

Books Worth Revisiting: To Sail the Ocean Blue, Part I--Hornblower

A popular genre of fiction is naval fiction, usually focusing on Great Britain's Royal Navy during the Age of Sail in the 18th and 19th centuries. The period "when Britannia ruled the waves" has given rise to some great series of novels, some of which will be featured in this column. The gold standard of all naval fiction series is the Hornblower adventures written by C. S. Forester (1899-1966). Horatio Hornblower is featured in eleven novels and some short stories. Forester did not write his novels in chronological order—his first Hornblower novel, *The Happy Return* (U.S. title, *Beat to Quarters*), was written in 1937 and featured a mature Captain Hornblower in his late thirties. The character caught on, and thereafter, Forester would move back and forth in Hornblower's life, writing novels to fill in gaps in the intrepid naval hero's adventures.

Hornblower is an interesting character study. He is all the things one expects of a naval hero: brave, resourceful, dutiful, and very lucky. He also is subject to seasickness, even in the calmest of waters. Being totally tone deaf, music means absolutely nothing to him and is often a source of irritation. His greatest delight while at sea is to have sea water hosed over him for his morning shower. And women find him irresistible—much to his mystification because he doesn't consider himself very handsome.

All of the Hornblower novels are available on digital cartridge or for download from the BARD site. Call 1-800-252-9605 to order. In chronological order:

#1 Mr. Midshipman Hornblower (DB 26915). Horatio Hornblower begins his naval career aboard HMS *Justinian* in 1794. He has many adventures, including a ship full of wet rice, rat-fighting, fire ships, and being captured by both the French and the Spanish.

#2 Lieutenant Hornblower (DB 46117). This novel is told from the viewpoint of Hornblower's great friend, Lieutenant William Bush, while they both serve under the paranoid Capt. Sawyer on HMS *Renown*. Hornblower shows his mettle during battles with the Spanish and is promoted to commander. Unfortunately, a temporary peace occurs before Hornblower's promotion is confirmed, forcing him to earn his living by playing cards.

#3 Hornblower and the Hotspur (DB 46118). Hornblower has his first ship to command, the sloop HMS *Hotspur*. Hornblower also marries Maria Mason, his landlady's daughter, whom he marries because he feels sorry for her.

#4 Hornblower During the Crisis and Two Other Stories (DB 41649). This novel was left unfinished at Forester's death. Hornblower undertakes a very dangerous mission to lure the French fleet into a decisive encounter with Admiral Nelson at the Battle of Trafalgar. Also included are two short stories, "Hornblower's Temptation" and "The Last Encounter," the former from Hornblower's early career and the latter from his final years.

#5 Hornblower and the Atropos (DB 46119). Hornblower is given the task of escorting Admiral Nelson's funeral barge up the Thames to Westminster Abbey. Then, he's off to the Mediterranean in his new ship, HMS *Atropos*, to recover a sunken shipment of gold in hostile Turkish waters.

#6 Beat to Quarters (DB 46120). Admiralty hands Hornblower another set of impossible orders: 1) sail to Nicaragua in HMS *Lydia* without the Spaniards knowing about it; 2) help a deranged revolutionary raise a revolt against the said Spaniards; and 3) find a water route across Central America. He also has to transport back to England Lady Barbara Wellesley, whose presence on his ship disturbs Hornblower very much.

#7 Ship of the Line (DB 46121). At last, Hornblower has earned the right to captain a ship of the line, HMS *Sutherland*. After several daring raids along the French coast, Hornblower engages in battle against four French naval ships. Forced to strike his colors to save what is left of his crew, Hornblower is taken prisoner.

#8 Flying Colors (DB 46122). Prisoner of the French once more, Hornblower and two of his crew are ordered to Paris for immediate execution. Escaping en-route, Hornblower and his companions take refuge with a prominent French family that has no love for Bonaparte. The three Englishmen eventually make a spectacular escape from France and return to a hero's welcome in England.

#9 Commodore Hornblower (DB 26916). Hornblower chafes at being ashore, so he jumps at the chance to sail to Russia. His mission is to convince the young Tsar to remain Britain's ally and not join the French.

#10 Lord Hornblower (DB 46123). France is defeated, and Bonaparte is imprisoned on the island of Elba. Hornblower visits the family who sheltered him in France in *Flying Colors*. Then word comes that Napoleon has escaped, and Hornblower finds himself facing execution once again.

#11 Admiral Hornblower in the West Indies (DB 26918). Hornblower finally becomes "admiral of the fleet" and has several adventures in the West Indies, including surviving a monster hurricane.