

The Path of a Lieutenant

The Begin



In this book, you will find a young officer in the Royal Navy of “Albion” (an imaginary nation rather like England) fighting at sea with “Gaul” in the time of Napoleonic Wars. But he isn’t just any young officer. Nobody knows it yet, but he will go to be one of the most famous officers in all of Albion. The “Naval Chronicle” will publish stories about him: sailors will tell tall tales about his adventures: one day, if he are lucky, people will write histories about him.

What makes him so notable is his leadership, an officer's most important duty is maintaining discipline and keeping the crew inspired, even in the face of death and destruction, the second most notable quality of this young officer is his strong patronage within the Royal Navy, as the child of an admiral, he has strong connections throughout the Royal Navy. They will always expect the best assignment and the most opportunity. This tells us what he is good at, but he can't be perfect, the greater weakness of this young man is his sailing skills, he doesn't sail as well as he could, but after all, isn't that what the sailing master and the master's mate are for?

The name of this young officer is Edward Smythe, he started work as a midshipman in an early age, but within the norms. His knowledge of trigonometry and his social polish are not what they could be, but his practical skills as a sailor and a gunner have benefited. Now he is about nineteen years old.

Edward lead by knowing the correct action and by reading the people around him and he sail based on knowledge of technique and expertise. But he will always remember that he will do better as an officer if he avoid situations that strain his weaknesses, and pursue strategies that play to his strengths.

With nineteen years old he starts to work in a ship call H.M.S. Courageous a big frigate. In the first week at the sea the captian found a enemy frigate, and is then Edward hears:

“Fire the starboard broadside!” shouts the Captian



Cannons roar as H.M.S. Courageous attacks the enemy frigate. As one of the junior officers - really, more of an officer in training - Edward commands three guns on Courageous's main gun deck. The guns of the battery next to him fire, leaping back against the heavy ropes that prevent them from smashing across the ship. Clouds of white smoke billow about him as he give his crew the command to ready the battery's cannons:

“Swab! Powder! Wadding! Shot! Run out the guns!”

The captian yells out:

“Fire as the guns bear!”

Edward give the hun crew orders to load and fire as quickly as they can, without waiting for the rest of the broadside. They swab out the bore, push in a charge of powder, push wadding down on the powder, load the shot, push the gun out through the gunport, and fire the cannon, with Edward commanding each step of the process:

“Swab, powder, wadding, shot, fire! Swab, powder, wadding, shot!”

The world turns upside down as the enemy's broadside rips through the hull some ten feet away. As the enemy cannonball tears through the side of the ship, giant splinters of wood fly through the air. One of the splinters, perhaps a yard long, rips through the stomach of Davies, a sailor under your command. A fragment of a cannon ball smashes Fisher's arm, mangling it horribly. Edward sailores seem stunned by the carnage, standig in shock while Davies and Fisher scream in agony. While the battle rages around Edward, he rush over to Davies and Fisher.

Their wounds are both bad - even with his prompt assistance, they may not live. Sill, he can help, and it was he does, bandaging their wounds and personally taking them to the surgeon in the cockpit. As Edward return to his station, he see a frown on the face of the lieutenant in command of his broadside. Not all officers would be willing to prioritize the wounds of sailors in the midst of a battle. But what else could he do?

He have dealt with the injured, in a fashion. Now, he need to keep firing his guns, but in the midst of all the excitement Edward shout:

“Swab the bore!”

The men under his command lift the sponge plunger and smash it down into the gun’s muzzle to extinguish any stray sparks that might cause the powder to ignite prematurely. The gun crew quickly rams in the powder, loads the shot and runs out the gun.

Edward give the word, and the senior rating touches the fuse to the touchhole. He flinch unconsciously against the expected explosion, but nothing happens. Edward wait a moment and realize what happened - the powder was already in the bore when he swabbed it out. Because the powder got wet, the gun could not fire.

It's embarrassing, but it could have been much, much worse. Edward give orders for his men to insert the screw and to clear the load from the gun manually, and after a delay of a few minutes, Edward are able to return the gun to service. The lieutenant commanding the broadside noticed, however, and your patronage suffers slightly.

