

THE GLOBAL IMPACT OF BRITISH NAVAL LEADERSHIP, 1757-1805

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A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of History

Sam Houston State University

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

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by

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December, 2018

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## ABSTRACT

Obringer, Christopher S., *The global impact of British naval leadership, 1757-1805*. Master of Arts (History), December, 2018, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, Texas.

Throughout the second half of the eighteenth century, the British Navy went through a development of its leadership that drastically changed its spirit and culture. After the court-martial and execution of Admiral John Byng for failing to relieve the British forces on the island of Minorca, the leadership in the British Navy took on a more aggressive posture and took more risks than in earlier periods. These changes in leadership were reinforced by the repeated success of naval leaders who experienced success through unconventional and aggressive combat tactics.

However, combat tactics were not the sole source of British naval success. British naval officers learned their craft through a proven and comprehensive process of development that gave them a distinct advantage over their enemies. By the time the vast majority of officers received their commission as an officer, they were already thoroughly experienced with seamanship and had a chance to develop a leadership style which carried on with them throughout their careers.

The unconventional tactics, the culture of aggressiveness, and the process of career development of British naval leaders are personified in several prominent naval leaders of the second half of the eighteenth century. This work explores these leadership characteristics in Admiral Richard Howe, Vice-Admiral Horatio Nelson, Vice-Admiral Cuthbert Collingwood, and Admiral Edward Pellew.

KEYWORDS: British Navy, Leadership, Social history, Leadership roles, Leadership styles,  
Edward Byng, Edward Hawke, Richard Howe, Horatio Nelson, Edward Pellew, Cuthbert  
Collingwood

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express gratitude to Dr. Jeremiah Dancy, the director of my thesis. His guidance throughout this process has been vital. He helped steer me toward important sources and guiding my research, not only to the creation of this work but also to a better understanding of the subject and the importance of the British Navy's impact on world history.

I am also grateful for my wonderful bride, Amy. You have put up with so much as I have plodded through this project. I am genuinely thankful for your support and your kind smiles that quietly said, "Keep going, you are almost there."

I also want to thank my four children for sacrificing so much time with me so I can finish this project. You can now be as loud as you like and it will not disturb daddy.

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## Chapter I

### Introduction

The wind blew hard across the waters of Portsmouth, England on March 14<sup>th</sup>, 1757, whipping and cracking pennants and signal flags among the naval ships anchored in the harbor. Amongst all the flags of canvas and silk fluttering in the wind, Admiral John Byng knelt down on the quarterdeck of the ship, *Monarch*, holding a silk handkerchief in his hand. In front of him stood three files of three Royal Marines, the firing squad with orders to execute him. Admiral Byng tied the handkerchief around his eyes. Then he held up a second handkerchief. It blew in the wind like the proud flags of the British Navy in the harbor, and throughout the world. A marine Captain ordered the marines to cock the flintlocks on their muskets. Byng dropped the second handkerchief, it was tossed in the wind and fell to the deck. The marines fired their muskets, instantly killing Byng. The small silk handkerchief falling from Byng's hand was symbolic of a new beginning in British naval leadership.

During the second half of the eighteenth century, leadership in the British Navy went through a profound evolution. The officers that served in the navy, and the policies directing their actions, developed from a posture of steady but stagnant to bold and daring. Bold and daring, coupled with unmatched experience and knowledge led the leaders and officers of the British Navy to be the critical factor in the success of Great Britain's foreign policy during some of the most contentious and significant wars in history. A preeminent scholar on the subject, N.A.M Rodger, describes the evolution of British naval leadership, "Byng's death revived and reinforced a culture of aggressive determination which set British officers apart from their foreign contemporaries, and

which in time gave them a steadily mounting psychological ascendancy. More and more in the course of the century, and for long afterward, British officers encountered opponents who expected to be attacked, and more than half expected to be beaten so that they went into action with an invisible disadvantage which no amount of personal courage or numerical strength could entirely make up for.”<sup>1</sup>

From the time of Admiral John Byng, and his controversial execution for failing to relieve the siege on the British forces on Minorca, to the end of the Napoleonic Wars, British Naval leadership was infused with a culture of resolve, and a sense of superiority. Byng’s execution signaled a symbolic change from a tendency for careful consideration to a spirit of tenacity. This new spirit was championed early on by Admiral Edward Lord Hawke and perfected nearly half a century later by Admiral Horatio Lord Nelson. The examples of Hawke and Nelson, and the many other leaders exhibiting this new spirit of tenacity permeated throughout the entire navy. The aura of preeminence exhibited by the leaders caused the British seamen to take on the same sense of superiority and develop into an unrivaled fighting force. During the period of this study, the British Navy was truly superior to its enemies in naval fleet actions. Their enemies were devastated by the unorthodox fleet techniques employed by this new breed of officer, and the tenacity of the British officers and seamen. The leadership of those officers and the naval dominance they accomplished laid the foundations for the global hegemony of Britain during the nineteenth century.

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<sup>1</sup> N.A.M. Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain: 1649-1815* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004), 272.

Through these experiences of victory and the resultant tradition of excellence, British naval officers arose to represent a distinguished and prominent military and diplomatic power. However, even among these dominant naval officers, there was a higher tier. This exalted group of officers could inspire the men under their command to achieve feats deemed impossible by the standards of the time. They galvanized their commands into well-balanced teams through genuine paternal compassion, heroic personifications, and an unwavering expectation for the very best performance from their men. These leaders used their natural and learned leadership skills to attain victory for Britain time after time.

The tradition of success and the global naval hegemony of the British Navy is a direct result of the leadership of the Navy's officers during the period of this study. These officers operated in a complex and demanding period. They served in multiple theatres of war; from the Mediterranean Sea to the Carribean Sea, and in their home waters in the North Sea and the English Channel. In order to understand how the results achieved by the British Navy during the period have been received and considered by historians and scholars, this study will begin with an overview of naval history encompassing the period.

### Historiography

The amount of scholarship concerning British Naval leadership during the period between the Seven Years' War and the end of the Napoleonic Wars is, for lack of better terms, shocking. Libraries of the world's leading universities are packed full of books and journals concerning the British Navy and its officers. Many of these resources outline the strategic maneuvers of the British Navy and the administrative advancements of the

British government ministries throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, because of the tendency for many of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century scholars to adopt a “great men” perspective when analyzing the subject, the vast majority of early scholarly works focus on biographical accounts of naval officers.

Among writings contemporary to the period, there is an astonishing dearth of work by naval officers serving in the British Navy. The lack of scholarship is surprising considering naval officers were usually proficient in writing the official correspondences and ships’ logs. Unfortunately, there are no enduring works of historical analysis by serving naval officers of the period; even though they provided a plethora of primary source material consisting of correspondences and diaries written by them. The insights researchers have pulled from these sources piece together a history seen through a lens of official communications and the personal letters which conform to the formal social norms of the time. Communications and letters of this type make critical analysis difficult.

There are three shining lights of surprise among the available contemporary sources. They are three popular social histories written by British seaman; Robert Hay’s *Landsman Hay*,<sup>2</sup> Williams Spravens’ *Memoirs of a Seafaring Life*,<sup>3</sup> and William Robinson’s *Jack Nastyface*.<sup>4</sup> These three books offer a view of British naval leadership from the perspective of one taking orders instead of issuing them. They discuss the effects an officer could have on morale, whether positive or negative. Hay gives a unique perspective from a seaman who worked up the courage to attempt desertion from the

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Hay, *Landsman Hay* (Barnsley, UK: Seaforth Publishing, 2010), 78.

<sup>3</sup> William Spravens, *Memoirs of a Seafaring Life* (London: The Bath Press, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> William Robinson, *Jack Nastyface: Memoirs of an English Seaman* (London: Chatham, 2002).

Navy. Spravens' book explains the desire and benefits of a seaman who attempts to remain attached to officers who treat the men well and avoid those officers who were harsh. Although the works are not meant to be works of historical analysis, they indirectly enlighten the reader to their unique personal analysis of the period. Robinson's book was especially helpful to confirm the adulation Horatio Nelson's seamen had for him, and the abusive conduct of some of the more authoritarian British naval officers.

Within a decade of the end of the Napoleonic Wars, the first historical work arrived with Williams James' six volumes of *The Naval History of Great Britain: From the Declaration of War by France in 1793 to the Accession of George IV.*<sup>5</sup> James' work was comprehensive, and his successors had a hard time improving on the thoroughness of his work. After all, James was an attorney in the Jamaica Prize courts during the Napoleonic Wars and had an authoritative understanding of the naval operations of the period. However, his history reads like a chronological log of events, with nautical and tactical considerations detailed to an almost ponderous extent. The work did not illuminate aspects of leadership. However, it set the stage for subsequent works to expand the subject. In 1847, Nicholas Nichols wrote *A History of the Royal Navy from the Earliest Times to the Wars of the French Revolution*<sup>6</sup> in two volumes. This work was the first history to consider some of the social aspects of the Navy, including manning, pay, and discipline. The second volume covers the period of our study, and although it

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<sup>5</sup> William James, *The Naval History of Great Britain, from the Declaration of War by France, in February 1793 : To the Accession of George Iv. In January 1820* (London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1822).

<sup>6</sup> Nicholas Harris Sir Nicolas, *A History of the Royal Navy, from the Earliest Times to the Wars of the French Revolution* (London, 1847).

discusses some social aspects, the work does not cover or identify leadership characteristics with any depth.

With the advent of the “great men” theory of history, biographies of British naval officers became an important part of the historiography of the period. Most prominent among these “great men” was Horatio Nelson, the universal hero of Great Britain. More biographies have been written about Nelson than almost every other naval officer of the period combined. One book, in particular, Alfred Mahan’s *The Life of Nelson*,<sup>7</sup> was the standard of Nelson biographies for nearly a century from its publishing in 1897. Mahan indeed saw history as guided by the actions and thoughts of prominent figures. To Mahan, Nelson was the supreme example; hence his almost adoring subtitle for the book: *The Embodiment of the Sea Power of Great Britain*. A bold subtitle. For someone to be considered the ‘embodiment’ of British sea power, the nation that boasts the infamous ‘wall of oak,’ they would have to be a monument of courage and leadership. Mahan skillfully expresses Nelson’s strategic thinking, tactical abilities, and innate leadership characteristics.

The twentieth century included many wars across the world and also saw a decrease in publications about eighteenth-century military history. Many historians were distracted by the intense naval campaigns that encompassed the first half of the century and the Cold War conflict arms race that took place in the second half of the century.

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<sup>7</sup> Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Life of Nelson: The Embodiment of the Sea Power of Great Britain*, 2 vols. (London: Sampson Low & Co., 1897).

However, there was an increase in fictional writing about the period of this study, including Jack London's *Seawolf*<sup>8</sup>, C.S. Forester's Horatio Hornblower series of novels, and Patrick O'Brian's Aubrey-Maturin series of novels. These works of fiction touch on the twentieth century's nostalgic look at the past, when wars were conducted with gentlemanly honor, chivalry, and close combat, as opposed to the detached modern wars of underwater submarine operations, long-range artillery, and air combat.

There were still some scholarly works about the British Navy and its leadership during the twentieth century. Alfred Mahan continued his scholarship on the period of this study when he wrote *The Major Operations of the Navies in the War of American Independence* in 1913.<sup>9</sup> In this book, Mahan outlines the critical naval actions of the War of American Independence and gives background to the conflicts and context to the specific battles. In 1926, William James, a Captain in the Royal Navy, wrote *The British Navy in Adversity*<sup>10</sup> which was an early look at naval leadership during the War of American Independence. James lamented the British planning and leadership that led to the struggles Britain faced in America at the time.

During the middle of the twentieth century, there was a flurry of histories written on the Battle of Trafalgar, and Vice-Admiral Nelson's success in the battle. These works were Oliver Warner's *Trafalgar*<sup>11</sup> in 1959, Donald Macintyre's *Trafalgar: Nelson's Great Victory*<sup>12</sup> in 1968, and David Howarth's *Trafalgar: The Nelson Touch*<sup>13</sup> in 1969.

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<sup>8</sup> Jack London, *The Sea-Wolf* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1904).

<sup>9</sup> Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Major Operations of the Navies in the War of American Independence* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, and Company, 1913).

<sup>10</sup> W. M. James, *The British Navy in Adversity: A Study of the War of American Independence* (London: Longmans & Co., 1926).

<sup>11</sup> Oliver Warner, *Trafalgar* (London: Batsford, 1959).

<sup>12</sup> Donald G. F. W. Macintyre, *Trafalgar: Nelson's Great Victory* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1968).

<sup>13</sup> David Armine Howarth, *Trafalgar: The Nelson Touch* (London: Collins, 1969).

These works describe the events of the battle in light of Nelson's leadership and hero status.

In 1960, Michael Lewis made an essential contribution to the study of British naval leadership with his book *A Social History of the Navy, 1793-1815*.<sup>14</sup> Lewis' book steered clear of an analysis of the battles fought by the British Navy. Instead, he focuses on the lives of the men on the British ships. His study included an outline of careers and living conditions of the seamen and officers. The book gives an excellent view of the interaction between the ships officers and the seamen under their command. Another book that focused on the lives and interactions of officers and seamen in the British Navy, instead of the specific battles they were involved in, was N.A.M. Rodger's 1986 book, *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy*.<sup>15</sup> Rodger's book explores the complex 'world' of life onboard a British naval warship; focusing on an inward view of the interactions within a ship instead of an outward look at naval battles or naval administration unless necessary.

At the end of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century, interest grew among scholars of the period into the social history of the British navy. Also, with the increase in the late twentieth century of leadership studies in the sociology and business fields, researchers started to look back in history for examples of leadership; many of those researchers re-discovered the leadership traits of the British Naval leaders of the late eighteenth century. These scholars tended to look for those aspects of leadership which affected the interpersonal relationships between officers and seaman and focuses

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<sup>14</sup> Michael Lewis, *A Social History of the Navy, 1793-1815* (London: Chatham, 1960).

<sup>15</sup> N. A. M. Rodger, *The Wooden World : An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy* (London: Collins, 1986).

on the human condition within the Navy. This trend brought several new biographies of Nelson which have become welcome additions to the field. During the bicentenary of Nelson's victory and death at the Battle of Trafalgar, three crucial historical works on Nelson were published; Colin White's *Nelson: The New Letters*<sup>16</sup>, Andrew Lambert's *Nelson: Britannia's God of War*<sup>17</sup>, and Roger Knight's *The Pursuit of Victory: The Life and Achievement of Horatio Nelson*<sup>18</sup>. All of these books contributed to the better understanding of the leadership qualities of Nelson and pointed out specific factors for the success of his command and the *esprit de corps* on board his ships.

It is evident there is a tendency for historians to focus on Nelson's exploits, and there are good reasons to do so; his success was unrivaled, his personality was inviting and intense, and his personal life bordered on scandalous. However, British naval leadership in this period was made up of several great leaders. Unfortunately, the historiography of the leadership qualities of these other British naval leaders is incomplete. There are books written about John Jervis, Cuthbert Collingwood, Richard Howe, and others; but the works pale in comparison to the scholarship recorded on Nelson. This paper will hopefully fill in the gaps among these great leaders.

Continuing the research into the social history of British naval leadership, Evan Wilson's *The Social History of British Naval Officers, 1775-1815*<sup>19</sup> gives tremendous insight into the inner workings of a naval officer's career. Wilson includes the good and

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<sup>16</sup> Colin White, *Nelson, the New Letters* (Woodbridge, Suffolk ; Rochester, NY: Boydell Press in association with the National Maritime Museum and the Royal Navy Museum, 2005).

<sup>17</sup> Andrew D. Lambert, *Nelson : Britannia's God of War* (London: Faber and Faber, 2004).

<sup>18</sup> Roger Knight, *The Pursuit of Victory : The Life and Achievement of Horatio Nelson* (London: Allen Lane, 2005).

<sup>19</sup> Evan Wilson, *A Social History of British Naval Officers, 1775-1815* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2017).

bad aspects of the practice of patronage among officers and how it could enhance careers. This book is the culmination of years of painstaking academic work and research into the lives and culture of British naval officers. He highlights the process of an officer's career, instead of the more common focus on battles and sea tactics. Wilson's perspective on naval officers helps to illuminate the timeline of a naval officer's career; from a nearly helpless and unformed young gentleman to commissioned sea officer. Not only does Wilson outline the careers of these officers, but he also helps researchers understand many of the motivations of these officers and their complex interactions with each other and British society in general. Wilson's book can sometimes give a reader the idea that he is privy to a world hidden from most scholarship, a world of sometimes dishonorable greed for prize money, nepotism, and toadying to patrons.

Another important work examining British naval leadership is Tom Wareham's *The Star Captains: Frigate Command in the Napoleonic Wars*.<sup>20</sup> In his book, Wareham discusses the careers and exploits of the little known or remembered captains of British frigate ships. Although large fleet actions served in battleships highlighted the careers of many of the most prominent British naval officers, nearly all officers served some time in frigates or ships under the rating, and most likely had the same experiences of command as the less known and forgotten frigate captains. Wareham examines frigates and their commanding officers and contends that some of the most significant naval strategic operations were carried out by these ships. The importance of frigates to the strategic

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<sup>20</sup> Tom Wareham, *The Star Captains : Frigate Command in the Napoleonic Wars* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2001).

mission of the British Navy bolsters Wareham's interest in the leadership abilities of the captains of the ships.

The historiography of the subject would never be complete without addressing the monumental work of the Naval Records Society (NRS). Since 1893, the society has produced 162 volumes of different materials about the history of the British Navy. Their volumes include collections of letters and documents that help document in detail the Navy's history. The editors' introduction to each section and volume uncover useful and pertinent details about the primary sources and how they can be utilized by scholars of the subject matter.

The Naval Records Society's volumes contain an almost endless supply of primary source material for research into this subject matter. This paper will rely heavily on those sources to bring to light the leadership characteristics of many of the naval leaders of the period. Of the 162 volumes, over fifty of them contain the letters, correspondences, or journals of many of the naval leaders of the period of this study.

Although much of the work on eighteenth-century naval leadership has focused heavily on the British officer corps, important studies of naval officers from other European countries has added depth and breadth to the historiography. Raoul Castex offers one of the most wholly Francophile perspectives on naval leadership. Although not a contemporary of the period, Castex offers a French viewpoint to naval officers of the late eighteenth century. His expertise comes from his naval career and extensive study of naval strategy and leadership. His works of the early twentieth century are widely recognized as a significant contribution to naval warfare scholarship. His work, *Theories*

*Strategiques*<sup>21</sup>, offers a blistering critique of the French strategy for world power during the second half of the eighteenth century. The critique focuses on the attempt by the French forces to match Britain in every theater of war, instead of offering a consolidated force in any one theater of conflict. Castex contends that the French strategy left their resources spread thinly over many different theaters of war. Although his point of view is French, it is an important consideration for this work, as the French were the primary antagonists for the British naval officers of the period. The work offers an opportunity to compare and contrast British and French leadership.

Another important work about the French Navy is William Cormack's book, *Revolution & Political Conflict in the French Navy, 1789-1794*.<sup>22</sup> This book outlines the drastic loss of leadership the French Navy experienced when many of the navy's officers emigrated to avoid persecution during the revolution. The French Navy suffered from a lack of leadership until some of the émigrés returned from abroad and the country was able to train a new officer corps.

With the vast resources available concerning British naval officers, the opportunity for scholars to study and fill in missing pieces of information on leadership characteristics should be plentiful. Understanding what characteristics encouraged British seaman to follow these officers, and how those officers utilized these characteristics to

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<sup>21</sup> Raoul Castex, *Theories Strategiques*, 2 vols. (Paris: Societe d' Editions Geographique, Maritimes et Coloniales, 1930).

