

B O O K S

Going to Sea

C.S. Forester's *Horatio Hornblower Series*

BY DUNCAN BROWN

knowledge a man needs to man, rig, and sail a three-masted sailing ship of the 18th century. Also to be learned is navigation by star, log, and calculation, spherical



trigonometry, gunnery, and so on. It was a hard service, doing desperate duty to protect England from the depredations of the French. English power was sea

power; it was the British Navy alone that stood between Napoleon and world empire.

Mr. Midshipman Hornblower is one of my favorites of the series. It is pieced together of vignettes of Hornblower's growing familiarity with his new life and responsibilities. Failures and successes together, we see the start of the formation of an interesting character.

In the second book, *Lieutenant Hornblower*, Forester tells us a story of despotic command and mutiny. If Hornblower doesn't watch out, he could be hung for treason.

Hornblower and the Hotspur shows us

Hornblower in his first independent command of a frigate, taking part in the blockade off the coast of France near Brest. This is a great read, again piecing together a series of engagements into a rousing tapestry.

Hornblower During the Crisis reveals the secret history of what Hornblower did during the months leading up to Trafalgar. Hornblower, temporarily without command, is asked to become a secret agent. He must travel to Spain and deliver forged documents to the French Admiral, Villeneuve, which will hopefully cause him to sail from his protected harbor and engage Nelson at Trafalgar. This book also includes two Hornblower short stories.



comprise *Captain Horatio Hornblower: Beat to Quarters*, *Ship of the Line*, and

Hornblower and the Atropos takes us from Nelson's funeral on the Thames River in London to Turkish waters in search of sunken treasure.

Next are the three books that

Flying Colors. These were the first three Hornblower books that Forester wrote, and many consider them his finest works. *Beat to Quarters* starts on a long and perilous journey to Central America to work with a dubious ally against the Spanish Empire. In *Ship of the Line*, Hornblower finally has command of a ship of the line, a term only applied to large capital ships with three decks and at least 74 cannons. In *Flying Colours*, Hornblower must escape from Napoleon's soldiers and a sentence of death in the heart of France.

Beyond these books are *Commodore Hornblower* (a trip to Russia), *Lord Hornblower* (Hornblower's final, personal battle against Napoleon's Empire), and *Admiral Hornblower in the West Indies*. I recommend all of them, and if you catch the Hornblower bug like me, you'll be sorry there are only 11 Hornblower books.

There's also a wonderful atlas and commentary on the Hornblower series, *The Hornblower Companion*. It is filled with gorgeous maps of Hornblower's travels and engagements by Samuel H. Bryant, and has an in-depth commentary by Forester on how he came to write each Hornblower book. Forester even provides a fascinating essay on his creative writing process. Once he had fully germinated an idea for a book (he describes his use of his subconscious for this), he would sit and visualize in three dimensions and with all five senses all the events. He was even able to witness the thoughts and feeling of his characters. As he describes it, all he had to do was report what he had seen and heard and experienced, and there was the new book. □

SUMMER BRINGS TO MIND Horatio Hornblower, the naval hero created by C.S. Forester. Hornblower lived during the Napoleonic war between France and England (1793 to 1815). It was fought on land (most famously at Waterloo) and sea (most famously at Trafalgar). The Hornblower series was written from 1937-1966. Like other worthwhile books, they continue in print to this day. The cable network A&E has made two decent mini-series on Horatio Hornblower starring Ioan Guffudd, the first recounting his days as a midshipman and the second his time as a lieutenant.

I fell in love with Hornblower on my summer vacations, reading and rereading the books in my grandmother's beach house in Maine. C.S. Forester is a great storyteller. He always rewards the reader by carefully and fully answering the timeless question, "What comes next?" His inventiveness is limitless, his characters realistic, and the events he plunges his hero into make for exciting reading. He is a master of description, and the details he weaves into his stories bring the reader into them fully. Also, Hornblower is a complex and interesting character. He doubts himself and his motives, but has a flexible and clear mind that allows him to solve the various challenges that beset him.

Hornblower's saga begins when he joins the British Royal Navy as a midshipman at age 18 in *Mr. Midshipman Hornblower*. A Midshipman is the lowest-ranked officer, yet with responsibilities that include leading a squadron of enlisted men and learning the incredible range of