

Professionalism and the Fighting Spirit of the Royal Navy

Rules, Regulations, and Traditions that made the British Royal Navy an Effective
Fighting Force during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, 1793-1815

by

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Abstract

During the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars (1792-1815), the armies of the French Republic and Empire performed very well – for much of this period, France dominated Europe. However, the oceans were a different matter. The British Royal Navy enjoyed a long period of spectacular naval operational success, allowing Britain to maintain and expand its colonial empire, protect its extensive seaborne trade, and protect British territory from the French armies which had overrun much of Europe. There were many factors in the navy's success, such as its administration or shortcomings of its enemies.

This thesis explores the role of the Royal Navy's various rules, regulations, and traditions on its effectiveness. The Royal Navy used the allure of prize money to motivate its personnel, and used the threat of unemployment to motivate its officers. Many regulations and traditions ensured that the naval officer corps was strong and fit for service. Above all, the navy cultivated and encouraged a "fighting spirit" or an "offensive ethos" among personnel. Through the above-mentioned motivations and threats, along with the Navy's official Articles of War and various incarnations of Fighting Instructions, officers and crewmen were encouraged to conform to the navy's offensive ethos. They were encouraged to engage the enemy whenever possible, even against superior odds. As victories mounted during the late Eighteenth Century and into the Napoleonic Wars, morale soared in the Royal Navy, causing the men of the fleet to openly seek battles with the enemy and to fully expect victory even against superior odds. It was a strategy which cultivated good morale in the Royal Navy and ensured that the fleet was able to fulfill Britain's war aims.

Chapter One: Historiography of the British Royal Navy, 1793-1815

Introduction

In two historiographical essays, written nine years apart (in 1999 and 2008), historian N.A.M. Rodger comments on the scant attention paid to British naval history during the 20th century. In the most recent, he says that “It is not very likely that the editor of the *Historical Journal*, or any other scholarly publication, would have asked for such an article as this twenty-five years ago, or indeed that it could have been written had it been invited. Even in Britain, where it might be thought to have a natural habitat, naval history was deeply unfashionable, and among academics lay on the bare margins of professional acceptability.”¹ Ever since Napoleon’s second and final exile to St. Helena in 1815, historians have been writing about the Royal Navy during the Napoleonic Wars; however, the volume and quality of historical works on this topic dropped considerably after the conclusion of the First World War. According to Rodger, there has been a century-long cycle thus far of good quality naval scholarship. The best works initially were published between about 1880 and the outbreak of the First World War, and a century later in the late twentieth century the quantity and quality of naval scholarship rose again.²

The historians writing about naval non-fiction have varied according to this cycle as well. Many writers of the pre-1880s naval histories tended to be more general authors. Some, such as Edward Pelham Brenton, had been naval officers during the period of which they wrote. Historians who compiled the histories written after 1880 were more

¹ N.A.M. Rodger, "Recent Work in British Naval History, 1750-1815," *The Historical Journal* 51, no. 3 (2008): 741

² N.A.M. Rodger, "Recent Books on the Royal Navy of the Eighteenth Century," *The Journal of Military History* 63, no. 3 (1999): 683

frequently university lecturers. One of the most influential, Alfred Thayer Mahan, began his career as an officer of the United States Navy. He never excelled at naval command and avoided active duty, but he was rather more successful as a lecturer in naval history at the United States Naval War College. After the World Wars, naval history was neglected by University trained historians,³ and it was not until the late twentieth century that University trained historians and professors such as Rodger, Jerry Bannister, or Martin Robson began to produce scholarly works on naval history.

This chapter will examine historical scholarship on the Royal Navy from the earliest works published in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars to those published within the last few decades. Due to the vastly increased volume of works published before the First World War and in the late twentieth century and early twenty first century, this chapter will focus on these works. Early writers of naval history, living in the context of a world pre-occupied with naval power, focused on the navy's operational history; their writing focuses on the navy's leaders, battles, and campaigns. After the world wars, naval fiction fell out of fashion with mainstream historians. When its popularity resurged in the late twentieth century, various other historical disciplines and topics were applied to naval history.

Late Georgian and Early Victorian Historians, 1800-1840

Works on the operations and the leaders of the Royal Navy between 1793 and 1815 were produced and published throughout the nineteenth century, some even before the wars ended. Biographies and other works focusing on single individuals – almost always, if not exclusively, officers – were common works published in the thirty or so

³ There were some exceptions, such as Gerald Graham

years after the end of the Napoleonic Wars. Another common type of book was general histories of the Royal Navy. Many authors published long, multivolume narrative accounts of Royal Navy operations. Some covered just the late eighteenth century until the conclusion of the Bombardment of Algiers in 1816. Others covered naval history from “The Earliest Times to the Present,” often including brief accounts of the naval affairs of Medieval English monarchs. These early works emphasize the role of the navy’s leaders, often passing over or excluding the lower deck men, as well as the bravery, skill and patriotism of English sailors (nearly all early works refer to the British sailors as English) in naval actions.

Biographies of Britain’s popular naval heroes were the most common type of biography during this period, and by far the most popular and most often written about hero during the late Georgian and early Victorian period was Viscount Horatio Nelson. Nelson rose to fame quickly in Britain due to his part in the French Revolutionary Wars; he proved himself to be an excellent naval commander at the Battles of Cape St. Vincent (14th February, 1797), the Nile (1st-3rd August, 1798), and the First Copenhagen (2nd April, 1801). In the latter and former he served under a senior admiral but helped achieve victory, and at the Nile he destroyed the French Mediterranean Squadron, capturing or destroying nearly the entire fleet and leaving Napoleon’s Egyptian Army stranded in the Middle East. These victories made him a national hero and celebrity, and his final victory, the Battle of Trafalgar (October 21st, 1805), immortalized him in public memory. His death in the battle was deeply mourned and a state funeral was held for him. Nelson “in death had already faced more biographers than he ever did enemies in life,”⁴ and many more followed in the decades after his death in 1805. One notable biography is

⁴ Rodger, “Recent Work in British Naval History”: 742

Rev. James Clarke and John M. Arthur's *The Life of Admiral Lord Nelson K.B., From His Lordship's Manuscripts*. These two authors, a librarian for the Royal Family and a Secretary to Admiral Lord Hood respectively, attempt to delve into "the private feelings and motives of this extraordinary man, as well as the great principles of his public and professional character."⁵ They admit that this task was difficult, and while they attempt to do this, they focus to a large degree on his professional career as an English hero of extraordinary quality.⁶ Nelson's letters are used in the work, and some are transcribed and printed in the book itself. Other biographical works, such as Edward Pelham Brenton's *Life and Correspondence of the Earl of St. Vincent* Vol. 1, on Sir John Jervis, Lord St. Vincent, provide a biography as well as a considerable amount of naval correspondence.

One notable work covering British naval history is Dr. John Campbell's *The Naval History of Great Britain, Commencing with the Earliest Period of History, and Continued to the Expedition against Algiers, under the command of Lord Exmouth, in 1816*. This eight volume work, published in 1818, is typical of the many other multi-volume histories of the Royal Navy published during the eighteenth century. It primarily consists of an operational history of the navy throughout English and British history. The narrative focuses on the navy's leadership and on naval actions. While discussions of politics, overall military strategy, and recruitment are covered in the book, the emphasis is on the battles deemed notable by the author; the first action of the war in 1803, where HMS *Doris* captured a French lugger on the 18th of May, is included only because it was the first naval action which occurred after the Napoleonic Wars began. The action itself

⁵ James Stanier Clarke and John Arthur, *The Life of Admiral Lord Nelson, K.B. from His Lordships Manuscripts*. (London: Caldell and Davies, 1810): xvi

⁶ Ibid: 678-690

was not significant in Campbell's opinion. A following battle on the 27th of June, when boats from HMS *Loire* cut out the French brig *Ventoux* under heavy artillery fire, was considered more important because it demonstrated an example of the bravery of British sailors.⁷ This work, like others written during this period, praises and emphasizes the patriotism, bravery, and skill of the British sailors:

“At Trafalgar, the enemy had a superiority of six sail of the line, were fresh from port, and in the most perfect state of equipment. Yet against such odds was this splendid victory gained, through the transcendent abilities of the English commander, and the bravery of his officers and men, and which would probably have been extended to the capture or destruction of every vessel of the enemy, had not the wind been so dull as to prevent the rear of the British fleet from coming up in proper time.”⁸

This work and other works from the period refer to the British ships and fleets as “ours” and praise their victories and patriotic deeds.

Two Royal Navy captains who served during the Napoleonic Period, William Goldsmith and Edward Pelham Brenton, each penned naval histories in 1825 and 1837 (second edition) respectively. Goldsmith's *The Naval History of Britain from the Earliest Times and Continued to the Expedition against Algiers, under the Command of Lord Exmouth, in 1816*, published in eight volumes, is very similar to Brenton's *The Naval History of Great Britain*, published in two volumes, in terms of their narrative style and focus. The main focus of their works is the operational history of the navy, as in Campbell. They focus on naval action, and incorporate other aspects of the war (such as politics or diplomacy) as side notes. They are different, however, as Brenton's work covers the history of the navy from 1783 to 1836, while Goldsmith's work covers a

⁷ Campbell, John. *The Naval History of Great Britain, Commencing with the Earliest Period of History, and Continued to the Expedition against Algiers, under the Command of Lord Exmouth, in 1816*. Vol. VII. (London: Baldwyn and, 1818):308-314

⁸ Ibid, 387

broader range of history, and includes biographical accounts of the navy's admirals and distinguished captains, focusing on their naval careers and notable exploits.⁹ Goldsmith's work uses speeches by politicians to discuss the politics and diplomacy of the war; his discussion of how the Peace of Amiens broke down in 1803, leading to war with Napoleonic France, is based on a quotation of Lord Melville's speech to Parliament.¹⁰

Like others from the period, Goldsmith and Brenton (who was in fact a former British sailor) praise the bravery of British Sailors. Goldsmith, when discussing the War of 1812, writes that

we are sorry to record that in the first two naval actions between the hostile powers, our enemy was triumphant: little glory, however, belongs to the Americans in either case, as will be seen by the detail which follows; while the gallantry of the English in contending against such an overwhelming force is a theme for universal eulogy: the probable effects upon the confidence which the uniform invincibility of our navy has created in the minds of our sailors, it is that we are sorry for; that confidence once shaken, we lose our chief hold on the dominion of the seas; inasmuch as that confidence creates the invincibility of a British sailor...¹¹

Goldsmith clearly emphasizes the gallantry of British sailors, and declares that the American triumphs are not the result of daring, but rather due to superior naval technology. He further addresses claims: "We are therefore constrained to regret that the admiralty, knowing the superior force of the American frigates should have neglected to have equipped ships of a sufficient force to cope with them."¹² To Goldsmith, the defeats in the War of 1812 were not the fault of the sailors who fought in them, but rather in the navy's administration. Brenton's similar work was criticised by William James, a contemporary of Brenton who also published a multi-volume naval history. James, as

⁹ Ibid, 800-900

¹⁰ Ibid, 719-721

¹¹ Ibid, 793

¹² Ibid

well as others, accused Brenton of not attempting to verify what he wrote in his works as facts, leading to many errors. In Brenton's second edition he retaliates by accusing James of copying entire pages from Breton's first edition, published in 1823.¹³

William James was a well-known naval historian of this period, and he published many works, including *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*, and *A Full and Correct Account of the Chief Naval Occurrences of the Late War between Great Britain and the United States of America*. Both works were very similar to other contemporary works on naval history. They consisted of operational narratives, focusing on naval actions and the officers who commanded them. James' *The Naval History of Great Britain* makes many references to the importance of British patriotism and shows a clear bias towards the importance of the navy's leadership. His descriptions of battles often include the names of killed or wounded officers, and nearly always list the officers who commanded fleets and ships in each action. His description of the battle of Trafalgar includes an anecdote in which an officer, who could not swim, was rescued by a seaman who swam to a nearby ship and brought back a line to save the officer. He praises this action as it meant that "by this means a brave young officer, who had been in two or three of the general actions of the preceding war, was saved to his country."¹⁴ It was the fact that an officer was saved for the country that was worthy of praise, rather than the act of saving another individual. His work uses previous published and printed sources, both in

¹³ Edward Pelham Brenton, *Naval History of Great Britain from the Year 1783 to 1822*. Vol. I, (London: Henry Colburn, 1837): xvii-xxii

¹⁴ 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*, 2nd ed. Vol. IV, (London: Harding, Lepard: 1826): 72-110

English and French, as well as primary sources, including log books.¹⁵ He also made use of interviews he held with witnesses to the events he described in the book, though he acknowledges the limitations of these due to the failure of human memory and the fact that men on individual ships often had no idea what was happening a few feet away.¹⁶ James' work also emphasize the importance of technological advances and advantages during naval wars. The first chapter of the first volume of his *Naval History of Great Britain* is entirely devoted to the development and construction of warships used during the Napoleonic Period. He concludes that French warships were of superior quality to British vessels.¹⁷ As well, in his comparison of the state of the European navies at the start of the French Revolutionary War, he emphasizes the number of ships and men available to each service, but also to the state of those ships; the Dutch fleet's strength was only on paper, as many of its ships were of inferior quality to the British or French vessels.¹⁸ Furthermore, he makes no reference to the negative impact that the French Revolution had on their navy, instead pointing out that the French fleet had never been so large or manned by such dedicated sailors as it was in 1793.¹⁹ His work on the War of 1812 defends Britain's reputation as a result of the single-ship victories of the United States Navy, pointing out the fact that American vessels were more heavily armed than their British opponents.

