

French Wars, the Venetian Republic owned seven islands on the west coast of Greece. After the Treaty of Campo in 1797, the islands became French. A few years later the French forces made way for the Russian and Ottoman armies. The victors founded the Septinsular – the Ionian – Republic, under Russian control and suzerain to the Ottoman empire until 1807.

In 1805, Tsar Alexander I sent out a naval squadron of six ships to bolster the Russian forces that had previously defended the Ionian Republic. The fleet set sail from Kronstadt, near St. Petersburg in Russia, across the Baltic Sea to Copenhagen in Denmark, and then on to Portsmouth in the south of England. At Gibraltar on the southern tip of Spain, the squadron headed further east; to Cagliari on the island of Sardinia, and Messina on the eastern tip of Sicily. From there, it was a short voyage to Corfu in the Ionian archipelago.

France still remained somewhat of a challenge. It was the time of the War of the Third Coalition (1803-1806); the United Kingdom, Sweden, the Holy Roman Empire, Naples, and Sicily were up against France and its allies. Russia entered the fight against France in April 1805. The war ended in a French victory and the end of the Holy Roman Empire. Peace was not to last, however, as the Fourth Coalition War broke out (1806-1807). This time Prussia joined Great Britain, Sweden, Saxony, and Russia against France. This war also ended in a victory for Napoleon. In July 1807, France, Prussia, and Russia signed the Tilsit Peace Treaty, which would last until 1810. The agreement led to the return of the Ionian Islands to French hands.

In 1806 another war erupted between Russia and the Ottoman empire. In 1807, the squadron of the Imperial Russian Navy moved to blockade the

Dardanelles Strait at the Aegean Sea, cutting off Ottoman trade between the Mediterranean Sea and its capital Constantinople. In their failed attempt to break the Russian blockade, the Ottoman navy lost three battleships and suffered about 2,000 casualties. Russian losses amounted to less than 100 casualties. It was against this background of war-torn Europe that Vladimir Bronevskiy wrote his memoirs while serving on the Russian navy frigate *Venus*. He describes the actions of Russian Admiral Dmitriy Senyavin's squadron and the infantry at his disposal in the Adriatic and Aegean Seas between the years of 1805 and 1810.

This translation could have done with better proof-reading and editing. Another improvement would have been a map with the voyages, along with indicating the various countries and ports, etc. This work has 112 chapters, describing voyages, ports, islands, naval actions, the flow of winds, the different cultures, political and social ideas, and the customs Bronevskiy encountered, the day-to-day life at sea; in all, a sometimes mindboggling array of subjects. Nevertheless, *Northern Tars in Southern Waters* is a fascinating read.

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Paul Brown. *Abandon Ship. The Real Story of the Sinkings in the Falklands War*. Oxford, UK: Osprey Books, www.ospreypublishing.com, 2021. 320 pp., illustrations, maps, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. UK £20.00, US \$25.00, CDN \$34.00, cloth; ISBN 978-1-4728-4643-3.

The Falklands War of 1982 was the first post-Second World War conflict fought between near peer defence forces in the missile age. Casualties on both sides

were high and the British task force commander Rear Admiral John ‘Sandy’ Woodward later stated it was “a lot closer run than many would care to believe.” Dr. Paul Brown has done an excellent job in describing just how close the British forces came to potential defeat in this war.

Abandon Ship does not cover the full details of the conflict but instead looks at the naval losses on both sides and particularly analyses the causes for the loss of several Royal Navy ships. Much of this analysis hinges on the release, under the British *Freedom of Information Act 2000*, of the transcripts of the Royal Navy post war Boards of Inquiry. These were held in late 1982 to ascertain what had gone wrong and why so many ships had been damaged or sunk. As these were conducted shortly after the conflict and the findings were not meant to ever become public, the details are at times raw and confronting. Poor command and leadership, flawed decision making, sub-standard training and poor equipment are often spelt out as major contributing factors to ships being sunk. Equally bravery, in dire circumstances, and outstanding leadership and skill at all rank levels were also singled out.

