

The Defence of British Trade with the Baltic, 1808-1813

The war at sea during the post-Trafalgar period of the Napoleonic War has generally been neglected by historians. This neglect, which is a consequence of the tendency to write naval history exclusively in terms of actions between the battle fleets, has caused the campaigns in the Baltic from 1808 to 1813 to have been almost completely ignored. It has, however, long since been recognized that Napoleon's continental system, his attempt to sever all commercial relations between Britain and Europe, was countered more effectively in the Baltic than elsewhere.¹ One might, therefore, expect that the part played by the operations of the Royal Navy in keeping open the routes between Britain and the Baltic ports would have been investigated. Several partial explanations of the relatively inefficient application of Napoleon's anti-British commercial decrees in northern Europe have been given. The French consuls responsible for the execution of the emperor's policy in those parts are believed to have been careless, if not corrupt; the local authorities, unco-operative. Much has been made of the use of cunningly forged papers by the ships engaged in the trade; the contribution of organized smuggling has been stressed.² Yet "when all this is admitted, much remains unexplained. After 1807, the year of the Franco-Russian treaty of Tilsit and the British attack upon Copenhagen, the Baltic trade was threatened in two ways. On the one hand British ships and property became subject to confiscation by the authorities of France and her allies in the Danish, German, and Russian ports; on the other, they were exposed to the risk of capture at sea. To meet the first of these threats recourse was had to disguise and evasion. The trade was, very largely carried in foreign ships armed with false papers; customs officials were bribed; systematic smuggling was organized. All these devices contributed in varying degrees to reduce the

¹E. F. Heckscher, *The Continental System: An Economic Interpretation* (Oxford, 1922), pp. 180 ff. and 230 ff.

²A. Cunningham, *British Credit in the Last Napoleonic War* (Girton College Studies No. 2, Cambridge 1910), p. 61; W. S. Lindsay, *History of Merchant Shipping and Ancient Commerce* (1874), ii. 316 ff.; C. Schmidt, *Die Grand-Duché de Berg 1806-1813: Etudes sur la domination française en Allemagne sous Napoléon Ier.* (Paris, 1905), p. 360.

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effectiveness of Napoleon's policy. But they only came into operation when the ships were on the Baltic coasts. Their successful employment depended upon the provision of a solution to the second and more fundamental problem, that of protecting the trade on its voyage to and from the Baltic. Protection against enemy action at sea was the business of the navy. In 1808, and in the five succeeding years, a British squadron was sent to the Baltic. One of its principal duties there was the defence of British trade.¹

The significance attached by the Admiralty to this aspect of the fleet's operations arose out of the importance of the Baltic trade to British security and economic progress. The Baltic region was still the principal source of naval stores. The best timber for medium sized masts came from Russia; Baltic oak was widely used by British shipbuilders for underwater planking, Russian fir deals for the decks of yessels. Alternative sources could supply these particular needs, but the timber obtained therefrom was certainly inferior in some respects, and the substitutes were generally regarded with disfavour in the navy.² For their supplies of hemp, the navy and the merchant marine relied upon importations from Russia, the source of over ninety per cent of Britain's total hemp consumption.³ The dangers of this dependence were realized, and unsuccessful attempts had been made throughout the eighteenth century to encourage the cultivation of hemp in North America.⁴ Their failure meant that Britain was dependent upon Russia for the necessary supply.⁵ By the end of the century, Britain was not, except in the case of hemp, at the mercy of a Baltic monopoly for her naval stores; but she drew upon the north for a vast amount of good quality material, and the continued flow of imports from the Baltic was regarded as a national necessity.⁶

After the outbreak of war with France in 1793, the Baltic trade took on an added importance. During the war years, British exports to the Baltic increased, and by 1804 their value was ten

¹P[ublic] R[ecord] O[ffice] Adm. 2/1365, Admiralty to Sir James Saumarez, 16 April 1808.

²R. G. Albion, *Forests and Sea Power* (Harvard Economic Studies, Cambridge, Mass., 1926), xxix. 22, 27, 30 ff.; D. Gerhard, *England und der Aufstieg Russlands* (Munich and Berlin, 1933), pp. 50 ff.; G. S. Graham, *Sea Power and British - North America, 1783-1820* (Harvard Historical Studies, Cambridge, Mass., 1941), xlvi. 143 ff.; 'Letters and Papers of Sir T. Byam Martin, ed. R. Vesey Hamilton Navy Records Society, xii. (1898) ii. 176, Byam Martin to Sir Henry Martin, 26 May 1812.

³J. J. Oddy, *European Commerce: Shewing New and Secure Channels of Trade with the Continent of Europe* (1804), p. 556; D. Gerhard, *op. cit.* p. 51.

⁴G. L. Beer, *British Colonial Policy 1763-1766*; (New York, 1922), pp. 215 ff.; J. Gee, *The Trade and Navigation of Great Britain Considered* (Glasgow, 1767), pp. 135 ff.; G. S. Graham, *British Policy and Canada, 1774-1791: A Study in Eighteenth Century Trade Policy* (Imperial Studies No. 4, 1930), pp. 100 ff.; Oddy, *op. cit.* pp. 561 ff.

⁵Hist. MSS. Comm., *Bathurst Papers* (1923), p. 137: Sir Stephen Shairp to George Chalmers, 25 December 1809; Gerhard, *op. cit.* pp. 423 ff.

⁶P.R.6., F.O. Russia 65/71, Canning to Sir Stephen Shairp, 13 August 1807.

times that of the pre-war years.¹ This increase was due, almost entirely, to the French policy of excluding British trade from the continental harbours under the control of France. The Baltic ports, since they were in neutral states or states allied to Britain, were open in the first fifteen years of war to British ships. Although temporarily threatened by the Northern confederation of 1800-1, the trade was not interrupted. The Baltic thus became the principal channel for the introduction of colonial produce and British manufactures into Europe. In short, the expansion was the result, not of increased demand for these goods in the Baltic markets, but of the diversion of the trade to the continent from its normal channels as a consequence of the upheavals of war.² The intensification by Napoleon of the policy of exclusion, and its application on an ever increasing scale meant that Britain's commercial connections with the continent were in danger of complete breakdown unless the Baltic were kept open to her merchantmen.³

After 1807 the chief threat to the trade came from the Danish and Norwegian naval forces and privateers. The seizure of the Danish fleet by Britain in 1807, an act which led directly to the outbreak of war between the two countries, did not make Denmark-Norway incapable of retaliation. As soon as the British left Copenhagen, the Danes began to rebuild the maritime forces there in obedience to orders received from the government on 24 October.⁴ There was neither the time nor the means to replace the lost ships, but a battle fleet of sailing vessels was not the only instrument capable of disputing with an enemy the passage of the landlocked Baltic and its narrow entrances. The Danish building programme was aimed at the production of gunboats. These were light-draught boats fitted with auxiliary sails, but normally driven by oars. The larger ones had an armament of two 24-pounder cannon and were manned by a crew of sixty; the smaller, with a crew of twenty-four carried a 24-pounder astern and a howitzer in the bow.⁵ These craft had a limited performance. They could not leave their bases when the wind was strong and the sea rough. Even during good weather they were confined to coastal waters. Furthermore, they could be out-maneuvred and out-gunned by sailing ships when the latter could make use of the wind; and, if they fell in with an enemy warship under sail some distance from the coast, it was difficult for

¹ Oddy, *op. cit.* pp. 398 ff.

² A. Redford, *Manchester Merchants and Foreign Trade 1794—18j8* (Manchester, 1934), pp. 31, 169 and 174. Oddy, *op. cit.* pp. 398 ff.

³ P.R.O., F.O. Russia 65/68, *Memorial of the Merchants to the Marquis of Douglas and Clydesdale, February 1807*; *Hist. MSS. Comm., Hastings Manuscripts* (1934), iii. 258, *William Miles to the Earl of Moira, 17 November 1806*; *Hist. MSS. Comm., Dropmore Papers* (1912), ix. 143, *Lord Auckland to Lord Grenville, 6 November 1807*.