The battle rages on, but finally the Gaulish ship hauls down its colors and surrenders. In the aftermath of the battle, a young midshipman runs up to Edward:

“Captian’s compliments, sir, and he askes you to report to the quarterdeck.”

When Edward get to the quarterdeck, the Captian looks over at him:

“Mr. Smythe! I’m rating you as an Acting-Lieutenant. Take a section of twenty men across to prize and assume command. Make any necessary repairs and set sail for any Albionish port.”

“Aye aye, sir! Thank you, sir!” Edward responds

He quickly gather the mens and head across on his first command. As he prepare to leave Courageous, he run into Mr. Bryce, the second lieutenant.

“Well, well, well! ‘Acting-Lieutenant’ Smythe!” he says, grinning widely and slapping Edward on the back. “I know you’ll do sashingly with your first command: I have the utmost confidence in you!”

“Thank you, sir” Edward reply, touching his hat in salute.

Just at that moment, first lieutenant Pigot rounds the corner:

“Mr. Smythe” he remarks, somewhat stiffly. “Fine piece of luck you’ve had.”

Pigot, with over twenty-five years of experience, is by far the most senior lieutenant on board - perhaps in the whole fleet - but it’s not to his credit. He’s too incompetent to earn a promotion to commander; he’s watched countless younger, more competent lieutenants pass him by, while he racks up years of “valuable experience”. All he has to show for it is the power to boss others lieutenants around imperiously, and he rarely misses an opportunity.

“Luck has not a bit to do with it, I say!” Bryce counters cheerfully.

“Well, go on then! Don’t want to keep the prize waiting!”

“Aye aye, sir!” Edward responds

He make his way across to the prize ship with his detachment of 20 men. Edward are the only officer, but he have Jones, a master’s mate, with he as his second-in-comand. The Gaulish ship is a 36-gun frigate - a square-rigged three-masted ship with an ordinary crew complement of 250 men, but his detachment of 20 will be sufficient to sail the prize. Warships carry much larger crews than similarly merchant ships because of the need to staff the broadsides, as well as to have men available for detached duties such as prize crews. And, of course, the larger crew size allows for a substantial number of casualties before the ship is incapacitated.

The long and the short of it is that Edward can fairly easily sail the frigate, but his prisoners outnumber his roughly 10 to 1, even taking into account the substantial losses they took before striking their colors. As Edward arrive, he quickly send some

of the men to bring the prisoners below and to lock them in the hold, where they will spend the rest of the voyage.

A Gaulish officer, no more than a few years older than Edward, approaches him and offers his sword in surrender. It addresses Edward in Gaulish.

“I believe you are the officer of the prize party, sir?”
he says

Given his social class, Edward tutors taught him Gaulish as a matter of course. He understand him perfectly and reply:

“I am. Acting-Lieutenant Edward Smythe of H.M.S. Courageous”

The Gaulish officer look at him and say:

“I am Lieutenant Villeneuve of the Gaulish Republican Navy. During the battle, the more senior lieutenants were all killed, and the Captian suffered shortly after we struck our colors. I am now the senior active officer of this ship.”

“I understand, sir” Edward reply. “You understand that we now command this prize?”

He nods:

“Alas, I do. I offer you my parole, sir” With that, Villeneuve has promised not to seek to escape, and not to interfere in Edwards efforts to steer the ship.

“Of course. I accept your parole.” You hand his sword back to him, producing a gratefil smile. “I trust you will join me in the Captian’s cabin for dinner?”

“With pleasure, sir. Thank you.”

Jones approaches you a short while later. “So that’s it then, sir? The bloody Gaul spends hours trying to kill us, does kill a lot of good men, and then after the battle it’s all nicey-nicey? His lot murdered Davies, but we’re supposed to not care after the battle is over?”

“I understand that it hurts, Jones. We all lost friends today. But there are rules about how wars are fought. We may not like the rules, but we still have to follow them” Edwards explain. “War is a terrible thing, but without those rules it would be even worse. Do you understand?”

“Yes, sir” say Jones, although it doesn’t seem that he does. “But why should we trust their officers but not their men?”

