



# All Guns Blazing!

## Newsletter of the Naval Wargames Society

### No. 187 –November 2009

#### Editorial

You know, a trip to the seaside does you good. I've just spent four very enjoyable days (courtesy of my in-laws) at the Saunton Sands Hotel, just outside Barnstable. There is a beach at the foot of the cliff by the hotel that is renowned among surfers, and after scrambling out along the rocks on a particularly windy day, I had a fantastic, and slightly nerve-wracking, view of the rollers as they surged past on the way to the beach. All this led me to reflect on the power of the main element that sets naval wargames apart from those on *terra firma*: the sea itself. It's all too easy (and I include myself here) to view your models on your perfectly flat, blue-cloth covered table and forget what the sea is *really* like. While standing on a jagged rock a quarter of a mile from the beach, soaked by spray and deafened by the sea's god-like roar, the full terror of the infamous 'lee shore' was brought home to me. "This," I reflected as I dodged another fearsome wave, "doesn't look anything like my kitchen tabletop!"

After energetic and soggy adventures like the one just described, it was nice to settle down in the hotel's lounge with a glass of something soothing and a good book. The one I had taken with me was V. E. Tarrant's *Jutland: The German Perspective*—an excellent read. Actually, I've read it before. Indeed it was the first book I ever bought on Jutland; way back in 1997, when I my 'Road to Damascus' with naval history. However, the last few days re-reading have reminded me just how good it is. Aside from a well-written text, the numerous maps and track charts are superb. They are exceedingly clear, and with one every few pages the very number of them makes following the progress of the action effortless. The visual impact of the book is further enhanced with beautiful line drawings and silhouettes of all the classes of vessel involved in the battle. Of particular interest for us wargamers are the excellent orders of battle and a table of the most important German WT messages and visual signals from May 30<sup>th</sup> to June 6<sup>th</sup>. Like me, you've probably all read Mr. Tarrant's book already and I'm preaching to the converted, but if you haven't, I can heartily recommend it.

On a slightly more official note, as you are all aware last month was the first issue of *AGB* that I was able to distribute without David Manley's much-appreciated assistance; however, I had a few recipients' emails returned with one of those 'Mail Delivery System—Returned to Sender (failure)' notifications, which I suppose we've all had from time to time. Anyway, I thought I'd list them here, so that if you know who they are, you may be able to let them know why they aren't receiving *AGB* and then they can get in touch with me. They are:

[peter.grizzell@virgin.net](mailto:peter.grizzell@virgin.net)  
[neil.egerton@ntlworld.com](mailto:neil.egerton@ntlworld.com)  
[jaysona@centurytel.net](mailto:jaysona@centurytel.net)  
[j.knuth@verizon.net](mailto:j.knuth@verizon.net)  
[ian.r.shaw@merseymail.com](mailto:ian.r.shaw@merseymail.com)  
[gwsmith@boltblue.com](mailto:gwsmith@boltblue.com)  
[dave-chandler@supanet.com](mailto:dave-chandler@supanet.com)  
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Well on with the show, as they say. First off there is a very useful piece of work by Peter Colbeck on just *where we all are*, which should help us shape a course to new opponents, followed by some details on Naval Seminars at King's College, submitted by Rob Morgan. And finally a request for help from your humble Editor himself on the subject of ensign colours at the Battle of Cape St. Vincent, something that has been niggling me for some years.

Yours Piping 'Up Spirits'

Richard Wimpenny ([wimpenny@talktalk.net](mailto:wimpenny@talktalk.net))

## NWS MEMBERSHIP

It was sometime last year that I had an email exchange with a new member about the locations of other members close to him. I remember he was from Cornwall and feeling somewhat isolated. I thought, at the time, that it would be a good idea to put together some statistics on member locations in the UK in order to help the founding, or revitalisation, of local groups. At last, I've done it.

The printed membership form asks if you're happy to have your details printed in a list. Unfortunately, not only is the wording potential misleading (an opt out rather than an opt in) but the same question is not posed to Paypal members, so I don't feel confident to pass on any member's details without their specific permission. However, I have compiled the following lists based upon last year's membership (as I suspect there are several people yet to rejoin this year) but only covering the UK. It's clear from this that there are several hotspots where a group could thrive if someone were willing to organise it: Bristol/Gloucester, Hampshire and Kent being examples.

