Nelsons Trafalgar : The Battle That Changed the World by Roy Adkins

An explosive chronicle of historys greatest sea battle

In the tradition of Antony Beevors Stalingrad, Nelsons Trafalgar presents the definitive blow-by-blow account of the worlds most famous naval battle, when the British Royal Navy under Lord Horatio Nelson dealt a decisive blow to the forces of Napoleon. The Battle of Trafalgar comes boldly to life in this definitive work that re-creates those five momentous, earsplitting hours with unrivaled detail and intensity.

My Personal Review:
This is in the balance an excellent work of naval history and truly readable. It is a well-paced account of the pivotal naval battle of the Napoleonic Wars, where a British fleet commanded by Lord Horatio Nelson engaged the combined fleet of the Spanish and French near Cadiz. The British decisively defeated the Combined Fleet, effectively ending Napoleons naval ambitions and any question of a cross-channel invasion of England. Trafalgar was the last great naval battle between fleets of sailing ships, and led the way to the British domination of the seas during the 19th century.

The book is a page-turning, captivating account of the actual mechanics of a sea battle with sailing ships. Adkins has considerable skill in making dramatic even the preparations before the battle - for instance noting the chilling but necessary sand strewn on decks for aiding footing in slippery blood. The combat itself he describes with a cinematic vitality, his details of the five hours of combat endured by sailors on both sides evokes a truly hellish stew of violent chaos, splinters, and smoke. A glimpse of this reality was recently portrayed in the movie Master and Commander, where two contemporary ships blast away at point blank range with shattering violence.
The book makes considerable use of first person accounts, but these are predominantly British, as is the perspective of the book. In describing the aspects of the sailing ships the English perspective is given, usually with an added comment that French and Spanish conditions were similar. The decisive difference was in the clearly superior skill and training of the British sailors and gunners. And that made the difference in the battle.

Which leads me to what I think is the books one flaw - the emphasis on Nelson himself seems considerably misplaced. The title Nelsons Trafalgar is simply not born out by the argument of the book. There was very little strategic thinking or command tactical control of the battle - the shape of the battle took place on Nelsons plan roughly as the shape of the letter pi, with the English fleet making up the two legs colliding at a right angle to the French and dividing the latter into thirds. This was anticipated by the French admirals, and it is also unclear that this strategy gave the British any tactical advantage since the long range gunnery of the French and Spanish was so poor. Nelsons idea was to engage the combined fleet in a pell mell battle - in other words to create a situation where there was no tactical fleet control of the battle. Furthermore Nelson was mortally wounded at the outbreak of the battle. In these conditions the outcome of the battle was decided by the skill of the average British gunner. Adkins comments in this regard are nuanced but he clearly is uncritical of the glowing mythology built around Nelsons brilliance. He is better to listen to the commander of the French fleets comment, which he quotes: to any other Nation the loss of a Nelson would have been irreparable, but in the British Fleet of Cadiz, every captain was a Nelson.

For More 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price:
Nelsons Trafalgar : The Battle That Changed the World by Roy Adkins - 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price!