Book Reviews

ARCTIC HELL-SHIP: THE VOYAGE OF HMS *ENTERPRISE* 1850–1855. William Barr. 2007. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press. xiv + 318 p, illustrated, soft cover. ISBN 970-0-88864-472-5. $Can34.95.
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Looking at the photograph of Richard Collinson on the back cover of Bill Barr's book, I wondered, would I have liked that man for a father or a grandfather? Without any hesitation my instincts said no. There is a hint of coldness in his gaze, severity in his expression, arrogance in his posture. His body language is intimidating. It seems to say, 'don't mess with me or I'll have you flogged round the fleet.'

This was the man who took HMS *Enterprise* through Bering Strait, past Point Barrow, and a thousand miles east to Cambridge Bay; skilfully conned the deep-draught ship through the reef-filled and uncharted waters between Victoria Island and the mainland; wintered three times in the Arctic; and returned to England more than five years later, having sailed around the world. In 1889 Admiral Sir George Henry Richards, himself an Arctic veteran, wrote, 'My own view has always been that the voyage of the *Enterprise* was the most remarkable of all' (Collinson 1889: x).

The extraordinary achievement of Captain Collinson, RN, was described posthumously in a book not published until 34 years later, consisting of his shipboard journal edited by his brother Thomas (Collinson 1889). Until now, no other detailed account of the voyage has been available in print, so historians have depended largely on that one book for their assessment of Collinson. In most of the Franklin search expeditions, the commanders had the privilege of publishing the official narrative. Their books were generally well written, beautifully illustrated, and superbly printed, but they represented only one version of events. Other officers were discouraged, if not expressly forbidden, from submitting their journals for publication. This raises an important question for both readers and writers. To what extent can a single account, written by the leader of the expedition, be considered reliable?

For a century and a half, partial journals written by Collinson's second master, Francis Skead, and his gunroom steward, Richard Shingleton, have been lying dormant in archives at the Scott Polar Research Institute and the Vancouver Maritime Museum, anxious to come out of the closet and tell their own story. Barr has brought those mute testimonies to life and used them, in conjunction with Admiralty records such as order books and letter books, to create a more balanced picture of the man and the voyage. What he has discovered is that Collinson carefully excluded a number of incidents from the supposedly complete day-to-day journal that later became the book, so that he would appear in the best possible light. The missing details relate to the disciplinary measures he took with his officers, which by the standards of any era appear to have been discriminatory, malicious, and grossly unfair.

While Collinson maintained good relations with his seamen and marines, he pounced on his officers at the slightest provocation — for comments allegedly made in their mess, for quarrelling, for using bad language, for gambling (cumulative earnings a few shillings), for not submitting their work books, and so on. Although the offences appear to have been trivial, the punishments were not. Second master Skead was placed under open arrest in March 1852. Lieutenant Parkes followed in October 1852, and Lieutenant Phayre in July 1853. In July 1854, Skead was placed under close arrest and Lieutenant Jago (the only executive officer left) joined him a month later. To fill their empty shoes Collinson took the unusual step of appointing the two ice mates (former whalemen), the quartermaster, and even the carpenter, as watch-keeping officers.

In Hong Kong, as they were proceeding homeward, Collinson formally requested that the four officers under arrest be court-martialled. The commander-in-chief of the China station sensibly denied the request, but this rebuff did not deter Collinson from seeking vengeance on those who, in his warped perception, had failed in their duty at some time during the voyage, or had offended him in some way. As soon as he arrived in England he made the same request to the Admiralty. (By this time Skead had been under arrest for more than three years). The accused officers countered with a demand for Collinson's court-martial, a serious action that they had been considering for many months.

Reluctant to hang more dirty laundry out in plain view so soon after McClure and Belcher had abandoned five ships in the Arctic ice and several commanders had been court-martialled, the Admiralty decided to quietly let the matter drop. Collinson retired without the recognition he expected for his noteworthy navigational feats. Those honours fell instead on his subordinate McClure, who had got HMS *Investigator* inextricably beset at Mercy Bay on the north coast of Banks Island, but had had the good luck to be rescued by Belcher's expedition and conveyed east to Beechey Island, for which he was rewarded as the discoverer of the Northwest Passage. In fact, Collinson

had accomplished more than McClure, and had managed to bring his ship safely home.