The primary focus and themes of these early works revolve around the operational history of the Royal Navy, focusing almost exclusively on naval actions, and the officers

¹⁵ Ibid, 57

¹⁶ Ibid, 89

¹⁷ 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*. 2nd ed. Vol. I. (London: Harding, Lepard: 1826): 30-36

¹⁸ Ibid, 70-80

¹⁹ Ibid, 75-90

who commanded these operations. Naval actions included in these multi-volume works often were chosen based on the display of bravery or patriotism of British sailors, which is praised by the authors of the early nineteenth century.

Naval Scholarship from the 1880s to the First World War

The period between the 1880s and the First World War is identified by Rodger as the first good phase of the naval history cycle. It saw an increase in the number of university and college historians writing about naval history. Some of the most important writers from this period are Alfred Thayer Mahan, Sir John Laughton, and Sir Julian Corbett. All three were connected to navies in their home countries. In turn, their naval histories influenced naval curriculum as well as naval policy reform. As Rodger points out, there was an increase in works on naval history during the decades before the outbreak of the First World War. Many naval enthusiasts during this period, such as Kaiser Wilhelm, saw navies as the key to imperial power. In the context of this school of thought and the resulting naval arms race between Britain and Germany, many people were interested in naval history. There was an increase in quantity and quality of these works, and while many aspects of work in this period remained the same as the last period, there were important differences.

Alfred Thayer Mahan, a USN officer who served as a lecturer at the United States Naval War College, produced many influential works on naval history.²⁰ He stressed its importance to history as well as its application to modern naval warfare and policy. *The Influence of Sea Power on the French Revolution and Empire*, published in 1892 in two volumes, was a successor to his more famous work *The Influence of Sea Power on*

²⁰ There is also extensive literature on Mahan and his influence on naval history and strategy – authors such as John Keegan and Andrew Lambert are recent examples

History. Both of his works were intended to demonstrate the importance that naval power has historically had on the course of history, in this case on the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars.²¹ This work was similar to older operational narrative histories in how the war was discussed. His account of the war focuses on the naval action covered by older histories. Mahan, like earlier writers, also stresses the importance of shipbuilding quality. He blames shortcomings of the British navy during the wars, such as their defeats at the hands of the small American Navy, on superior ship quality.²² He applies naval history to current world politics, and argues that sea power is closely connected with a country's worldwide influence.

There were some important changes in the focus of his work from historical works produced earlier in the century. Mahan is much more concerned about the condition of the French and British navies when the war began; he discusses at length the various problems which the French Revolution imposed on the French Navy, compared to the British Navy.²³ He provides a deeper discussion of British sailors and officers, aside from exploits in battle, than in earlier histories. Mahan argued that, despite the harsh treatment and irregular pay of the sailors, as well as the Royal Navy's poor administration, the British officer corps was excellent, due to the collective experience acquired from centuries of conflict.²⁴ He also discusses, more than earlier historians, the importance that Britain's naval supremacy had on the war with Napoleon. He discusses commerce raiding, which earlier historians largely ignored. As a British strategy,

²¹ Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon The French Revolution and Empire, 1793-1812*. Vol. I. (London: Sampson Low, Marston, 1892): iii-vii

²² Ibid, 66-67

²³ Ibid, 36-60

²⁴ Ibid, 69-71

however, he considers it to be of no importance, as it had no impact on France.²⁵ He later notes that as a French tactic it was more effective, and that the British took action to protect their trade against harmful French commerce raiding.²⁶ Mahan's work was very similar to the operational narratives which were common during the early nineteenth century. While he focused on the operations of the navy, he also discussed many other elements of naval history.

Another major work published by Mahan was the 1901 *Types of Naval Officers*, in which he provides brief biographies of six British naval officers as examples of "types" of naval officers. In the book he argues that the navy benefits from these very different types of officers, and uses examples of famous officers from the late eighteenth century: Edward Hawke, George Rodney, Richard Howe, John Jervis (Lord St. Vincent), James Saumarez, and Sir Edward Pellew.²⁷ He groups these six officers into pairs to contrast their professional characteristics and demonstrate how each, while very different from others, benefitted Britain's navy. Hawke's career demonstrated the navy's "spirit" which was carried forth by officers later in the century, during the American Revolutionary Wars and the Wars with France.²⁸ Rodney was a brilliant strategist whose tactics of cutting through enemy lines would be copied by admirals such as Howe and Nelson during the French Revolutionary Wars and Napoleonic Wars.²⁹ He does not overtly praise each officer. He criticises Rodney who, despite his excellent tactics at the Battle of the Saintes (9th-12th April, 1782), failed to achieve a victory comparable to those

²⁵ Ibid, 99-100

²⁶ Ibid, 109-110

²⁷ Mahan, Alfred Thayer. *Types of Naval Officers Drawn from the History of the British Navy: with Some Account of the Conditions of Naval Warfare at the Beginning of the Eighteenth Century, and of Its Subsequent Development during the Sail Period*. (Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1901): x-ix

²⁸ Ibid, 77-147

²⁹ Ibid, 148-253

of Jervis or Nelson.³⁰ Mahan's biographies focus exclusively on their naval careers after their promotion to post captain, and concentrate on how their exploits demonstrated their naval type. The narrative focuses, as in other books of this and previous eras, on the operations and battles in which their subjects fought. The book's mandate was to discuss the various types of naval officers in the service. While it does this, its choice of admirals does not provide the reader with typical officers; the six officers covered were extraordinary officers. For example, very few frigate captains were as successful or served as long as Sir Edward Pellew.

Charles N. Robinson, a Royal Navy Captain, published *The British Fleet: The Growth, Achievements and Duties of the Navy of the Empire* in 1896. This book was intended for a more general audience than Mahan or Corbett's works, and was a result of the British public's interest in the Royal Navy. A *Times* advertisement in the front of the book discusses the growing popular interest in the navy, due in part to its importance to Britain's national existence.³¹ This work, unlike the others reviewed thus far (aside from Mahan's *Types of Naval Officers*) is organized thematically, rather than chronologically. This work emphasizes the impact of the French Revolution on the French Navy, which had been an excellent fighting force during the American Revolutionary War. The Revolution's purge of the aristocratic officer corps, along with its poor administration under the Revolutionary regime, degraded the French Navy's effectiveness. In addition to praising the bravery of the British as other authors had done, Robinson also heavily criticizes the French and Spanish navies; he describes the "naval inferiority of the

³⁰ Ibid, 235-247

³¹ Charles Robinson, R.N., *The British Fleet: The Growth, Achievements and Duties of the Navy of the Empire* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1896): vii

French,” which resulted in many naval defeats.³² When discussing the Battle of Cape St. Vincent, he says only that “The worthlessness of the Spanish fleet was made apparent by Jervis’ notable victory off Cape St. Vincent (February 14th, 1797), wherein Nelson and Collingwood showed their prowess.”³³ He concludes his section on the naval war by noting that “the final act of this great naval drama was the victory of Trafalgar (October 21st, 1805) whereby England was once again saved from fear of invasion, and the ultimate fall of the continental Dictator was assured.”³⁴ While the rest of the book focuses on the navy’s operations, it does not include any discussion of naval action occurring after Trafalgar. The book then operates on the assumption that Britain’s naval superiority was entirely unchallenged.

Robinson further discusses the importance of the Royal Navy’s supremacy in defeating Napoleonic France in other ways. The naval supremacy achieved at Trafalgar allowed Britain to destroy French trade while protecting British shipping. As a result, “Bonaparte was driven by the exercise of our Sea Power to those continental complications and wars wherein he perished.”³⁵ In addition to operations, he discusses the importance and development of the navy’s administration, including the various Admiralty boards, such as the Victualing Board and Sick Board.³⁶ He discusses naval construction and the evolution of warship design in detail, and the superiority of France’s shipbuilding over Britain’s. Robinson states that the seamen (not necessarily the officers), who actually used the naval equipment, were more important factors in the navy’s success, and that not enough has been written on the subject of the navy’s sailors. His

³² Ibid, 45

³³ Ibid, 45

³⁴ Ibid, 46-47

³⁵ Ibid, 47

³⁶ Ibid, 134-143

discussion of the lower deck focuses mostly on punishment in the navy, the tasks performed by the men, and recruitment.³⁷

David Hannay's contribution to naval scholarship was through his efforts in the Navy Records Society (which has published collections of primary documents since 1893), and his own historical research, writing, and lecturing. His most famous work was the two-volume *A Short History of the Royal Navy, 1217-1815*, published in 1909, which was very similar to the histories of the early nineteenth century, but did have some differences compared to other contemporary works. *A Short History of the Royal Navy* discussed the impact of the French Revolution on the French Navy, through the destruction of the officer corps and creation of a mutinous culture among the crews of the navy, inspired by the Revolutionaries who now controlled them.³⁸ Hannay also discusses the superiority of French ships; the French Brest fleet escaped the Channel fleet in November 1793 due to more scientific sails and hull designs, according to Hannay.³⁹

Corbett's works discuss British naval and military history more generally in many periods, including the Elizabethan war with Spain and the early nineteenth century. One notable work of his is *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*, published in 1911, in which he applies aspects of Britain's naval history to modern naval theory. One argument he makes is that the best naval defense is made using an offensive spirit, demonstrated by Japan's defeat of the Russian navy in Japanese home waters, but also a tradition embedded in British naval doctrine.⁴⁰ For example, the Royal Navy defended the

³⁷ Ibid, 315-439

³⁸ David Hannay, *A Short History of the Royal Navy, 1217-1815: Volume II, 1689-1815*. Vol. II. (London: Methuen, 1909): 290-310

³⁹ Ibid, 300

⁴⁰ This book was published during the High Point of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, and in fact the Imperial Japanese Navy was modelled after the British Royal Navy in many ways, including its tactics and strategy

Channel by maintaining a blockade of Brest; any French fleet intending to invade England had to first bring the blockading squadron to battle.⁴¹

Naval history had been a popular topic in Britain for a long time; during the wars with America and France during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries naval exploits were followed by the popular press and victorious captains and admirals were remembered as popular heroes.⁴² However, after 1880 the popularity of naval history with public and academic writers and audiences grew considerably, not only in Britain but in the United States as well. In the imperial era of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, naval power was regarded by many, from ordinary citizens to powerful statesmen, as a central aspect of national power. Britain, the economic centre of the world and the largest colonial empire, had been the dominant naval power since the Battle of Trafalgar. Increasing understanding of the importance of naval power in the contemporary world (which was dominated by patriotic nationalism) led to an increasing desire to understand how naval power impacted the modern world, and how this had come about.⁴³ As a result, more academic historians studied and wrote higher quality naval historical works than before.

Most of the works on naval history during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century tended to have the same themes and focuses as the works published in the few decades after the Napoleonic Wars. They consisted of primarily narrative operational histories, which emphasized and often praised the skill and bravery of “English” seamen

⁴¹ Sir Julian Stafford Corbett, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*, (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1911): 20-23

⁴² P.J. Marshall, “Empire and British Identity: The Maritime Dimension.” In David Cannadine ed., *Empire, the Sea and Global History: Britain’s Maritime World, c. 1760-c. 1840* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007): 41-59.

⁴³ Rodger, “Recent Books on the Royal Navy of the Eighteenth Century,” 683

in the Napoleonic Wars. The importance of Britain's supposed shipbuilding inferiority was stressed, and was used as an excuse for shortcomings in some naval battles. However, these authors discussed topics not relating to combat more frequently than earlier authors had, and provided more analysis and application of naval history.

Naval Scholarship in the Post-World War II Era

The result of the two World Wars was that military history, and by extension naval history, declined in popularity among British historians. The important naval aspects of the Second World War did little to sustain or revive the study of British naval history.⁴⁴ Economic issues became the dominant focus for academics studying maritime history, and fewer and fewer historians studied conventional naval history as a result. Increasingly, books on British naval history tended to be written by amateur historians and general authors, as opposed to academic scholars. Many academic scholars did continue to study and publish in naval history, but as Rodger points out, the number of naval historians and naval historical works declined significantly during this period.

