public is perhaps shown by the horror at its cataclysmic loss in 1941 and continued interest in its history and sinking. See also Harrington, “Mighty”, pp. 171-172; Taylor, *End*, pp. 202-207; *The Guardian*, 24 July 2001.

⁹⁹ Harrington, “Mighty”, p. 179

¹⁰⁰ RNM 1988/259/1: Diary of Arthur Russell

It is unclear whether Russell is referring to the locals or the crew by the use of the word "all" but nevertheless it suggests he believed that the fleet was awe inspiring. Furthermore, Russell suggests that there was demand for the squadron to visit ports in addition to the organized cruise programme. It was decided that *Hood* and *Repulse* were to call at Mossel Bay, Port Elizabeth, East London and Durban and he wrote: 'each port holds an excited and enthusiastic population – the excitement being due to the fact that the Admiral has proposed to stay at each port for about 12 hours and allow the people to see the "floating power" of Britain'.¹⁰¹ Similarly, in Malaya Woolman proudly noted the excited locals and what he perceived as the keen interest displayed by these subjects of the British Empire. He described a visit aboard by a group comprising Tamils, Sikhs, Japanese, and Chinese stating: 'Of such and many other types were the motely throng that swarmed here, there and everywhere aboard the two huge ships. Of such is the great British Empire composed'.¹⁰² More humorously however Douglas Poole was aboard HMS *Carlisle* on his way to the China Station when the Special Service Squadron called into port. His initial words were not of the grandness of the sight or pride in seeing the squadron but rather: 'The arrival of the S.S.S. was a sign for a break in the weather. Hitherto it had been nothing else but sunshine'.¹⁰³

Nevertheless, sailor diaries demonstrate that the response from both white and indigenous populations was typically one of awe and excitement in seeing the ships, which was interpreted by the sailors as pride and loyalty to the Empire.¹⁰⁴ For instance, Russell wrote: 'Many visitors came aboard during the afternoon and their faces shewed that the latest warships with their powerful guns filled them with pride'.¹⁰⁵ However, the dichotomy between the visual effect of the ships on indigenous and white inhabitants was paramount and recently Harrington has argued that HMS *Hood* meant different things to different people in the colonies: to the Europeans she 'symbolized and made real a remote and intangible homeland' and to the indigenous population she reinforced 'the power and beneficence of their imperial overlord'.¹⁰⁶ This suggests some support for O'Connor who noted that 'she has warmed the hearts of our own people, striving to maintain under conditions of exile... the greatness of the Empire they serve'.¹⁰⁷ In addition, sailor diaries support this dual role. For example, Frederick Bushell wrote regarding white colonial desires for a link to home: 'met a very nice old Scotchman who has come from Pretoria [to Cape Town] to see the Fleet'.¹⁰⁸ Meantime, Russell continued to demonstrate the power instilled on the locals. Writing about his experience at Freetown in Africa, Russell noted: 'today we had about 200 black visitors – they were exceedingly pleased'.¹⁰⁹ A further entry continues in this vein:

¹⁰¹ RNM 1988/259/1: Diary of Arthur Russell

¹⁰² RNM 1999/31: Diary of Wilfred Woolman

¹⁰³ RNM 1994/253/1: Diary of Douglas Poole

¹⁰⁴ Sailors do not comment on any popular dissent encountered during the cruise although local papers note occurrences. See *The Richmond River Express & Casino Kyogle Advertiser* (NSW), 20 February 1924.

¹⁰⁵ RNM 1988/259/1: Diary of Arthur Russell

¹⁰⁶ Harrington, "Mighty", p. 181

¹⁰⁷ O'Connor, *Empire Cruise*, p. 96

¹⁰⁸ RNM 2004/55/1: Diary of Frederick Bushell; A distance of around 900 miles.

¹⁰⁹ RNM 1988/259/1: Diary of Arthur Russell

many chiefs of various tribes visited the ship today – some carrying ornamental spears and other dangerous looking articles of warfare. They marvelled in the size of our 15" guns... I think, by the expression on their faces they would far sooner face a spear than our guns.¹¹⁰

Again, this reflects the awe that the locals felt but also demonstrates Russell's pride in the size and power of the ship. Furthermore, Russell stated: 'These people are indeed lucky because there are thousands in England who have never seen a warship'.¹¹¹ This is an interesting comment given the close proximity to the First World War and the level of pre-war naval pageantry. It is perhaps telling of the lack of naval pageantry post-war and its perception by sailors as to the lack of interest in the Royal Navy by the British public.

The other ships that took part in the Empire Cruise were chosen, therefore, as suitable escorts for *Hood*: the most modern of their class to ensure the world saw the best of the Royal Navy. This included *Repulse*, *Delhi*, *Dauntless*, *Danae* and *Dragon*. It is unclear whether the choice of HMS *Delhi* was due to the proposed visit to India (which was cancelled fairly early in the planning stage), but the Admiralty records suggest it was simply because it was a modern ship of a suitable class and would be available.¹¹² Nevertheless, Rüger has pointed to the importance of links forged between locations and ship names, therefore this is an interesting point to raise.¹¹³ The Special Service Squadron did call at Trincomalee, Ceylon (present day Sri Lanka) where the name may have aroused some additional interest.¹¹⁴ Contemporaries were cognizant of local links and, in his chapter on the visit to Malaya, O'Connor made reference to HMS *Malaya* which was gifted to the Royal Navy by the Malay States.¹¹⁵ Sailors were also aware of the patriotic connotations of this and Arthur Russell wrote during their time in Malaya: 'The ships are open to visitors in the forenoon from 9.30AM rather an unusual privilege – but really not too great a privilege for such a patriotic nation – the people having presented to Britain the fine Battleship HMS *Malaya*'.¹¹⁶ Therefore, sailors were aware of these imperial links, although the extent to which this was also reinforced during the cruise by commentators such as O'Connor is unclear.

In addition, the ports to be visited during the Empire Cruise were chosen with a specific diplomatic agenda. For example, the selection of the Protectorate of Zanzibar was called 'an unlikely destination' by Bruce Taylor.¹¹⁷ However, Taylor argued that Zanzibar was considered an important location to visit in order to demonstrate the continued power of the Royal Navy to the protectorate, as it had witnessed the surrender of HMS *Pegasus* in 1914: the first British

¹¹⁰ RNM 1988/259/1: Diary of Arthur Russell

¹¹¹ RNM 1988/259/1: Diary of Arthur Russell

¹¹² See ADM 116/2219.

¹¹³ Rüger, *Great Naval*, pp. 166-167

¹¹⁴ Newspapers and diaries do not reveal anything further.

¹¹⁵ O'Connor, *Empire*, p. 102; Michael W. Williams, *A Brief History of the Royal Navy: its people, places and pets*, (London: The London Press, 2006); p. 113; HMS *Malaya* was not part of the cruise and thus sailors were clearly aware of these links generally.

¹¹⁶ RNM 1988/259/1: Diary of Arthur Russell

¹¹⁷ Taylor, *End*, p. 23

surrender in a hundred years.¹¹⁸ Therefore, there was a desire to make an example to the protectorate. For instance, Bushell noted: 'Dressed ship and fired a Royal Salute of 21 guns for Sultan's benefit'.¹¹⁹ Whilst this salute would have been dramatic and have demonstrated the power of the navy, Bushell does not comment on whether he was aware of this. It is unsurprising that O'Connor makes only a slight mention of the loss of HMS *Pegasus* before blaming it squarely on the inadequacy of Zanzibar to field its own navy and the importance of having one to protect the coast.¹²⁰ Again, this signifies the necessity of their link to the British Empire, their dependence upon it, and that they should be grateful for its continued protection.

Conscious efforts were made to impress British power on the locals throughout the cruise and events were specifically organized to do this. Simple things such as the searchlights being aimed on the African coast during the night had a powerful political message. Harrington argued: 'The ships' searchlights were a particularly effective means of conveying their ability to project British power across the globe; visually dramatic, effective far inland, distinctly modern, and echoing the power and penetration of gunfire'.¹²¹ Wise supports this, stating: 'the mixed message behind this powerful announcement of the ship's presence was unmistakable'.¹²² However, although the effect on the locals was not doubted, it is unclear whether sailors understood or were conscious of this deeper meaning. Russell, aboard HMS *Hood*, certainly noted the use of searchlights on the African coast but simply recorded the exercise each time he saw it.¹²³ Meanwhile Frederick Bushell found such displays an inconvenience, writing: 'Searchlight display from warships in harbour interrupted our cinema several times'.¹²⁴

Nevertheless, this relative silence should not be taken as evidence that sailors were unaware of the deeper meaning behind aspects of the cruise such as this. Furthermore, their diaries documenting the various port visits do much to counter this suggestion and demonstrate recognition of the politics behind displays. For example, Wilfred Woolman described a ceremonial march past of a naval brigade at Singapore numbering 2,000 men, complete with artillery:

This march undoubtedly impressed the natives. In the early part of the war [First World War], there was a mutiny among the Sikh regiment at the Tanglin barracks, Singapore, which was nipped in the bud by a party landed from HMS *Cadmus* and thus prevented what would have proved an ugly affair. This show of force today evidently brought back that incident vividly to the minds of the inhabitants and impressed them with the might of Britain's power.¹²⁵

¹¹⁸ Taylor, *End*, p. 23

¹¹⁹ RNM 2004/55/1: Diary of Frederick Bushell

¹²⁰ O'Connor, *Empire Cruise*, p. 56

¹²¹ Harrington, "'Mighty'", p. 180

¹²² Wise, *The role*, p. 21; Gordon, 'Special', p. 111

¹²³ RNM 1988/259/1: Diary of Arthur Russell

¹²⁴ RNM 2004/55/1: Diary of Frederick Bushell

¹²⁵ RNM 1999/31: Diary of Wilfred Woolman

Therefore, Woolman not only demonstrates an awareness of the politics behind the display but also that he believed the event was an important success and reinforced British imperial power to the colony which he did not question.

However, despite the key aim of the enterprise and the overt imperialistic displays by the cruise abroad, the departure of the Special Service Squadron from Britain was distinctly low key, and very different from pre-war naval theatre. Although the 1920s saw the gradual reintroduction of naval pageantry, Taylor stated that the ships sailed 'without fanfare'.¹²⁶ Somewhat strangely perhaps, contemporaries who were otherwise promoting the Empire Cruise did not hide this apparent lack of enthusiasm. In particular, O'Connor wrote that the squadron: 'departed from our shores without any noise or circumstance, their departure stirring scarcely a ripple upon the calm surface of English life'.¹²⁷ O'Connor argued that this was due to the disillusionment and hardship caused by the war, suggesting that the public appetite for such pageantry was still considered to be low.¹²⁸ Although the papers reported on the squadron's departure, without a dramatic spectacle and large crowds, the lack of pageantry made it a challenge to make it newsworthy.¹²⁹ For instance, the *Daily Mail* reported on the departure early on 28 November 1923 and that the ships were 'heartily cheered by Service men in the dockyards as they passed down the harbour'.¹³⁰ Local papers do not add much, although the *North Devon Journal* noted that 'among the crew of the flagship "Hood", are two well-known Barnstaple men', which may suggest some local pride in their involvement.¹³¹

Similarly, sailor diaries reveal few differences to departing on a typical commission, commenting on the weather and receiving messages of good wishes from ashore, and do not suggest that they thought this lack of publicity odd.¹³² However, Woolman hinted at the situation by noting that the squadron: 'weighed anchor and silently, unostentatiously glided off'.¹³³ On the other hand, their quiet departure was not overlooked by one officer who served on *Hood* during the cruise. C. R. Benstead was more candid and wrote that they had:

idly speculated upon the manner of send-off our people would give. The subject was controversial, but we agreed that a vast crowd would see us depart... We sailed; and there were none to bid us good-bye.¹³⁴

Although Benstead does not go into detail regarding the controversies, this lends support to the argument that the navy's position in popular culture was deeply affected by the changing opinion of the British public. It also suggests that sailors were expecting some level of enthusiastic display. Some may have experienced pre-war naval pageantry, and more would

¹²⁶ Taylor, *End*, p. 23

¹²⁷ O'Connor, *Empire Cruise*, p. 13

¹²⁸ The importance of which Harrington, Rüger, Bell and Wise have noted. See O'Connor, *Empire Cruise*, p. 14; Harrington, "Mighty", p. 175; Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 260; Bell, *Royal Navy*, p. xvi; Wise, *The role*, pp. 19-20.

¹²⁹ This point has been discussed further in Chapter Two.

¹³⁰ *Daily Mail*, 28 November 1923

¹³¹ *North Devon Journal*, 29 November 1923

¹³² See for example RNM 1988/259/1: Diary of Arthur Russell; RNM 2004/55/1: Diary of Frederick Bushell.

¹³³ RNM 1999/31: Diary of Wilfred Woolman

¹³⁴ C. R. Benstead, *Round the World with the Battle Cruisers*, (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1925); p. 4

have witnessed it. Instead it appears that the Admiralty observed the mood and was fearful of a public backlash if they made a spectacle out of it.¹³⁵ Interestingly, Rüger has not commented on the Empire Cruise and it may be that its success aided the reintroduction of naval pageantry.¹³⁶ Whilst the cruise may not fit the typical naval theatre that Rüger investigated, it is a strange omission given that it put the navy on the world stage once again and his study continued into the 1920s and 1930s.

Eager flag wavers? Sailors' thoughts on "showing the flag"

Although there was a muted atmosphere at home, the Empire Cruise was an important undertaking with imperial (and economic) aims, and had been well-planned to ensure maximum effect. Furthermore, the scale and duration of this spectacle of naval pageantry meant that sailors were very much a part of the nature of the cruise. Consequently, how they engaged with "showing the flag" is important, as this put them undeniably at the forefront of the British imperial mission. The cruise meant sailors would be away from home for ten months and therefore the Empire Cruise would significantly affect them.¹³⁷ Bruce Taylor succinctly summed up the Empire Cruise: 'For most it was the beginning of an unforgettable adventure, the zenith of the peacetime Navy. For others... it was a desperate wrench'.¹³⁸ To demonstrate the "wrench", Taylor gave an example of an officer who was a newlywed and for whom the cruise meant time away from his bride.¹³⁹ However, Taylor argued that "for most" it was an "adventure" and the inference is that it must have been an enjoyable experience, yet he neglects to consider the lower deck in detail. It is also interesting that O'Connor avoided discussing the attitudes of sailors as they departed from Britain, simply noting: 'Of those who were concerned in the personal fortunes of each one of those men who sailed from England in these ships, this is no place to speak'.¹⁴⁰ However, as it was his mandate to promote the Empire Cruise, it is surprising that O'Connor did not choose to portray sailors' enthusiasm. This suggests that sailors may not have been overt in their enthusiasm, and this view may be supported by the diaries' lack of description regarding their departure.

However, it is more complicated than this. Firstly, Wilfred Woolman suggests to the contrary by noting the background excitement prior to the departure of the squadron:

For weeks past, the great cruise has been the one topic of conversation dominating all others. Again and again the itinerary has been gone over on

¹³⁵ Remember this was before the reintroduction of naval reviews in 1924.

¹³⁶ This link has not yet been confirmed and currently nothing has been found to prove this but given the time periods involved, the Empire Cruise may have reassured the Admiralty that naval pageantry would not meet with complete aversion.

¹³⁷ Although overseas commissions could last similar lengthy periods, this cruise would have them showing the flag on an unprecedented scale. Sailors who took part in the cruise were not selected individually as they were if they accompanied a royal tour but rather had to go if their ship was selected.

¹³⁸ Taylor, *End*, p.23

¹³⁹ Taylor, *End*, p. 23

¹⁴⁰ O'Connor, *Empire Cruise*, p. 14

maps and charts and now a globe is brought into the mess with the trip marked on by a white strip, adding a new zest to the journey...¹⁴¹

Therefore, Woolman suggests there was a degree of excitement and interest in the experience amongst the lower deck. Similarly, Russell indicated his feelings at being part of the cruise when, following an announcement made by the captain, he wrote: 'he tells us that H.M. the King is very interested in this cruise (so am I)'.¹⁴² On the other hand, Frederick Bushell noted with some humour: 'it is a small consolation to know that we are on the way home, though we are going a long way round to get there'.¹⁴³ This suggests an element of veracity to Taylor's argument and that it depended on the personal circumstances of the sailor as to how they viewed the experience.

Nevertheless, despite the adventure it promised, within a few days of the squadron leaving Britain some sailors were already grumbling at the tedium of the voyage. For example, Bushell stated with evident sarcasm: 'This lovely cruise is getting rather boring'.¹⁴⁴ Perhaps even more telling is a further comment: 'I have to be inoculated early next week, that should relieve the monotony somewhat'.¹⁴⁵ Although presumably humorously meant, it is suggestive of the level of boredom sailors were experiencing. This view is also suggested by Russell who wrote, 'one feels rather depressed after staring at the sea for 5 or 6 days on end'.¹⁴⁶ Woolman expressed a sense of boredom, too, noting: 'we had a whist drive in the mess, making a very welcome break to the monotony'.¹⁴⁷ It is somewhat contrary to the image of the exciting Empire Cruise, and indeed the popular image of sailors as adventurous, uncomplaining stalwarts of the Empire, to hear them - only a few days into their voyage - complaining of boredom.¹⁴⁸ Perhaps adding to this was a lack of routine training exercises recorded by sailors in these opening days, which usually helped to instil some structure in their daily lives.¹⁴⁹ Yet, despite the apparent grumbling of the men, the diaries demonstrate that many were excited at the prospects the Empire Cruise offered. Whether this reflected their own imperial sentiment, eagerness for adventure or a combination of both needs to be considered.

As the main objective of the cruise, visits to British colonies feature highly in sailors' diaries. For many it was their first visit to these ports and consequently they were usually detailed in their description. After the monotony of day-to-day life at sea, the "otherness" of the colonies was the experience that they wanted to record for posterity. Arthur Russell made this clear when he wrote that 'Naval affairs afford little or no interest to diary holders'.¹⁵⁰ Their language

¹⁴¹ RNM 1999/31: Diary of Wilfred Woolman

¹⁴² RNM 1988/259/1: Diary of Arthur Russell

¹⁴³ RNM 2004/55/1: Diary of Frederick Bushell; See also RNM 1994/253/1: Diary of Douglas Poole who described departing for 3 years on the China station and said he saw no sign of unhappiness or regret.

¹⁴⁴ RNM 2004/55/1: Diary of Frederick Bushell

¹⁴⁵ RNM 2004/55/1: Diary of Frederick Bushell

¹⁴⁶ RNM 1988/259/1: Diary of Arthur Russell

¹⁴⁷ RNM 1999/31: Diary of Wilfred Woolman

¹⁴⁸ Mary A. Conley, *From Jack to Union Jack: Representing naval manhood in the British Empire, 1870-1918*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009); pp. 123-132

¹⁴⁹ RNM 1988/259/1: Diary of Arthur Russell; Russell noted the benefit of being kept busy with training exercises to relieve the monotony.

¹⁵⁰ RNM 1988/259/1 Diary of Arthur Russell

is revealing of how they perceived the Empire but, more importantly, it demonstrates how imperialist ideas had been adopted into sailor culture. In particular, Russell described the approach to Port Swettenham like something from a *Boy's Own Paper* story, demonstrating the excitement and also the link to imperial adventure:

it indeed thrilled me – having at last actually steamed up a river between jungles which I have read so much about in books – I eagerly scanned the outer edge of the jungles with a telescope with the hope of perhaps being able to see some wild animals but I was doomed to disappointment.¹⁵¹

However, on their arrival there was little celebration and Russell described the Chinese locals who turned out to greet them: 'the Chinese spectators watched us pass by and their faces bore no signs of emotion at our great dimensions they simply wore the stolid expression so characteristic of Orientals'.¹⁵² It is unclear whether Russell had picked up this stereotypical view of "Orientals" from previous experience or perhaps from popular imperialist stories. However, this account suggests he had a clear picture in his mind of what he might experience.

Sailors were acutely aware of their surroundings and noted items of interest, including tangible links to Britain and the Empire. For example, at Zanzibar Wilfred Woolman noted a prominent feature: 'In the main street is a tall milestone, the first reading on which is London, 8064 miles'.¹⁵³ This would have served as a focal point to all locals, traders and visitors, constantly reminding them about the trade link of which they were a part. Furthermore, Woolman suggested that the link to the Empire, and indeed home, was particularly evident, noting the common sight of packaging in shops: 'one is suddenly carried back home by seeing such things as Sharp's Kreemy Toffee in the tins so familiar in England, Coleman's Mustard, Sunlight Soap, etc.'.¹⁵⁴ Although not specifically referring to it, Woolman is drawing a link to trade and to the Empire which clearly had an effect on him and demonstrates latent thoughts of imperial culture.

Furthermore, considering sailors' experience of patriotism in the colonies provides an insight into their own relationship with imperialism. In particular, it demonstrates the contrast between imperialism for white and indigenous populations, and also sailors' own perceptions of "otherness". For example, whilst at Sierra Leone, Russell noted that:

German is never used now in Sierra Leone – many of the black soldiers here proudly wear the Great War medals... Altogether they are proud of England and quite happy and content under British Rule.¹⁵⁵

This suggests that Russell understood this to be a demonstration on the part of the locals to eschew anything as unpatriotic as the language of their Empire's vanquished enemy. However,

¹⁵¹ RNM 1988/259/1: Diary of Arthur Russell; See also Conley, *From Jack*, p. 9 for the importance of boys' stories on recruitment etc.

¹⁵² RNM 1988/259/1: Diary of Arthur Russell

¹⁵³ RNM 1999/31: Diary of Wilfred Woolman; It is in fact still standing and was reported in the *Milestone Society Newsletter* in 2006 see <http://www.milestonesociety.co.uk/NL10.pdf>.