⁴ C. F. Wandel, *Sjømringen i de dansk-norske Farvande 1807-1814* (Copenhagen, 1915), p. 20.

⁵ Wandel, *op. cit.* p. 3.

them to escape by flight since maximum speed could not be maintained indefinitely by the oarsmen. Once within range of the enemy's fire, gunboats were virtually defenceless since, being open boats, a few accurate shots could cause heavy casualties amongst the crews who were closely packed and unprotected.¹

In certain circumstances, however, the gunboats could resist and even outmatch the sailing warship. Their long 24-pounders were effective at a range greater than that of the carronade, the conventional armament of the small British warships. When sailing ships were becalmed, the gunboats being propelled by oars could attack their immobile opponents at a range convenient to themselves. On still days, and they were frequent during summer in the waters around the Danish islands, the brigs and sloops of the Royal Navy were in constant danger of attack; and the risk, especially to single ships, was such that it was deemed advisable that the small cruisers should operate in pairs for mutual protection.² The obvious answer to the gunboats, the equipment of the small class of warships with guns of a longer range, was found to be impossible because the recoil of such weapons was too great for vessels of this size.³ The gunboats usually avoided the British sail-of-the-line; only once between 1808 and 1813 did they attack one. Their victim was the sixty-four gun ship *Africa*, becalmed off Malmo on 20 October 1808. The gunboat division based at Copenhagen under the command of Captain J. C. Krieger swarmed down upon her, and, at considerable cost to itself, damaged her masts and rigging to such an extent that she was compelled to retire to Karlskrona and eventually return to the Nore for repairs.⁴

During the first winter of the war, the shipyards of Denmark and Norway were busy producing craft for the navy. To ensure that all available materials were used for this purpose, a ban was placed on the building of merchant ships.⁵ The Danish government was handicapped by a shortage of money. The suspension of virtually all Danish maritime commerce and the loss of revenue attendant upon the non-collection of the Sound dues created a financial problem which became progressively graver during the war years. Appeals had to be made to communities and individuals

¹ H. G. Garde, *Den Dansk-norske Sjømagts Historie 1700-1814* (Copenhagen, 1852), p. 479.

² P.R.O., Adm. 1/6, *Saumarez to Admiralty, 17 June 1808*; enclosure (undated) from Captain Graves, H.M.S. Brunswick; *Saumarez to Admiralty, 6 August 1808*; enclosure from Rear Admiral R. G. Keats, 5 August 1808.

³ P.R.O., Adm. 1/8, *Saumarez to Admiralty, 22 March 1809*; enclosure from Captain Barker, H.M. Sloop *A-lon*^p, 21 March 1809.

⁴ P.R.O., Adm. 1/7, *Saumarez to Admiralty, 29 October 1808*; C...F. Wandel, *op. tit.* pp. 135 6f.

⁵ Wandel, *op. cit.* p. 83.

to contribute money towards the maintenance of the sea forces? Despite the financial difficulties, considerable progress was made in equipping a force for the campaign of 1808. From the early days of the year launchings took place regularly, chiefly at Copenhagen, and when the craft were ready for service they were posted to the several gunboat stations on the Danish coasts, the most powerful squadrons being based at Copenhagen. and Nyborg. Gunboats were also, made in Norway, and a force adequate to the needs of that country was gradually built up.³ It was used primarily to defend the Norwegian coasts and to protect shipping from attacks by British cruisers. The limitations of the gunboat prevented its employment as a commerce raider in the open waters of the Skagerak, except near to the Norwegian coasts. At the beginning of 1808, the Norwegians possessed only one seagoing warship, the brig *l.ougen*. Reinforcements, some of them brigs captured from the Royal Navy, the remainder Danish built brigs of war, eventually gave them a small squadron of cruisers which after 1810 numbered between seven and eight ships.⁵ Its existence created a threat to the security of British convoys in the Skagerak.

The Danes and Norwegians were also active in the equipment of privateers which operated in great numbers throughout the war, except for one brief interval. This was between August 1809 and March 1810 when Frederick VI ordered them to restrict their operations to the Heligoland Bight and to sail only from the Slesvig ports of Tøning, Husum, and Frederikstadt. These instructions were issued partly as a result of protests made by Prussia and Russia against indiscriminate privateering, and partly in the vain hope that the British would welcome the move, and would in return cease to obstruct traffic between Denmark, and Norway where there was much distress owing to shortage of corn.⁶ The economic situation in Denmark encouraged privateering. The privateers were manned by seaman who would otherwise have been unemployed in consequence of the Danish merchant marine having been driven from the seas by the British navy.⁷ They were financed by business men, in particular merchants and shipowners, whose

¹Wandel, *op. cit.* p. 121; Garde, *op. cit.* p. 481.

²Wandel, *op. lit.* pp. 101 and 124. Garde, *op. tit.* p. 481.

³Wandel, *op. cit.* pp. 91 and 164, Lorentz Fisker, *Commander-in-Chief Norwegian Sea Defences to Frederick VI, 8 March and 27 September 1808*. J. T. von Raeder, *Danmarks Krigs-og Politiske Historie fra xSoy til Freden til Jonkoping 1809* (Copenhagen, 1845), ii. 48 ff.

⁴N. A. Larsen, *Fra Krigens Tid: Bidrag til den Norske Marines Historie* (Kristiania, 1878), p. 31.

⁵N. A. Larsen, *op. tit.* pp. 131 and 169.

⁶K. Larsen, *Danmarks Kapervaeser* (Copenhagen, 1915), pp. 26 ff.; M. Rubin, *Studier til Kjibenhavns og Danmarks Historie 1807-1810* (Copenhagen, 1892), p. 339; J. N. Tannessen, *Kaperfart og Skips/art* (Oslo, 1955), p. 224.

⁷K. Larsen, *op. cit.* p. 8.

normal commercial interests were severely curtailed by the cessation of Danish overseas trade.¹ Several Copenhagen merchants equipped small fleets of privateers which included vessels ranging from fast sailing luggers to row-boats. Others equipped one or two vessels. In all parts of the land individuals purchased shares in privateering ventures organized by syndicates.² Privateering was organized in a similar fashion in Norway. Owing to shortage of equipment and lack of capital, the Norwegians did not equip as many as did the Danes. Nor was the Norwegian government commission as enthusiastic in its support for privateering as was the king. It gave first priority to the equipment of gunboats for coastal defence, and, since its resources in men and material were limited, it was cautious about promoting a movement which might reduce the efficiency of the national sea forces.³ Privateers were fitted out in most of the Norwegian ports; but the majority came from the ports in the Kristiansand area. This district was the centre of the ship-building industry, and the source of the best seaman. Here also were situated the bases most convenient for the service of privateers operating in the Skagerak and the northern part of the Kattegat.⁴

All these forces operated from bases on the coasts which flank the approaches to the Baltic: the Skagerak, the Kattegat, the Sound, and the Great Belt. Within the Baltic the island of Bornholm and the adjacent group of islets known as the Ertholms played an important part in Danish privateering. As soon as the news that Denmark was at war with Britain reached Bornholm, the governor issued privateering regulations.⁵ There was a quick response. The first capture by a Bomholm privateer was reported on 6 November 1807, and two days later a prize court was established at the town of R.Ønne.⁶ Since many of the Bornholmers were seafarers, commerce raiding was one of their chief occupations throughout the war. Of more strategic importance was the fact the Christiansø, one of the Ertholm group, had a fine natural harbour which gave the Danes a base within the Baltic, and thus extended the cruising area of privateers from all parts of the kingdom. This harbour, moreover, was easily defended by the batteries which covered its entrance.⁷ Copenhagen privateers frequently resorted there, and a brisk trade sprang up. The auctions at Bornholm

¹K. Larsen, *op. cit.* p. 40.

²K. Larsen, *op. cit.* pp. 55 ff. This part of Larsen's study contains a list of the Danish privateers, the date when the letters of Marque of each was issued, the owner or owners, its home port, &c.

³Tonnessen, *op. cit.* pp. 23 and 225; F. Scheel and J. S. Worm-Muller, *Den Narske S/fifarts Historie*, ii, pt. i (Oslo, 1935), 57.

