THE NAVY IN THE WAR OF WILLIAM III 1689–1697

To
A. and R.E.

PLATE I

WILLIAM III

Ships in Torbay in background

[JAN WYK]

THE NAVY

IN THE WAR OF WILLIAM III

1689-1697

Its State and Direction

BY

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CONTENTS

ILLUSTRATIONS

PLATES

(Plates II–VII, and XI are from British Museum King's MS 43, and Plate IX from the print in the British Museum)

FIGURES

PREFACE

I must thank the Editors of *The Mariner's Mirror* and *The Cambridge Historical Journal* for permission to reproduce Chapter VIII, and parts of Chapters XI and XII, which have appeared respectively as articles in their journals.

The Plates have been reproduced by kind permission of the Trustees of the British Museum (Plates II–VII, IX, XI), the Trustees of the National Portrait Gallery (Plate X), the Trustees of the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich (Plates I, VIII) and the Westminster City Council (Plate XII). I must also acknowledge my gratitude to the following authorities and individuals for permission to quote from manuscripts or typescripts in their possession: to Major J. R. Hanbury and the Historical Manuscripts Commissioners, for the Finch manuscripts at present on loan to the Commission; to the Master and Fellows of Magdalene College, Cambridge, for papers in the Pepysian Library; the Librarian of the Admiralty, for the Corbett manuscripts; the Trustees of the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, for the Sergison Papers and for the Admiralty papers recently acquired from the Bibliotheca Phillippica; the Trustees of the Beaulieu Manor Estate, for access to estate maps of the period; the late Mr W. H. L. Richmond, for permission to use my transcripts of some unpublished notes by the late Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond; Mr Norman McLeod, formerly Director of Labour at the Admiralty, for his unpublished paper on 'Shipwrights' Wages, 1496–1788'; and Mr G. F. James, of Melbourne University, for his unpublished chapters on 'The Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, 1689–1714', and the Librarian of Birmingham University for sending them to me on loan. This last source has been of particular value, and I am much indebted to Mr James's generosity in allowing me to use his material and conclusions.

The following have kindly given me information on specific points. Miss Gladys Scott Thomson answered questions on Admiral Russell's

correspondence in the possession of His Grace the Duke of Bedford; the late Librarian of the Admiralty, Mr D. Bonner Smith, gave me information on the history of the Admiralty building; the late Sir Geoffrey Callender drew my attention to the acquisitions from the Bibliotheca Phillippica now at Greenwich, and allowed me to consult them as soon as they arrived there, since otherwise I could not have used them; Professor M. A. Lewis first called my attention to the Sergison Papers, and Commander R. D. Merriman gave me the loan of his typed index to the Sergison Miscellany; the Hon. Clerk of the Worshipful Company of Shipwrights answered questions on the manuscripts in the possession of the Company; Dr J. H. Plumb suggested some of the authorities cited for information on the Admiralty Commissioners; the Provost of Oriel lent me a list of owners of privateers during the period; and the late Mrs Gerard Tharp gave me information on Chippenham Park, formerly the property of Admiral Russell. I must also thank the staffs of the Government and Literary Search Rooms at the Public Record Office, of the Manuscripts Room at the British Museum, and of the Bodleian Library for assisting me in my search for particular manuscripts which otherwise I should have missed. Mr Noel Blakiston very kindly had certain Admiralty papers brought back to the Public Record Office from their wartime storage, which I could not otherwise have consulted at the time.

Of those who helped me in the later stages of the book, I should like particularly to thank Commander Merriman, who corrected some of my remarks on technical detail, and Mr Lawrence Stone, who attended in detail, and at considerable expense to his time, to the style and treatment. The shortcomings which remain are my own. Mr G. V. Carey has undertaken the Index.