¹⁵⁴ RNM 1999/31: Diary of Wilfred Woolman

¹⁵⁵ RNM 1988/259/1: Diary of Arthur Russell

he does not explain or demonstrate he was aware of whether this was due to government edicts or enforcement. Bushell, on the other hand, was 'surprised' to hear the locals singing "Yes we have no bananas" and noted that 'they seem to know most of the old wartime songs'.¹⁵⁶ However, he makes no comment as to why they have learnt these songs or any reference to their involvement in the war. This surprise suggests that he had not considered their involvement in the Great War.

Nevertheless, despite recognizing patriotism amongst indigenous populations, the size of the colony and the port being visited, and whether it was a white majority population, was an influencing factor in the scale of the reception and how patriotic it was. For example, at Auckland Frederick Bushell enjoyed their arrival and wrote that:

The Harbour Board building is beautifully illuminated and has Haere Mai! Haere Mai! written in lights which in Maori means "Come Here. Come Here (or welcome gallant sons of the sea)!" and there are the usual signs on the buildings such as "Welcome to the Boys in Blue" "Safeguards of the Empire" etc. until we are not quite sure what we really are, and shall soon imagine we are real sailors.¹⁵⁷

Putting aside his humour and general excitement at the welcome, it is clear that he felt pride at the greeting they received. This stands in contrast to other experiences of local languages, notably at Singapore where the men attended a dinner at the town hall which had been decorated by Chinese locals. However, being in the presence of some government officials who translated the banners with Chinese characters decorating the building it appears that messages reading 'dear departed one' and similar funerary themes were being displayed which prompted Arthur Russell to note 'the Orientals take advantage of the ignorance of the white race for not knowing the Chinese language'.¹⁵⁸

Consequently, some of the most patriotic receptions that the Special Service Squadron received were in the primarily white Dominion of Australia where the squadron called at various ports.¹⁵⁹ Woolman recorded a particularly positive experience:

For nearly four months, we have been travelling around Australasia and on leaving it I cannot help but reflect on the fact that here we have vast dominions with resources scarcely touched, where there is work for everyone who is willing to work and where everyone seems happy, contented and prosperous...¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ RNM 2004/55/1: Diary of Frederick Bushell

¹⁵⁷ RNM 2004/55/1: Diary of Frederick Bushell

¹⁵⁸ RNM 1988/259/1: Diary of Arthur Russell; Whether or not they said this, Russell believed what he was told and it fitted the stereotypical image in his mind.

¹⁵⁹ The diaries do not make reference to interactions with aborigines nor note any of them visiting the ships. They did however encounter them on some organized trips ashore.

¹⁶⁰ RNM 1999/31: Diary of Wilfred Woolman; Interestingly William Stone reported 140 deserters whilst in Australia although unpublished diaries do not comment. William Stone, *Hero of the Fleet*, (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 2009); p. 90

Woolman added, 'Many people, not content with giving entertainment and hospitality, have added valuable souvenirs to weld the links of friendship which binds the colonies to the mother country'.¹⁶¹ Thus he recognized it as a place where one had the ability to better one's self but he also speaks with a sense of pride that it is a British possession and delight in the evident links he felt existed between Australia and Britain.

On the other hand, Russell presents a rather negative view about the colony and wrote:

A great many immigrants from our own little island were abroad and they were not slow in telling us how they have fared during their stay in Australia – so far I have not met one who is content with his lot...¹⁶²

Nevertheless, despite Russell's reservations about the opportunities offered by Australia, he evidently enjoyed the patriotic displays he witnessed. Russell noted as he and a party of men journeyed into the countryside:

it was inspiring to see so many clothes props bearing the Union Jack – some people had hung their flags on the fence of their garden close to the rail track. Groups of kiddies hunger over the... window sills, garden fences, and railings cheering and excitedly jumping up and down waving little flags & handkerchiefs – of course we being full of pride & perhaps (swank) waved our hands or saluted the elderly people. (Oh! well if you want to know. Yes! we waved our hands to the young ladies too!¹⁶³

When encountered, displays of patriotism were assumed to be exhibitions of universal pride in the Empire.¹⁶⁴ This suggests that the imperialistic atmosphere had an effect on sailors and they were more likely to respond favourably when it was encountered.

However, although the majority of ports offered a warm welcome, the squadron's visit to the port of Hobart on the island of Tasmania was a stark contrast to their mainland Australia visit. It was the most unenthusiastic visit recorded by sailors during the entire cruise and more surprising because it had a predominantly white populace. Woolman noted: 'There was no display of bunting, such as we have seen at all our other ports of call, and only a few flags here and there'.¹⁶⁵ Summing it up, he continued:

No cars were provided for us – we had to find our own way and walk through the muddy streets in our uniforms. The people we passed showed not the slightest interest. After Melbourne, it was so noticeable. It was the coolest reception we have had so far. Perhaps we have been spoilt and expect to be

¹⁶¹ RNM 1999/31: Diary of Wilfred Woolman; Officers were also reporting this in newspapers. See *The Times*, 5 July 1924

¹⁶² RNM 1988/259/1: Diary of Arthur Russell

¹⁶³ RNM 1988/259/1: Diary of Arthur Russell

¹⁶⁴ For examples of the patriotic receptions see *Singleton Argus* (NSW), 12 April 1924; *Examiner* (Launceston), 15 April 1924; *Western Argus* (Kalgoorlie, WA), 29 April 1924.

¹⁶⁵ RNM 1999/31: Diary of Wilfred Woolman

made a fuss of everywhere we go, but there was not a vestige of enthusiasm displayed anywhere...¹⁶⁶

Similarly, Bushell commented on the atmosphere: 'There were comparatively few people at the dock to see us come alongside and it seems very quiet after our last two ports'.¹⁶⁷ The following day Bushell went ashore and he 'did not get a very good impression of Hobart... there seemed to be absolutely nothing to do at all'.¹⁶⁸ The local and Australian press, such as *The Argus* (Melbourne), blamed the weather, although the Tasmanian *Daily Telegraph* noted: 'despite unpropitious and hazy weather... thousands of loyal Tasmanians greeted the advent of the pride and flower of Britain's Navy by demonstrations of enthusiasm and national fervour'.¹⁶⁹ Another paper proclaimed, in contrast to Woolman's comments, that 'Jack ashore had a good time' and enjoyed 'motor car rides' and 'free tram rides'.¹⁷⁰

On the other hand, O'Connor wrote that the people of Hobart appeared more English, 'their manner more reserved, and quieter and less expansive than that of the Australians'.¹⁷¹ However, O'Connor conceded that the Special Service Squadron was not met with much enthusiasm and suggested the reason for this coolness was that the effects of convict life had 'reached their most poignant' in Tasmania and 'cast a gloom over the city'.¹⁷² Unsurprisingly O'Connor's chapter on the visit to Hobart is relatively short.

Considering another published account therefore allows further excogitation of this point. For instance, C. R. Benstead did not avoid the subject but detailed a rather surprising story:

Inspired by an organisation avowedly hostile to British interests, the voice of calumny had been raised against us... The general scheme was this: in the visiting Squadron the men were convicts who preferred to serve their sentence in His Majesty's ships instead of his prisons...¹⁷³

Benstead concluded that once this had been countered the people of Hobart were very welcoming.¹⁷⁴ The veracity of Benstead's story is unclear but he was an officer trying to make light of the experience in a published account and thus clearly wished to project imperial unity. However, later that year a memorial tablet was installed at a signal station in Hobart to mark the squadron's visit, leaving an indelible mark on the town.¹⁷⁵ This was originally proposed by a private benefactor but the local board 'recognising the "usefulness" of such a plate to visitors, deemed it a duty to the public to carry the idea into effect'.¹⁷⁶

¹⁶⁶ RNM 1999/31: Diary of Wilfred Woolman

¹⁶⁷ RNM 2004/55/1: Diary of Frederick Bushell

¹⁶⁸ RNM 2004/55/1: Diary of Frederick Bushell

¹⁶⁹ *The Argus* (Melbourne), 1 April 1924; *Daily Telegraph* (Tasmania), 28 March 1924

¹⁷⁰ *Kalgoorlie Miner* (Western Australia), 1 April 1924; See also RNM 1999/31: Diary of Wilfred Woolman.

¹⁷¹ O'Connor, *Empire Cruise*, p. 180

¹⁷² O'Connor, *Empire Cruise*, p. 182

¹⁷³ Benstead, *Round the World*, p. 144-145; William Stone also supports this; See Stone, *Hero*, p. 89.

¹⁷⁴ Benstead, *Round the World*, p. 146; Woolman gives a good account of the children's party hosted at Hobart and a dance that attracted a good deal of attention see RNM 1999/31: Diary of Wilfred Woolman.

¹⁷⁵ *The Mercury* (Tasmania), 1 December 1924

¹⁷⁶ *The Mercury* (Tasmania), 1 December 1924

Nevertheless, sailors were much affected by the lack of enthusiasm they encountered especially, as Woolman noted, after what they had experienced previously. Whilst Woolman and Bushell were vexed by the lack of opportunities they encountered, this was not simply annoyance at not being made a fuss of. Although their previous success undoubtedly increased their awareness of this, it is likely that this also affected their own sense of pride and made for an uncomfortable time.¹⁷⁷ In particular, that they experienced this in a white colony perhaps added to the surprise at the less than friendly welcome. A similar situation occurred at Quebec in Canada, however here sailors noted that it felt as if they were in a distinctly French town rather than a British one. For instance, Bushell noted: 'Quite 80% of the people speak nothing but French... from the matelots point of view the only redeeming feature is that beer is 5 cents per glass!'.¹⁷⁸ Similarly, Woolman wrote: 'Quebec is undoubtedly French'.¹⁷⁹ Bushell also suggested a lack of awareness of the Empire and recorded stopping at a little store 'kept by an old woman who had an idea that England was where the King and Queen lived'.¹⁸⁰ This testimony suggests some feeling of affront to sailor pride but was perhaps assuaged somewhat by the feeling that the colony was "distinctly French" unlike the experience at Hobart which could not be excused by "foreignness".

Another important aspect of the port visit was opening the ship to visitors, known as "At Home" days. These provided an opportunity to further demonstrate the power of the Royal Navy to locals. They also allowed an opportunity for the men to interact with the locals, particularly the white colonials, and both gain more from the imperial community spirit. For example, at Fremantle Bushell wrote: 'At present my head is full of such details as: length of Hood... I hope they are all correct to a few places of decimals as I have been repeating them parrot fashion to visitors all day'.¹⁸¹ "At Home" days provided the chance for sailors to make friends with the locals for whom they would conduct guided tours of the ship and treat to tea in their mess. The point of this was an expected reciprocal arrangement whereby their new acquaintances would take them around the port town and show them the sights.¹⁸²

Therefore, this was not just a visit of ships and sailors to a port town but also the port town to ships and sailors. This was an important facet of the visit to sailors, and led to some annoyance when there was no reciprocation. As Woolman noted: 'usually, people like to show their appreciation by inviting us in return and help us to see some of the sights of their town. I was a little piqued, therefore, when they said "well, good-bye and thank you very much"'.¹⁸³ In addition to guided tours, visitors were able to buy souvenirs of their visit: a tangible reminder of the Empire Cruise and one that would serve as a reminder of the strength and power of the

¹⁷⁷ Other sailors have noted discomfort when unwelcome; See Christopher McKee, *Sober Men and True: Sailor lives in the Royal Navy, 1900-1945*, (London: Harvard University Press, 2002); p. 171; Henry Baynham, *Men from the Dreadnoughts*, (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1976); pp. 192-193; Sidney Knock, *Clear Lower Deck: An intimate study of the men of the Royal Navy*, (London: Philip Allan & Co., 1933); p. 131.

¹⁷⁸ RNM 2004/55/1: Diary of Frederick Bushell. See also Benstead, *Round the World*, p. 237.

¹⁷⁹ RNM 1999/31: Diary of Wilfred Woolman

¹⁸⁰ RNM 2004/55/1: Diary of Frederick Bushell

¹⁸¹ RNM 2004/55/1: Diary of Frederick Bushell

¹⁸² McKee, *Sober Men*, p. 166; *Singleton Argus* (NSW), 12 April 1924; *The Brisbane Courier* (Qld), 12 June 1924

¹⁸³ RNM 1999/31: Diary of Wilfred Woolman

Royal Navy. Russell suggests that these were popular and following their visit to Trincomali recorded: 'Our ship's bookstall takes the eye of all the visitors and hundreds of "Repulse" photographs are purchased during the visiting hours. It was necessary to send to England for another 3,000'.¹⁸⁴ Sailors would also pose for photographs with their visitors: another tangible reminder.¹⁸⁵

One aspect of these "At Home" days evidently enjoyed by some sailors was the hosting of children's parties aboard. Indeed this fits with the stereotypical image of the sailor: a diligent family man.¹⁸⁶ Woolman enjoyed these parties and described them in some detail. For instance, at Cape Town he described the cancellation of the children's party due to bad weather and wrote: 'we heard later that Cape Town... was a city full of crying children' because of this.¹⁸⁷ Following another party, Woolman noted: 'All the attractions were well patronised, not only by the kiddies but by the grown-ups too, who were simply amazed to find such things on board. Many of them confessed they thought the children would be bored for three hours on board the ship'.¹⁸⁸ On the other hand and in contrast to this image, Bushell remarked on being asked by a female visitor to help find her missing children and was unimpressed at the task of looking for lost children amongst the crowds.¹⁸⁹

However, there was more to this than a reflection of imperial imagery. Sailor testimony suggests a degree of pleasure in these open days and seamen recorded interesting encounters with the locals. Their language demonstrates that sailors took pride in their ships and enjoyed showing them off to visitors but they also enjoyed the chance for social interaction and new experiences. Nevertheless, the repeated demands made upon them and the vast numbers of visitors aboard caused some inconvenience to sailors, which impacted upon their own comforts and could cause irritation. For example, Bushell complained about the crowds and wrote: 'Mess absolutely crowded for tea. Sat opposite two giggling girls, quite took away my appetite'.¹⁹⁰

Public interactions with the sailors was particularly important. As this thesis has argued, sailors were a vital part of the imperial image of the Royal Navy and the sailor as a construct was equally important. They were a fundamental part of the pageantry and in particular the extended pageantry when the navy came ashore in the colonies and took part in organized marches. These served to further reinforce upon the locals the power of the Royal Navy and its men. As Arthur Russell commented at Zanzibar: 'Still further have we ventured to exhibit the efficiency and power of our navy'.¹⁹¹ Route marches attracted significant public interest and at Zanzibar, even on a small scale march to the church accompanied by *Hood's* band, Bushell recorded that they 'were nearly stifled by the swarms of natives running alongside'.¹⁹² Similarly

¹⁸⁴ RNM 1988/259/1: Diary of Arthur Russell

¹⁸⁵ RNM 2004/55/1: Diary of Frederick Bushell

¹⁸⁶ Conley, *From Jack*, p. 123

¹⁸⁷ RNM 1999/31: Diary of Wilfred Woolman

¹⁸⁸ RNM 1999/31: Diary of Wilfred Woolman; See also RNM 201459/1: Diary of LSA Reynolds.

¹⁸⁹ RNM 2004/55/1: Diary of Frederick Bushell

¹⁹⁰ RNM 2004/55/1: Diary of Frederick Bushell

¹⁹¹ RNM 1988/259/1: Diary of Arthur Russell

¹⁹² RNM 2004/55/1: Diary of Frederick Bushell

Russell stated that a march in which he took part 'was a complete success and was the event of the visit – thousands of people of all nationalities greeted us with cheers'.¹⁹³ Likewise at Cape Town, Wilfred Woolman wrote of 'A route march through the town by marines and parties landed from each ship which evidently delighted the inhabitants'.¹⁹⁴

Whilst these marches could demonstrate power and create excitement, they also allowed different experiences depending on the audience. For example, at Fiji Woolman noted: 'The natives watched the procession with the utmost reverence, but there was no waving of flags or cheering'.¹⁹⁵ This did not dampen his opinion of their success. This suggests almost godly worship of the bluejackets. In comparison, where there were white audiences, displays of "tub-thumping" patriotism were far more evident and the mood was expected to be different. There was less superiority and a different sense of pride. Consideration of local newspapers lends support to sailor testimony. For example, *The Brisbane Courier* wrote: 'The principal event of the visit of the English naval squadron to Adelaide took place this morning' and described it as 'a glorious and impressive spectacle'.¹⁹⁶ Its most patriotic comment summed up the event: 'The huge crowd remained steady, and gazed with wonderful appreciation at the units of the British Navy, and gloried in the thoughts of the great traditions associated with Britain's supremacy of the sea'.¹⁹⁷ Thus these different forms of imperialistic appreciation again demonstrates the dual role of the cruise and the contrast between white and indigenous populations. Nevertheless, it suggests a level of awareness amongst sailors but also pride in how they were viewed.

However, although they enjoyed the fuss, it is again evident that sailors sometimes found ceremonial duties tiresome.¹⁹⁸ This is hinted at by Russell who wrote: 'It was terribly hot on the march but no one faltered or openly complained'.¹⁹⁹ This suggests that complaints may have been made in private. Therefore, although recognized as their duty and an order to be obeyed, participation was viewed by some sailors as a chore, as Russell noted regarding their visit to Port Adelaide. He was one of 150 men given shore leave whilst another 800 took part 'in the ceremonial march in Adelaide. So by 9AM Port Adelaide was overcrowded by sailors and marines – we with a cool appearance and the others sweating out their very lives'.²⁰⁰ His sense of smugness is barely contained. On another ceremonial occasion, at Fremantle, Russell wrote: 'I was not there this time (and I'm not sorry either) a rifle gets a bit weighty in these climates'.²⁰¹ Again, this also reveals the balance between duty and personal enjoyment.

¹⁹³ RNM 1988/259/1: Diary of Arthur Russell

¹⁹⁴ RNM 1999/31: Diary of Wilfred Woolman

¹⁹⁵ RNM 1999/31: Diary of Wilfred Woolman

¹⁹⁶ *The Brisbane Courier*, 12 March 1924

¹⁹⁷ *The Brisbane Courier*, 12 March 1924

¹⁹⁸ This point is also raised in Chapter Two.

¹⁹⁹ RNM 1988/259/1: Diary of Arthur Russell

²⁰⁰ RNM 1988/259/1: Diary of Arthur Russell; See also RNM 2014/59/1: Diary of LSA Reynolds.

²⁰¹ RNM 1988/259/1: Diary of Arthur Russell

Colonial experiences: imperial sentiment v personal enjoyment

The experience of sailors in the colonies therefore raises an important question regarding what seamen felt about their interactions with the colonies and imperialism as a whole. As this chapter has argued, sailors were aware of their part in the Empire and proud of Britain's position, and of what they regarded as *their* colonies. However, the concept of "pride" is a complicated issue. Although sailors were displaying pride in the Empire, it is also evident that alongside this there was individual pride in the ships and the service as well. This combination is demonstrated by an incident of international rivalry described by Frederick Bushell. Recording their arrival at Zanzibar he noted the USS *Concord* was in harbour and wrote in his diary: 'Yankee light cruiser type boat lying in harbour when we arrived and soon were scooting round in a motor boat of theirs but they soon piped down when we hoisted out our CMB [Coastal Motor Boat]'.²⁰² There is a sneer of superiority in this comment, demonstrating his pride in the Royal Navy and a belief that British vessels were better than American ones. This sense of superiority is interesting given the economic situation at the time and its effect on the Royal Navy through the Washington Treaty and, of which the sailors must have been aware.²⁰³ However, the Empire Cruise was to show the world that Britain still had the biggest, most modern ships, and that Britannia still ruled the waves. Therefore, Bushell's testimony suggests this idea still had some currency with British sailors.

Therefore, there is a danger in seeing sailors' pride in their ships simply as synonymous with pride in the Empire. Although this chapter has demonstrated that sailor culture fostered imperial sentiment, such sentiment is more often implied than stated, and there is little evidence to suggest that imperial sentiment was a single factor. For example, Russell noted that on leaving Cape Town they had 'left behind... a high reputation for the British Navy'.²⁰⁴ Similarly Woolman wrote: 'Once more the Special Service Squadron has scored a success and won the hearts of the people of Vancouver and British Columbia generally with, it is hoped, permanent results'.²⁰⁵ Therefore, although the Empire was important, the Royal Navy's reputation, intrinsically linked with their own, was also important and a source of pride.

In particular, the pride and patriotism that sailors believed the colonies demonstrated helped shape their interpretation. Given the level of organization, it is not surprising that none of the diaries considered describe witnessing any dissent in the colonies.²⁰⁶ Instead sailors' testimony suggests many accepted without question that local inhabitants were proud of the Royal Navy

²⁰² RNM 2004/55/1: Diary of Frederick Bushell; The Empire Cruise was in fact smaller than the USA's "Great White Cruise" in 1907 which saw 16 Battleships tour the world but if sailors were aware of this then they made no mention. For further information see Wise, *The role*, p. 18. This point regarding international rivalry is considered further in Chapter Six.