⁴Tonnessen, *op. cit.* pp. 87 and 256; J. S. Worm-Muller, *Norgegjeimomndsarme 1807-1810* (Kristiania, 1918), p. 130.

⁵C. Flood, *Under Krigen 1807-1814: Nog/e Historiske og Biografiske Optegnelser* (Kristiania, 1892), p. 9.

⁶Flood, *op. cit.* pp. 12 if,

⁷Flood, *op. cit.* pp. 24 and 34; K. Larsen, *op., cit.* p. 49,

of condemned cargoes were attended by Danish, Swedish, and Prussian merchants who were attracted there by the prospect of profitable speculation in colonial produce and British manufactures.¹

The most effective way of dealing with commerce raiders being to deprive them of their bases, it was natural that the capture of the Ertholms should be considered by the British government. On 16 April 1808, Sir James Saumarez, commander-in-chief of the Baltic fleet, was instructed to make a reconnaissance of them to ascertain the strength of the defences and the nature of the facilities to be found there.² On the strength of the evidence collected, instructions were given that an attack should be made by the ships of the fleet if an opportunity arose to do so.³ The general opinion of naval officers was that the navy alone could not reduce the Ertholms. This opinion was vindicated in October 1809. The garrison of the group mutinied, and Saumarez when he learnt of the event detached a small squadron of two sail-of-the-line and three bomb vessels to make an attack. The bomb vessels made a preliminary bombardment which was followed by a cannonade from the line ships. Some prizes lying in the harbour were damaged, but the squadron was beaten off by the batteries.⁴ No further attacks were made on the Ertholms. Two years later, the Admiralty still had the project in mind;⁵ but the refusal of the Government to spare troops for operations against it made its capture impossible.

Once clear of Bornholm, the trade was in much less danger of attack by a pack of raiders. Merchantmen bound for Danzig, Pillau, Memel, the Gulf of Riga or the Gulf of Finland were still liable, however, to fall in with privateers, for a number of French corsairs operated continuously during the period from bases on the south coast of the Baltic. It was the practice amongst the French *armateurs*, as the profits from privateering in the Narrow Seas declined, to venture farther afield in the wake of the advancing French armies. Some went to Italy and equipped privateers at Naples and Ancona. Others went northwards and established themselves on the Baltic coast, particularly at Danzig.⁶ The hunting ground of the French was in the immediate vicinity of the ports, though occasionally they were sighted off Gotland. The protection of trade against them was complicated by the fact that the British merchants did not wish the ships laden with their property to appear off the ports under convoy of the Royal Navy as this would

¹ *Flood, op. cit. p. 47.*

² *P.R.O., Adm. 2/1365, Admiralty to Saumarez, 16 April 1808.*

³ *P.R.O., Adm. 2/1366, Admiralty to Keats, 30 September 1808.*

⁴ *P.R.O., Adm. 1/8, Saumarez to Admiralty, 18 October 1809; enclosure from Captain MacNamafa, H.M.S. Edgar, 2 October; C. Flood, op. cit. pp. 39 ff.*

⁵ *P.R.O., Adm. 2/1373, Admiralty to Saumarez, 10 September 1811.*

⁶ *H. Malo; Les Derniers Corsaires: Dmkerque xyij-iSij (Paris, 1925), pp. 235 ff.*
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have defeated the precautions taken to disguise the origin of the cargoes.¹ In the circumstances, the only method left to the commander-in-chief was to throw out a screen of cruisers along the south Baltic coast and off the island of Gotland to intercept the privateers and thus reduce the danger to the unprotected merchantmen. This method was approved by the British intelligence agent Louis Drusena, formerly consul at Koenigsberg, who, under the alias of Heinrich Hahn, continued to reside there and remained in communication with the fleet.²

The defence of the Baltic trade rested upon the following principles. The merchantmen were herded together and given the protection of an escort of warships; this was the normal convoy system. In addition, cruisers patrolled the trade routes in certain areas to destroy or drive off the raiders before they fell in with their prey. Up the Baltic where the French privateers were active, the patrol of cruisers was a substitute for the convoy system. Around the great focal points of the trade, in the Skagerak, for instance, and off Bornholm, the cruisers reinforced the convoys. The Baltic convoys were arranged by the Admiralty after consultation with the commander-in-chief and the interested merchants. At a Board meeting, held on 29 March 1808, the Lords Commissioners decided to request the secretary of Lloyds to put up a notice asking the Baltic merchants to appoint one of their number to communicate with the Admiralty respecting the fixing of convoys.³ William and Philip Emes of the firm Ernes, Moller and Ernes were selected.⁴ They acted as representatives of the Baltic merchants until 1813 when they were replaced by Samuel Thornton, a director of the Russia Company.⁵ In the spring of each year, usually towards the end of March, the commander-in-chief, one or other of the two Admiralty secretaries, and one of the Emes met at the Admiralty to discuss arrangements for the coming season. The principal points to be settled were the dates of the sailing of the first and last-convoys from Britain to the Baltic, the intervals between sailings and the date of the last homeward convoy.⁶ Once these arrangements were made, the Admiralty, although allowing some latitude to the commander-in-chief with regard to the date of the last convoy from the Baltic, was very reluctant to alter them. It sometimes granted an extra outward convoy as far as Gothenburg, but the numerous petitions, many of them from individual merchants who communi-

¹ *P.R.O., Adm. 1/6, Saumarez to Admiralty, 28 July 1808.*

² *Hamilton, op. cit. pp. 73 ff.*

³ *P.R.O., Adm. 3/163, Admiralty Rough Minutes, January-April 1808.*

⁴ *P.R.O., Adm. 12/4887 (Digest), Lloyds to Admiralty, 13 April 1808.*

⁵ *P.R.O., Adm. 2/1108, Admiralty to William and Philip Emes, 3 March 1813.*

⁶ *P.R.O., Adm. 2/1102, Admiralty to W. and P. Emes, 7 March 1809; Adm. 1/4556, Promiscuous Letters 'E' 1811, W. and P. Emes to Admiralty, 21 March 1811; Adm. 1/4557, Promiscuous 'E' i8i2, W. and P. Emes to Admiralty, 6 April 1812.*

cated directly with the Board instead of through the representatives, were, for the most part, peremptorily refused.¹

There was good reason for this firmness. Except during a very mild winter, the Baltic harbours were liable to be frozen between December and March, and the sea its elf made unnavigable by drifting ice which sometimes extended as far west as the Kattegat. The violent gales encountered in the Baltic and the North Sea late in the year were also a hazard to shipping. Two disasters emphasized the risk which attended late convoys. On 22 December 1808, the last convoy consisting of thirteen merchantmen, sailed from Karlskrona for Britain. In attempting to enter the Sound by the Malmo passage, it was lost in the ice, and three of the escorting brigs of war were wrecked.² A worse calamity occurred in 1811. A convoy of 120 sail accompanied by the *St. George*, flagship of Rear-Admiral Reynolds, and several other men of war, left Hano Bay on 9 November. It was scattered by a storm when approaching the southern end of the Belt, and thirty merchantmen were lost. The *St. George* received serious damage to her masts and rudder, and was unable to continue her voyage until this damage had been remedied. The delay meant that she did not clear Gothenburg until 17 December, and, after making a slow passage owing to further gales, she was wrecked along with her consort the *Defence* on the Jutland coast. The *Hero*, another of the line of battle returning from the Baltic, went down off the Texel about the same time.³

Judging from the number of requests annually rejected by the Admiralty for an extension of the period during which, convoy should be given from the Baltic, and from the number of vessels frozen each winter in the Swedish ports of Karlskrona and Karlshamn, the merchants were prepared to risk the late passage. The Navy saw things in a different light. 'You will be pleased to inform their Lordships', wrote Saumarez in 1809, that having taken upon myself to extend the time originally determined upon with the Chairman of the Committee of Merchants concerned in the Baltic Trade to the 1st of December, which was a fortnight later than the period at first fixed upon with their concurrence, I was impelled to it, in consequence of the number of ships that I was informed were delayed in the ports of St. Petersburg and Riga and that were at that time shipping their cargoes for England, but I do not consider it to be consistent with the safety of H.M.. Ships appointed for the protection of Trade and those stationed in the Belt to defend them against the attack of the Danish gunboats, that they should be ordered to remain in the Baltic to a later period