Lastly, I wish to record my gratitude to the Master and Fellows of Trinity College, Cambridge, who provided the opportunity and the reward for undertaking this work, and two of whom gave me assistance without which it could not have been completed in its present form. Dr G. M. Trevelyan, then Master, gave me the great benefit of his advice and support in conditions which were not always easy for research. Dr G. N. Clark, at that time at Cambridge, suggested the

subject and supervised its treatment. Whatever I may have learned of historical method has been from him, and I am very glad that I can here record my debt.

This book was written to a time limit, and my subsequent work has been such as to prevent me from rechecking references as I should have liked, and from following the subject further in detail. I must therefore apologize for any errors that I may have committed in transcribing references, and for not mentioning certain articles and publications that have appeared since 1949.

J. E.

APRIL 1952

NOTE ON DATES

During this period two calendars were in use. In England and Ireland, the Julian or Old Style (O.S.) was used exclusively, while Scotland and all continental countries, except Russia, used the Gregorian or New Style (N.S.). The former was ten days behind the latter, so that 15 November abroad was 5 November in England. The Old Style also began the year on Lady Day, 25 March, whereas by New Style it began on 1 January. Thus 24 March 1688 in O.S. was 3 April 1689 in N.S. English envoys abroad, and English ships on foreign stations, sometimes used N.S., and sometimes gave both styles.

I have dated events throughout in Old Style, but have begun the year on 1 January. Thus 22 February 1688 (O.S.) would be given here as 22 February 1689. Where events were dated N.S. I have changed them into O.S., unless there has been any particular reason for giving both dates.

ABBREVIATIONS

Admty:Corbett	Admiralty Library, Corbett Manuscripts
B.M.Addnl.	British Museum, Additional Manuscripts
B.M.Harl.	British Museum, Harleian Manuscripts
Bodl. Rawl.	Bodleian Library, Rawlinson Manuscripts
Burchett	Josiah Burchett, *Memoirs of Transactions at Sea during the War with France* (1703)
Cal.S.P.Col., Am. & W.I.	*Calendar of State Papers, Colonial: America and West Indies*
Cal.S.P.Dom.	*Calendar of State Papers, Domestic*
Cal.Treas.Bks.	*Calendar of Treasury Books*
Cal.Treas.Papers	*Calendar of Treasury Papers*
Catal.	*A Descriptive Catalogue of the Naval Manuscripts in the Pepysian Library in Magdalene College, Cambridge*, ed. J. R. Tanner (4 vols., 1903–23)
Conduct	*The Conduct of the Earl of Nottingham*, ed. W. A. Aiken (1941)
D.N.B.	*Dictionary of National Biography*
E.H.R.	*English Historical Review*
Ec.H.R.	*Economic History Review*
Finch Transcr.	Transcript of the Finch Manuscripts at the Public Record Office
H. of L. N.S.	*Manuscripts of the House of Lords, New Series*
H.C.J.	*Journals of the House of Commons*
H.L.J.	*Journals of the House of Lords*
H.M.C.	Publications of the Historical Manuscripts Commission
M.M.	*Mariner's Mirror*
N.M.M., Bibl.Phill.	National Maritime Museum, acquisitions from the Bibliotheca Phillippica

N.M.M. MSS.	National Maritime Museum, unnumbered Manuscripts
N.R.S.	Publications of the Navy Records Society
Pep:Sea MSS.	Pepysian Library, Magdalene College, Cambridge, Sea Manuscripts (other than Admiralty Letters)
Pep:A.L.	Pepysian Library, Magdalene College, Cambridge, Admiralty Letters
P.R.O.Adm.	Public Record Office, Admiralty Papers
P.R.O. T.	Public Record Office, Treasury Papers
S.P.Dom.	Public Record Office, State Papers, Domestic
S.P.For.	Public Record Office, State Papers, Foreign
Serg.MS.	National Maritime Museum, numbered Sergison Manuscripts
Serg.Misc.	National Maritime Museum, Sergison Miscellanies
Serg:Mins.	National Maritime Museum, Sergison Manuscripts, Navy Board Minutes

