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978-1-108-02260-6 - The Naval Chronology of Great Britain: Or, a Historical Account of Naval and Maritime Events from 1803 to 1816, Volume 1

James Ralfe

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The Naval Chronology of Great Britain

James Ralfe (*fl.* 1820–9) was a historian best remembered for this comprehensive history of British naval involvement in the Napoleonic Wars. First published in 1820 and intended as a successor and continuation of Captain Isaac Schomberg's history of the navy, *Naval Chronology*, Ralfe's work is remarkably detailed, using first-hand accounts of naval engagements taken from interviews with officers and sailors in addition to contemporary official naval documents. Chronologically by year, Ralfe notes and explains major parliamentary proceedings relating to the navy, lists the serving flag officers for the given year, and describes naval battles and engagements, arranged according to location. The innovative structure of these volumes, with detailed descriptions of naval battles, provide a valuable reference for the study of the British navy during the Napoleonic Wars. Volume 1 covers 1803–6.

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The Naval Chronology of Great Britain

*Or, a Historical Account of Naval and
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VOLUME 1

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His Royal Highness
the Prince Regent

Drawn by H. Bone. Esq. R.A.

London. Pub.^d Feb.^r 1, 1820 by Whitmore & Fenn, Charing Cross.

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OF
Great Britain;
OR,
AN HISTORICAL ACCOUNT
OF
NAVAL AND MARITIME EVENTS,
FROM THE
Commencement of the War in 1803, to the End of the Year 1816:
ALSO,
PARTICULARS OF THE MOST IMPORTANT COURTS-MARTIAL,
VOTES OF PARLIAMENT, LISTS OF FLAG-OFFICERS IN COMMISSION,
AND OF PROMOTIONS FOR EACH YEAR:
The Whole forming a complete Naval History of the above Period.
ILLUSTRATED WITH NUMEROUS ENGRAVINGS.

BY MR. J. RALFE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.
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TO
 HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS
GEORGE AUGUSTUS FREDERIC,
Regent
 OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND,
 PRINCE OF WALES,
 DUKE OF CORNWALL AND ROTHSAI,
LORD OF THE ISLES,
 VICE-ADMIRAL OF THE COASTS OF DEVON AND CORNWALL,
&c. &c. &c.

SIR,

IN laying before Your Royal Highness the present work, permit me to offer my most grateful acknowledgments for the high honour which my humble efforts to record the services of the British Navy, have derived from your gracious condescension in permitting them to be supported by the patronage of royalty; and to express my conviction, that it is the importance of the subject, and the great interest manifested by Your Royal Highness in whatever relates to the Navy of England, which could alone induce you to confer on this work so flattering a mark of distinction.

It would be the height of presumption in me, to point out to Your Royal Highness the vast advantages this country has derived from her maritime superiority.

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DEDICATION.

When, through the lamented indisposition of his Majesty, you undertook the government of this realm, you found it involved in all the difficulties of a long and protracted war. The Regency of Your Royal Highness has been attended by the most important and decisive events. Under the auspices of Your Royal Highness, the vigour, fortitude, and perseverance of the nation have finally triumphed; the empire now enjoys a profound peace; and that element, which has always been considered the domain of Britain, which has for more than two centuries been the scene of her most brilliant achievements, Your Royal Highness now rules with undivided sway; and that you may long continue so to do, is the fervent wish of

YOUR ROYAL HIGHNESS'S

Much obliged and

Obedient humble Servant,

JAMES RALFE,

LONDON, *Feb.* 1, 1820.

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P R E F A C E.

OF all literary publications, compilations have the least claim to merit; yet I think it must be allowed, that they are not without their use. The services of the British Navy have at all times been the theme of universal admiration, and a multiplicity of works have, at various periods, been produced, to record their gallant exploits; though few have been of that general description as to insert actions, which, though trivial in themselves, serve no less to evince the ardour and gallantry of British seamen, than those of a more important description. They seem to have proceeded on a system of exclusion; and the difficulty of following such a plan is, to know where to stop—to say which shall be recorded, and which omitted. Particular individuals might feel more interested in one action than in another, and might be convinced, that its omission was injurious to the memory of those engaged in it. There would, therefore, be great difficulty in determining what actions were worthy of record, without incurring the imputation of invidiousness. If the skill and intrepidity displayed in an action constitute alone a sufficient claim to commemoration, there can be no limits to the plan of the work. The whole navy has distinguished itself, through a long series of years, whenever and wherever they have been fortunate enough to come along side the enemy; and there is often as much skill, intrepidity, and determined courage displayed in capturing a gun-boat, or cutting out a vessel from under the fire of an enemy's battery, as in achieving any of those brilliant victories which illustrate our naval history.