<sup>22</sup> William S. Cormack, *Revolution and Political Conflict in the French Navy, 1789-1794* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Book review (H-Net) <http://www.h-net.org/review/hrev-a0a5i9-aa>. Sample text <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/samples/cam031/94017249.html>. Publisher description <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/description/cam026/94017249.html>. Table of contents <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/toc/cam021/94017249.html>. Book review (H-Net) <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=1339>.

gain victory and success is an important endeavor. Information gained from the study of British naval leaders will no doubt complement and enhance modern studies of military leadership, and scholars will likely use the material for many years to come.

### Historical Context

#### *1763-1778*

The conclusion of the Seven Years War brought about a period of British diplomatic and military dominance outside the European environs, most notably in the Atlantic region. After the Treaty of Paris of 1763, British possessions in North America stretched from Barbados in the South to Labrador in the North. These vast colonial possessions soon came to be an important part of the British people's idea of Imperial power. The British North American colonies became a symbol of British world dominance in the public's opinion, and in turn the political leadership.<sup>23</sup> An emphasis on the importance of the American colonies brought about a renewed interest in the success and improvement of the British Navy, the critical strategic component necessary for the maintenance of the colonies.

The renewed interest in achievements of the Navy around the world brought about an interest in world exploration among the British. Not only was there an interest to discover the unknown, but there was also an Enlightenment-inspired desire to make scientific and geographic discoveries throughout the world. Two expeditions which highlight these intentions were Captain Cook's expedition to the South Pacific and Captain Phipps' voyage to the Arctic. Britain used these expeditions for another purpose

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<sup>23</sup> Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean*, 327.

as well. As they developed diplomatic relationships with new trade partners they came into contact with, they discovered and developed new allies against France. Through strong economic relationships with these new allies, Britain was able to gain access to resources and labor. In doing so, they were able to deny France access to the same resources. Gaining access to resources while denying the same resources to the French gave the British a distinct strategic advantage in most of the world.<sup>24</sup>

Britain gained many essential land holdings at the end of the Seven Years War. However, as William Pitt, the British Prime Minister, lamented, many of the territories gained by the British were considered an economic burden to the French, and therefore the British government was seen as assuming a diverse array of burdens.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, what seemed like a tremendous victory at first, before too long, started to fade in glory and many in British political and military circles resigned to the fact that they did not gain as much as they initially thought. Also, Britain had accumulated an enormous debt to pay for the costs of the war. They also had to pay to keep a standing army in the American colonies to protect the frontiers from Native American rebellions to British rule.<sup>26</sup>

To pay for the enormous expenditures for war debt and the cost of retaining troops in the colonies, the British looked to the colonies as an excellent source of revenue. As the British government developed the statutes necessary to implement the increase in revenue, they circumvented colonial representation in the process. British

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<sup>24</sup> Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean*, 327-28.

<sup>25</sup> Jonathan R. Dull, *The French Navy and the Seven Years' War* (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 242.

<sup>26</sup> Jonathan R. Dull, *The Age of the Ship of the Line : The British & French Navies, 1650-1815* (Lincoln, Neb. ; London: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 92.

lawmakers enacted taxes on colonial trade, causing an increase in smuggling and general disobedience to the taxes.

Ignoring the Colonials' desire for representation increased resistance to the colonial governmental structures. The increased resistance and the precipitant potential for insurrection forced the British colonial governments to reevaluate their strategic troop deployments in North America. Therefore, many troops retreated from the frontiers and ensconced themselves in the colonial urban centers. The quartering of British soldiers in these urban areas only exasperated the resistance of the colonial people.

The new taxes on trade led to an extensive network of smuggling by colonials who wished to circumvent the excise efforts of the British government. Smuggling was supported by trade connections developed between the colonialists and the foreign commercial operations of France and Spain. Britain found it necessary to use its navy to curtail the smuggling. The effort to prevent smuggling started a naval campaign in North America which proved to be more difficult than expected. The number of small ports in the New England area alone proved to be too numerous for the North American squadron to cover. They were unable to establish an effective blockade, and their efforts only increased the profit gained by those who were successful in the smuggling trade.

When the War of American Independence started, Britain found itself in a problematic logistical situation. Never before had the British Navy supported a large army at such a considerable distance from the British Isles. The army was unable to purchase food, supplies, or transportation locally; so they were almost entirely dependent on the Navy to supply them with food and supplies. Dependence on the navy for supplies restricted the army's ability to conduct their strategic operations in the manner in which

they desired. The British strategic disability on land caused by the need for naval resupply had the effect of balancing the overall strength of opposing forces in North America. It did so by reducing the fighting ability of the ground forces, and by diverting scarce naval resources from hunting privateers to convey operations to safeguard incoming supplies.

The British Navy's combat operations at the beginning of the war consisted of maintaining a blockade of the east coast of North America and enforcing a trade embargo in the Caribbean Sea. Also, as American privateers started preying on British merchants in Canada, the Caribbean, and along the East Coast of the American colonies, the British Navy found it necessary to start long-range patrol operations and increase convoy protection missions. These demands on the North American squadron were strenuous and stretched the ability of the British Navy. However, since the colonies did not have frigates or any ships of the line, the British resources that were available had little difficulty in maintaining dominance. However, in 1778, the war would change drastically, and the British naval power in North America was shaken.

### *1778-1793*

On February 6<sup>th</sup>, 1778, the United States and the Kingdom of France signed the Franco-American Treaty of Alliance. The agreement stated:

...in case Great Britain in Resentment of that connection and of the good correspondence which is the object of the said Treaty, should break the Peace with France, either by direct hostilities, or by hindering her commerce and navigation, in a manner contrary to the Rights of Nations, and the Peace subsisting between the two Crowns; and his Majesty and the said United States having resolved in that Case to join their Councils and efforts against the Enterprises of their common Enemy, the respective Plenipotentiaries, in power'd

to concert the Clauses & conditions proper to fulfill the said Intentions, have, after the most mature Deliberation, concluded and determined on the Articles.<sup>27</sup>

The agreement, in effect, guaranteed the United States and France would join forces militarily against Great Britain; both knowing full well the British would not allow French ships to bring supplies and arms to the United States. Britain would prevent the free commerce and navigation of French ships, triggering the military cooperation intended in the agreement.

The entrance of French into the American War of Independence changed the strategic considerations for the British Navy. War with France necessitated the need for the British Navy to protect their homeland from invasion in the English Channel and the North Sea, as well as maintain a sufficient force in the Americas and the Mediterranean Sea. This challenge remained through the entire war.

In the Americas, this challenge was felt first hand by Admiral Richard Howe, commander of the North American squadron. Exasperated by the lack of ships sent to him and distraction other campaigns were presenting to the British government; he sent several requests to the Admiralty for reinforcements. Finally, Lord Germain was able to convince the British government to send a portion of the Western Squadron to North America to assist Howe; but only after the French fleet in Toulon was dispatched to North American as well.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> David Hunter Miller, *Treaties and Other International Acts of the United States of America, Treaties, Etc.*, vol. 8 v. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. G.P.O., 1931), 35-36.

<sup>28</sup> Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean*, 336.

The situation only got worse in 1779, when Spain entered the war against Britain. Now that its Western Squadron had been weakened by sending reinforcements to North America, the combined threat of the remaining French fleet and the Spanish fleet made the threat of invasion even greater. The threat of invasion became the preeminent concern of the British government. Therefore, the naval commitment in North America was seen as a lower priority. As the War of American Independence continued, the British navy was unable to maintain the level of support for the land forces required to win the war.

British efforts in the Caribbean Sea suffered as well. The combined Franco-Spanish naval assets in the region made it very difficult for the British navy to fulfill its strategic mission. The Battle of Saintes occurred during this period and within this theatre of operation. It occurred off the coast of Dominica between Admiral Rodney's fleet of thirty-seven and the French fleet of thirty-six, led by Admiral de Grasse. Poor ship-handling by the French and an opportunistic wind shift favoring the British allowed the British to gain the upper hand and ultimately winning the battle.<sup>29</sup>

Admiral de Grasse reciprocated the fortune later, in a battle known as the Battle of the Chesapeake; near the end of the War of American Independence. The French fleet had moved in mass to the Chesapeake River capes to deny Lord Cornwallis' army supplies and an escape route from their position in Yorktown. A coordinated attack by American and French forces on land backed Cornwallis' army into a defensive position and he was utterly dependent on the British Navy for support.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean*, 353.

<sup>30</sup> Steven E. Siry, *Liberty's Fallen Generals : Leadership and Sacrifice in the American War of Independence*, First edition. ed., *Military Profiles* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2012), 122.

The British fleet during the Battle of the Chesapeake, commanded by Rear Admiral Sir Thomas Graves, arrived after the French fleet had already anchored in the bay. The French fleet sallied forth from the bay and lined up for battle. The British fleet assumed their line of battle and approached to engage. The rear division of the British fleet, commanded by Admiral Samuel Hood, was unable to gain an effective battle position and was mostly uninvolved in the fighting of the battle. Therefore the British van and center divisions were greatly outnumbered. The British were repulsed by the French fleet and had to return to New York for repairs.

Cornwallis was left in an indefensible position. He was surrounded on land by American and French forces, and the French fleet was in a position to bombard the British fortifications in Yorktown. Cornwallis asked for terms of the surrender of his forces. The surrender occurred on October 18<sup>th</sup>, about one and a half months after the Battle of the Chesapeake on September 5<sup>th</sup>.

The continuance of the naval war in the Americas moved south to the Caribbean Sea. The British and French battled in a contest for control of strategic islands and seaports in the Caribbean. Toward the end of the war, the British began to gain the upper hand over the French, due to the strategic abilities of Admiral Hood. Dominance over the Caribbean Sea gave the British a strategic naval advantage, as most of the shipping trade to the Americas came through the Caribbean Sea on the predictable and steady trade winds.

There is one more crucial strategic contest during the conflict concurrent with the War of American Independence. This event did not occur in North America, but on the European continent, at Gibraltar. The British held this critical strategically positioned

port for decades and considered the defense of it as a primary concern. The British occupation of the port still stung at the pride and international reputation of the Spanish. They therefore also made it an urgent priority for their military operations. Throughout the war, the Spanish attempted to blockade the port and besieged it from the land. The British were able to hold on to the critical strategic position through careful allocation of resources and the tenacity of the British Navy and Army. As the period of war came to an end, the British attention apportioned to protecting this small, but crucial strategic holding paid off. They remained in control of the port for the interbellum period and at the beginning of the next war.

The War of American Independence ended with the signing of the Treaty of Paris, in 1783. The British War with France and Spain ended with the Treaties of Versailles during the same year. Hostilities with the Netherlands, the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War, ended during the following year. The results were disastrous for Britain. Like France two decades before, Britain lost most of a continent. British influence in North America was significantly reduced. However, Britain maintained influence in the Caribbean Sea and Canada. This influence set the stage for an interbellum period that staged the British Navy, commanded by many of the naval leaders of the wars to come, against a veritable flotilla of smugglers and illicit traders from the United States and other economic powers.

The struggle to limit the smugglers in the West Indies gave the British commanders valuable experience they would use in the future. They learned how to operate during inshore operations as well as deep-sea patrols. Many of the commanders, including Horatio Nelson and Cuthbert Collingwood, became frustrated by the continual

complacency exhibited by their superior officers.<sup>31</sup> The senior officers and British Governors in the West Indies had to perform a delicate balancing act between the enforcement of the unpopular trade laws, and the interests of the local British merchants and businesses who thrived on the cheap goods from the Americas instead of the more expensive British goods.

Beyond the enforcement of the Navigation Acts in the Americas, Britain did not have many naval strategic concerns after the War of American Independence. The period included an extended period of demobilization of the British fleet resources. Much of the West Indies operations were handled by frigates and smaller unrated ships. However, demobilization did not lead to the deterioration of the British Navy. The Navy Comptroller, Admiral Charles Middleton (Lord Barham), enacted a successful campaign to prepare the navy for future needs by “reforming and extending dockyards, eliminating the grosser forms of corruption and inefficiency, building up stocks of naval store, ensuring that existing warships were regularly repaired or replaced, and supervising the entire construction programme.”<sup>32</sup> These reforms placed the British navy in a strong position as tensions mounted on the continent after the beginning of the French Revolution.

### *1793-1813*

The next chapter in British naval history came after the French revolutionary government declared war on Austria and Prussia, in 1792. Although Britain did not

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<sup>31</sup> Knight, *The Pursuit of Victory : The Life and Achievement of Horatio Nelson*, 91-92.

<sup>32</sup> Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery* (Amherst, N.Y.: Humanity Books, 2006), 121.

immediately declare war on France, the possibility of war was real, and reasonably expected to occur. Britain watched the war developments on the continent with increasing concern. Once France invaded the Austrian Netherlands, the war between Britain and France was inevitable. Britain could not allow France to have a position of strategic advantage in the Netherlands, where they could threaten the home island and dominate Baltic Sea trade. However, the British government still failed to act. The international diplomatic community thought the French action necessitated a strategic response by Britain, but it was the French who declared war on the British in 1793.<sup>33</sup>

The British Navy immediately started the mobilization process. The British mobilization was quick and efficient, backed by the government and the British people who were outraged by the regicidal actions of the French revolution and the fear created by the French continental territorial gains. They saw the French revolution and the subsequent republican government as a radical threat to their form of monarchy government.

Mutiny and internal political unrest plagued early French Republic naval operations. British naval victories and advantages came quick. First, a group of Republican rebels who disagreed with the conduct of the Jacobin government in Paris took control of Toulon in the south of France. The French Mediterranean Fleet was at anchor in the Toulon harbor at the time. The rebels conducted diplomatic discussions with Admiral Hood of the British Mediterranean Fleet to surrender the Toulon fleet to the British. During the summer of 1793, the Toulonese handed over the harbor and the

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<sup>33</sup> Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean*, 426.

French fleet to the British.<sup>34</sup> The British government was slow to reinforce the fortunate events in Toulon, and the British were soon forced to abandon the harbor and move their Mediterranean operations elsewhere.

British naval victories dominated the remainder of the period of hostilities. Every significant fleet action until the end of the Napoleonic Wars was won by the British Navy. The domination was so complete that by 1806 the British reduced the French and Spanish Navies to a point where they did not have the naval strength to enter a fleet battle.

First among these battles was the Glorious First of June. This battle was fought during late May to June 1<sup>st</sup> of 1794. Although the immediate result of the battle was a crushing victory by the British Navy, the victory was not so glorious as time passed and experts analyzed the results. There are two primary reasons the glory of the victory was questioned later; the condition it left the British Navy and the fact that a large grain convoy made it to France to resupply the country.<sup>35</sup>

The condition of the British Navy after the battle was miserable. Not only were many of the ships severely damaged in the battle, but many of the crews were also left under-numbered due to battle casualties. To make conditions worse, many more British sailors became casualties as the French prisoners brought disease onto the British ships.<sup>36</sup>

In the eyes of the French, the most important result of the Glorious First of June battle was the arrival of a large grain convoy from the Americas. The goal of the British

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<sup>34</sup> Sam Willis, *In the Hour of Victory : The Royal Navy at War in the Age of Nelson*, First American Edition. ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2014), 22-23.

<sup>35</sup> Willis, *In the Hour of Victory : The Royal Navy at War in the Age of Nelson*, 78-79.

<sup>36</sup> Willis, *In the Hour of Victory : The Royal Navy at War in the Age of Nelson*, 78.

fleet had been to intercept this shipment; however, due to the determination and bravery of the French Navy, the British fleet was occupied with the battle and unable to stop the convoy from arriving in France. The grain provided by this convoy was a substantial windfall for the struggling Revolutionary government, which was struggling to maintain control while food supplies ran low. The government knew they would be unable to maintain control and order if they did not prove themselves able to secure food for the French people.<sup>37</sup>

In 1797, there was another decisive fleet engagement, off the Cape of Saint Vincent in Portugal. This battle became known as the Battle of Cape St. Vincent and was fought between the British fleet commanded by Admiral Sir John Jervis against the Spanish fleet commanded by Don Jose de Cordoba y Ramos. Jervis' mission was to prevent the Spanish fleet from joining the French fleet at Brest. Keeping the fleets isolated was a critical mission. The fear in Britain was the combined Franco-Spanish fleet, along with the Dutch fleet, would be able to facilitate an invasion of Britain.<sup>38</sup>

Admiral Jervis, later Lord St. Vincent, rose to the occasion. He implemented an unorthodox fleet tactic:

By carrying a press of sail, I was fortunate in getting in with the enemy's fleet at half-past eleven o'clock, before it had time to connect and form a regular order of battle. Such a moment was not to be lost; and, confident in the skill, valour, and discipline of the officers and men I had the happiness to command, and judging that the honour of His Majesty's arms, and the circumstances of the war in these seas, required a considerable degree of enterprise, I felt myself justified in departing from the regular system; and, passing through their fleet, in

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<sup>37</sup> Sam Willis, *The Glorious First of June: Fleet Battle in the Reign of Terror* (London: Quercus, 2011), 288-89.

<sup>38</sup> W. Laird Clowes, *The Royal Navy : A History from the Earliest Times to the Present*, vol. 4 (London: Sampson Low, Marston and Company, 1897), 305.

a line formed with the utmost celerity, tacked, and thereby separated one-third from the main body...<sup>39</sup>

Jervis' tactic divided the Spanish fleet, decreasing their combat effectiveness tremendously. The tactic succeeded in bringing disorder and confusion to the Spanish. However, the Spanish had an opportunity to regain their cohesiveness and join back together through switching tacks and coming around behind the British. An aggressive and intuitive commodore in the British fleet, Horatio Nelson, anticipated the move and acted without orders. His daring move, to pull out of the line of battle and cut off the Spanish maneuver, continued the advantage for the British and led the way to the British victory.<sup>40</sup> After the battle, Nelson's close friend Cuthbert Collingwood would write him, "...you formed the plan of attack, we were only accessories to the Don's ruin; for, had they got on the other tack, they would have been sooner joined, and the business would have been less complete."<sup>41</sup>

After the Battle of Cape St. Vincent, the Spanish fleet was reluctant to put to sea. After losing the battle in such a disgraceful way at the advent of their entry into the war, they shied from experiencing another fleet encounter with the British. The Spanish reluctance relieved the challenges of British naval strategic conditions.<sup>42</sup> Without the Spanish Navy to distract it, the British Navy was able to concentrate its forces on the French and Batavian navies.

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<sup>39</sup> Jedediah Stephens Tucker, *Memoirs of Admiral the Right Honore the Earl of St. Vincent*, vol. 1, 2 vols. (London: Richard Bentley, New Burlington Street, 1844), 263.

<sup>40</sup> Knight, *The Pursuit of Victory : The Life and Achievement of Horatio Nelson*, 222-23.

<sup>41</sup> Cuthbert Collingwood, and G. L. Newnham Collingwood, *A Selection from the Public and Private Correspondence of Vice-Admiral Lord Collingwood: Interspersed with Memoirs of His Life.*, 5th ed., vol. 1, 2 vols. (London: James Ridgway & Sons, 1837), 55.

<sup>42</sup> Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean*, 440.

Later in 1797, at the Battle of Camperdown, Admiral Adam Duncan handily defeated the Dutch naval fleet. The battle lacked the strategic imperative many of the naval battles of the time held. There were no merchant fleets to defend or attack. There was no longer the danger of allied invasion of England or Ireland.<sup>43</sup> The battle was motivated by Dutch political policy. The Dutch government wanted their fleet to head to sea to lure Duncan's North Sea fleet to battle and cripple it. Another Dutch political motivation was the desire to assert its strategic foreign policy independent from the influence of France.<sup>44</sup>

The Dutch learned to regret their impatience for naval conflict with the British fleet. Duncan was able to intercept the Dutch fleet off the Dutch coast near the village of Camperdown. Duncan attacked the Dutch line of battle by sending two lines of ships perpendicular to the Dutch line; a tactic made famous by Lord Horatio Nelson at the Battle of Trafalgar eight years later. The Dutch fought valiantly, but were no match for the British fleet. The British captured eleven Dutch ships during the action.<sup>45</sup> The Dutch navy was unable to recover from such a loss of ships and was all but mute for the remainder of the war.

