



The Real Hornblower: The Life and Times of Admiral Sir James Gordon, GCB

Bryan Perrett

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Ever since C.S. Forester's fictional hero Horatio Hornblower began to delight readers, there has been speculation that his adventures were based on the career of a real naval officer. Several names were suggested, but the general conclusion was that Hornblower was a composite character. In this thoroughly researched book the author argues convincingly that Forester's model was Adm. James Gordon, a flesh-and-blood hero of Nelson's navy. Gordon entered the Royal Navy as a semi-literate eleven-year-old and rose to become Admiral of the Fleet. He took part in major sea battles, frigate actions, single-ship duels, and operations far behind enemy lines. It was the fire of Gordon's ships against Fort McHenry that inspired the American national anthem. When he died, after more than seventy-five years of service in the navy, The Times called him "the last of Nelson's captains."

To support his claim, Bryan Perrett points to The Commodore and Hornblower's venture into the Baltic to harass the seaward flank of Napoleon's army during its retreat from Moscow as a remarkable parallel to Gordon's invasion up the Chesapeake in 1814 and his return down the Potomac with twenty-one prizes. He explains that Forester lived in the United States at the time he wrote The Commodore and fearful of offending his American readers, studiously obscured the identity of the real Hornblower.

In telling the largely unknown story of Admiral Gordon's active service career, the book will be appreciated not only by the thousands of readers who have enjoyed the adventures of Hornblower, but also by those interested in the naval warfare of the Napoleonic period. Readers who enjoy biography will find that they have the added bonus of an absorbing literary and historical detective story.

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