While academic work on the Navy declined, an effort to produce primary source collections and reference works for naval historians persisted. The Navy Records Society, founded by historians working during the second period covered in this chapter (1880s-1914), has been active from its founding in the 1890's until the present day. The society has collected and published over 150 volumes of primary documents relating to naval history, ranging from collections relating to the Dutch Wars of the 1600s to the papers of Admiral Sir John Fisher. Volumes are published as collections relating to themes, individuals, or major events. A large number of these volumes contain documents from

⁴⁴ Ibid

the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, including papers of notable officers, journals of men from various ranks in the navy, and various other documents. These volumes are a valuable resource for both students and scholars of naval history, and provide evidence for this thesis. While the amount of secondary sources on the Royal Navy declined after the World Wars, the Navy Records Society consistently published volumes throughout the twentieth century, and has made valuable contributions to the field of naval history by making these documents easily accessible.

Modern Naval Historians and Scholarship from the 1970s to 2014

The prevalence of maritime economic history over naval history, and the decline of military and naval history more generally, started to reverse in the 1970s. Among many lessons historians learned from the Cold War was that warfare was still prevalent in global society, and so in the latter half of the twentieth century there was a revival in military history. Rodger argues that this school of thought – the War and Society School, which accepts the continuing importance of warfare in society – is the primary reason for the increase of naval historical works, a century after the last “good period” of the cycle described by Rodger.⁴⁵ More university trained historians, such as Paul Kennedy, began to study naval history, either to expand upon related topics or to study it in its own right.⁴⁶ A side effect was that new historical approaches and methodologies, which were created and became more prevalent in the twentieth century, such as social history, were integrated into the historical narrative of British naval history, which traditionally had focused primarily on battles. Scholarship on the British Royal Navy during the latter twentieth century and early twenty-first century is more inclusive of other historical

⁴⁵ Rodger, "Recent Books on the Royal Navy of the Eighteenth Century," 683-684

⁴⁶ Ibid

themes and focuses than previously, but there are also many works covering the same themes as earlier books, but with very different conclusions and focuses.

In the last forty years, there has been an increasing number of monographs and reference works that discuss eighteenth and nineteenth century naval technology and shipbuilding. According to Rodger, the availability of technological reference works is a factor in the re-emergence of academic naval scholarship. Naval warfare has always been a war of high technology; eighteenth century warships were some of the most complicated inventions thus far in human history.⁴⁷ Naval operations were limited greatly by weather and the skills of those manning the ships, but also by the limits of ship design and armaments. A strong base of technological histories, which accurately discussed naval vessels and technology, is a useful tool for historians and students of history.⁴⁸ According to Rodger, there are clear benefits of the emphasis on technological histories. These works help to correct the common myth that French warships were superior to Britain's due to more scientific hulls and sails. This was universally accepted by sailors during the wars with France, and the myth has continued to be accepted up until the present. Almost every major work reviewed in the first two sections of this chapter accepted this "fact," and many authors today still do. However, professional historians in the last few decades have increasingly accepted that this is a myth. Rodger, in several works, has helped to dispel it.⁴⁹ Like the Navy Records Society's primary source volumes, the navy's technological histories provide a wealth of information and references for use by historians of the navy.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 684

⁴⁸ Ibid, 696-698

⁴⁹ Rodger, "Recent Work in British Naval History, 1750-1815," 750-751

Charles B. Arthur, in *The Remaking of the English Navy* (1986), aims to discuss the revolution of Royal Navy policy and practice in the wars against France.⁵⁰ This revolution was the result of the leadership of Admiral John Jervis, Lord St. Vincent. Various aspects of naval policy and practices were changed by St. Vincent during his time in command of the Channel Fleet, (1800-1801, and 1806-1807) and during his term as First Lord of the Admiralty (1801-1803). One of the most important aspects of his reforms was establishing continuous close blockades of French ports, notably of Brest. Prior to this, Britain's blockades of French ports had been unable to prevent the French from escaping to sea. The Channel Fleet's primary role was to protect British home waters from enemy attacks; St. Vincent's continuous blockade made it nearly impossible for the French fleet at Brest to escape to sea. His reform of blockading policy in the navy enabled Britain to nearly cut off the French and their allies from the Atlantic entirely.⁵¹ Arthur's thesis is that Britain was endangered by the inadequacy of its own navy at the start of the wars, shown by French expeditions to Ireland (many of which were never intercepted by British warships) and the mutinies of 1797. Had St. Vincent's naval revolutions not taken place, Bonaparte's invasion plans of Britain would have been much more likely to succeed.⁵² Arthur emphasizes the importance of blockades rather than fleet actions in the defeat of France. He also discusses the importance of St. Vincent's dockyard reforms, responsible for removing corruption and making naval dockyards, without which the navy could not operate, more efficiently.⁵³

⁵⁰ Arthur, Charles B. *The Remaking of the English Navy by Admiral St. Vincent - Key to the Victory Against Napoleon: The Great Unclaimed Naval Revolution (1795-1805)*, (London: University Press of America, 1986): 25-150

⁵¹ Ibid, 25-150

⁵² Ibid, 239-241

⁵³ Ibid, 210-213

Michael L. Palmer's 1997 article "The Soul's Right Hand: Command and Control in the Age of Fighting Sail," published in *The Journal of Military History*, gives a detailed analysis of British naval command and control in fleet actions throughout the age of sail. Palmer remarks that historians such as Mahan and his contemporaries, when writing on the Royal Navy, focused on naval doctrine, embodied in the navy's *Fighting Instructions*, and tactics. Palmer argues that the previous focus on doctrine and tactics exclusively was misplaced, and he instead focused on naval command and control, a very difficult issue for British admirals in the age of sail.⁵⁴ The line of battle, the dominant tactical formation throughout the age of sail, maximized the firepower of naval vessels but did nothing to improve command and control, according to Palmer. The reliance on this tactic resulted in very few decisive naval battles throughout the period. The line of battle was a centralized naval formation; it required ships to maintain a position relative to each other and to follow the commands of a commodore or admiral for manoeuvres. However, the limitations of flag-based signalling systems and limited visibility in battle made it difficult to manoeuvre fleets formed in line of battle. As a result, few naval actions featured sophisticated fleet manoeuvres once the battle began, and most naval actions had indecisive results.⁵⁵ Palmer argues that the decentralized tactical approach, used by admirals such as Rodney and, more famously, Nelson, was much more effective, as it relied on the skill of the navy's officer corps to make up for the inability of admirals to effectively coordinate naval actions.⁵⁶ Palmer's discussion focuses on traditional

⁵⁴ Michael A. Palmer, "'The Soul's Right Hand': Command and Control in the Age of Fighting Sail, 1652-1827." *The Journal of Military History* 61, no. 4 (1997): 679-682

⁵⁵ Ibid 685-693

⁵⁶ Ibid 696-704

topics, namely fleet actions, but he approaches it through a different angle than previous authors.

Tom Wareham's 2001 *Star Captains: Frigate Command in the Napoleonic Wars* was a statistical social history focusing on the Royal Navy's officer corps, in particular the men who commanded the navy's frigates who, according to Wareham, represented some of the best officers of the navy, due to the almost unanimous desire to command frigates; the surplus of officers meant that frigate commands went to the most capable officers.⁵⁷ Wareham uses a random sample of officers who commanded frigates between 1793 and 1815. *Star Captains* is a broad social history looking at the many variables which impacted the lives and careers of frigate captains, including their class and heritage, lengths of commands, experiences and tasks in command. He details a group he calls the Star Captains, who held extraordinarily long frigate commands. Wareham's discussion of battles looks at some notable frigate actions, but due to the large amount of published material on this topic, focuses on the personal experience of battle for officers by using their correspondence.⁵⁸

In stark contrast to the nineteenth century's scholarship (which focused on the patriotism and skill of British sailors), Douglass W. Allen's 2002 article in *Explorations in Economic History*, "The British Navy Rules: Monitoring and Incompatible Incentives in the Age of Fighting Sail" argues that Britain's success during the wars with France was not a result of superior technology, training, or tactics. Instead it was a result of a system of incentives and monitoring of the Navy's officers and seamen to ensure that

⁵⁷ Tom Wareham, *The Star Captains: Frigate Command in the Napoleonic Wars*, (Rochester: Chatham Publishing, 2001): 14-50

⁵⁸ Ibid, 35, 161-162

men did their utmost in service of the King.⁵⁹ Allen argues that the navy's rewards, namely the promise of prize money and continued employment (which, due to the surplus of officers, was not guaranteed) encouraged captains to be active, as remaining in port did not lead to prizes. To keep these prize-seeking captains from focusing only on prize hunting rather than doing their assigned duty, a system of monitoring was imposed on the navy. Those who did not follow their assigned tasks were removed from command. Captains who failed to show enough initiative in command were be removed from prize-rich stations, or removed from command completely.⁶⁰ These rules and regulations, argues Allen, meant that the Navy as a whole spent more time at sea and actively searching for enemy ships, whereas the French Navy relied on very different rules and regulations, which instructed the French Navy only to sail with specific goals and to avoid battles.⁶¹ For example, the fleet which escorted Napoleon's invasion force to Egypt sailed for that exclusive mission. Upon arrival in Egypt the fleet took up a defensive position and did not attempt to hunt down or engage Nelson's British squadron, despite the French fleet enjoying a significant advantage in firepower. This work is an instance when the Royal Navy's history was addressed by another field, in this case, economic history.

N.A.M. Rodger's British naval scholarship covers a wide range of historical sub-disciplines. One of his earlier works, *The Wooden World: an Anatomy of the Georgian Navy*, (1986) provides a detailed social history of the navy during the Seven Years War.

⁵⁹ Douglass W. Allen, "The British Navy Rules: Monitoring and Incompatible Incentives in the Age of Fighting Sail." *Explorations in Economic History*, 39 (2002): 204–210

⁶⁰ Ibid

⁶¹ Ibid, 204-230

It discusses many aspects of lives of navy sailors, including both officers and lower deck men, such as shipboard life, career paths, victualing and health, and discipline.

Rodger's two volumes, *Safeguard of the Sea: A Naval History of Britain, 660-1649* and *Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain, 1649-1815*, cover the naval history of the British Isles from 660-1815, and a final volume has been promised. In some ways, these two are similar to the multi-volume histories of scholars such as Mahan, but his works are different in many important ways. His works emphasize the importance of naval history within Britain's wider history: "To describe the eighteenth-century British state, in war or peace, without mentioning the Royal Navy is quite a feat of intellectual virtuosity; it must have been as difficult as writing a history of Switzerland without mentioning mountains, or writing a novel without using the letter 'e.'"⁶² While the older multi-volume surveys of the Royal Navy had focused exclusively on the naval operations, Rodger's works are more inclusive; they discuss in detail the navy's social history, its administrative history, technological history, as well as its operational history. In this work he makes several important observations. He dispels the common and persistent myth that French warships were superior to Britain's as a result of more scientific construction and design methods.⁶³ He also acknowledges the importance of the navy's administration in the Navy's success during the Napoleonic Wars; without the financing, the victualing, and dockyard infrastructure, the navy could never have kept so many of its ships constantly at sea, maintaining the blockade that ensured Britain's naval supremacy during the war.⁶⁴

⁶² N.A.M. Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain, 1649-1815*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005): lxiii

⁶³ Ibid, 408-425

⁶⁴ Ibid, 582-583

Samantha Cavell's Master's Thesis, defended at Louisiana State University in 2006, *Playing at Command: Midshipmen and Quarterdeck Boys in the Royal Navy, 1793-1815*, is a social historical study of the navy and, like Wareham's study of frigate captains, focuses on the navy's officer class; in this case, on the navy's junior officers, the midshipmen and other "quarterdeck boys." Her thesis argues that the growing political influence on the selection and promotion of young officers in the navy throughout the Napoleonic Wars was a danger to the "brilliance, daring, and valor [that] had delivered Britain her sovereignty of the seas."⁶⁵ She also explores the practice of training these young officers by giving them command over men far older than themselves, and how treatment of the men under their command impacted future careers and reputation.⁶⁶ Like other social histories, her thesis represents a shift in scholarship on the Royal Navy which occurred in the later 20th and early 21st centuries. Historians such as Rodger and Cavell focus on topics beyond the navy's operations and the politics behind them.