¹ Many examples are to be found in *Letters relating to Convoys, P.R.O., Adm. 2/1101-1109.*

² *P.R.O., Adm. 80/146, Keats Papers. Letters and Orders of Rear-Admiral R. G. Keats. Keats to Saumarez, 25 January 1809.*

³ *Sir J. Ross, Memoirs and Correspondence of Lord de Saumarez (1838), ii. 251 ff.*

particularly after the disastrous events that occurred last season, when so many of H.M. Ships were lost and so many others exposed to imminent danger, besides the number of valuable vessels that were wrecked and fell into the hands of the enemy.¹

The Baltic trade sailed from Britain in four divisions: from the Nore, the Humber, Leith, and Long Hope Sound, the rendezvous in the Orkneys for Baltic traders from the north-west ports. The Nore division was joined off Yarmouth with the trade from that port. Convoy was provided at all these places, except the Long Hope, at fortnightly intervals between mid-April and mid-October, responsibility for the provision of which lay with the Port Admirals at the Nore, Yarmouth and Leith.² Arrangements for sailings from the Long Hope differed slightly in certain years. In 1809 convoys were formed there when a sufficient, but unspecified, number of vessels were collected, and in 1813 at intervals of three weeks.³ The escorts for the voyage across the North Sea consisted of one or two small men of war, though in the spring, sail-of-the-line proceeding to the Baltic occasionally reinforced the convoys from the Nore.

On passing the Naze of Norway the trade entered the area screened by the cruisers of the Baltic fleet. The force of brigs and sloops stationed in the Skagerak contributed to the defence of trade in a variety of ways. The interception of commerce raiders was the obvious, but not the most telling aspect of its contribution. By impeding commerce between Denmark and Norway, by harassing the coastal trade, and by threatening the long and vulnerable Norwegian coast, it thrust the Norwegians onto the defensive, and compelled them to give priority to the defence of vital interests.⁴ The Norwegian privateers were active. Between 1807 and 1809, 166 were fitted out, of which total 52 were taken or wrecked, most of them in the Skagerak. The number of good prizes only totalled 49. After the resumption of privateering in 1810, 108 privateers were fitted out; 29 were lost; and the number of good prizes which they made was 42.⁵ These figures and the value of the condemned prizes give some indication of what privateering was worth to the Norwegians. They do not represent the loss to Britain, and that for two reasons. A proportion of the prizes

¹ *P.R.O., Adm. 1/9, Saumarez to Admiralty, 7 December 1809.*

² *The frequent orders on this subject are to be found in the Letters relating to Convoys. I have been unable to find in the Convoy Books any instructions for 1808, nor has a search of the routine orders yielded anything. It does not seem likely that there was any great variation from the practice in the following years.*

³ *P.R.O., Adm. 2/1102, Admiralty to W. and P. Ernes, 7 March 1809; Adm. 2/1108, Admiralty to Rear-Admiral Otway, 8 March 1813.*

⁴ *Wandel, op. cit. pp. 222 and 232, Fisker's reports of 13 May and 25 November 1809.*

⁵ *Tonnessen, op. cit. pp. 86 ff. and 256 ff.*

between 1807 and 1809 was made up of Swedish ships. Sweden was at war with Denmark-Norway during this period, and some of the Swedish ships taken were almost certainly not on charter to the British. Secondly, it must be remembered that the value of a prize to the captor was almost invariably greater than its value to the owner. Since the cargoes of the captured ships included coffee, sugar, and hemp which, owing to their scarcity, fetched high prices in Norway, it would be misleading to accept the proceeds of the sales there as a reliable guide to British losses. In fact, losses in the Skagerak at the hands of privateers were never on such a scale as to cause anxiety.

The Norwegian naval forces also took part in the war against commerce. The gunboats did not present a serious threat; but the gradual build-up of the Norwegian brig *squadron* did. By the beginning of 1810 the squadron consisted of seven ships, and Saumarez was gravely concerned lest all or part of it should break out and cause havoc to shipping in the Skagerak.¹ He had reason to be. Lorentz Fisker, the commander-in-chief, now felt that he had at his disposal a sufficient force to risk an attack upon a convoy.² A squadron of five brigs put to sea, and on 19 July it fell in with a homeward bound convoy of forty-seven sail off the Naze. The escort, the *Forward* gunbrig escaped, but all the merchantmen were captured.³ This was an isolated coup, the Norwegian navy's only major success in the war. In face of the immediate reinforcement to the British cruiser force in the Skagerak, Fisker was compelled to act on the defensive and to refrain from exposing his force to the chance of falling in with superior numbers.⁴ But the possibility that the exploit might be repeated had to be taken into account by Saumarez.⁵ In 1812, for instance, the potential threat was considerable. In February of that year the Danes, taking advantage of the customary winter absence of the British fleet, sent the newly built frigate *Naiad* of thirty six guns to Kristiansand to strengthen the coastal defences. The arrival of this powerful vessel at a base a few miles distant from the convoy routes demanded immediate countermeasures.⁶ Saumarez reinforced the customary squadron of small vessels in the Skagerak with the sixty-four gun ship *Dictator*? The *Naiad's*, career lasted only a few months. After one or two brushes with British cruisers in Norwegian coastal

¹P.R.O., Adm. 1/10 Saumarez to Admiralty, 19 May 1810; N. A. Larsen, *op. cit.* p. 131.

²Wandel, *op. cit.* pp. 290 ff., *Fisker to Captain J. Krieger, June 1810; Tonnessen, op. cit.* p. 268.

³P.R.O., Adm. 1/10, Saumarez to Admiralty, 27 July 1810; enclosure from Captain Elliot, H.M. Armed Ship *Hebe*, 22 July 1810; Tonnessen, *op. cit.* p.265.

⁴Wandel, *op. cit.* p. 298, *Fisker's report, 20 August 1810; Garde, op. dt.* p. JCII,

⁵P.R.O., Adm. 1/11, Saumarez to Admiralty, 13 May 1811.

⁶P.R.O., 1/14, Saumarez to Admiralty, 17 March 1812; N- A. Laisen, *op. cit.* pp. 198 ff.

⁷Ross, *op. cit.* p. 274.

waters, she and her consorts -were attacked in Lyng<zlr harbour on 6 July by the *Dictator* and three brigs. After a hard fought action, she was destroyed.¹ The destruction of the *Naiad* increased the reluctance of the Norwegians to risk their limited forces at sea. The brig commanders were already cautious about venturing far to sea lest they should encounter a numerically superior British force.² Throughout the war, the overall command exercised by the cruisers in the Skagerak obstructed the passage of supplies to Norway. The result was a scarcity of food and naval stores there which made it difficult for the Norwegians to maintain the operational efficiency of their warships. By 1813 this sustained pressure had produced a shortage which strained the available* resources to the limit.³ At the end of August Otto Lutken, Fisker's successor as commander-in-chief, had to lay up the least efficient brigs, and use their stores to keep the remainder in service.⁴ The incessant blockade of Norway, by its damaging effect upon the Norwegian war potential limited the offensive capacities of the naval forces and prevented their sustained employment in the battle against commerce.

The rendezvous for the various divisions from Britain was Vinga Sound, near Gothenburg. The escorts which accompanied the merchantmen across the North Sea and up the Skagerak went no further. From this point convoy was provided by the Baltic fleet. The senior officer of the detachment stationed in Vinga Sound was responsible for assembling the merchantmen, issuing instructions to the protecting warships and arranging the sailings. This procedure was a source of continued controversy between the merchants and the Admiralty. The merchants objected to the delays which occurred at Vinga; delays inevitably attendant upon the task of handling the mass of shipping which put in there; They argued that the practice of organizing into one fleet the several divisions from Britain was unnecessary and even dangerous since it resulted in the formation of convoys which were too big to be properly defended.⁵ Since the evidence does not support this last contention, the truth probably is that they were more concerned about the commercial consequences of delays to the trade. A halt at Vinga was, in fact, necessary. Ahead of the merchantmen lay the most hazardous lap of the voyage, the passage of one or other of the narrow entrances to the Baltic, the Sound and Great Belt. In the Belt, a special squadron was stationed which operated a

¹Ross, pp. 275 ff.; Wandel, *op. cit.* pp. 404 ff.; N. A. Larsen, *op. cit.* pp.' 201 ff.

