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Cloudisley Shovell

Cloudesley Shovell was born in November 1650 at Cockthorpe, Norfolk . His father was descended from a family who had property and standing in Norwich and his mother was descended from local gentry. Although not poor, the Shovells were by no means wealthy.

Shovell first went to sea in 1664 as a cabin boy in the care of a relative on his father's side, Sir Christopher Myngs. After Myngs died from wounds received during the Second Dutch War (1665-7), Shovell's career continued through the influence of another distant relation, Sir John Narborough. It is likely that he was with Narborough in the West Indies between 1667-1668, followed by a voyage to the South America 1669-1671. Although he had already been at sea for a number of years, Shovell's first official entry to the Navy as a Midshipman was made on 22 January 1672, on the *Royal Prince*, flagship of the Duke of York, where Narborough had been appointed the Duke's 1st Lieutenant. Both were to see action at the battles of Solebay (28 May 1672) and the battle of the Texel (11 August 1673). After Solebay, he moved, along with Narborough, to the *Fairfax* as Master's Mate and again to *Harwich* and finally *Henrietta*.

He was appointed 2nd Lieutenant of the *Henrietta* on 25th September 1673, and sailed to the Mediterranean to ratify a peace treaty with Algiers at Tunis and the redemption of English slaves with Narborough as Commander in Chief. Shovell must have assisted in the negotiations for he was awarded £100 (or pieces of eight). On conclusion of their business there, the squadron proceeded to the Barbary pirate stronghold Tripoli where another treaty was under threat. When the English claims were rebuffed, Narborough began a blockade of Tripoli that was to last for a year. During this time, Shovell followed Narborough back to the *Harwich* in 1675. While attempting to continue negotiations on behalf of his Commander in Chief, Shovell was able to observe the situation of the harbour in Tripoli and proposed a plan of attack. On the 14th January 1676, he commanded the boats of the fleet in an operation to burn the ships in Tripoli harbour. The surprise attack was successful and no English losses were recorded. For his endeavours, Shovell received £80 (or pieces of eight) from a highly delighted Narborough; a total of 1956 coins were distributed amongst all those who took part. However, the Dey of Tripoli did not seek an immediate peace and it was not until two months later after another attack on his ships outside harbour that he sought terms and a treaty was signed in March 1676. In a letter from the Admiralty, Samuel Pepys recorded Charles II's satisfaction with Shovell's actions. This included the King giving him a gold medal, on their return to England, worth £100, although this was not without some controversy. This was, however, the start of his rise to prominence.

After a winter back home, he re-joined Narborough on the *Plymouth*, as 1st Lieutenant on 16 April 1677. They were to return to the Mediterranean again to treat with the Algerians, who it was claimed had broken the previous treaty. In September 1677, after the death of Captain Harman, he was appointed to take command of the 5th rate 32 gun *Sapphire*, in which he served for two years. Following the departure of Narborough for England in 1679, Shovell spent the next nine years in operations against the Barbary pirates in the Mediterranean, capturing or assisting to capture several of their ships. Vice Admiral Arthur Herbert (later Earl of Torrington) appointed Shovell to command

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in a number of ships; *Phoenix* (April 1679), *Sapphire* (May 1679), *Nonsuch* (July 1680), *Sapphire* (September 1680), and the *James* (April 1681). He served in the *James* until his return to England in November 1686.

In June 1683, Shovell was faced with a diplomatic dilemma with the Spanish fleet. On returning to Cadiz, the Spanish Admiral, Conde de Acquila, demanded that Shovell's ship salute his flagship. Shovell refused saying that his orders forbade him to do so at which Acquila issued an ultimatum which if he did not comply, the *James* would be fired at by the Spanish. Hemmed in by the Spanish, Shovell was left with the choice of obeying orders and thereby maintaining British honour, or the destruction of his ship and the loss of his men's lives. Outgunned, Shovell decided to give salute and fired nine guns. He received only three in return, a clear insult from the Spanish, but the ship and men survived intact. Shovell was supported in his decision by his officers. A similar incident involving another English Captain, Matthew Alymer, occurred the following month. Shovell and Alymer's actions, in violating their standing orders, placed them in great difficulty with two influential people. Samuel Pepys and George Legg, 1st Baron Dartmouth, were incensed at the two Captains to allowing themselves to commit what was a humiliating action. Dartmouth, accompanied by Pepys, was on his way to Tangier, on a mission from the King to end the English presence from Tangier (a colony given to him from Portugal on his marriage to Catherine of Braganza) which was too expensive for England to maintain. Dartmouth intended court-martialling both Captains. However, Herbert had already returned to England and defended their actions to the King who agreed that their actions were reasonable in the circumstances. Pepys had never really liked Shovell and was always grudging in praise, partly because he felt Shovell was not really a "gentleman" but also because of the audacity of the man after the affair with the gold medal awarded to him after Tripoli.