²⁰³ Even aboard ship the economic situation was hard to ignore and sailors would have been aware of the strict rules issued by the Admiralty to keep costs down, such as limits on steaming speeds. Sailors were aware of political developments e.g. Arthur Russell mentions the importance of newspapers and the wireless to hear news from home regarding strikes. See RNM 1988/259/1: Diary of Arthur Russell; Kennedy, *Rise*, p. 270

²⁰⁴ RNM 1988/259/1: Diary of Arthur Russell

²⁰⁵ RNM 1999/31: Diary of Wilfred Woolman

²⁰⁶ This point has also been discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

and, by extension, the Empire.²⁰⁷ Again, this confuses matters as there is no clear demarcation between pride in the navy and pride in being part of the Empire. Sailors did not consider which the greater draw was: the novelty of their visit or patriotism. If they did, then they did not make the distinction. Although they were aware that the ships were an awe-inspiring sight they equated this primarily with pride and respect. Therefore, sailor testimony suggests they did not question that the colonies were better off under the aegis of the Union Flag.²⁰⁸ Whether consciously or subconsciously, sailors felt some degree of benign duty of care to those people under their protection suggesting that this element of imperial thinking was part of the wider sailor culture.²⁰⁹

However, despite this, it is necessary to question the importance of their enjoyment and the role this played; in particular, how vital it was for sailors to have an opportunity to relax.²¹⁰ The opportunities presented by the different colonies was very much at the forefront of sailors' minds. Furthermore, the interest shown by sailors does not necessarily equate to interest simply because they were British colonies.²¹¹ What was on offer was an important factor and itineraries and ports of call formed a common topic on the lower deck, and older sailors would have shared with their younger messmates their own experiences of different ports: which were good and which were bad, and what was available for their entertainment.²¹² For example, one of the most anticipated visits was to Australia. Already possessed of a reputation as a place where people could make something of themselves, Australia was a colony with great potential draw to the sailors who visited. Prior to their arrival, Russell recorded: 'I am really getting quite enthusiastic about our long stay in Australia because it is supposed to be a very pleasant land'.²¹³ This demonstrates his expectations and the thoughts and feelings he has formulated about Australia either from books, hearsay, or propaganda. Similarly, enjoying themselves was clearly on Bushell's and his friends' minds. On one visit ashore in Australia he wrote: 'Should have caught the 9-30 train to some unearthly place in the bush... but we conveniently made a mistake & went to Adelaide'.²¹⁴ Sailors were adept at finding the experience they wanted. Furthermore, sailors also used this opportunity to visit friends or family members who had emigrated and the diaries describe a number of liaisons.²¹⁵ Again, this demonstrates a sense of independence amongst sailors, that they would take matters into their own hands if it were possible, especially when the potential benefits outweighed the possible repercussions.

²⁰⁷ As previously mentioned, sailors were usually good at recognizing when they were unwelcome visitors and thus this one-sided report of local patriotism suggests that concerted efforts were made to keep any disruptions hidden.

²⁰⁸ RNM 1988/259/1: Diary of Arthur Russell; RNM 2004/55/1: Diary of Frederick Bushell

²⁰⁹ This has been used by others as a defence for empire. In particular, see Agar, *Showing*, p. 26.

²¹⁰ This has been considered in previous chapters, particularly Chapter Three and Chapter Four.

²¹¹ For instance Woolman proclaimed that the USA's territory Hawaii was superior to the British colony Jamaica; See RNM 1999/31: Diary of Wilfred Woolman.

²¹² RNM 1999/31: Diary of Wilfred Woolman; McKee, *Sober Men*, pp. 84-101

²¹³ RNM 1988/259/1: Diary of Arthur Russell; Although Russell was ultimately disappointed as discussed above.

²¹⁴ RNM 2004/55/1: Diary of Frederick Bushell

²¹⁵ RNM 1999/31: Diary of Wilfred Woolman; Stone, *Hero*, p. 87

Larger colonies had more to offer sailors, assisted by the more-developed imperial societies present such as the Navy League who catered to the sailors' needs.²¹⁶ For instance, Douglas Poole also wrote that the Special Service Squadron enjoyed, 'The Squadron club being open in which 1,000 meals were served daily and as much beer... as you wish'.²¹⁷ Russell added to this: 'Here the men can obtain beer and refreshments also cigarettes, free of charge'.²¹⁸ On the other hand, smaller colonies provided fewer opportunities for sailors to have fun ashore, as Russell noted at Zanzibar: 'It is of course obvious to any sensible fellow that the people of this island cannot entertain us on a lavish scale'.²¹⁹ This also reflects the difference between white and indigenous populations. For example, Poole noted: 'The European community ashore has arranged a varied programme of entertainments for the amusement of the sailors during their stay'.²²⁰ Although usually giving a warm welcome, native colonies lacked this imperial infrastructure catering towards sailors' enjoyment, and cultural differences could not always bridge the gap. In particular, it is important to recognize how sailors viewed race, and its influence on the manner in which they reported their experiences abroad. For example, it is evident that whether the population was white or indigenous was important. They were very conscious of the difference and noted when there were fewer white people in the colony.²²¹ However, this should not be seen simply as xenophobia but rather that sailors relied heavily on white locals to provide an opportunity for them to enjoy themselves within their own cultural expectations.²²²

Nevertheless, indigenous peoples provided a much desired experience of the *exotic* which formed part of the globe-wandering experience.²²³ This is demonstrated by the detail sailors used to describe their experiences, from the local customs and curiosities to the outrageous attempts at Westernization. For example, sailors made fun of the locals who: 'were either naked or wearing ridiculous imitations of European clothing'.²²⁴ Thus they satisfied the "exotic" and "uncivilized" stereotype.²²⁵ Displays such as snake charming and tribal dances provided simple and cheap entertainment which sailors enjoyed but viewed with varying degrees of scepticism and amusement. For example, on having his fortune told Bushell remarked: 'It was most amusing, in all probability I should have been a Admiral if I had another 5/- in my purse but he could only make me happy and "comfortable" with my last two shillings – "oh what fools these mortals be"'.²²⁶ However, there is a distinct lack of respect for these customs and

²¹⁶ For instance Launceston in Australia was proud that it was the first Australian town to have a Navy League and its ability to provide entertainment for the British Sailors. See *Daily Telegraph* (Launceston), 8 March 1924.

²¹⁷ RNM 1994/253/1: Diary of Douglas Poole

²¹⁸ RNM 1988/259/1: Diary of Arthur Russell; See also RNM 2004/55/1: Diary of Frederick Bushell. The importance of alcohol should not be discounted as sailors often wrote of their drinking exploits and the encounter with American Prohibition. See RNM 1999/31: Diary of Wilfred Woolman; RNM 2004/55/1: Diary of Frederick Bushell.

²¹⁹ RNM 1988/259/1: Diary of Arthur Russell

²²⁰ RNM 1994/253/1: Diary of Douglas Poole

²²¹ RNM 2004/55/1: Diary of Frederick Bushell; RNM 2014/59/1: Diary of LSA Reynolds

²²² For further information on "otherness" and how this was used to define "Britishness" see Thompson, *Empire Strikes Back?*, pp. 179-202.

²²³ McKee, *Sober Men*, pp. 166-167

²²⁴ RNM 2004/55/1: Diary of Frederick Bushell

²²⁵ Whilst racism was common this was casual and typical of the time and defined superiority. In particular, the rise of orientalism and the portrayal of natives in British culture. For example, see Mackenzie, *Propaganda*, pp. 39-66.

²²⁶ RNM 2004/55/1: Diary of Frederick Bushell; This line is taken from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by William Shakespeare and suggests that Bushell is fully cognizant of how foolish such superstition is.

although “otherness” was exotic and exciting, it was simply viewed and absorbed as something to be enjoyed and experienced.

The importance of enjoyment is shown further by the disappointment recorded when ports and colonies did not live up to their reputation. For example, Russell was disappointed with Australia and did not find it as enjoyable as he had expected, stating:

The Australian people of this port [Fremantle] are very nice but they are rather too abrupt in their mannerisms. They are not slow to speak their mind and by doing so perhaps quite unconsciously injure the feelings of some of us.²²⁷

He also noted that there was a lack of interest from the Australian women and this may also have influenced his views. Following a dance party he wrote: ‘only 2 females condescended to dance with our chaps. At this we were greatly surprised because at Cape Town, dancing on board was accepted with enthusiasm’.²²⁸ On the other hand, Bushell did not encounter the same problem and made a number of female acquaintances whilst in Australia, and it appears that this particular episode may have added to Russell’s negative experience.²²⁹

However, despite the adventure and wide variety of events laid on to provide entertainment, a number of sailors found the Empire Cruise a tiring experience. The length of the cruise and the constant demands made of them increased the wishes to be home and for the cruise to be done with. Woolman summed this up succinctly: ‘we are all thoroughly fed up with all this joy-riding and are all longing to be home’.²³⁰ Although couched in jocular terms, “joy-riding”, it is evident that he meant a degree of seriousness with this comment.²³¹ Similarly, on the home-run across the Atlantic, Bushell wrote that: ‘most people have written for each day of this week – at sea – as there is nothing else to note’.²³² On finally arriving in his home port Woolman wrote: ‘home at last’; Bushell noted ‘cheering ship’ as the squadron broke up but gave no further sense of his feelings at returning.²³³ Nevertheless, the Empire Cruise returned with glowing praise from the colonies especially for the behaviour of all the sailors who had taken part and who had formed a crucial part of showing the flag.²³⁴

Conclusion

This chapter has considered the Royal Navy and its sailors during the inter-war years, especially focusing on its continuing role in supporting the Empire despite the changing economic and

²²⁷ RNM 1988/259/1: Diary of Arthur Russell; One Australian paper wrote that Australians are ‘naturally hospitable’ but that there had ‘been some good-natured badinage’ with the British sailors. *World* (Hobart, Tas.), 1 April 1924

²²⁸ RNM 1988/259/1: Diary of Arthur Russell; Whether any stereotypical British/Dominion views had a bearing on this is unclear but perhaps the white population in South Africa was more welcoming.

²²⁹ RNM 2004/55/1: Diary of Frederick Bushell

²³⁰ RNM 1999/31: Diary of Wilfred Woolman

²³¹ See also Lavery, *Able*, p. 83

²³² RNM 2004/55/1: Diary of Frederick Bushell

²³³ RNM 1999/31: Diary of Wilfred Woolman; RNM 2004/55/1: Diary of Frederick Bushell

²³⁴ *Eastern Districts Chronicle* (York, WA), 7 March; *Sunday Times* (Perth), 18 May 1924; *The Times*, 5 July 1924; Stone, *Hero*, p.87. Taylor has noted the importance of all the troublemakers being discharged before the squadron sailed to remove the danger. Taylor, *End*, p. 23

political situation. By appraising the continued use of naval pageantry, despite the disruption of the First World War, it has examined sailors abroad in the Empire at a time when the navy was being used to reinforce Britain's imperial image. Their involvement, and position in British culture, ensured that sailors were fully aware of their status and image. As such, it has revealed that feelings of pronounced imperial sentiment continued to form a key element of sailor culture during the inter-war years. Nevertheless, it also demonstrates the importance of the wider discourse. Imperial sentiment meant different things at different times depending upon circumstance but became more pronounced during episodes of increased patriotic fervour, particularly during the heady imperialistic atmosphere of the Empire Cruise. Such sentiment was latent and formed part of the way in which they interpreted and made sense of their experiences. Sailors approached their encounters confident in British superiority over both white and indigenous populations and with an unquestioning belief in their role as the premier naval power. However, examining episodes of "showing the flag" reinforces the arguments of this thesis and demonstrates that although pride in the Empire was overarching, equally powerful were feelings of pride in themselves, their ships and the service itself. These formed part of the construct of imperial sentiment but were not always synonymous with it and could be interpreted differently by sailors.

Furthermore, it is evident that sailors used the opportunity to enjoy themselves and explore the colonies they visited and demonstrates their independence to imperial aspects of sailor culture; it was a culture that sat underneath an imperial agenda but was not governed by it. Consequently, their enjoyment was equally important to any understanding or acceptance of the cruise's imperial aims. This was a body of men who wanted excitement and is demonstrated by the more difficult encounters described by the men, especially at Hobart. In particular, although experiences of "otherness" were exciting, sailors welcomed cultural similarities and recognized that white colonies would provide better enjoyment for them. Nevertheless, their expectations were undoubtedly predicated upon some understanding of the colonies portrayed through imperialist channels and their vivid descriptions of encounters with the "exotic" supports the image of the globe-trotting adventurer. Although sailors could form their own interpretations, their experiences were couched in terms they were familiar with and ultimately viewed through the prism they occupied.

Chapter Six

Firing up the boilers: sailors and imperialism in the 1930s

If we were challenged in the Mediterranean, please God that challenge would be properly met.¹

The 1930s witnessed increasing tensions in Europe with the resurgence of Germany under the Nazis and the strengthening of dictatorships in Italy and Spain. In consequence, the naval disarmament treaties of the 1920s, which had achieved a moderate level of success, gradually fell away, and by the mid-1930s British rearmament had begun in earnest.² The uncertainty of global affairs during the 1930s demanded that Britain reassert itself on the world stage and, as the key symbol of the Empire, the Royal Navy was increasingly called upon to do this. However, the economic situation at the beginning of the decade resulted in a naval mutiny which struck at the bedrock of British imperial prestige.³ As such, this is a period of naval history that has understandably enjoyed a healthy interest by historians concerned with the political, economic and strategic aspects of the Royal Navy. This chapter expands the existing debate, juxtaposing the experiences of sailors alongside a number of key events, which challenged both the Empire and the Royal Navy's image. In particular, it examines The Invergordon Mutiny, The Abyssinian Crisis, and The Spanish Civil War. In addition, it continues to consider the theme of naval pageantry, which gained greater importance as British naval power was challenged and the navy reverted to imperialistic displays to position itself on the world stage. Finally, it examines the beginning of rearmament in order to demonstrate the complexity of sailors' characters as feelings of patriotism, duty, and concern over the threat of war came together. By considering these themes, this chapter posits that despite a weakening of British imperial prestige, the image of the Royal Navy remained integral and, more importantly, the Empire remained an important facet of sailor culture. Setting this within the wider discourse of British imperial sentiment, their testimony demonstrates that they remained convinced they were the finest sailors and that the Royal Navy (and by extension the British Empire) was pre-eminent.

¹ Sir Roger Keys MP quoted in *The Times*, 8 April 1936

² Emily O. Goldman, *Sunken Treaties: Naval Arms Control Between The Wars*, (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994); p. vii

³ Kenneth Edwards, *The Mutiny at Invergordon*, (London: Putnam, 1937); p. 11; Stephen Roskill, *Naval Policy between the Wars: Volume 2 The Period of Reluctant Rearmament 1930-1939*, (London: Collins, 1976); p. 89; Christopher M. Bell, 'The Royal Navy and the Lessons of the Invergordon Mutiny', *War in History*, 12, 2005; pp. 75-92, p. 76

The Invergordon Mutiny

In September 1931, following an announcement of a reduction in pay, the sailors of the Atlantic Fleet of the Royal Navy mutinied at Invergordon when they refused to put to sea for manoeuvres. *The Times* reported events with evident understatement: 'The promulgation of the reduced rates of naval pay has led to unrest among a proportion of the lower ratings'.⁴ Although popular memory has almost forgotten the mutiny, at the time the impact upon Britain and the world was resounding.⁵ As a key symbol of the British Empire, the mutiny of the Royal Navy had severe political and economic ramifications which threatened to undermine Britain's place on the world stage. The mutiny forced Britain to abandon the Gold Standard, and Alan Ereira has argued that 'it is hard to overstate the importance' of this given what had happened to the German economy.⁶ Similarly Kenneth Edwards, a retired officer and one of the first historians of the mutiny, wrote: 'in British minds, for more than two centuries, the Royal Navy had been regarded as the symbol of Great Britain's character and fortune; the very foundation of her security'.⁷ Therefore, this was a defining moment for the Royal Navy in the 1930s, and would continue to overshadow the navy for the remainder of the period.⁸ Certainly, the importance of the mutiny should not be understated. Perhaps most importantly for the sailors, it forced the Government to concede to their demands in front of the world.

Consequently, the Invergordon Mutiny has attracted a degree of interest amongst historians.⁹ However, this has typically been from an economic and political history perspective. Edwards produced the first study in 1937 and this was followed by David Divine in 1970 after the initial release of Government papers, and then Stephen Roskill in 1976.¹⁰ The topic has continued to attract some scholarly attention since the 1970s with the causes of the mutiny eliciting the most debate. In a charged atmosphere of naval treaties and pay cuts designed to balance the books, there were a number of issues affecting the Royal Navy at the beginning of the 1930s. The historiography of this divides into two schools of thought. The first, promoted by both Edwards and Roskill, argues that blame ultimately rests with the Admiralty's handling of the situation in announcing the pay cuts and the belief amongst sailors that they had been betrayed.¹¹ To some extent Brian Lavery has supported this approach, stating that the Admiralty displayed 'spectacular incompetence'.¹² The second, taken up by Anthony Carew, put the emphasis on the long-term factors affecting the navy over the period and that class tension was a key issue.¹³ Carew caveated himself by stating that this 'point is certainly not without

⁴ *The Times*, 16 September 1931

⁵ Edwards, *Mutiny*, p. 11; Roskill, *Naval Policy*, p. 89; Bell, 'Royal Navy', p. 76

⁶ Alan Ereira, 'The Hidden Life of the British Sailor', *History Today*, 1982; pp. 27-32, p. 27

⁷ Edwards, *Mutiny*, p. 5; Rüger has argued strongly regarding the navy's role as a symbol. For further information see Jan Rüger, *Great Naval Game: Britain and Germany in the Age of Empire*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009 [first edition 2007]).

⁸ Roskill, *Naval Policy*, pp.131-132; Anthony Carew, *The Lower Deck of the Royal Navy, 1900-39: Invergordon in perspective*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981), p. 172

⁹ See for example Edwards, *Mutiny*; David Divine, *Mutiny at Invergordon*, (London: Macdonald, 1970); Roskill, *Naval Policy*; Carew, *Lower Deck*; Bell, 'Royal Navy', pp. 75-92.

¹⁰ Stephen Roskill served as official historian to the Royal Navy.

¹¹ See Edwards, *Mutiny*; Roskill, *Naval Policy*; Bell, 'Royal', p. 87.

¹² Brian Lavery, *Able Seaman: The Lower Deck of the Royal Navy, 1850-1939*, (London: Conway, 2011), p. 288

¹³ See Carew, *Lower Deck*. See also Bell, 'Royal', p. 87-88.

relevance' although as a solution 'is too simple'.¹⁴ The importance of long-term factors has been recognized by other historians, such as Lavery, who also noted the existence of deeper issues behind the mutiny. Lavery stated that 'to the lower deck it was the last straw' and that the continuous pressure placed on the navy was damaging for morale.¹⁵ Similarly Edwards suggested that long-term issues played a role, affecting morale, particularly the policy of disarmament and the sight of half-built ships rusting on the stocks whilst famous warships were broken up.¹⁶

However, a recent approach by Christopher M. Bell has been particularly succinct in excogitating the existing historiography, arguing that both schools fail to deal with the issue satisfactorily.¹⁷ Instead, Bell advocates that 'the main causes of the Invergordon mutiny must be sought in short-term factors, and in particular the Admiralty's inept handling of the pay cuts'.¹⁸ Bell's argument is commendable and does much to counter Carew's hypothesis regarding the strength of class tension which, although undoubtedly present, did not exist on the scale he envisaged.¹⁹ Sailors did not blame their officers for the situation nor (except in one recorded incident) attempt to harm them.²⁰ Importantly, the blame was not laid at class level but at the Admiralty as an entity.²¹ Set within the confines of this thesis, it is important to be aware how the Royal Navy – a benchmark of the imperial image – mutinied and what this meant to those who took part. In particular, it will consider their loyalty – an important factor at the time but one that historians have so far failed to capitalize on in the wider debate over levels of imperial sentiment.

Nevertheless, examining the socio-cultural aspect of Invergordon presents additional problems for historians seeking to move beyond official records; perhaps an indication of why this area remains relatively untouched by historians.²² Stemming from a desire by all involved to protect themselves and their position, there is a significant silence on the matter. Mutiny is one of the severest of naval crimes and threatened the careers of both sailor and officers alike.²³ Although in the aftermath the Admiralty effectively swept the incident under the carpet, it is understandable that officers in the Atlantic Fleet wanted to protect themselves against accusations of wrongdoing; and sailors had to look out for themselves and their crewmates.²⁴ As Ereira has said, 'everyone had a reason to conceal what they knew'.²⁵ The fear of recriminations was well-founded as the Admiralty discharged a number of sailors "services no

¹⁴ Carew, *Lower Deck*, p. 162

¹⁵ Lavery, *Able*, p. 288

¹⁶ Edwards, *Mutiny*, pp. 35-36; p. 93. See also Chapter Two which discusses the importance of a sailor's relationship to a ship in more detail.

¹⁷ Bell, 'Royal Navy', pp. 87-88

¹⁸ Bell, 'Royal Navy', p. 90

¹⁹ See Carew, *Lower Deck*; See also Bell, 'Royal', p. 88.

²⁰ Edwards stated that the threat of violence was limited and the only serious threatening behaviour that occurred was on HMS *Valiant* where an officer was forced to lock himself in his cabin for his own safety. Edwards, *Mutiny*, p. 266

²¹ Bell, 'Royal', pp. 88-90

²² For example Edwards, Divine, Roskill, Carew, and Bell have focused on socio-political and economic factors rather than socio-cultural factors.

²³ Divine, *Mutiny at Invergordon*, pp. 19-21; Lavery, *Able*, pp. 66-69

²⁴ Ereira, 'Hidden', p. 31

²⁵ Ereira, 'Hidden', p. 31

longer required" following the mutiny.²⁶ Despite adopting a "conspiratorial" tone, Ereira noted the difficulties in using other material such as diaries and logs to study the mutiny, stating that even officer's private diaries were self-censored and 'in some cases, pages were glued together. Ships logs were written up most selectively'.²⁷

Thus far the majority of historians have overlooked lower-deck testimony, focusing primarily on the published accounts – the most cited being the autobiography of Len Wincott published in 1974.²⁸ Wincott was a self-styled ringleader and one of a number of sailors discharged following the mutiny. His autobiography was damning of the existing historiography, arguing that historians had not engaged with sailors themselves but had based their research on official records.²⁹ However, although his criticism is valid, this does not negate from his own overt agenda.³⁰ Both Edwards and Divine gave credence to Wincott's role in the mutiny and relied upon a pamphlet published in 1931 and attributed to Wincott.³¹ However, this is controversial as Wincott later denied having anything to do with the production of this pamphlet.³² As such Roskill urged caution, believing it to be an exaggerated account from a sailor whose word could not be trusted.³³ Roskill argued that historians have given such weight to Wincott because the first historians to engage with the Invergordon Mutiny had no other lower-deck testimony at their disposal.³⁴ Roskill's caution has some strong foundations given the almost unquestioning belief in Wincott's statements by both Edwards and Divine.³⁵ Yet, despite accepting this shortcoming, Roskill similarly failed to seek out and examine sailor testimony in detail.