²N. A. Larsen, *op. cit.* p. 243, *Captain Scheneyder to' Captain Holm, 18 May 1812.*

³Wandel, *op. cit.* p. 465, *Otto Lutken to King Frederick VI, 1 July 1813.*

⁴Wandel, *op. cit.* p. 468.

⁵P.R.O., Adm. 12/4887 (*Digest*), *Bennet & Co. to Admiralty, 23 June 1808; Adm. 1/4554, W. and P. Ernes to Admiralty, 16 March 1809; Adm. 1/3993, Letters from Lloyds, John Bennett to Admiralty, 30 June 1812.*

shuttle service to provide cover for every convoy. Its commanding officer could make better use of the forces at his disposal if he had to protect relatively large convoys sailing at something like regular intervals, than if he had to deal with small groups on the timing of whose arrival in the Belt no reliance could be placed.¹ Moreover, the provision of convoy for small and frequent groups of vessels would have entailed dispersion of his forces, and hence less effective protection for all.

From Vinga the great convoys with their new escorts steered southwards up the Kattegat at the end of which are the two channels, the Sound and Great Belt, which lead into the Baltic. In these channels the hazards were great. The navigation was intricate, the ships having to pick their way amongst shoals from which the buoys and markers were removed by the Danes. The difficulties -were increased in the Belt by currents, strong enough to make a ship unmanageable.² Apart from these natural risks the conditions favoured the Danish raiders. The frequent calms suited the gunboats and handicapped the British men of war. The narrowness of the two passages meant that the convoys could be kept under continual observation and attacked at the moment most convenient to the Danes who possessed the added advantage of being able to conduct the raids near to base in waters with which they -were familiar. It was on the coasts of these two channels that the principal Danish gunboat and privateer bases were established.³ Whichever passage the convoys took to reach the Baltic, the chances were that they would be subjected to fierce and persistent attacks by the enemy sea forces, and bombarded by the land batteries if they strayed within range. It was in the entrances to the Baltic that the critical battle for the safety of the trade was fought. The stakes were high. It was not just a question of suffering heavy losses in merchantmen. There was a possibility that in the conditions which existed there, the Danes would succeed in preventing altogether the passage of British convoys.⁴

In the spring of 1808, when the first Baltic convoys began to sail, the attempt was made to send them through the Sound. This was a natural decision. The Sound runs between Zealand and the Swedish, coast, and Sweden was allied to Britain. It is narrow, being barely three miles wide at its northern end, but by hugging

¹ P.R.O., Adm. 1/7, Keats to Admiralty, 27 November 1808.

² P.R.O., Adm. 52/3805, Master's Log H.M.S. Vanguard, August 1807; Hamilton, *op. cit.* p. 68, Byam Martin to Sir Henry Martin, 11 May 1809.

³ For the orders relative to the annual distribution of the Danish flotilla, see Wandel, *op. cit.* pp. 124, 178, 256, 316, 383.

⁴ P.R.O., Adm. 1/3845, Letters from Consuls. John Mitchell, Consul in Norway, to Admiralty, 24 July 1807. E. Holm, *Danmarks-Norge Udenrigske Hiffark under Franske Revolution og Napoleons Krige fra lyyi til 1807 (Copenhagen, 1875), ii. 207, Bemadotte to Napoleon, 14 July 1807.*

the Swedish coast the convoys could keep clear of the Danish artillery. Another point was that a division of the Swedish *skdrg&rdsflottan*, made up of vessels equivalent in performance to the Danish gunboats, was stationed at Landskrona and Malmo.¹ It was hoped that it would be of assistance in combating the Danes.² Finally, the Baltic skippers were familiar with the navigation of the Sound, and seem to have been reluctant to attempt the relatively unknown passage of the Belt.³ Ignorance of the conditions prevailing there probably gave rise to exaggerated ideas of the undoubted difficulties which did exist. Apart from these factors, there were other arguments against using the Belt if the Sound could be kept open. Though wider, it was flanked on both sides by Danish territory. This was a less serious disadvantage than the fact that it took longer to pass than did the Sound. Even with favourable winds,, the slow moving convoys often took four days or more to sail through its tortuous passages. This meant anchoring at night amid the swirling currents on the threshold of the enemy bases. The longer period of exposure to enemy attack in the Belt, the difficulties encountered there and the fact that there was no friendly coast within reach made the Sound appear to be safer.

The apparent advantages of the Sound were soon shown to be cancelled out by one drawback. From the beginning, great difficulty was experienced in passing convoys through the Malmo channel. The Malmo channel was a narrow passage close to the Swedish coast which linked the Sound with the Baltic. It led through the sandbanks and was so confined that it was impossible for the convoys to manoeuvre. Strung out in a long line ahead formation they were an easy target during calm weather for the Danish gunboats from Copenhagen. Heavy losses were experienced there, and Saumarez had very soon to request permission from the Admiralty to send convoys through the Belt.⁴ Their Lordships were not at first convinced by the commander-in-chief's arguments though they were aware of the losses and had received several complaints from the merchants.⁵ They approved of his using the Belt, but expressed the opinion that the dangers were less in the Sound.⁶ A further consideration of developments led to a change of mind, and on 28 July Saumarez received instructions to detach

¹ J. Mankell, *Studur cfver Svenska Skargaris-Flottatis Historia (Stockholm, 1855), p. 158.*

⁵ P.R.O., Admi. 1/6, Sir Samuel Hood to Saumarez, 24 April 1808.

³ P.R.O., F.O. 38/11, Secret Reports from Malmo and Halsingborg 1808, Sir Charles Gordon to Canning, 23 June 1808; Adm. 50/51, Journal of Sir James Saumarez, June 1808.

⁴ P.R.O., Adm. 1/6, Saumarez to Admiralty, 10 and 20 June 1808; Wandel, *op. at.* pp. 115 ff.; Garde, *op. clt.* p. 528.

⁵ P.R.O., Adm. 2/1365, Admiralty to Saumarez, 24 and 27 June 1808.

⁶ P.R.O., Adm. 2/1365, Admiralty to Saumarez, 22 June 1808.

a squadron commanded by Rear Admiral Keats to cruise in the Belt for the better protection of convoys passing that way.¹ This step marked the first tentative establishment of what later became known as the convoy service in the Belt. Keats was well qualified for this duty, having served in the Belt during the Copenhagen campaign of 1807, when he had solved some of its navigational mysteries.² During his comparatively short period of service with the Baltic fleet, he devised in principle the system which his successor in the Belt, Rear Admiral Manley Dixon, employed with outstanding success in the following years.³ Essentially the system was as follows. Dixon's squadron consisted of six sail-of-the-line and a proportionate number of smaller vessels. One sail-of-the-line was stationed at either end of the Belt to receive convoys as they approached from the Baltic and the Kattegat and to conduct them into the passage. The station of the remaining four was off Sprogj island, roughly midway through the Belt at a point near to the largest enemy bases. Their duty was to shelter the trade from the enemy raiders operating from these bases. They did so in two ways. The presence of ships-of-the-line was a deterrent to the Danes, and a welcome reinforcement to the small escort vessels. Secondly, and this was an important factor in Dixon's eyes, the boats of the squadron, armed with long guns, were able to operate as gunboats in calm weather and to patrol the flanks of the convoy when they were anchored for the night. The squadron was in fact a floating gunboat base.⁴ The original plan for 1809 was that convoys should be sent through the Belt and the Sound with the object of preventing the concentration of Danish forces in one or other passage.⁵ Dixon's tactics were, however, so successful that this plan was quietly abandoned. Between mid-June and early November 1809, 2,210 merchantmen were escorted through the Belt without a single casualty resulting from enemy action.⁶ Not until 1813 was the passage of convoys through the Sound resumed.⁷ The successful campaign of 1809 did not mean that the battle was over. In the late summer of 1810 a new type of gunboat made its appearance in the Belt. It was more seaworthy and manoeuvrable than those hitherto encountered by the British, and was fitted

¹ P.R.O., Adm. i/6, Saumarez to Admiralty, 28 July 1808.