“Because I know that Lieutenant Villeneuve has been taught for years that nothing is more important than his honor. He would rather die than break his parole.” Edward explain

“If you say so, sir” Jones respond

A few days later, Lieutenant Villeneuve comes to you with a question.

“Sir” he inquires, “may we have access to some additional medical supplies? A member of our crew suffered a compound fracture; without further attention, he may die.”

Edward make the choice to provide the medical supplie and seem to be getting along with Vileneuve handsomely!

“Thank you sir. Thank you.” says Villeneuve

The next several days pass smoothly. Edward get used to the routine of passing watches, even with the new experience of commanding the ship. The process of trimming the sails, taking his bearings, and setting the course is nerve-wracking - never before have his decisions been the final word

, leading a ship either on a safe and direct course to his destination or towards disaster. But the weather is blessedly easy, with a steady breeze but clear skies, and Edward goes through the process, relying on his training and his experience.

On the fifth day, Jones comes to Edward with a disturbing piece of news. "I've found something below deck that I need to bring your attention, sir."

"What is it, Jones?"

"We're taking water in the hold. We'd missed the hole at the first because it's beneath the waterline."

Sure enough, he's right. Edward orders the crew to start pumping out the water; with Jones's help, they manage to patch the hole in time to prevent any further damage to the ship.

On the sixth day, one of his men calls down to the deck. "Sail to lee!"

“What sort of ship is it?” he call back, as he search with his spyglass.

After a minute, the sailor calls back, “She looks to be a Gaulish sloop-of-war, sir.”

A sloop-of-war ... That presents Edward with a difficult choice. A sloop carries no more than 20 guns, and often fewer. What’s more, a sloop’s gun will be of lighter weight than those of a frigate. If he had a full crew, he could easily capture her. But with only a prize crew at his disposal, the sloop would have a much greater rate of fire and substantially larger number of men.

Edward decides to attempt to capture the enemy sloop through a clever ambush, his plan is to pretend to be a crippled ship in need of assistance. When they approach to within pistol shot range, threaten them with a full broadside.

Edward fake an accident, positioning some sailcloth to make it look like one of his yardarms has fallen, but with only two lines to cut to make the whole wreckage fall away. He then run up the old Gaulish flag that he captured along with the prize as the sloop approaches. As the enemy sloop approaches, the Gaulish captian must realize that something is off. Perhaps them went too obvious in loading the guns, or perhaps the fake wreckage was not as convicing as Edward thought, or perhaps he could see that Edward uniform did not look right. In any event, he were not clever enough. The Gaulish sloop stop well within cannon shot but ahead of Edward , instead of positioned so that his broadside will bear, and runs up the private racognition signal that Gaulish ships use to confirm each other's identities. Sadly, he have no idea what the response should be. After an appropriate pause, the sloop opens fire, and he have no choice but to cut away the wreckage and engage.

As the ship and the sloop close with each other, Edward time the order to open fire with the guns carefully. The small crew has had the time to load the entire starboard broadside once, one cannon at a time, but he know that they will not have that luxury again. He have no choice but to endurance some long range cannon fire from the sloop - since he will only have one opportunity, he need to make the most of it.

Finally, Edward decide that the moment is right. He bring the ship around in a tight turn, presenting the starboard broadside directly towards the enemy sloop. He run from gun to gun, giving the order to fire each one as it bears on the enemy sloop.

As the cloud of smoke from the broadside clears, Edwards can see that the Gaulish sloop is damage, but not badly. The sloop answers his broadside with one of its own - its guns are light, but splinters still kill three of the men. The enemy captian seems to have understood the situation and maveuvers to board the prize ship.

Edward do his best to rally his crew, but it's obvious even to he that they are unwilling to fight (and likely to die) against overwhelming odds. As the Gaulish boarders cross over from their sloop to his prize ship, he fight them almost alone. Edward charge at the enemy swinging his sword, but he are quickly surrounded. Despite his best efforts, they knock his sword aside and stab him, driving him to the deck. After he fall, the surviving men promptly throw down their weapons. Edward survive, although it is a close thing, and some moths before he recover fully. The Gaulish have recaptured the prize, and his first command has ended in failure.

THE END?