The next notorious battle was The Battle of the Nile in 1798. This battle solidified the British dominance in the Mediterranean Sea and effectively ended the French expedition to Egypt and the Middle East. French forces in Egypt were left isolated with no easy way back to the European continent. The battle also happens to be Horatio

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<sup>43</sup> Willis, *In the Hour of Victory*, 121.

<sup>44</sup> Willis, *In the Hour of Victory*, 125.

<sup>45</sup> Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean*, 456.

Nelson's first fleet action as commander; the results foreshadowed his daring and brilliance as a fleet commander.

The battle occurred after Nelson's long hunt for the French fleet in the Mediterranean. He used the available intelligence to determine the French headed South toward Egypt. Nelson arrived off the coast of the Nile River and started a search for the French fleet. The French were found anchored close to shore in Aboukir Bay. The French had positioned their anchored fleet in a way to defend against any attack from the sea. In the act of unpredictability and unrequited daring, Nelson ordered his ships into a line of battle. He ordered a portion of his fleet to form a line and sail in between the French fleet and the shore, a maneuver the French had not predicted.

The result of the battle was devastating for the French. Of the 13 ships of the line they had anchored in the bay, the British captured nine, and two more were destroyed. The flagship of the French commander, Vice-Admiral Brueyes d'Aigalliers, the *L'Orient*, exploded during the battle after its gunpowder magazine ignited. The battle began the public acknowledgment of the heroism of Nelson and celebration of his "Band of Brothers," a group of captains serving under him in the battle.

British victory at the Nile led to British dominance in the Mediterranean. Just three months after the Battle of the Nile, the British recovered Minorca from the French. The capture of Minorca served as a symbol of a reversal of fortunes from the disgraceful actions of Admiral Byng over four decades earlier. The Mediterranean was opened to

nearly unmolested British trade, while French shipping trade was reduced to a hazardous business.<sup>46</sup>

The next significant battle of the French Revolutionary war was the Battle of Copenhagen. The British conflict with Denmark leading up to the battle had complicated roots. The prosperous trading nation of the Baltic Sea was engulfed in an international conflict because of events that took place on the small Mediterranean island of Malta. After the Battle of the Nile, the British forces acted with the approval of their Russian ally to reconquer Malta for the Order of the Knights of Saint John. The Russian leader, Tsar Paul, had been elected Grand Master of the order shortly after the French had conquered the island.

However, after the British captured Malta from the French, they decided not to hand it back to the order or Russia. The island included a deepwater port the British saw as too valuable a resource in the region.<sup>47</sup> This decision ended the Russian alliance with Britain. Russia then led a Baltic coalition, including Denmark and Sweden, in an effort to usurp British trading restrictions and shipping inspections in the Baltic and North Seas. The coalition members were also required to close their ports to British trade. Denmark was reluctant to fulfill this measure, but the threat of Russian military coercion forced them to comply. Britain could not allow this measure to pass unanswered. A fleet commanded by Admiral Hyde Parker was sent to attack Copenhagen and force Denmark and Sweden to resume trade.

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<sup>46</sup> Knight, *The Pursuit of Victory : The Life and Achievement of Horatio Nelson*, 303.

<sup>47</sup> Willis, *In the Hour of Victory*, 209.

Copenhagen was positioned at the gateway to the Baltic Sea and was a vital trading center. However, its approaches were challenging when the wind was westerly even for even a single ship. The problematic approach was magnified by the effort of maneuvering a fleet into the port in battle order. Consistent with his temperament and bravery, Lord Nelson volunteered to command the portion of the fleet that was appointed to enter the King's Deep channel from the south and form a line of battle across from the anchored Danish ships.<sup>48</sup> Admiral Parker and his division remained up the King's Deep channel to the north and would be unable to join the battle due to the wind and current conditions.

The British division under Nelson's command defeated the Danish naval forces, and in creative use of *ruse de guerre* by threatening to burn all the Danish ships with their men on board unless the Danish surrendered. The crown prince of Denmark immediately ordered a ceasefire to all his forces.<sup>49</sup>

During the next year, the Republic of France and Great Britain signed the Treaty of Amiens; ending hostilities between the two empires. However, the peace did not last. The following year France and Britain were at war again. As in the previous war, Spain joined France against Britain, first in a secret alliance and later in an open declaration of war. This war, or more appropriately stated, series of wars, lasted until the defeat of Napoleon by the combined forces of Britain and Prussia at the Battle of Waterloo.

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<sup>48</sup> A. T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon the French Revolution and Empire, 1793-1812*, 2 vols. (Boston,: Little, Brown and company, 1892), 44.

<sup>49</sup> Knight, *The Pursuit of Victory : The Life and Achievement of Horatio Nelson*, 381.

The final crucial naval fleet battle of the Napoleonic Wars was the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805. This battle occurred off Cape Trafalgar on the Atlantic coast of Spain. The British fleet of twenty-seven ships of the line, commanded by Rear Admiral Nelson, attacked the combined allied fleet of France and Spain, consisting of thirty-three ships of the line.<sup>50</sup>

Once again Nelson led the British forces of inferior numbers into a spectacular victory. Again, he used unorthodox tactics, as Duncan had used at Camperdown and Nelson had previously used at the Nile, to be unpredictable and to drive the enemy into confusion. At the end of the battle, the British had captured twenty-one allied ships and destroyed one.<sup>51</sup> The glory of the victory proved to be bittersweet for Britain. Although the British fleet had struck a significant blow to the allied naval power and strategy, Britain suffered its own loss when it learned Lord Nelson was killed during the battle. Nelson's heroic reputation had already become a national phenomenon, and the blow of his loss placed the nation into mourning. The nation's feelings for Nelson were embodied in Vice Admiral Collingwood's address to the fleet, as he assumed command at Nelson's death:

The ever-to-be-lamented death of Lord Viscount Nelson, Duke of Bronte, the Commander-in-Chief, who fell in the action of the 21<sup>st</sup>, in the arms of Victory, covered with glory –whose memory will be ever dear to the British Navy and the British Nation, whose zeal for the honour of his King and the interests of his country will be ever held up as a shining example for a British seaman- leaves to me a duty to return my thanks.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Willis, *In the Hour of Victory*, 244.

<sup>51</sup> Willis, *In the Hour of Victory*, 244.

<sup>52</sup> W. Clark Russell, *Collingwood* (London: Methuen, 1895), 153.

After the Battle of Trafalgar, the French and Spanish navies were significantly weakened. The Spanish navy no longer offered a threat to Britain, but the French had a fleet in reserve at Brest. This fleet was able to make its way to sea when the British blockading force returned to England for much-needed rest and repair during the winter of 1805.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, the threat of a French invasion of the British homeland remained for years after Trafalgar. The British government administration enacted reforms to build coastal defenses<sup>54</sup> and bolster the naval resources available to defend the homeland in the English Channel and the North Sea.

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<sup>53</sup> Willis, *In the Hour of Victory*, 303.

<sup>54</sup> Roger Knight, *Britain against Napoleon : The Organisation of Victory, 1793-1815* (London: Allen Lane, 2013), 252.

## Chapter II

### British Naval Leadership

Over the five decades from the time of Admiral Byng's execution, to the death of Admiral Lord Nelson, there was a distinct transformation of British naval leadership. The transformation consisted of a change in the overall aggressiveness of British commanders and the acceptance of creativity and unorthodox tactics when they were used to defeat Britain's enemies.

The naval leadership demonstrated between 1793 and 1813, exhibited a marked difference from the naval leadership demonstrated before 1763. Before 1763, and most notably in 1757, when Admiral Byng was executed because he failed to relieve the British forces on Minorca, British leaders exercised a balance between aggression and cautiousness. They were reluctant to extend themselves into battles where they could not follow the prescribed fleet action orders. These orders prescribed fleet actions where the fleet remained in a controlled and structure line of battle no matter what the conditions dictated.

Admiral Byng may not have been the only British naval officer to be cautious, but he has come to embody the antithesis to what later came to be expected of a naval officer in Vice-Admiral Nelson's time. During April of 1756, when Byng sailed for the Mediterranean Sea, he was given orders to pick up garrison troops at Gibraltar and bring them to assist on Minorca. In May, Byng embarked from Gibraltar to relieve the Lieutenant-General William Blackeney's soldiers in Fort St. Phillip on Minorca. He did

not take the garrison troops with him. He sent a letter to London explaining he did not take the troops because the operation was bound to fail.<sup>55</sup>

Byng arrived off of Minorca on May 20<sup>th</sup> and found the British ground forces were still defending their position. Byng's fleet attacked the French fleet commanded by Admiral La Galissonnière. However, the attack was handled clumsily, and only a few of the British ships were able to engage the French before Byng withdrew. Byng's fleet was still very much intact and able to renew the attack. In fact, it was not even necessary for Byng to directly attack the French fleet again; just allowing his frigates to patrol the area and prevent supplies from being shipped to the French ground forces would have been a strategic victory. Instead, Byng completely withdrew his fleet and returned to Gibraltar.<sup>56</sup>

British naval officials and the British public were furious with Byng. Due to the disgrace perceived by the British people, the British government failed and was replaced by the ministry formed by William Pitt. The new government appeared to be fortuitous for Byng, as the Pitt-Grenville administration appeared to be a political ally. However, a series of accusations of intentional failure in the conflict off Minorca, and the poorly timed adulation from several French officials only led to more public criticism of Byng. Ultimately, he was convicted during a court-martial for "failing to do his utmost to take or destroy the enemy ships."<sup>57</sup> The subsequent execution of Byng did not settle the matter entirely. The general embarrassment among Navy officials, triggered by the public perception of systemic cowardice and incompetence within the Navy brought about an

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<sup>55</sup> Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean*, 266.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Charles Fearn, *The Trial of the Honourable John Byng, at a Court Martial* (London: R. Manby, 1757), 3-4.

urgency to make changes to address deficiencies and encourage an attitude of supremacy among British naval leaders.

Many British naval leaders understood a change in the fleet fighting instructions would address some of the deficiencies in fleet actions. There was a need for allowing more individual adaptation to conditions and the positive opportunities that sometimes present themselves during complex combat evolutions. The instructions also needed to allow for the development of a more aggressive officer corps. In response to the need for a change in the fighting instructions, a year after Byng's execution, Admiral Edward Hawke altered the fighting instructions for his Western Squadron. He removed the requirement for ships in line of battle to engage enemy ships "in the Order the Admiral has prescribed,"<sup>58</sup> and replaced it with, "as close as possible, and therefore on no account to fire until they shall be within pistol shot."<sup>59</sup> In the wake of Admiral Byng's failure at Minorca, British leaders recognized more aggressive and bold actions were not only needed, but it was also necessary to spell them out in general orders. Hawke's new tactical boldness was the legacy that he would start, and Nelson and his contemporaries would perfect nearly fifty years later.<sup>60</sup>

Over the next five decades, the British Navy had carried the lions share of the burden of defeating France and her allies, and the leadership of the navy reflected on its success. Overwhelmingly, these men recognized the difference in spirit exhibited by their

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<sup>58</sup> Edward Russell, "Fighting Instructions," in *Fighting Instructions: 1530-1816*, ed. Julian Corbett, vol. 29 (Great Britain: Naval Records Society, 1905), 190.

<sup>59</sup> Ruddock F. Mackay, *Admiral Hawke* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 181.

<sup>60</sup> Arthur Herman, *To Rule the Waves : How the British Navy Shaped the Modern World*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2004), 281. Contributor biographical information <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/enhancements/fy0910/2004295510-b.html>. Publisher description <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/enhancements/fy0910/2004295510-d.html>.

contemporary flag officers in comparison to earlier officers before the Seven Years' War. The fighting spirit had changed. Long gone was the measured outcomes of predictable and cautious naval fleet actions. The success of the navy was recognized to be a product of relentless courage and unorthodox adaptation of a new breed of officers.

Moreover, the spirit of Nelson as a national hero and a perfect example of naval leadership carried on for decades after the Napoleonic wars. His reputation and success was an inspiration for the next generation of naval officers. His relentless courage, unmatched aggression, and high regard for the honor of the British nation formed the standard from which naval officers were measured. However, even with all the praise lauded on Nelson, and the unmatched historiographical material that had been produced on his account, he was not unique. Many of his contemporaries had the same vigor in action and exhibited courage comparable to Nelson. The set of military attributes in which Nelson has been given credit for was held by many of those who trained Nelson to be a naval officer, and by those that served with and under Nelson.

The following pages will explore the characteristics of British naval officers of the period, with an effort to understand how they developed into leaders, and how their leadership manifested to their subordinates and peers. To come to this understanding it is essential to analyze the social history of British naval officers, the leadership roles officers served, and the executive leadership styles represented within the group.

### Social History of Leaders

One of the most important considerations of the superiority of British naval officers over their adversaries is the how these officers' careers developed. Was there a formula for developing a superior officer, or was it luck, or was it an innate superiority of

the British maritime communities that supplied the majority of the officers? To answer these questions, the career development of British naval officers must be examined. This examination must study the broad social history of British naval officers. The social history must consider factors such as upbringing, education, training, social class, wealth, personal characteristics, and the importance of professional merit within the patronage system. The important consideration when comparing British naval officers with officers from rival navies is whether there were differences in the social characteristics of the officers. Identifying social differences among the officers will allow for a comparison when other factors -such as gunnery, shipbuilding, tactics, and strategic advantage- are equal.

The origin of the British Navy's officers, where they came from, was critical to the Navy's success. The geographic origin of the officers, as well as their family connections, had a significant impact on whether or not an aspiring officer would make it on board a ship to eventually rise to the level of a commissioned officer. Naturally, based on the proximity to the ocean and the major Navy ports, most young men and boys came from maritime communities and had family connections to either the navy or the civilian maritime shipping industry. However, there were exceptions to this rule. Many noble and landed families saw the navy as an opportunity for their second and subsequent sons to make a name for themselves and benefit financially from the prize money available during the extended periods of active war. In his work, *A Social History of British Naval Officers, 1775-1815*, scholar Evan Wilson points out how wealthy families recognized how crucial it was to expose their young men to the responsibilities and adventures of a navy life as a part of their development into a sophisticated gentleman. These families

came to choose this structured environment for this period of their children's development over the traditional Grand Tour.<sup>61</sup>

Previously, during the first half of the eighteenth century, these families would have encouraged their young men to make a Grand Tour of Europe to satisfy the need for adventure and exposure to the world. However, during the period of this study, this popular tradition was discouraged. The Grand Tour was seen by English leaders and clergy to give a French influence to the British young men. A tour in these continental countries was believed to weaken their masculine Englishness.<sup>62</sup> The Bishop of Worcester, Richard Hurd, wrote in his work, *On the Use of Foreign Travel*, "Let the arts of address and insinuation flourish in France. Without them, what merit can pretend to success, what talents, open the way to favour and distinction? But let a manlier character prevail here."<sup>63</sup> With these thoughts prevailing in England, these families would use any influence they had to attach their sons to the Navy, knowing they could quickly usher themselves into manhood through the glory of naval wartime operations.

These patriotic English families recognized the importance of attaching their young men to the Navy, which was seen as the primary protector of the island nation. Since the middle of the eighteenth century, the British Navy was known by the English people by the enduring term of "Wooden Walls," safeguarding the country from invasion.

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<sup>61</sup> Wilson, *A Social History of British Naval Officers, 1775-1815*, 14-15.

<sup>62</sup> Michele Cohen, "The Grand Tour. Language, National Identity, and Masculinity," *Changing English: Studies in Reading & Culture*, vol. 8, no. 2, Oct. 2001, p. 129.

<sup>63</sup> Richard Hurd, *Dialogues on the Uses of Foreign Travel, Considered as a Part of an English Gentleman's Education: Between Lord Shaftesbury and Mr. Locke*. (London: A. Millar ; Cambridge : W. Thurlbourn & J. Woodyer, 1764), 161-62.

Most notably used in T. Augustine Arne's work, *Britain's Best Bulwarks*, a dramatic piece from the period:

Thine oaks descending to the main,  
With floating forts shall stem the tides,  
Asserting Briton's liquid reign,  
Where'er her thund'ring navy rides;  
Nor less to peaceful arts inclin'd,  
Where commerce opens all her stores,  
In social bands shall lead mankind,  
And join the sea-divided shores;  
Spread then thy sails where naval glory calls,  
Britain's best bulwarks are her wooden walls.<sup>64</sup>

However, the navy was also an attractive prospect for many British families for another reason. Unlike the British army, where commissions were bought, and only wealthy families could dream of success, the Navy offered commissions without monetary consideration. Although money could help gain influence to speed up the process, it was not a necessity, and a young officer from meager beginnings could earn a commission or a fortune in the navy.<sup>65</sup>

The majority of the commissioned officers in the British navy started their navy careers as young boys. They were entered into their respective ships' books as young gentlemen and took on a role of authority and responsibility even though they were technically a rated seaman and not a commissioned officer. They lived in a quasi-leadership role where they were expected to lead small groups of men, and act as a supervisor of mundane and repetitive labor. However, at the same time, these young boys

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<sup>64</sup> *The Harp of Orpheus: Being a Collection of the Best English, Scotch, and Irish Songs, Catches, Glees, Duets, &C. &C.* (Derby: H. Mozley, 1820), 243. <http://books.google.com/books?vid=BL:A0017776614> Google Books.

<sup>65</sup> Rodger, *The Wooden World : An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy*, 253-54.

were expected to learn the fundamentals of seamanship and warfare from the commissioned officers, and even from the seamen they supervised.

These young gentlemen started their careers entirely dependant on the captain of the ships on which served. The captains brought these young gentlemen onboard the ships for various reasons. Many of the captains took on board sons of other naval officers, friends, or family members.<sup>66</sup> Also, captains were approached by members of influential families looking for a berth for their young gentlemen. In these situations, the captains could make powerful political allies in a career that largely depended on political connections to receive valuable assignments and commands.

Although the captains that took these young gentlemen on board could greatly benefit from the favor they served to another, he was also limited to the number of boys he could take onto his ship. He would work to ensure the boys were worthy of appointment and would serve honorably. Many captains were stuck with less than desirable boys on their ships, sometimes lamenting their bad luck to have such a let down from their expectations, or regretting being talked into taking on a boy from a person he found it politically difficult to deny. Therefore, captains attempted to choose the young gentlemen when they could do so. They may be forced to take on a son of an influential political leader, but when they could make choices, they would attempt to take those young gentlemen that showed excellent prospects for becoming a commissioned officer.

The entry of young boys into the navy with the prospect of one day gaining a commission is closely related to another aspect of the social history of the British Navy,

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<sup>66</sup> Wilson, *A Social History of British Naval Officers, 1775-1815*, 21.

patronage. British naval officers assumed the role of patron to some of their young subordinates. The process of patronage within the navy served two purposes. First, it allowed for the training and advancement of young officers. These officers were encouraged and assisted by their patrons to learn all the essential knowledge needed in seamanship, navigation, and gunnery. Then as the young officer's career advanced, the patron would use their position and political influence to acquire promotion and favorable assignments for their protégé. In turn, the patron would have a following of young officers whom he could trust and call on to perform various assignments or favors.

Patrons did not use their influence to help every young officer under their command or sphere of influence. The patron had to carefully choose whom they would use their political capital to assist through their naval career. If the young officer had no promise to become an effective leader, or had a personality vice, the patron did not want to risk their reputation by supporting the young officer. If the young officer turned out to be a disgrace or commit some act unbecoming of an officer, that stain of disgrace would touch the patron's reputation. Many times patrons would assist young officers within their own family, or within a close friend's family. Assistance from a patron occurred early in Horatio Nelson's career as his uncle Captain Suckling used his influence to get Nelson command of the ship *Albemarle*.<sup>67</sup>

The ordinary system of patronage had a great deal of influence on the quality of officers in the officer corps. As young gentlemen and officers with less desirable traits were left without patrons and influence, those who had ability received patrons and

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<sup>67</sup> Knight, *The Pursuit of Victory*, 63-64.

influence and had a better chance of promoting and receiving desirable assignments. Therefore, because the officers who had superior abilities had a patron, and a better chance of promoting, the overall quality of the officer corp remained high.