² P.R.O., Adm. 80/145, Order Book of Rear Admiral Keats, 1808. General Memorandum, 16 September 1808.

³ P.R.O., Adm. 1/7, Keats to Admiralty, 27 November 1808.

⁴ P.R.O., Adm. 1/8, Dixon to Saumarez, 30 June, 5 July, 2 August 1809. For an account of actions in the Belt, see D. Bonner Smith (Ed.), *Captain Botdr'j Recollections* (Navy Records Society, lxxxii, 1942), pp. 10 ff.

⁵ P.R.O., Adm. 1/8, Saumarez to Admiralty, 13 May 1809; enclosure from Keats, 10 May 1809.

⁶ P.R.O., Adm. 1/8, Dixon to Admiralty, 9 November 1809: *Montbly-Magazine* January 1810, p. 649.

⁷ P.R.O., Adm. 2/1376, Admiralty to Rear Admiral J. N. Morris, 27 February 1813.

with, improved sails and rigging. The squadron equipped with these craft made some successful attacks in September, the first successes in the Belt which the Danes were able to claim in that year.¹ Such attacks were usually made on dark and windy nights when the boats of the British fleet rowing guard around the merchantmen found it difficult to keep their stations. The marauders would make a sudden descent, cut adrift some unsuspecting traders, and sweep away into the darkness with their prizes.² But if this variation in the Danish tactics called for greater vigilance and resulted in some minor setbacks for the British, it did not cause any major reverse. In 1812 and 1813, the Danish forces in the Belt achieved few successes, since the gunboat squadrons found the strength of the escorts too formidable.³ The privateers had the same experience. By 1812 the profits from privateering had declined to such an extent that the whole business was languishing. It revived in the autumn of 1813; but this was due to the outbreak of war with Sweden, an event which promised rich pickings to the speculators in the shape of Swedish prizes in the Sound.⁴

After passing from under the protection of the Belt squadron the trade continued up the Baltic guarded by the escorts which had joined at Vinga. These escorts had as their remaining duty to see the merchantmen clear of Bornholm and Christians. Those bound for the Swedish ports were escorted to their destinations. The rest sailed under convoy until they were fifty leagues east of Bornholm.⁵ Then the convoys dispersed and the ships proceeded, independently, relying on the cruisers stationed off Gotland, Danzig, and along the southern coast of the Baltic to keep the French privateers; in check.⁶

Privateering in the Baltic under the French flag was the direct result of individual initiative, but it also owed something to official support. Napoleon regarded privateering as an integral part of the war against British trade, and he was aware of the contribution which the privateers in the Baltic could make towards the fulfilment of his designs.⁷ Information about their operations is scanty. One of them, the *Tilsit* which operated from Danzig, achieved notoriety in 1808 by taking several rich prizes off Pillau. Her career ended early next year when she was taken in the Gulf of

¹ Wandel, *op. cit.* pp. 278 ff.

² P.R.O., Adm. 1/12, Dixon to Saumarez, 9 June 1811.

³ Wandel, *op. cit.* pp. 387 ff.

⁴ K. Larsen, *op. cit.* pp. 4; ff.

⁵ P.R.O., Adm. 2/1102, Admiralty to Emes & Co., 7 March 1809.

⁶ P.R.O., Adm. 2/1368, Admiralty to Saumarez, 22 April 1809; Adm. 2/1370, Admiralty to Saumarez, 8 May 1810.

⁷ B. de Jouvenel, *Napoleon et l'Écotxmiie Dirigie: Le Blocus Continental* (Paris, 1942), p. 313; *Correspondence de Napoleon*, xxi. 462, Napoleon to Decres, 10 March 1811; xxii. 457, Napoleon to Decres, 2 September 1811.

Danzig.¹ The other Danzig based privateers seem to have been curbed by the British cruisers, and, with the exception of the *Sedimane* which did some damage off the Courland coast in 1812, did not achieve any spectacular successes.² Privateers also operated under the French flag from Stralsund. Mahelin, the French consul at that place, encouraged privateering; but again the results were not outstanding. Between December 1809 and May 1812, twenty-eight ships were brought into Stralsund of which ten were definitely condemned as good prizes.³ Over roughly the same period, seven privateers which sailed from Stralsund and nearby ports were lost.⁴ In comparison with the efforts of the Danes and Norwegians, French privateering in the Baltic had little more than a nuisance value, and it was never on such a scale as to constitute a serious threat to British trade.

After casting off the merchantmen, the escorts, unless under orders to reinforce the cruiser detachments within the Baltic, made for the rendezvous at which merchantmen bound for Britain joined the convoys. In 1808 and 1809 when Britain and Sweden were allies, the homeward convoys sailed from Karlskrona. When the Swedes made peace with Denmark, Russia, and France in the autumn and winter of 1809-10, this arrangement was no longer possible, since they were compelled to agree to the exclusion of British shipping from their harbours.⁵ Being anxious, however, to avoid a maritime war with Britain, they made no attempt to interfere with the collection of convoys in Hano Bay off the south coast of Sweden, a place well situated for this purpose during the summer months.⁶ Moreover, Saumarez received verbal assurances in the autumn of 1810 that no obstacle would be placed in the way of the fleet having resort to the small and undefended harbour of Matvik after the onset of rougher weather.⁷ On 17 November 1810 Sweden, under pressure from Napoleon, declared war against Britain. This declaration was made unwillingly.⁸ The Swedish armed forces were ordered not to attempt any active hostilities against the British, and a British secret agent in Stockholm was

¹P.R.O., Adm. 1/6, Saumarez to Admiralty, 5 July 1808; Adm. 1/8 Saumarez to Admiralty, 20 May 1809.

²Archives] Nat[ionales, Paris] F 12.185 3. Report of Consul at Danzig, 12 November 1812.

³Arch. Nat., F 12.1853, Tableau des Resultats de la course dans l'Atondissement consulaire de Stralsund. Undated, probably compiled May 1812.

⁴Archives des] A[ffaires] E[trangères, Paris], Correspondence Commereiale, Stralsund vol. i 1810-1813, Consul's Reports, 27 July, 27 December 1810; 3 August, 30 October 1811.

⁵A. Grade, *Sverige och Tilsit-Alliansen 1807-1810* (Lund, 1913), pp. 443 and 477; L. Tingsten, *Sveriges Yltre Politik 1807-1810* (Stockholm 1923), pp. 2 ff.

⁶P.R.O., Adm. 1/10, Saumarez to Admiralty, 13 June 1810; Grade, *op. cit.* p. 430.

⁷P.R.O., Adm. 1/11, Saumarez to Admiralty, 9 October 1810.

⁸O. Alin, *Carl Joban och Sveriges Yltre Politik 1807-1810*; (Stockholm, 1899), i. 70 ff.; T. T. Hojer, *Carl XIV Joban: Krmprinstiden* (Stockholm, 1943), pp. 55 ff.

assured by the foreign minister that every facility would be afforded the squadron stationed off the coast of Sweden.¹ As a consequence of the Swedish policy, the collection within the Baltic of the homeward trade did not suffer any great inconvenience during these difficult years. The Swedish ports were re-opened in 1812.

