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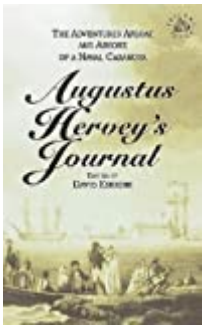

David Erskine, ed. *The Adventures Afloat and Ashore of a Naval Casanova: Augustus Hervey's Journal.* Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 2004. xxxv + 349 pp. $34.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-86176-123-1.

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Captain Augustus Hervey: A Practiced Seducer and First-Class Naval Officer

This book contains a detailed narrative of personal experience written by a British naval officer when he was a captain, both in war and time of peace, during the years 1746 to 1759. To this reviewer's knowledge the original edition of 1953 was never reviewed in a scholarly journal, yet in the fifty years since its publication, writers of naval history have often consulted it. The object of this review is not only to offer a glimpse of its unusual contents, but also to deal with its problematical value as an original source. It may be mentioned that David Erskine's (1953) introduction is well informed and felicitous, and his footnotes are so useful that one wishes for more of them.

The current edition is simply a reprinting. Only the cover with an altered title that dubs Augustus Hervey a "naval Casanova" is new. Young Captain Hervey's inclinations and conduct appear to justify the appellation; his narrative is, however, generally discreet in its avoidance of physical details. A few passages were cut out of the manuscript by some unknown hand before Erskine (a member of the family) edited the journal for publication. He eliminated, "for reasons of taste" (p. xxxv), only one phrase.

It is obvious that Hervey drew on his wealth from prize money to reward willing women, sometimes with cash. Only once does he mention keeping a woman on board, a Mademoiselle Sarrazin from Marseilles, with her maid. She was occasionally seasick, but otherwise, he writes, "a delightful fine woman … cheerful and ready to oblige" (pp. 147, 163). She remained on the frigate for six months in 1752-53, after which he gave her Â£360. That is all he says about it. Hervey was evidently a charming conversationalist and practiced seducer, and he plainly liked the company of women; the matter-of-fact style of the memoir sidesteps passion, however.

Readers interested in the attitudes, amusements, and private transactions for pleasure of mid-eighteenth-century high society will be gratified. Much of what is recorded takes place or is noted ashore–more in Paris, Genoa, Leghorn, and Lisbon than in London. Hervey was a cosmopolitan *bon vivant*: opera, theater, dinner parties, and all-night balls were his favorite pastimes. As second son of the earl of Bristol (a title he inherited near the end of his life) his entree into elite European circles

was assured, and he amply reciprocated the hospitality with dinner parties aboard his ship in harbor. Regarding the common people of the various countries, however, Hervey provides us with nothing, except to comment on whether they hated the French.

The journal displays the variety of activities of a British warship in the Mediterranean. Some of these were in pursuit of private gain. Royal Navy captains were not allowed, as French officers were, to carry merchandise, but the rules permitted them to employ their ships as armored trucks for merchants and governments who needed to transport money. The one-percent fee was handsome, and Hervey was one of many captains who dallied in port to maximize his earnings from this source. In 1752 he lingered at Lisbon for five months–spending most of the time chasing women, it seems–until quantities of coin and bullion were ready to be shipped from there and from Cadiz into the Mediterranean. The aspects of an active officer's life that are seldom revealed in official records–the sorts of things that Patrick O'Brian needed to find out when he created Jack Aubrey–may be looked for here, but, unfortunately, Hervey's memoir ignores his ship's company, even his lieutenants. He notes his anxiety to get 150 of his crew restored to his ship after a major repair, but otherwise seamen are invisible.

Over 20 percent of the book (appendices included) concerns the loss of Minorca. While strategy was being deliberated in London, Hervey was at Port Mahon attending meetings devoted to organizing defensive measures against the increasingly ominous French threat to the island. When Byng arrived Hervey was keenly aware that the admiral had been sent out too late and should have been given three or four more ships. His bitter criticisms of the Admiralty and leaders of government for allowing these lapses were aggravated by his long-standing hatred for Anson, the First Lord of the Admiralty, who was indeed responsible for failing to provide Byng with fleet preponderance over the Toulon squadron. The circumstances of Admiral John Byng's failure, his subsequent court-martial, and the course of events that led to his execution were matters about which Hervey was passionate.

After Byng was charged under an article of war that mandated the death penalty, Hervey, who had to come home as a witness, undertook to lead the admiral's defense, writing pamphlets and preparing for the court-martial. He was a skillful writer with the mind and spirit of a first-rate litigator, and he gave it his all. The account he provides of what transpired in the Mediterranean and in England during these fateful months is gripping, and no historian can ignore it, though some have too readily assumed its complete veracity.