If anyone wants to email me to say they're happy to have their details released to a local member who may be trying to set up a group, then please do so. Similarly, if you are that enthusiastic person, feel free to contact me and I can send on your details to other members in your county or adjacent counties. (Use petercolbeck@gmail.com or the postal address in Battlefleet.)

<b>County</b>	<b>Members</b>	<b>County</b>	<b>Members</b>
Bedfordshire	1	Surrey	4
Berkshire	1	Suffolk	3
Bristol	4	Warwickshire	1
Buckinghamshire	2	West Midlands	1
Cambridgeshire	5	West Sussex	2
Cheshire	1	West Yorkshire	2
Cornwall	1	Wiltshire	1
County Durham	1		
Devon	2	Edinburgh	2
Dorset	1	Fife	1
Essex	2	Kirkcudbrightshire	1
Gloucestershire (incl S Glos)	6	Lanarkshire (incl S Lanarkshire)	2
Greater London	8	Morayshire	1
Hampshire	7	Stirlingshire	1
Hertford	3	West Lothian	1
Kent	9		
Lancashire	2	Ceredigion	1
Merseyside	2	Clwyd	1
Middlesex	3	Gynedd	1
Norfolk	2	Swansea	1
Northumberland	1		
Nottinghamshire	1	Belfast	1
Shropshire	1	County Antrim	2
Somerset	1		
South Yorkshire	1	Guernsey	1
Staffordshire	1		

**Peter Colbeck**

## KING'S COLLEGE NAVAL SEMINARS 2009-2010

The seminar programme of the 'International Commission for Maritime History' is a longstanding programme, which produces some of the best naval lectures to be found in the British Isles. It's a few years since I was able to drop in to one of them, Wales being a little out of the way for King's College, but believe me they are really worthwhile events, if you can get to one!

In the coming winter to spring series, there are four which will interest NWS members.

February 11th 2010. 'The Royal Navy and North America 1800-1815', by Dr. Brian Arthur Greenwich.

February 25th 2010. 'New Public Management in Defence', by Vice-Admiral Sir Jeremy Blackham, RUSI.

May 6th 2010. 'Amphibious Warfare-reluctant Allies Cadiz 1810', by Augustin Guimera.

May 20th 2010. 'The Kriegsmarine and Sea Power in the Baltic 1932-39', by Dr. Marcus Faulkner of King's.

Meetings are usually very well attended and take place on Thursdays at 1715hrs at the Meeting Room at the Dept. of War Studies, 6th Floor, Old Main Building, Strand, London. No charge is made for attendance. No-one's ever given a talk on 'The History and Development of Naval Wargames', by the way, which seems a rather obvious gap in the annual programme.

**Rob Morgan**

## ENSIGN COLOUR OR COLOURS AT THE BATTLE OF ST. VINCENT, 1797?

For some years now I have been puzzled by the pictorial rendition of British ensigns at the Battle of Cape St. Vincent; whether they were blue, red, or a combination of the two? Jervis himself, as well as his two subordinates Vice-Admirals Thompson and Waldergrave were all of the 'Blue Squadron'; Rear-Admiral Parker was the only 'Red' admiral present. (Information taken from Volume II of William James' *History*, page 30.) The thing is, many of the paintings of the period seem to show a mix of red and blue. Now I know artists are not generally a reliable source, but it seems to me that there is no 'gun-smoke without fire', as it were. Even the redoubtable, and now sadly missed, Geoff Hunt shows the British line with blue ensigns in his painting of the battle.



*G Hunt: The Battle of Cape St. Vincent*

However, in his painting depicting Nelson wearing out of the line and into posterity in that same battle, Mr. Hunt shows HMS *Captain* with a red ensign and commodore's pennant; as can be seen below.



Geoff Hunt's publishers kindly gave me his email address, and I contacted him with my query. Within hours I had a reply and I thought my search was over! Unfortunately, Mr. Hunt said that while he was painting the picture of *Captain* he was probably the world's foremost authority on the subject, but, it being ten years ago, he couldn't remember. He did say, and I believe him, that he must have had a good reason!