Therefore, Wincott raises a valid point. Although Ereira highlights the lack of sailor testimony, there is enough material extant to give some indication of lower-deck sentiment. In particular, and the paramount point, the silence on the subject of the mutiny is resounding. Given what was at stake it is unsurprising that lower-deck diaries are more than usually reticent on the subject.³⁶ Nevertheless, this silence is important and deserves consideration. A deliberate silence is precisely what this absence of lower-deck dialogue represents since collectively the lower deck was aware of the situation at Invergordon. To argue that there was a lack of knowledge and information about what was happening at Invergordon would be incorrect. As Commander Arthur Layard noted: 'The air is full of cypher messages about this pay reduction and trouble in the A. F. [Atlantic Fleet]'.³⁷ This suggests that sailors would have had an understanding of what was going on, even in the absence of newspapers. In any event the

²⁶ Roskill, *Naval Policy*, p. 121; ADM 178/114

²⁷ Ereira 'Hidden', p. 31

²⁸ See Len Wincott, *Invergordon Mutineer*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974).

²⁹ Wincott, *Invergordon*, p. 85

³⁰ Len Wincott was a member of the British Communist Party and later defected to Soviet Russia. For further information see Roskill, *Naval Policy*, p. 100.

³¹ Edwards, *Mutiny*, p. 115; pp. 120-121; Divine, *Mutiny at Invergordon*, pp. 113-114; The pamphlet was entitled *The Spirit of Invergordon* and published by the Communist Party in 1931.

³² Roskill, *Naval Policy*, p. 100

³³ Roskill, *Naval Policy*, p. 100

³⁴ Roskill, *Naval Policy*, p.100; See also Edwards, *Mutiny*; Divine, *Mutiny at Invergordon*.

³⁵ See Edwards, *Mutiny* and Divine, *Mutiny at Invergordon* where they demonstrate acceptance of Wincott's role in events based on his testimony.

³⁶ For further analysis of diaries and subjects of silence see Chapter One.

³⁷ RNM 1990/271: Diary of Commander Arthur Layard; Layard was serving overseas with the Mediterranean Fleet at this time.

foreign press picked up the story with eagerness and on 23 September 1931 Layard managed to see a paper and wrote in his diary: 'In other words plain mutiny'.³⁸ Poignantly, there were also isolated incidents aboard other Royal Navy vessels. In particular, HMS *Delhi* was in the West Indies and mutinied in sympathy which, although quickly resolved, resulted in visits to American ports being cancelled.³⁹

Diaries of sailors serving overseas, and thus removed from the mutiny itself, are also conspicuous in their absence of making any critical comments. For instance L.A.C. Cantellow simply wrote: 'News came through about the reduction in pay' and made no further observations over the following days.⁴⁰ Thus this silence suggests a desire to commit nothing to paper which might incriminate them. This is perhaps not so unusual, as historically sailors had shied away from discussing politics openly or in their diaries.⁴¹ Again, officer diaries can give an added perspective beyond that offered by most lower-deck diaries. For example, Commander Layard, wrote that: 'The seaman's messes are really bloody' following the announcement of the pay cut.⁴² Nevertheless, in addition to the limited lower-deck testimony, the increased use of oral history in the 1970s and 1980s meant that a number of sailors were interviewed on their involvement, and this provides some further insight.⁴³ From a review of the records of the Imperial War Museum it appears sailors' attitudes to the Invergordon Mutiny was a stock question asked by a number of interviewers, irrespective of whether or not the interviewee was present at Invergordon.⁴⁴ Although oral history presents its own problems to historians, when used alongside the above-mentioned sources, oral testimony offers an opportunity for historians to bridge the vacuum and examine these silences further. Again, however, as yet few historians have utilized this material. Consequently, a number of holdings from the IWM have been drawn on below.

A key issue regarding Invergordon and this topic is the question of sailors' loyalty.⁴⁵ Whilst historians have considered this, it has been primarily a side issue to examination of the effect the mutiny had on the Royal Navy, and perceptions of British imperial power.⁴⁶ Certainly historians have recognized that, following the mutiny, ascertaining the loyalty of the lower deck was an important line of enquiry.⁴⁷ Much was done to reassure the British public and the world

³⁸ RNM 1990/271: Diary of Commander Arthur Layard

³⁹ Edwards, *Mutiny*, p. 275; Bell, 'The Royal Navy', p. 88; In addition, HMS *Delhi* had mutinied for around 2 hours during the Royal Navy's involvement in the Baltic in 1919 against the Bolsheviks over the issue of poor food and conditions. For an account of this see IWM 669: Walter Nicolson Basford.

⁴⁰ RNM 2014/87/2: Diary of Engineer L. A. C. Cantellow

⁴¹ Christopher McKee, *Sober Men and True: Sailor Lives in the Royal Navy, 1900-1945*, (London: Harvard University Press, 2002); p. 98

⁴² RNM 1990/271: Diary of Commander Arthur Layard

⁴³ In particular, the collection held by the Imperial War Museum. Henry Baynham, who has been considered elsewhere in this thesis, was fundamental in interviewing sailors and recording their testimony in the 1970s.

⁴⁴ If sailors were serving during the 1930s then this was a question often posed by the interviewer. See for example: IWM 10741: Thomas Teece; IWM 778: George Thomas Weekes; IWM 13107: Frank William Miles.

⁴⁵ As Mary A. Conley has argued, sailors became an integral part of the masculine imperial image: promoting loyalty and duty to the Empire. For imagery of sailors see Mary A. Conley, *From Jack Tar to Union Jack: Representing naval manhood in the British Empire, 1870-1918*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009).

⁴⁶ Edwards, *Mutiny*, p. 13; Roskill, *Naval Policy*, p. 114-118; Ereira, 'Hidden', p. 28; Christopher M. Bell, *The Royal Navy, Seapower and Strategy between the wars*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000); p. xvi; Lavery, *Able*, p. 294; The effect on imperial imagery will be considered in further detail below.

⁴⁷ The question of whether loyalty was really in doubt has been dealt with by Edwards, Roskill, Carew and Bell.

that the Royal Navy remained a harmonious, loyal and able-bodied fighting machine. Furthermore, the press downplayed the mutiny and suggested that all was as it should be.⁴⁸ Writing only six years later Edwards was at pains to stress the loyalty of the lower deck was beyond doubt:

The British sailor is intensely proud of the Service. This pride, although inarticulate, is one of the greatest forces on the lower deck. It is based upon a tradition of complete supremacy over the navies of all other powers.⁴⁹

Although Edwards was writing in the highly charged atmosphere of the late 1930s, this was certainly the view amongst contemporaries and Admiralty investigations after Invergordon suggested that 'most ratings were instinctively loyal'.⁵⁰ In particular, Admiral Kelly who conducted the investigation into the mutiny on behalf of the Admiralty 'was encouraged by the respect mutineers has shown to their officers throughout the mutiny'.⁵¹ This has been supported by Roskill who noted that despite the mutiny, sailors continued to turn in for the hoisting of the colours.⁵² This does not suggest any deep animosity against the flag or to the patriotism and symbolism inherently linked to it. Similarly Edwards noted that despite some hesitation, the "Still" continued to be sounded as ships approached others lying at anchor.⁵³ This demonstrates that the respect due to others was capable of overriding any detrimental sentiment. More recently, Brian Lavery has stated: 'the men were always keen to state their basic loyalty to the crown and the navy'.⁵⁴

Thus it has been suggested that during the mutiny sailors remained fundamentally loyal to the navy (and for this read loyalty to the King and Empire) throughout the mutiny.⁵⁵ In particular, there was no violent upheaval of the established order. Carew especially has focused on the political nature of Invergordon and argued strongly about the use of the term "mutiny".⁵⁶ Carew opined that it would be described more accurately as a strike, and Wincott used similar terminology.⁵⁷ Certainly contemporaries sought similarities between mutineers and sailors who had northern, industrial backgrounds, in the belief that these people had communist tendencies.⁵⁸ As Edwards has stated, the mutiny at Invergordon is something of a paradox being completely peaceable in nature.⁵⁹ Therefore, there is some support to Carew's assertion that it was a strike. Re-classifying it as such removes the perceived breakdown of loyalty that the image of a mutiny conjures up. Yet the basis for this is questionable. The military is

⁴⁸ See *The Times*, 16 September 1931; *Daily Herald*, 16 September 1931; *Daily Mail*, 16 September 1931; *Devon and Exeter Daily Gazette*, 16 September 1931; *The Cornishman*, 17 September 1931. This will be considered in more detail below.

⁴⁹ Edwards, *Mutiny*, p. 34; p.84; p. 259; This sense of superiority over other navies will be considered further below.

⁵⁰ Bell, 'Royal Navy', p. 85

⁵¹ Bell, 'Royal Navy', p. 79

⁵² Roskill, *Naval Policy*, p. 104

⁵³ Edwards, *Mutiny*, p. 277; The "Still" is a signal given as mark of respect or when silence is required.

⁵⁴ Lavery, *Able*, p. 292

⁵⁵ Martin Pugh, *We Danced all Night: A social history of Britain between the wars*, (London: Bodley Head, 2008); p. 392; Edwards, *Mutiny*, p. vii; Lavery, *Able*, p. 294

⁵⁶ Carew, *Lower Deck*, p. 162

⁵⁷ Carew, *Lower Deck*, p. 162; Wincott, *Invergordon*, p. 92-93

⁵⁸ Carew, *Lower Deck*, pp. 163-163

⁵⁹ Edwards, *Mutiny*, p. 264

governed by its own law and mutiny is seen as a criminal attempt to resist these laws.⁶⁰ Although it could be argued they are synonymous, there is a danger that Carew is shoehorning the mutiny into an inappropriate industrial setting. Nevertheless, he is supported by Edwards who argued that it 'was not regarded as such by the majority of the men'.⁶¹ However, contrary to this, sailor testimony suggests that they were well aware of the seriousness of their actions and the possible ramifications. For instance one sailor, Frank Miles, stated: 'we were committing mutiny, unheard of in the British navy'.⁶² Mutiny was a crime set out in the King's Regulations and naval heritage still remembered those at Spithead and The Nore in 1797.

One item that has been widely discussed by Edwards, Divine, Roskill, and Carew is the importance of the manifesto, or petition, produced by sailors aboard HMS *Norfolk* during the mutiny.⁶³ It did not suggest any radical action against the Government, the King, or the Empire and opened with: 'We the loyal subjects of HM the King'.⁶⁴ If a genuine reflection of lower-deck sentiment, then this again reinforces the loyalty of the lower deck.⁶⁵ However, the manifesto has been viewed with caution by historians such as Roskill because its ownership was claimed by Wincott.⁶⁶ In addition, Roskill has argued that the manifesto did not have a wide readership in the Fleet and cannot be indicative of the lower deck.⁶⁷ Certainly it is questionable how much information was passed between the different ships and both George Weekes and Frank Miles suggest this would have been nearly impossible.⁶⁸

Nevertheless, sailors did resent their loyalty being called into question. In particular, there was anger at the insinuation made by the Labour MP Admiral Dewar regarding their loyalty. An election poster published for Dewar's campaign ran with the heading: "Leaders of Lost Causes," and stated: "The British Navy at Jutland in 1916 beat the ex-Kaiser; and at Invergordon in 1931 it beat Mr Montagu Norman".⁶⁹ Montagu Norman was the governor of the Bank of England at the time and the connotation was made that sailors had been disloyal and damaged the country by their actions. In addition, it attacked their reputation and position in society. Consequently, *The Times* reported that: 'Indignation has been roused in Portsmouth, especially among Naval men'.⁷⁰ This has been supported by Barry Hunt and Mike Farquharson-Roberts, who have argued that it cost Dewar votes from naval circles.⁷¹

⁶⁰ Army Act 1881; Divine, *Mutiny at Invergordon*, pp. 19-21; Bell, 'Royal', p. 91

⁶¹ Edwards, *Mutiny*, p. viii

⁶² IWM 13107: Frank William Miles

⁶³ See Edwards, *Mutiny*, pp. 269-270; Divine, *Mutiny at Invergordon*, p. 158; Roskill, *Naval Policy*, pp. 105-106. Interestingly Carew does not make mention of this.

⁶⁴ Attributed to Len Wincott although more likely a collaborative effort. For further information see Roskill, *Naval Policy*, p. 105; For the full text see ADM 178/110.

⁶⁵ Lavery, *Able*, p. 292

⁶⁶ Roskill, *Naval Policy*, p. 106

⁶⁷ Roskill, *Naval Policy*, p. 106

⁶⁸ Roskill, *Naval Policy*, p. 106; IWM 778: George Thomas Weekes; IWM 13107: Frank William Miles; IWM 5821: Norman Clements

⁶⁹ *The Times*, 26 October 1931

⁷⁰ *The Times*, 26 October 1931

⁷¹ Barry Hunt, *Sailor-Scholar: Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond, 1871-1946*, (Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1982); p. 208; Mike Farquharson-Roberts, *Royal Naval Officers from War to War, 1918-1939*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Although sailors were often conservative in outlook at this time. For further information see McKee, *Sober Men*, p. 62.

To expand upon this debate, examination of sailor testimony suggests that there was no determined disloyalty on the part of the lower deck. For instance, George Weekes, a sailor aboard HMS *Warspite*, said the whole incident was down to the political situation and the cuts which 'were unfair to the lower, to the ordinary class seamen'.⁷² Similarly, Norman Clements commented on the visit of Admiral Kelly to the ships when they returned to Portsmouth where he gave a speech noting their loyalty. Clements suggested that there was appreciation and respect for Admiral Kelly, saying that he [Kelly] had seen the King and told him that the navy was still loyal but it was the effect on sailors' families that caused the problem.⁷³ Therefore, for Clements loyalty was not in question and their mutiny had nothing to do with loyalty to service, King and Empire. Clements is worth considering as he was a Marine and therefore separate to the lower deck but still close to them in social standing. Marines were "sworn men" and in Clements' words it would have been impossible to refuse if the officers had ordered them to take action against the mutineers: 'never downed tools and said we're not doing it... I don't think a marine would do that'.⁷⁴

However, it is also important to recognize that there were a range of loyalties present that perhaps have not been fully considered by historians. As discussed at some length in this thesis, a sailor's loyalty was not clear cut; within sailor culture there existed simultaneously loyalty to shipmates, loyalty to the ship, loyalty to the service, loyalty to the Empire, and loyalty to local towns (especially their home ports).⁷⁵ In particular, loyalty to shipmates is clearly evidenced and the mutiny elicited a good deal of sympathy amongst the lower deck despite the cuts not affecting all sailors. For instance Frank Miles, a sailor aboard HMS *York*, confirmed he was on the post-1925 rate (a lower rate not affected by the cuts) but stated: 'I joined in the mutiny but simply because we felt sorry for the older people'.⁷⁶ This is interesting because it demonstrates the strength of loyalty to shipmates even over their sense of duty.⁷⁷ This sympathy extended outside of the Atlantic Fleet and Seaman Thomas Teece, when asked whether there was sympathy for the mutineers replied: 'Oh, yes. Definitely'.⁷⁸ Similarly, Seaman John Skeats also expressed sympathy for the mutineers.⁷⁹

On the other hand, Edwards has argued that these younger ratings 'were more impressionable to subversive propaganda' and that they 'joined the mutineers in a spirit of sheer hooliganism'.⁸⁰ However, whilst the mutiny undoubtedly provided an excuse for some sailors to pursue personal agendas, the majority of testimony points to genuine sympathy with their fellow sailors being a key reason for their involvement. Yet, the mutiny was evidently a divisive issue and when asked if everyone on *York* was in agreement Miles was certain that this was

⁷² IWM 778: George Thomas Weekes; HMS *Warspite* was present at Invergordon.

⁷³ IWM 5821: Norman Clements

⁷⁴ IWM 5821: Norman Clements; See also Lavery, *Able*, p. 84.

⁷⁵ For examples of this see Chapters Two, Three, and Four.

⁷⁶ IWM 13107: Frank William Miles; For further information on how the cuts were made across the board see Lavery, *Able*, p. 288.

⁷⁷ For further examples of loyalty on the lower deck see Chapters Three and Four.

⁷⁸ IWM 10741: Thomas Teece

⁷⁹ IWM 18007: John Goldup Skeats

⁸⁰ Edwards, *Mutiny*, p. 179; p. 265

not the case: 'No, no we were one of the ships where maybe 30-40% were in agreement and the remainder were not. Mostly the senior rates, see, they had a lot to lose. But on some of the ships it was 100%'.⁸¹ Miles also confessed to some disharmony amongst the crew because of this: 'there was a certain amount of bitterness, bound to be... but not to us, the ones already on the new scale of pay'.⁸² Nevertheless, Miles suggested that bitterness did not come to anything but that 'it made just a bad feeling all through the ship'.⁸³ Norman Clements supports this stating that there was no intimidation: 'there was sympathy all round'.⁸⁴ However, sailors were also accused of lacking loyalty to their brethren by not taking part and there is evidence to suggest that peer pressure played a role in deciding whether or not to mutiny.⁸⁵ Lavery noted the importance of 'inter-ship rivalry', which was a key facet of navy life, and was brought to bear by the mutineers.⁸⁶ For instance, sailors from HMS *Hood* received abuse from *Rodney* and *Malaya*, and *Repulse* also suffered negative comments.⁸⁷ Therefore, Edwards failed to analyse sailors sufficiently given the complexities of the situation.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that despite the pay cuts being brought in across the board, only sailors from the Atlantic Fleet mutinied whilst the rest of the navy, despite some minor incidents, remained loyal, at least perceivably even if they had sympathy with their fellow sailors.⁸⁸ As such, Bell surmised that conditions were unique within the Atlantic Fleet.⁸⁹ This argument has some validity because whilst the pay cuts were announced and explained elsewhere in the service, the Atlantic Fleet's orders were delayed as they sailed north.⁹⁰ This meant that the men found out through other channels before they were told officially and this led to ill-feeling. Supporting this, Lavery has noted Invergordon was an awful place to break the news and argued that had they been at home ports the affair might have been more subdued and families may have been able to deter them from taking action.⁹¹

In arguing that it was a unique case, Bell dismissed the view of other historians that a link can be drawn to Devonport and sailors from this port being more mutinous.⁹² Other historians are less convinced, however. For example, Edwards noted 'the dockyard port of Devonport was the link between a number of events'.⁹³ In particular, earlier that year the crew of HMS *Lucia* had mutinied at Devonport and was reported as a case of 'mass indiscipline'.⁹⁴ However, Bell makes no reference to the *Lucia* incident. This suggests support of Roskill's view, that the *Lucia*

⁸¹ IWM 13107: Frank William Miles

⁸² IWM 13107: Frank William Miles

⁸³ IWM 13107: Frank William Miles

⁸⁴ IWM 5821: Norman Clements

⁸⁵ Lavery, *Able*, p. 289

⁸⁶ Lavery, *Able*, 289

⁸⁷ Edwards, *Mutiny*, p. 210; Roskill, *Naval Policy*, p. 107; p. 104; Bruce Taylor, *The End of Glory: War & Peace in HMS Hood, 1916-1941*, (Barnsley: Seaforth, 2012); pp. 100-101

⁸⁸ For instance the sympathetic mutiny aboard HMS *Delhi*.

⁸⁹ Bell, 'Royal Navy', p. 90

⁹⁰ Edwards, *Mutiny*, pp. 153-156; Roskill, *Naval Policy*, pp. 94-95

⁹¹ Lavery, *Able*, p. 289

⁹² Edwards, *Mutiny*, p. 115; Taylor, *End*, pp. 94-95

⁹³ Edwards, *Mutiny*, p. 115

⁹⁴ Roskill, *Naval Policy*, p. 89; The mutiny aboard HMS *Lucia* was actually caused by an order to paint ship instead of leave being given to the crew.

incident was simply 'a case of an "unhappy ship"' and not indicative of wider sentiment.⁹⁵ However, Edwards also drew a link between Devonport and a Chilean warship that mutinied in the weeks prior to Invergordon which had recently undergone a refit there.⁹⁶ This made headlines in the days leading up to Invergordon as well as a military mutiny in Bolivia.⁹⁷ Both were believed to be the work of communist agencies.⁹⁸ Similarly, Carew has argued the importance of the Devonport link, and more recently Taylor has also argued of the existence of a link between the two, stating that the presence of Devonport ships at Invergordon was significant.⁹⁹

The threat of a communist presence was certainly a genuine fear amongst the Admiralty and Government who, following Invergordon, investigated suspected communist links to the port town. To put this into context, during this period there was a continuing fear of the "Red Menace" infiltrating society and it is therefore not surprising that the Admiralty fixated upon this theory.¹⁰⁰ This was further propagated in the following weeks by several arrests of known or suspected communists who attempted to encourage further mutiny.¹⁰¹ In particular, parallels were drawn with the Kiel mutiny in 1918 and a recent visit of certain British sailors to that port which included one of the Invergordon ships, HMS *Norfolk*.¹⁰² Deeply rooted in contemporaneous beliefs, it is not surprising that Edwards' study paid careful attention to the navy's visit to Kiel, and the key similarities between the two mutinies.¹⁰³

Nevertheless, despite being a genuine fear, as Bell has stated, the threat of total breakdown perceived by the Government was in their minds alone.¹⁰⁴ Sailor testimony supports this interpretation, suggesting that loyalty was not in question and their actions points towards the issue being with pay and the handling of the situation, and not any latent communist sentiment against the Service and Britain. True, there are various accounts of sailors singing "The Red Flag" during the mutiny, such as those noted by Clements who recalled that many returning from the meeting ashore were singing it.¹⁰⁵ In addition, Weekes gives a particularly interesting account of an episode he witnessed on *Valiant*:

⁹⁵ Roskill, *Naval Policy*, p. 89

⁹⁶ Edwards, *Mutiny*, p. 115

⁹⁷ *The Times*, 12 September 1931; *The Times*, 11 September 1931

⁹⁸ *The Times*, 11 September 1931; The Admiralty considered and quickly abandoned any ideas for such a heavy-handed response at Invergordon.