Patronage remained one of the most critical factors for the career prospects of young gentlemen entering the navy. Their favor among the naval leadership was usually not determined by their gentility at birth, but rather their gentility in behavior. In fact, in his book, *A Social History of British Naval Officers*, Wilson points out there was a minuscule difference in the percentage of naval officers of different social classes that reached the rank of Post Captain. Whether they came from middle-class families or the wealthy elite, roughly twenty percent of officers reached post rank.<sup>68</sup> When it came to a successful naval career, what mattered more than claiming a landed estate was the capacity to behave like a gentleman. Rich and poor alike could succeed or fail to live up to this standard. Although those raised on a lower social scale had a distinct disadvantage due to their lack of exposure to examples of gentility while growing up, they could overcome this disadvantage and impress the commissioned officers of their ship with proper behavior and etiquette. Once an aspiring officer came on board his particular ship, he gained permission and access to walk the quarterdeck, and be treated as a gentleman.<sup>69</sup>

Wilson's argument supporting an environment which depended less on one's background, and more on one's ability to 'act the part' of gentility, runs counter to the idea Lewis forwards in his book, *A Social History of the Navy*. Lewis held that the

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<sup>68</sup> Wilson, 111.

<sup>69</sup> S. A. Cavell, *Midshipmen and Quarterdeck Boys in the British Navy, 1771-1831* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2012), 8.

“Interest” aspiring naval officers held, by way of connections to powerful and influential patrons, was what separated the elite officers from the rest.<sup>70</sup>

In support of his argument that social status had little to do with an aspiring officer’s success, Wilson’s argument is primarily based on the importance of merit for an officer’s success. He believes successful officers didn’t go along passively in their roles; instead they were active participants in the process of promoting themselves and attracting positive attention toward their abilities and ambition.<sup>71</sup> Wilson gives two exceptional examples of meritorious officers and how their actions benefitted their careers.

First, Wilson gives the example of Christopher Cole, who worked through the death of two subsequent patrons, to finally be made post-captain by a third patron. His abilities and determination to do his best impressed each of the patrons in turn. He did not come from a navy family or have powerful political connections, but he had the traits that his naval patrons wanted to encourage and develop.<sup>72</sup> He was a self-made man in his naval career.

The second, and more profound, example Wilson gives is the career of John Perkins. Perkins was born into slavery in Jamaica. Just before the American War of Independence, he joined the British Navy as a pilot at the Jamaica station. Perkins so impressed the naval officers on the Jamaica station with his knowledge of the area, and his ability, that he was given command of a schooner. For two years, during his command of the schooner, he captured many prizes and conducted reconnaissance missions and

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<sup>70</sup> Michael Lewis, *A Social History of the Navy 1793-1815* (London: Chatham, 1960), 202.

<sup>71</sup> Wilson, 120.

<sup>72</sup> Wilson, 121.

intelligence gathering for Vice-Admiral Sir Peter Parker. In 1781, Parker rewarded Perkins with a lieutenant's commission. After a year, Admiral George Brydges attempted to promote Perkins to the rank of commander. However, the Admiralty refused to confirm the promotion. Perkins continued to serve as a lieutenant after the war. When war with France started, he continued his intelligence-gathering efforts in the Caribbean. In 1797 he was again promoted to commander, and this time the Admiralty confirmed his promotion. In 1800 Perkins was made a post Captain. He continued to serve in the West Indies for another four years before poor health forced him to retire.<sup>73</sup>

Perkins career is a strong example of Wilson's argument for the following reason. The commanding admirals at the Jamaica station were well aware of the serious implications of their efforts to raise Perkins to command within the navy. The slave-owning planter society of Jamaica would not accept a black man having command over whites. Even more shocking to the white planters was the idea of a black man having the right to discipline whites according to the Navy's articles of war, which allowed Perkins to order the flogging of white sailors. However, the most critical point to take away from Perkins' career in the Caribbean was the support he had from the local admirals even though their support for him went against the powerful white planters society in the islands. The Admirals recognized his ability as a naval officer and regarded that characteristic over the interests of the locals. Regardless of the social taboos, and due to the merit he deserved, he was promoted to commander twice and then promoted to post-captain.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Wilson, 123.

<sup>74</sup> Wilson. 124

The reverse is also true; if an officer showed a lack of ability or tenacity, he gave a negative impression, and his career consequently suffered. Patrons were much less likely to advance or place trust in a subordinate that repeatedly showed an inability to live up to the strict standards of a navy officer. This tendency came from the very top of leadership within the navy and extended down to the captains and commanders when they were making decisions on whether or not to bring a young gentleman on board. The importance of merit shines through at this point. Even if a young gentleman was from a noble and powerful family, officers were reluctant to advance those who did not show promise and merit. Even a paragon of the navy, Lord St. Vincent, once wrote of how he rejected the advancement of an ‘honorable’ subordinate:

“He...like the rest of the Aristocracy, thinks he has from that circumstance a right to promotion in prejudice to men of better services and superior merit, which I never will submit to. Having refused the Prince of Wales, Duke of Clarence, Duke of Kent, and Duke of Cumberland, you will not be surprized[sic] that I repeat the impossibility of departing from any principle which would let in such inundation upon me as would tend to complete the ruin of the Navy.”<sup>75</sup>

Lord St. Vincent saw the importance of merit over political influence when it came to the success of the navy, and he advanced promotions based on that principle. St. Vincent was not alone. “On the whole the captains and admirals, whose own professional credit was at stake, were good at insulating officers’ careers from outside interference; meaning that they themselves acted as a filter, receiving recommendations from political and personal connections, but adopting only those candidates whose abilities justified their endorsement and strengthened their professional authority.”<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> John Jervis, "Lord St. Vincent to Lord Nelson, May 31, 1801," in *The Letters of Lord St. Vincent, Vol. 1*, ed. David Smith, vol. 55 (London: Publications of the Navy Records Society, 1922).

<sup>76</sup> Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean*, 389.

Whether Lewis' idea of the need for the powerful 'Interest' held by the highest social classes was the key to promotion, or it was Wilson's assertion of merit as the chief catalyst for an officer's career, we will probably never definitively know. However, nobody can disagree that British naval officers were highly skilled and knowledgeable seamen. These officers, most of who spent a good portion of their childhood at sea, were trained in every nautical and navigational skill on board their respective ships. They spent at least six years learning their trade before they could take the exam which was their gateway to an officer's commission. During those six years, they learned knots, splicing rope, the principles of sailing, gunnery, navigation, and basic leadership skills. When compared to officers of other navies of the world, British officers had the background and development as a seaman first, and an officer second. Starting their careers as seaman gave them a distinct advantage over naval officers of other countries because they had an intimate knowledge of all aspects of seamanship and ship handling. They had a greater understanding of the impact of their orders on their men and their ships.

The origins and the entry of young gentlemen into the navy, the practice of patronage to promote worthy aspiring officers, and the dominance of the British officer training program at sea explain how British officers were able to develop a distinct advantage over the officers of other navies. Subsequently, these officers' professional pride which came along with their ability multiplied their success by giving them deserved confidence in their ability. In order to understand how the development of the British officers gave them distinct attributes and advantages, it is crucial to review the development of the officers in Britain's primary naval enemy of the period, the French

Navy. The contrast between the development of the two nations' officers speaks volumes to the real life preparation British officers had at the time of their commissioning.

While British 'young gentlemen' were learning their skills on board a ship, French officers in training received their education in naval academies on shore. The academies were open to nobles under the age of sixteen and taught fundamental skills of writing, drawing, mathematics, fortifications, hydrography, geometry, seamanship, navigation, and naval warfare. However, since the French were primarily trained these skills on land, and aspiring British officers learned them during practical application at sea, the British trainees had critical experience dealing with crisis management and learned to handle life and death situations first hand.<sup>77</sup>

Due to the difference in officer preparation between the two nations' navies, a distinct difference formed between the relationship between British officers and their seamen, and French officers and their seamen. British officers, who developed an equal appreciation for seamanship and served as midshipmen in the lower decks of their ships during their training, could empathize with the plight of their seamen. They were accustomed to applying their knowledge of seamanship during their service in a practical manner. The French officers, on the other hand, because they received a primarily theoretical education, were detached from the practical application of their knowledge. In turn, they were detached from their sailors that performed those skills.<sup>78</sup> A contemporary observer, Admiral Graham Moore, stated the following of French officers:

[V]ery few of the French navy officers of the old regime knew anything at all about [seamanship]. They affected indeed to despise it, which men often wish to

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<sup>77</sup> Wilson, *A Social History of British Naval Officers, 1775-1815*, 176.

<sup>78</sup> Wilson, *A Social History of British Naval Officers, 1775-1815*, 177.

do when they find those whom they deem their inferiors more perfect in an art than themselves. The superior skill, however, in practical seamanship is one of the causes of the unrivalled eminence which the British navy has attained, and I should be very sorry to see any more relaxation in the strictness of our young Midshipmen's time of probation.<sup>79</sup>

In 1786, the French established some reforms for officer recruitment and training. Although much of the initial technical training was still provided in naval academies, after commissioning examinations, there was a new emphasis on practical training at sea.<sup>80</sup> However, these reforms came late in the period preceding the French Revolution. During the revolution and the ensuing purge of aristocratic officers from the Navy, the French were again left with an inexperienced officer corps that had little practical application of their theoretical knowledge, or experience. The British officers and navy took advantage of their superiority in leadership and seamanship, and the lack of effective reform within the French Navy, throughout the next two decades.<sup>81</sup>

There is another important comparison that must be made in order to understand how the training and development of a British naval officer contributed to their superiority. This comparison must be made to rule out the idea that all branches of the British military were equal in their development of officers and contribution to the various war campaigns fought throughout the period. Therefore, the following pages will outline the development of the officers within the British Army.

From the middle of the eighteenth century to the end of the Napoleonic Wars, Britain was almost continuously in a state of war. The British navy became thoroughly

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<sup>79</sup> Tom Wareham, *Frigate Commander* (Barnsley, South Yorkshire: Pen & Sword Maritime, 2004), 214.

<sup>80</sup> Cormack, *Revolution and Political Conflict in the French Navy, 1789-1794*, 43.

<sup>81</sup> Wilson, *A Social History of British Naval Officers, 1775-1815*, 181.

adept at mobilizing and engaging in combat operations throughout the period. However, the navy was not alone; the British Army was also engaged in continuous conflict during the period. The British army fought in the Seven Years War, the American Revolution, the French Revolution, the Napoleonic Wars, and other smaller conflicts. However, the results were not the same for the Navy and the Army. The Navy was victorious in nearly every fleet battle they engaged in, while the army had mixed results. In order to determine the reason for the discrepancy in results achieved by the British Navy and the British Army, historians have studied these outcomes for two centuries. After all the study on the subject, there is no clear consensus about why the two branches of the British military had such varying results.

Although there are many reasons posited by scholars for the difference in results among the British military forces, there is one primary reason that touched on the nature of leadership within the respective branches of the British military. This reason is the structure of advancement of officers within the branches, an important aspect of the development of leaders. As briefly mentioned earlier in this study, there was a distinct difference in the manner in which officers in the navy and the army were promoted. The army had a system of promotion focused on the purchase of officer commissions, while navy promotions were based on merit and the political art of patronage.

The army's commission payment system focused on a set amount of cash payment the candidate would pay in order to achieve the next rank. The payment was a bond payment in a trust held by the army in order to guarantee the officer acts with appropriate demeanor, courage, and obedience. Among the army there were several practices which were seen as scandalous and which tended to reduce the efficiency of the

army as a whole. The intention of this study is not to make a complete evaluation of commission purchase system within the British army of the period, but rather to point out some of the principles that caused naval officers to have distinct advantages in experience and ability within their military branch, over army officers. Nothing in this study will suggest there were not highly effective officers within the army; however, it will discuss the implications of the commission purchase system of the army as opposed to the merit and patronage system of the navy.

The primary weakness of the commission purchase system was the fact that unproven and inexperienced officers who had vast financial resources, usually a product of family connections, could rise through the ranks of a regiment without experiencing combat or other challenges that developed his knowledge or leadership skills. Money, and sometimes tenure, was all that was required. These purchases sometimes rose less experienced men to higher ranks than the experienced men who did not have the financial ability. A glaring example of this problem is highlighted by Field Marshal Colin Campbell, Lord Clyde, and his testimony before the army's Purchase Commission:

There was an officer in the 55<sup>th</sup> regiment, who had been promoted for service in the field, and had obtained his brevet majority. He led the assault at Ching-kiang-foo; and though he became brevet lieutenant-colonel, and was in command of the 55<sup>th</sup> regiment in the field, in the presence of the enemy, a young captain, who had just come out, purchased over his head, and took command of the regiment, and he was obliged to descend to the command of a company. The poor fellow was killed in leading his company against the Redan – his name was Lieutenant-Colonel Cuddy. The young officer was very young; and in this case a man of experience, who was fitted for his position for that particular occasion, and had proved himself a bold and intrepid soldier, was superseded in his command by one who, I dare say, was equally so, but did not possess his experience; nor could that young man have commanded the confidence of the soldiers in the manner in which Cuddy had done, from his having been

frequently in the field with them, and having distinguished himself as a soldier.<sup>82</sup>

Lord Clyde's testimony sums up the argument against the purchased commission system and points out the weaknesses in relation to combat effectiveness. He includes an important detail that is even more damning to the system; the fact that Cuddy's authority and leadership were superseded "in the presence of the enemy." Although the testimony does not state how often something like this has occurred, it is clear to anyone with a sense of leadership, the act of changing leadership as two forces line up for battle, is bound to have adverse effects on morale. Also, based on Lord Clyde's testimony, the soldiers in the regiment had come to respect Cuddy based on his experience and bravery in the past. This advantage was discarded for a young, inexperienced captain who had not earned the respect of the men yet. This type of promotion, whether in the presence of the enemy or not, reduced the amount of experience and battle proven boldness at the higher ranks of the British army. There is no doubt this practice took a negative toll on the success of the army.

Another fault of the purchased commission system was the prevalence of officers searching out commissions to purchase in other regiments. If there were no open spots for promotion in their regiment, they would look elsewhere to promote to the rank they desired. The problem with this aspect of the system is evident from a leadership point of view. These officers would be leaving the soldiers and other officers they knew well and the internal policies of the regiment they belonged to and switch to a new regiment with

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<sup>82</sup> Charles E. Trevelyan, *The Purchase System in the British Army* (London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1867), 2.

new superiors, peers, and subordinates. This change and lack of the knowledge or relationships within the new regiment could harm the officer's ability to lead. Also, the officer would not have earned the respect of the soldiers in his new unit, which would have a profound effect on morale and the soldiers' willingness to follow the new officer.<sup>83</sup>

Finally, the commissioned officers in the navy were, in general, more competent in their field because they were required to demonstrate knowledge, and had a required period of time at sea before they could be commissioned. The ordinary process for promotion was to demonstrate knowledge through a rigorous testing process before a board of senior officers before they qualified for promotion.<sup>84</sup> In the army there was no such requirement. The army did not require any prerequisite knowledge, nor did it offer training to gain the knowledge, to gain a commission.<sup>85</sup>

As stated above, the sale of commissions in the British army is not the only difference between the army and the navy or the only factor which caused the discrepancy between the overall success of the army and the navy. However, this study is focused on leadership and the sale of commissions within the army profoundly affected leadership. It raised up undeserving men without experience, or knowledge of their duties, merely because they had means of money. The navy did not use this practice, and therefore, its officer corps was comprised of highly knowledgeable and experienced seamen, and for the most part, tested and bold warriors who had proven themselves in

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<sup>83</sup> Trevelyan, *The Purchase System in the British Army*, 32.

<sup>84</sup> Rodger, *The Wooden World : An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy*, 298.

<sup>85</sup> Rodger, *The Wooden World : An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy*, 253.

combat. In the following pages, this confidence will be explored as the different professional leadership roles of British officers are studied.

### Leadership Roles

British naval officers had to fulfill many different roles throughout their careers. However, some primary roles were essential to maximize the effectiveness of the British Navy. Some of these roles were official, commanding a warship and diplomacy with other nations, and some of these roles were unofficial, being a patron to younger officers and acting as a mentor toward all subordinates. The ability an officer had in each of these roles helped determine how successful he would be as an officer. In addition to the ability in which they performed these roles, the number of roles an officer could successfully perform allowed him to be more efficient and valuable to the navy. Some officers could perform all these primary roles, and some could only perform a few.

#### *Combat Commander*

One of the primary roles of a naval officer was their ability to command a ship in battle. The skill required to perform this role did not only consist of remaining calm under fire while in great danger, but it also required much more. Naval officers also needed to consider tactical navigation, seamanship, and the morale of their sailors. All of these aspects combined allowed for success as a combat commander. There is little question the British Navy produced some of the most effective combat officers in the world.

There were several reasons why the British officers excelled as combat commanders. First, they saw themselves as the protectors of Britain. The idea that a naval officer sees himself as a protector is to be expected of a naval officer from an island

nation, and it was a common theme among the personal identification of British officers. Nelson once wrote to the new government ministry that he “*protect[s]* all from French rapacity.”<sup>86</sup> However, the persona of the protector of Britain was not limited to the British officers’ image of themselves. The British public and even international dignitaries looked upon British officers in a similar way. As the navy was an extension of British foreign policy, dignitaries around the world from countries who were friendly to Britain, saw the navy and her officers as protectors. When the Queen of Naples writes to Collingwood after learning of the death of Nelson, she employs, “I count that you will do for us that which was done by the respectable Milord Nelson, our friend, *protector*, and defender.”<sup>87</sup>

British officers took the role as protectors of Britain seriously. This role provided the impetus for unmatched bravery on the part of the British officers. They looked upon themselves as the only thing keeping their families and their way of life safe. The notion of being the only thing between the enemy and Britain prompted them to willingly put themselves in extreme danger, or up against overwhelming odds. Other nations’ navies did not have this unique characteristic. Those nations had land borders with other countries and faced the possibility of invasion over land or sea, so their navies did not rise to the same level of importance to their governments.

The second reason British officers were excellent combat commanders was they maintained a very high level of expectation for the skill and discipline of the men under their command. They expected the very best at all times. This high level of expectation

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<sup>86</sup> Mahan, *The Life of Nelson: The Embodiment of the Sea Power of Great Britain.*, 229.

<sup>87</sup> William Russell, *The Life of Admiral Lord Collingwood* (San Francisco: Waghams Press, 2014), 129.

usually resulted in efficient and professional subordinate officers and skilled and highly trained seaman.

The combination of skillful British seamen and the disciplined order of a British ship proved to be the match of any equally sized naval ship of any nation. Over the period of this study, the confidence of the British officers and sailors only increased their combat effectiveness. They began to feel invincible, and this led to more daring and unpredictable tactics. In turn, the enemies of the British were even more confounded and overwhelmed. These attributes of skill and the environment of discipline that allowed for the increased combat effectiveness of the British navy was a direct result of the highly developed professionalism of the British officers. The advantages caused by this increased combat effectiveness allowed the British navy to completely dominate the oceans by the end of the Napoleonic Wars.

### *Diplomat*

There were times when British naval officers had to serve as diplomatic agents. There were times when detached frigate captains could fill this role. However, the vast majority of diplomatic duties carried out by naval officers was completed by flag officers, and most likely the commander-in-chief of a fleet.