In this respect, the work of Captain Schomberg appears to me preferable to all others. But though I have undertaken to publish a continuation of Captain Schomberg's *Chronology*,

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I did by no means consider myself bound to follow the plan which he has laid down, in every particular. Captain Schomberg's accounts of the different events recorded in his work are compiled principally from official documents published in the Gazette: I have considered it preferable to insert (with few exceptions) those accounts entire, thinking it would be far more satisfactory to those individuals whose services are noticed, to see their own description of their own actions, than that of another. By this arrangement I guard myself against those errors, which, from my not being a naval man, I might very probably fall into. I have also deviated in some other respects from Captain Schomberg's plan, but whether judiciously or not, whether the present work is deserving of patronage or not, must be left to the peruser to determine. But this I may safely say, that, in undertaking the present compilation, I have been actuated solely by a sincere desire to record the services of the British Navy, from a thorough conviction of their importance to Europe, the renown which they have conferred upon the national character, and that through their exertions is mainly to be attributed the security in which the kingdom is now placed. Should a doubt arise on this point, it must be wholly removed by the following extract of a speech, delivered in the House of Commons by Lord Castlereagh, on a vote for a monument to commemorate the battle of Trafalgar:

“ I have already said, that, in the latter part of the war, the traits of naval glory were less brilliant than they were in the former part. This, however, only arose from the circumstance of the enemy having ceased, from the successful exertions of that navy, to present himself in that tangible shape in which he was accustomed to appear before; but it would be a great act of injustice to suppose, that the merit of the exertions of the navy became less important than they had been. The importance of the navy must be acknowledged, when it was

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considered how greatly its operations had conduced to the triumphs of our army. The navy had not merely contributed to these, by that most difficult and most painful of all services, that of blockading all the ports of the enemy, but the navy had in truth been the instrument which had enabled our armies to make those efforts, which had so conspicuously developed that singularity of power which England could alone boast, and which, if it did not enable us to be at different points at the same time, it put it in our power to act in different parts of the world so nearly at the same time, as to make the events which took place most wide of each other, coincident. It had enabled us, in the late war, to follow up our operations in different quarters of the globe with a rapidity and success unparelled in history. It has fallen to my lot to meet with a regiment before Paris, which had served at Thoulouse in April 1814, which acted in America in that same campaign, and which was again in France in the following July. I should be glad to know, where instances could be found of such stupendous exertions having been made, in different parts of the world, by any other power. These, but for our navy, it would have been impossible for us to have accomplished; it was this which, bringing with astonishing rapidity our forces from various places, to new fields of action, had enabled us to bear on successive points with the happiest effect;” and finally to triumph over all our enemies.

In the arrangement of the work, each year commences with the opening of Parliament, and the proceedings therein relating to the navy. Then follow the list of flag-officers in commission; and the naval operations, which are divided into *Occurrences at and near Home—Baltic—Mediterranean, &c.*; so that an account of each action will be found under the name of the station where they respectively occurred.

I have inserted short biographical Memoirs of the professional services of a few officers of distinction, which I trust

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will not be found altogether uninteresting. It was my intention to have added several others, but finding it would greatly exceed the limits of this work, and having received several communications on the subject, with promises of support, I have determined on forming them into a separate work, which will be published as soon as arrangements are made for that purpose.

Respecting the Plates with which this work is illustrated, it will not become me to say more, than that they are all copied from original drawings made by officers who were in the actions represented, and whose names are attached to them. And I here beg leave to offer my acknowledgments to all those gentlemen, through whose kindness I have been able, I trust, to make this part of the work at least, complete in every respect.

JAMES RALFE.

LONDON, *Feb.* 1, 1820.