INTRODUCTION

In the twenty-five years from 1689 to 1714, twenty-one of which—from 1689 to 1697 and again from 1702 to 1714—were occupied by wars with France, England became the dominating sea power of Europe. Throughout the half century that followed, as the classic authority on the subject has remarked, 'on the few occasions in which [the navy] is called on to fight its superiority is so marked that the affairs can scarcely be called battles'.[1] At the earlier date, the English fleet was second in size and quality to the French, and to contemporaries seemed not greatly superior to the Dutch. At the later date, the Dutch had fallen out of the race, while the French had been outstripped in numbers and had for nine years declined any serious challenge at sea. At the accession of William III, England was one of the three leading sea powers; at the accession of George I, she was the leading sea power, without a rival or even a companion.

The significance of the period lay not simply in the rise of the English navy in relation to its contemporaries, but in its establishment during that time upon foundations which endured for a further two centuries. For the fleet which expressed this growing power was itself only the reflection of other elements of maritime strength. These may be defined in various ways, according to the position from which the definition is made. The most recent classification, taking the material of naval power alone and made from the point of view of the statesman who must control it, has divided it into three elements: the fighting instruments themselves, the bases from which they operate, and the organization, particularly of transport, which supplies ships and bases alike.[2] If, however, with a different end in mind, we identify ourselves not with the statesman but with the fighting instrument, the factors may be grouped rather differently, and the latter may be seen as the product of the policy which employs it, the wealth which supports it, and the organization which supplies it. None of these three factors is independent of the others; and their combined result, which is naval power,

[1] A. T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History* (1889), p. 209.
[2] Sir Herbert Richmond, *Statesmen and Sea Power* (1946), p. x.

is to the fighting strength of the ships at sea as the iceberg is to the section which is visible on the surface.

At any time, however, the exact connexion between the three factors may be difficult to trace. They themselves are not always free from contradiction. It is seldom that policy at all its levels is clear, that the elements of national wealth complement and do not partly detract from each other, or that the state of administration reflects at all precisely the demands which will be made upon it; and their interaction is more or less complex according to the complexity of each factor. Such considerations affect all departments of national life in which administration is involved; but they are made more complex in naval affairs by the peculiar demands which the raw materials of sea warfare make upon the form of their organization. It is not only that many kinds of material are required, coming from different parts of the world, produced by different techniques and thus involving a variety of conditions for administration; nor that most of them are required in large quantities, so that it has to operate on a large as well as a varied scale; it is also that the rate at which administration develops bears a peculiar relation to the development of its object, the fleet. The fleet in turn depends upon the ships of which it is composed, for a large fleet is of little use unless it includes ships which can stand comparison with those of other fleets, while the type of ship in turn determines the size as well as the type of the fleet. The two seldom develop together, but changes in the size of the fleet, where they are not occasioned simply by changes in policy, usually follow changes in the performance of the ship. This was the case towards the end of the seventeenth century, when, after a sudden increase in the size of the man-of-war during its fourth decade, a more gradual increase was taking place in the size of the national fleet, affecting its character and the nature of sea warfare. Such a development reacts upon administration. At a certain point the material problem changes in kind as it increases in extent, and that point does not necessarily correspond with the point at which its organization changes. The rate at which naval administration develops, therefore, may not, and where the development is rapid usually does not, coincide with the rate of development of its object. It is quite possible for an administrative system to produce a fleet which it cannot satisfactorily administer.

This was the position in 1689. The type of ship around which grew

the larger and more powerful fleet had been in existence for some decades; but the fleet itself had not yet reached the limits of the development made possible by the ship, and in consequence its organization, which lagged behind its own development, was still further behind the conditions which had been set for both. During the French war, which lasted for nine years and in which the fleet was used more strenuously than it had been in any of the Dutch wars, the balance was partly redressed, and while the material conditions of administration remained the same as they had been twenty years before, administration itself developed to meet them. The elements which combined to form the new type of navy were produced in the middle of the seventeenth century; but they were combined only in its last decade.