One of most significant examples of diplomatic action taken by a British naval officer was at Toulon, on the southern coast of France, shortly after the outbreak of the French Revolution. As Admiral Samuel Hood's fleet blockaded the port, French royalists arranged to meet with him. After conferring with representatives from Marseille and Toulon, Hood sent the following "Preliminary Declaration" to the town officials:

If a candid and explicit declaration, in favour of Monarchy, is made at Toulon and Marseilles, and the standard of royalty is hoisted, the ships in the harbor dismantled, and the port and forts provisionally at my disposition, so as to allow the egress and regress with safety; the people of Provence shall have all the assistance, and support, his Britannic Majesty's fleet under my command can give; and not an atom of private property of any individual shall be touched, but protected: having no other view than that of restoring peace to a great nation upon just, liberal, and honourable terms.

This must be the ground-work of the Treaty; and whenever peace takes place, which I hope and trust will be soon, the port, with all the ships in the harbor, and forts of Toulon, shall be restored to France, with the stores of every kind, agreeable to the schedule that may be delivered.<sup>88</sup>

Hood did not have time to send a message back to the Admiralty and wait for a response and orders. A Republic army was already headed south toward Provence to crush the royalist rebellion. He recognized the importance of the opportunity that had been laid before him, and he knew he could not delay. He immediately sent urgent requests for ground troops from the British allies at Turin and Naples. He recognized he would be unable to defend Toulon without them.<sup>89</sup>

The occupation of Toulon was a momentous event for the British. It placed the French Mediterranean fleet into the hands of the British and hampered the strategic operations within the region for years. French military plans against Spain and Naples had to be reevaluated and canceled.<sup>90</sup> The diplomatic proceedings undertaken by Hood secured more than he could have ever accomplished militarily. The effort of attacking the French fleet in the well-fortified harbor of Toulon would have been disastrous for the fleet. All naval opinion of the time counted it as nearly impossible. The effect of such a

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<sup>88</sup> *The Naval Chronicle*, vol. 2 (London: Bunney and Gold, 1799), 103.

<sup>89</sup> J. Holland Rose, *Lord Hood and the Defence of Toulon* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1922), 24.

<sup>90</sup> Rose, *Lord Hood and the Defence of Toulon*, 25-26.

success was expressed by Nelson in a letter to his wife, “What an event this has been for Lord Hood. Such a one as History cannot produce an equal. That the strongest place in Europe and 22 sail-of-the-line &c. should be given up without firing a shot. It is not to be credited.”<sup>91</sup>

Acts of diplomacy were often necessary due to the broad area of influence of the British Navy. In many parts of the world, the British naval officer may be the only representative of the British government; and they had to be prepared at all times to make diplomatic entreaties with global strategic concerns in mind.

### Leadership Styles

Another distinct characteristic of a leader is their leadership style. Leadership styles have a profound impact on the relationship between a leader and his subordinates. In the British navy, the tone of the interaction between the ship's sailors with their officers was set by the leadership style of the captain of the ship; and to a lesser extent, the leadership styles among the rest of the officers on the ship. The tone could be anywhere on a range of cold and impersonal on one end, to warm and friendly on the other end.

Undoubtedly, the leadership style of individual British naval officers was a product of their personality, upbringing, training, and professional experience. These factors are well recognized in modern military leadership studies. However, in the late 18th century there was a more rudimentary understanding of leadership styles and how

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<sup>91</sup> Horatio Nelson, *Nelson's Letters to His Wife and Other Documents 1735-1831*, ed. George Naish, vol. C (London: Spottiswoode, Ballantyne and Company, 1958), 89.

they affected leadership and ship efficiency. Leadership abilities at that time were more closely linked to how capable the fighting unit was in battle. How the leader was able to accomplish the goal or his relationship with his subordinates, was seen as more or less an insignificant factor. During the period of this study, results were the only considerations, not the means to achieve them. Nevertheless, distinct differences in leadership styles among British naval officers of the period can be observed and analyzed.

Today, modern western military leaders recognize and identify distinct differences in leadership styles. They recognize the importance of identifying the difference between leadership styles, and how to train leaders to alter, or develop, their leadership style to build a more cohesive fighting unit. Such a complete understanding of leadership styles was not accessible to the British naval leaders of the period of this study. This is not to say the leaders of the period lacked the ability to recognize leadership styles. They recognized the differences in leaders, but they lacked the formal study of leadership styles which is accessible to modern military leaders. Late eighteenth-century British naval leaders could easily differentiate between a tyrannical leader and a disinterested leader who delegated all responsibility to others. However, their understanding of leadership, as mentioned above, was more centered on the results of the leadership, not the means of achieving the results. So, successful leaders in combat and navigation were placed on a pedestal, not for the way they achieved their greatness, but because of the success itself. Therefore the individual leadership style of the leader was typically ignored as long as the leader succeeded in performing their duties.

As a result of the extensive scholarship which has been performed on British naval leaders of our period of study, it has become possible to see a clear vision of the leadership style of a significant number of these leaders. Some of the brightest examples of leadership styles studied by modern military theorists are the British naval leaders of the period of this study. These leaders are examined because they represent a group of military leaders who contributed to a force of dominance in the world of their time, and appeared to have distinct advantages over their enemies and contemporaries. Therefore, modern military and leadership scholars study these leaders to identify their leadership styles, and how those styles affected combat effectiveness, morale, and strategic awareness.

The three most common and most broadly recognized leadership styles are authoritarian leadership, laissez-faire leadership, and visionary leadership. The first two have a direct impact on the operational interaction between a leader and a subordinate, while the visionary style is much more of an abstraction; more related to overall strategic missions and personal inspiration rather than everyday interactions and tactical operations. These leadership styles are accepted by a majority of scholars in the field of sociology and leadership, as well as by military leaders and military training programs. These styles will be examined in light of the leadership of British naval officers from the period of this study. Some of the important outcomes which are critical to examine are; how the leadership style inspired sailors, how the leadership style accomplished the goals of the leader and the navy, and whether or not the leadership style contributed a positive or negative effect on morale and performance.

The first leadership style to be examined is authoritarian leadership. This style is most commonly associated with the popular image of a British naval officer of the period. These leaders are domineering and appear to be distant and aloof from their subordinates. This description of leadership can easily be seen in the British naval captains who regularly flogged sailors for any offenses or those captains who believed personal relationships with their subordinates would create weakness and compromise to their command.

However, it was not necessary for a captain to be a “flogging captain,” or an impersonal tyrant, to be associated with an authoritarian leadership style. Merely being an officer in the British navy would necessitate the need to take an authoritative leadership role at times. The control mechanism on British ships was the authority of the officers and the submission of the sailors. Even the most charismatic officers had instances in their careers where they found it necessary to extend the use of corporal punishment to effect a goal. The most severe, and for some officers, the most common punishment to assert authority over the ship’s crew was flogging. Therefore, since all naval officers had to exert authoritarian leadership qualities at times to complete their duties of command, it is essential in this section to focus on those officers who exhibited authoritarian leadership most of the time.

Fortunately for this study, there are several contemporary accounts of authoritarian leadership. The following two examples are written by sailors who experienced this style of leadership firsthand. The tone of the passages exudes a sense of

warning to the reader to beware if they are ever placed under the command of a leader of this type.

In his book, *Thirty Years from Home, Or a Voice from the Main Deck*, Samuel Leech, a man who served as a sailor on a British ship in 1812, gives an explicit representation of the definitive authoritative leadership:

The captain was excessively proud; even his officers scarcely dared walk the quarter deck on the same side with him. He never allowed himself to be addressed but by his title of “my Lord.” Should a sailor, through design or forgetfulness, reply to a command, “Yes, sir,” the lordly man would look at him with a glance full of dignity, and sternly reply, “What, sir?” This, of course, would put the offender in mind to correct himself by saying, “Yes, my Lord.” Judge them of his surprise, indignation, nay, of his lordly horror, when the poor drunken Bob Hammond called him “Billy, my boy!” Doubtless is stirred up his nobility within him, for, with a voice of thunder, he exclaimed, “Put this man in irons!” It was done.<sup>92</sup>

Likewise, in an account by William Richardson, in his book, *A Mariner of England*, the authoritative leadership of British officers is again displayed:

I was obliged to be very cautious in this business, for our captain began now to show in his proper colours, and would flog a man as soon as look at him, and assumed as much consequence as if he had been captain of a line-of-battleship: all we four mates had to attend him with hats off at the gangway in going out or coming in to the ship; he flogged a good seaman for only losing an oar out of the boat, and the fellow soon after died.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Samuel Leech, *Thirty Years from Home, or a Voice from the Main Deck* (Boston, MA: Charles Tappan, 1844), 60.

<sup>93</sup> William Richardson, *A Mariner of England: An Account of the Career of William Richardson Form Cabin Boy in the Merchant Service to Warrant Officer in the Royal Navy (1780-1819) as Told by Himself*, ed. Colonel Spencer Childers (London: John Murray, 1908), 51.

These passages give us an insight into the primary motivation for the sailors under the command of this type of leader. That motivation was fear. Fear of punishment. Although there may also have also been an air of respect for the leader, especially if the leader was proven to be successful in combat operations, the authoritarian leader needed the fear of punishment to maintain control and discipline on his ship.

Therefore, the authoritarian leadership style did not produce results originating from the systematic inspiration of the sailors to achieve greatness, but instead forced them to perform their duties to avoid punishment under a cloud of fear. This is not to say ships under this type of leadership lacked combat effectiveness. Some of these ships were the most disciplined and organized ships in the navy. However, ships under this leadership style were more likely to lack the other two leadership outcomes that are important for total effectiveness; the inspiration of the sailors and the beneficial increase of morale.

Authoritarian leadership stands in stark contrast to laissez-faire leadership. In the culture of the British navy of the time, this leadership style was evidenced in a minority of officers. However, it did exist, and it is essential to see how this leadership style contributed to the navy. At first glance, most would conjecture that laissez-faire leadership would be an ineffective leadership style for a ship during a war. The idea of a leader who gives his subordinates the freedom to perform their duties with little or no interference strikes most as irresponsible or disengaged. It is not the idea most hold about the leadership style of the British naval officers of the period.

What is not immediately apparent to many studying leadership is laissez-faire leadership can be an important leadership style for the development of subordinates and the maintenance of morale. As laissez-faire leaders entrust their subordinates to perform their duties with little or no supervision, those subordinates learn vital lessons from their assignments and develop their skills. The satisfaction of personal development in this way increases the morale and the individual ability of the subordinates.

Allowing subordinates to take a risk and succeed, as well as fail, helps train subordinates to perform their duties better. It gives the subordinates practical leadership abilities that cannot be experienced in any other manner. Allowing success through risk-taking raises the level of experience and competence for the subordinates and develops the next generation of officers. Subordinate officers who are entrusted with important leadership duties and advanced responsibilities also learn to take pride in their accomplishments. This pride of accomplishment, in turn, increases the young leader's confidence to perform at a higher level and become a competent leader as well.

Researching British naval officers of the period who possessed laissez-faire leadership style is a challenge. The vast majority of officers of the period did not see this leadership style as a viable approach. Naval officers were expected to be active leaders; the laissez-faire style would have been an anomaly. Also, unless leaders of this period who held this leadership style were successful in every aspect of their leadership, they would most likely be labeled as fearful, timid, or shy. Even though there were very few prominent officers of the period that portrayed this leadership style, there is one that deserves mention. This leader was Vice Admiral William Hotham.

Starting in 1793, when England entered the French Revolutionary Wars, Vice Admiral Hotham served as second in command to the commander-in-chief of the Mediterranean Fleet, Admiral Samuel Hood. Hotham was with Hood during the siege of Toulon and British operations in Corsica. When Hood was recalled to England in 1794, Hotham took over the command of the Mediterranean Fleet. His leadership could be described as laissez-faire, as well as ineffective. He appeared to lack the aggressive and decisive leadership his patron Hood possessed. Leadership was not a characteristic passed down from the senior to the junior admiral.

Two incidents highlight the ineffectiveness of Hotham's command. During March 1794, Hotham pursued the French Toulon Fleet off Cape Noli, near Genoa. Captain Nelson was commanding the leading ship, *Agamemnon*. Because his ships were worn-out and undermanned and so far from a friendly base, Hotham settled on the capture of two ships and allowed the rest of the French fleet to escape. Predictably, Nelson was disappointed, "Admiral Hotham seems to have given the business up and thinks we have done enough, whilst Goodall and myself think we have done nothing in comparison to what we might."<sup>94</sup> Another incident occurred during July. There was a partial fleet engagement, and the French fled. The British fleet pursued the French, but Hotham called off the pursuit when the French neared the coast. After hearing of the halt of the pursuit, Hotham's second in command, Vice Admiral Goodall, "is described as kicking his hat about the deck in a frenzy of rage when he was called off."<sup>95</sup> Reflecting on the same

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<sup>94</sup> Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean*, 433.

<sup>95</sup> Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean*, 433-34.

orders to halt the pursuit, Nelson wrote, “Had Lord Hood been here he never would have called us out of action but Hotham leaves nothing to chance.”<sup>96</sup>

Although Hotham’s leadership style can be argued to be cautious, not laissez-faire; his leadership lacked the usual aggressiveness and confidence common among the average authoritarian leader, and it lacked the critical trait of inspiration common with visionary leaders.

Another example of laissez-faire leadership is described in Tom Wareham’s book, *The Star Captains*. In his chapter on command styles among British naval frigate captains, Wareham discusses the differences between captains that had a reputation of conducting a large amount of punishment on their ships and those captains that tended to have little punishment on their ships. His research consisted of an analysis of the ships logs, with a focus on punishment and morale among the crews.

Through his analysis, Wareham points out a particular frigate captain that was highly successful and had very little punishment on his ship, Captain James Newman. Punishments were so rare on Newman’s ship, the *Mermaid*, that there were no punishments recorded on the ship’s logs from April of 1797 to July 1798, nearly fourteen months.<sup>97</sup> Although it is not conclusive whether Captain Newman’s lack of punishment was because his crew was so well behaved, this would most likely not be the case as no other British naval ship came close to the miniscule amount of punishment on board the

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<sup>96</sup> Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean*, 434.

<sup>97</sup> Wareham, *The Star Captains : Frigate Command in the Napoleonic Wars*, 217.

*Mermaid*, or because Newman was able to achieve a rare success using laissez-faire leadership.

The final leadership style is the visionary leader. Visionary leadership had less to do with the everyday and ordinary duties of a fighting ship, but more to do with the inspiration of men, and a vision toward the development of the ship's company into an integral part of the overall mission of the navy. Due to the amount of research conducted on the leadership of Lord Nelson, and the clear indications that he was a visionary leader to his subordinates and peers, a discussion about visionary leadership cannot veer far from Nelson. Naval researchers, land force military researchers, and business leadership researchers all look to Nelson's leadership for clues to the most effective way to lead an organization of any size.

Modern leadership researchers recognize Nelson's ability to inspire subordinates to reach the heights of his vision and victory at all costs. The researchers attribute Nelson's success to his ability to lead without making the means to success to be his actions, but to the collective actions of his ship's crew.<sup>98</sup> The results of Nelson's leadership ability is summarized in the following:

Lord Nelson is just one example of an individual from that era who could lead a band of rough-and-ready seamen, many of whom were outright criminals, unite them into a formidable fighting force, inspire them to die for a cause remote to many of them, and, through the force of his personality, bring about victory.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Sonia Ospina, and Mary Uhl-Bien, *Advancing Relational Leadership Research: A Dialogue among Perspectives* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2012), 194, accessed April 2, 2018, eBook Academic Collection.

<sup>99</sup> Ospina, and Uhl-Bien, *Advancing Relational Leadership Research: A Dialogue among Perspectives*, 194.

Visionary leadership primarily involves the leader inspiring his subordinates to exceed expectations and performing extraordinary acts of heroism and courage in the face of overwhelming forces. These leaders “inspire others to move beyond their self-interests to what is best for the group or organization.”<sup>100</sup> Many of these visionary leaders in the British Navy used different motivations to encourage their men to work as a more effective fighting unit. Among these motivations were the promise of prize money, the notorious British hatred of the French, religious differences between Protestant England and her Catholic enemies, and a healthy development of unit esprit de corps.

However, these visionary leaders moved beyond the diverse motivations of their ships’ crews. They were able to transform the different motivations of all the crew members into a cohesive fighting unit that took on a mystique of greatness. This mystique of greatness was not the sum of all the motivations of the crew put together, but something higher. A unit could rise out of obscurity and become the essence of the British imperial military power. To create this mystique, these leaders allowed and encouraged their crews to believe they were the last great hope for Britain; and this belief stirred up the courage, determination, and hardiness exhibited by the crews onboard ships and within fleets led by these leaders. These crews and fleets, under these visionary British naval leaders, became some of the most significant fighting forces ever known in military history.

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<sup>100</sup> Colette Taylor, Casey Cornelius, and Kate Colvin, "Visionary Leadership and Its Relationship to Organizational Effectiveness," *Leadership & Organization Development Journal* 35, no. 6 (2014): 566, <https://dx.doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1108/LODJ-10-2012-0130>.

The list of leadership styles above is not exhaustive. They represent the most common leadership styles among the British naval leaders of the time. Of course, many of the leaders of the period would have possessed varying degrees of crossover between different styles. Throughout their careers they may have recognized situations where altering their primary leadership style may have produced different and better results. However, in general, it is easy to assign one of these leadership styles to the most prominent Naval leaders of the period.

There were British naval leaders of all leadership styles that were successful and contributed significantly to the success of the British Navy during this critical period of history. Likewise, there were naval leaders with these same leadership styles that were unsuccessful and made a minimal contribution to the overall success of the British Navy. Where did the difference arise? The difference arose out of the bold acceptance of a new culture within the naval command. A culture that was born with the execution of Admiral Byng put into action by Admiral Hawke and perfected by Vice-Admiral Nelson. This new culture is exhibited through the great battles of the period and in the highlights of the careers of several of these naval officers. The tenacity, boldness, and dominance of the new culture within the British Navy and its leaders shines through in the following summaries of battles, and biographical vignettes of some of these naval officers.

### Chapter III

#### Study of Naval Leaders

In order to understand how the leadership of the British naval officers contributed to the continued success of Great Britain during the period of this study, it is important to look at some individual leaders and how they applied their leadership. The following pages contain short discussions of the leadership of four selected leaders.

##### Admiral Richard Howe

Admiral Richard Howe was fortunate enough to be the British fleet commander for the first large-scale fleet action of the French Revolutionary War. He was already a veteran of previous wars and had fully accepted the new culture of aggressive British naval leadership. He was known as a stern but professional officer and had gained the esteem of the sailors under his command. He was known to them and his peers by the mysteriously enduring nickname of “Black Dick.”

Admiral Howe had long been a proponent of the standardization of orders on board ships throughout the navy. He was the author of the earliest ships order book that survives to this day. Howe even codified the principle of ship's crews working in organized divisions in 1776.<sup>101</sup> His leadership brought about the effective standardization of many of the most important aspects in naval warfare; from crewmember organization to improvements of fleet combat signaling.

However, Admiral Howe's most notable accomplishment was his victory against the French on what has become known as the Glorious First of June in 1794. The battle

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<sup>101</sup> Rogeer Knight, *Precursors of Nelson : British Admirals of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Peter Le Fevre and Richard Harding (London: Chatham, 2000).

came at a time when the fledgling French Republic needed sea access to foreign food sources, a risky endeavor with the British Navy mobilizes and looking for a fight.



Figure 1. The Battle of the Glorious First of June. Adapted from a map in the Public Domain.

By the time the winter of 1793 came, France was in a miserable state. The country was rife with internal conflict as the royalist forces continued to struggle against the fledgling Republic of France. There was an active and organized rebellion in the Vendée region, and the residents of Toulon had handed their city and port to the British Mediterranean fleet, including the French fleet anchored there. These internal problems compounded the difficulties France had as it struggled to support its foreign interests with its limited and worn-out naval resources.

