

CHAPTER I

THE NAVY IN 1688

What do the officers and men of the Royal Navy look like when we first see them by the light of Court Martial documents at about the time of the Revolution of 1688?

The first we see in 1680 is that three sailors of the *Hampshire* were condemned on Herbert's flagship, the *Bristol*, in Cadiz Bay for disobedience to the orders of the master, and that the sentence was that they should draw lots and that he on whom the lot fell should receive fifty lashes on his bare back with a cat o' nine tails. Then at Tangier Thomas Woodgreen is sentenced to receive ten lashes alongside the *Bristol* and five beside every other ship in the squadron, a paper declaring his fault was to be hung round his neck, and he was to be towed ashore at the stern of a boat, for scandalously and falsely accusing his captain Richard Dickenson (who by the way sat as member of the Court) of cowardice in action. At the same place and on the same day, Mr Anthony Hastings, lieutenant of the *James Galley*, was acquitted of the murder of Mr Nathaniel Ludlow. The ground of acquittal was that he had acted in self-defence. We guess that they had fought a duel. The use of "false, scandalous, reproachful, and

provocative" language was manifestly common in that squadron. It was for this offence that John " Bombo " (Benbow), master of the *Nonsuch*, was ordered to make a public apology to Captain William Booth of the *Adventure*, on the deck of the *Bristol*, in the presence of all captains and a boat's crew from each ship, and to forfeit three months' pay for the benefit of the wounded then aboard the *Adventure*. On the other hand William Jenkins, sailor of the *Adventure*, was sentenced on 8th July, 1681, to be flogged for scandalous words concerning Captain Wheeler of the *Nonsuch*. These disputes arose out of actions with Barbary pirates. The time was loud-mouthed and abusive. Charges of cowardice were thrown right and left all through the Dutch Wars. These wrangles in Herbert's squadron were only a small part of a large vulgarity and may as well rest in silence. Bad language was rife in the Straits squadron but not unchecked. Mr Thomas Rooke, lieutenant of the *Adventure*, was dismissed his ship on 10th August, 1681, for the use of blasphemous language, unlawful oaths and curses, contrary to article No. 2.

Forfeiture of pay was a favourite penalty, and that in cases where something more serious would appear to have been well deserved. In September, 1680, the gunner of Herbert's flagship, the *Bristol*, was called upon to explain how he came to blow up her gunroom. Mr Doberall (for so I read his name in the scrubby court hand of the report) had no plausible excuse to give. The court of nine captains had no choice but to condemn him for gross carelessness. Four of them voted for dismissal, which would appear to have been the very least punishment due. But five voted that

he should be fined the pay of a whole year, one half of the fine to be paid to William Slathery, mariner, who had been maimed, and the other to the families of four members of the crew who had been killed by the explosion. The sentence was probably due to pity for the maimed sailor, and the families of the slain. The five captains perhaps thought that Mr Doberall ought to pay for his breakages, and the only way of forcing him to comply was by allowing him to remain as gunner after he had blown up the gunroom, and damaged or killed five of the crew. The fact that fines were paid to the Chest at Chatham, then the only naval charity, made them popular with the Court. When John Lewis, carpenter of the *Charles Galley*, was found guilty in September, 1687, of selling a coil of the ship's rope to the Spaniards at Gibraltar, which was just embezzlement of the King's stores, he was fined ten pounds to be stopped out of his wages for the benefit of the Chest. But circumstances alter cases, and every careless gunner was not so fortunate as he of the *Bristol*. In October, 1691, when the War of the League of Augsburg was in full swing, the gunner of the *Exeter* was tried on board the *Victory* in the Medway. His offence was that he had kept gunner's stores in his cabin, and had thereby caused an explosion, and the loss of the ship. He was condemned to be hanged. The Court added a petition to the King that his body might be hanged in chains on the Marsh opposite the gunwharf as a perpetual warning to negligent gunners. The severity of the punishment was measured by the amount of the damage done.

There was, it is clear, much laxity in the Navy as it was left by James II, and taken over by the

