

# H-Net Reviews

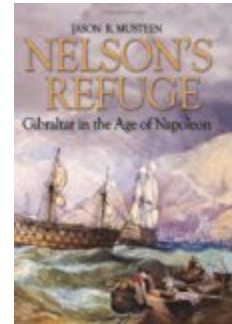
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Jason R. Musteen. *Nelson's Refuge: Gibraltar in the Age of Napoleon*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2011. 251 pp. \$29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-59114-545-5.

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey



## The Rock of Gibraltar during the Napoleonic Wars

The Rock of Gibraltar, for all of its importance as a staging point and supply depot in British military and naval history, has long been without a comprehensive history of its use as such during periods of increased British activity in the Mediterranean. Lieutenant Colonel Jason Musteen aims to provide an in-depth account of British Gibraltar for one well-known period of activity, the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. Despite its title, *Nelson's Refuge: Gibraltar in the Age of Napoleon* focuses more on Gibraltar itself than the more well-known naval exploits of Admiral Horatio Nelson, and Musteen carries the story of Gibraltar past Nelson's death in 1805 up through the end of the Napoleonic era in 1815. Musteen examines Gibraltar's transformation from "a defensive military fortress" to "an offensive base capable of rapidly deploying forces," and concludes that this evolution played a major role in both British success at sea and in the Peninsular Campaign (pp. 137-138).

*Nelson's Refuge* begins with a brief overview of Gibraltar's history, including its official acquisition by the British in 1713. The author then shifts to the beginning of the French Revolutionary Wars. Chapters 2 and 3 provide chronological descriptions of the British naval operations that utilized Gibraltar as a base of supply, namely the occupation of Toulon in 1793, the Battle of Cape St. Vincent in 1797, and Napoleon's Egyptian campaign. It is with the fourth chapter that Musteen's excellent primary research and *Nelson's Refuge's* contribution to the literature become apparent. Two lesser-known naval conflicts involving British warships based

in Gibraltar are the subject here: the July 1801 Battle of Algeciras, a British defeat, and the Battle of the Gut of Gibraltar later that same month where the British made good their previous losses with the smashing of a small Franco-Spanish fleet. Both of these naval battles have rarely been studied in detail, and Musteen's research provides a clear picture of the nautical skirmishes that played a part in the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars.

Chapter 5 provides an account of the Duke of Kent's unhappy tenure as governor of Gibraltar from 1802 to 1803. Musteen again uses a great deal of primary research to shed light on the duke's implementation of severe disciplinary measures among Gibraltar's garrison and the ensuing attempted mutiny by British soldiers—however, Musteen remains impartial throughout his treatment of the affair. He then follows with a chapter on the scourge of "Gibraltar Fever," the disease that swept over the civilian and military population of the Rock throughout the period, and with especial ferocity in 1804. This section delves into the reasons for the epidemic as well as its treatment, and provides an intriguing blend of military and medical history. The author next covers the period between the Peace of Amiens through the Battle of Trafalgar in a brief chapter. The account of Nelson's time at Gibraltar and the Trafalgar engagement is perfectly serviceable, but more information on the repair of ships at Gibraltar after the battle would have been appreciated.

*Nelson's Refuge* shifts its focus slightly from this point, with the second half of the work dealing generally with Gibraltar's role in the Peninsular War. Chapter 8 explores General Sir Hew Dalrymple's time as commander of the Gibraltar garrison from 1806. Musteen takes a great interest in Dalrymple's career, and musters an impressive amount of research to rescue the general from the prevailing historical view that his career in Spain was a failure; rather, Musteen points to Dalrymple's covert contact with Spanish officials as an important step in establishing communication between the soon-to-be-allied powers. The endnotes for this chapter contain a very in-depth historiographical discussion of Dalrymple's career. The final three major chapters firmly establish Gibraltar as an offensive rather than defensive base, with chronological accounts of the various siege and defensive operations undertaken by Gibraltar troops and associated naval units during the Peninsular War. Here Musteen again brings an impressive amount of detail to a variety of smaller engagements: Fuengirola, Barrosa, Tarifa, and a variety of related local coastal and support operations receive their due here. However, the author never allows the narrative to become bogged down but keeps his account moving at a brisk pace. *Nelson's Refuge* concludes with a brief chapter summing up Gibraltar's transformation from defense to offense during the period in question. Supplementary material includes bibliographical information on key personages and a comparison table of equivalent ranks in the British, French, and Spanish armed forces.

Colonel Musteen has done an excellent job tracing the development of British Gibraltar from "an impregnable, yet largely symbolic, fortress" in 1793 to the "base of offensive action" that the Rock served as throughout the Peninsular War (p. 87). The author also devotes space throughout his work to the use of Gibraltar-based forces in early attempts at joint operations (pp. 14 and 142 are two examples), thus tying Gibraltar's role in the nineteenth century together with modern combined military operations in the twenty-first. Musteen's primary source research is superb. He utilizes Spanish, French, and British archival sources as well as the Gibraltar Government Archives; this new research is put to particularly good use in his chapters on little-studied aspects of Gibraltar's history such as the epidemic of 1804 and the contact between British and Spanish officials before the beginning of the Peninsular War. However, there are some small issues that appear in the work. The first is the

lack of any maps or diagrams. Maps of both Gibraltar itself and the surrounding Spanish coastline would have been useful, particularly in the later chapters devoted to various forces striking out from Gibraltar to points in Spain. The second concern is that the secondary source bibliography is quite sparse, particularly when compared to the author's strong primary source research. Musteen utilizes more secondary sources from the nineteenth century than the twenty-first, and many of the major secondary sources—William Laird Clowes's *The Royal Navy* (1897-1903), Alfred Thayer Mahan's *Life of Nelson* (1897), and Charles Oman's *History of the Peninsular War* (1902) are examples—are foundational but long-superseded accounts. Musteen does cite Charles Esdaile's recent *The Peninsular War* (2003) for that conflict, but the bibliography mentions no sources newer than the 1970s on Nelson's career—Roger Knight's *The Pursuit of Victory* (2005) and Nicholas Tracy's *Nelson's Battles* (revised edition, 2008), to name two, are more recent works that dedicate pages to Nelson's time at Gibraltar.

These nitpicks aside, *Nelson's Refuge* stands as an important contribution to both the military and broader histories of Gibraltar. As a general account of military and naval comings and goings on the Rock itself, *Nelson's Refuge* can be placed alongside William Jackson's *The Rock of the Gibraltarians* (revised edition, 2001) as the most comprehensive modern accounts. But Musteen's work truly shines in two areas. The first is his comprehensive examination of the many small naval, land, and amphibious operations that took place during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars using Gibraltar as a base of operations or supply depot, many of which have slipped through the cracks of previous histories. The second is the author's willingness to expand his focus to cover aspects of Gibraltar life not specifically related to the British armed forces; besides the impressive medical history of Gibraltar Fever, *Nelson's Refuge* delves into the cultural history of life on Gibraltar at various points, from the Duke of Kent's efforts to close local pubs to promote sobriety among his troops (pp. 56-57) to official concerns about a pro-French "fifth column" within the civilian population (pp. 91-93). With the recent releases of Colonel Musteen's volume and Stephen Constantine's *Community and Identity: The Making of Modern Gibraltar since 1704* (2009), the military and naval history of Gibraltar has begun to be integrated with medical, cultural, and social histories of the same, with intriguing and valuable results.

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