⁹⁹ Carew, *Invergordon*, pp. 141-142; Taylor, *End*, pp. 94-95

¹⁰⁰ Bell, 'Royal Navy', p. 76; See also Michael Paris, 'Red Menace! Russia and British Juvenile Fiction', *Contemporary British History*, 19, 2, 2005; pp. 117-132.

¹⁰¹ For example the cases of George Allison and William Shepherd in Portsmouth and William Wilkinson, Editor of the Utopia Press. See *Daily Mail*, 16 October 1931; *The Times*, 3 October 1931.

¹⁰² The mutiny at Kiel in 1918 sparked the revolutions that effectively brought the war to an end and led to the collapse of Imperial Germany. For further information see David Woodward, 'The Mutiny at Kiel, November 1918', *History Today*, 18, 12, 1968); Bell, 'Royal Navy', p. 76.

¹⁰³ Edwards, *Mutiny*, p. 116; pp. 119-120

¹⁰⁴ Ereira, 'Hidden', p. 27; Bell, 'Royal Navy', p. 76

¹⁰⁵ The Red Flag is a socialist anthem. For further information see *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase & Fable*, Fourteenth Edition, (London: Cassell, 1991 [first edition 1870]); p. 427; See also IWM 5821: Norman Clements.

there was a piano up on the top of a turret, you see. Most unusual, you see. When we passed them... the people on the turret with the piano, they struck up "The Red Flag" on the piano. We were so amazed.¹⁰⁶

Given the strict naval discipline faced by sailors, this sudden breakdown would understandably have caused amazement.

However, there is a difference between singing an anthem and wholeheartedly acting upon an ideology. None of the diaries considered suggest any communist plot, nor does the oral testimony considered suggest this. Newspapers offer some further insight. For instance, the *Daily Mail*, reported on the alleged attempt by George Allison and William Shepherd to incite further mutiny in Portsmouth amongst sailors returned from Invergordon. The report quoted a sailor who in response to Allison and Shepherd's request allegedly asked what good it would do his wife whilst he was in prison, and asked for £100 up front.¹⁰⁷ This further suggests that it was primarily a pay-related issue and not disloyalty based on a communist element within the Fleet. Furthermore, this is supported by the findings of Admiral Kelly discussed above, that it was the threat the pay cut posed to sailors' families which angered them more than anything. As Conley has argued, sailors were increasingly proud of their image and, despite what some contemporaries believed, they were dutiful husbands.¹⁰⁸ Again, this demonstrates a level of independence. Thus this was a group of men pushed by circumstance and a fringe element, who felt there was no option left to them to make their grievance heard. For the most part they acted peacefully and respectfully to their officers, the country was not at war and there was no risk of a serious breakdown and overthrow of society.¹⁰⁹ Order did not break down because they were disloyal to the navy or Britain but rather because of loyalty to their fellow sailors.

Nevertheless, given the vital role of the Royal Navy, both actual and perceived, within the wider imperial image, efforts to limit the damage of the mutiny were carefully considered. In particular, Ereira has commented on the importance of terminology and that the Admiralty actively avoided the use of the term "mutiny", stating that 'the prestige of Great Britain was intimately bound up with the prestige of the Royal Navy'.¹¹⁰ As Ereira and Rüger have noted, contemporaries remained fully aware of the importance of the navy as a symbol.¹¹¹ Similarly, Edwards wrote 'the realisation that there was insubordination of a very serious character in the Royal Navy delivered a blow to the nation which was almost personal in its intensity'.¹¹² Although Edwards was writing during the late 1930s when the Royal Navy was experiencing rearmament, and could be accused of being hyperbolic, this view is generally supported by more recent historiography, particularly both Bell's and Rüger's work on links between the

¹⁰⁶ IWM 778: George Thomas Weekes

¹⁰⁷ *Daily Mail*, 16 October 1931

¹⁰⁸ Conley, *From Jack*, pp. 87-91; See also Lavery, *Able*, p. 246 where he discusses the continuing grievances and desire for better support for their families.

¹⁰⁹ See ADM 178/129 which contains extracts from a letter to Sir Clive Wigram, Private Secretary to the King from Sir George Chetwode, the Naval Secretary, 16 September 1931.

¹¹⁰ Ereira, 'Hidden', p. 28

¹¹¹ Ereira, 'Hidden', p. 28; Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 1

¹¹² Edwards, *Mutiny*, p. 5

image of the navy and empire.¹¹³ As discussed in previous chapters, the image of the Royal Navy in British popular culture should not be underestimated.¹¹⁴

In a pointed attempt to reassure and suggest that all was well, British newspapers tried to downplay events. For instance, the *Devon and Exeter Daily Gazette* carried a report on sailors of the Atlantic Fleet enjoying shore leave once they had returned to their home ports:

During the week-end spent in their several home ports, sailors of the Atlantic Fleet have certainly done their best to reaffirm the landsman's pride and belief in our Navy. Cheery good humour, and quiet conviction that the inquiries will be opened today will remove such misunderstandings as may have existed, is the spirit reported from all ports... If the sailor is grouching at all it is mainly about the sensational and galling reports regarding him that have appeared in the foreign press. That, however, is the price he has to pay for his ill-considered escapade.¹¹⁵

Similarly *The Times* wrote of *Hood* returning to Portsmouth: 'The men came up "at the double" and took their stations smartly in the traditional British way'.¹¹⁶ Whilst this and other papers were evidently trying to reassure the British public and the world that the Royal Navy was as disciplined as ever, reinforcing traditional masculine imperial values, it also downplayed the seriousness of the issue by referring to it as an "escapade" and appealing to the stereotypical image of Jolly Jack Tar getting up to his tricks.¹¹⁷ HMS *Hood* in particular, with her key position in British popular culture and indeed international culture, was a media-friendly ship to feature prominently in the papers and drive home the message.¹¹⁸ Consequently, Ereira has suggested that the papers did as they were bidden by the Government which caused the public to believe the press was being censored.¹¹⁹ Edwards also noted this feeling: 'It was concluded that a censorship had become necessary, and that the press was under orders to minimise the true facts'.¹²⁰ However, the press was not censored and Edwards argued that there was nothing strange in this approach, but that it 'was in accordance with British tradition'.¹²¹

Yet although the mutiny was swiftly swept under the carpet, memory lingered and the damage this caused is demonstrated by an article in the *Devon and Exeter Daily Gazette* which commented on an alleged mutiny aboard *Hood* in 1933: 'The supposed mutineers on HMS *Hood* were, we now know positively, perfectly disciplined and jolly bluejackets, who had been landed to enact the role of pirates as part of Fleet exercises'.¹²² Edwards also commented upon this

¹¹³ Bell, *Royal Navy*, p. 80; See also Rüger, *Great Naval*.

¹¹⁴ In particular see Chapter Two.

¹¹⁵ *Devon and Exeter Daily Gazette*, 22 September 1931

¹¹⁶ *The Times*, 19 September 1931

¹¹⁷ McKee, *Sober Men*, pp. 1-12; Conley, *From Jack*, pp. 123-159; The uses of the sailor's different images has been examined further in Chapter One.

¹¹⁸ *The Times*, 19 September 1931; For more information about HMS *Hood* and its cultural image see Chapter Five. Interestingly this idea does not seem to have been picked up by historians commentating on the mutiny.

¹¹⁹ Ereira 'Hidden', p. 28

¹²⁰ Edwards, *Mutiny*, p. 6

¹²¹ Edwards, *Mutiny*, p. 7

¹²² *Devon and Exeter Daily Gazette*, 20 October 1933

noting: 'absurd as these reports were, they showed that a certain section of the British public was receptive to the idea of mutiny in the Royal Navy. It is almost certain that no such report would have been circulated in the days before September 1931'.¹²³ Thus, the mutiny had implications on the image and prestige of the Royal Navy, both at home and abroad. In particular, it resonated in America, with its growing naval power, and Edwards argued that it 'was at last proof that the British sailor was not the infallible creature Americans had believed'.¹²⁴ Furthermore, Edwards wrote that it was deeply felt in Italy where the dictatorial powers were strengthening their grip.¹²⁵ However, it would be overstepping the mark to argue that this perceived loss of discipline and subsequent loss of British prestige was a contributing factor to the rise of expansionist ideas of Italy and Germany as Edwards suggested. The Royal Navy remained a formidable power during the 1930s. Furthermore, sailor testimony does not suggest that they thought it lessened their image. On the contrary, Frank Miles said: 'I think it showed people abroad, Russians or Americans or whatever that we had the guts to stand up for ourselves'.¹²⁶ This suggests that other elements of sailor culture had the power to take precedence over duty to the Empire and the navy, and reinforces the argument regarding sailors' independence. Furthermore, it also suggests an element of lower-deck pride in their victory over the Establishment.

Continuing Pageantry

Despite the apparent damage to the prestigious image of the Royal Navy caused by the mutiny, and continuing anti-war sentiment, during the 1930s naval pageantry remained an important part of the British imperial image.¹²⁷ The *Devon and Exeter Daily Gazette* reported in 1930 'That amateur soldiering is unpopular among the rising generation' of school children but that 'Among those of maturer age, however, the enjoyment of warlike displays appears to be undiminished', noting the phenomenal success of Navy Week.¹²⁸ Additionally it gained a further importance at this time because the 'dual challenges of a rising rival on the Continent and a chronically overstretched empire abroad motivated a wave of renewed rituals'.¹²⁹ The re-emergence of German naval power was deeply troubling and Emily Goldman has argued that the creation of the German pocket battleships put Germany back into the naval power ratio.¹³⁰ Similarly Divine argued that they were 'the symbol of German naval renaissance'.¹³¹ This was not lost on the British public, nor on sailors. For instance Able Seaman Jack Napier said: 'We heard about the German ship-building and how their fleets were all modern'.¹³² Therefore, in a

¹²³ Edwards, *Mutiny*, p. 19

¹²⁴ Edwards, *Mutiny*, p. 13

¹²⁵ Edwards, *Mutiny*, p. 16

¹²⁶ IWM 13106: Frank William Miles

¹²⁷ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 267

¹²⁸ *Devon and Exeter Daily Gazette*, 26 August 1930; See Chapter Five for a discussion of the success of Navy Week.

¹²⁹ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 267

¹³⁰ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 267; Goldman, *Sunken*, p. 215

¹³¹ Divine, *Mutiny at Invergordon*, p. 239

¹³² Able Seaman Jack Napier quoted in Max Arthur, *The True Glory: The Royal Navy 1914-1939*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1996); pp. 268-269

time of uncertainty, naval pageantry afforded a number of opportunities to reaffirm traditional ideas of British power and prestige.¹³³

A key feature of the decade was the Naval Review in celebration of George V's Silver Jubilee in 1935. In addition, that year the Navy Week went to additional lengths to put on a show: *The Times* reported it 'was the most successful of any' Navy Week with 333,007 people attending.¹³⁴ Given the financial situation, events such as this were accepted cautiously by the monarchy and there were voices of opposition.¹³⁵ However, this opposition was not widely publicized and the press 'emphasized consensus and continuity'.¹³⁶ In particular, the press repeatedly published information on previous Reviews alongside information regarding new warships being launched.¹³⁷ Thus when the Home Fleet visited the Thames as part of the celebrations, *The Times* reported that the ships arrived in 'aloof and silent dignity', words chosen to reinforce the almost magisterial position of the Royal Navy in British culture.¹³⁸

As with pre-war naval pageantry, sailors regularly commented in their diaries on day-to-day pageantry and special events they took part in. For instance, William Brooman recorded 'Holding the fort [in Malta] while the Mediterranean Fleet are in Home waters for the Naval Review'.¹³⁹ Brooman noted the Fleet was returning for the Review 'celebrating His Majesty's Silver Jubilee' but he makes no further comments about the jubilee and neither does he make any reference to how he feels about his ship not being included in the celebrations.¹⁴⁰ On the other hand, Leonard Williams was aboard *Hood* for King George VI's Coronation Review, and said the return from the Mediterranean 'made a welcome break for the ship's company as they were able to visit their homes'.¹⁴¹ For those who were not at their home port, special entertainments were laid on for officers and ratings when they were granted shore leave.¹⁴² As a published memoir, Williams elucidates rather more and speaks with some pride of the light display that they created (his branch was responsible): 'The whole effect was like something out of Fairyland. *Hood* cast her reflection on the water like jewels on rippled velvet'.¹⁴³ As the previous chapter demonstrated, illumination of the Fleet was a typical activity and was used to demonstrate the dual themes of power and technology.¹⁴⁴ *The Times* wrote: 'large numbers of visitors are expected in the town from to-morrow onwards, and particularly on Saturday and Sunday, when the Fleet is to be illuminated'.¹⁴⁵

¹³³ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 267

¹³⁴ *The Times*, 1 January 1936

¹³⁵ Rüger, *Great Naval*, pp. 267-268

¹³⁶ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 267; PRO, MEPO 38/144: Jubilee celebrations 1935: anti-jubilee literature

¹³⁷ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 269; See for example *The Times*, 28 March 1935; *The Times*, 15 May 1935; *The Times*, 1 January 1936.

¹³⁸ *The Times*, 16 May 1935

¹³⁹ RNM 2013/100.2: Diary of William Brooman

¹⁴⁰ RNM 2013/100.2: Diary of William Brooman

¹⁴¹ Leonard Charles Williams, *Gone A Long Journey*, (Bedhampton: Hillmead, 2002); p. 121

¹⁴² *The Times*, 15 May 1935

¹⁴³ Williams, *Gone*, p. 121

¹⁴⁴ For more information see Chapter Five.

¹⁴⁵ *The Times*, 15 May 1935; The most celebrated account of fleet illuminations was a BBC broadcast by Lieutenant-Commander Thomas Woodrooffe who drunkenly repeated over the airways 'The Fleet's lit up!'

Given the success of the Silver Jubilee Review, it is not surprising that the Admiralty continued to believe that Reviews were a useful tool and pushed hard for a Coronation Review in 1936 to mark Edward VIII ascending the throne. As Rüger has argued: the Admiralty 'was very keen'.¹⁴⁶ Although due to the abdication of Edward VIII this did not take place, it was repeated in 1937 when George VI was crowned. Perhaps the most interesting incident here is the refusal of the Australian navy to send their flagship to take part in the Coronation Review, indicating further breakdown in the imperial force and increased autonomy of the dominions. The Australians made it clear that they had better things to do than send their ship round the world again.¹⁴⁷ The views of sailors on this issue are not recorded either by unpublished diaries or published memoirs considered by this thesis. Similarly, the press blanked the voice of opposition and thus they made little of the Australian flag ship's absence despite coverage of other dominion ships, notably from India.¹⁴⁸

Furthermore, despite voices of dissent, the number of visitors continued to increase yearly.¹⁴⁹ At what turned out to be the last Navy Week prior to the Second World War in 1938, the *Daily Mail* reported: 'The annual naval display is a sight never to be forgotten'.¹⁵⁰ Visitors were treated to 'Mock battles, air raids, dress parades and naval drills... "staged" in the immense dockyards for the benefit of "John Citizen" to see how his tax is spent, and how his shores are guarded'.¹⁵¹ Although given the international situation and the personal agenda of the *Daily Mail's* editors in 1938, this concerted praise is not surprising. The availability of Navy Week also continued to be reinforced with papers giving travel information on cheap day excursions.¹⁵² The relative cheapness of the day was also extolled, for instance *The Times* stated: 'Navy Week is the most democratic of all Service entertainments, for there is one price only, 1s.'. ¹⁵³ The navy used various mediums to advertise Navy Week and draw greater crowds. In particular, an 18 foot model of HMS *Repulse* was 'taken on a tour of the Midlands and the South of England' to 'interest the public in Navy Week'.¹⁵⁴ On another occasion there was an exhibition at Olympia headlined by the *Daily Mail* as 'Seeing the Navy at Home'. This included 'full-sized replicas of the living quarters of an L class submarine, and three of the messes in HMS *Orion*', providing further opportunity for the public to see what life was like aboard.¹⁵⁵

Alongside this the navy continued its traditional forms of pageantry, such as the naval field gun display. Douglas Poole described one such event at Durban: 'The Navy gave a display with Naval field guns, the Commander in Chief taking the salute at the march past, which was much appreciated by everyone'.¹⁵⁶ The field gun exercise was especially poignant in South Africa

¹⁴⁶ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 268

¹⁴⁷ NAA, CP4/2, 5: Prime Minister, Canberra, to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, London, 30 January 1937 quoted in Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 268

¹⁴⁸ See *The Times*, 22 March 1937; *The Times*, 29 April 1937; *The Times*, 1 May 1937.

¹⁴⁹ See *The Times*, 5 August 1935; *The Times*, 10 August 1936.

¹⁵⁰ *Daily Mail*, 8 July 1938

¹⁵¹ *Daily Mail*, 8 July 1938

¹⁵² *The Cornishman*, 28 July 1932; *The Cornishman*, 25 July 1935; *Essex Chronicle*, 22 July 1938

¹⁵³ *The Times*, 19 February 1935

¹⁵⁴ *The Tamworth Herald*, 11 July 1935

¹⁵⁵ *Daily Mail*, 27 March 1937

¹⁵⁶ RNM 1994/253/3: Diary of Douglas Poole

where the naval brigade has played a key role in the Boer War and thus served to reinforce the political message behind the pageantry.¹⁵⁷ However, whether Poole was cognizant of this is unclear. In addition, the "Showing the Flag" policy continued alongside regular port visits around the Empire.¹⁵⁸ For instance HMS *Ajax* visited the Caribbean and South America in 1935. As had been done in the 1920s, ships would be open for visitors, sailors would land to conduct marches, and searchlight displays would be held. Brooman noted of his visit to Trinidad in 1935: 'HMS "Ajax" landed a party of seamen and Royal Marines for a demonstration march through the town of Trinidad'.¹⁵⁹ On the following day Brooman recorded this was followed by an "At Home" being given but wrote: 'unfortunately tropical torrential rain spoilt the whole show, the bunting and other decorations being soaked through, anyhow the best is done to give the guests an "Ajax" welcome'.¹⁶⁰ On a more sombre note, Edward Records described the navy marking the death of King George V: 'divisions at noon... while a salute was fired. It consisted of 1 gun for every year of his life, fired at 1 minute intervals. 70 minutes'.¹⁶¹ Records does not mention any complaint at having to stand on parade for 70 minutes other than the fact he mentions the length of time. Nevertheless, he and his friends on the lower deck were evidently interested in events and Records wrote: 'Most of the talk aboard is of putting the [royal] family in its correct sequence of taking the crown'.¹⁶²

However, Bell has suggested that although 'The navy remained genuinely popular', it was hindered by numerous factors.¹⁶³ In particular, Bell argued that:

The navy's difficulties might have been alleviated if a greater effort had been made to win the support of the British public... its only objective was to reinforce the idea that seapower still mattered to Britain. It did not attempt to educate the public about how seapower operated or, more importantly, what was required to maintain it.¹⁶⁴

Thus although Bell recognized the continued use of naval pageantry, he believed that it was used inefficiently considering the pressures facing the navy and did little to help sustain it. Nevertheless, despite Bell's misgivings regarding its uses, naval pageantry remained a vital tenet of British imperial imagery, even if it may have better served the navy's interests to educate their audience. As Rüger has noted, 'The naval theatre of the 1930s was designed to affirm the unity of empire at a time when this unity was being challenged more than ever before'.¹⁶⁵ Importantly, and to advance Rüger's thesis, as the forgotten participants in naval

¹⁵⁷ For more information on pageantry see Chapter Two and for the Boer War see Chapter Three.

¹⁵⁸ See Chapter Five for further information regarding showing the flag.

¹⁵⁹ RNM 2013/100/2: Diary of William Brooman

¹⁶⁰ RNM 2013/100/2: Diary of William Brooman; This also demonstrates pride in the ship and a desire to be good hosts to their guests. For a greater examination of this see Chapter Five.

¹⁶¹ RNM 2004/40/3: Diary of Edward Records

¹⁶² RNM 2004/40/3: Diary of Edward Records. Whether they were discussing the situation surrounding Edward VIII is unclear but his relationship with Wallace Simpson was more widely known outside of Britain so those serving overseas may have had more knowledge of it.

¹⁶³ Bell, *Royal Navy*, p. 188

¹⁶⁴ Bell, *Royal Navy*, pp. 187-188

¹⁶⁵ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 269

pageantry, the imagery also worked on sailors themselves. As this chapter argues, it remained a common belief that they were part of the best navy in the world. This sentiment was regularly expressed and was a fundamental part of lower-deck culture.¹⁶⁶ As Seaman Walter Basford said: 'When you were in the navy you were really something'.¹⁶⁷

Policing the world – the Abyssinian Crisis and the Spanish Civil War

Despite the restrictions imposed upon the Royal Navy by inter-war disarmament treaties, Britain remained a dominant naval power and continued her various overseas roles.¹⁶⁸ Although Paul M. Kennedy has argued that the navy's overall position during the inter-war period was in serious decline, going so far as to state 'the British Empire... had lost its muscle', other historians have been more positive.¹⁶⁹ In particular Bell has argued that the adoption of 'a one-power standard was not a sign of imperial decline'.¹⁷⁰ Given Britain's continued involvement in world affairs and its strength ratio as it entered the Second World War, this would not seem without some grounding.¹⁷¹ However, the deterioration of the political situation in Europe and escalating conflicts of the 1930s demanded the involvement of the Royal Navy and added significantly to the pressures it faced. In addition, the Royal Navy was expected to continue its age-old role policing the world's oceans and protecting British interests overseas. As such, British warships were deployed keeping the peace during the Abyssinian Crisis and the Spanish Civil War; both conflicts were instrumental to the shaping of the political situation on the eve of the Second World War and thus deserve consideration at this point.

