

often overlooked in history. After basic, he was assigned to HMS *Attack*, an RN Coastal Forces base and further assigned to a ML designated for rescue operations. One anecdote in the book – in Chapman’s first sea cruise, he immediately suffered from sea sickness – a condition he never fully overcame in his RN career.

After that introductory period, the RN assigned him to a MGB, and it is here that the narrative takes shape. The rescue ML saw little action aside from rescue operations; the MGB was in the thick of things. His descriptions of the actions between E-Boats and his MGB are vivid and illuminate just how vicious was the war waged between British and German coastal forces.

Later, Chapman was assigned to duty in the Eastern Mediterranean. This is a valuable contribution to history, as the war in the eastern Mediterranean is little-known after the 1941 German invasion of the island of Crete. (One slight exception – the British invasion and subsequent German recapture of the islands of Kos and Keros in the Dodecanese has attracted some attention from military historians.) Chapman served in the Mediterranean from 1943 through the German surrender in May 1945, and his narrative makes it clear that duty in the eastern Mediterranean was no backwater of war picnic. His descriptions of landing commando parties, traveling in international waters within reach of German coastal artillery, and the ever-watchful presence of the Turkish military, anxious to preserve its nation’s neutrality. (Turkey eventually did declare war on Nazi Germany in 1945, too late to have a marked effect on the war.)

Chapman first wrote this book in 1979 so his grandchildren would have some remembrances of the part he played in the Second World War. He put it away for seven years, rewrote it in 1986, and then, with the help of fellow Coastal Forces veterans, rewrote the manuscript a third time. It is good that he did so, for this book captures the life aboard Coastal Forces’ vessels – the cramped conditions, the heat of the Mediterranean, his ever-present bouts of seasickness, all vividly bring the reality of Chapman’s war to the reader. He writes well and the illustrations add to the narrative. *The War of the Motor Gun Boats* fills in another piece of the great struggle that was the Second World War.

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Glynn Christian. *The Truth About the Mutiny on HMAV Bounty and the Fate of Fletcher Christian*. Barnsley, S. Yorks: Pen and Sword, distributed by Naval Institute Press, www.usni.org, 2021. xiv+214 pp., illustrations, bibliographic essay, index. UK £19.99, cloth; ISBN 978-1-39901-418-2.

It is a bold assertion to declare in the title of the book you have written that you will reveal “The Truth” about the subject matter. It is even more audacious to do so when telling the tale of the mutiny on HMAV *Bounty*. There has been an entire cottage industry of books and articles published (not to mention the three movies and two replica ships built) around the story of Lieutenant Commander William Bligh and Master’s Mate (Acting-Lieutenant) Fletcher Christian’s experiences aboard the ship. It is perhaps the most commonly known ship mutiny. Nevertheless, that is exactly what Glynn Christian, Fletcher’s great-great-great-great grandson, has done. He has set out to square away the debate over what took place on the ship and with Fletcher before and after the mutiny. The author is not new to this area, having researched his subject for decades, even visiting Pitcairn Island and penning a fictional story around Fletcher’s wife Mauatua. For clarity’s sake, in the rest of the review I will only use the last name Christian to refer to the author of the book, and Fletcher to refer to the historic person of interest.

The story begins with the prior relationship between Fletcher and Bligh before going to Tahiti. We are told the two men knew and respected each other, and had worked well together on two previous voyages. It made perfect sense for Bligh to seek the young Fletcher out for the expedition to fetch breadfruit plants from Tahiti to feed the slaves on the British plantations in the West Indies.

The key phase of the voyage to Tahiti from England, in 1787, was the attempt to beat round Cape Horn, in horrific weather. Abandoning the effort after 29 days, with the crew used to its breaking point, they spent another month reaching the Cape of Good Hope, only a bit less stressful. At the Cape, an issue of a debt owed by Fletcher to Bligh ruptured into the open. Bligh had also begun to use his rough language, becoming highly critical and overly demanding. These tensions cut into the relationship between the two men.

