

June 12, 2018

To: Julian Stockwin

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Re: My review of *The Iberian Flame*

First of all, I want to thank you for the opportunity to review your latest *Kydd* novel. Being one of five chosen was my great good fortune. Like many, I became an avid reader of the British naval fiction genre by way of Patrick O'Brian in 2004, although I'd read with great pleasure the *Mutiny on the Bounty* trilogy in my youth. (*Doctor Dogbody's Leg* by James Norman Hall is still my favorite!)

I have "sailed" every sea with Lucky Jack Aubrey and Horatio Hornblower. I wept at the passing of Nathaniel Drinkwater, and have read countless other novels, many at your suggestion, including those of Captain Marryat. And as you can see, with your next volume, I must shift my *Kydd* collection to a longer, taller shelf. I have spent so many years now in literary gun rooms and forecastles that my own "American Broadcast English" has shown the effect.



At 63, I begin to wonder how soon I can retire from my business school faculty position and return to sea with a wig-maker's son from Guildford. When I hear of Captain Peter Puget, or Admirals Peter Rainier or James Vashon, or others whose names grace Pacific Northwest landmarks and waterways, I feel a connection with my British ancestors (the Sleight's of Lincolnshire). I climbed Mt. Rainier at 17, and spent my college summers on Hood Canal (named in honor of Admiral Lord Samuel Hood).

To be honest, you had me with the copper colored text on the dust jacket. THE IBERIAN FLAME indeed. After THE BALTIC PRIZE, I should be more careful what I read into your titles! 😊

Review:

The Iberian Flame proved to be complete and expansive. Of course the historical context framing a story dictates much of what can be believably fictionalized. While focused primarily on events in Spain and Portugal, it moved from Fontainebleau to Devonshire to the Adriatic and

back. It was helpful to have read the entire series, since many references to earlier events and ships added color to the tale and impacted the plot itself. The historical setting was established early, and the fictional overlay of the good Captain Sir Thomas Kydd was woven into that history with care. And, while the story was complete in itself, it left sufficient clues for the enthusiast of the genre to whet our appetite for the upcoming twenty-first volume, *A Sea of Gold*. One wonders how things will play out with Admiral Rowley and will the Basque Roads sketches by the midshipmen prove useful? No doubt our hero's "plot armor" will find him rising to new heights no matter how low he must tumble to get there. The *Kydd* series proved once again to be a most enjoyable way to hoist aboard one's European history.

The reality of warfare in the Napoleonic age was painted not just with heroism and derring-do, but also with its true and tragic nature honestly rendered. The book advances both the individual story of the hero of the series, but also the history of nations.

[Aside — As a Yank, one wonders if Capt. Kydd will see action across the pond in our War of 1812, except Napoleon's march on Moscow may prove more significant for that year!]

The plot complication brought about by trusting in false intelligence found itself twice in the current volume. One would have hoped Captain Kydd would have learned his lesson after being taken in by the French at Stralsund. And it must be an unfortunate fact of the historical genre that different authors employ similar scenarios since all draw from the same historical well. An army traveling a coastal road patrolled by their adversary's navy earn what fate awaits them.

Other thoughts that come to mind include:

- The maps in the forward are very appreciated, but inevitably amount to spoilers as they telegraph the venues for the coming action.
- Glimpses into the lives and character of great men like Collingwood and Moore are always appreciated.
- The need to interject a cameo by the sixth Earl of Farndon in each edition can seem contrived.

The dean of my business school (a Kiwi) insists I visit London one day to see Nelson's Column in Trafalgar Square. But my eldest daughter brought me a small piece of oak from *Victory* when she studied abroad in Great Britain. I'm having it mounted with the Geoff Hunt signed and numbered print *Victory Breaks the Enemy Line*. Your *Kydd* series will find a place in our library beside that reminder of October 21st. Heartfelt thanks for your good work.