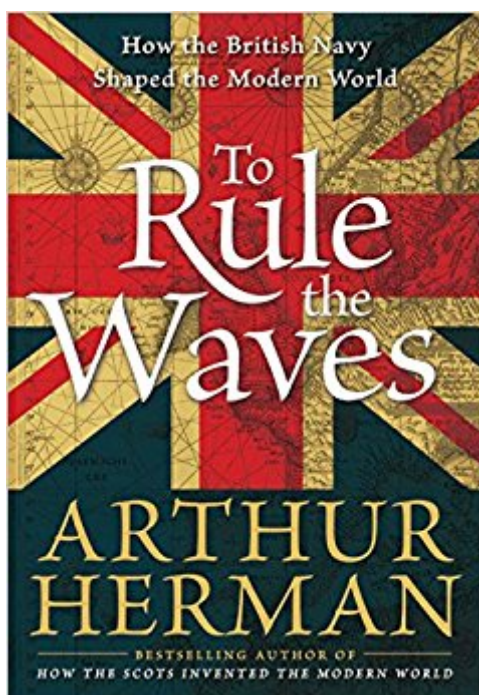


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# To Rule The Waves: How The British Navy Shaped The Modern World



## Synopsis

To Rule the Waves tells the extraordinary story of how Britain's Royal Navy allowed one nation to rise to power unprecedented in history. From its beginnings under Henry VIII and adventurers like John Hawkins and Francis Drake, the Royal Navy toppled one world economic system, built by Spain and Portugal after Christopher Columbus, and ushered in another -- the one in which we still live today. In the sixteenth century, such men as Hawkins, Drake, and Martin Frobisher were all seekers after their own fortunes as well as servants of their nation. But at the moment of crisis in 1588, they were able to come together to thwart Philip II of Spain and his supposedly invincible Armada. In the seventeenth century, the navy became the key to victory in the English Civil War and played a leading role on the world stage in the years of the Commonwealth and Oliver Cromwell's Protectorate. The navy's dominance allowed England's trade to boom and prosper. It sustained its colonies, reshaped its politics, and drew England, Scotland, and Ireland together into a single United Kingdom. It was this system that Napoleon had to break in order to make himself absolute master of Europe. And it was the Royal Navy, led by men like Horatio Nelson, that stopped him in his tracks and preserved the liberty of Europe and the rest of the world. That global order would survive the convulsions of the twentieth century and the downfall of the British Empire itself, as Britain passed its essential elements on to its successors, the United States and its navy. Illuminating and engrossing, To Rule the Waves is an epic journey from the age of the Reformation to the age of computer warfare and special ops. Arthur Herman tells the spellbinding tale of great battles at sea; of heroic sailors, admirals, and aviators; of violent conflict and personal tragedy; of the way one mighty institution forged a nation, an empire, and a new world.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The author of *How the Scots Invented the Modern World* returns with this quite splendid history of the British Royal Navy. Probably to no one's surprise, his thesis is that the British Empire was the foundation of the modern world and the Royal Navy the foundation of that empire. By and large, he sustains that thesis in a fluent narrative that stretches from the Elizabethan Age to the Falklands War. Although definitely Anglocentric and navalist, the author has done his research on a scale that such a large topic (to say nothing of a large book) requires. The Royal Navy's discipline and food in the age of sail may not deserve quite as much rehabilitation as he gives them, but on the other hand, he is frank about the limitations of British warship design, poor Victorian gunnery and lack of preparations for antisubmarine warfare between the world wars. He also writes extremely well, whether dealing with the role of the Royal Navy in founding the British iron and steel industries (it was a major customer) or grand battles, such as Quiberon Bay (1759) or Trafalgar (1805). Good one-volume histories of one of the modern world's most vital fighting forces appear rarely; this one should rule for a while to come. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Unlike many of the great empires of the nineteenth century or those of antiquity, the British empire was not based upon contiguous territory. With their imperial possessions separated by vast oceans and large landmasses, it was essential for the British to develop and maintain a mighty navy to supply and exploit the empire's resources. Herman, who has been a professor of history and the coordinator of the Western Heritage Program at the Smithsonian, writes a stirring account of the origins and evolution of the British navy. He also presents convincing arguments that illustrate that many of the broad strategic goals pursued by the British continue to be pursued by American geopolitical strategists today. This is an exciting chronicle filled with colorful characters and enthralling adventures; some of these men, such as Francis Drake and James Cook, are already imperial icons, but Herman also relates stories and exploits of more obscure but equally compelling figures who helped establish and preserve the greatest maritime empire in history. Jay Freeman Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

Why read a history of the British Navy? Why read a history of a Navy? A partial answer is that war is always entertaining. A truer answer perhaps would be that there is no greater teacher than war.