However, as the year closed out, France's situation improved drastically. During December, at the Battle of Savenay, the Republican army defeated the last remaining forces of the Vendée rebellion. Also in December, the Republican forces were able to move artillery batteries into the heights surrounding Toulon. The prospect of French artillery in the heights around Toulon necessitated the evacuation of British troops and naval resources from Toulon. The British and their Spanish allies attempted to burn the French fleet as they relinquished control of the harbor but failed to burn all the ships. However, the damage they inflicted on the French fleet significantly weakened the French ability to threaten the British Navy in the Mediterranean Sea.

Even though the French were able to make significant progress in their land campaigns to remove the threats in the Vendée and Toulon, the Republic still faced many internal struggles and the need to import grain to feed its people. There were riots over bread distribution, and France needed to feed its increasingly larger armies on the continent. This task was made increasingly difficult by the effectiveness of British naval blockades and patrols. The French maritime trade had been cut off almost entirely. Maximilien Robespierre, a Deputy of the National Convention, and member of the Committee of Public Safety, was able to arrange for a massive convoy of grain from the United States of America.<sup>102</sup> He sent several warships to escort the convoy and attempted to maintain the secrecy of the mission. However, he failed to keep the secret from the British.

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<sup>102</sup> Willis, *The Glorious First of June: Fleet Battle in the Reign of Terror*, 111.

During April of 1794, the British discovered the existence of the convoy and understood the importance of the grain for the stability of the French Republic's government. British authorities made the interception of the grain convoy a top priority. Admiral Richard Earl Howe, command of the Channel Fleet, was immediately put to sea to attempt to find and destroy the convoy.<sup>103</sup> Howe's fleet sailed with sixteen 74-gun ships, two 80-gun ships, three first-rate ships of 100 guns, and three second-rate ships of 98 guns. The fleet was powerful in the way of firepower, however it suffered greatly from manning shortages. Most of the ships in the fleet contained around 80 percent of their complement.<sup>104</sup> This manning problem offered Howe a severe handicap in fleet battle. With inadequate numbers of seamen to work the guns and sail the ships in the manner which they were designed, it would take flexibility and the uncommon ability of the leadership among the fleet in order to be victorious against the expected French fleet.

The British formed a two-pronged strategy to prevent the convoy from reaching France. First, Howe would use his massive Channel Fleet to blockade the French fleet at Brest and prevent it from forming an escort for the convoy. The second prong consisted of Rear Admiral George Montagu's powerful squadron, of six 74-gun ships and three frigates, sailing south deep into the Bay of Biscay to intercept the convoy.

Fortune joined the French side, on May 16<sup>th</sup>, as a strong storm blew Howe's fleet off their station blockading Brest. The French admiral commanding the fleet at Brest, Admiral Louis Thomas Villaret de Joyeuse took this fortunate opportunity to quickly slip out of Brest into the Atlantic Ocean. Admiral Villaret's goal was to lure the British fleet

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<sup>103</sup> Willis, *The Glorious First of June: Fleet Battle in the Reign of Terror*, 112.

<sup>104</sup> Willis, *The Glorious First of June: Fleet Battle in the Reign of Terror*, 117.

away from the grain convoy, so he sailed west into the Atlantic. Once Howe's fleet had recovered from the storm and regrouped, he sailed west in pursuit of Villaret.

Villaret's orders were to protect the grain convoy at all costs. In this pursuit, Villaret saw his best chance was to delay the British fleet as long as he could through defensive tactics, so the convoy could slip into port while the British were trying to engage Villaret's fleet in an extended pursuit. Villaret was under orders to not engage the British fleet unless it was necessary to save the grain convoy. On May 28<sup>th</sup>, the French spotted the British fleet on the horizon. Once they were able to discern it was the British, enthusiastic Republican fervor spread throughout the fleet as French sailors longed to prove their patriotism and merit to France. The fervor was so contagious and motivating, the representative of the Committee of Public Safety, Jeanbon Saint André was caught up in the enthusiasm. He assented to the widespread call for action and adjusted Villaret's orders to that effect.<sup>105</sup>

For the next three days, the fleets shadowed each other as they sailed west. Each fleet struggled to gain the favorable position based on the wind, the wind gauge. On May 31<sup>st</sup>, a thick mist came down, and the fleets were unable to maintain clear visibility of each other. However, on the morning of June 1<sup>st</sup>, the mist was blown out by a moderate breeze. The French fleet was four miles to the leeward of the British fleet, giving the British the advantageous wind gauge.

Howe formed up his line of battle and closed with the French to engage them. His tactical plan called for all the ships of his line to cut through the line of French ships at

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<sup>105</sup> Adolphe Thiers, *The History of the French Revolution*, trans. Frederick Shoberl, vol. 3 (London: Richard Bentley, 1838), 383.

the same time. They were then going to engage the French from the leeward side of their line and prevent them from escaping. The tactic was audacious and risky. Howe had to trust his Captains would not lose their nerve on the approach to the French line. In addition to trusting his Captain's nerves, he had to trust the sailing competence of all the crews to be able to pull off the challenging maneuver.

Howe's trust in his subordinates and his audacious tactics amounted to nothing less than a 'glorious' outcome. Although many of his fleet captains did not follow, or understand the signals for the attack, enough of them followed the order to make it a success. The British fleet was able to cross through the French line, raking the ships as they passed through, and engage the French from the leeward side of the French line. The aggressive and bold move took the French by surprise. The raking fire from the British ships through the bow and stern of the French ships, as the British passed through the French line, crippled many of the French guns and induced heavy casualties. The element of surprise and the initial overwhelming damage the British inflicted was the beginning of the end for the French. This was followed by superior British gunnery and ship handling, leading to a victory for the British.

Although the British victory was a tremendous tactical success and led to the capture and destruction of several French ships of the line, in light of French strategy, the battle was a necessary consequence in order to cover the movement of the grain convoy from America. The French saw the battle as a victory for the stability of their nascent Republic, not a naval defeat.

Howe's audacity, and the trust he had in his subordinates' ability to perform the risky tactics, proved he had the important instinct of leadership that came to be the standard other leaders would exhibit throughout the rest of the wars with France.

#### Vice-Admiral Horatio Lord Nelson

During the late eighteenth century, and for the first five years of the nineteenth century, Britain had an undisputed hero. This hero was a member of the famed and trusted British Navy, the *wooden wall* protecting Britain from its enemies. The glorified hero was Vice-Admiral Horatio Lord Nelson. Horatio Nelson's fame and honor was not just a result of luck or the proverbial right place at the right time. Throughout his career his natural leadership characteristics allowed him to inspire a generation of British naval officers and seamen to overcome all other navies in the world. The following pages will describe how Nelson's leadership, uncompromising confidence in English seamen, and his unparalleled tenacity in combat was one of the most coherent causes of British naval superiority throughout his career and to the end of the Napoleonic Wars.

It is clear from the many sources available that Nelson had a different leadership style from many other Captains in the British Navy. Even captains that observed the success of his leadership style were still unable to emulate it.<sup>106</sup> His warm and welcoming personality was the foundation of his leadership. "It is clear that Nelson genuinely believed that cordial unanimity and cheerfulness were an essential ingredient of a successful team..."<sup>107</sup> In contrast to many of his peers, who maintained order through

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<sup>106</sup> Willis, *In the Hour of Victory*, 251.

<sup>107</sup> Colin White, "Eager and Happy to Exert Themselves in Forwarding the Public Service," in *A Great & Glorious Victory: New Perspectives on the Battle of Trafalgar*, ed. Richard Harding (Barnsley, UK: Seaforth Publishing, 2008), 34.

strict discipline and a fearful environment on their ships, Nelson was not only able to maintain excellent order on his ships; he was able to foster admiration and respect from his men at the same time. A key difference was Nelson's fairness and genuine care for his men.

The first key theme of leadership Nelson possessed was the ability to inspire his subordinates. One of the most important aspects of a leader is his ability to inspire others. However, the concept of inspiration can be a very subjective idea. It is subjective because there are many ways a leader can inspire and different levels of inspiration can be achieved. Therefore, the critical point is how a leader inspires and to what degree. In the case of Horatio Nelson, he not only inspired his men to fight better and harder than the enemy, but he also inspired his superiors to have hope for the future, and the prospect of glory for the British Navy. Nelson's inspiration for his superiors is most poignantly stated by Lord St. Vincent, John Jervis, in a letter he sent to Nelson after he learned of Nelson's illness following the Battle of Copenhagen. Jervis had the daunting task of finding a replacement for Nelson:

To find a fit successor, your Lordship well knows, is no easy task, for I never saw the man in our Profession, excepting yourself and Troubridge, who possessed the magic art of infusing the same spirit into others which inspired his actions...Your Lordship's whole conduct, from your first appointment to this hour is the subject of our constant admiration; it does not become me to make comparisons. All agree there is but one Nelson...<sup>108</sup>

It is easy to see the admiration Jervis had for Nelson's ability to inspire. Nelson's ability is so hard to describe Jervis uses the words "magic art." He must have been at a

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<sup>108</sup> Jervis, "Lord St. Vincent to Lord Nelson, May 31, 1801," in *The Letters of Lord St. Vincent, Vol. I*, 101.

loss of words to explain Nelson's inspiration to men in concrete terms. Also, Jervis gives a hint of what he thinks Nelson inspires men to do; namely, "infusing the same spirit into others which inspired his actions." This is an elegant way of Jervis to say that Nelson inspires men to take upon them the same intention that Nelson possesses when they perform their duties. They become one in mind and cause with Nelson; an extension of him in every way. In short, everything a leader could want or have.

The proceedings at the Battle of the Nile gave clear evidence of the inspiration Nelson gave to his subordinates, and of the trust they had in his leadership. The previous several weeks before the battle had been spent searching the Mediterranean Sea for the French fleet. Nelson was in command of the fleet searching for the French, and he had used the several weeks to drill and train his fleet into a superior fighting force. The fleet reached, "...the highest levels of proficiency in all aspects of its task. These ships were fit champions for England - none better existed - and they would be tested to the limit before their work was done."<sup>109</sup>

As the British fleet arrived at Alexandria, they were disappointed to find the French fleet was not there. However, Nelson's fleet soon discovered the French fleet was anchored in Aboukir Bay, just up the coast to the North. It was already late afternoon as Nelson's fleet approached the French fleet, and there were only a couple of hours of daylight left. Nelson's tenacity would not let him delay an attack until the next day, and his subordinates' trust in Nelson fighting instinct encouraged them to follow their leader wherever he led them. Their trust in Nelson was so great, and he encouraged them to

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<sup>109</sup> Lambert, *Nelson : Britannia's God of War*, 117.

such a degree; as Nelson signaled “form line as convenient,” his captains in his vanguard competed for the honor of being the first engaged. They raced each other for the honor of pleasing Nelson.<sup>110</sup>

The fact that the captains in Nelson’s fleet raced for the honor of being the first engaged in a battle so close to darkness and shallow shoals is evidence that they trusted him to a great extent. Common practice and caution would demand a different tactic, one of waiting until the morning and a battle in open water. Nelson inspired them to something greater than common practice. He inspired them to glory, and they lived up to the endearing term Nelson used for them, “Band of Brothers.” Nelson later writes to Lord Howe, “I had the happiness to command a band of brothers; therefore, night was to my advantage. Each knew his duty, and I was sure each would feel for a French ship.”<sup>111</sup>

The next leadership characteristic embodied in Nelson was his humility when dealing with subordinates. His humility was most likely a result of his middle-class upbringing. He had a personality that made him reluctant to flaunt his position, or to lord it over others. This tendency engendered loyalty to him from sailors and soldiers to whom he came into contact. He felt it was not only important to show respect to fellow officers, but also to the lower classes as well. There are many instances of this occurring.

On January 27, 1801, Lord Nelson inspected the citadel overlooking Plymouth Sound. Nelson entered the Baroque style and highly decorated main gate to begin the inspection. In honor of the highly respected guest, the Governor of the citadel turned out

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<sup>110</sup> Lambert, *Nelson : Britannia's God of War*, 123.

<sup>111</sup> Horatio Nelson, "Horatio Nelson to Lord Howe, January 8, 1799," in *Letters and Dispatches of Horatio, Viscount Nelson*, ed. John Laughton (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1886), 180.

the main guard, in addition to the duty guard. Nelson did not want to trouble the main guard with standing in parade formation for the duration of the visit. He asked the Governor to turn them in. After Nelson's request, the main guard was relieved of their additional ceremonial duty. Only the guard scheduled for the day remained on duty. This act of humility did not go unobserved. Nelson was accompanied on the inspection by Captain Hardy and Captain Parker, and he gave them an example of leadership they would not soon forget.<sup>112</sup> It is easy to imagine the guards of the citadel would have shared this story with friends and family within the town of Plymouth; and Nelson's reputation as a caring sea officer growing even more.

Another leadership characteristic of Nelson was his compassion for his men. As opposed to many officers in the navy, Nelson felt punishments should be evaluated on a case by case basis. He had the critical ability to find a balance between punishment and order on his ship. This ability won him the respect and admiration of the seamen of the lower decks.<sup>113</sup> He even acted in opposition to the common practices of punishment of his time. While in the West Indies, Nelson showed great compassion for a deserter, Able Seaman William Clark. Clark had been on the run for a year and was found drunk in a port town. Even though it was peacetime, the sentence for desertion was death, and Clark was subsequently sentenced to hang during his court-martial hearing. Nelson disagreed with the sentence, pardoning Clark and setting him free. Nelson was rebuked for his decision, but he wrote to the Admiralty, "The law might not have supposed me guilty of

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<sup>112</sup> "Plymouth Report, from January 20 to February 16, 1801," in *Naval Chronicle*, vol. 5 (London: Bunney & Gold Shoe Lane, 1801), 180.

<sup>113</sup> John Eric Adair, *Inspiring Leadership: Learning from Great Leaders* (London: Thorogood Publishing, Ltd., 2002), 197.

murder, but my feelings would have been nearly the same.”<sup>114</sup> It is clear that Nelson believed there were circumstances where leniency and pardon were appropriate.

Nelson’s philosophy of discipline balanced three crucial points. The first point was the authoritative discipline administered by his ships’ officers. It would be wrong to say there was disorder on Nelson’s ships because of a lack of discipline. He expected great care to be taken to the order of his ship, the seamanship of his men, and the fighting quality of his officers and men. However, he understood perfection was unattainable, as he informed Sir Edward Berry in a letter of 1800:

Young men will be young men, and we must make allowances. If you expect to find anything like perfection in this world you will be mistaken: therefore do not think of little nonsenses too much. Such strictness as you show to your duty falls to the lot of few, and no person in this world is more sensible of you worth and goodness in every way than myself. Let it pass over, and come dine here...<sup>115</sup>

The second point of this balance of discipline was the self-discipline exhibited by his subordinates. Since his ships were “happy ships,” and the men respected his leadership, his officers and men wanted to please him. In turn, they disciplined themselves to prove worthy of Nelson’s leadership and admiration. The final point of Nelson’s discipline philosophy is “what Nelson would have called the discipline of the sea.”<sup>116</sup> This was the discipline the ship’s crew would place upon themselves as a unit that had a collective understanding of what was required of them based on their shared situation. This last point represented the discipline needed to have the most efficient

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<sup>114</sup> Victor T. Sharman, *Nelson's Hero : The Story of His 'Sea-Daddy', Captain William Locker* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2005), 120.

<sup>115</sup> Horatio Nelson, "Horatio Nelson to Sir Edward Berry, February 7, 1800," in *Letters and Dispatches of Horatio, Viscount Nelson* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1886), 233.

<sup>116</sup> David Hurst, "Issues and Observations-the Full Nelson: Leadership Lessons from a British Naval Hero," *Leadership in Action* 26, no. 6 (2007): 22.

fighting ship possible. Not only did they discipline themselves because of their leader's authority, or for their respect of their leader, they disciplined themselves because they were a cohesive fighting unit with a common goal.

Foremost in Nelson's mind, when it came to his ship's operation, was his crew. He repeatedly proved that if a captain was fair and respectful to his men, he could maintain discipline with ease. He also understood that discipline and good order, whether in seamanship or in fighting ability, brought about self-respect and pride for a crew. This type of leadership allowed Nelson's ships to be happy ships, and a great sense of esprit de corps developed within his ship's company.<sup>117</sup> It is easy to understand how this developed on Nelson's ships. He showed respect for his men, and the respect he showed for his men was real. Nelson's respect for his men can be summed up from a heartfelt line he included in a letter to his wife, "Nothing can stop the courage of English seamen."<sup>118</sup>

Nelson's natural tendency to be fair and respectful to his subordinates led him also to be loyal and protective of them. He always strove to keep his crews intact when he shifted from ship to ship. During the British blockade of Toulon in 1793, Nelson wrote to his wife, Fanny, and told her Admiral Lord Hood offered him a 74-gun ship. Accepting the 74-gun ship would be an important step in his career, as he would then be considered the captain of a full-size line of battleship. Nelson writes the letter to explain to Fanny why he turned down the ship. He cites the wisdom of the admiralty placing him

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<sup>117</sup> Jeremiah R. Dancy, *The Myth of the Press Gang : Volunteers, Impressment and the Naval Manpower Problem in the Late Eighteenth Century* (Suffolk, UK: Boydell and Brewer, 2015), 117.

<sup>118</sup> Horatio Nelson, "Horatio Nelson to Fanny Nelson, April 1, 1795," in *Nelson's Letters to His Wife*, ed. George Naish (Great Britain: Navy Records Society, vol.100, 1958), 204.

in a 64-gun ship as one of the reasons he turned down the ship. This reason can be discounted because it appears too much to be what he would be expected to say as a loyal officer submissive to the Admiralty. The more convincing answer follows when he tells her, "I cannot give up my officers."<sup>119</sup> Based on a careful look at Nelson's leadership characteristics this reason is much more believable. Although some may say Nelson did not want to give up the hybrid 64-gun *Agamemnon* because it was a quick ship and gave him the possibility of pursuit and cruising, the second reason cited by Nelson must be given at least as much credibility. Nelson knew he would not be able to transfer all the officers serving under him into the new ship. Many of those officers and petty officers would have served with Nelson since the recommissioning of the *Agamemnon* earlier in the year. Many others served with Nelson on his previous ships.

Among the officers Nelson was reluctant to leave was his first lieutenant Martin Hinton, who served with Nelson in the West Indies in the *Albemarle*, his second lieutenant Joseph Bullen, who had served with Nelson in Nicaragua, and his third lieutenant George Andrews, who served as a midshipman for Nelson in the *Boreas*. In addition to his lieutenants, he also had several midshipmen, or 'young gentlemen' to consider. These young gentlemen included William Hoste and John Weatherfield, sons of Norfolk parsons, and William Bolton, the son of his sister's brother-in-law. Last of the mentionable midshipmen was Nelson's thirteen-year-old step-son, Josiah Nisbet.<sup>120</sup> With all these officers to consider, it showed a great deal of selflessness to put his figurative promotion into a proper line of battleship on hold in order to keep his crew together. This

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<sup>119</sup> Nelson, "Horatio Nelson to Fanny Nelson, April 1, 1795," 86.

<sup>120</sup> Knight, *The Pursuit of Victory*, 145-46.

selflessness was a clear indication of Nelson's leadership. His crew knew they had Nelson's support and protection; in turn, they dedicated themselves to serving Nelson to the best of their abilities.

Nelson's dedication to his men did not stop with his officers. He genuinely cared about the seaman under his command and undertook to keep them with him as he moved from ship to ship through advancement. Due to standard practices of the time, many of the seamen on board a ship would stay with a ship and be unable to follow their captain to another ship. Nelson disapproved of the practices, "[T]he disgust for the seamen to the Navy is all owing to the infernal plan of turning them over from ship to ship, so that men cannot be attached to their officers, for the officers care two-pence about them."<sup>121</sup> To Nelson, it only made practical sense to allow a captain that has trained up and fostered respect from his men to be able to take those men into his new ship. Otherwise, the captain has to start over with an untested and unknown crew; a crew that quite possibly may have been debilitated by ineffective leadership from the previous captain and officers.