Works reviewed thus far have shown, however, that the navy's operations have not been neglected in recent historiography. Instead, they have been expanded upon through new ways of looking at them, and by contextualizing them. Daniel K. Benjamin and Anca Tifrea do just that in their 2007 *The Journal of Economic History* article "Learning by Dying: Combat Performance in the Age of Sail." Their aim is to explain Britain's operational success during the wars against Revolutionary and Napoleonic France. Their article is an empirical quantitative study (they state that most other studies are qualitative) which argues that the series of naval conflicts which the British fought

⁶⁵ S.A. Cavell, *Playing at Command: Midshipmen and Quarterdeck Boys in the Royal Navy, 1793-1815*, Master's Thesis, (Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, 2006): 3; Ibid, 94

⁶⁶ Ibid, 2-10

since the 1600s resulted in a collective increase in the skill of Britain's officers and men. While in the mid-1600s no one expected Britain to become the "sovereign of the seas," by the 1800s this was a fully accepted fact.⁶⁷ Generation after generation of officers developed skills and tactics during periods of warfare, and each successive generation of officers learned from their commanders. A large collective skill-base within the navy's officers developed over the century and a half before 1793.⁶⁸ Evidence to support this claim includes the death rate of British seamen, which decreases dramatically during this period, as well as the ratio of victories and defeats at sea. During the first three Anglo-Dutch Wars, on and off from 1652-1674, the Royal Navy lost many battles; during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, Britain won every major fleet action, as well as the majority of minor actions.⁶⁹

Martin Robson's *A History of the Royal Navy: Napoleonic Wars* serves as an introduction to the navy of the period. His book argues that the British Navy was a critically important factor in Napoleon's defeat, as it allowed Britain to remain free of French occupation. British trade flourished, allowing Britain to intervene in the continent at will and subsidize allies in the war.⁷⁰ It provides an operational narrative of the war, demonstrating how the British were able to challenge Napoleonic France and become the strongest naval power by 1815.⁷¹ In this way it is similar to the nineteenth century's multi-volume operational narratives, but it is significantly different. His introduction acknowledges that there are many other interesting and important topics about the navy

⁶⁷ Daniel K. Benjamin and Anca Tifrea, "Learning by Dying: Combat Performance in the Age of Sail." *The Journal of Economic History*, 67, no. 4 (2007): 970

⁶⁸ Ibid, 973-986

⁶⁹ Ibid, 992-993

⁷⁰ Martin Robson, *A History of the Royal Navy: The Napoleonic Wars* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co, 2014): 2-4

⁷¹ Ibid, 5-6

of this period; however this volume is more narrowly focused.⁷² Because it is far more concise (one volume of 234 pages) than the nineteenth-century's works, Robson is far more selective in what he discusses. He covers all of the major fleet actions, as well as many other small ones, but does not recount even a fraction of the minor actions which pre-occupied the writers of 19th century multi-volume operational histories. His chapters discuss the broader strategic situation in different theaters throughout the wars, rather than telling the narrative through many minor actions. He also emphasizes the importance of amphibious operations conducted by the navy, a topic which was hardly touched on by writers in the nineteenth century.⁷³ While this book is focused on the navy's operations, the author recognises the importance of other topics (such as administrative reform), the importance of the overall strategic situation rather than individual actions during the war, and the importance of amphibious operations and other non-traditional naval fleet actions.

There have been many more academic histories written in the decades since the 1970s, which itself is an improvement for the field of British naval history since the first half of the century. However, it is not the quantity of works that makes Rodger call this period the second high point of the century-long cycle of naval historiographical quality. Instead it is the inclusion of other historical fields and topics within the naval narrative, and the fact that other fields have incorporated naval history into their frameworks.

The operations of the navy continue to be discussed, of course, but in different ways; for instance, Palmer's article shifts the discussion of naval warfare from a discussion solely of regulations and tactics to the critical issue of command and control.

⁷² Ibid, 6

⁷³ Ibid, 7-10

The practice of publishing dense multi-volume operational narratives of the navy, which were very popular in the nineteenth century, had died out in the twentieth century. Because of this, authors who do discuss the navy's operations, such as Rodger and Robson, have to be more selective about what they discuss. These histories tend to focus on the wider strategic picture of the naval war, as well as discussing more important or noteworthy actions in greater detail.

Topics which have been mentioned as sidelines to the operational narratives in the past, such as recruitment and manning issues in the navy, have been dealt with in more comprehensive forms, as in Rodger's *The Wooden World* and *Command of the Ocean*. Naval administration, victualing, and dockyard infrastructure are now considered crucial to Britain's naval strength. Social history, which has become an increasingly important historical field, has opened new discussions in naval history; scholars such as Rodgers, Wareham, and Cavell take social history approaches with great success. Allen and Benjamin and Tifrea, who specialise in economics and economic history, use the Royal Navy as case studies to demonstrate their own economic theories. Allen's conclusions apply more specifically to the navy, while Benjamin and Tifrea use their conclusions to make arguments about other fields. These cases show naval history being beneficial to other disciplines, but also show that the incorporation of economics and economic history can be advantageous to naval history.

The main recent historiographical trend in naval history has been the wide integration of other historical sub-disciplines and methodology. One relatively recent historical sub-discipline which has not been integrated with naval history is environmental history. To quote Roger Marsters, a historian of Canada's maritime history

and of British Imperial hydrographic knowledge, the environmental history of the British Royal Navy can be found primarily in “relevant environmental topics on the margins of related studies, especially in history of science literature.”⁷⁴ One such topic is the British Empire’s relationship to environmental knowledge, in particular cartographic and hydrographic knowledge; the topic of Marster’s Ph.D. thesis. Due to the navy’s importance to the British Empire, works on the Empire’s environmental history address the navy indirectly. There are many naval topics which could be studied from an environmental standpoint, such as shipbuilding and forestry policies, agriculture and naval supplying, as well as terraforming and environmental alterations, as in the case of Ascension Island and Pitcairn Island. A topic which has received more historical attention, though still not to a huge degree, is the connection between the history of science and the Royal Navy; the exploits and importance of James Cook and the cooperation of the Royal Society and Imperial processes are examples. Some environmental historians have called for more discussion of maritime environmental history, as the majority of environmental history focuses on terrestrial environments.⁷⁵ Both fields are expanding, and it is likely that there will be more studies integrating the two.

⁷⁴ Correspondence with the author, December 1st, 2014

⁷⁵ J.R. McNeill, “Observations on the Nature and Culture of Environmental History,” *History and Theory*, 42, 4 (2003): 42

Chapter Two: Naval Administration

Introduction

Administration was a crucial aspect of the success and operational effectiveness of the Royal Navy during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. Naval administration ensured that the fleet was maintained at the level of operational effectiveness necessary to protect trade, blockade enemy ports, and carry out offensive actions. This was accomplished, first, through a vigorous dockyard infrastructure, which built ships and kept the fleet ready for sea, second, victualing operations kept the fleet well-fed and supplied, and a financial system which paid for the very expensive navy.

This chapter focuses on another aspect of naval administration, namely the matter in which the Admiralty managed the Royal Navy in a decentralized fashion, and how it maintained an effective body of officers and men. The navy's use of the prize system motivated officers and crewmen on naval vessels to achieve British strategic goals. The official and unofficial rules and regulations of promotion ensured that all officers possessed some degree of competency. The overabundance of officers in the navy meant that all officers had to be extremely competitive in order to achieve promotions and to gain appointments. The best way for officers to compete with their colleagues was to participate in and distinguish themselves in battle.

Prize-Taking in the Navy

Capturing enemy warships and merchant vessels, or "prize-taking," was extremely important to both the national war effort and to the individual officers and crewmen who manned the fleet. The Royal Navy was manned by a diverse group of

people. While the majority of sailors in the Royal Navy were from the British Isles, there were many in the fleet from elsewhere in the British Empire, Europe (including many from France or other countries at war with Britain), the Americas, and from places as far as Africa or Asia. Over one hundred of HMS Victory's crewmen at the Battle of Trafalgar were not from the British Empire.¹ Patriotism was not the prime motivator of most of the navy's crewmen. Prize-taking was encouraged by the government due to its importance to Britain's war effort, and the rewards of prize taking became a very important motivation for officers and crewmen alike.

Napoleon Bonaparte considered Great Britain to be a nation of greedy merchants, and denounced the Third Coalition as a result of the avarice of the English.² In a way, Napoleon was not wrong; throughout the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, Great Britain conducted few land campaigns, aside from limited colonial ventures, such as in the West Indies or expelling the French from Egypt, where it was closely supported by the Royal Navy. The British Army was small and was unable to achieve much in many of the campaigns it undertook on the Continent, as the campaigns in Holland in 1794 and 1799 show.³ The Army commanded by the future Duke of Wellington, Arthur Wellesley, did achieve considerable success alongside the Portuguese Army and Spanish guerillas, but until the Peninsular War the British effort did not rely on major land campaigns. Instead, Britain's grand strategy depended on financing coalitions of great powers against the French to offset Britain's small army. In order to continue to finance

¹ Martin Robson, *A History of the Royal Navy: The Napoleonic Wars* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co, 2014): 118

² Charles Esdaile, Charles. *Napoleon's Wars: An International History, 1803-1815*. (London: Penguin Books, 2007): 154-155

³ Robson, 27-29; T.C.W. Blanning, *The French Revolutionary Wars, 1787-1802*, (London: Arnold: 1996): 114-128

its allies, Britain needed to ensure that the British economy flourished while the French economy stagnated. This was achieved through naval warfare, specifically trade protection and commerce raiding.⁴

The British Government encouraged both naval officers and civilian sailors (as privateers) to hunt enemy warships and merchant vessels, and provided incentives to do so. The government got no immediate material rewards for the capture of enemy vessels, as the crews who took prizes were free to sell the ship and its cargo.⁵ A royal proclamation issued upon the outbreak of war in 1803 declared that the produce of all prizes taken by the ships of the navy will “be for the entire benefit and encouragement of our Flag Officers, Captains, Commanders, and other commissioned Officers in our pay, and the seamen, marines, and soldiers on board our ships and vessels at the time of the capture.”⁶ Prize agents acting on behalf of naval officers could lawfully sell the ships and cargo of any prizes taken during the war.⁷ Often, the Navy would purchase captured warships and cargo,⁸ and offered bonuses such as head money for all prisoners taken along with a prize.⁹

Prize distribution was heavily weighted in favour of the officers of a vessel, but everyone serving on board a ship when an enemy was taken shared the prize money. When prizes and cargo were sold, the proceeds were divided into eighths. Three eighths were given to the captain of the vessel – when a captain served under the command of an

⁴ Robson, 1-6

⁵ George III “By the King: A Proclamation for the Granting the Distribution of Prizes during the Present Hostilities - 1803.” In *Tracy, Vol. II*, 346-347, Henceforth: “Tracy, Vol II.”

⁶ *Ibid*, 347

⁷ *Ibid*, 347

⁸ George Gostling, “Selling of Prizes, 1780: George Gostling, Admiralty Proctor, to Philip Stephens, Secretary of the Admiralty, 9 May 1780,” *British Naval Documents, 1204-1960*. Edited by John B. Hattendorf, et al (Aldershot: Navy Records Society, 1993): 460. Henceforth: “*BND*, Hattendorf, et al,”

⁹ James Sykes, “James Sykes, for Thomas Barry, Esq; Agent, London, May 7, 1807.” *The London Gazette*, (May 9, 1807): 621

admiral, which was frequent, the admiral got one of the captain's eighths, even if the admiral was not present at the time.¹⁰ One eighth was divided among a ship's lieutenants, the master, and any marine or army captains or physicians on board.¹¹ The marine lieutenants and ward room warrant officers shared another eighth, and all the remaining junior warrant officers and petty officers shared another eighth. The remaining fourth was divided among the remaining crewmen.¹² It was a system which was heavily weighted towards the captain and the officers, but it did ensure that every man received a share of prize money. In fact, the same 1803 proclamation required captains to send in lists of everyone serving on board his ship at the time a prize was taken, to ensure that everyone received the money he was owed.¹³

The proclamation includes very specific instructions for distributing prize money. For instance, it specifies that all Royal Navy ships in sight when a prize strikes its colours share in the money,¹⁴ as the Admiralty recognised that the appearance of additional warships could cause a vessel to strike to their immediate attacker.¹⁵ It also states that when multiple admirals have command over a ship which takes a prize, all admirals shared the allotted one eighth given to Flag Officers.¹⁶

According to Tom Wareham, the navy's officers became more politically and socially aware of the men of the navy's lower decks over the course of the Napoleonic Wars.¹⁷ Due to the growth of such awareness among the navy's officers and

¹⁰ George III, "By the King: A Proclamation for the Granting the Distribution of Prizes during the Present Hostilities - 1803." 347

¹¹ Ibid, 347

¹² Ibid, 347

¹³ Ibid 349

¹⁴ Gostling, 348-350

¹⁵ Mark Lardas, *British Frigate vs. French Frigate: 1793-1814*, (London: Osprey Publishing 2013): 30-50

¹⁶ Gostling, 348-350

¹⁷ Wareham, *Star Captains*, 212-213

commanders, the naval prize system was redistributed in 1808.¹⁸ According to the redistribution, captains after 1808 only received two eighths of the total proceeds from captured prizes. The midshipmen, junior warrant officers, petty officers, and all other crewmen on board ship (which in the 1803 distribution system had been divided into two groups, receiving one eighth and two eighths respectively) collectively shared four eighths of the prize money. The distribution within this last category still depended on rank, but the addition of one third of the prize money meant that ordinary seamen received larger sums of prize money after 1808.¹⁹ The new system was contested by many captains in the navy,²⁰ but the Admiralty maintained its position as the navy collectively considered it to be fairer.²¹ Evidently, the Admiralty considered that prize money was a very important motivation for the crewmen of the navy, and by 1808 had become more aware of the issues facing the navy's sailors. By increasing the share of prize money allotted to the navy's sailors, they boosted morale and enhanced the role of monetary rewards in motivating the navy's vital manpower to do their duty.