Convoy was provided at Karlskrona or Hano at fortnightly intervals, as far as wind and weather allowed, between April and November.² In practice, the date of the last homeward convoy was usually a little later than that agreed upon with the merchants at the beginning of the season, though not as late as many merchants would have liked. The first convoy, consisting for the most part of vessels which had missed the last convoy in the previous year, and had been forced to winter in the Baltic, was brought home as soon as the sea was free of ice. May and June were comparatively quiet months, and the convoys were usually quite small, some of them amounting to less than one hundred sail.³ By early July, the ships were streaming down the Baltic from the Gulf of Finland and the Gulf of Riga in great numbers to join the convoys at the rendezvous. During the autumn homeward convoys of 300 to 400 ships arrived off the southern end of the Belt, and accumulations of over 500 were occasionally reported.⁴ Such extra large convoys usually resulted from the detention of the trade at Karlskrona or Hano due to the persistence of unfavourable winds. Another factor which caused the formation of large convoys towards the end of the season, was the custom of the Baltic traders to make two round voyages annually, many of them clearing from a British port on their second trip as late as September.⁵ And, whereas in midsummer the trade seems to have been fairly well spread, the approach of winter produced a heavy rush of traffic as the merchantmen came racing down the Baltic, pressing on each others' heels in an effort to join convoy before the ice made the sea unnavigable.

There is no need to describe in detail the homeward voyage. The merchantmen were shepherded through the Belt by the squadron stationed there, and were usually escorted by a ship-of-the-line from that squadron as far as the island of Anholt in the Kattegat. Anholt was occupied by the British in 1809. It provided a supply of fresh water for the Belt squadron, and its possession also contributed to the safety of the trade in that its lighthouse was an important

¹ P.R.O., F.O. Sweden (Consuls) 73/65, George Foy to Culling Smith, No. 1, 9 May 18 n; Tingsten, *op. cit.* p. 108.

²P.R.O., Adm. 2/1102, Admiralty to Ernes & Co., 7 March 1809; Adm. 1/4556 William and Philip Emes to Admiralty, 21 March 1811; Adm. 1/4557. W. and P. Emes to Admiralty, 6 April 1812.

³P.R.O., Adm. 1/9, Dixon to Admiralty, 9 November 1809; Adm- 1/10, Dixon to Admiralty, 4 August 1810.

⁴Ross, *op. cit.* pp. 196 and 214.

⁵P.R.O., Adm. 106/1457, Navy Board in Letters (Promiscuous Series B), 1805-7, Mr. Bagley to Navy Board, 27 September 1805.

navigational aid, warning the skippers of the dangerous Anholt reef, graveyard of many a Baltic trader.¹ At Vinga, the large convoys were divided into smaller divisions, and placed under the charge of the several escorts which had conducted the trade across the North Sea from the British ports. The various divisions sailed from Vinga on the first fair wind after the different convoys were formed. They sailed either independently or in company down the Skagerak. Those sailing in company remained together until they were clear of the enemy bases on the Norwegian coast. Then they parted, and the escorts conducted the merchantmen across the North Sea to their destinations in the British Isles.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to estimate accurately the shipping losses incurred during this prolonged battle.² Even if the figures were available, they would not indicate the value of the property which was lost to British merchants and ship-owners. Samples of the insurance rates quoted for the Baltic trade have, however, survived. These give a picture of the situation from the underwriter's point of view, probably the best surviving indication of the risks incurred.³ It is evident from these figures that the dangers to the trade increased considerably following the events of 1807. In 1805 the premiums for the Baltic were light, the quarterly averages fluctuating between 3 per cent and 5 per cent, rates which were lower than those for other foreign voyages. In 1808, premiums of 20, 30, and 40 per cent were common. The Baltic premiums quoted by George Hobson, a prominent underwriter associated with Lloyd's show that in 1810 and 1811 the average rate was three times the average premium on all other voyages both foreign and coastal, falling in 1812 to double the same. The highest average homeward risk was 22 per cent in 1811; the highest outward average 21.5 per cent in 1810. The premiums began to decline in 1812, but not until 1814 did the yearly average for the Baltic again fall below the general average.

If these high premiums reflected only the risk from the enemy raiders and the ordinary navigational hazards, the indication would be that very heavy losses were incurred in action. The picture is complicated, however, by another risk: the risk of confiscation. It has been argued that it was not the sea risks but the extension of French control along the coasts which sent the insurance premiums

¹ Ross, *op. cit.* pp. 143 and 147, gives an account of the capture of Anholt. The importance of its possession is described by Saumarez in his dispatch dated 18 October 1808 (*Adm. 1/11*). For the navigational dangers in the Kattegat see P. de Lovenorn, *Sailing Directions for the Kattegat to be used with the mm improved Chart*, trans. by F. Schneider (Copenhagen 1800).

² Tonnessen, *op. cit.* pp. 478 ff.

³ C. Wright and C. Ernest Fayle, *A History of Lloyd's* (1928), pp. 187 ff.; J. T. Datson, *Our Next War in its Commercial Aspect; with some account of the Premiums paid at Lloyd from 1805 to 1816* (1894), pp. 33 ff. and 70 ff.

up to great heights.¹ There is much truth in this argument. Certainly, the most severe blow to the underwriters was the great confiscation of British property in the Baltic ports in 1810; an event which represented Napoleon's most determined effort to exclude British goods from northern Europe.² Leaving aside this point for the moment, there is another matter of some relevance which should be mentioned.

The merchants and underwriters did not remain silent when their interests were damaged by events at sea. They complained to the Admiralty, and their complaints were forwarded to the Commander-in-chief. In June 1808, for example, a convoy was badly mauled in the Malmo passage. Saumarez was called upon to provide a detailed explanation of this affair.³ The dispatches concerning the Baltic campaign reflect pretty faithfully the anxieties of those engaged in commerce. They contain many complaints about delays to the trade, complaints about the timing of convoys, complaints, particularly in 1810, about the lack of reliable intelligence concerning the political situation on the southern Baltic coast, complaints about the detention by the cruisers of the Baltic fleet of foreign vessels sailing without a licence, and laden, according to the claimants, on British account; but there are comparatively few complaints about shipping losses resulting from enemy action. On occasion the convoys suffered badly; in June and December 1808, in July 1810, and in November 1811. But these incidents were exceptional. Naturally enough, they caused some alarm and provoked some criticism. There is no suggestion, however, that they produced a loss of confidence in the ability of the fleet to give protection. At no time was the point reached, as it was for instance in the cases of the Malta and Russia convoys in the war of 1939-45, when the commerce raider threatened to win ascendancy. The technical and numerical inferiority of the Danish and Norwegian naval forces prevented them from inflicting heavy losses on British trade regularly over a prolonged period. The limited maritime resources of the two countries forced them into a reliance upon the privateer as the principal weapon of sea warfare. The privateers achieved much. But privateering from its very nature was incapable of sustained effort in the face of disappointing returns. The sharp decline in the number of privateers fitted out in Denmark and Norway in 1811 and 1812 reflects that fact. On the other hand

¹ C. N. Parkinson (ed.), *The Trade Winds* (1948), p. 79. The opinion is expressed by G. Ernest Fayle in his contribution, 'The Employment of British Shipping'.

² Wright and Fayle, *op. cit.* pp. 241 ff.; J. Holland Rose, 'A document relating to the Continental System', *ante*, xvii (1903), 122 ff. Heckscher, *op. cit.* p. 235.

³ P.R.O., *Adm. 2/1365*, Admiralty to Saumarez, 27 June 1808: 'And I am commanded to express the great regret their lordships feel at the disaster which has happened and to call upon you for a more detailed statement of the circumstances which led to this untoward occurrence. . . .

complete protection was impossible. Every convoy had its proportion of bad sailers and undisciplined masters who tended to straggle from the main body and expose themselves thereby to capture. A continual trickle of losses between the Naaze of Norway and the Baltic ports must be presumed. The sea risks cannot, therefore, be discounted when the rise in premiums is considered. Their greatest effect upon insurance rates was probably in 1808, which might be described as a year of experiment in the defence of the Baltic trade. A high price was sometimes paid for the lessons learnt in that year, but those lessons were applied in subsequent campaigns with progressively improved results. Losses were reduced to a minimum, and the flow of trade between Britain and the Baltic continued. That was what mattered.

