

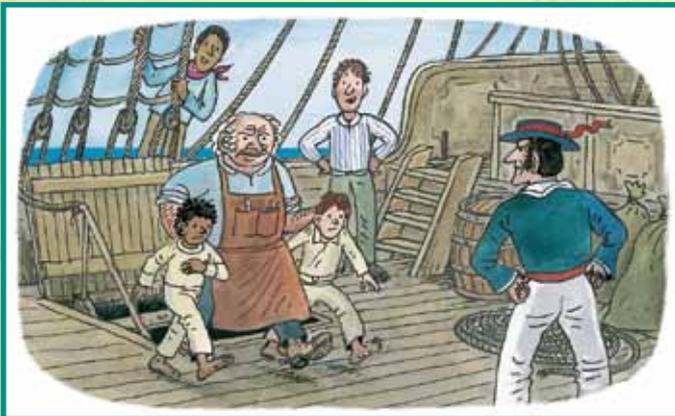
Mission Victory

A sailor's life

If you could go back in time to visit *HMS Victory* at the time of the battle of Trafalgar, like Chip and Wilf did, you would find out that young sailors had a hard life. But was it really so much harder than life on shore at that time?

Starting young

At the time of Trafalgar and before, it was normal for sailors to join the Navy very young - often at the age of about 11. They were known as Sailors Third Class. Some of these boys were well educated and came from rich families (for example, look at the letter from William Parker to his mother, in the list of websites below). Others were from much poorer families, or were orphans who were given the chance of a new life at sea by charities such as the Marine Society.



A step up in life

If they worked hard, it was possible for boys from poor families to become officers. Even those who didn't

become officers often ended up as sailors, earning more money than they would have done if they stayed on shore. So for poor boys, joining the Navy could be the start of a better life.

Regular meals

The food that sailors ate doesn't sound very nice compared with food we enjoy today. There were no fridges or freezers, so there was no way of keeping food fresh apart from salting or drying it. And because they didn't get much fresh fruit or vegetables, sailors could catch a disease called scurvy. (By the 1790s, sailors were issued with lemon juice rations which helped to keep scurvy at bay). However, even if the food at sea wasn't very nice, for poorer sailors at least there was the benefit of regular meals, not to mention rations of beer and rum!

Crime and punishment

Sailors who disobeyed officers or committed crimes would often be flogged (beaten) with the cat o' nine tails - a rope with a split end. (The splits were the 'nine tails'.) This would have been very painful, but no worse than the punishments given to criminals on land at that time.

Fact Kissing the bosun's daughter

Any boy sailor who had committed an offence had to lie face down over a cannon to be beaten with a cane on his buttocks. It was called "kissing the bosun's daughter".

What if you got ill?

It was easy to fall ill at sea, and more sailors died of illnesses like dysentery and malaria than were killed in battle. Sailors who were injured in battle often ended up having an arm or leg amputated (cut off), and they had no anaesthetics to take the pain away. But Nelson was famous for keeping his sailors healthy (perhaps because he knew that he would not be able to win any battles if they were sick). So again, poorer sailors may have had a healthier life on board ship than they would have done at home on shore.

Going off with a bang!

In the story, Chip and Wilf discover that a Viran has been messing about with the gunpowder so that the ship's cannons won't fire properly. But how does the gunpowder actually work?

- First, the flintlock mechanism in the cannon creates a spark of fire.
- When the fire reaches the gunpowder inside the cannon, chemicals in the gunpowder react and create a massive amount of gas that expands in a fraction of a second
- The expanding gases can only escape by rushing down the barrel of the cannon and out of its mouth.

- The expanding gas pushes the cannonball out of the cannon in a huge explosion (unless, of course, a Viran has been tampering with the gunpowder!).

Some more websites to explore

- A *Daily Mail* web page with information and images taken from the diary of an 18th Century sailor, George Hodge. The diary is hand-written (with interesting spelling!) and decorated with lots of pictures. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1044940/Diary-18th-century-sailor-provides-fascinating-insight-life-decks-Nelsons-navy.html>
- A letter from an 11-year-old sailor, William Parker, to his mother in 1793: <http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/britishnavy1793.htm>
- The website of HMS Victory: http://www.hms-victory.com/index.php?option=com_frontpage&Itemid=1
- The website of the National Maritime Museum, where you can look at objects from their collections and find out more about the history of ships and sailing: <http://www.nmm.ac.uk/places/maritime-galleries/>