In the aftermath of the Battle of the Nile (August 1-3, 1798), Nelson burned three of the prizes that had not yet been taken from Aboukir Bay, due to orders he received from Admiral St. Vincent to set sail. He then wrote to the Earl George Spencer, then First Lord of the Admiralty, saying that he expected the government to compensate his officers and seamen for the three burned prizes. He argued that "if an Admiral is, after victory, only to look after captured prizes, and not distressing the enemy, very dearly indeed does

¹⁸ George III "By the King: A Proclamation Revoking the former Proclamations Relating to the Distribution of Prizes and Appointing a new Distribution Thereof - 1808." In *Tracy, Vol. II*, (London: Stackpole Books, 1999): 354

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 354-355

²⁰ "To the Right Honourable the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, 1809." In *Tracy, Vol. II*, 355-356

²¹ W.W. Pole, "W.W. Pole, Admiralty's Office, January 6, 1809." In *Tracy, Vol. II*, 356-357

the Nation pay for its Prizes.”²² He therefore considered £60,000 to be a fair amount for the Admiralty to pay, and if the money was not paid then it would defraud not only him, but every single man in the fleet.²³ The victory itself and approbation of superiors is enough for an admiral after a battle, he claims, but “what reward have the inferior Officers and men but the value of Prizes?”²⁴ Prize money was very important to men from all ranks of the navy, even considering the uneven distribution. Nelson’s letter to the Earl Spencer shows that it was an important motivation for the whole navy, and important enough to the Admiralty to expect them to pay out £60,000.

Correspondence and memoirs reveal other examples of a lust for prize money among men of the navy. Midshipman W. Lovell, serving in the blockade of Toulon under Nelson, complained that the blockading fleet had received no prize money, nor even chances to earn prize money, despite the hardships which they served under.²⁵ The autobiography of Captain William Dillon shows that the chance of earning prize money was frequently discussed by his ship’s crew, in particular the midshipmen (despite having a relatively low share and their young age). Based upon their ship’s course, the midshipmen of HMS *Thetis* “made the most favourable calculations upon the capturing of the enemy’s ships, their homeward bound Indiamen, etc.”²⁶

Naval officers frequently complained that pay of frigate captains was inadequate to cover the costs of the lifestyles they were expected to live. Frigate captains were paid much lower than their counterparts commanding ships of the line. Between 1796 and

²²Horatio Nelson, “Nelson to Earl Spencer: *Vanguard*, 7th September 1798,” *The Mammoth Book of How It Happened Trafalgar: Over 50 First-hand Accounts of the Greatest Sea Battle in History*, edited by Lon E. Lewis (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2005): 102-103. Henceforth: Lewis

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ W. Lovell, “The Water over Toulon, 1803-1804,” *Lewis*, 126-127

²⁶ Sir William Henry Dillon, *A Narrative of My Professional Adventures*. Edited by Michael A. Lewis. Vol. I. (London: Navy Records Society, 1953): 71

1806, a fifth rate frigate captain earned 61% of the salary that a captain of a third rate ship of the line earned; two pay increases in 1807 and 1810 did little to remedy this, as in 1815 a fifth rate's captain earned 58% of a third rate captain's salary.²⁷ There were several reasons for this. One was that the crew of a typical frigate was much smaller than that of a ship of the line; with a smaller body of men to command, the duties of a frigate captain were considered to be less onerous.²⁸ Another reason was that frigate captains had a much higher chance of taking prizes. Most frigate captains hoped to make up the difference in their pay with prize money.²⁹

Naval traditions, deeply rooted in the social expectations of officers in the Royal Navy, tended to be expensive undertakings for naval captains, particularly during wartime. One such expected tradition was the maintenance of what could be an elaborate dinner table and private food supplies.³⁰ Captains were expected to entertain their officers, guests, and fellow captains frequently while in command.³¹ Additional wartime costs, such as purchasing expensive articles and uniforms, staff wages, and postage, meant that many captains ended up having to spend more money than they could afford.³² The expectations for captains to shoulder expensive living costs increased during the French Revolutionary Wars.³³ In a letter to recently promoted Commander Francis Fane, Lord St. Vincent warns him against maintaining too expensive a table while in command. "An expensive way of living having crept into the Service, during the

²⁷ Tom Wareham, "The Duration of Frigate Command During the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars," *The Mariner's Mirror* 86, no. 4 (2000): 420-421

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Ibid; Wareham, *Star Captains*, 35

³⁰ "To the Right Honourable the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, 1809." 355

³¹ Ibid; Sir John Jervis, Lord St. Vincent, "To Captain Fane, 21 May 1802," in *The Letters of Admiral of the Fleet the Earl of St. Vincent Whilst First Lord of the Admiralty, 1801-1804*, Vol. II (London: Navy Records Society, 1927): 249-250 Henceforth: *Letters of Lord St. Vincent*.

³² "To the Right Honourable the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, 1809." 355

³³ Jervis, "To Captain Fane, 21 May 1802," 249-250

late War, I cannot avoid stating my decided opinion that it has done more injury to the Navy.”³⁴ While he does not approve of the high expectations for captains, he admits that as a young commander Fane will not be able to avoid it, and instead advises him to do what he can to limit costs.³⁵ Graham Moore, a prominent frigate captain, often confided in his personal diary about his inability to afford a marriage, which caused great loneliness.³⁶ In a petition in response to the 1808 redistribution of prize money, various naval captains complained that only those with private financial resources were able to maintain the expected costs of their position, as some spent nearly all of their salaries on the abovementioned expenses.³⁷ The prevalence of this opinion among naval officers, including admirals such as St. Vincent, shows that this expectation was indeed a problem. In fact, as St. Vincent (then First Lord of the Admiralty) says, it was unavoidable for young commanders and captains at least – this being said despite his stated dislike for the traditions.³⁸ For those officers without private financial resources, described as very few in the 1809 captain’s petition,³⁹ prize money was one of the means to offset their high expenses, which drove the desire of frigate captains to find and capture prizes.

Competition and fights between naval officers over prize money were a long-running problem. In 1696, an English naval captain complained to the Admiralty about his former captain, whom he accused of stripping a recently captured prize of its cargo and embezzling it for his own personal profit.⁴⁰ Admirals frequently took each other to court (through their prize agents) over the distribution of prize money earned under their

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ Wareham, *Star Captains*, 230

³⁷ "To the Right Honourable the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, 1809.", 355-256

³⁸ Jervis, "To Captain Fane, 21 May 1802," 249

³⁹ "To the Right Honourable the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, 1809.", 355-356

⁴⁰ James Dunbar, "Prize, Plunder, and Profit: Capt. James Dunbar, HMS *Falkland*, to the Commissioners of Prizes, Dec 1697," *BND, Hattendorf, et al*, 304-305

commands. In 1803, in a court case between Admiral Nelson and Admiral Tucker, the judges decided that when a superior officer left a station, the inferior flag officer who assumed full command (even if he was not officially in full command yet) was entitled to the full Flag Officer's eighth share of prize money earned by ships under his command.⁴¹ An earlier case in 1799, between Lord Keith and Lord St. Vincent, concerned prize money captured by ships of the Mediterranean Fleet,⁴² which had passed from St. Vincent's command to that of Lord Keith's in 1799. Concurrent to this, Lord Nelson's prize agent pursued an action in court against St. Vincent over a dispute regarding prize money earned by HMS *Alcmene* (32-guns) for the capture of Spanish frigates during the Action of 16 October, 1799.⁴³

Nelson, in his letter (dated September 7th, 1798) to Earl Spencer after the Battle of the Nile, said that his demand for compensation for the burned prizes was not out of personal greed, and that "an Admiral may be amply rewarded by his feelings and the approbation of his superiors."⁴⁴ However, prize money was considered important enough by Nelson and his fellow admirals for many court cases to be undertaken over the admiral's share of prize money, which could amount to considerable sums. While commanding in the Indian Ocean in 1795, Lord Keith earned over £64,000 from captures made by the ships and soldiers under his command.⁴⁵

While many crews never took any prizes during the war, men in the navy yearned for the chance to earn a fortune in prize money. According to Richard Hill, an estimated

⁴¹ Court of King's Bench, November 14 [1803]. Lord Nelson v Tucker. Tracy, Vol II, 351-352

⁴² John Jackson "John Jackson to Keith," *The Keith Papers*, edited by Christopher Lloyd, Vol. II (London: Navy Records Society, 1955): 395

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ Horatio Nelson, "Nelson to Earl Spencer:"103

⁴⁵ Jackson, "John Jackson to Keith," 394-395

£30 million was received by members of the Royal Navy for captures made between 1793 and 1815.⁴⁶ The capture of the Spanish frigates *Thetis* and *Santa Brigada* resulted in £652,000 being split between four British frigates; each captain received £40,730 and every seaman received £182, and 4s: the equivalent of ten years' wages.⁴⁷ The potential to earn small fortunes through prize money was certainly an important motivation for officers and the crewmen of the navy.

On the 5th of October, 1804, four British frigates commanded by Commodore Graham Moore (commanding from HMS *Indefatigable*) engaged a Spanish treasure convoy in the Battle of Cape Santa Maria (also known as the Action of 5 October, 1804). The convoy was carrying a large quantity of bullion from Spain's American colonies, which was going to be paid to Bonaparte as a tribute before Spain entered the war against Britain. The British government decided to intercept the convoy to prevent the funds from being given to Bonaparte.⁴⁸ The British squadron quickly captured three of the frigates, and the fourth exploded during the action.⁴⁹ However, since Britain and Spain were not at war when this capture occurred, the Admiralty Court decided that the wartime prize rules did not apply, and the prize money from the capture (amounting to over £900,000) was given to the Admiralty. The loss of such a large sum of prize money did not sit well with the captains of Moore's squadron, and after a year-long legal argument, the admiralty awarded £160,000 to the crews of the four ships.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Wareham, *Star Captains*, 41

⁴⁷ N.A.M. Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean*, 522-524

⁴⁸ Nicholas Tracy, *The Naval Chronicle: The Contemporary Record of the Royal Navy at War, Volume III: 1804-1806*, Vol. III. (London: Stackpole Books, 1999): 68; Robson, 105

⁴⁹ Graham Moore, "Indefatigable, at Sea, 08, 6, 1804," *The London Gazette*, (October 20-23): 15747

⁵⁰ Nehemiah Augustus Hunt, Arthur Miles Raymond, and John Page. "London, November 8, 1805." *The London Gazette*, (November 9, 1805): 867

Capturing prizes was not important just for the officers and sailors who fought the actions; it was also important for the nation. In a memorandum on naval resources in 1793, Vice-Admiral Sir Charles Middleton stressed that because of Britain's naval superiority over France, France's naval strategy would focus primarily on commerce raiding. He stated therefore the Royal Navy needs as many frigates and sloops available to protect trade, both by hunting French commerce raiders as well as convoy protection.⁵¹ As Britain's trade was vitally important for her financial prosperity and therefore the war effort, Middleton considered protecting trade to be key.⁵² Naval personnel, encouraged by the government and motivated by the potential to earn small fortunes, captured many warships and merchant vessels throughout the Wars, hurting the trade of France and her allies, as well as their ability to attack Britain's trade.

Britain's economic prosperity allowed government to continue its war effort against Revolutionary and Napoleonic France. Its economic assets allowed Britain to maintain its fleet and to conduct campaigns in the colonies. It also allowed Britain to finance multiple coalitions of Great Powers to fight France on the European Continent, as Britain's army was unable to operate effectively against the French armies until the Peninsular War. Encouraging prize taking was an effective way to motivate officers and men of the navy, and to accomplish the nation's wartime goals.

Promotion and Professionalism in the Royal Navy's Officer Corps

Promotion in the officer corps of the Royal Navy during the Napoleonic Wars was driven by a combination of an individual's merit and his political and professional

⁵¹ Charles Middleton, "Naval Resources at the start of the war, 1793 (undated in October): draft memorandum by Vice-Admiral Sir Charles Middleton," *BND, Hattendorf, et al*, 338-341

⁵² *Ibid*

influence. Interest refers to the political, personal, and professional connections which benefitted officers in the navy. Connections within the British political, social, and naval elite were very important for young officers in the Royal Navy. Political and social interest, connections with family and friends in Britain's elite society, was strong in the navy; many young boys entered the navy as apprentice officers due to connections their families had with individual naval captains. The proportion of naval officers of aristocratic birth, or those from among the political elite, grew between 1793 and 1815.⁵³ However, a substantial number of officers in the navy came from middle class backgrounds, and regardless of political interest, the importance of merit and professional interest – connections with serving senior officers in the Royal Navy – remained high during the period. The navy was not a true meritocracy, but the navy's officer corps was open to those with talent. Coming from the aristocracy certainly helped in many ways, but the officers of the navy had to have a degree of competency, regardless of social background. While it was harder for those without political interest, there were those who climbed through the ranks with virtually none at all.