The protection of the Baltic trade, when judged in the light of the dangers which threatened it, appears as a purely defensive operation. This view of it is incomplete; for the operations in defence of trade had important offensive aspects which undermined Napoleon's economic and maritime policy. The extension of the maritime war to the Baltic was preceded and accompanied by declarations on the part of France and Britain, the Berlin and Milan Decrees and the Orders in Council of 1807, which intensified the war against the other's trade, and in the process extended the ground upon which shipping of all nations became liable to capture and condemnation.¹ After 1807 the Baltic swarmed with men of war and privateers empowered to arrest merchantmen suspected of deviating in any way from the stringent codes regulating maritime trade which had been issued by the two chief belligerents. In the circumstances, shipowners were driven to conduct their business in accordance with the maritime code of the power which could provide a measure of security to the vessels which obeyed it. The British convoy system was the answer to the dilemma of the Baltic shipping industry and of American shipowners who sought employment for their vessels in European waters, as it gave protection to vessels of all nations[^] except the French, on condition that their activities were in accordance with British maritime interests. In consequence a vast pool of foreign shipping was made available for the carriage of cargoes to and from the Baltic on British account.² Freight rates for Baltic voyages rose sharply in the second half of 1807 and they tended to increase further. Seamen's wages were also high.³ Thus the Baltic shipowners and seamen came to have a vested

¹ A. T. Mahan, *Influence of Sea Power on the French Revolution and Empire* (1892)ii. 274 ff.; F. Melvin, *Napoleon's Navigation System* (New York, 1919), p- 45.

² A.A.E., *Correspondance Commerciale, Dantzic vol. si, Consul's Report, 7 July 1810; Dantzic vol. xii, Considerations sur l'Etat du commerce dela Baltique a la Fin de 1811, dated 7 December.*

³ A.A.E., *Correspondance Commerciale, Memel vol. ii, Consul's Report, 1December 1810; Tooke, History of Prices* (1837), i. 309 seqq.

interest in the maintenance of a trade from which, as its carriers, they profited handsomely. Britain had no need of recourse to corruption in order to win their co-operation in the evasion of the French decrees. The realities of maritime power dictated their conduct.¹ And, since Napoleon's authority ceased at the water's edge, he was powerless to control the movements of ships once they had put to sea. In an age when land transport could not compete in terms of time, efficiency, and costs with maritime transport, this was a fundamental weakness in the structure of Napoleonic commercial strategy.

The importance of the exercise of control over the movements of ships leads to a consideration of the second offensive aspect of the British convoy system: its employment as a means of regulating shipping. The implications of the system as a controlling factor can best be seen in relation to the widespread use of false papers which created legal and administrative problems for the authorities responsible for the enforcement of Napoleon's policy in the Baltic ports. Ships bound from Britain for the Baltic always carried papers, forged with great attention to detail, by which it appeared that they had cleared from a port in amity with France and were sailing in accordance with the French decrees.² It is worth noting that so skilfully were such papers prepared and so well couched were the crews in substantiating under interrogation the details contained therein that it was difficult to obtain proof that a vessel had in fact made a voyage contrary to the regulations issued by the French.³ Ships clearing from the Baltic for Britain usually declared their destination to be Norway or the Low Countries and sailed accordingly with papers to that effect. As a protection against detention by the British cruisers the ships engaged in the trade carried licences issued by the Privy Council Office. These licences which were valid for a fixed period ordered the commanders of British warships to allow free passage to the ships so covered ' notwithstanding all the documents which accompany the ship and cargo may represent the same to be destined to any neutral or hostile port, or to whomsoever such property may belong'. It might be objected at this point that the French were able to simulate licences and papers as difficult to detect as -were the British productions and that under cover of these, ships on charter to French merchants could engage freely in the Baltic trade and

¹A.A.E., *Correspondance Commerciale, Dantzic vol. xi, Consul's Report, 1 j February 1810; Memoirs of John Quincy Adams, ed. by C. F. Adams* (Philadelphia, 1874) ,ii. 209.

² Lindsay, *op. at. ii.* 316.

³ Mem. of]. Quincy Adams, p. 308; *Writings of John Qtiincy Adams, ed. by W. C. Ford* (New York, 1914), iv. 235, Adams to Monroe, 3 October 1811; A.A.E., *Correspondance Commerciale, Colberg vol. i, Consul's Report, 30 June 1812; This dispatch contains some interesting details concerning the statements made by the crews of several ships when they -were interrogated.*

enjoy the protection of the Royal Navy. The answer is that of course they could produce such forgeries. But the successful employment on a big scale of simulated papers postulated the possession of the physical means to direct the ships concerned into the desired channels, and to control effectively their movements. In other words, the methods employed by Britain in the shape of simulated papers to promote her Baltic trade depended ultimately upon her ability to exercise the degree of maritime power necessary to prevent the abuse of the system. The adherence by the merchantmen in convoy to prescribed routes under the supervision of warships provided some guarantee that Britain's commercial decrees would be obeyed. This was of particular importance in the case of the homeward bound trade.

The ships bound for Britain from the Baltic were laden for the most part with naval stores. It was an axiom of British policy that such stores must not reach France. The problem was how to prevent this happening. To obtain their clearance in accordance with the French ban upon commercial intercourse with Britain,¹ the ships in question sailed ostensibly for Norway or the Low¹ Countries.¹ The papers with which they were issued naturally substantiated this. The masters also carried a licence, usually¹ obtained in advance from London, which protected the vessels from arrest by the British navy. The immunity from detention granted by the licence theoretically conferred upon them great freedom of movement and opened the way for abuses calculated to undermine the basic principles of British maritime policy. There was need for vigilance in this respect. The supply of the French naval bases with stores from the Baltic was a problem for which Napoleon energetically sought a solution. The sea routes being closed to French trade, it was necessary to rely upon inland waterways and coastal navigation to nourish the arsenals, a necessarily slow procedure.² Napoleon, therefore, with the opportunism which characterized many of the modifications he made in his navigation system sought to stimulate the trade by permitting ships to comply with the British regulations if they could in the end reach a French port.³ The sensitivity of the British Government with regard to the leakage of naval stores is apparent in the precaution taken in 1810 to prevent vessels laden with them from slipping out of convoy at the southern end of the Great Belt and making for Kiel whence they could easily be transported by inland waterways

¹ Frequent references to this practice are to be found in the consular reports preserved in the Archives des Affaires Etrangères.

² Arch. Nat., F.12.662, *Commerce avec la Russie 1757 a 1810. Memorandum on Supply of Naval Stores 1808,*

³ Arch. Nat., A.F. 33 III 464, *Danemark 1793-1816, Champaguy to Didelot, 5 September 1810.*

to the North Sea.¹ Even more striking as evidence of this sensitivity was the provision in licences for the importation of naval stores to Britain in foreign ships that any ship destined to a port south of Hull should proceed with convoy, 'and not desert the same till her arrival at her port of destination or as long as such convoy shall be instructed to protect her'. If for any reason a ship with such cargo were separated from its convoy in the North Sea, it had to make its landfall at Dundee or Leith and sail in convoy from there to the port of destination in the south.² The power to exercise this tight control over the Baltic trade by means of the convoy system neutralized the risks arising out of the apparent — immunity which the licence and the falsifications conferred upon the ships employed in it. It made possible the employment by Britain of irregular procedures to evade the French decrees and the enforcement of her own maritime code.

In 1807 Britain faced possible exclusion from the Baltic after the extension of French hegemony to the north of Europe put Napoleon's economic war against her on a continental basis. Over the next six years, a ceaseless battle was fought to keep the Baltic open to British commerce and to subject the Baltic trade to the principles of the British maritime code. The Royal Navy won that battle. The victory was not achieved in a memorable fleet action. The many engagements which were fought have been passed over completely or else relegated in a fragmentary condition to that division of naval history known as 'minor operations'. A more inappropriate term for a struggle upon which depended the control of vital trade routes would be difficult to find.

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¹ P.R.O., B.T. 5/20 *Minutes of Board of Trade, August 1810; Adm. 2/1370, Admiralty to Saumarez, 3 August 1810; Adm. 1/10, Saumarez to Admiralty, 31 August 1810.*

² P.R.O., Adm. 106/1626, *Navy Board Promiscuous Letters, Series 'S', I. Solly to Navy Board, 17 May 1810; enclosure from E. Toller, reporting case before High Court of Admiralty of the ship Europa.*