Nelson's leadership was not only a product of his heroism and ability to inspire, but it was also a product of his integrity, especially early in his career. Throughout his career, Nelson exhibited integrity to his duty as a naval captain in many ways. One of the most notable periods of Nelson's career where he displayed integrity was his service in the West Indies; commanding the *Boreas* frigate. During this assignment to the West Indies, Nelson would become a thorn in the side of the many of the established British

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<sup>121</sup> Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean*, 398.

naval and merchant officials in the region. Nelson quickly recognized the lack of adherence to the Navigation Acts in the British controlled territories of the West Indies. These officials allowed merchant ships of the United States, and other countries, to carry cargo to and from British ports; in direct contradiction to the Navigation Acts. Nelson's integrity would not allow him to look the other way, and he placed his career in jeopardy by confronting the commonly accepted trade practices in the region. As he saw it: "I must either disobey my orders, or disobey Acts of Parliament, which the admiral was disobeying. I determined upon the former, trusting to the uprightness of my intention, and believed that my country would not allow me to be ruined by protecting her commerce."<sup>122</sup>

His first action upon arriving in Antigua was a clear display of Nelson's proclivity to the proper channels of command. This display happened after receiving a letter from the station commander, Admiral Sir Richard Hughes, indicating Nelson was to take orders from the resident commissioner Moutray. Moutray was a captain of a British merchant ship and was not in the navy. Nelson remarked, "I know of no superior officers besides the Lord Commissioners of the Admiralty and my seniors of the post list."<sup>123</sup> He then, in a very public rebuke, ordered a boat from the *Boreas* to remove the commodore's broad pennant Moutray had flown as a symbol of his command of the port.<sup>124</sup> Since the *Boreas* had just arrived on station in the West Indies, this was probably the first interaction his men saw between their captain and another authority. After this incident, Nelson's men knew without a doubt they were under the command of someone who took

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<sup>122</sup> Joseph F. Callo, "Nelson," *Military History* 29, no. 1 (2012): 56.

<sup>123</sup> F.W. Payn, *Cromwell on Foreign Affairs: Together with Four Essays on International Matters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1901), 137.

<sup>124</sup> Edgar Vincent, *Nelson : Love & Fame* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 65.

his commission as a naval captain seriously and had an implacable sense of duty. Very few on his ship would have doubted his integrity toward his duty.

If this was not enough, as soon as Nelson learned of the complicity in which the West Indies squadron was enforcing the Navigation Acts, he confronted Sir Hughes. Admiral Hughes claimed he had not been informed of the Orders in Council of the Navigation Acts Nelson was citing. Nelson produced the Orders and Acts to Hughes. Hughes made his own interpretation and ordered his officers to allow foreign ships to enter harbors if local authorities approved of the shipments. Nelson knew this was a blatant violation of the Act and made this clear to Hughes. Nelson also started to write to other captains in the squadron to garner support.<sup>125</sup> Nelson disobeyed Hughes' orders and enforced the letter of the law of the Navigation Acts.

During May of 1785, Nelson seized the ship *Eclipse* which was crewed entirely by Americans, for violating the Navigation Acts. The crown lawyer challenged Nelson's right to seize the *Eclipse*. After personally defending himself in court, Nelson was not only found to be in the right; he convinced the crown attorney of the legality of the seizure. Weeks later, Nelson arrested four American ships at Nevis Island. The four ships and their cargoes were declared prizes and sold. Capturing the four American ships brought about a significant degree of local protest and pressure. The four American captains were able to raise enough clamor to threaten Nelson's arrest. Nelson remained on his ship, fearing arrest if he was to go ashore. After several months, Nelson was

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<sup>125</sup> Lambert, *Nelson : Britannia's God of War*, 20-21.

wholly exonerated and Hughes was ordered by the Admiralty to direct his squadron to enforce the Navigations Acts in their entirety.<sup>126</sup>

Nelson's dispute with Sir Richard Hughes would not be the last time he disobeyed a superior officer. There were times when Nelson believed his call to duty was a higher priority than following orders. To Nelson, integrity to duty and tactical effectiveness trumped all orders. There are two battles Nelson fought in that prove Nelson's dedication to integrity to duty and tactical effectiveness. The first is the Battle of the Cape St. Vincent. During this battle, Nelson recognized a tactical danger and took immediate action without orders from his superior officer. The second battle was the Battle of Copenhagen. During this battle, Nelson ignored signals from his superior officers and remained engaged in a battle he knew would be a triumphant British victory. Below is a summary of each of these battles and how Nelson's leadership characteristics of decisive tactical decision making, and his robust sense of integrity to duty, contributed to victory.

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<sup>126</sup> Knight, *The Pursuit of Victory*, 93-95.



Figure 2. The Battle of Cape St. Vincent. Adapted from a map in the Public Domain.

During the Battle of Cape St. Vincent, the captains of the ships in the rear division of the British attack were placed in a “professional conundrum.”<sup>127</sup> The Admiral in command of the fleet, John Jervis, had given a signal to the rear division to tack and block the enemy’s flanking maneuver. Vice-Admiral Sir Charles Thompson, the commander of the rear division, either failed to see or ignored the signal. The conundrum the captains of the rear division were placed in was whether they follow the signal from Jervis, or follow their divisional commander’s lead straight ahead. Nelson was the first to act. He ordered his ship, the *Captain*, to fall out of the formation and

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<sup>127</sup> Willis, *In the Hour of Victory*, 93.

maneuver to a position where he could prevent the Spanish ships from joining together. According to the *Captain's* logbooks for the day, there was no signal given from Thompson's ship for Nelson's maneuver.<sup>128</sup> Nelson showed a tremendous amount of courage when he made this move. At the time he made his turn, he did not know if other ships in the division would follow him. There was the potential of taking his one ship into the heart of the Spanish fleet surrounding the enemy's flagship. Fortunately for Nelson, the other ships in the division followed Nelson's maneuver and supported him in his brave action.

At the conclusion of the battle, Nelson and his crew boarded and took the 80-gun San Nicholas and the 114-gun San Josef. Nelson personally led his boarding party onto the Spanish ship, the San Nicholas, becoming the first British flag-officer to lead a boarding party since 1513.<sup>129</sup> He then led his boarding party onto the adjacent Spanish flagship, the San Josef. Nelson's bravery and willingness to lead from the front, first by sailing his ship into the heart of the enemy, and secondly, by personally leading his boarding party, ingratiated him to his crew and the British people. Nelson engendered such jovial admiration from the fleet, they named the boarding of one ship to board another ship, "Nelson's patent bridge for boarding first rates."<sup>130</sup> In the end, Nelson's initiative which led him to act without orders from his division commander led him to glory and honor, and established him as a bold tactician as well as a effective leader.

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<sup>128</sup> T. Sturges Jackson, ed., *Logs of the Great Sea Fights, 1794-1805*, vol. 1 (Great Britain: Navy Records Society, vol.16, 1899), 223.

<sup>129</sup> Willis, *In the Hour of Victory*, 93.

<sup>130</sup> Horatio Nelson, "Horatio Nelson to Fanny Nelson, February 1797," in *Nelson's Letters to His Wife* (Great Britain: Navy Record Society, vol.100, 1958), 317.



Figure 3. The Battle of Copenhagen. Adapted from a map in the Public Domain.

The second battle where Nelson chose duty over obeying his superior officer was the Battle of Copenhagen of 1801. During this battle, Nelson led the main attacking force from the South to the North through the Copenhagen Road. Admiral Hyde Parker, the commander of the entire fleet, remained to the northeast of the roads and planned to move to block any gun boats from sallying out of the harbor. Starting at 10:40 am, Nelson's divisions of ships engaged in a fierce battle with the Danish ships and ground batteries for several hours. At 1:30 pm, presumably because of his uncertainty of the situation and to assess his fleet's condition, Admiral Parker ordered the signal "discontinue the engagement" be raised.<sup>131</sup> Nelson ignored the signal and allowed his signal of "engage the enemy closer" to fly. Hours later Nelson was able to secure a

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<sup>131</sup> T. Sturges Jackson, ed., *Logs of the Great Sea Fights, 1794-1805*, vol. 2 (Great Britain: Navy Records Society, vol.18, 1900), 90.

ceasefire with the Danish which allowed the British Navy to carry away eleven of the Danish ships as prizes. If Nelson would have followed Parker's signal, the outcome may have been drastically different. The next day Nelson's second in command of the attack, Rear-Admiral Thomas Graves, wrote to his brother and outlined Nelson's decision to ignore Parker's signal:

Lord Nelson was appointed to command this attack, and he asked for me to serve with him; if not, you might depend on my not staying behind when anything was to be done. I think yesterday must prove that the enterprise of the British is invincible...In short, it was worthy of our gallant and enterprising little Hero of the Nile. Nothing can exceed his spirit. Sir Hyde [Parker] made the signal to discontinue the action before we had been at it two hours, supposing that our ships would all be destroyed. But our little Hero gloriously said, "I will not move till we are crowned with victory..."<sup>132</sup>

Graves' letter to his brother gives a clear indication of his view of leadership within the fleet. He gives nothing but praise for Nelson and highlights the defeatism of Parker. If this letter is any indication, Graves would follow Nelson into any battle but would think twice about following Parker.

In the months before the Battle of Trafalgar, Nelson's leadership within the navy was recognized entirely. Not only did the navy respect and love him, but the British public was enthusiastic in their praise of their naval hero. The words of Able Seaman James Martin, aboard the *Neptune* express the feelings of the fleet when Nelson joined the fleet about three weeks before the Battle of Trafalgar, "On the 28th September was

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<sup>132</sup> Jackson, ed., *Logs of the Great Sea Fights, 1794-1805*, 102.

joined by H.M.Ship Victory Admirl Lord Nelson and the Ajax and the Thunderer it is Imposable to Discribe the Heartfelt Satisfaction of the whole fleet upon this Occasion and the Confidance of Success with which we ware Inspired.”<sup>133</sup> Nelson’s previous successes and his unmatched leadership led to inspiration and encouragement for members of the fleet, from the flag officers down to the men of the lower decks. Whatever would happen at the future battle of Trafalgar would be a result of Nelson’s leadership.

As Nelson reviewed his assembled fleet, he saw familiar faces and new faces among the captains. Of the twenty-seven ships of the line in his fleet, only eleven were led by captains Nelson had personally served with previously.<sup>134</sup> Nelson worked quickly to meet the captains he had not served with before. He used the opportunity of dining with them to try to build relationships. One captain, George Duff, wrote to his wife, “I dined with his Lordship yesterday, and had a very merry dinner. He certainly is the pleasantest Admiral I ever served under,”<sup>135</sup> and later, “He is so good and pleasant a man, that we all wish to do what he likes, without any kind of orders.”<sup>136</sup> Captain Duff was truly inspired to greatness by building a relationship with Nelson; he even expresses his desire to do everything Nelson “likes” without even being asked or ordered.

Another captain that met Nelson days before the Battle of Trafalgar was Captain Codrington. He describes Nelson’s arrival to the fleet in a letter to his family:

Lord Nelson is arrived! A sort of general joy has been the consequence, and many good effects will shortly arise from our change of system. He joined us too

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<sup>133</sup> Stephanie Jones, and Jonathan Gosling, *Nelson's Way: Leadership Lessons from the Great Commander* (Boston: Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2005), 251.

<sup>134</sup> White, "Eager and Happy to Exert Themselves in Forwarding the Public Service," 32.

<sup>135</sup> George Duff, "George Duff to Sophia Duff, October 1, 1805," in *The Dispatches and Letters of Vice Admiral Lord Viscount Nelson*, ed. Sir Nicholas Nicolas, vol. 74 (London: Henry Colburn, 1846), 70.

<sup>136</sup> Duff, "George Duff to Sophia Duff, October 1, 1805," in *The Dispatches and Letters of Vice Admiral Lord Viscount Nelson*, 71.

late yesterday evening for communication. I had not got any of your letters before I waited on Lord Nelson this morning; he received me in an easy, polite manner, and, on giving me your letter, said that, being entrusted with it by a lady, he made a point of delivering it himself. I have no fear of obtaining his good will by the conduct of 'Orion'; because I shall do my best to deserve it, and he is a man well able to appreciate such endeavours.<sup>137</sup>

Codrington excitement upon Nelson's arrival is self-evident. He predicts that many good changes will be made now that Nelson was with the fleet. This must come from a trust of Nelson's leadership and administrative abilities. Codrington ends the letter with a sentence alluding to the fact that he is confident he will gain Nelson's good will through the performance of his ship, the *Orion*. He trusts Nelson is the type of Admiral that will recognize good performance when he sees it. Codrington proved a man of his word. During the battle, he did everything he could to 'engage the enemy more closely,' even taking friendly fire from the rearmost British ships as he tried to take the *Orion* into the heat of the battle.<sup>138</sup> Codrington was one of the few captains in the rear of the line to follow Nelson's order that if he was unable to get into action by the prescribed mode of attack "they might adopt whatever they thought best, provided it led them quickly and closely alongside the enemy."<sup>139</sup> In another letter, Codrington comments about how Nelson was able to bring his captains together into a happy fighting force, "...allow the superiority of Lord Nelson in all these social arrangements which bind his captains to their admiral."<sup>140</sup> These 'social arrangements' have been recognized as one of

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<sup>137</sup> Edward Codrington, "Edward Codrington to Lady Bouchier, September 29, 1805," in *Memoir of the Life of Admiral Sir Edward Codrington* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1873), 51.

<sup>138</sup> Michael Duffy, "Trafalgar: Myth and Reality," in *A Great and Glorious Victory: New Perspectives on the Battle of Trafalgar*, ed. Richard Harding (Barnsley, UK: Seaforth Publishing, 2008), 63.

<sup>139</sup> Michael Duffy, "'...All Was Hushed up': The Hidden Trafalgar," *The Mariner's Mirror* 91, no. 2 (2005): 232.

<sup>140</sup> Edward Codrington, "Edward Codrington to Lady Bouchier, September 30, 1805," in *Memoir of the Life of Admiral Sir Edward Codrington* (London: Lonmans, Green, and Co., 1873), 51.

Nelson's most effective tools of leadership. He molded his men into a team, under his leadership, with frequent and 'merry' dinners. "In the days before the battle [of Trafalgar], therefore, Nelson held regular dinners and conversations aboard his flagship, to get to know his fellow officers and to instill in them, in very general terms, what he expected of them in the coming engagement."<sup>141</sup> By the time Nelson rose his famous signal, "England expects that every man will do his duty," Nelson knew his fleet would rise to the task ahead of it.



Figure 4. The Battle of Trafalgar. Adapted from a map in the Public Domain.

Admiral Lord Nelson's victory at the Battle of Trafalgar has been recognized by nineteenth and twentieth-century historians as one of the most critical and pivotal military successes in modern British history. Prodigious amounts of attention have been given to

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<sup>141</sup> Willis, *In the Hour of Victory*, 253.

every aspect of the battle, including; the condition of the Allied fleet, the British commanders, Nelson's tactics, opposing gunnery, and the aftermath of the battle. This increased attention is especially true for the anglophile North American and British historians. These historians have contributed to the perspective that promoted the construction of monuments and statues, and the restoration of the *HMS Victory*, which has immortalized the battle and lifted Admiral Lord Nelson to heroic status. However, beyond the personal admiration held for Nelson and the characterization of him as a glorious protector of Britain, there are several objective reasons for exalting Nelson's victory at Trafalgar. These include, but are not limited to, the subsequent British naval strategic dominance for the remainder of the Napoleonic Wars and the weakening of Spain as an imperial power.

The first reason so much attention has been given to the Battle of Trafalgar is the subsequent naval strategic dominance Britain achieved, and it cannot be emphasized enough. In his discussion of the aftermath of the Battle of Trafalgar in his book, *The Command of the Ocean*, N.A.M. Rodger states, "...Britain had an unchallenged command of the sea, in quantity and quality, materially and psychologically, over all her actual or potential enemies, which she had never known before."<sup>142</sup> This dominance allowed Britain to take risks and to explore new strategic realities. Among these were "expeditions to recapture Cape of Good Hope and the islands in the West Indies."<sup>143</sup> Britain also made some unsuccessful expeditions to Montevideo and Buenos Aires.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean*, 543.

<sup>143</sup> Knight, *Britain against Napoleon : The Organisation of Victory, 1793-1815*, 273.

<sup>144</sup> Knight, *Britain against Napoleon : The Organisation of Victory, 1793-1815*, 273.

The strategic dominance was also a practical advantage to British global logistics. Britain was able to expand trade routes and capacity with the reduced threat from enemy squadrons.<sup>145</sup> This allowed Britain to maintain a flow of foreign supplies to its people. It also allowed Britain to resupply its armies anywhere in the world and to choke off supplies to its enemies. Effective blockades of enemy ports, and tenacious trade route raiding, forced Britain's enemies to make a desperate search for overland supply routes. This problem was especially distinct for France and Spain. Spain was a peninsula attached to Europe at its border with France, and France was in constant conflict on its Eastern front.

The British naval dominance was especially bothersome to Napoleon's strategy. With many enemies on France's Eastern front, Napoleon desperately needed to consolidate his resources to the Eastern front. Therefore, he needed to reduce Britain's effectiveness or remove them from the war altogether. However, without the ability to stop the economic trade from flowing to and from Britain with the French or Spanish navies, he would not be able to interrupt Britain's source of power.<sup>146</sup>

The second reason why Britain's victory has received so much attention is it had a significant effect on the Spanish ability to be an imperial power. Spain's influence in the world, based on its trade from the New World depended on its strong naval power. At Trafalgar, the Spanish fleet it needed to maintain this imperial power was sacrificed for the French strategic efforts in the Mediterranean.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Duffy, "Trafalgar: Myth and Reality," 66.

<sup>146</sup> Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery*, 143.

<sup>147</sup> Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean*, 543.

Writing about leadership can be difficult. It is difficult because for most people it can be difficult to explain why someone is a good leader, while others are bad leaders. Leadership can be a very abstract quality. It can be a quality that is difficult to describe. However, when writing about Lord Nelson's life, leadership becomes the topic of discussion. Nelson so epitomized leadership among the British Navy in his lifetime, that a discussion about the period cannot, without difficulty, avoid a discussion about him. His inspiration to the British Navy and the nation became the key to success. His respect and fairness to his men endeared him to generations of British people. His integrity to his duty made him many political enemies, but it exposed his passions. He led the British Navy and nation until his end. Some of his last words sum up his passion for integrity to duty, "Thank God I have done my duty."<sup>148</sup>

#### Admiral Sir Edward Pellew

Sir Edward Pellew, First Viscount Exmouth, gained his title due to the extraordinary sea service he gave to Great Britain. His humble beginnings did not indicate he would end up Vice-Admiral of England, and one of the greatest frigate captains of his period. Even though his beginnings did not point to greatness, they did point him to sea service. His father was a packet ship captain out of Dover. Sir Edward's early life gave him a solid foundation for his future on the oceans of the world. Besides being, in the words of Alfred Mahan, "a born frigate captain,"<sup>149</sup> Sir Edward went on to be the Commander in Chief of the East Indies, and the Commander in Chief of the Mediterranean fleet.

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<sup>148</sup> Knight, *The Pursuit of Victory*, 519.

<sup>149</sup> A. T. Mahan, *Types of Naval Officers Drawn from the History of the British Navy* (Boston: Little, Brown, and company, 1901), 432. <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gdc/scd0001.00206610633>.

