

HARD AS IRON?

Imagine you are captain of a ship. You have to make sure every officer and seaman obeys orders. Would you win their respect by kindness or be very tough? What sort of captain was Collingwood do you think?



Collingwood was Nelson's second-in-command at the Battle of Trafalgar 1805

National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London

The Captain, a well read man as well as a clever seaman, took it into his head one day that he would like to see the midshipmen (young officers) work their day's-work whilst he watched them from the quarter deck. They did so, but only three or four out of twelve or thirteen could do their jobs successfully, so calling those to him who had failed, he told them how poor they were. Suddenly, he took his penknife out of his pocket and cut off their pigtails close to their heads above the tie. Giving them to their owners, he told them to put them into their pockets and keep them there until such time as they could do a proper day's-work, when they might wear them again.

Jeffrey de Raigersfeld

'A better seaman - a better friend to seamen - a greater lover and greater defender of his country's rights and honour, never trod a quarterdeck. How careful he was to the health and comfort and happiness of his crew! A man who could not be happy under him, could have been happy nowhere; a look of displeasure from him was as bad as a dozen lashes at the gangway from another man.'

Landsman Hay