Arthur Herman's book is the story of one of the greatest instruments of war ever to exist – the Royal Navy. It is about how this instrument was forged. It is also about how it was wielded over five centuries to create the greatest empire in history. That the sun did not set on the British Empire was in very large measure due to its Navy. The book begins in 1568 with a raid on San Juan in Mexico by a John Hawkins of Plymouth. Hawkins and his flotilla of 5 small ships were out to attack the annual "treasure fleet" that carried gold and silver from South American mines to the royal Spanish treasury. To the Spaniards, Hawkins was a brigand and an outlaw, a pirate, albeit a rather distinguished pirate. His foray had been financed by a syndicate of very respectable investors that included Queen Elizabeth. The syndicate invested on the basis of Hawkins' rather remarkable track record of providing rates of return in tens of thousands of percent on capital in previous voyages. Piracy was one of his two revenue streams. The other more predictable source of profit was a controlling position in the slave trade that dominated world commerce in the 16th century. Hawkins' cousin, Francis Drake, deserted him during this raid but went on to win eternal glory and respectability as the man who saved England from the wrath of then global hegemon, King Philip of Spain, by destroying the Spanish Armada in 1588. The second part of the story, which begins after this famous victory, is also about Empire, and about how small, scrappy England became the mighty United Kingdom. Mr Herman does a fine job of describing in rich detail the characters of Hawkins, Drake and their contemporaries and the temper of their lawless and violent world. He describes how these tough and brutal men created a nucleus of fighting vessels and sailors. Perhaps the most interesting part of the book is about how this marine force subsequently morphed into the mighty Royal Navy instead of becoming a criminal empire. A fighting organization is built on three pillars: its weapons, its administrative ability and the quality of its manpower in general and its leadership in particular. Over the course of the 17th and 18th centuries a succession of capable Englishmen strengthened each pillar. Shipbuilding became a major industry that ceaselessly innovated to increase the speed and maneuverability of its vessels and the lethality of its weapons. An Admiralty office with very capable officials oversaw the growing machinery that learned to pay, victual, arm and run the Navy. Ships and armaments were standardized. The officer corps attracted the best talent in the country and rewarded performance. Naval tactics like the broadside, signaling, maneuvering together under a single commander (that origin of the office of a fighting Admiral) were developed over a century of constant fighting with the French and more occasionally, the Dutch. Shipboard medicine and nutrition developed to treat war-wounds and diseases such as scurvy that incapacitated more sailors than the enemy. All this was in tune with

the spirit of an England that was being energized by the Industrial Revolution and political reform. A fighting organization also requires what the French call *elan*. The Royal Navy was able to retain the habitual daring and the tradition of superb seamanship that were characteristic of its piratical forbears. It also found ways of maintaining very high levels of motivation and morale amongst its sailors even as it slowly moderated fearsome shipboard discipline. Perhaps no one represented the spirit of this Navy better than the impossibly brave and impossibly patriotic Nelson. His victories, culminating in Trafalgar (1805), and later, Wellington's triumph at Waterloo, paved the way for world domination by a Britannia that ruled the waves. Nelson died because he, like Hawkins, led his men from the front. But the Royal Navy was a very dissimilar to Hawkins fleet of marauders. Amongst other things, it occupied itself very differently. England learnt from what it inflicted on the Spanish. Protection of free passage on the high seas became non-negotiable. A small island dependent almost entirely on its well being for ship-borne trade could not afford the insecurity of lawless seas. Hawkins's descendants accordingly concentrated on stamping out piracy. They were very successful. The temper of the times had also changed. The Royal Navy became the scourge of slavers, stamping out the trade that had made Hawkins a rich man. The book describes not just how an institution like the Navy is created but also how it is necessary to possess such an instrument if a nation has an aspiration to become a great power. Mr Herman establishes that the guns of the Royal Navy anchored the unparalleled prosperity of the relatively small British Isles. The British state could transcend its island home because it could develop a mighty instrument of state. In Nelson's time, when a voyage to India was still a six-month affair, the British already had a "blue-water navy" with squadrons for the Caribbean, the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean. We would have called it "strategic thinking." Another interesting take-away from this book is the very fine line that divides good and evil in statecraft. Today's robber is tomorrow's policemen and statecraft every so often consists of setting a robber to catch a thief. The book is a great read. Memorable characters populate it. Sir Francis Drake, Lord Nelson, King Philip of Spain, the Duke of Medina Sidonia, and Captain James Cook to name a few. The demands of command, the dreams of glory and the nightmares of defeat are brought out vividly. Dry technical details are brought to life and illuminate the fog of battle. The portrayals of the horrors of war, the details of lives of the human beings that fought and died on the ships are woven with the flow of larger events to create an excellent popular history.

"To Rule The Waves - How The British Navy Shaped The Modern World" is an engaging and

enjoyable read! It spans centuries from the days of Francis Drake to the war in the Falklands and the author does a very good job of making a book of such wide scope and covering so many eras very enlightening and enjoyable. The book covers the British navy beginning with the privateers of the Elizabethan age that preyed upon ships of the "Spanish Main" and helped turn back the Armada. The author covers the history of English fleets against Spain, Holland, the many wars with France from Louis XIV to Napoleon as well as the Germans in two world wars. All the while, the author gives us insight into life in the navy for officers and seamen during these time periods. We learn much about the naval strategies and tactics employed (successes and failures) by both the British and their opponents. The author does a fine job of relating the importance of the technology that affected the wars at sea as well as how they were adopted. He brings the men who shaped the British navy to life for the readers, both their virtues and their vices. The author writes with a sense of genuine admiration for the Royal Navy and its predecessors - and here we come across the negatives of this book. Unfortunately, the author sometimes chooses to gloss over some failures and defeats. He has a tendency to explain away the Royal Navy's often being "behind the curve" in terms of technology. He sometimes overstates the importance of the British navy on history. For an example, the author states that the sinking of two RN battleships of Force Z by the Japanese as more significant than the attack on Pearl Harbor! Despite the negatives, this is such a well-written and enjoyable read that does indeed give the reader an idea of how important the navy was to Britain over such a long period of time (though, not nearly as important as the author would have us believe) I'm willing to still recommend it with four stars.

Arthur Herman is the big reason to read this history of the canvas-sailed British navy,. His research is impeccable, his style reads like a novel and this edition was available for a great price and arrived on time. More of these, please

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