Political interest was certainly extremely helpful in the careers of young officers, but if the officer was not a competent sailor then his career prospects were grim in the navy.⁵⁴ Even the King's patronage could not allow him to bypass the competency requirements of the usual service trends and traditions.⁵⁵ Young midshipmen were required to serve for at least six years at sea before they were eligible to become a

⁵³ Wareham, *Star Captains*, 212-213; Cavell, 3

⁵⁴ Wareham, *Star Captains*, 110-123

⁵⁵ Ibid

commissioned officer (starting as a lieutenant).⁵⁶ Theoretically, one had to also be at least twenty years of age to become a lieutenant, but this rule was frequently ignored;⁵⁷ John Duckworth's passing certificate in 1766, for example, stated that Duckworth "appeared to be twenty years of age."⁵⁸ In order to qualify as a lieutenant, a midshipman had to pass an oral examination (judged by a board of three senior captains), and was judged on many aspects of seamanship, including working sails, sailing vessels, and navigation. Duckworth's certificate shows that it was necessary for potential lieutenants to "be qualified to do the duty of an able seaman and midshipman."⁵⁹ Competency in the duties of junior officers and able seamen, as well as a demonstrated knowledge of seamanship and navigation, were required to pass the exam. The examinations were regarded as formidable by officers during the Napoleonic Wars, and while the failure rate was low, they ensured that the navy's commissioned officers all met a standard for seamanship and other necessary skills as an officer.⁶⁰ Regardless of the proportion of officers promoted with the assistance of interest, this assured that every officer in the navy had some degree of competency.

This did not make the Royal Navy a true meritocracy, as political and social interest was still very important in advancing the careers of naval officers. One of HMS Royal Sovereign's senior midshipmen in 1800, Edward Marker's, letter (dated July 18th, 1800) to his uncle shows that he is very worried about receiving a commission before the war ends. He is convinced that without "friends to apply for him to the Admiralty either

⁵⁶ Cavell, 29; "Lieutenant's passing certificate, 1766: Passing certificate of Lieutenant John Duckworth, 13 May 1766," *BND, Hattendorf, et al*, 532

⁵⁷ "Lieutenant's passing certificate, 1766," 532; Cavell, 30

⁵⁸ "Lieutenant's passing certificate, 1766," 532

⁵⁹ "Lieutenant's passing certificate, 1766," 532

⁶⁰ Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 510-513

in a direct or indirect manner, he may remain in my situation thirty or forty years without being taken any notice of.”⁶¹ In his desperate state, he saw interest as the key to promotion in the navy.⁶² Commander Francis Fane’s promotion appears to be connected to the Earl of Westmoreland, as well as his family’s connection with Lord St. Vincent.⁶³ Captain Hoste, commanding HMS *Greyhound* in 1803, “received all his promotion” from Lord St. Vincent.⁶⁴

However, the ability of a titled friend or other elite member of British society or governance to have an officer promoted was limited. Interest could not allow an officer to bypass the traditional patterns of service, and could not make up for a lack of seamanship or competency.⁶⁵ Many aristocratic officers were not promoted past lieutenant in the navy, even during the height of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars.⁶⁶ St. Vincent, in his letter (dated 29 April, 1802) to the Earl of Westmoreland, says that “it is morally impossible” to promote Francis Fane to both command and then to post captain at once,⁶⁷ and therefore he will not do so.⁶⁸ In a letter (dated 29 June, 1802) to Commander Fane’s mother, St. Vincent asks her not to apply to her son to take on Mr. Curson, a young boy, into his sloop as a midshipman until he has gotten rid of “the youth

⁶¹ Edward Marker, “Influence needed in gaining promotion, 1800: Edward Marker to his uncle, Samuel Homfray, the iron master, *Royal Sovereign* off Ushant, 18 July 1800,” *BND, Hattendorf, et al*, 546

⁶² Ibid

⁶³ Sir John Jervis, Lord St. Vincent, “To Earl of Westmoreland, 29 April, 1802,” In *The Letters of Admiral of the Fleet the Earl of St. Vincent Whilst First Lord of the Admiralty, 1801-1804*. Vol. II. David Bonner Smith (London: Navy Records Society, 1927): 247-248, Henceforth: *Letters of St. Vincent, Vol II*.

⁶⁴ Sir John Jervis, Lord St. Vincent, “To Honble. W. Eliot, 20 March, 1803,” In *Letters of St. Vincent, Vol II* 278

⁶⁵ Wareham, *Star Captains*, 120-123

⁶⁶ Wareham, *Star Captains*, 122

⁶⁷ The Earl of Westmoreland wanted St. Vincent to promote Lieutenant Francis Fane to post captain. However, as this would mean Fane skipped the rank of commander, St. Vincent refused and instead promoted Fane to commander.

⁶⁸ Jervis, “To Earl of Westmoreland,” 247-248

he is now burdened with.”⁶⁹⁷⁰ Even after he has room for Curson in his vessel, St. Vincent warns that the Commissioners of the navy will object to his rating Curson as a midshipman, possibly because young Mr Curson was underqualified to serve and be paid as a midshipman.⁷¹ Commander Fane’s patrons include both Westmoreland and St. Vincent, who was evidently close with the Fane family, but nevertheless St. Vincent refused to bypass the usual promotion patterns of the service.

After the resumption of war in 1803, St. Vincent informed the Earl Cholmondeley that he could not promote Lieutenant Richard Falkland to commander, as there were already ‘two-hundred commanders panting for service.’⁷² Richard Falkland, despite his aristocratic connections and interest, was only promoted to commander on the retired list, after the wars ended; he was passed over for promotion in favour of numerous other lieutenants.⁷³ A possible reason was that his skills as an officer were not exemplary, meaning that despite his political influence he was never promoted beyond lieutenant while in active service. A few months before the Peace of Amiens was signed, St. Vincent issued a relatively harsh rebuke to the Earl of Portsmouth concerning a request for a promotion for his client (unnamed in the letter):

“I cannot possibly agree in opinion with your Lordship, that a person sitting quietly by his fireside, and enjoying very nearly a sinecure, during such a war as we have been engaged in, has the same pretensions to

⁶⁹ Sir John Jervis, Lord St. Vincent, "To Lady Elizabeth Fane, 29 June, 1802," In *Letters of St. Vincent, Vol II*, 254-255

⁷⁰ By this St. Vincent is referring to the “quarterdeck boys” – midshipmen and other youngsters – serving on his ship

⁷¹ Ibid

⁷² Sir John Jervis, Lord St. Vincent, "To Earl Cholmondeley, 12 June, 1803," *Letters of St. Vincent, Vol II* 343

⁷³ David Bonner Smith, *Letters of St. Vincent, Vol II* 343

promotion with the man who has exposed his person, and hazarded his constitution in every clime.”⁷⁴

Portsmouth’s client was in fact a naval officer commanding the Sea Fencibles.⁷⁵ While St. Vincent says that this is not ordinarily an impediment to promotion, he is unwilling to promote the Earl’s client when there are many actively serving officers more deserving of promotion.⁷⁶

Tom Wareham, in *Star Captains*, makes a distinction between political or social interest and professional interest. Patronage of a senior officer, professional interest, was just as influential in promotions and employment as political interest; often it was more important.⁷⁷ Professional interest refers to the support and patronage of a senior officer in the British Navy; officers such as Nelson, Keith, or St. Vincent frequently attempted to have their junior officers promoted. Sometimes this support was due to personal connections. Josiah Nisbet, Nelson’s son in law, first joined the navy as a midshipman on HMS *Agamemnon*, a 64-gun ship which happened to be commanded by Nelson.⁷⁸ In 1796, Nelson attempted to use his influence with St. Vincent (then the commander-in-chief of the Mediterranean Fleet), to have his son promoted.⁷⁹ Some of the above-mentioned examples of political interest being used to secure promotions for friends and family in the navy also demonstrate professional interest. Francis Fane’s patron, the Earl

⁷⁴ Sir John Jervis, “St. Vincent to Earl of Portsmouth.” *Admiral the Right Hon. The Earl of St. Vincent GCB &C. Memoirs* vol II, ed Jedediah Stephens Tucker, (London, Richard Bentley, New Burlington Street, 1844): 192

⁷⁵ The Sea Fencibles was a coastal defense naval militia which existed from 1798 to 1811. It was an important aspect of Britain’s defenses, but the officers enjoyed a more lenient lifestyle than their counterparts actively serving in the navy

⁷⁶ Jervis, “St. Vincent to Earl of Portsmouth.”

⁷⁷ N.A.M. Rodger, *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy*, (London: Collins, 1986): 273-280; Wareham, *Star Captains*, 110-136

⁷⁸ John Sugden, *Nelson - A Dream of Glory*. (London: Jonathan Cape, 2004): 420

⁷⁹ Horatio Nelson, “Useless to my Country,” Nelson in Despair, 27 July, 1797: admiral Sir Horatio Nelson,” *Lewis*, 69-70

of Westmoreland, writing to St. Vincent is a case of political interest; the Earl was not a member of the navy, and instead was a titled member of Britain's political elite. However, St. Vincent also describes himself as a friend of Fane's family, meaning that Fane's promotion was influenced by a senior admiral in the navy directly (in this case, the First Lord of the Admiralty).

As with political interest, the application of professional interest was not always successful. John Hancock, an officer with demonstrated skills as a seaman and an officer, enjoyed the support of several admirals, as well as a long-serving Member of Parliament.⁸⁰ However, his patrons were unable to assist him when it was needed most, and he was never promoted; he twice retired from active service on account of seeing no prospects in the navy for him.⁸¹ Hancock's case demonstrates that professional interest was no guarantee of success in promotions, even for those with demonstrated skills and success as officers; it had to be applied effectively at the right time. Edward Marker's call for "instant and immediate application" of political interest (his family had connections to the nobility)⁸² shows that this was also the case for political interest; it had to be applied at the right time to succeed.

An important aspect of professional interest in the Royal Navy, which distinguished it from political interest, was how it quite often reflected the merit of an Admiral's young client. According to N.A.M. Rodger, the most prominent use of interest and patronage in the navy, both personal and professional, was in identifying and promoting young officers of ability.⁸³ Wareham states that professional interest usually

⁸⁰ Wareham, *Star Captains*, 110-111

⁸¹ Ibid

⁸² Marker, 546

⁸³ Rodger, *The Wooden World*, 273-280

reflected the merits of young clients, as it was an officer's demonstrated skills which most frequently caught, and held, the attention of senior officers.⁸⁴ It was in the best interest of senior officers to have skilled and reliable officers under their command, so it was common for Flag Officers such as Sir John Jervis to act as patrons for aspiring young officers.⁸⁵ Good seamen and skilled officers were more likely to capture enemy vessels and to have the respect and confidence of their crews, and less likely to lose their ships. Having a strong number of good officers under their command was beneficial for admirals both for financial reasons (as they were more likely to earn their admiral prize money) and for enhancing their reputation.⁸⁶

While titled officers and officers from the gentry made up a significant portion of the navy's officer corps during the Wars, there were also many from middle-class backgrounds.⁸⁷ In fact, some famous officers from this period were of middle-class origins. Graham Moore, a prominent frigate captain and later Flag Officer, was the son of a doctor.⁸⁸ Another famous frigate captain, Sir Edward Pellew, and his younger brother Captain Israel Pellew, were the sons of a middle-class civilian Dover packet captain, whose family had suffered many financial hardships throughout the mid-18th century.⁸⁹ Even Sir John Jervis, later Lord St. Vincent, though he died a peer, was born the son of a lawyer.⁹⁰ At the battle of Trafalgar, only 16 out of a total of 587 "quarterdeck boys" were

⁸⁴ Wareham, *Star Captains*, 122-123

⁸⁵ Wareham, *Star Captains*, 110-111; Rodger, *The Wooden World*, 273-280

⁸⁶ Wareham, *Star Captains*, 110-111; Rodger, *The Wooden World*, 120-124

⁸⁷ Appendix A; Wareham, *Star Captains*, 93; Cavell, 3

⁸⁸ John Nichols, *Gentleman's Magazine and Historical Review*, Vol. 175. London: E. Cave, 1844.

⁸⁹ P.A. Symonds, "Pellew, Sir Edward, 1st Bt. (1757-1833), of Flushing and Trefusis, Nr. Falmouth, Cornwall, and Hampton House, Plymouth, Devon." *The History of Parliament: British Political, Social & Local History*. Accessed March 20, 2015.

⁹⁰ David R Fisher, "Jervis, Sir John (1735-1823)," *The History of Parliament: British Political, Social & Local History*, Accessed November 20, 2014; *The Naval Chronicle : Containing a General and*

the sons of peers.⁹¹ The navy intentionally made its officer ranks open to people of middle-class backgrounds. In 1805, an order in council preventing Masters from being commissioned as lieutenants was rescinded.⁹² Sailing masters were typically older seamen who began their careers before the mast; their positions were due to proven navigational experience and they rarely came from the upper classes.⁹³ Rescinding of the order was considered to be, “in the opinion of officers of high distinction, of material use in the service.”⁹⁴ Evidently, senior officers in the Royal Navy valued the navigational experience of the masters of the fleet.