The time on Tahiti stretched between October 1788 and April 1789. Fletcher remained ashore directing the *Bounty*’s collection of breadfruit. Bligh delayed sailing home until the winds favoured the course directed by the Admiralty. The Tahitian’s were enamoured by the Europeans, their ship, and anything that was made of iron. Petty thefts threatened to upend the peaceful relations between the sailors and the Tahitians. Aboard ship, Bligh seemed less concerned with order, failing to adequately punish some men who had deserted, and with lax security, some ship’s tools and supplies went missing. *Bounty* left Tahiti in April, with Bligh expecting to put everything back into order by overworking the crew and punishing any infraction of his orders.

The mutiny erupted immediately from Bligh’s rage over missing coconuts, which he accused Fletcher of stealing. Further confrontation with Bligh, who threatened to lash Fletcher appears to have unhinged the acting-lieutenant,

whose anxiety mounted to the level of a panic attack. During the night he openly fretted first over leaving the ship himself (possibly as a suicide attempt) and then acts on the option of mutiny to rid himself (and others) of Bligh. The confrontation between Bligh and Fletcher is high volume, in voice and aggressive posturing, the former realizing too late that he has driven the latter over the edge. This part of the story ends with the crew divided between those who would stay with Fletcher and those choosing to go off in an open boat with Bligh. It is here that Christian suggests that Fletcher had lost his sanity, even calling on the advice of a psychologist to offer a diagnosis of Brief Psychotic Disorder with Marked Stressors.

What happened after the mutiny is divided into two stories. Bligh's 6700 km trip in an overloaded open boat is only sketched out, as it is not as relevant to Christian's overall narrative. The central focus falls on the *Bounty's* path from Tahiti to its final fate, burning alongside the rugged coast of Pitcairn Island. The first stop for the mutineers was the Island of Tubuai. Without enough women for all the men, nor livestock for food, the mutineers agree to return to Tahiti for both. Back at Tahiti again, the Tahitians are told Bligh is with Captain Cook and the ship has returned for livestock. Accompanied by several women and Tahitian men they return to Tubuai and construct a fort. When the island's Indigenous groups turn hostile, Fletcher and his followers have no choice but to take to the ship again. They returned to Tahiti and left behind those crew members who did not wish to continue on board. With nine mutineers, six indigenous men, eighteen women and a baby, the ship leaves Tahiti. The mutineers found the isolated Pitcairn Island and once ashore divided the island up and settled in.

One overarching aspect of the story are the women that joined the mutineers. This line of narrative runs from *Bounty's* arrival at Tahiti through to the end of the book. Christian is clear that on Tahiti women were subjugated and had a brutal marginalized existence, but with the mutineers, their life could and indeed did get much better. The author portrays Fletcher as a revolutionary, giving everyone on board ship, including the women, a vote on everything, from where they took *Bounty*, to what they did in any given day. Once on Pitcairn, the inclusion of women in the decision-making process was the first place where women had the same franchise as men. It ends with the women, in Christian's telling of the events, orchestrating the murder of four of the mutineers, including Fletcher, by a group of the Indigenous men. These murders were followed by the killing of those who had struck down the four mutineers, by the remaining sailors, Indigenous men, and the women. This, Christian states, turned the balance of power on the island around to favour the women. Indeed, it went from a situation where some of the men had to share one of the women as "wife," to several women sharing one of the remaining

men as “husband.”

The last piece of the tale is Pitcairn’s discovery by others and what happened on the island. Ships calling at the island carried the story of Bounty’s last stop to the outside world. This led to outside interference, culminating in the removal of everyone living on the island to Tahiti. After some time they returned to Pitcairn which had become their home. Wrapped up in this part is HMS *Pandora* being sent out to find the mutineers, their capture on Tahiti, and their individual fates.

The difficulty with the last two points is that, as Christian notes, the women told very different stories about what happened on Bounty and Pitcairn Island to different visitors, interlopers, and supporters. For the author, this appears to be acceptable and he crafts a perspective from the muddle of versions by concentrating on what facts worked best for the women, in securing them power and safety on Pitcairn Island. The range of stories is explained away as the women protecting themselves, or simply giving the listener what they wished to hear.