Hervey's prominent role in Byng's defense raises the question of whether, considering the dreadful outcome, he helped or hurt the admiral. For all his energy, intelligence, and verbal skill, he may have made the admiral's situation worse. First, everyone in the naval profession knew that he was immensely "obliged to Mr. Byng" (Henry Fox's words, p. 323). How true this was is revealed by the journal (pp. 45-47, 53-55, 64): he owed to Byng's initiatives not only his promotion to post captain, but also the "favorite" orders that enabled him to cruise for prizes in 1747-48, whereby he netted Â£9,000. Naval gossip about such matters ensured that Hervey's credibility as Byng's advocate would be discounted. The second factor was political. Prior to the Minorca debacle Byng had been apolitical. Hervey, by contrast, was a passionately partisan adherent of the Leicester House opposition who hoped that the governing ministers would be hung. The ministers would be forced to resign (Anson with them), but that did not save Byng from condemnation and death. Perhaps moderate opinion had no chance anyway, but Hervey's role did not encourage it.

Hervey tells us that he offered strategic advice to fleet commanders in the Mediterranean between 1756 and 1758. Here it must be said that notwithstanding his conduct as an aristocratic playboy, he was a first-rate naval officer, truly dedicated to the service whenever there was an important mission at hand. In 1759, off Brest, his bravery, audacity, and tactical resourcefulness were prominently on display, and he continued to accomplish important services with distinction until the war ended. (The journal terminates in mid-1759, but Erskine prints some interesting letters pertaining to that year.) Hervey was not just an able sea officer; he was intelligent, well informed and articulate–a man of "parts." Unsurprisingly, then, the strategic advice he gave to superior officers as it is recorded here is analytically astute and remarkable in its degree of foresight.

Unfortunately, a historian cannot be sure that it truly represents foresight because this document is not an authentic journal but, rather, a memoir that was compiled between 1767 and 1770. When Hervey wrote it up he must have worked from a rough diary (dates and locations are precise) and he understandably retained the form of a journal. The question therefore arises: Regarding the strategic analyses and offerings of advice, did he, with advantage of hindsight, alter, delete, or add? Per-

haps he essentially reproduced his original thoughts, but readers need to be aware that the document was written up some years afterwards. At one point Hervey remarks, "I write this over purely for my own satisfaction of recalling to my memory.... I pursue the thread of it, just as I had set it down every day of my life as it happened" (p. 91, see also pp. 95-96). No explanation what "the thread" means; so the memoir (which he did not intend to publish) must be used with caution. Yet it is packed with detailed information, most of which is surely authentic. Whatever doubts one may have, this is a very valuable source-book for mid-eighteenth-century naval history, a period for which material of this kind is scarce.

There is one other important caveat. Although Erskine observes that the naval officer corps of Hervey's day was "riddled with politics" (p. xvii), that is a misleading statement and no one should suppose that naval officers in general had the instinctively political disposition that Hervey had. Patronage was indeed fundamental, but it often crossed political lines, and Hervey's own career was a case in point. He averred, in 1757, that Anson "had ever been very adverse" to him (p. 253). This was almost certainly true on a personal level, and Hervey's energetic (and justified) opposition to one of Anson's proposed naval reforms in 1749 had provided the First Lord with some reason to mark him out as a political opponent, yet in 1751 Anson gave him a frigate in the Mediterranean (in peacetime), an assignment that countless other deserving officers very much desired. Hervey took the appointment as his due and went on hating Anson. His mother, a very sensible woman–she, too, was effective with a pen–cautioned him against behaving in so intensively partisan a manner. After both Hawke and Anson warmly praised his conduct off Brest in 1759, his mother asked him to stop blowing on the embers of enmity, but he would not do it. Wherever his politics and prejudices were in the mix, Hervey must be considered a less than reliable witness.

This reviewer's enjoyment in reading the journal would have been greater if the man were more likable. Hervey's style is smooth, informal, and concise, but also supercilious (a posture less common in eighteenth-century English memoirs than some people might think), and this style when joined to Hervey's habit of detecting narrowly selfish or factional motivations behind the deeds of others is a bit off-putting. Although impatience with the lassitude and stupidity that he thought he saw all around him was sometimes justified, his generally mean-spirited view of other men (but not women) is hard to accept. He rarely has a word of praise for another officer. When viewing Hervey's professional career one might therefore call to mind not only his very considerable merits as a naval officer, but also the forbearance of certain senior admirals who were aware of his personal and political animosity towards them but overlooked it so that the service might benefit.

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