An exceptional case was that of Captain John Perkins. He began his career as a pilot serving Admiral George Rodney’s fleet in the West Indies during the American Revolutionary War, and by the end of his career he had commanded many Royal Navy vessels, including HMS *Arab* and HMS *Tartar* as a post captain.⁹⁵ He was not only an officer of humble birth; he was the son of a Jamaican slave, and very likely a former slave himself.⁹⁶ After serving the West Indies squadron as a pilot he was commissioned as a lieutenant in command of HMS *Endeavor*. Admiral Rodney tried, unsuccessfully, to have him promoted to commander in 1779.⁹⁷ The denied promotion was not due to a lack of skill on the part of Perkins; he was described by Commodore John Ford, in a dispatch

Biographical History of the Royal Navy of the United Kingdom with a Variety of Original Papers on Nautical Subjects, Vol. IV. London: J. Gold, 1800.

⁹¹ Cavell, 106

⁹² "Status of Masters Changed." *The Naval Chronicle: The Contemporary Record of the Royal Navy at War, 1793-1798*. Edited by Nicholas Tracy, Vol. I. (London: Stackpole Books, 1999): 353: Henceforth: Tracy, Vol I

⁹³ David Davies, *A Brief History of Fighting Ships: Ships of the Line and Napoleonic Sea Battles 1793-1815*, (London: Constable & Robinson, 2002): 47

⁹⁴ Ibid

⁹⁵ Arthur Herman, *To Rule the Waves: How the British Navy Shaped the Modern World*, (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2004): 242; Sykes, 621

⁹⁶ Herman, 242

⁹⁷ George Rodney, 1st Baron Rodney, “Rodney to George Spencer, First Lord of the Admiralty.” *The Life and Correspondence of the Late Admiral Rodney*. vol II, ed. Godfrey Basil Mundy, (London: Kessinger Publishing Co, 2007): 344-345

announcing the capture of the French schooner *National Convention* (which was subsequently placed under Perkin's command), as "an Officer of Zeal, Vigilance, and Activity."⁹⁸ By July 1803, Perkins had been promoted to Post Captain and commanded HMS *Tartar*, a 32-gun frigate. The *Naval Chronicle's* obituary of Perkins in 1812 praises his actions while in command of *Tartar*, particularly when he out sailed and engaged a French 74-gun ship of the line long enough for a British squadron to catch up and engage the French ship. The *Chronicle* states that without his actions, the French ship would have escaped.⁹⁹ Perkins' exceptional journey through the ranks of the Royal Navy, at a time when slavery was still legal in most of the British Empire, was a unique case rather than an ordinary occurrence. However, it demonstrates that the Royal Navy's ranks were open to those with talent. His initial commission, his subsequent promotions, and patronage by senior officers such as Rodney, were due to his skills as an officer and a seaman.

The management of the officer corps of the Royal Navy was decentralized.¹⁰⁰ Under normal circumstances, young midshipmen entered the navy on the whims of individual captains,¹⁰¹ and there was little Admiralty oversight over officers until they received a commission. Despite the decentralized nature of the navy's officer corps, and while interest was an extremely important factor in advancement, the promotion rules and patterns of the navy did ensure that everyone holding a commission in the navy had some degree of competency. Political, personal, and professional interest could do very little if

⁹⁸ John Ford, "Ford's Dispatches, Europa, Mole of Cape St. Nicholas, October 27, 1793." *The London Gazette*, (December 10, 1793): 1096

⁹⁹ *The Naval Chronicle: Containing a General and Biographical History of the Royal Navy of the United Kingdom with a Variety of Original Papers on Nautical Subjects*, Vol. 12. (London: J. Gold, 1800): 352

¹⁰⁰ Wareham, *Star Captains*, 4-53

¹⁰¹ Jervis, "To Lady Elizabeth Fane," 254-255

the officers in question were truly incompetent, and often an officer's interest depended on his skills.

Competition for Promotions and Appointments in the Royal Navy

One significant impact of the decentralized nature of naval promotion was the fact that the navy had far more officers than it could employ. There was very little oversight over the introduction of “young gentlemen” and midshipmen into the navy, and over lieutenant examinations churning out “passed midshipmen” and lieutenants.” The Admiralty had no official knowledge of young gentlemen in the navy, and made no attempt to regulate or limit the number of officers passed by lieutenant examinations.¹⁰² During both times of war and peace, there were always more officers in the Royal Navy than there were ships and appointments for. Officers without appointments were placed on half-pay waiting for employment in the navy. During peacetime, with fewer and fewer ships in commission, large numbers of officers had no opportunities for naval employment. More ships were commissioned during wars, and during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars hundreds of ships were commissioned into service, meaning many officers on half pay during peace were appointed to active service. However, the size of the officer corps itself grew during warfare or during international crises, or “armaments”, as more officers were commissioned and promoted; meaning that even during wars there could still be hundreds of officers who were on half pay.¹⁰³ In 1790, the Nootka Incident (also referred to as the Spanish Armament) resulted in large numbers of ships being fitted out for active service, and the size of the officer corps exploded in anticipation of a conflict with Spain. The crisis was resolved, however, and the navy was

¹⁰² Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 519-520

¹⁰³ Wareham, *Star Captains*, 16-26

left with large numbers of unemployed officers.¹⁰⁴ Upon the outbreak of war in 1793, the number of officers increased further. While the navy was mobilizing after war broke out in 1803, there were hundreds of unemployed navy commanders.¹⁰⁵

The overabundance of officers was beneficial for the navy in several ways. As there was always an abundance of unemployed officers, officers were able to go on leave from active service, their positions being filled by officers on temporary appointments. It was not uncommon for officers, particularly senior officers, to accept a position at sea while an elected or appointed member of parliament, for instance.¹⁰⁶ With a large number of half pay officers of every rank, there were always enough temporary officers to fill in the gaps of officers on leave. Even then, however, there were still more than enough officers for the navy's uses.

The overabundance of officers allowed the Admiralty to filter officers out of active service if they were deemed to be "unfit" or "unsuitable." Lieutenants, commanders, and post captains potentially faced a fear of never another appointment in their careers, even if they wanted them. In fact, it was not uncommon for officers to be promoted, but then to never receive an appointment. Many officers were in effect superannuated in this fashion. Lieutenant Richard Falkland was not promoted to commander until 1831, when he was in effect promoted into retirement, despite a connection to the British peerage.¹⁰⁷ Despite serving in several battles and being mentioned in dispatches¹⁰⁸ as a lieutenant in HMS *Thames*,¹⁰⁹ Samuel Whiteway's career

¹⁰⁴ Wareham, *Star Captains*, 76

¹⁰⁵ Jervis, "To Earl Cholmondeley," 343

¹⁰⁶ Wareham, *Star Captains*, 26; Rodger, *The Wooden World*, 328-329

¹⁰⁷ Jervis, "To Earl Cholmondeley," 343; Editor of book, 343

¹⁰⁸ He commanded a detachment during a cutting out expedition

¹⁰⁹ John Marshall, *Royal Naval Biography; Or, Memoirs of the Services of All the Flag-officers, Superannuated Rear-admirals, Retired-captains, Post-captains, and Commanders*, (London: Longman,

did not advance after his promotion to commander; he was never promoted to post captain, and retired as a half-pay commander.¹¹⁰ Commanders and post-captains could expect periods of unemployment, and some were never given commands after promotion at all; some lieutenants and commanders, who lived on their pay, actually refused promotions out of fear of unemployment and a reduction of income.¹¹¹

Many senior post captains were outright forced into retirement through promotion. The navy's admirals were divided into three coloured squadrons; red, white, and blue. Since admirals could only be promoted from the captains highest on the seniority list, a common practice was to promote old officers whom the navy did not want to employ as active-serving admirals to rear admiral "without distinction of squadron," or to what was called yellow admirals.¹¹² Captain Mark Pattison, in 1793, petitioned the Lord Commissioners of the Admiralty to have him promoted into "the list of superannuated half-pay admirals."¹¹³ Pattison was a very senior captain, and because of his "age, infirmity and long service" of fifty-two years he does not mind being yellowed.¹¹⁴ His letter demonstrates that the number of superannuated yellow admirals was extensive and well-known to the fleet. In 1769, according to William Falconer's contemporary *Dictionary of the Marine*, out of a total of 53 admirals, 22 (41% of the Royal Navy's admirals) were superannuated yellow admirals.¹¹⁵ This enabled the Admiralty to bypass the seniority-based promotion of admirals; unfit senior officers

Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1827): 192; J. Allen, *The New Navy List and General Record of the Services of Officers of the Royal Navy and Royal Marines*, (London: Parker, 1853): 107

¹¹⁰ ADM 45/31/669; ADM 196/6/584; Allen, 107

¹¹¹ Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 519

¹¹² "Yellow Admiral." Oxford Index - Oxford University Press. Accessed February 12, 2015.

¹¹³ "Mark Pattison to The Lord Commissioners of the Admiralty, Stonehouse, near Plymouth, 21st Feb 1793." The National Archives, ADM 2/2310

¹¹⁴ Ibid

¹¹⁵ William Falconer, *An Universal Dictionary of the Marine*. 2nd ed. (London: T. Cadell, 1780):16

could be superannuated, allowing more junior captains to be promoted to admirals in the active service. In his letter, Pattison complains that captains junior to him have already been promoted to active-serving rear admirals.¹¹⁶ While Pattison was happy to retire on an admiral's half pay, other senior captains would have dreaded being promoted into retirement.¹¹⁷

In 1803, using funds from the estate of deceased Member of Parliament Stephen Travers, the navy established the Naval Knights of Windsor, a group of seven senior naval lieutenants who had been continuously passed over for promotion. While it was stated to be a service bestowed on the lieutenants "as a reward for their past services,"¹¹⁸ in reality it was a method of forced retirement (although one which provided a substantial salary). During and after the Napoleonic Wars, every vacancy in the Naval Knights received an abundance of applicants, suggesting that there were many naval lieutenants who saw no hope of advancement in the navy for them.¹¹⁹

Commissioned officers who were not employed as seagoing officers had several potential methods of employment. Many officers were in the Sea Fencibles or in the Press Gang service, for instance. Even those without any appointments at all still got their half pay. However, very few officers in the navy were content without employment, as they had not joined the navy to sit on shore and receive half pay.¹²⁰ Many of the officers without appointments did want them. During the peace following the American Revolutionary War, Captain Nelson tried to get himself a new appointment, although he

¹¹⁶ Pattison

¹¹⁷ Wareham, *Star Captains*, 26-27

¹¹⁸ "Establishment of the Naval Knights of Windsor - 1803." In *Tracy, Vol. II*, 346

¹¹⁹ "No. 3: Naval Knights of Windsor," *St. George's Chapel Archives and Chapter Library Research Guides*: 1

¹²⁰ Wareham, *Star Captains*, 26-27

did not receive another command until 1793.¹²¹ The result of this was that there was heavy competition for both promotions and appointments among officers in the navy. Some officers were desperate and would take any position they could, while others were more picky and would hold out for particular appointments.

Many officers were particularly eager to command frigates. Commander Graham Moore, desperately wanted to be promoted and given command of a frigate, to which end he often wrote to the First Sea Lord requesting such a promotion.¹²² St. Vincent, in his 1803 letter to Captain George Hope, tells him that while he will attempt to get him command of a ship of the line, “a frigate is totally out of the question,”¹²³ suggesting that Hope’s preferred choice was in fact a frigate. There were many reasons why officers would prefer to command frigates over ships of the line, the principal reason being that they were much more likely to get prize money on board a frigate.¹²⁴ Due to the increased likelihood of independent cruises and increased chances of encountering enemy vessels, commanders of frigates had a better chance of taking prizes, distinguishing themselves in action, and of not serving under an admiral (meaning they could take their whole three eighths prize money share).¹²⁵

Frigates were not the only sort of vessels that captains preferred. In his letter home in early 1793, Nelson tells his wife that while he is very happy to have received command of a ship (after being on half pay for several years), he would have preferred to

¹²¹ Sugden, 397

¹²² Tom Wareham, *Frigate Commander*, (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Maritime, 2012): 76-77

¹²³ Sir John Jervis, Lord St. Vincent, "To Captain George Hope, 17 March 1803," in *Letters of St. Vincent*, 276

¹²⁴ See the above *Prize Taking in the Navy* section

¹²⁵ Wareham, *Star Captains*, 49; George III, "By the King: A Proclamation for the Granting the Distribution of Prizes during the Present Hostilities - 1803." 347

command a 74-gun ship.¹²⁶ Instead, he was given command of the 64-gun ship HMS *Agamemnon*. Increasingly, 64-gun ships were being considered too weak to serve alongside other ships of the line in fleet actions.¹²⁷ Many other navies, including the French navy, had phased out ships of the line carrying fewer than 74 guns. During the first years of the French Revolutionary Wars, several of Britain's 64-gun ships of the line were razed into heavy frigates, as they were considered more useful as heavy frigates than as light ships of the line.¹²⁸ Nelson was cheerful, however, as he had been promised to be given command of a seventy four soon.¹²⁹ Cuthbert Collingwood also stated that he would prefer to command a 74-gun ship of the line over a frigate.¹³⁰

There was a considerable amount of competition among officers to be appointed to stations considered to be desirable. William Dillon, in his memoirs, recounts that he and his fellow midshipmen in HMS *Thetis*, serving in the South Atlantic, considered it to be an excellent station due to the likelihood of encountering enemy commerce raiders or Indiamen.¹³¹ The South Atlantic, and the Indian Ocean, was where homeward-bound Indiamen sailed, and their valuable cargoes made these stations excellent hunting grounds, both for enemy merchantmen and commerce raiders.¹³² After being given command of HMS *Agamemnon*, Admiral Lord Howe hinted to Captain Nelson that he and his ship may be transferred to the Mediterranean Fleet under Admiral Samuel Hood.