This development of administration in relation to its material was made more complicated in 1689 by the fact that it was being directed to an unfamiliar end. Its conditions had been formed during the three Dutch wars which took place between 1652 and 1673; but the new war was a French war, so that the strength which had been formed with one end in view had now to be concentrated upon another, and one moreover to which it was not altogether suited. For in the Dutch wars the chief protagonists had fought on the same terms. Each concentrated on the same area of campaign, in the Channel and North Sea, and the elements of naval power in each case were alike. Each relied for his prosperity principally upon overseas trade, and thus, provided that they were to be rivals, each required a more powerful navy than the other to protect his commerce. The struggle between the two was direct and unambiguous. French sea power, on the other hand, was not of the same kind as either Dutch or English. For whereas, in an age of national wars, the economy of Holland and England demanded a large fleet, that of France did not; and whereas their naval strategy was in each case based upon the necessity for superior strength, hers could be based successfully on a slight inferiority. Less dependent than England upon foreign trade, France could damage England by attacks upon English commerce more than she herself could be damaged by similar attacks; and thus, provided that her inferiority was not marked, she could, like all sea powers whose power does not come from the sea, largely dictate the course of sea warfare.

The new war, therefore, set new and difficult strategic problems.

They were obscured during its early years, owing to the French attempt to fight England on her own ground with the fleet which Colbert's organization had built up in recent years. But on the failure of this attempt, in the course of which the English navy was expanded to meet the familiar threat of superior strength, the change in strategic conditions was revealed. It was, moreover, given point by a strategic circumstance which had not hitherto existed. For the first time in the century, England found herself, in a war against a major Mediterranean power, a member of a European alliance which included other Mediterranean powers. There was therefore more than one possible area of campaign; and in the choice of areas the advantage lay with France. With her interior lines of communication, and her excellent ports in the south, she could develop a campaign there in which the English could rely only upon borrowed facilities. Under such circumstances, the weaker force could hope to dictate the conduct of the stronger. Material superiority did not, as in the recent past, automatically result in a strategic advantage, but was required rather to compensate for a strategic disadvantage; and the emphasis fell increasingly upon organization, which alone could ensure that the weight of material overcame the obstacles confronting policy. The virtues of administration were now required to offset strategic conditions, rather than directly to support them.

But at the end of the seventeenth century, all organization for purposes of war was difficult. Naval administration was more favourably placed than its military counterpart in one respect, for the service itself was popular, and a war at sea was always considered more natural than large-scale operations on the continent. There was never any hesitation to grant money for such a purpose, or to support it when necessary with legislation. But on the other hand, the material of naval administration was more complex than that of any other department. Stores for the fleet came largely from overseas, particularly from foreign powers, and many of them, owing to the technical demands made by the construction of the largest ships, were of unusual types; the men, or at least a fair proportion of them, had to be trained seamen, of whom there was only a limited number to share among the different seafaring activities of the country; victuals had to be provided in large quantities, often at unusual places and, with no reliable form of preservation possible, often at short

notice; and the facilities for the construction and maintenance of the ships raised their own problems of labour, material and direction. The navy with its varied requirements presented an inherently difficult administrative problem. In the social conditions of the day it seemed at times almost impossible to administer, for it had so little control over the agents of supply. It was unable to commandeer its stores or its labour, to obtain accurate information on the numbers and whereabouts of the seafaring population, to buy its food and drink on its own terms, or to obtain priority for dockyard construction. It had instead to rely in war largely on the methods of peace; to bargain with domestic and foreign contractors for stores and with domestic contractors for victuals, and to attract as well as to impress seamen and workmen. It was at times given the power to deny to the enemy the resources at its command, by embargoes on native commodities and shipping and by forcibly restricting neutral trade; but it was not given the power to mobilize these resources in its own support. It remained throughout merely one, and not always the most favoured, of the national interests.

