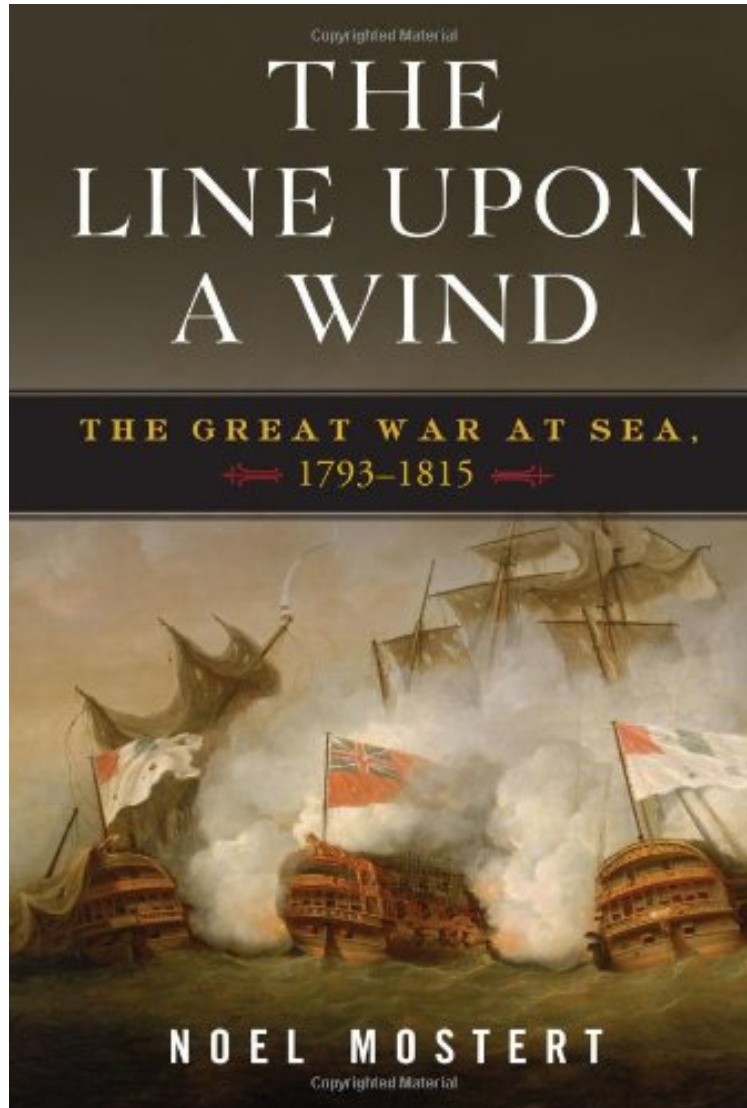


[Download] The Line Upon a Wind: The Great War at Sea, 1793-1815

## The Line Upon a Wind: The Great War at Sea, 1793-1815

Noel Mostert

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**Noel Mostert : The Line Upon a Wind: The Great War at Sea, 1793-1815** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Line Upon a Wind: The Great War at Sea, 1793-1815:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Epic but Anglo-Centric and Patchy History of the Great War at SeaBy AWNoel Mostert has tackled the daunting task of covering the entire course of the story at sea during the French Revolution and the age of Napoleon—a nearly 25 year period of commerce, privateering, and war on the oceans. It is an epic story and Mostert provides an appropriately matched epic narrative. He devotes more than 700 pages to the topic, and yet still only scratches the surface. Overall, it is an excellent book that provides an adequate