On Dartmouth's arrival at Tangier, he set out to find the most plausible excuse for the English evacuation and this concentrated on the Mole – a structure built to protect the harbour and shipping. He decided that if the Mole were destroyed, this would provide the reason. It needed, however, the agreement of the English Captains to declare that Tangier, and the Mole, was not suitable as a naval base, in which case, the Mole could then be destroyed and the English could leave. However, Shovell and other of his colleagues disagreed. The wily Pepys sought a device with which he could get them to agree and the Mole was destroyed. However, the initial disagreement inflamed Pepys' animosity towards Shovell.

In 1687 he was appointed to the *Anne*, after which he escorted the daughter of the Prince of Orange from Rotterdam to Lisbon to marry the King of Portugal. In the following spring, he was moved into the *Dover* and became part of Lord Dartmouth's fleet that was to defend the King against a possible Dutch invasion, led by William of Orange and his wife Mary, the Protestant daughter of the Catholic King James II. However, the invasion went ahead without interception and the *Dover* found herself at Spithead under a new monarch.

Soon afterwards, Shovell found himself in command of the *Edgar* and was able to demonstrate his skills to the new King in the first naval engagement that preceded a new war with France. France had come to the aid of the former King James and sent an expeditionary force to Ireland. William responded by sending a fleet under Herbert, which included the *Edgar*, reaching Cork in April. After a short cruise looking out for the French fleet, they were spotted at Bantry Bay. The English fleet were outnumbered despite having had reinforcements arrive. However, on May 1st

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1689, not knowing he was outnumbered, Herbert sailed into the bay to engage the French. *Edgar* was heavily engaged in the centre of the battle and sustained severe casualties. The battle broke off late in the afternoon and was a tactical victory for the French in that they had completed their task of unloading troops and supplies and sailed off to Brest. However, the performance of the English fleet was heartily approved and William went to Portsmouth on 15th May to meet those who had been involved in the action, including Shovell, who was knighted by the King for his actions.

In October, Shovell was appointed to the *Monk* and patrolled the area between Ireland and the Scilly Islands. On 19th April 1690, Shovell led a successful action at Dublin against his former monarch, James. Later, in June 1690, he escorted King William's fleet to Carrickfergus. By being employed on this, Shovell missed the battle of Beachy Head when his former commander, Herbert (now Earl of Torrington) was defeated. Although acquitted at the subsequent court martial, Torrington never held a sea command again. Shovell was promoted to Rear-Admiral of the Blue in June and sailed to Plymouth where he joined Henry Killigrew, returning from the Mediterranean, and sailing around the Irish Sea and the Scillies attempting to catch up with the fleeing James Stuart after his defeat at the battle of the Boyne. In late 1690, Shovell was appointed to the *London* and remained mostly with that ship during the following year.

In 1691, he was part of the fleet that escorted King William to the Netherlands and was also appointed Major to the First Marine Regiment, an honorary commission, and subsequently transferred to the Second Marine Regiment as Lieutenant Colonel with a promotion to Colonel in 1697. In March, Shovell married the widow of his former patron, Lady Elizabeth Narborough, whose father was a Commissioner of the Navy, John Hill. In doing so, he became the step-father of Narborough's children whom he treated as his own. They were to have two daughters.

Early in 1692, Shovell was promoted to Rear Admiral of the Red and joined Admiral Russell's fleet. In March, the fleet once again escorted King William across the Channel. In April, he transferred his flag to the *Royal William* amid rumours of a French invasion threat. The two fleets engaged on May 19th off Cape Barfleur. In this battle, against a French fleet under the Comte de Tourville, Shovell played a distinguished role in the victory; by breaking through the French line, he commenced a manoeuvre which resulted in the complete defeat of the French. However, sickness, thought to be blood poisoning from a wound to his thigh, deprived him of being part in the subsequent destruction of the French ships, which had taken refuge at La Hogue, and Sir George Rooke undertook this duty instead. The invasion threat was completely over. Shovell returned to Portsmouth and recuperated from his wounds at nearby Fareham.

Early in 1693, Shovell, along with Ralph Delavall and Henry Killigrew, was appointed in a joint commission to command the fleet. His own appointment was as a nominal Admiral of the Blue. They were to command a fleet to escort a large convoy of merchant vessels to Smyrna, the principal trading port in the Levant. They were also to accompany Sir George Rooke who was appointed to command the Mediterranean fleet. Additionally, they were ordered to look for and contain the French fleet at Brest and prevent that fleet from joining up with the French fleet at Toulon. However, lack of information prevented them from being able to find them and eventually their fleet parted company with Rooke's off Ushant and proceeded north, as they were concerned at leaving England open to

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attack. What they did not know was that the French fleet at Brest had sailed south and was lying in wait off Lagos Bay, Portugal for Rooke's squadron. Outnumbered, Rooke retreated and the merchantmen were scattered. Forty of them were captured and fifty others destroyed - nearly a quarter of those that had set out from England. Back in England, the three Admirals came under fire for their apparent handling of the situation, accused of not keeping Rooke's squadron safe and not obtaining intelligence on the movements of the French. The Admirals were relieved of their command. Killigrew and Delavall, known to be sympathetic still towards the former King, were removed from all military commands and were never to command at sea again. Shovell, known for his loyalty to the King, was only to suffer a temporary setback in his career - by the autumn of 1694, he was back at sea.