The role of "Policeman of the seas" had long been propagated to the British public and writing to the *Devon and Exeter Daily Gazette*, one commentator wrote that although it was now far easier to rush troops to different areas of the world 'the psychological effect is not the same as that gained by the display of the White Ensign'.¹⁷² Similarly after Invergordon the prompt response of the navy to an incident in Cyprus caused another commentator to write of the timely arrival of British ships and that 'it will also, doubtless, have the effect of acting as a timely damper upon other disturbances of a similar character... in different portions of our far-flung Empire'.¹⁷³ Sailors were fully cognizant of this position and recognized the navy's mission to police the seas.¹⁷⁴ As Petty Officer Stan Smith summed it up: 'The Royal Navy between the wars was a benign policeman with a beat covering all the world's seas'.¹⁷⁵ Likewise during the

¹⁶⁶ Williams, *Gone*, p. 116; IWM 10741: Thomas Teece; IWM 10744: William Arthur Townley; IWM 20817: Percy Thomas Price

¹⁶⁷ IWM 669: Walter Nicholson Basford

¹⁶⁸ For a background on the Washington Treaty see John Jordan, *Warships after Washington: The Development of the Five Major Fleets 1922-1930*, (Barnsley: Seaforth, 2011) and Goldman, *Sunken Treaties*.

¹⁶⁹ Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery*, (London: Penguin, 2017 [first edition 1976]); p. 285; Martin Pugh has argued that Britain was actually far less affected than America and Germany at this time. Pugh, *We Danced*, p. viii

¹⁷⁰ Bell, *Royal Navy*, p. 181

¹⁷¹ Arthur, *True Glory*, p. 159

¹⁷² *Devon and Exeter Daily Gazette*, 24 October 1931; As discussed in Chapter Five, the psychological effect of the White Ensign continued to be a core belief.

¹⁷³ *Devon and Exeter Daily Gazette*, 24 October 1931

¹⁷⁴ Bell, *Royal Navy*, p. 180

¹⁷⁵ Arthur, *True Glory*, p. 248

Abyssinian Crisis William Brooman recorded HMS *Ajax* was 'to act as a Policeman to the entrance to the Suez Canal'.¹⁷⁶

HMS *Hood* again stands dominant in this decade and Taylor has argued that 'as the ultimate symbol of British seapower it was natural that the *Hood* should feature prominently in this strategy' of appeasement.¹⁷⁷ When *Hood* hove into view crowds would gather to see her mighty superstructure, demonstrating the perceived power of the Royal Navy.¹⁷⁸ Leonard Williams joined her just before the start of the Spanish Civil War and wrote that she was 'the finest looking ship in this, or any other navy'.¹⁷⁹ Furthermore, Taylor has argued that '*Hood's* role as the sharp instrument of Britain's foreign policy if push came to shove was not lost on the lower deck, which christened her "The Seven B's": Britain's Biggest Bullshitting Bastard Built By Brown'.¹⁸⁰ This attitude is supported by sailor testimony and Thomas Teece, a Petty Officer aboard HMS *Protector*, recounted one occasion where they were challenged by a Spanish cruiser but 'the *Hood* came up and stopped all that'.¹⁸¹ Similarly, William Townley took evident enjoyment from the Royal Navy's superior firepower. Recounting one encounter where *Hood* went to the aid of a hospital ship, Townley said it 'was hilarious... we told these destroyers to shove off or we would open fire on them'.¹⁸² On another occasion known as the "Bilbao Blockade" the Spanish asked *Hood* to hand over an armed merchant man, "Potato Jones", or they would be fired upon.¹⁸³ Townley said that *Hood's* captain responded: 'You can open fire when you like', and 'when the turrets trained round on her she [the Spanish] decided it was time to go back in the harbour'.¹⁸⁴ Following this incident, Admiral Pridham aboard *Hood* wrote: 'we... did feel that we had been "a big bully"'.¹⁸⁵ Perhaps somewhat curiously, Leonard Williams made little of their part in this standoff in his autobiography, where it might be expected he would publicize the story because it was deemed of interest to the public.¹⁸⁶

Thus sailors retained a genuine sense of pride in the Royal Navy and Britain, and a sense of superiority over other nations. For example, William Brooman, recorded the events of the Abyssinian Crisis with no hint of doubt that it was Britain's duty to be ready to intervene as and when to maintain order.¹⁸⁷ After being called off hurricane rescue duty in the Caribbean, Brooman wrote: 'there is no doubt that the Italian-Abyssinian Affair and other affairs in Europe make it necessary for a modern cruiser as the "*Ajax*" is, to be on the scene of activities'.¹⁸⁸ He does not disclose his feelings regarding their imminent departure to a possible warzone except:

¹⁷⁶ RNM 2013/100/2: Diary of William Brooman

¹⁷⁷ Taylor, *End*, p. 125

¹⁷⁸ Taylor, *End*, p. 126

¹⁷⁹ Williams, *Gone*, p. 116

¹⁸⁰ Taylor, *End*, p. 125; See also IWM 12422: Joseph Frederick Rockley.

¹⁸¹ IWM 10741: Thomas Teece

¹⁸² IWM 10744: William Arthur Townley

¹⁸³ Potato Jones was running guns and other weaponry. See Roskill, *Naval Policy*, p. 379; Lavery, *Able*, p. 299

¹⁸⁴ IWM 10744: William Arthur Townley

¹⁸⁵ Admiral Pridham, Unpublished Memoirs (Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge, PRID 2/2) quoted in Taylor, *End*, p. 126

¹⁸⁶ See Williams, *Gone*, p. 119; McKee has argued that many autobiographies conformed to a belief that they should only tell what they thought others would find important. McKee, *Sober Men*, pp. 7-8

¹⁸⁷ RNM 2013/100/2: Diary of William Brooman; Again it is evident that war made sailors more forthcoming in their diary entries and this point has been discussed in detail in Chapters Three and Four.

¹⁸⁸ RNM 2013/100/2: Diary of William Brooman

'we welcomed the cooler atmosphere'.¹⁸⁹ Whether he was concerned at the possible danger is not mentioned but the comment about the weather suggests that it was seen as a reprieve; his comment also suggests a hint of pride in the *Ajax* that its presence was necessary.

As the crisis continued, Brooman found himself at Alexandria where he wrote: 'Britain's Fleet is absolutely ready in every respect for any particular duty which we may be called upon to carry out'.¹⁹⁰ Again, Brooman noted their prowess, stating: 'special precautions being taken by all ships against a surprise "Air Attack", a good reception awaits the first aggressor'.¹⁹¹ Similarly, John Skeats made the following remark about the Mediterranean Fleet at Alexandria: 'we were there to keep control of the Italians because of their activities in Abyssinia'.¹⁹² Skeats made no suggestion that he doubted their ability to perform this duty should the need arise. This fighting talk suggests the lower deck saw it as their duty to intervene if necessary and were ready to do so. Skeats made a similar observation on the outbreak of the Second World War: 'I think the attitude of the British nation at that time that you can't do this sort of thing, we are the British, we will not allow you to do this, you know, the old spirit of the gunboat'.¹⁹³

Similarly, Edward Records demonstrated that he felt it was Britain's duty to stand up to Italy and enforce her will. He followed the discussions in connection with a proposed oil embargo on Italy with interest stating: 'If they don't impose an embargo I shall be disappointed. All the British cackling will have been all flannel'.¹⁹⁴ This suggests a deep-rooted concern that Britain's position in the world would suffer if it did not make a stand. In addition, Records recounted an interesting account of a discussion he had with some Somali policemen regarding Italy and Germany:

One or two of the Somali police asked me what I thought England would do about Abyssinia. They said they didn't think Italy was so strong and expected England to assist Abyssinia. Now they don't know what to make of things... They are surprised at Italy's strength, but firmly believe that Britain is the strongest nation in the world now and for ever more. I told them that we expected when we came up here to go to war against Italy, and we'd polish them off in 3 months. Couldn't do it any quicker as Italy is a long country to walk through.¹⁹⁵

Despite the typical stoic humour, this account provides an insight into several fundamental points believed by sailors. Although simply framed, it is revealing about what they took from such interactions with indigenous peoples in the colonies, and it is the sailors' views that are

¹⁸⁹ RNM 2013/100/2: Diary of William Brooman

¹⁹⁰ RNM 2013/100/2: Diary of William Brooman

¹⁹¹ RNM 2013/100/2: Diary of William Brooman

¹⁹² IWM 18007: John Goldup Skeats

¹⁹³ IWM 18007: John Goldup Skeats

¹⁹⁴ RNM 2004/40/3: Diary of Edward Records; For further information see G. Bruce Strang, "'The Worst of all Worlds': Oil Sanctions and Italy's Invasion of Abyssinia, 1935-1936', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 19, 2008; pp. 210-235.

¹⁹⁵ RNM 2004/40/3: Diary of Edward Records

important.¹⁹⁶ Firstly it suggests that they did not think Britain's power was seriously questioned by indigenous people in the colonies, and that they did not doubt Britain's ability to enforce its will; secondly it suggests that sailors believed indigenous populations expected Britain to assert itself; thirdly that sailors had expected the situation to deteriorate into war and that it was likely Britain would have to step in; and fourthly that sailors did not doubt Britain's ability to defeat Italy, although Records may have made his reply so light-hearted for the benefit of the Somalis.

Again, this episode demonstrates the complex issue of sailor pride. Whilst Records highlights pride in British strength because it was defined as such by the situation, pride continued to mean different things to sailors, not just pride in the navy but genuine pride in other British abilities. For instance, Brooman spent some time at Haifa during the Abyssinian Crisis and described improvements made to the harbour and town 'carried out by two English firms, and the present results give credit to British workmanship'.¹⁹⁷ Sailors were proud of what they perceived as benefits brought by Britain and E. G. T. Ardley wrote of a visit to Trincomali: 'In the native quarters the streets are clean and well kept, the meaning of sanitation and hygiene being taught with great success'.¹⁹⁸ Ardley also demonstrated a belief in the power and moral good of Britain in the world. A visit to Dar-es-Salaam prompted an account of a group of Africans travelling to Britain after the Great War to request assistance in the return of the skull of Sultan Makuraura [Mkwawa], taken as a trophy by the Germans.¹⁹⁹ Ardley proudly wrote: 'the British were known throughout the world for respecting the beliefs of all who sheltered themselves under their flag'.²⁰⁰ Similarly, Ardley wrote of Malta becoming a British possession: 'by the voice of the people'.²⁰¹ He described Malta as being: 'the proud possession of the mistress of the seas from Phoenicia [sic] in 1400BC to the British Empire in 1930'.²⁰² Although clearly his perspective and should be viewed with caution, it demonstrates Ardley's imperialist views and how he fits the navy within this. This view was similarly propounded by Leonard Charles Williams who wrote of the Maltese as 'our responsibility' and such beliefs reveal that the moral message of imperialism expounded by social commentators had traction.²⁰³

Nevertheless, Ardley was also evidently aware of the tensions within the Empire. In Bombay he noted that: 'our walks were limited owing to the trouble with the Ghandi-ites'.²⁰⁴ He also discussed the difference in how sailors were greeted in the Seychelles in comparison to India where 'the people seemed to give us the impression that we were not wanted, by either white or black'.²⁰⁵ However, he does not comment in detail upon these issues and whether he

¹⁹⁶ Sailor's interaction with natives in the colony is an interesting topic which requires additional research and would further the sailors and imperialism debate.

¹⁹⁷ RNM 2013/100/2: Diary of William Brooman

¹⁹⁸ RNM 105/84: Diary of E. G. T. Ardley

¹⁹⁹ RNM 105/84: Diary of E. G. T. Ardley

²⁰⁰ RNM 105/84: Diary of E. G. T. Ardley

²⁰¹ RNM 105/84: Diary of E. G. T. Ardley

²⁰² RNM 105/84: Diary of E. G. T. Ardley

²⁰³ Williams, *Gone*, p. 77

²⁰⁴ RNM 105/84: Diary of E. G. T. Ardley

²⁰⁵ RNM 105/84: Diary of E. G. T. Ardley

understood the political reasoning behind any tensions. On the other hand, as discussed in Chapter Five, sailors were not unaware of feelings in the colonies and ports they visited, and noted when they encountered any issues, or if there was something in the colony's history that affected the visit.²⁰⁶ In particular, Basford noted that the Chinese were particularly unfriendly: 'The Chinese never had any time for you'.²⁰⁷

Alongside feelings of national pride there continued to be sense of racial superiority over other nations, although once again this was not necessarily a question of colour.²⁰⁸ For instance, Daniel Owen Spence has noted this in connection with the threat of the Japanese navy.²⁰⁹ However, of particular note during the 1930s was a dislike for the Italians. Although Brooman is not overtly imperialistic in his diary, he stated: 'the Duce is very obstinate and not at all popular in the Royal Navy'.²¹⁰ More recently, Lavery has argued that 'seamen despised the bombast of Mussolini's regime in Italy'.²¹¹ He cites Able Seaman John Whelan who commented on a discussion with another sailor and said: 'lower deck sailors... loathed Mussolini long before British civilians were officially authorised to do so. It was a matter of pride, not politics'.²¹² British sailors in particular viewed the Mediterranean as their territory and did not like Italian posturing, especially Mussolini's argument of Mare Italia or the 'Italian Lake'.²¹³ Similarly Leonard Williams noted a certain coolness towards the Italians by the mid-1930s due to their activities.²¹⁴ Furthermore, Able Seaman Fred White displayed stereotypical beliefs of racism and regarded the Italians as 'slovenly'.²¹⁵ Again, describing clashes ashore, Whelan noted: 'our battles with the Italians were motivated by the bitterest contemptuous hate'.²¹⁶ In addition, Records spoke with damning sarcasm of Italy's involvement in Abyssinia revealing a keen dislike: 'Great stuff Muss [Mussolini] you'll sure get it in the neck. He is acting with utter disregard of any nation and with contempt also to the world'.²¹⁷ Nevertheless, when sailors of different nationalities met at sea there were expected behaviours to be followed and such sentiment was curtailed by etiquette. As Brooman noted: 'As a mark of respect and friendship Italian Troopships when passing HMS "Ajax" parade a guard, with fixed bayonets and give the salute, this mark of respect is returned by HMS "Ajax", sounding the "Attention" on a bugle'.²¹⁸ Similarly the old rivalry with the French continued, despite previous alliances, as Ardley demonstrated when he recounted a meeting with the French sloop *Amates*:

²⁰⁶ See for example RNM 1999/31: Diary of Wilfred Woolman and RNM 105/84: Diary of E. G. T. Ardley.

²⁰⁷ IWM 669: Walter Nicolson Basford; This point regarding views towards the Chinese was also noted in Chapter Five.

²⁰⁸ See also Chapter Five.

²⁰⁹ Daniel Owen Spence, *Empire and Imperialism*, (London: I. B. Tauris, 2015); p. 138

²¹⁰ RNM 2013/100/2: Diary of William Brooman

²¹¹ Lavery, *Able*, p. 297

²¹² John Whelan, *Home is the Sailor*, (London: Angus and Robertson, 1957); p. 92

²¹³ Augustus Agar, *Showing the Flag: the role of the Royal Navy between the wars*, (London: Evans Brothers, 1962); p. 149 Whelan, *Home*, p. 92; David Omissi, 'European Imperialism, 1871-1945', in Martin Pugh (ed.), *A Companion to Modern European History, 1871-1945*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004); pp. 236-261, p.258

²¹⁴ Williams, *Gone*, p. 126

²¹⁵ Able Seaman Fred White quoted in Taylor, *End*, p. 132; Whelan made the same comment regarding Spanish soldiers. Whelan, *Home*, p. 72

²¹⁶ Whelan, *Home*, p. 93

²¹⁷ RNM 2004/40/3: Diary of Edward Records

²¹⁸ RNM 2013/100/2: Diary of William Brooman

We were surprised to see that she was one of our own old "Flower" class sloops which had been evidently turned over to France after the Gt War. Yet what a great change had come over her in those years, from once a splendid looking craft with grey upper work, yellow funnels, white ship-side and decks like only a British man-o-war can be, to a craft ill-used, unpainted, rust showing through everywhere and decks in a filthy condition, a condition in which Frenchmen could live. Yet it seemed as if she knew that we were of her original flag, for the engines were running as smoothly as in days gone by, as much as to say "My nationality may be changed, as also my flag, but my heart beats made in England".²¹⁹

This reveals a certain disdain and belief in British superiority, as well as British naval superiority over the French sailors who could not maintain such high standards. Again, Records expressed disappointment in the French, noting on the re-occupation of the Rhineland in 1936: 'It is a pity that nations do not uphold things they sign. France have been very backwards in coming forward over the Abyssinian affair. Now she will be the opposite and I hope we'll be the same as she was over the Abyss [Abyssinian] war'.²²⁰

In addition, relations with American sailors were only moderately better. Whelan noted:

when ships representing three or more navies were in port and a rough house started, the British and Americans fought shoulder to shoulder. It is a regrettable fact, however, that if they were the only two naval powers in port, the British and Americans were at one another's throats at the slightest provocation.²²¹

After one large fight between British and American sailors in Gibraltar, Whelan said: 'Were proof needed that the Royal Navy is more disciplined than the American, it was given then. The British took names, the Yanks clouted their compatriots over the head'.²²² The inter-war years were marked by ill-feeling towards the Americans, which Roskill has argued 'was on the British rather than the American side, the former still regarding the US Navy as something of a parvenu from whom they had little or nothing to learn'.²²³ Edwards also noted the disagreement, arguing that rivalry was based on the growth of the USA and its attempts to gain equal power status with the British Empire.²²⁴

However, relations were markedly better with German sailors and more recently Taylor has argued that the lower deck was on far better terms with German sailors than with their French and Italian counterparts.²²⁵ For instance, Percy Price recalled playing football against the

²¹⁹ RNM 105/84: Diary of E. G. T. Ardley

²²⁰ RNM 2004/40/3: Diary of Edward Records

²²¹ Whelan, *Home*, p. 87

²²² Whelan, *Home*, p. 89

²²³ Roskill, *Naval Policy*, p. 25

²²⁴ Edwards, *Mutiny*, p. 12

²²⁵ Taylor, *End*, p. 132

German crew of the *Graf Spee*: 'You used to go ashore to the various places in Tangiers and used to hang out... we were friendly'.²²⁶ Similarly, Cantellow recalled a port visit to Rio where he met 'a very nice German fellow'.²²⁷ Likewise, Fred Coombes noted that at Tangiers the British 'chose to chum up with the German [cruisers]... where the German and British had some battles royal with the French and Italian crew'.²²⁸ Leonard Williams suggested a key reason for these alliances 'was because the Germans and ourselves were beer drinking types, whereas the others usually drank wine'.²²⁹ The importance of such cultural similarities has much to commend it from a social interaction viewpoint.²³⁰ In addition, White suggested there was greater respect because the Germans were smart-looking and 'a credit to their nation'.²³¹ Furthermore, Able Seaman Joseph Rockey drew a direct comparison and said the Germans were 'well disciplined... theirs was a harsh discipline, and we were disciplined'.²³² Again, the British viewed themselves as smart and well-disciplined whereas they did not feel the same regarding the French and Italians, and this is another reason for greater respect between the German and British navies.

Thus there was particular dislike of the rising navies of Italy and America which were viewed as infringing upon the Royal Navy's position, and this stemmed from both their own views and inculcation. Although Taylor has argued that 'the political complexities... were lost on much of the lower deck', this does not mean that sailors were incapable of understanding situations and following them with interest.²³³ In particular, it had never been easier for sailors to keep up to date with developments and access news stories and through the availability of the wireless aboard ship. As Leonard Williams noted, most ships were fitted with 'a radio and local broadcasting apparatus with extension loudspeakers fitted in all parts of the ship'.²³⁴ This allowed sailors to formulate their own opinions but also hear those of others as well.

For instance, William Brooman aboard HMS *Ajax* was on routine duty off Bermuda when they received a sudden change in orders: 'We are left to surmise why this sudden change in our sailing orders, probably the answer is to be found in the Italian-Abysian [sic] dispute'.²³⁵ This is the first reference Brooman's diary makes to the conflict but it is apparent that he and his crewmates were aware that something was happening. Furthermore, Brooman suggests that sailors were eager for news, writing upon their arrival at Gibraltar: 'It is a treat to be able to buy English Newspapers (four days old) and read what is happening at Geneva and Europe'.²³⁶ However, the lower deck was not bound by political sentiment and Leonard Williams wrote that 'sailors the world over have a knack of conveniently sweeping under the carpet any political

²²⁶ IWM 20817: Percy Thomas Price

²²⁷ RNM 2014/87/2: Diary of L. A. C. Cantellow

²²⁸ IWM 205: Diary of Fed Coombes quoted in Taylor, *End*, p. 132

²²⁹ Williams, *Gone*, p. 125

²³⁰ This point has been discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.