Revolution Government. In fact what the modern Navy counts efficiency and discipline were but dimly understood. Let us for instance look at the story of the loss by fire of H.M.S. *Henry*, in 1682, in the Medway. Our principal witness is Richard Wallis, mariner, who caused the fire, and very frankly confessed his fault. He tells how he entered the *Henry* in March of that year, and at his first coming lay in a hammock on the middle deck, but finding it "uneasy to get in and out of by reason of his age" he removed to a cabin in the cockpit. Here he laid his bed on a quantity of "ocum" stored in the cabin. On the night on which the fire took place, he was turning in after prayers at about 9 p.m., and after undressing took his candle off the nail on which it was fixed. By all regulations and the custom of the sea that candle ought to have been safely housed in a lantern. It fell from the old man's fingers and fired the oakum. Poor Wallis did his best to put the flames out by beating them down with his hands, to no purpose. The flames grew, and poor old Wallis was burnt to the bone in face and hands. The escape of the smoke up the hatchway alarmed the boatswain, Mr Hawes, who tells in his deposition how he rushed down and saw the "ancient man" on his knees contending with the flames. Mr Hawes tried to make the most plausible looking case he could for himself, but it is pretty clear that he lost his head, and so did the other members of the crew. The ship was burnt. The Court Martial which sat on the *Charlot* yacht, condemned Wallis to be cashiered, to forfeit his pay to the Chest at Chatham, and to stand for half an hour on H.M. Hulk at Chatham, with a rope round his neck "reeved to the gibbet," between the hours of 11 and

12 on the 13th of the month. The boatswain was dismissed and sentenced to be imprisoned during His Majesty's pleasure. It is to be noted that the Court acquitted the purser, Mr Oliver Hardiman, on the ground that the fire did not happen in his watch. From that we may conclude that the purser in 1682 kept harbour watch.

There was also, as we can well believe, much brutality which had full freedom when discipline was lax. In 1687 and on the 6th September a Court Martial was held on the Flagship in Gibraltar Bay to try John Shaw for the murder of Allen Leads or Leeds. The President was, of course, the Commander-in-chief of the squadron in the Straits, Henry Fitzroy, Duke of Grafton, son of Charles II and Barbara Villiers—he who joined the whigs at the Revolution and fell in the attack on Cork in 1690. Ten captains formed the Court, and among them were Killigrew, Lloyd the Jacobite agent of after days, Lord Berkeley, and Berry. The case they were to decide on was of the simplest.

Shaw and Leeds, who belonged to the *Pearl*, had been drinking before the main hatchway, and after the manner of such as they, had been contending in a boozey fashion as to which of them was the best man. Shaw urged his mate to come with him before the bitts, two solid pieces of timber which stand in front of the foremast, and are used to regulate the run of the cable which is turned round them. His object was of course to decide the question in debate. Leeds was reluctant to go but in the end consented. They transferred their squabble, and their drink, to the front of the bitts. After a few minutes Leeds was heard to scream "He has stabbed me." Then Shaw came

swaggering aft with his can in one hand and a bloody knife in the other, swearing that he would “cut up” anybody who tried to stop him. Of course he was overpowered, and in due course sent to hang at the lee yardarm.

In the early months of the same year a Court Martial had been ordered by the Admiralty to be held in the *Bristol* in the Downs. She was the flagship of Sir Roger Strickland, the Roman Catholic officer to whom King James, in his ruinous infatuation, had entrusted the command of his fleet. The case was one of gross brutality in which the actors were officers of position—Sir William Jennings, who was a rear-admiral, and like Strickland a Roman Catholic, and Captain Charles Skelton. These officers and gentlemen had been watching the work of their boats near Porchester, at the head of Portsmouth harbour, some time before the Court Martial was held in February. Jennings, as the superior officer, kept an open table. When at dinner, then a mid-day meal, he made some remarks of a querulous and not well-bred kind on the cost of these hospitalities, adding that his guests were all welcome, but that Captain Skelton ought not to have brought his friend, Mr James Greenway, who was, it seems, personally disliked by the host. Skelton retorted angrily. Jennings first observed that Skelton had been kicked once before, then drew the deduction that he might be kicked again, and wound up by predicting that he would be kicked at a future date. Skelton’s answer was to hit his admiral on the nose so violently as to draw blood. It ran down Jennings’ white lace cravat.

There are those who still speak of the fine manners

of the ages when every gentleman wore a sword, and knew how to use it. They are also among the many who take their own hasty deductions for facts, and assume what they would find it difficult to prove. The fine clothes painted by Vandyck and Lely covered much mere blackguardism. The age of Falkland was the age of Goring and Lunsford. In an age of fine manners as well as fine clothes Jennings and Skelton would not have come to fisticuffs like a couple of tipsy bargees. If gentlemen did settle their quarrels with the romantic sword their scuffle would not have ended as it did. Skelton would not have gone off to his own ship to avoid, as he says, further disturbance. He would not have reflected that he had got himself into trouble, and under the influence of that sobering reflection would not have rushed off to Jennings' flagship to make a grovelling apology. He was said to be addicted to saving himself from the consequences of insolence by grovelling. On this occasion, after telling one of the officers of the flagship, the *Jersey*, that even if he had given the admiral a bloody nose they would not take his command from him, he cringed to Jennings. The admiral might beat him if he liked, but he would be forgiven. He would lie at Jennings' cabin door till he had his pardon. At last Jennings was wearied into making a promise to forgive him, and so got rid of him. But the scandal had been public, and Jennings did report it at head-quarters. Orders came down from Whitehall to hold a Court Martial. The Court found—and what else could it do?—that both men had been guilty of “scandalous misdemeanour derogatory to the honour and discipline of His Majesty's Service.” The sentence was not one of dismissal from that service in