The only advantage, therefore, which the navy could hope to have over its rivals was financial; and here, on the contrary, it found itself at a disadvantage. For the financial sources of national wealth were as difficult to harness for war as the material sources. It was only quite recently that wartime expenditure had consistently outrun peacetime revenue; and while this was undeniably the case from 1689, the machinery of collecting and allocating the national income could not at that time meet the demands that were made upon it. The navy thus found itself chronically short of money, and with its contemporary methods of accounting was often unable to calculate its deficit or to estimate its future requirements. Under such circumstances, a reliable system of credit was needed; but while the cost of naval warfare meant that it could no longer be run on cash, the conception of running it on credit was accepted only within the strictest limits. Facilities for government credit existed, and were widely used; but they were intended purely as a temporary measure to meet a temporary deficit, and proved quite inadequate after a short time to deal with a perpetual and increasing debt. Thus the navy was unable to dictate its own terms, and unable to satisfy the terms of the agents through whom it had to work; and its administration suffered accordingly.

Many of these problems faced the department on a new scale, and others for the first time in 1689, and their combination was entirely unfamiliar. It was the answers provided to them that turned England from a small into a great naval power. In each case the solution was adumbrated in the first of the two French wars, although it was not in each case fully applied. The direct threat from the French fleet was defeated so as hardly to be raised again, and the consequences were demonstrated and partly met in the following years; while in the same years the answer was found to the difficulties of financing the war, although this was not fully developed to meet the peculiar difficulties of naval credit. In this new context of strategy and finance, administration itself was changing as the organization of the navy was developed to meet the physical expansion. When, therefore, the second French war began in 1702, the problems were already clarified and partly answered. Unlike its predecessor, which was faced largely with unfamiliar conditions, it resumed where the other had left off, and its task was to complete at sea a job already begun. The great material expansion had taken place: while the fleet had risen from 173 ships in 1688, with a tonnage of 101,892 tons and a gunpower of 6930 pieces, to one of 323 ships in 1697, of over 160,000 tons and 9912 guns, at the end of the second war in 1714 it consisted of 247 ships, of 167,219 tons and 10,603 guns; and the great increase in organization had accompanied it. But it was not only in their settings that the two wars differed, but also, and as a result, in the course of their events. The naval war of 1689–97 was a dramatic war, with a great defeat followed by a great victory. Its issue was in the balance at the beginning, and remained undecided for several years. Its successor was by comparison a placid war, in which the issue at sea was never in doubt from the start. Its monument is Gibraltar, the guarantee of a Mediterranean policy; but the monuments to William's war lie nearer home, in the naval dockyard at Devonport which guaranteed the Channel approaches, and in the hospital buildings at Greenwich which commemorate the defeat of an attempted French invasion of England.

As it was in the course of a war that the elements of sea power were developed, so they must be treated within its framework, and the naval organization seen in action under the external pressure of events. For

while this organization operated within limits set by its material—of ships and men, of stores and provisions, and of shipyards and harbours—the men who had to run it were concerned principally with its results, and took the material itself very largely for granted in their daily business. The conduct of policy and finance, and of administration itself, cannot each be followed separately, out of their contemporary context; to do so would be to ignore what the makers of policy, the financial officials and the naval administrators were doing from day to day, and to elevate the three factors to a self-sufficiency and a logical development which was not perceived, intended or in most cases achieved at the time. While the material conditions of naval warfare remained the same throughout the war, their application varied according to its progress.

Once these conditions have been examined, therefore, the conduct of the war itself becomes a study in executive authority, wherein an executive process is followed, not by an analysis of the factors which compose it, but as it descends from one level of government to another, from the initial decision to its consequence in action. The pattern is chronological, and the story must be told as a story, recording the sequence of events. This applies to all executive processes in which different levels of authority are involved; but it applies particularly to a war, for of all human activities war most easily lends itself to narrative, in which the periods form naturally around the climax of an event. This study, therefore, falls into two parts, the first of which attempts to define the terms on which the war at sea was fought, and the second to describe its progress, within those terms, in chronological order. Such a treatment has three main disadvantages, and a word must be said about them before we proceed to the body of the work.