Shovell was promoted Vice-Admiral of the Red and appointed to serve in *Neptune*. As part of an attack on Brest, Shovell was to join a small squadron under Lord Berkeley, to embark land forces at Camaret Bay. The landing was repulsed and the squadron returned. Further activities along the channel coast continued throughout the year at places like Dieppe and Dunkirk. Late in the year, a brief skirmish in the Downs occurred with Shovell ordering the *Stirling Castle* to fire on a Danish ship for refusing to salute in English waters.

In 1695 and early 1696 Shovell spent his time mainly in the Channel for bombardments along the French coast. He was promoted Admiral of the Blue, and commanded the fleet in the Channel and off Brest. In October 1695, Shovell was elected to Parliament as MP for Rochester, although his sea duties took priority over his political activities. He was to remain as their MP until his death. In 1699 and 1701 Shovell commanded the squadron which was guarding the Channel.

On the accession of Queen Anne, he was promoted to Admiral of the White. In October 1702, during the War of the Spanish Succession (1702-13), Shovell joined the main fleet, under Sir George Rooke, four days after the attack on the combined Franco-Spanish fleet at Vigo, where he was given the task of bringing home the treasure and prizes and dealing with disabled state of many of the ships. In 1703 he commanded a squadron in the Mediterranean, and in 1704 was sent to reinforce the fleet under Rooke, whom he joined off Cape St Mary on 17th June. Shovell then commanded a squadron in Rooke's fleet, which played a prominent part in the capture of Gibraltar, and the subsequent action off Velez Malaga on 13th August, where he commanded the van of the English line.

He returned to England with Rooke in September, and on 26th December was appointed Rear-Admiral of England. On 13th January 1705 he was appointed Admiral of the Fleet, and on 1st May 1705 he was appointed in joint command of an expedition to the Mediterranean shared with the Earl of Peterborough. The fleet and land forces laid siege on Barcelona and the ultimate success of the campaign was largely due to Shovell's command of the naval operations.

In September 1706 Shovell sailed for Lisbon, where on 7th November he was appointed sole Commander-in-Chief, and a few days later was ordered to take reinforcements for the army, under the Earl of Galway, to Alicante. In March 1707 Shovell was back in Lisbon, but sailed again at the end of April, with orders to co-operate with the Duke of Savoy's, (Prince Eugene), campaign in southern France to attack Toulon. The action succeeded in scuttling the French fleet at the port, and came near to capturing Toulon.

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When this campaign came to an end, Shovell sailed for England with the Mediterranean Fleet, in October 1707. However he never arrived at his destination. Nearing the English Channel, his flagship, the *Association*, with *Romney* and *Eagle*, were swept onto the Bishop and Clerk rocks off the Scilly Isles, by strong westerly winds, and wrecked. The weather was not good and the fleet had not been able to get good readings for their position and for this reason, Shovell thought they were further eastward than they actually were. Of the 1315 men in these three ships, there was only one survivor, the Quartermaster of the *Romney*.

What exactly happened to Shovell has never been discovered. The most likely outcome, considering that his body was found six miles from the wreck site, suggests that Shovell left the ship in one of its boats, along with two of his step-sons, his Flag Captain and a pet dog and that they were drowned while trying to get to shore. The bodies were washed ashore at the Porth Hellick Cove on St Mary's, the largest of the Scilly Isles. One tradition has it that Shovell was still alive when he reached shore, but was murdered by a local woman who smothered him in the sand, as he lay semi-conscious on the beach. A large emerald ring which he wore was missing when his body was discovered and it is assumed that it was for possession of this that he was murdered.

Whatever the circumstances, his body was later brought back to England on the *Salisbury*, and carried to Plymouth, where it was embalmed by Dr James Yonge. Shovell's body was then taken to London and buried, at the cost of the government, in Westminster Abbey. A monument was erected at the Abbey in his memory. His two step-sons, Sir John and James Narborough were buried in Old Town Church on St Mary's. It is claimed that the emerald ring was recovered thirty years later, when on her deathbed, the woman who is supposed to have murdered him confessed to the crime, and gave the ring to her clergyman, who sent it to the Earl of Berkeley, who had given Shovell the ring, although there is no trace of it within the family today.

It was after this disaster that the Admiralty later instigated the search for a way of calculating longitude for which John Harrison was to make his name.