disgrace, but a fine of nine months' pay, and a "severe reprehension." Jennings fled abroad at the Revolution, and is vaguely heard of as serving with the French. Skelton remained in the Navy, and is often to be found sitting on Courts Martial. What essential difference was there between such officers and gentlemen as these, and such men as Leeds and his murderer Shaw? I can see one only. The ruffian of the fore-castle was not quite such a cur as the rowdy of the quarter-deck. And the mild penalty inflicted must be held to prove that in the opinion of their brother officers they had not so disgraced themselves as to be disqualified for serving the King.

As we turn over the grimy, ill-arranged, and fragmentary papers of No. 5253 Secretary's In-Letters, we naturally look for signs of what the Navy thought of the fall of its Sovereign and patron. There are a few, and they cannot be said to show that his sailors were deeply moved by the misfortunes of the King. We probably hear the real sentiment of the Navy from the mouth of Mr Thomas Jennings, lieutenant of the *Pendennis*. He deposed as a witness before the Court Martial which, in June, 1689, tried Captain Wilford, of the *Eagle* fireship, for not revealing a proposal made to him in March by Sir William Booth. This was the same Captain Booth of the *Adventure* to whom John "Bombo" was ordered to make the *amende honorable*, on the deck of the *Bristol*. He remained loyal to King James and fled to France, after making an unsuccessful attempt to persuade Wilford to seize the *Pendennis*, and carry her over to a French port for the service of the King "over the water." The plot failed for reasons stated by Jennings. He said he was sorry for King

James, but that it was not he, the lieutenant, who had driven the King away. The blame lay on himself and his priests. Moreover the lieutenant would not join Frenchmen and Irishmen to fight against his own country. The officers tempted by Booth saw no prospect of advantage to themselves if they joined in his plot, and as for the cause of the King, it was in their eyes the cause of the foreigner. Wilford who had listened to Booth in his cups and had repented when he was sober, was perhaps unwilling to betray an old messmate. He was fined £500 for the Chest at Chatham, and sentenced to a year's imprisonment in the Marshalsea. Mr Philip Foster, who acted as Judge Advocate in the Channel between June and October, 1689, declared that Mr John Maddock, late gunner of the *Lyon*, was the only man in the fleet who offered opposition to the new government, and he only by words spoken on shore.

Another Court Martial held in December, 1689, on board the *Saphir* at Portsmouth, had to decide on the case of Richard Ravenhill of the *Bonaventure*, accused of "writing to the prejudice of H.M. Service, and for not reporting seditious speeches." He had written to the effect that two-thirds of the people of London (where he then was on leave presumably) were in favour of King James; that the sailors were all for him; that King William had money for the States of Holland, but not for the sailors; that Scotland was all up in arms, having turned out the Bishops and Ministers, and was raising stores for King James (Ravenhill's grip of the political situation was but loose) and the King would have his own again. Ravenhill was, we gather, indulging in a grumble. It cost him dear—

to wit, thirty lashes to be “ smartly laid on ” by the side of the *Saphir* and ten beside each other ship then in the harbour. Seven captains signed the sentence and there must have been at least that number of vessels at Portsmouth. Rare instances of Jacobite sentiments are indeed to be found. In 1697, a chaplain of the name of Samuel Middleton, late of the *Dreadnought*, was found guilty of having expressed sympathy with Sir John Friend and his fellow-conspirators. Whatever kindly feeling there may have been for King James in the Navy was overborne by hatred of his French and Irish allies.

When the Jacobites were in the field in 1745, we find faint traces not of active sympathy for them in the Navy, but of the operations of spite and perjury working by means of accusations of drinking the health of the “ Pretender ” or of seditious professions of admiration for him. On the 17th March, 1745, before the Highland rising but not before the futile attempt of the French to carry out an invasion on his behalf in 1744, Alexander Ferguson, a seaman of the *Sutherland*, was brought before a Court Martial on the *Argyle*, in St John’s Road, Antigua, on the charge of drinking the Pretender’s health. The Court came promptly to the conclusion that the accusation was frivolous and malicious. The principal witnesses, two seamen of the *Sutherland*, S. Cruise and A. Justice, not only contradicted themselves and one another, but had to confess that they were tipsy at the time when they professed to have heard the seditious outcries of Ferguson. It was, by the way, the middle watch. We become conscious of a certain monotony in the constant recurrence of testimony that of all the hours in the day’s