First, although a narrative is meant faithfully to record what happened, in fact it cannot do so. Each year, many of the same events recurred, and the same administrative processes were set in motion. Once these have been examined in detail, there is little point in examining them again until they change in some respect. Chronological treatment is necessarily selective, and thus a certain lack of proportion arises, and the interest in practice turns after a time from an investigation of the executive processes themselves to an investigation of the factors which affect them; from, for instance, an analysis of the annual mobilization of

ships and men after a winter in harbour, to an analysis of the reasons for its failure on a particular occasion.

Secondly, the chronological treatment is not always even, for the relations between the different levels of authority are not always of the same kind and do not always develop at an even pace. At one time, they may need to be followed in equal detail, while at other times their significance may be best appreciated by examining each level in turn over a given, but not necessarily equal, period. This unevenness of treatment arises from the different types of material which have to be studied. For naval history is a microcosm of national history; it is not a subject with its own particular technique, but an application of different subjects, each with their own technique, to a particular field. It has its own economic and constitutional history, its own legal problems and its own relations with diplomacy and politics. If national history may be compared to a cake, the different layers of which are different aspects of national life, then naval history is not a layer but a slice of that cake. Thus, while the analysis of a war finds its best medium in chronological treatment, the chronological proportions are determined largely by the different types of analysis required.

Not all of these yield an equally valuable result, and a word must be said in particular about one technique which has frequently to be used, and whose limitations illustrate the limitations of the work in other respects. A study so largely concerned with material must be largely concerned with measurement. Not only must many of its conclusions be quantitative, but they in turn must form the basis for other conclusions which themselves are not quantitative. To determine, for instance, the reason for a certain act of policy, which cannot be assessed by measurement, it may be necessary to know the relative states of two fleets at a given time, not only numerically, but in stores of all kinds, in their condition and in men, all of which are discoverable by such means. At any time, such statistical investigations are subject to two limitations: first, that the techniques required in measuring different types of material are themselves different; and secondly, that figures are often compiled not on any absolute basis, but for specific purposes, and may not yield to measurement for other purposes. This second difficulty is a common experience when we come to examine the figures of another age. The authorities in the late seventeenth century

often compiled their tables in a way which is useless to ourselves, because they were not asking the same questions of them; and in such cases, the interest of the figures lies in their illustration of an attitude of mind, or of the pertinence of the problem which they seek to answer at the time at which they attempt to answer it, rather than in the result of the calculations itself. Such an experience, however, is not uncommon in examining contemporary figures, drawn up for a specific purpose which is not our own. The great difference between the statistics of the late seventeenth century and those of the twentieth is that whereas in many cases the latter, although combined to suit a given end, have themselves been compiled on a statistical method which is not affected by that end, the former almost certainly have not. As a result, at times—particularly in investigating the figures of provisions, where quantitative measurement was peculiarly difficult—statistical inquiry ends merely in a vicious circle, in which the figures required are found to depend largely on the requirements. Thus, in a study which, from its nature, must often be concerned with measurement, measurement is often subjective and unsatisfactory; and whoever attempts to apply to the naval warfare of William III the objective criteria which, in this and other respects, may be applied more successfully to such warfare 250 years later, can only confess, as one such investigator confessed at the time, that he is 'well-knowing how far from infallible his best endeavours must be, that has to do with a subject so extensive, various, and complicate, as that of a Navy; and a Navy circumstanc'd as this happens to be within the limits of this Chapter'.[1]

[1] Samuel Pepys, *Memoires relating to the State of the Royal Navy of England* (1690), pp. 210–11.