A quarter-century after the voyage of *Enterprise*, a brief biographical sketch of Collinson concluded with these words: 'It is universally regretted among geographers, that Admiral Collinson has never published his narrative of his very important Arctic voyage' (Markham 1875: 11). When the narrative was at last published 14 years later — by which time Collinson was dead — it contained no mention of arresting his officers. He had succeeded in laying before the public a record that was misleading because it gave the impression of a happy ship (Collinson 1889).

Although the voyage is justly famous for Collinson's penetration into the central Arctic, his officers considered him too cautious. They were disappointed when he took the long way around the Aleutian Islands instead of cutting through gaps, when he retreated from Point Barrow in 1850 to winter at Hong Kong, when he hesitated to follow the shore lead along the north Alaska coast in 1851, and when he turned back from Cambridge Bay in 1853. The latter decision was made after the discovery of a door frame that appeared to have drifted from one of Franklin's ships somewhere to the east. How differently things might have turned out if they had continued on to King William Island!

In addition to the disciplinary incidents that Barr has brought to our attention, the book contains many interesting details about the expedition. Frequent visits by Inupiat, Inuit, and, on once occasion, Gwich'in Indians, revealed striking cultural differences from west to east as the ship proceeded from a region crisscrossed by Russian fur traders and American whalers into one in which contact with whites had been rare. Guns, tobacco, and rum were in high demand in Bering Strait, but the relatively primitive bow-wielding hunters of Victoria Island preferred beads and buttons. Like Parry and others before him, Collinson was a promoter of winter activities such as plays and concerts. Outside games required an ingenious use of local materials. Snow blocks comprised the walls, and harbour ice the surface, of a skittle alley. A slab of freshwater ice formed the smooth top of a billiard table made of ice blocks, with pockets and cushions crafted out of walrus-hide.

Quoting liberally from primary documents, Barr has presented a fascinating description of the *Enterprise*'s voyage. One realizes how vast and complex the search for Franklin was. A naval steamer was waiting to tow the ship through the Strait of Magellan; a ship was posted in Alaska to meet Franklin; supply ships were carrying supplies north from Hawaii; fur trade posts and native people were on the lookout; message balloons were floating through the Arctic air space. Everything had to be arranged in London, with instructions dispatched round the world by ship, well in advance.

The book contains four maps, a studio portrait of Collinson, and 16 beautiful colour reproductions of paintings by the assistant-surgeon Edward Adams. Aside from the repetition of a sentence on page xi the text appears to be free of typos. Notes, a bibliography, and an index are provided. Sources would be easier to identify, however, if the relevant text pages, or at least the title of the appropriate chapter, were indicated at the head of each page of notes.

Arctic hell-ship is a noteworthy addition to the literature of the Franklin Search, one that provides new facts and insights. (W. Gillies Ross, Bishop's University, Lennoxville, Quebec J1M 1Z7, Canada.)

References

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Markham, C.R. 1875. *The Arctic Navy list; or, a century of Arctic & Antarctic officers, 1773–1873*. London and Portsmouth: Griffin.

THE OFFICIAL HISTORY OF THE FALKLANDS CAMPAIGN. VOLUME II: WAR AND DIPLOMACY. Lawrence Freedman. 2007. London and New York: Routledge. xxxvi + 859 p, illustrated, soft cover. ISBN 978-0-415-41911-6. £24.99.
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This is the paperback, second edition of Volume II of this book, which was originally published in 2005. It presents a comprehensive account of the Falkland Islands hostilities of early 1982 between the United Kingdom and Argentina. The first volume set out the history of the dispute with Argentina together with an account of the years of intermittent negotiation that had failed to find any resolution to it. The present volume starts with the invasion of the islands by Argentine forces, and with the consequent sending of a task force with the capability of expelling them and the intense, and in the end futile, political activity directed towards reaching a peaceful solution. Following this, a full account of the hostilities themselves is given together with a study of the aftermath up to the restoration of diplomatic relations between the two countries in 1990. The author states that that while he had 'many offers of help from Buenos Aires,' his intention is to present 'British policy and strategy,' intending at the same time to report the Argentine position 'fairly.'

Official histories have the great advantage that the historian has, or should have, unrestricted access to all the relevant government papers. The author describes these as 'quite staggering' in volume and permits himself the wry observation that on occasion 'the amount of signal traffic significantly slowed the transmission of signals.' The other point about official histories is that they have a tradition of being rather bland, indeed boring, in tone. This is definitely not the case with the present volume. There are throughout continuous and timely reminders of the huge risks that were being accepted by the government and, by implication, by the people of