As a frigate captain during the French Revolutionary War, Pellew nearly reached legendary status. “He was, arguably, the most successful of frigate captains of the earlier part of the Revolutionary War and his capture, in single combats, of two French frigates – *La Cléopâtre* in 1793 and *La Virginie* in 1796 – and the driving ashore of the 74-gun French line of battle ship *Les Droits de l’Homme* in 1797, must place him in the forefront of any pantheon of naval officers of this period.”<sup>150</sup>

He was known to be an excellent judge of men and had a gifted ability to recognize the best suitability of men for his crew. He matched the ability and personality of men to the most appropriate assignment and division on his ship. One of the most notable examples of this ability was in 1793 when Pellew was first appointed a captain in the frigate *Nymphe*. Short of his ships complement of men and unable to locate enough seamen, Sir Edward decided to recruit among the Cornish miners of his region of birth. He knew the miners were hardy and hard-working men, accustomed to climbing, and the use of ropes and gunpowder, from the Cornish type of mining. This system of mining led the men to be accustomed to strict obedience and sometimes forced the lowest level men to make crucial decisions based on their own judgment. Also, Pellew knew well of the local past-time sport of wrestling and determined the toughness and experience in this martial sport would only make better sailors in combat. All these traits led Pellew to know the miners would make the best seamen of all landsmen.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Peter Le Fevre, and Richard Harding, *British Admirals of the Napoleonic Wars : The Contemporaries of Nelson* (London: Chatham, 2005), 272.

<sup>151</sup> Edward Osler, *The Life of Admiral Viscount Exmouth* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1841), 71-72.  
<http://books.google.co.uk/books?vid=BL:A0018607525> Google\_Books.

Pellew's trust in the ability of the miners proved correct. In the *Nymphe's* first single combat under Pellew's command, against the French *La Cléopâtre*, the fighting effectiveness of the crew exceeded all expectations. The *La Cléopâtre* was a larger frigate and had a much larger crew. However, the *Nymph's* crew exchanged a cannonade with French frigate for 50 minutes before boarding and capturing. Both ships suffered heavy casualties, but in the end the *Nymphe* was victorious even after ending the battle with 67 fewer men. Pellew's good judgment of his ship's crew led to the first enemy ship captured in the war.<sup>152</sup>

Not only did Pellew possess sound judgment in the capabilities of men, but he was also heroic in his efforts to save the lives of those he could. In 1795 alone, he risked himself three times to save the lives of his sailors. In one instance, his dinner was interrupted after a cutter being hoisted onboard had fallen when some tackle broke. Through a course of events, several men were overboard in the water. Pellew ordered he be lowered in his gig to rescue the men, over the protest of many of his officers. The gig was quickly destroyed by the rough seas, and Pellew was injured after colliding with the rudder of his ship. He called for a rope to be thrown to him, lashed himself to one of his sailors, and ordered those on the ship to haul them up.<sup>153</sup> Pellew's repeated self-sacrificial acts of courage led his men to admire and respect him.

John Gaze, a man that served for nearly 30 years at sea, summarized Pellew's ability to lead seamen:

No man ever knew better how to manage seamen. He was very attentive to their wants and habits. When he was a captain, he personally directed

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<sup>152</sup> Osler, *The Life of Admiral Viscount Exmouth*, 81-82.

<sup>153</sup> Osler, *The Life of Admiral Viscount Exmouth*, 106-07.

them; and when the duty was over, he was a great promoter of dancing and other sports, such as running aloft, heaving the lead, &c., in which he was himself a great proficient. He was steady in his discipline, and knew well the proper time to tighten and relax. He studied much the character of his men, and could soon ascertain whether a man was likely to appreciate forgiveness, or whether he could not be reclaimed without punishment. During the whole time he commanded frigates, his men had leave in port, one third at a time, and very rarely a desertion took place.<sup>154</sup>

Gaze's insight into Pellew's leadership reveals a great deal about the relationship between him and his men. Pellew appears to be a very engaged leader who worked side by side with his men until all the duties were complete, and when all was complete, allowed his men to engage in recreation and mirth. He even lowered his station by participating in this recreation with his men. Participating in his men's recreation no doubt earned the respect and trust of his men. This respect and trust reduced the chance of desertion among Sir Edward's men and most likely increased his ability to recruit new men. In times when manning ships was a challenge, this characteristic in a leader gave him a significant advantage.

Sir Edward excelled in strategy and tactics. During the mutiny at the Nore, he was able to keep his squadron of frigates free from the mutiny and active within the English Channel. Sir Edward intentionally brought his ships in close to shore in several different French coastal regions, to make his squadron appear to be a force more extensive than it was.<sup>155</sup> Tactically, he was a careful and aggressive combatant. Every morning at dawn, when his ship's crew was beat to quarters, he would have the reefs shaken out of the sails and sail booms rigged out, in anticipation of an enemy ship being sighted at first light. Sir

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<sup>154</sup> Osler, *The Life of Admiral Viscount Exmouth*, 157.

<sup>155</sup> Osler, *The Life of Admiral Viscount Exmouth*, 162.

Edward's ship would be ready for the chase immediately, giving him the advantage of several minutes over his chase.<sup>156</sup> These strategic and tactical practices were just some of the leadership traits that allowed Sir Edward to make an impact in the English Channel.

Sir Edward continued his leadership much later in the war as he commanded the British fleet in the East Indies. His ability as a leader and diplomat allowed him to operate the East Indies fleet in a manner that maintained important alliances and protected the trade operation of the East India Company.

#### Vice-Admiral Cuthbert Lord Collingwood

A study of leadership that touches on the leadership of Vice-Admiral Nelson inevitably will touch on the career and leadership of Vice-Admiral Cuthbert Collingwood. For one to say the two were merely contemporaries fails to recognize the very close relationship the two had with each other, and the close trajectory their careers followed from their nascent friendship which began during their service in the West Indies. Not only was Collingwood a great friend and confidant of Nelson, but he was also a great leader in his own right. Although his personality was more subdued than Nelson's, Collingwood possessed many excellent leadership abilities, including; compassion for his sailors, a strict sense of duty and discipline, and confidence that inspired his subordinates to greatness.

Collingwood's leadership abilities are reflected in his successes, but also in what his contemporaries wrote about him. One of his midshipmen, Jeffrey Raigersfeld, the son of an Austrian baron, wrote, "He was a reserved man, a good seaman and navigator, and

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<sup>156</sup> Osler, *The Life of Admiral Viscount Exmouth*, 169.

well-read in the English classics; and most heartily do I thank him for the care and pains he took to make me a seaman.”<sup>157</sup> The respect and warm sentiment of Raigersfeld’s words make it clear Collingwood was the type of leader that gained the admiration of his subordinates.

However, this study must return to the successes of Collingwood, and how those successes were evidence of his leadership ability. Although most of Collingwood’s career was spent according to the title of Denis Orde’s book, “In the Shadow of Nelson,”<sup>158</sup> after the death of Nelson the important command in the Mediterranean Sea was successfully lead by Collingwood until his own death in 1810. This command was central to the maintenance of British interests and alliances necessary for the eventually defeat of the French Republic.

During his command in the Mediterranean, he was responsible for many fronts of the war. His fleet protected the British base on Malta and was the primary defender of Sicily. The defense of these two islands allowed the British to divide the Mediterranean and to control the trade throughout the majority of the trade routes. Collingwood’s fleet successfully supported Russia against the Ottoman Empire, until the Russians became allies with France. The fleet then prevented the French from threatening the Ottoman Empire from the French positions in the Ionian Islands. During the same period, Collingwood’s fleet successfully restricted the French resupply efforts and supported

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<sup>157</sup> Le Fevre, and Harding, *British Admirals of the Napoleonic Wars : The Contemporaries of Nelson*, 143, Jeffery Raigersfeld, and Leonard George Carr Laughton, *The Life of a Sea Officer, Jeffrey Baron De Raigersfeld, The Seafarers' Library* (London etc.: Cassell and company ltd., 1929).

<sup>158</sup> Denis A. Orde, *In the Shadow of Nelson: The Life of Admiral Lord Collingwood* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Maritime, 2008).

Duke Wellington's ground forces against the French invasion of the Iberian Peninsula.<sup>159</sup> These successes taken individually may seem unimpressive. However, when the vast size of the Mediterranean Sea and the limited resources Collingwood had at his disposal to deal with all the threats are considered, it is difficult to ignore the greatness of his ability to lead and inspire his fleet.

Collingwood's leadership has also been seen in his ability to maintain order and discipline on his ships. Early in his career, when he led his own ships as a captain, he gained a reputation of being able to maintain the highest levels of discipline without resorting to the harsh punishments common for the time. Collingwood took great care to maintain discipline on his ship by keeping the men occupied with worthwhile and productive activities. He avoided allowing the idle time of his men to lead them to discipline problems and the need to enact punishment. In a letter, he described this challenge to his father-in-law, "My wits are ever at work to keep my people employed, both for the health's sake, and to save them from mischief. We have lately been making musical instruments, and have now a very good band. Every moonlight the sailors dance; and there seems so much mirth and festivity as if we were in Wapping itself."<sup>160</sup> He exhibited great wisdom to indulge his men's interests in music and dancing in order to maintain discipline on his ship.

Collingwood was never a flogging Captain. He was credited with saying, "I cannot for the life of me comprehend the religion of an officer who prays all one day and

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<sup>159</sup> Dull, *The Age of the Ship of the Line : The British & French Navies, 1650-1815*, 176-77.

<sup>160</sup> G. L. Newnham Collingwood, *A Selection from the Public and Private Correspondence of Vice-Admiral Lord Collingwood: Interspersed with Memoirs of His Life.*, 5th ed., vol. 1 (London: James Ridgway & Sons, 1837), 83-84.

flogs his men all the next.”<sup>161</sup> On board his ships he was known as a merciful man; the punishment for many offenses on board his ships was the performance of extra duty of menial tasks. Many of the punishments he gave were designed to shame or embarrass the offender. Collingwood effectively used the peer pressure of the offender’s messmates to make needed corrections to discipline. In this area, Collingwood was seen as a pioneer in an age of brutality.<sup>162</sup>

Collingwood’s philosophy toward punishment, and his personal devotion to the leadership of his men was most likely affected by an experience he had when he first became a commissioned officer in the West Indies. He was commissioned into the *Hornet* as the first lieutenant to Captain Haswell. Haswell was known to be tyrannical and unpopular with his men. Collingwood’s letter to his brother outlines the experience:

I cou’d tell them fortune was not to blame so much as they suppose, I blame her only for placing me under the command of a man, who has taken all the pains he cou’d to make himself detested, and so far has he succeeded that I am convinced there is not a man or officer in the Ship that wou’d not consider a removal as a kind promotion. For my own part knew I the least of Admiral Gayton, had I been lucky enough to have has a letter from Capt. Roddam to him I wou’d not have hesitated asking to remove me: indeed, those who I believe to be most my friends advise me to do so as it is. Midshipmen, mates and those who were more dependant on him and obliged to bear every indignity he exposed them to have quited the ship every one, so that the whole business of the ship rests on me, without an assistant; the fatigue I undergo is inconsiderable to what I suffer from the insolent manners of a strange compound of extravagant pride, and abject meanness.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Orde, *In the Shadow of Nelson: The Life of Admiral Lord Collingwood*, 5.

<sup>162</sup> Orde, *In the Shadow of Nelson: The Life of Admiral Lord Collingwood*, 6.

<sup>163</sup> Cuthbert Baron Collingwood, *The Private Correspondence of Admiral Lord Collingwood*, ed. Edward Hughes, vol. 98 (London: Publications of the Navy Records Society, 1957), 3.

Collingwood's experience serving on the *Hornet* under Captain Haswell gave him an example of what a captain should not do. He saw that tyrannical behavior and harsh punishments did not lead to respect or higher performance. All indications show that Collingwood learned from this experience and developed a leadership style that was the antithesis of Haswell.

He developed a leadership style that looked out for the well-being of his men. This style and Collingwood's care for his men was tested and observed to be genuine. However, nonetheless, Collingwood also knew that happy men who were properly trained in the art of war made the most efficient sailors. He understood that morale was one of the most valuable tools he had for the proper operation of his ship. He also understood morale was one of the best weapons he could use to the dismay of his combat opponents. Therefore, Collingwood strove to care not only for the healthy bodies of his sailors but also healthy minds. He used clever and creative ways to keep his men occupied in efforts that would keep their minds off of vices while fostering teamwork and comradery. Among these productive distractions were the musical escapades mentioned above, as well as theatrical performances, and ship maintenance details.<sup>164</sup>

Although Collingwood's career did not include as many fleet actions as the unmatched career of Nelson, he was present for some of the greatest events of the period. As captain of the *Barfleur*, he contributed a significant role to the British victory at the battle of the Glorious First of June. While captain of the *Excellent* he and Nelson worked together like two twins sharing and finishing each other's thoughts, to absolutely

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<sup>164</sup> Orde, *In the Shadow of Nelson: The Life of Admiral Lord Collingwood*, 7.

devastate and embarrass the Spanish fleet at the battle of Cape St. Vincent. Finally, leading his division of ships and working alongside his oldest and dearest friend, Nelson, Collingwood was key to the victory at the Battle of Trafalgar. The battle's outcome was foreshadowed by Collingwood's words to his officers before the battle, "Now, gentlemen, let us do something today which the world may talk of hereafter."<sup>165</sup>

Moreover, just as at the Battle of Cape St. Vincent, Collingwood and Nelson were again thinking of each other and of one accord. Collingwood had the distinction and honor of entering the combat first, leading his division in the *Royal Sovereign*, and in delight Nelson said to his captain, "Look at that noble fellow Collingwood, how he leads his division into action!"<sup>166</sup> In return, Collingwood's thoughts moved to Nelson as he said, "What would Nelson give to be here!"<sup>167</sup> It is no small wonder Nelson and Collingwood have gone down in history as two of the greatest leaders in naval history; they thought about others and duty at the defining hour of their careers and the future of their nation.

After the bitter-sweet victory at the Battle of Trafalgar, Collingwood found himself in command of a heavily damaged British fleet, and the addition of four crippled prize ships. His wisdom and leadership revealed itself when he sent a letter to the Governor of Cadiz, a Spanish authority, and offered to repatriate all the wounded Spanish sailors so they could receive proper treatment. This action had the two-fold effect of alleviating the need for the British to care for the Spanish wounded, and to make an

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<sup>165</sup> Orde, *In the Shadow of Nelson: The Life of Admiral Lord Collingwood*, 194.

<sup>166</sup> Sir Thomas Byam Martin, *Letters and Papers of Admiral of the Fleet Sir Thos. Byam Martin, G.C.B.*, ed. Sir Richard Vesey Hamilton, vol. 1 (London: Publication of the Navy Records Society, 1898), 72-73.

<sup>167</sup> Martin, *Letters and Papers of Admiral of the Fleet Sir Thos. Byam Martin, G.C.B.*, 72.

unnecessary gesture of humanity to the Spanish. The Spanish were so touched by the magnanimous offer, the Marquis of Solano replied to Collingwood that Spain would also treat the British wounded in their hospitals and swore on the honor of Spain that the British would be treated well.<sup>168</sup>

During the twilight of Collingwood's career his leadership, patience, and commitment to duty allowed the British to hold an unmatched strategic advantage over the French by controlling the Mediterranean Sea. This control was aptly summarized by Denis Orde:

And so, for all the monotony and burden of his duty, Collingwood stuck faithfully to his task and continued as before, maintaining a tight and efficient vigil and blockade in the Mediterranean day after day, week after week and month after month. And it was totally successful, for Ganteaume's abortive sally to Corfu was the very last time the French ventures out into the Mediterranean while Collingwood was there. And at no time during this tenure of command did the British bases at Sicily and Malta ever fall to the enemy.<sup>169</sup>

Collingwood's compassion and dedication to his sailors, his unmatched integrity and humanity, and his patient laboring for the sake of duty, made him a great leader. Even though most of his career was spent in the shadow of Nelson, Collingwood's personal and leadership traits, which differed in presentation from the rousing and outgoing Nelson, shown through to be equal to any naval leader of the time. His example was noted by his contemporaries and has survived the test of scrutiny over the past two centuries.

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<sup>168</sup> "Biographical Memoir of Cuthbert Lord Collingwood," in *The Naval Chronicle*, vol. 15 (London: Joyce Gold, Show-Lane, 1806), 375-76.

<sup>169</sup> Orde, *In the Shadow of Nelson: The Life of Admiral Lord Collingwood*, 235.

### Conclusion: Legacy of Leadership

On January 8, 1806, a clear and calm day, with sleet on the ground from a hailstorm the day before, the *Dead March* from Handel's *Saul* echoed from the Admiralty office gates and continued throughout the streets of London along the route to St. Paul's Cathedral. A troop of Royal Dragoons led the funeral procession of Vice-Admiral Horatio Lord Nelson at a solemn pace. Nearly ten thousand soldiers with black shakos over their red uniforms followed the dragoons. They were followed by forty-six members of the *HMS Victory*, bearing the white St. George's ensign that flew over their ship in the Battle of Trafalgar. The flag was riddled with holes from the battle that claimed their leader's life. Following the sailors were thirty-one admirals and one hundred sea captains.<sup>170</sup>

Those officiating the funeral had deemed it appropriate for the *Victory's* crewmembers to place the folded ensign on the coffin of Nelson. At the last moment, in an unorthodox and resolute manner, indicative of the manner of their fallen leader, the sailors tore the ensign in pieces so they could take a memento of Nelson with them. The surrounding mourners watched in horror because they did not understand what was happening. The assembled naval leaders approved, and Lady Codrington said, "*That was Nelson.*"<sup>171</sup> The sailors held such a tremendous admiration for their leader they could not bear to be separated from him entirely. Nelson had inspired them to accomplished feats they had never thought imaginable. Their respect and adoration for their leader rose above all decorum.

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<sup>170</sup> Herman, *To Rule the Waves : How the British Navy Shaped the Modern World*, 397.

<sup>171</sup> Herman, *To Rule the Waves : How the British Navy Shaped the Modern World*, 397.

The city and nation mourned the loss of their great naval leader. However, Nelson was not the whole navy. There were still officers serving throughout the world leading British sailors to victory and honor. Even after all Nelson achieved, he was only a symbol of something greater than himself. He was a symbol of the British naval officer corps. He was a symbol of the evolution in leadership that had occurred since that fateful day in 1757 when another scrap of fabric, Byng's handkerchief, signaled the end of a different era of leadership.

The transition of the British Navy after Byng went beyond empirical factors that can be measured and counted. It was not impacted so much by the number of ships each nation had, or by unmatched technological advances. The transformation occurred in the leadership of the navy. It was the result of what the preeminent British naval scholar N.A.M Rodger calls, "a steady mounting psychological ascendancy."<sup>172</sup>

This psychological ascendancy had a double effect on the outcome of naval operations. The primary effect was to imbue courage and an aggressive determination into the British officers. In turn, this allowed the officers to inspire their men to achieve greater heights of efficiency and competence. A secondary effect was to discourage the enemies of the British navy. The officers of the navies opposing the British came to expect to be defeated.<sup>173</sup> They lost hope in their ability to withstand the British navy's tenacity.

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<sup>172</sup> Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean*, 272.

<sup>173</sup> Daniel A. Baugh, *British Naval Administration in the Age of Walpole* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965), 146.

The psychological ascendancy is difficult to contextualize. However, this study of the origins, training, and development of British naval officers, in addition to the aggressive culture developed among the officer corps, offers strong evidence of how the ascendancy was achieved. The culture of the careful and deliberate navy before Byng's execution was eclipsed by the unpredictable and relentless navy which developed from the early reforms of Hawke and was embodied in the image of Nelson.

The legacy of this new form of British naval leadership would continue throughout the nineteenth century, leading to one of the most successful periods of British imperial expansion and influence the world has seen. For nearly a century, throughout the period known as the *Pax Britannica*, Britain was truly feared as the ruler of the waves.

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