



Fireship: The Terror Weapon of the Age of Sail

Peter Kirsch

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The fireship was the guided missile of the age of sail. Packed with incendiary (and sometimes explosive) material, it was aimed at its highly inflammable wooden target by volunteers who bailed out at the last moment. Although it often missed its target, the panic it caused among the crews—who generally could not swim and had no method of safely abandoning ship—did the job. The most famous example of its use was the English attack off Gravelines in 1588 that led to the rout of the Spanish Armada and the adoption of the fireship as an integral part of the British fleet. The author explains how increasingly sophisticated "fireworks" were designed into specially-built ships, and how doctrines were worked out for their deployment. In covering some of the most dramatic battles of the sailing era, this heavily illustrated book reveals the full impact of a much used but little understood weapon on naval history.

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