²³¹ Able Seaman Fred White quoted in Taylor, *End*, p. 132

²³² Able Seaman Fred White quoted in Taylor, *End*, p. 132

²³³ Taylor, *End*, p. 132

²³⁴ Williams, *Gone*, p. 63

²³⁵ RNM 2013/100/2: Diary of William Brooman

²³⁶ RNM 2013/100/2: Diary of William Brooman

rumpus, as having nothing to do with them'.²³⁷ Similarly Arthur Townley suggested that politics were easily cast aside for when more important things were at stake, for instance rescuing other sailors from the water: 'You can't let people drown just because you might not agree with their politics'.²³⁸ In arguing that sailors were not capable of understanding the complexity of political situations, Taylor is doing sailors a disservice; this is not a comment that can be applied wholeheartedly to the lower deck. Sailors had other worries which to them were far more important but if events began to affect them then they wanted to know about it and understand why they had to be involved.²³⁹

This is demonstrated by the Royal Navy's involvement in the Spanish Civil War, and Roskill has argued that this was an important episode for the navy between the wars and put it back into the public eye.²⁴⁰ However, once again there has been a lack of engagement from the perspective of the lower deck. Importantly, sailors were very conscious that this was not *their* war.²⁴¹ Nevertheless, because of the effect the conflict was having on the Atlantic and Mediterranean, Britain adopted a policy of non-intervention but patrolled the Spanish coast in the interests of British shipping and humanitarian aid. Consequently, this necessitated British warships being close to the conflict and suffered numerous incidents. For example, they faced aerial attacks and in particular HMS *Hunter* was badly damaged when she hit a mine. This naturally angered sailors and prompted Leonard Williams to state: 'It was a sad affair and we were really wild about this'.²⁴² Many sailors could not understand or see the benefit of their involvement especially when, despite their peace-keeping role, they were often targeted. For instance, John Skeats wrote that the navy was 'bombed and generally ill-treated by either side. It didn't matter that we were there'.²⁴³ Meanwhile, William Townley wrote that 'it was a waste of time'.²⁴⁴ Likewise another sailor, Thomas Teece, called it 'the most boring thing I've ever been in'.²⁴⁵

On the other hand, John Whelan did not suggest it was a boring experience but evidently thought they were underappreciated. Whelan recounted a conversation with a friend who complained that although all the blockade runners were popular with the press, he wondered 'what half these "I'm going in" heroes would do without us'.²⁴⁶ Nevertheless, Percy Jones, serving aboard *Hood*, stated: 'We done quite a good job, during the Spanish Civil War, taking refugees from Barcelona and Valencia and Palma to Marseilles'.²⁴⁷ Despite being bored, Thomas Teece supports this view and acknowledged that the refugees appeared grateful for

²³⁷ Williams, *Gone*, p. 126

²³⁸ IWM 10744: William Arthur Townley; This is discussed further in Chapter Four.

²³⁹ For instance the minor mutiny of HMS *Delhi* in the Baltic in 1919 was resolved when it was explained to them that they were there to counteract the Bolsheviks. IWM 669: Walter Nicolson Basford

²⁴⁰ Roskill, *Naval Policy*, p. 369

²⁴¹ See IWM 18007: John Goldup Skeats

²⁴² Williams, *Gone*, p. 118

²⁴³ IWM 18007: John Goldup Skeats

²⁴⁴ IWM 10744: William Arthur Townley

²⁴⁵ IWM 10741: Thomas Teece

²⁴⁶ Whelan, *Home*, p. 69

²⁴⁷ IWM 20817: Percy Thomas Price

the help the navy gave.²⁴⁸ This suggests that despite the knowledge they were playing an important role, it was not enough to alleviate both the boredom and the danger when they were aware it was not a war they were actively involved in.²⁴⁹ Sailors did not object to being the policeman, this was an important part of their role on some level, but they needed purpose and they also wanted respect.²⁵⁰ In particular, a comparison can be drawn to their role during the Abyssinian Crisis where their presence was much more respected.

Yet this did not stop a number of British sailors from being sympathetic to the situation. As Whelan commented:

This was a wretched business, for not only was it plain that both sides had treated their prisoners abominably, but there were scenes of heart-rending poignancy on the quaysides when the silently assembled women did not find their menfolk among our passengers. We were glad when the job was finished.²⁵¹

Whelan also suggested that sailors were happy to help with the humanitarian crisis and described several individual enterprises to help Spaniards caught up in the war: including the transport of escaped political prisoners and personal messages from people they met in other ports along the coast.²⁵²

Consequently, Edwards has argued about the importance of the Abyssinian Crisis and Spanish Civil War for sailors as it made them feel as though 'they were at last doing a real job, and were earning the respect of most of the civilised world'.²⁵³ Certainly this was the opinion of naval commanders at the time. For instance, Admiral Fisher commented at the 1936 Navy Week that 'it is the men who count all the time, and... you have got something you can count on'.²⁵⁴ Similarly Lord Chatfield noted: 'at this moment the Navy stood high in the respect of the world'.²⁵⁵ Yet, whilst this may be true of the Abyssinian Crisis, as has been argued above, it is less clear that sailors involved with the Spanish Civil War took such pride. In particular, it might be expected that the terrible bombardment of the Spanish town of Guernica which shocked the world would have caused sailors to feel as though they were part of an important protective mission. Yet this event went unmarked in both the published and unpublished testimony considered by this thesis.²⁵⁶ However, unlike the Abyssinian Crisis which saw what they viewed as an upstart European nation bullying a primitive country, a civil war meant that they were stuck between two opposing sides who did not want them there.

²⁴⁸ IWM 10741: Thomas Teece

²⁴⁹ On sailors and boredom see Chapter Four, particularly sailors based at Scapa Flow.

²⁵⁰ Sailors liked a fuss as long as it was not patronizing. This has been discussed more in Chapter Five.

²⁵¹ Whelan, *Home*, p. 81

²⁵² Whelan, *Home*, pp.76-81

²⁵³ Edwards, *Mutiny*, p. 417

²⁵⁴ *The Times*, 10 August 1936

²⁵⁵ *Daily Mail*, 1 August 1938

²⁵⁶ Whelan, *Home*, pp.75-76; Although they would have heard about the incident from the press, perhaps to them it did not stand out above any of the horrors they had already seen. The rescue of refugees echoes the sailor diaries of 1919-1921 where many were horrified by the sights they saw. See for example RNM 1998/58: Letter from Thomas Oliver; RNM 1999/87: Scrapbook of James Morkham.

Nevertheless, from the point of view of the navy's image, both conflicts arguably assisted in re-asserting the navy on the world stage. Furthermore, the Abyssinian Crisis was asserted to have lessened tensions between Britain and some of its mandated territories, especially Egypt. In an article entitled 'Thanks to the Duce', the *Devon and Exeter Daily Gazette* reported that 'A joint parade of British bluejackets and Egyptian troops has actually been staged'.²⁵⁷ Similarly William Townley suggested that in his experience British ratings commanded far more respect than soldiers amongst the locals in Palestine and Egypt, and could go ashore where soldiers could not because their image was far more respectable.²⁵⁸

In addition, Roskill argued that the involvement of the Royal Navy in the Spanish Civil War was important. In particular, although sailors did not comment upon it, Roskill suggested that the bombing of Guernica may have influenced the Coronation Review and the need for British posturing, stating:

Though the occasion was in the main ceremonial the mobilisation of the Reserve Fleet was again rehearsed, and the general tuning up of the Navy for war was thus carried a stage further – amid all the gun salutes, displays of bunting, cheering to order and fireworks. But it is worth recalling that only some three weeks before the review the little Spanish town of Guernica has been destroyed by German bombers.²⁵⁹

The situation required the navy to be portrayed as strong and counter the growing threats in Europe.²⁶⁰

Therefore, there is some merit towards Edwards' assertion regarding the importance of these conflicts and their effect on sailors. Furthermore, despite their grumblings, sailors do not appear to contradict this image. The navy was again fulfilling its key role in world politics: that of a defensive power policing the ocean, which many still viewed as their duty.²⁶¹ This also supports Kennedy's argument regarding the impact of disarmament on the British where the navy had only just been built up to be the most powerful force in the world prior to the First World War only to stagnate in the 1920s.²⁶² The steady resurgence of the navy in British society, and in world affairs prior to the Second World War, was therefore important to sailors who firmly believed in the power of their navy, and to whom it was a key part of their identity and culture.

Rearmament and the road to war

As the political situation deteriorated during the second half of the decade, Britain no longer could ignore the question of rearmament: continuing the policy of naval arms control was not

²⁵⁷ *Devon and Exeter Daily Gazette*, 18 October 1935

²⁵⁸ IWM 10744: William Arthur Townley

²⁵⁹ Roskill, *Naval Policy*, p. 351; See also Pugh, *We Danced*, p. 325.

²⁶⁰ Rüger, *Great Naval*, p. 267

²⁶¹ Bell, *Royal Navy*, p. 180

²⁶² Kennedy, *Rise*, p. 267-268

viable.²⁶³ Germany had already rejected the Treaty of Versailles in 1933 and her modern pocket-battleships made her, in the words of Emily Goldman, 'a major contender'.²⁶⁴ Although Britain did not cast aside its policy of Appeasement, by the mid-1930s British rearmament was proceeding as quickly as possible. This was well detailed by the press and, although the navy did not receive sums on the same scale as before the First World War, the navy was finally reversing the position of the 1920s.²⁶⁵ For instance, 1936 was the biggest year for naval ship building since 1918 with expansion featuring heavily in the press.²⁶⁶ In February that year the *Daily Mail* reported that the 'cost of Britain's recent precautions [was] nearly Eight Millions', and that 'The worsening of the international situation has largely influenced the Government in its determination to speed up the overhauling and reconditioning of the defence service'.²⁶⁷

However, Roskill has stated that the full scale of rearmament was kept quiet from 1936, suggesting: 'These precautions were obviously inspired by the desire not to provoke the dictatorships into undertaking retaliatory building, and to avoid alarming the home population'.²⁶⁸ Despite the press coverage, and the popularity of the anti-war voice, the British public was unsure whether or not there was going to be a future war. Yet sailors were less uncertain. Serving on the frontline, as it were, of British foreign policy, especially in light of the Abyssinian Crisis and the Spanish Civil War, sailors had a good understanding of the severity of the European situation. For instance, Edward Records wrote regarding the Locarno Pact in 1938: 'Well it's a pretty kettle of fish. The people at home do not realise how serious it is. If I get through my time in the service without a war [I] shall consider myself exceedingly lucky'.²⁶⁹ Records therefore followed news of British rearmament with interest, noting in his diary: 'England is rearming. £10,000,000 extra on this years' Armament Bill'.²⁷⁰ However, Records also suggests an element of happiness with British rearmament. He was disgusted at the failure of the League of Nations – especially over the Abyssinian Crisis – saying 'Sincerely hope we leave the league of nations [sic]'.²⁷¹ Records hoped that British rearmament would be 'a fore runner with a break from the league in view' and therefore clearly believed that power needed to be asserted.²⁷² This suggests that he was pleased that the navy was finally receiving the funds it needed and that it would assist in maintaining the power and reputation of the Royal Navy in order to keep the peace.

²⁶³ Goldman, *Sunken*, p. vii

²⁶⁴ Goldman, *Sunken*, p. 215

²⁶⁵ Roskill, *Naval Policy*, pp. 322-323

²⁶⁶ Roskill, *Naval Policy*, p. 322; *The Times*, 6 January 1936; *The Times*, 8 January 1936; *The Times*, 15 January 1936; *The Times*, 5 March 1936

²⁶⁷ *Daily Mail*, 17 February 1936; The damage of the so called "naval holiday" has been considered at the start of this chapter.

²⁶⁸ Roskill, *Naval Policy*, p. 219

²⁶⁹ RNM 2004/40/3: Diary of Edward Records

²⁷⁰ RNM 2004/40/3: Diary of Edward Records

²⁷¹ RNM 2004/40/3: Diary of Edward Records

²⁷² RNM 2004/40/3: Diary of Edward Records; Max Arthur has argued that the failure of the League was a shock to many, and again this suggests that the lower deck was forming its own views and increasingly taking an interest in what was going on. See Arthur, *True*, p. 158; See also Omissi, 'European', p. 258.

In addition, the scale of rearmament was particularly noticeable to sailors and, as Lavery has noted, there was an influx of new recruits and expansion of training establishments.²⁷³ When interviewed, John Skeats revealed that sailors were all too aware of this, stating that 'the navy was expanding rapidly, they were taking on air gunners like wildfire'.²⁷⁴ Reflecting on the situation, Williams wrote that in 1934: 'It was very noticeable that since the Nazi Government had taken over in Germany... our fleet practices had become more intense'.²⁷⁵ Similarly Whelan wrote that 'By May, 1939, the carefree quality of our exercises had been replaced by a solemn urgency'.²⁷⁶ Although both Williams' and Whelan's memoirs were published, there is supporting evidence to suggest that the urgency and seriousness of the situation they describe are not entirely influenced by post-war events and memories. For instance, Thomas Teece thought that the Mediterranean Fleet had been working up to war during the 1930s.²⁷⁷ Similarly sailor diaries make regular reference to either taking part in exercises or witnessing them, and Brooman's comment, 'sighted HMS "Glorious" (Aircraft Carrier) with HMS "Guardian" (Net laying vessel) carrying out gunnery practise, HMS "Searcher" (Destroyer) attending on', is typical of such descriptions.²⁷⁸

Despite the seriousness, these exercises also demonstrate other feelings such as pride in the navy and light-heartedness. For instance, Brooman recorded with a hint of pride observing the destroyers at gunnery practise in Alexandria: 'what a grand spectacle they make, the Greyhounds of the Ocean'.²⁷⁹ This sense of pride is recorded with greater clarity when writing of an air attack practise: 'this part of the programme makes us realise the importance of our Fleet Air Arm, and we are proud to have such efficient members and machines in that particular unit'.²⁸⁰ Similarly Records makes practising for gas attacks seem relatively humorous, despite the horror of the reality of which many would have been aware, writing: 'First time I've seen a person in it [the protective clothing]... They had them on about 10 minutes and were sweating like the devil when they took them off'.²⁸¹ In particular, Records evidently has some understanding about the dangers of gas warfare as he wrote with intonations of disgust that the Italians had 'used gas against the Abyssinians who are unprotected for that type of warfare'.²⁸² Interestingly his criticism of Italy's actions ignores various aspects of Britain's colonial subjugations and instead gives support to Ardley's comments on the moral purpose of the British Empire.

In particular, the threat brought about by growing German naval strength was not lost on the lower deck who had had numerous encounters with their German counterparts during the

²⁷³ Lavery, *Able*, pp. 301-302

²⁷⁴ IWM 18007: John Goldup Skeats

²⁷⁵ Williams, *Gone*, p. 100

²⁷⁶ Whelan, *Home*, p. 93

²⁷⁷ IWM 10741: Thomas Teece

²⁷⁸ RNM 2013/100/2: Diary of William Brooman

²⁷⁹ RNM 2013/100/2: Diary of William Brooman

²⁸⁰ RNM 2013/100/2: Diary of William Brooman; Importantly the Fleet Air Arm had recently been returned to the Royal Navy's control.

²⁸¹ RNM 2004/40/3: Diary of Edward Records; Following the First World War many would have had a greater appreciation for the dangers of gas warfare.

²⁸² RNM 2004/40/3: Diary of Edward Records

Spanish Civil War, which allowed them to form their own opinions. Furthermore, the pocket-battleship *Graf Spee* represented Germany at George V's Coronation Review and Roskill argued that German 'smartness and very evident power made a great impression on the vast crowds'.²⁸³ Although this chapter has demonstrated there was a level of respect between British and German sailors, they realized that the "naval holiday" had weakened the Royal Navy's position.²⁸⁴ As Able Seaman Jack Napier commented: 'If war ever came, we thought we were going to get a good hammering... Our ships went back to the 1914-18 war'.²⁸⁵ However, this did not mean that sailors thought that they would lose if it came to war. Sailors recognized their own ships were being replaced and William Brooman remarked on joining the newly commissioned HMS *Ajax*: 'we have joined a modern and well constructed ship'.²⁸⁶ The belief in their superiority was not curtailed by the Germans building a few smart new warships. When asked if he had thought the Royal Navy could handle the Germans, Thomas Teece replied 'Yes' without any show of concern.²⁸⁷ Granted he was speaking with the knowledge that Britain was victorious, but the additional testimony considered above demonstrates that British sailors continued to feel a strong sense of superiority despite their respect for the German navy and sailors.

Conclusion

This chapter has considered the difficulties faced by the lower deck during the challenging and changing international situation of the 1930s. It has examined how the deteriorating international situation caused the navy to be increasingly utilized to assert Britain's position on the global stage. The navy's increased involvement in world affairs by the late 1930s reaffirmed its grandeur and power. Examining these key events reveals the continued importance of the navy as an image of the Empire – not only to the public – but also to sailors who continued to play a prominent role. It heightened their feelings of imperialism and patriotism, which reaffirmed important elements of sailor culture and as such it remained a crucial part of their identity, each reinforcing the other. Furthermore, it has allowed further insight into the sailor character and the competing elements of sailor culture. For instance, the question of loyalty regarding the mutiny at Invergordon is important. Despite the seriousness of their actions, at no time did sailors consider themselves to be disloyal to the Empire or seek to bring about significant social change. Instead, what it demonstrates is the complexity of sailors' loyalty, and this chapter has progressed this beyond the existing discourse which is limited to whether they were loyal or disloyal, ignoring the nuances of the situation: loyalty was not clear-cut and conflicted with other sailor loyalties. In addition, the uncertainty of the international situation increased rivalry with other nations and their navies. British sailors continued to believe that

²⁸³ Roskill, *Naval Policy*, p. 350; As discussed above, the smart, professional image of German sailors was recognized by the lower deck.

²⁸⁴ The Ten Year Rule that Britain would not be engaged in a serious war and enabled the naval budget to be cut. This ended in 1933. See Goldman, *Sunken*, p. 216.

²⁸⁵ Jack Napier quoted in Arthur, *True Glory*, pp. 268-269

²⁸⁶ RNM 2013/100/2: Diary of William Brooman

²⁸⁷ IWM 10741: Thomas Teece

they belonged to the best navy in the world and were proud of their perceived image, which was integral to their identity. Relations with the rising Italian navy were particularly heated, stemming from a belief that they were encroaching on British rights and possessions. In particular, the Mediterranean Sea had long been considered to belong to the Royal Navy. This was ingrained sentiment, nurtured within the navy as part of its heritage and was also reinforced by concepts of British racial superiority, utilized to justify their imperial position and identity. Thus, as Italy began to assert itself, this drew anger from British sailors who considered themselves superior to the Italians and also resented their intrusion on the Empire's dominance.

Furthermore, this chapter has demonstrated sailors' perceptions of the navy's role during both the Abyssinian Crisis and the Spanish Civil War. In doing so this has introduced a new development to the history of the lower deck during the 1930s, moving beyond the confines of socio-political studies. These conflicts placed sailors on the frontline of events and demonstrate their relationship with the navy, the Empire and the political situation of the time. In particular, examining the Abyssinian Crisis has shown that sailors felt a deep sense of pride in their perception of Britain's place in the world and that they believed it was their duty to stand up to Italian posturing, defending both their position as the premier world power and the moral duty they perceived was due to Abyssinia. Similarly, although they did not see the benefits in their involvement in the Spanish Civil War and questioned how much good they did, it was their duty and they did it nonetheless. As such, despite the challenges, sailor culture continued to extol the same ideology. Their feeling of superiority continued to be strong despite the growth of other naval powers and lack of investment and modernization since the end of the First World War, of which they were aware. Consequently, as Britain approached the Second World War, British sailors continued to accept as fact that they were the best sailors in the world and the Royal Navy was the mistress of the seas.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion: Sailors - the sure shield of empire

This thesis has examined British sailors and their relationship with imperialism, together with concepts of identity, pride, and patriotism during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. In doing so it has engaged with the growing trend of cultural and gender histories of the Royal Navy, whilst at the same time developing the social history of the lower deck alongside imperial studies. More importantly, by using unpublished sailor diaries and testimony it has moved away from the overreliance on published memoirs and officer diaries of existing studies. As Christopher McKee acknowledged, in order to deconstruct the character of sailors, historians need to examine 'those who know naval sailors best – the ratings themselves'.¹ Consequently, this has enabled a significant insight into the nuances of the character of sailors during the verisimilitudes of empire. Although historians such as Mary A. Conley, Quintin Colville and Isaac Land have investigated the intricacies of sailors' identities, this thesis has further demonstrated how these were shaped by the lower deck's understanding, and interpretation, of the Empire and imperialism.

The sailor image was intimately linked with the Empire through social constructs and symbolism portrayed to the public by a variety of everyday cultural mediums as well as orchestrated naval pageantry.² Furthermore, as their imperial image developed, it saw them increasingly portrayed to the public as possessing heroic, chivalrous and respectable characteristics. This drew upon Victorian and Edwardian ideas of masculinity which traversed the strata of British society. Sailors did not question this element of their identity and by the late-nineteenth century increasingly viewed themselves as respectable men and servants of empire with a distinct sense of duty. However, they also retained aspects of the "Jolly Jack Tar" image and thus their identity was that which they required at that point in time, an element of fluidity rather than fixed. As Linda Colley argued, people wear multiple hats and therefore can possess multiple identities depending upon the situation.³ Consequently, sailors were not simply passive respondents to this manufactured cultural image but identified with it in their own way. This is demonstrated particularly clearly by their attitude to their uniform. The image of the 'bluejacket' was iconic and the sailor uniform was widespread in society by the early-twentieth century. However, as Colville has demonstrated, it was also important to them, and they made it their *own* by making alterations to the standard design according to their own tastes. It became an embodiment of their image and their identity as they saw themselves. Thus when

¹ Christopher McKee, *Sober Men and True: Sailor Lives in the Royal Navy, 1900-1945*, (London: Harvard University Press, 2002); p. 1

² See Mary A. Conley, *From Jack Tar to Union Jack: Representing naval manhood in the British Empire, 1870-1918*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009) and Jan R uger, *The Great Naval Game: Britain and Germany in the Age of Empire*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009 [first edition 2007]).

³ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837*, Second Edition, (London: Yale University Press, 2005 [first edition 1992]), p. 6

the naval brigades began to wear khaki during the Boer War many sailors were unhappy with this and they perceived it as a loss of their identity, particularly as they were sometimes indistinguishable from the army. Therefore, they sewed on their own badges in an attempt to make it *theirs* and reassert their own identity.⁴ The presence of this imperial identity demonstrates that the nuances of the lower deck's relationship with the Empire and imperialism requires greater consideration.

