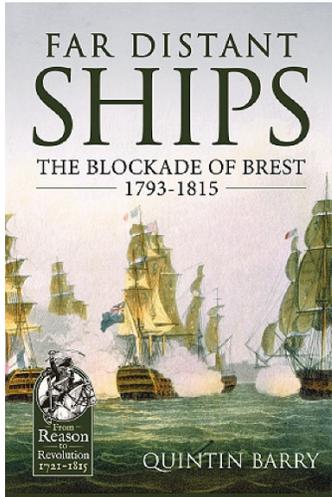


## The Napoleon Series Reviews

Barry, Quintin. *Far Distant Ships: The Royal Navy and the Blockade of Brest, 1793-1815*. Solihull (UK): Helion, 2017. 351 pages, illus., index. ISBN# 9781911512141. \$59.95/£25



In recent years Helion and Company has published a number of very solid books on Napoleonic subject and bid fair to become the leading publisher of titles devoted to the period. *Far Distant Ships* is a very strong entry in the field. This book is a survey of the Royal Navy's blockade of the largest French naval base during the great war of 1793-1815, a subject which deserves detailed study.

Britain is an island nation and Britain's wealth was based on maritime trade, the greater part of which during the period of sailing ships moved down the Channel to the great ports of southeast England. Given its physical location, opposite the western approaches to this vitally-important maritime route, Brest represented a major threat. The Admiralty was well aware of the danger Brest posed and earlier in the 18th century, during the War of the Austrian Succession in the 1740s, had created a Western Squadron to counter this threat. In the Seven Years' War, the RN mounted a close blockade of Brest but they were unable to do so, owing to a shortage of ships, during the American Revolutionary War.

In 1793, however, the RN had 498 warships in commission while its opponent had been seriously harmed by revolutionary excesses which not only destroyed much of its officer corps but also its cadre of trained seamen. An essential part of the training of a naval officer, particularly in the sailing period, was shiphandling in all weathers and to get the necessary experience, officers had to be at sea. British officers were at sea through much of the great war, French officers rarely so and the discrepancy would show in almost every naval engagement between 1793 and 1815.

The author traces the history of the Brest blockade from 1793 to 1815, noting the major naval engagements around the port, demonstrating how the RN's blockade became progressively tighter and unceasing until by 1800 the Channel Fleet was the largest single component of the RN. Barry is particularly effective when discussing the personalities and problems of senior commanders and their relationships with the Admiralty. The Brest blockade involved some of the most prominent officers in British naval history including such famous admirals as Barham, Collingwood, Hood, Howe, Keith and Pellew, and lesser lights such as Calder, Cornwallis, Gambier, Gardner and Warren. The author also contributes separate chapters on such specialized topics as warship types and qualities, particularly frigates, health and welfare, and the mutinies of 1797.

The *Far Distant Ships* is a very welcome addition to a growing body of literature on the lesser known, but no less important, operations of the Royal Navy during the Great War with France, 1793-1815. Recommended for all readers interested in Napoleonic naval history.

Reviewed by Donald E. Graves

Placed on the Napoleon Series: September 2017