I have often wondered whether Rear-Admiral Parker and his recently arrived reinforcements retained their red ensigns, but even if this was the case, *Captain* was not among Parker's squadron (As listed by James, page 22). Nelson, of course, had only just re-joined *Captain* after an independent operation in the Mediterranean, onboard the frigate *La Minerve*. During this cruise he could have used a red ensign and pennant, but it seems unlikely that he would have retained them when rejoining Jervis' flag, unless there was another reason as well. I know that Jervis approached the Spanish Fleet in two columns before forming a hasty line of battle. Could it be that there was a 'Blue' column and a 'Red' column? This seems to have been how Admirals Duncan (Blue) and Onslow (Red) went into action at Camperdown later the same year, as can be seen in this painting by Derek Gardner.



My initial interest in this topic was from a wargaming and modelling standpoint: could I accurately use red ensigns at *both* the First of June and St. Vincent? But increasingly I'm just dying to find out! I have used William James' *History* as a reference during this short enquiry, and even the cover of the volume in question has William Allen's version of Nelson's boarding of the *San Nicholas*; note the red ensign and pennant...



William Allen: *Battle of Cape St. Vincent*

...as does Ivan Berryman's version of the scene (*Captain* is on the left, almost broadside on.)...



...and also in this one by the contemporary, and usually reliable, Nicholas Pocock.



Yet there *seem* to have been blue ensigns, too. Rod Langton in his book on painting and rigging his exquisite models says that blue ensigns were worn at St. Vincent, and this would make sense considering the red and yellow Spanish ensign. However, in an article he wrote on the same subject in *Miniature Wargames* way back in the summer of 1990, he says they were red! I've asked Rod about this, and he can't remember why he changed 'tack' either! Maybe it was just a typo' error!

Over the last three years or so, I have also posed this question on various naval discussion groups, including that of the venerable *Society of Nautical Research*, and come up with nothing. So, if any members of this esteemed body can shed some light on this I would be VERY MUCH obliged. I have checked through every book on the battle and the period that I possess, and aside from the William James *History* I have already mentioned, I bought—especially!—an old copy of the Navy Records Society's 'Logs of the Great Sea Fights, Vol. I'. This has copies of the logs of all the British ships involved, but nothing on ensigns!! Dr. Colin White's *1797: Nelson's Year of Destiny* has a good account of the battle, but, again, nothing on ensigns. However, he makes a reference to an article he wrote for the 'Nelson Society' entitled *Reconstructing the British Line of Battle at Cape St. Vincent*. It was published in the society's journal, *The Nelson Dispatch*, vol. 6, Part 2, pages 55-7. If anyone has this or has access to it I would dearly love to know if it contains what I seek! I could join the society, of course, but at present I seem to be spending a tidy sum each year as it is on various 'nautical memberships'! So if anyone can solve my dilemma, or even just make a few suggestions, I can be contacted via my email address, which as always can be found at the foot of the Editorial.

Any help will be gratefully appreciated!

**Richard Wimpenny**

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## **NWS Events and Regional Contacts, 2009**

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### **NWS Northern Fleet – Falkirk East Central Scotland**

Kenny Thomson, 1 Excise Lane, Kincardine, Fife, FK10 4LW, Tel: 01259 731091  
e-mail: [kenny.thomson@homecall.co.uk](mailto:kenny.thomson@homecall.co.uk) - Website: <http://falkirkwargamesclub.org.uk/>

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Falkirk Wargames Club meets each Monday night at 7pm with a variety of games running each evening. Naval games are popular with 2 or 3 run each month. Campaign games sometimes feature in our monthly weekend sessions. Games tend to be organised week to week making a 3-month forecast here a waste of time. Please get in touch if you'd like to come along.

- Popular periods – Modern (Shipwreck), WW1 and 2 (GQ), WW2 Coastal (Action Stations), and Pre-dreadnought (P Dunn's rules)
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### **NWS North Hants [Every 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday]**

Jeff Crane 31 Park Gardens, Black Dam, Basingstoke, Hants, 01256 427906  
e-mail: [gf.crane@ntlworld.com](mailto:gf.crane@ntlworld.com)

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### **NWS Wessex [Bi-Monthly Meetings]**

The Wessex Group has gone into (hopefully) temporary abeyance for the moment. If anyone living in the Bath / Bristol / Gloucester area (or further afield) would like to take on managing the group please contact myself or any of the other NWS officials.

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