



A Voyage Round the World: In the years MDCCXL, I, II, III, IV

George Anson

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Example in this ebook

The men-of-war in which Anson went to sea were built mostly of oak. They were painted externally yellow, with a blue stripe round the upper works. Internally, they were painted red. They carried cannon on one, two, or three decks according to their size. The biggest ships carried a hundred cannon and nearly a thousand men. The ship in which this famous voyage was made was of the middle size, then called the fourth-rate. She carried sixty cannon, and a crew of four hundred men. Her lower gun deck, a little above the level of the water, was about 140 feet long. She was of about a thousand tons burthen.

Though this seems small to us, it is not small for a wooden ship. It is not possible to build a long wooden ship. The Centurion, though short, was broad, bulky, and deep. She was fit for the sea. As she was built more to carry cannon than to sail, she was a slow sailer. She became slower as the barnacles gathered on her planks under the water. She carried three wooden masts, each fitted with two or three square sails, extended by wooden yards. Both yards and masts were frequently injured in bad weather.

The cannon were arranged in rows along her decks. On the lower gun deck, a little above the level of the water, she carried twenty-six twenty-four-pounders, thirteen on a side. These guns were muzzle-loading cannon which flung twenty-four-pound balls for a distance of about a mile. On the deck above this chief battery, she carried a lighter battery of twenty-six nine- or twelve-pounder guns, thirteen on a side. These guns were also muzzle-loading. They flung their balls for a distance of a little more than a mile.

On the quarter-deck, the poop, the forecastle, and aloft in the tops (the strong platforms on the masts), were lighter guns, throwing balls of from a half to six pounds' weight. {viii} Some of the lightest guns were mounted on swivels, so that they could be easily pointed in any direction. All the guns were clumsy weapons. They could not be aimed with any nicety. The iron round shot fired from them did not fit the bores of the pieces. The gun-carriages were clumsy, and difficult to move. Even when the carriage had been so moved that the gun was accurately trained, and when the gun itself had been raised or depressed till it was accurately pointed, the gunner could not tell how much the ball would wobble in the bore before it left the muzzle. For these reasons all the effective sea-fights were fought at close range, from within a quarter of a mile of the target to close alongside. At a close range, the muskets and small-arms could be used with effect.

The broadside cannon pointed through square portholes cut in the ship's sides. The ports were fitted with heavy wooden lids which could be tightly closed when necessary. In bad weather, the lower-deck gun ports could not be opened without danger of swamping the ship. Sometimes, when the lower-deck guns were fought in a gale, the men stood knee deep in water.

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