The growth of this imperial identity meant that sailors had a well-developed relationship with the Empire. In particular, this was both displayed and nurtured during events of naval pageantry. The spectacle of naval pageantry was one of the primary ways in which sailors regularly encountered overt imperial themes and this thesis has argued that sailors are the forgotten participants: both as part of the spectacle portrayed to the British public but also as receptive agents who observed and absorbed the imperial message. Naval pageantry took many forms and varied in scale. However, in addition to the more overt forms of ship launches and fleet reviews considered by Jan Rüger, this thesis has examined the pervasiveness of pageantry in sailors' everyday lives and argued that through these experiences the lower deck developed its identity and understanding of the Empire. Furthermore, it has noted the importance of Daniel Owen Spence's argument that 'Beyond Britain, the Royal Navy was a crucial cultural adhesive for binding the empire's young settler societies together with the mother country'.⁵ Thus it has expanded the examination of naval pageantry to consider how it occurred overseas, where sailors were on display to the colonies as visible symbols of imperialism, and how they interacted with these experiences. In particular, overseas naval pageantry was used to impress upon the colonies the continued power of Britain and the necessity of strong links to the mother country. It has argued that sailors were often aware of these political messages and recognized that the displays in which they took part had such agendas. However, despite this, sailors embraced the patriotism they experienced on these occasions and many did not question and or doubt its sincerity.

Nevertheless, by examining pageantry through such a broad spectrum it has demonstrated that sailors responded in different ways to imperialism and, more importantly, that they were not always receptive to imperial messages. Like the public audiences, sailors were similarly struck by the grandeur of the spectacle which fostered feelings of imperial sentiment but these were not blind or universal expressions of imperialistic beliefs. Feelings of consensus and conflict co-existed: sailors could feel proud of the sight of the navy and embrace the imperial symbolism being displayed, but they could also see their duties as a chore and prefer to be enjoying themselves with the crowds ashore.⁶ Whilst social histories of the lower deck, such as the work by Brian Lavery, have recognized that sailors had a strong relationship with the navy, their feelings and how they interacted with, and indeed understood this themselves, was more

⁴ Arthur Bleby, *The Victorian Naval Brigades*, (Dunbeath: Whittles Publishing, 2006); p. 130

⁵ Daniel Owen Spence, *A History of the Royal Navy: Empire and Imperialism*, (London: I. B. Tauris, 2015); p. 92

⁶ Jan Rüger, *The Great Naval Game: Britain and Germany in the Age of Empire*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009 [first edition 2007]); p. 138

complex.⁷ For instance, pride was overt and heightened during imperial spectacles. However whilst "pride" is a useful umbrella term, the concept is more nebulous. Sailors exhibited pride in their ships, the service, the monarch, the Empire, fellow crewmates, themselves, as well as both national and local pride. Collectively this was influenced by a number of different factors and depended upon the situation. For instance, national pride could be heightened by war and large patriotic displays but this could also generate equal feelings of pride in the service and themselves. In addition, their image and identity was intimately bound up within this and it gave sailors a heightened sense of superiority, which was also supported by a long naval heritage, imperial inculcation and an understanding of racial concepts.

Therefore, there was rarely a singular feeling of pride in the Empire. Instead, sailors' pride collectively grouped together these different expressions of pride. This does not mean that sailors were not proud of the Empire specifically, but these other aspects were often present and could take precedence. Whether sailors broke down their sentiment in their own minds is, however, a rather more complicated issue. They did use their understanding of imperialism to interpret their experiences. Furthermore, they recognized displays of patriotism in the colonies when they observed it as sincere colonial appreciation, despite often realizing that there was an agenda behind political expressions of power. As their own image was bound up with this, they were usually relatively receptive and enjoyed the experience, not simply because they had a good time but because it reinforced their understanding of their identity. This sense of appreciation appealed to sailors on an imperial level and also on a personal level. Whilst sailors did not like awkward social experiences (which could sometimes come with being made the centre of attention), they did enjoy validation of their social standing and appreciated their contributions being recognized.

In particular, public recognition of their contribution to the Empire and Britain was important especially during war because their role and duty as servants of empire was intricately connected to their image. This has also demonstrated how the Victorian and Edwardian construct of heroic masculinity was especially important to how sailors were identified by the public and also how they identified themselves. Their sense of duty and the acceptance of their professional, masculine image was paramount. Thus sailors accepted it was their duty to serve the Empire when necessary and they went to war with an image and expectation of how they should behave by conforming to masculinity norms created by Victorian and Edwardian society.⁸ By examining their role in war and in particular by considering both the Boer War and the First World War, it has allowed two very different styles of conflict to be examined. In particular, it has questioned the limitations of existing historiography which has omitted sailors under the misapprehension that the study of them has little to add to socio-cultural imperial studies because they were not volunteers and were clearly imperialistic. However, whilst imperial duty occupied a significant part of their image, to accept this and disregard its

⁷ Brian Lavery, *Able Seamen: The Lower Deck of the Royal Navy, 1850-1939*, (London: Conway, 2011); p. 11

⁸ See Anne Summers, 'Militarism in Britain before the Great War', *History Workshop Journal*, 1976; pp. 104-123 and Michael Paris, *Warrior Nation: Images of War in British Popular Culture, 1850-2000*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2000).

importance without question is problematic and ignores the nuances of the lower deck. Furthermore, many volunteered for roles ashore in the naval brigades during the nineteenth century and this contribution has so far been overlooked. Whilst in part this volunteering was due to enthusiasm for battle and eagerness to fight, there were a number of different reasons why they volunteered. Firstly, their relationship with imperialism did have a significant impact, and both society and their training had inculcated them with the belief that they were servants of the Empire, and thus it was their duty. Enthusiasm was not universal and sailors were not blind to the possible dangers of death that they faced whilst at war, but loyalty and feelings of duty both to the Empire and the service remained a powerful factor. Even when enthusiasm waned, this belief in duty remained strong.

Consequently, the imagery of both wars is important. The role sailors played in war during the nineteenth century enhanced and was enhanced by their actions, especially their active role serving ashore in naval brigades. This put them in the public eye and resulted in them being feted as heroes. Their exploits during the Boer War further enforced this, fulfilling their image as the imperial handyman. However, the stalemate at sea during the First World War was to severely challenge both their public image and their own understanding of their identity as the chief symbol of British imperial strength. The realities of the Great War thus conflicted with the image built up over the course of the nineteenth century, together with the dominance in British culture of naval heritage such as Trafalgar. This was not just a perception amongst the public but also an expectation of sailors who had been inculcated by the service to believe their image. It is evident that this issue was present for many sailors during the First World War and that the criticism and lengthy periods either at Scapa Flow or at sea enforcing blockades, meant that sailors had a real desire to be a part of the war effort and, more importantly, make it known to the public. This inactivity cut across their own perceptions of masculinity and challenged them. Furthermore, despite their understanding of masculinity, the realities of war further challenged how they identified themselves with their imperial image. By drawing comparisons to existing studies of soldiers such as those by Joanna Bourke and Simon Harrison, it is evident that sailors faced similar problems. They too had to cope with stress, nerves and death on a daily basis and, like soldiers, they employed a variety of mechanisms ranging from humour to sport through which they attempted to cope with these pressures and, to some extent, control them.

The end of the Great War did not bring a return to the old order, and the inter-war years similarly had the potential to threaten the established image of the navy and its sailors. Having been effectively side-lined by the army during the war in the eyes of the public, the economic and political situation also affected the Royal Navy. In particular, the reduction of the navy following the Washington Treaty and inter-war disarmament agreements had the potential to damage the service both publically and professionally. As anti-militarism grew, there was a noticeable decrease in naval pageantry in comparison to the pre-war years, and the symbolism of the navy in society was challenged. However, by the mid-1920s naval pageantry was again

taking place and sailors were once again part of the imperial symbolism being displayed to the public and to the world. In particular, it is suggested that events such as the Empire Cruise of the Special Service Squadron confirmed the continued value of naval pageantry and demonstrated that the public were not averse to such displays. Furthermore, the examination of the Empire Cruise as a case study for the policy of showing the flag, determines that imperialism remained important and they continued to frame their experiences within the same imperial themes. Their voyage around the world, and the visits to the colonies of the Empire, was a varied experience, both exciting and boring at times. It introduced them to a large range of patriotic experiences and demonstrated that they did not often doubt the imperial loyalty and support of the colonies and dominions. Whether or not this was realistic, this was how *they* interpreted what they experienced. In particular, this examination has revealed their expectations of the colonies and how such expectations were shaped by imperial views. Thus they wanted, and looked for, the experience of *otherness*; they wanted their own experiences from these encounters and went out of their way to ensure that they had these experiences. Therefore, whilst sailors were concerned on some level with the loss of what they recognized as their rightful position of prestige on the world stage, it was not seriously detrimental to their image or how they perceived the navy.

However, these challenging conditions continued into the 1930s, and in particular this was brought into sharp relief by the growing naval power of the United States of America, Italy, Germany and Japan. Yet despite this many sailors did not doubt the Royal Navy's prestige and superiority. For instance, the rising power of Italy and the posturing of its navy was not viewed as a significant threat by British sailors, but rather Italy was viewed as something of an upstart. The claims by Italy of "Mare Italia" in respect of the Mediterranean was especially disliked as Britain had controlled the middle sea since Nelson, and a number of sailors continued to draw this link to their heritage which formed a keystone of their identity. Consequently, the fact that Britain did not take a firmer hand during the Abyssinian Crisis disappointed some elements of the lower deck who felt that Britain was not fulfilling its imperial moral duty. In addition, their mood was also shaped by continuing stereotypical racial beliefs, particularly that Italians were slovenly; this further demonstrates how ingrained racial ideas fused with concepts of identity and imperialism. Together this made for poor relationships between British and Italian sailors when they encountered each other in port, despite having to observe the niceties of etiquette at sea. Therefore, rearmament was welcomed and the attention being directed at the navy was met with approval by sailors who were not oblivious to the external pressure and threats the Royal Navy faced. Although the deteriorating global situation was a cause for concern amongst sailors, the continued symbolism of the navy, and its position in society, reinforced their imperial standing.

Consequently, sailors saw nothing unusual in the reassertion of British naval power during the 1930s, and many accepted the continuation of their age-old role as policeman of the world's oceans, especially in response to Italy during the Abyssinian Crisis. They saw it not only as

their moral duty to stand up for a lesser nation but also a chance to demonstrate their power to the Italians. On the other hand, the Royal Navy's involvement in the Spanish Civil War was a different matter and one that challenged sailors. Neither the Nationalists nor the Republicans wanted the Royal Navy to be involved, and thus sailors were left with the clear knowledge that it was not *their* war. Therefore, their sense of duty was compromised in comparison to the moral duty felt during the Abyssinian Crisis to stand up to an aggressor nation. Many also felt that they received little appreciation for putting themselves in the line of fire to protect civilians, which further supports the argument above that they liked to know their efforts were appreciated. However, this did not amount to anything more than minor discontent and grumbling; sailors were conscious that the Spanish coast was where their orders had taken them, and they accepted that it was still their duty to fulfil this obligation.

Therefore, the key argument is that the Empire, imperialism, patriotism and pride were an integral part of a sailor culture, shaping their character and identity. This culture drew on a shared naval heritage and imperial themes inculcated by through elements of British culture and the teachings of the Royal Navy. As John Mackenzie argued about British imperial culture, it 'set them apart' and it helped to give British sailors an identity.⁹ Their exposure to imperialism meant that it formed an important part of how they understood the Empire and framed their experiences. In particular, this has been demonstrated by the importance of the *exotic* and *otherness* of the colonial experience. Sailors drew upon what they knew of the Empire from popular culture and clearly expected certain experiences. In addition, the way in which they viewed the colonies and the indigenous populations was predicated on common racial stereotypes and understandings inculcated through imperial culture. Furthermore, they accepted a certain level of responsibility over the colonies because they believed it was the Empire's duty to keep the peace, and they were the foremost means by which to do this.

However, this sailor culture was not only imperialistic. As British imperial culture was not 'monolithic' but rather multi-layered', so too was sailor culture.¹⁰ It was independent and grouped together many competing themes which consequently allowed other elements of sailor culture to take precedence as circumstance dictated. This has been demonstrated by the consideration of how sailors responded to important themes such as naval pageantry both at home and in the wider Empire, and their response to charged atmospheres of imperialism particularly through war. By examining these themes, it has shown how conflicting beliefs and ideals could come together within sailor culture. These can be disassociated and viewed separately but were also equally important to each other and mutually reinforcing.

Although this thesis has continued to consider British sailors as a collective body of men in order to examine their relationship with the Empire, it has demonstrated the importance of

⁹ John M. Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003 [first edition 1984]); p. 2

¹⁰ Andrew Thompson, *The Empire Strikes Back? The impact of imperialism on Britain from the mid-nineteenth century*, (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2005); p. xiv; Brad Beaven, *Visions of Empire: Patriotism, popular culture and the city, 1870-1939*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012); p. 208

recognizing the nuances of their character and that relationship. In particular, by using sailor testimony it has argued that the Empire was deeply ingrained in their identity and a significant element of sailor culture. Therefore, they had a very strong relationship with the Empire; it was both a concept and something tangible that generated pride and displays of patriotism. Although they were not simply passive recipients, the Empire was used to frame their experiences and they viewed the world through the imperialistic prism in which they lived and worked, and were very much a part.

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PRO: 22/7/2010 Log Book of Albert Road School 1899-1914

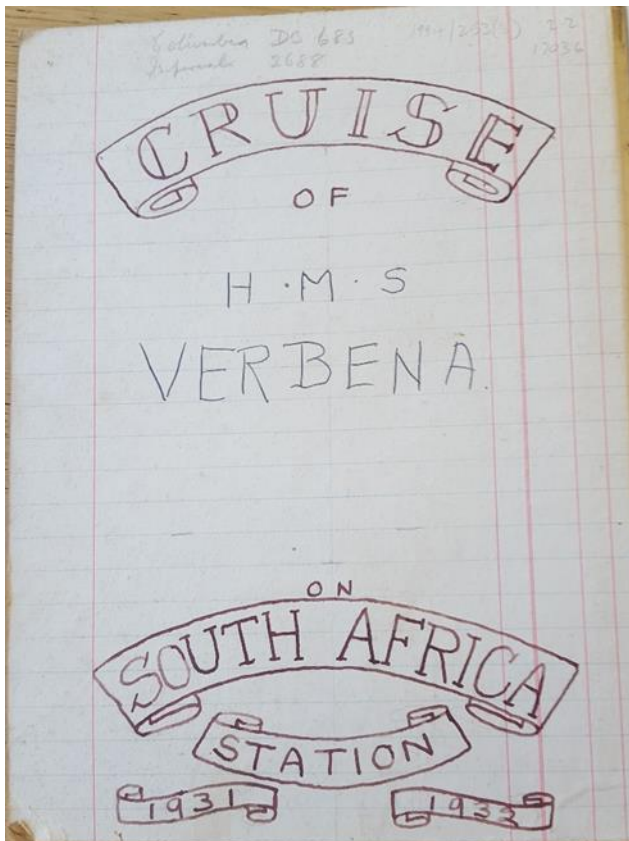
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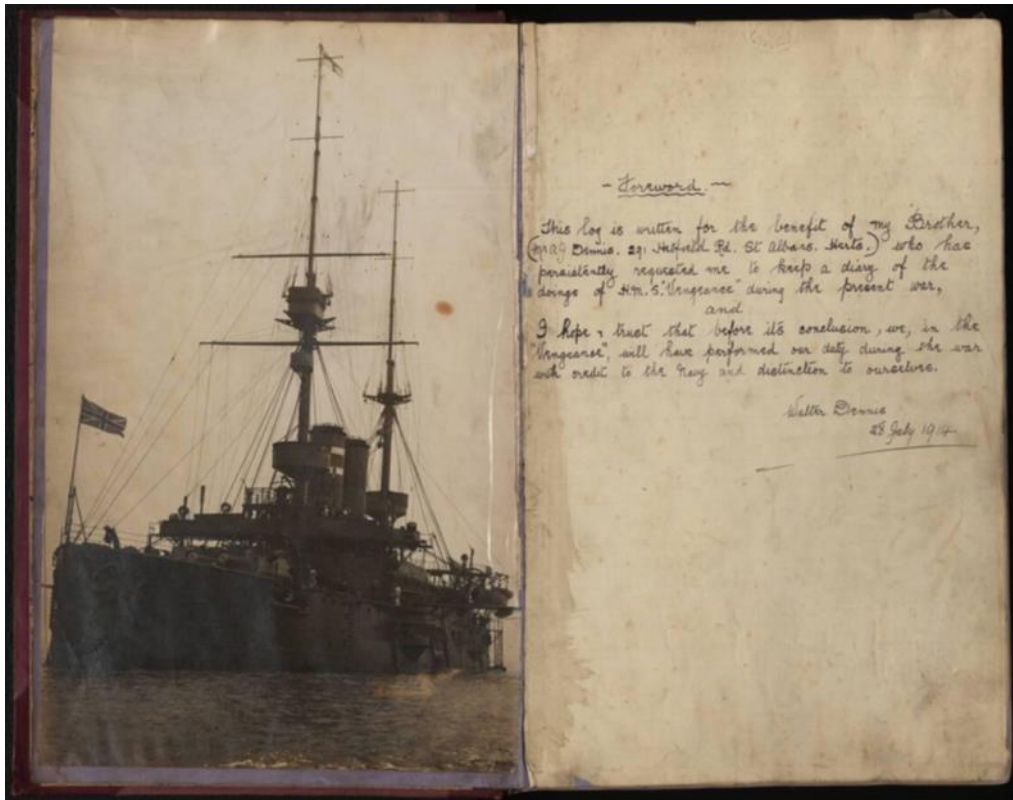
Appendices



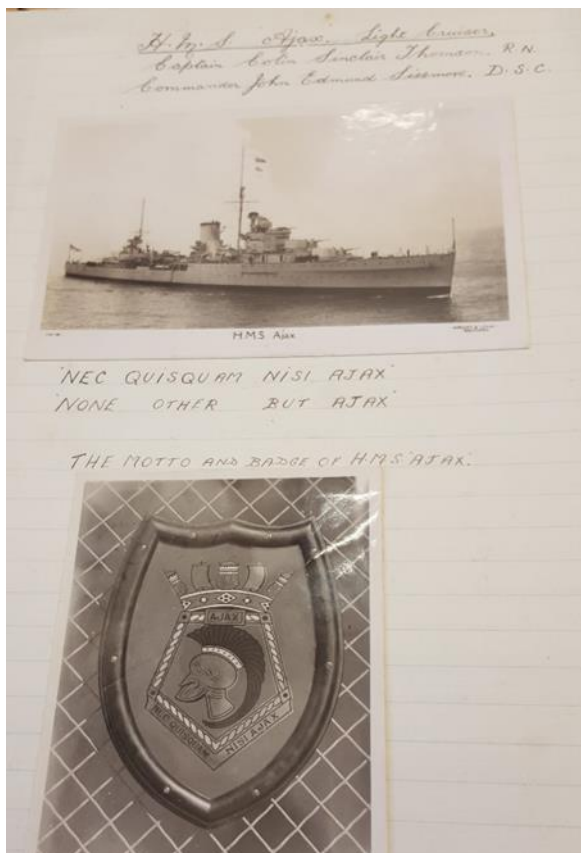
Appendix 1.1 John Player Ltd. Player's Navy Cut (John Player Ltd.)



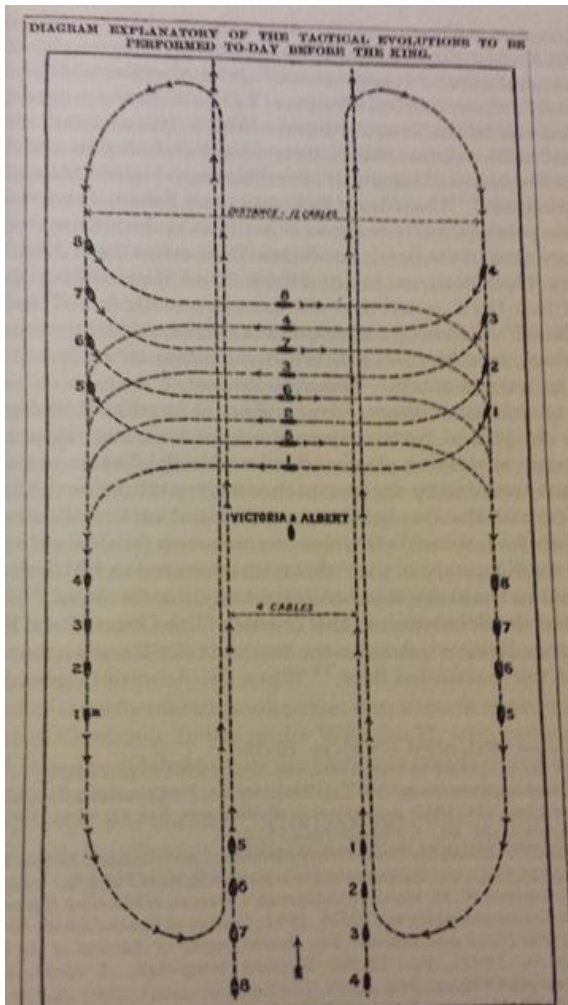
Appendix 1.2 RNM 1994.253.3: Diary of Douglas Poole



Appendix 1.3 Diary of Walter Dennis



Appendix 1.4 RNM 2013/100/2: Diary of William Brooman



Appendix 1.5 The Gridiron Movement (*The Times*, 18 August 1902)

With the Royal Navy for half an hour. Our Gallant Tars.

These brave protectors of the State
 Our Empire guard from jealous hate,
 We rest at night, in peaceful sleep
 While they patrol & watch the deep.
 For we who live on land.
 Their hearts are stolid, like their ships
 God help the foe who comes to grips
 God grant no need to sound those guns
 So bravely manned by British sons,

We trust, who live on land.
We never heard, we never shall
Jack forgot his duty, or a pal
And should our country stand in need,
We are sure that Jack will always lead.
We know, who live on land.
Our homes, our peace, our very lives,
Are in the hands with which he strives,
Lets thank him heartily this year,
And give him just a rousing cheer,
From we, who live on land.

Appendix 1.6 'With the Royal Navy for half an hour. Our Gallant Tars', RNM 2013/100/1: Diary of William Brooman