overview of the most intense and destructive conflict on the sea during the “Age of Sail.” It falls short of five stars because of its overwhelming focus on Britain (rather than a more balanced narrative) and because of its frequent “patchwork” storytelling—jumping from one story to another without enough overview, context, and focus. Mostert starts the story with several chapters covering the role of the ocean in the development in civilization and the accompanying rise of commerce and navies. This background and overview leading up to what Mostert calls the “Great War” (not World War I but the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars) is excellent and informative. The second part of the book begins the narrative of the Great War up to the pivotal Battle of Trafalgar in 1805. The third and final part takes the Great War to its conclusion with Napoleon’s final defeat (and also extensively covers the American-British War of 1812). The book is heavily focused on the British story to the exclusion of most other nations. Mostert provides adequate overviews of the general political situations throughout the conflict, but nearly all of his protagonists are British and most of the events he covers are written with a clear British perspective. To be clear, Mostert is not making a political statement about who was “right and wrong” in this conflict. But it leaves the reader wanting to know more about the French and Spanish sailors and about the perspectives of these nations’ naval and commercial leaders. We never really get that perspective in the book. For the first half of the work, we mostly follow none other than Horatio Nelson. Nelson’s personal story is interwoven and often the centerpiece of the larger narrative of events. This is hardly surprising given Nelson’s heroic historical stature and the enormous volume of sources focused on him. And Mostert does an excellent job of making the story of Nelson novel-like in its flow, providing plenty of page-turning interest in the reader. But after Nelson’s death at the Battle of Trafalgar, the book really does feel like it has lost its hero, and it never really recovers the same exciting edge. Its centerpiece gone, the second half of the book is mostly a patchwork history of various characters and events. The coverage is mostly chronological, but without the core storytelling mechanism of Nelson, it does not feel as fluid. Though Nelson is a controversial and exciting character, too little is detailed of his opponents and their stories, primarily the French naval leaders Villeneuve, Brueys, and Bruix (Villeneuve gets the most coverage because of his notoriety and suspicious death, but not nearly enough to balance the perspectives in the book). As it stands, Mostert’s central French character is Napoleon himself. Again understandable, but in a book with a scope as specific and yet epic as this one (the conflict at sea), should we not expect more focus on some less-familiar characters from both sides of the conflict? Mostert is a journalist and not an historian, and if you care about that sort of thing you may not like aspects of the book. Where Mostert truly shines as an author is in storytelling. His most brilliant chapters are the ones that focus on an exciting story or battle, and he narrates with flair and enthusiasm. But the overarching nature of the narrative is superficiality, with little of the depth or analysis that one may expect from an historian/academic writing a book of this nature. The entirety of the book is generally chronological, with occasional tangential chapters covering in detail an event or character. But the book has major gaps in its strategic overview at critical stages. For example, after Trafalgar in 1805, there is almost nothing on the naval conflict between France and Britain until 1808. Yes, the French Toulon fleet was destroyed, but the French navy was doing something during that time, even if it was training within its fortified harbors. Mostert covers a few frigate battles in his book, but there could have been much more devoted to these smaller conflicts, which he reports were continuous throughout the war. Generally speaking the book needs more “strategic interludes”—points or chapters where Mostert pulls us back to the 30,000 foot view and takes stock of the state of the oceanic world. Another item that is missing is more frequent reporting on naval and commercial metrics—how many ships did the belligerents have at various points in the conflict and how much commercial shipping was taking place, etc. These metrics would have helped to provide crucial context and detail for understanding the dispositions and decision making of the political leaders. The book is generally easy to read and has short chapters that provide the reader with plenty of natural stopping/bookmarking places. Frequently interrupted or busy readers may find this to be a major plus. There are some editing blunders that are distracting—I specifically remember one glaringly wrong date. Still, except for the previously described patchiness in some of the narrative, the book was easy to follow and fun to read. I would recommend this book for anyone interested in a broad analysis of the war at sea during the French Revolution and Napoleonic eras. I believe it will primarily appeal to readers who have some background on the time period but lacking in significant knowledge of the commercial and naval struggle at sea.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A tale of adventure and conflict ....By Herbert BenkelAs a casual historian, I came upon this history by accident. One day I read a review here at , and I decided to read it. Reading this book takes some minor resolve. In the beginning it appears to be a dry history, but very quickly it turns to a riveting tale of adventure and conflict. I enjoyed every minute I spent reading this book. I finished it a few minutes ago, and felt that the concluding chapter (Postscript) summed up the entire book to bring its relevance to 2016. Again, at 729 pages it is complex and requires concentration. Stick with it, and you will receive a great reward at the end....0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Excellent overall. Mostert deals mainly with naval conflicts during ...By Steven B. Excellent overall. Mostert deals mainly with naval conflicts during the Great War, but of course that cannot be done properly without discussing the military campaigns happening on land at the same time, which he does adequately. I bought this book hoping to learn about Admiral Nelson, and Mostert provides a vivid picture of the man which includes excerpts from his correspondence. In fact, the book is full of pieces from writings of the time,

including accounts by common seamen. One also gets to know what Napoleon was up to on land at this time, and I learned enough about the Emperor to glimpse his depth and genius as well as his driving mania. If you are fascinated by the "nuts and bolts" of wooden ships, buy this book. (My copy, by the way, had two identical sets of photo pages, which bothers me, so yours might too.) My final comment is that Mostert leaves out articles and is really stingy with commas, which can be forgiven. I guess Mostert is British.

The thrilling story of Britain's death-struggle with Revolutionary France, wherein Napoleon is checkmated by Nelson's brilliant naval exploits. In February 1793 France declared war on Britain, and for the next twenty-two years the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars raged. This was to be the longest, cruelest war ever fought at sea, comparable in scale only to the Second World War. New naval tactics were brought to bear, along with such unheard-of weapons as rockets, torpedoes, and submarines. The war on land saw the rise of the greatest soldier the world had ever known?Napoleon Buonaparte?whose vast ambition was thwarted by a genius he never met in person or in battle: Admiral Horatio Nelson.Noel Mostert's narrative ranges from the Mediterranean to the West Indies, Egypt to Scandinavia, showing how land versus sea was the key to the outcome of these wars. He provides details of ship construction, tactics, and life on board. Above all he shows us the extraordinary characters that were the raw material of Patrick O'Brian's and C. S. Forester's magnificent novels.

From BooklistFor 22 years, the Napoleonic Wars ravaged Europe, toppled thrones, reshaped empires, and determined the diplomatic and political destinies of European nation-states for the next century. The land battles and chief military figures of those battles are familiar, even to many laypeople. The naval campaigns, perhaps less publicized, were equally as important in the defeat of Napoléon. Mostert, a former foreign correspondent, has written a stirring saga of these campaigns that is both comprehensive and easy to digest. Although Mostert doesn't neglect the technical aspects of naval warfare, he avoids the trap of allowing details to overwhelm his exciting narrative. This is a vast, fast-moving chronicle that ranges across great distances while examining a host of characters, both well known and relatively obscure. Mostert does justifiably place great emphasis on Admiral Nelson and the critical battle at Trafalgar. He also offers useful and interesting descriptions of less-prominent aspects of the wars, including conflicts with the Barbary pirates and the British struggles against the rise of American naval power. This is an outstanding survey of a prolonged struggle that helped shape world history. --Jay FreemanAbout the AuthorNoel Mostert was the Montreal Star correspondent in New York and Europe during the 1950s and has since reported for different American magazines from Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. He lives in Tangiers.