

# THE BICENTENARY OF THE REVOLUTIONARY AND NAPOLEONIC WARS

BY

DAVID K BROWN, RCNC

Most readers will be aware that 1994 marks the 50th anniversary of 'D' Day, but fewer will be aware that it is the bi-centenary of the first of the great naval victories of the long wars with France. Over the next twenty years or so, it is hoped to note briefly the more important bi-centenaries, drawing attention to the involvement of ancestors of today's ships. The first important date passed without notice: on 29 December 1792, H.M.S. *Childers* left Plymouth to watch the approaches of Brest.

The first major battle came 18 months later. ADMIRAL Lord HOWE sailed from Spithead at the beginning of May 1794 with 32 ships of the line (including *Invincible*, *Marlborough* and *Thunderer*) and sighted the French fleet on 29 May. Heavy firing commenced at 1000 on 1 June and, quite soon the battle was over with six French ships captured. HOWE was nearing 70 and had not been to his bed for five nights and was so exhausted that he had to be carried below. In consequence there was no effective pursuit of the defeated enemy. More seriously, the vast grain convoy which the French fleet had been covering escaped without being sighted.