The immediate cause of the mutiny for Christian is Fletcher’s outrage at how he was spoken to, generally treated and Bligh’s accusation of theft. Add to this Fletcher’s potential mental health issues and we have a person on the edge in a highly agitating situation. With the decline in discipline at Tahiti and the distance between Fletcher and Bligh as the former stayed ashore, also fed into the mutiny. But Christian avoids blaming one party over the other for the mutiny, thus Bligh’s mismanagement of the crew and the mission share in the responsibility.

Early in the book, Christian mentions that Fletcher’s brother Charles, a surgeon, was involved in a mutiny. Details are sketchy, but it seems that Charles mentioned it to Fletcher in a brief meeting of the two. This may be a possible factor in Fletcher’s choice of mutiny to resolve his problem with Bligh. But more details of Charles’ situation and some other reference by Fletcher to Charles’ actions are needed for this idea to stick.

Christian dispels the idea that there was a homosexual relationship between Bligh and Fletcher, as the ship they had sailed on earlier was very small, and Bligh left his door open, thus anything happening in the captain’s cabin would be public knowledge. Closing the door, Christian says, would have sent a signal to the crew that something was amiss. The suggestion by earlier authors that Fletcher returned to England is also put permanently to bed. The idea that he hid in the forest next to his country home, the author reveals is impossible as the forest had been cut down by the 1790s, leaving him nowhere to hide. Fletcher lies in an unmarked grave on Pitcairn Island, something Christian hopes to rectify one day.

The author cites two pamphlets by Fletcher’s brother Edward, used in his

attempt to reclaim Fletcher's reputation and sink Bligh's. These seldom used documents have a central role in this story. Christian believes they give an accurate picture of the situation aboard *Bounty*. He also combed through the Bligh-Banks correspondence in the Mitchell Library, Sydney, to good benefit, though he claims more is there to be found. Much of this material has a certain amount of self-preservation and promotion within it. Christian sees more truth in the pro-Fletcher perspective than Bligh's.

Christian has a clear disdain for Bligh's command abilities, and his subsequent career. Yes, Bligh was to have two more mutinies, but he commanded HMS *Director* at the Battle of Camperdown, grappling with three Dutch ships, and fought bravely at the Battle of Copenhagen, in 1801, on HMS *Glatton*, earning Lord Nelson's praise. Bligh's singular feat of sailing an open boat the distance he did, with a potentially less than supportive group of men in it, is a mark of not only seamanship, but command. This is not to overlook Bligh's shortcomings.

There are thirty-two illustrations in the centre of the book, two of which are maps. A chronology of events appear at the beginning of the book, as does a list of the crew. A list of the people who settled on Pitcairn Island is also provided. There is a genealogy list for the author's connection to Fletcher but it needs some interpretation to make it actually useful. Bibliographic notes on sources provide a quick overview of the original and contemporary writings used, and a few of the more recent publications. Many of the secondary sources are pre-1990, none are after 1999. Christian's use of John Masefield's *Sea Life in Nelson's Time* (1905) to provide information on life in the navy in 1790, is problematic. Masefield had a one-sided perspective, which has been critiqued in detail in much more current work.

It may not be the final 'truth' about the story, but the book has much to offer the historiography of the *Bounty* and its mutiny, especially adding to our potential understanding of life on Pitcairn Island. Christian's work will appeal to those who study the *Bounty* mutiny, mutiny in general, order and disorder aboard ships, and the interface between Europeans and Indigenous cultures in the Pacific, in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries.

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Cathy Converse. *Frances Barkley, Eighteenth-century Seafarer*. Victoria, BC: Heritage House, www.heritagehouse.ca, 2023. 137 pp., illustrations, maps, glossary, notes, bibliography, index. CDN \$12.95, paper; ISBN 978-1-77203-441-7. (E-book available.)