The sinking of the Argentine cruiser *General Belgrano* opens the narrative with poor tactics displayed by the cruisers commanding officer (failing to zig-zag in a war zone, poor use of her escorts and the cruisers sonar) which made the ship an easy target for the submarine HMS *Conqueror*. The fighting at sea, however, soon highlighted that the Argentine forces could fight well. While the Argentine surface fleet played a very minor part in the ensuing campaign the Argentine fleet air arm and air force soon proved they were well-trained and brave; consistently pressing home their attacks on British ships with skill

and determination. British losses would have been catastrophic if the Argentines had access to more Exocet missiles and if many of the bombs dropped had actually detonated.

Britain lost six ships in the battle for the Falklands (HM Ships *Sheffield*, *Ardent*, *Antelope*, and *Coventry*, the civilian transport *Atlantic Conveyor* and the Royal Fleet Auxiliary *Sir Galahad*). Several other ships were damaged, but, in the end, it was the British ability to get enough troops and logistical support ashore and prevent Argentine forces being resupplied that tipped the scales in their favour – but it was a close run thing.

The following are the salient points.

The Royal Navy was being reduced in size and capability due to 1981 British Government budget cuts and struggled to put its South Atlantic task force together; that they did speaks volumes of the skill and determination at all rank levels.

The ships in many cases were not ready to deploy due to a distinct lack of training and their materiel state was, in several cases, quite poor. British radar and weapons systems were plagued with various problems and, in some cases, were useless, especially the Sea-cat missile system and 4.5-inch guns in the anti-air role. Much of this was due to poor design rather than poor maintenance; although there were failures in keeping equipment well maintained in the South Atlantic.

Ship design was also a problem particularly with aluminum super-structures which burned more readily and with many ships built for “habitability and not survivability.” Some of the older ships that were deployed were of an all-steel construction, or well-designed, and survived serious damage.

Failures of command and leadership, at all rank levels, led to the loss of

some ships – especially *Sheffield* whose command team were lucky to escape a court martial due to their poor decisions prior to being attacked. Additionally, once other ships were damaged, degraded communications led to poor decision making – particularly in the case of *Ardent*, which might have been saved if the commanding officer had received sound advice (or sought out advice) regarding the ship's actual damage.

The fog of war and confusing higher-level orders placed other ships in difficult positions. Equally some ships were damaged but were still in an area where enemy attack was expected so were still trying to fight the ship while dealing with unexploded bombs on-board and many casualties. The Boards of Inquiry were conducted in quiet office spaces and well after the events. Many of the recommendations made regarding equipment and training were sound but they often failed to comprehend the time pressure that many command teams were under – where split second decisions made the difference between life and death or staying afloat or sinking. In other cases, such as the loss of *Atlantic Conveyor*, being in the wrong place at the wrong time and following orders played a major part in her loss.

Command and control at the staff level showed serious limitations due to the skill and stamina, or lack of it, amongst the various embarked headquarters staff. Poor decision making and lack of communication at the operational level had, in some cases, a disastrous flow on effect at the tactical level particularly at the landing of troops at Fitzroy from RFA *Sir Galahad*.

My only suggestion to improve this analysis would have been a little more on what kept other damaged ships afloat – what were the ship design and decision-making aspects that enabled their

survival vice that of their peers. It is easy to be critical, from our safe arm-chairs, of the failures of those in combat – but equally analysis of what went wrong, and why, should be investigated in order to try and prevent its repetition. Overall, an excellent book and one that should be read by all naval personnel, regardless of nationality or rank, as it provides well-described cases studies on modern war at sea.

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Barry Cahill. *Rebuilding Halifax. A History of the Halifax Relief Commission*. Halifax, NS: Formac Publishing, www.formac.ca, 2020. 224 pp., illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. CDN \$27.95, paper; ISBN: 978-1-45950-637-4. (E-book available.)

This study of disaster relief adds another book to the growing corpus of 1917 Halifax Explosion literature. Barry Cahill concentrates on the Halifax Relief Commission (HRC), a bureaucracy adopted to disburse the funds – some \$18 million from the federal government which amounted to two-thirds of the total donations available for the relief of the injured and dispossessed in Halifax-Dartmouth and the redevelopment of the “Devastated Area.” For the initial context, Cahill chooses the field of disaster studies. Then he moves on to envisage the long-lived HRC as both a forerunner and later an example of Canada's regulatory state.

The reader is left in no doubt about the objective of the analysis. It is not meant to explore the cause of the collision between the *Imo* and *Mont-Blanc*. That was beyond the purview of the HRC. It largely bypasses the initial rescue, relief, and restitution efforts of the volunteer-based Halifax Relief Com-