¹²⁶ Horatio Nelson "Nelson to Mrs Nelson, Jan 7 1793: London," *Nelson's Letters to His Wife: And Other Documents, 1785-1831*, ed. George P.B., Naish (London: Navy Records Society, 1958): 72

¹²⁷ Davies, 23

¹²⁸ Mark Lardas American Heavy Frigates 11; David Davies, *A Brief History of Fighting Ships: Ships of the Line and Napoleonic Sea Battles 1793-1815*, London: Constable & Robinson, 2002:, 23

¹²⁹ Nelson, "Nelson to Mrs Nelson, Jan 7th 1793: London," 72

¹³⁰ Wareham, *Star Captains*, 26

¹³¹ Sir William Henry Dillson, *A Narrative of My Professional Adventures*. Edited by Michael A. Lewis. Vol. I. (London: Navy Records Society, 1953): 70-75

¹³² Dillon, 70-75

Nelson then wrote to his wife, (dated March 15th, 1793) saying: “So very desirable a service is not to be neglected, therefore I am anxious to get to Spithead.”¹³³

Several naval stations were particularly desirable for naval officers, while others were less sought after. The Mediterranean Fleet was considered to be a prestigious station; it was a place of frequent action and had a romantic spirit.¹³⁴ The West Indies brought hardships and disease, but was a lucrative hunting ground.¹³⁵ Some stations, such as the North Sea, were considered to be undesirable; most officers had no real urge to fight the Dutch, the principle enemies in the North Sea, and the station saw infrequent action, cold weather, and tended to receive the navy’s oldest ships.¹³⁶ Officers who fell out of favour with the Admiralty may find themselves being assigned to unpopular duties or stations.¹³⁷

The best way to achieve promotions and appointments was to distinguish oneself in battle. Officers who demonstrated their ability in battle were more likely to be noticed by senior officers, who could act as patrons by requesting their promotion or requesting that they serve under them.¹³⁸ Mentioning officers in dispatches was a common trend in the Royal Navy; dispatches were often printed in publications such as the *London Gazette* and therefore attracted notice by the public and by the British government. Officers who served in battle and were mentioned in dispatches had a good chance of being promoted.¹³⁹

¹³³ Horatio Nelson “Nelson to Mrs Nelson: March 15, 1793: Chatham,” *Nelson's Letters to His Wife: And Other Documents, 1785-1831*, ed. George P.B., Naish (London: Navy Records Society, 1958): 74

¹³⁴ *Davies, A Brief History of Fighting Ships: Ships of the Line and Napoleonic Sea Battles 1793-1815*, London: Constable & Robinson, 2002: 86; Wareham, *Star Captains*, 138

¹³⁵ *Ibid*

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, 86-90

¹³⁷ Wareham, *Star Captains*, 104; Allen, 204–210

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, 111

¹³⁹ *Ibid*, 30-31

On 18 June, 1793, the 38-gun British frigate HMS *Nymphe*, commanded by Edward Pellew, captured the 32-gun French frigate *La Cleopatre*. Following the action, Pellew commended several of his officers in his dispatches:

I am very particularly indebted to my First Lieutenant, Mr. Amherst Morris, and no less to Lieutenants George Luke and Richard Pellowe, and I was ably seconded on the Quarter-Deck by Lieutenant John Whitaker, of the Marines, and Mr. Thomson, the Master; and I hope I do not presume in recommending those Officers to their Lordships Protection and Favour: And I should do Injustice to my Brother, Captain Israel Pellew, who was accidentally on board, if I could possibly omit saying how much I owe him for his very distinguished Firmness, and the encouraging Example he held forth to a young Ship's Company, by taking upon him the Directions of some Guns on the Main Deck.¹⁴⁰

Pellew praises the action of all of his men (his crew was in fact significantly understrength compared to *La Cleopatre's*) but the praise of his senior officers is highlighted. After Edward Pellew's praise for his brother in the action, Israel Pellew¹⁴¹ was promoted to post captain.¹⁴² Edward Pellew was knighted for the capture,¹⁴³ possibly because it was the first capture of a frigate in the French Revolutionary Wars. His officers, having distinguished themselves in the action, were commended and recommended in their captain's dispatches; Amherst Morris, the first lieutenant, was promoted to commander.¹⁴⁴ As this was the first frigate action of the war, it received considerable public and official attention;¹⁴⁵ Pellew's account of the battle was written on June 19th, and it was immediately published in the June 18th-22nd edition of the *London Gazette*.

¹⁴⁰ Edward Pellew, "Copy of a Letter from Captain Edward Pellew, of His Majesty's Ship La Nymphe, to Mr. Stephens, Dated off Portland, June 19, 1793," (*The London Gazette*, June 18, 1793): 517

¹⁴¹ Israel Pellew had been a commander on half pay when the war began

¹⁴² Mark Lardas, *British Frigate vs. French Frigate: 1793-1814*, (London: Osprey Publishing 2013): 58

¹⁴³ Robson, 19

¹⁴⁴ C. Northcote Parkinson, *Edward Pellew, Viscount Exmouth, Admiral of the Red*, (London: Methuen &, 1934): 80-96

¹⁴⁵ Ibid

After HMS *Shannon's* capture of USS *Chesapeake* on June 1st 1813, Captain Philip Broke's dispatches praised the actions of all of his men, and while he particularly praised his officers, he also mentioned several members of the ship's lower deck. Broke praises the sacrifices of those killed, and names several warrant and petty officers.¹⁴⁶ Of his second and third lieutenants, Wallis and Falkiner respectively, Broke writes: "I beg to recommend these officers most strongly to the Command-in-chief's patronage, for the gallantry they displayed during the action,"¹⁴⁷ and for their leadership roles following Broke's injuries.¹⁴⁸ Broke also praised several of the ship's sailors for their actions during the battle:

It is impossible to particularize every brilliant deed performed by my officers and men, but I must mention, when the ship's yard arms were locked together, that Mr. Cosnahan, who commanded in our main-top, finding himself screened from the enemy by the foot of the topsail, laid out at the main yard arm to fire upon them, and shot three men in that situation. Mr. Smith, who commanded in our foretop, stormed the enemy's fore-top from the foreyard arm, and destroyed all the Americans remaining in it.¹⁴⁹

Shannon's victory came after a series of defeats against the American Navy which shocked the British navy and the public. *Shannon's* victory was the first naval victory in the War of 1812, and the joy over the event resulting in a generous offering of promotions to the *Shannon's* officers, and Broke himself was awarded a baronet.¹⁵⁰

There was some resistance to the trend of noting particular officers in dispatches. Following the Glorious First of June (June 1st, 1794), Admiral Earl Richard Howe wrote to the First Lord of the Admiralty, Lord Chatham, expressing that he felt that the victory

¹⁴⁶ Philip Broke, "Philip Broke to T. Bladen Capel, Senior Officer at Halifax, Shannon, Halifax, June 6 1813," *The London Gazette*, (July 6, 1813): 1329-1330

¹⁴⁷ Ibid

¹⁴⁸ Ibid

¹⁴⁹ Ibid

¹⁵⁰ "Whitehall, Feb. 1, 1814." *The London Gazette*, (February 5, 1814): 280

was a result of “idea of perfect harmony subsisting on the fleet, as well as concurrent opinion of unexceptionable good conduct of every person having pate in the late engagement.”¹⁵¹ His dispatches reflected this, and did not in particular praise any specific officers. “But I am so assailed to nominate those officers who had opportunity of particularly distinguishing themselves, that I shall proceed in the earliest preparation of it; though fear it may be followed by disagreeable consequences.”¹⁵² Howe’s concern raises an important issue; in actions, ships do not always have equal opportunities to get into action, and officers do not have equal opportunities to distinguish themselves.¹⁵³ Even very skilled and capable officers might never receive enough recognition to be promoted; this encouraged officers further to do what they could to distinguish themselves in battle.

A common stereotype of the Royal Navy of the 18th century is that discipline was harsh and crews were consistently poorly treated. In fact, by the standards of the time, crews were treated well, and there were important incentives to do so. In order for a ship to succeed in battle, its crew had to be properly trained; this was an incentive for officers to sufficiently train their sailors. Most captains during the Napoleonic Wars also recognised that crews performed the best when they were well-treated. Mistreated crewmen could endanger an officer’s reputation, especially if it resulted in a defeat or a loss of a ship.¹⁵⁴ Mistreating crewmen could also result in court martials. Lieutenant Robert Graeme, commander of HM cutter *Viper*, was court martialled in 1793 for many offenses, including withholding provisions from his crewmen.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ Richard Howe, 1st Earl Howe, “Ill-Feeling after the Glorious First of June, 1794: Admiral Lord Howe to Lord Chatham, First Lord of the Admiralty, 19 June, 1794,” *BND, Hattendorf, et all*, 543

¹⁵² *Ibid*, 543

¹⁵³ *Ibid*

¹⁵⁴ Wareham, *Star Captains*, 213-220

¹⁵⁵ J. Smith, et al, “John Smyth, Charles Pybus, and Philip Affleck To Thomas Pasley, Captain of HMS *Bellerophon* Given the 23rd July, 1793,” ADM 2/1117, The National Archives

Due to the decentralized nature of officer entry into the navy, and due to Admiralty policy, there was an overabundance of officers in the navy. This overabundance of officers allowed the navy to filter out officers who were not of suitable quality, and it also encouraged competition among the officers of the navy for promotions and appointments. The scarcity of promotions, appointments, and commands meant that officers of the navy had to continuously exert themselves to their utmost in order to remain employed.

Conclusion

Prize money was highly desired by both officers and crewmen alike, and served as a very effective method of motivating the navy's personnel while also contributing to Britain's wartime goals (the reduction of enemy merchant vessels and commerce raiders). The navy's basic requirements for commissions ensured that the officer corps had a degree of competency. Even personal and political interest could not allow officers to bypass usual patterns of promotion, nor could it act as a substitute for actual skills. Attaining promotions and appointments was no easy matter, as at every grade there was an overabundance of officers. The difficulties of attaining promotions and employment in the navy as an officer served as another effective method of motivation. It, along with the temptation and allure of prize money, encouraged the navy's officers to be energetic and proactive, or to be what was called "zealous" at the time. The Admiralty's management of the officer corps ensured that a trained and competent body of men commanded the navy, who were highly motivated and encouraged to do their duty, to demonstrate zeal, and to distinguish themselves in action against Britain's enemies.

Chapter Three: “Engage the Enemy More Closely”

Introduction

The Royal Navy encouraged its officers and crewmen to be zealous, energetic, and proactive in fulfilling their duty. An offensive spirit, or ethos, was prominent within the Royal Navy. It was established by the navy’s regulations, through the Articles of War and Fighting Instructions. Because of the competition among naval officers for employment and promotion, and the encouragement of offensive attitudes, the officers and crewmen of the navy strove to bring enemy ships to battle. As a result of Britain’s naval victories during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, the navy’s personnel not only wanted to bring the enemy to battle, but were extremely confident of victory.

The Royal Navy was a strong practitioner of the military philosophy: “the best defense is a strong offense.” The Royal Navy defended Britain’s economic and territorial integrity not just by defending Britain’s coasts and trade routes, but by attacking the enemy directly. Britain’s naval strategy during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars focused on proactive means of defense – blockades, pre-emptive strikes, and fleet actions were used to degrade enemy naval strength and protect Britain’s interests. Britain’s strategic interests depended on an offensive-based strategy; its success depended on a fleet of officers and crewmen influenced by the same offensive dogma.

Expectation and Encouragement of an Offensive Ethos in the Royal Navy

During the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, the Royal Navy operated on an ethos that emphasized proactive and offensive tactics and strategies, rather than

reactive or defensive ones. Prize money, competition for promotions and appointments, and the navy's own regulations facilitated an offensive spirit, or ethos, among the navy's officers and, to a lesser extent, crewmen. This resulted in the officers and men of the navy actively seeking out chances to engage the enemy. Officers were expected to be zealous, a contemporary term meaning energetic and active. Zealous officers were patriotic, and fulfilled their duty with energy and enthusiasm, principally displayed as an eagerness to engage the enemy.

The Royal Navy's Articles of War regulated and governed the behaviour of officers and seamen of the navy, and prescribed punishments for those who violated the Articles. The articles, as revised in 1749, reflect the offensive ethos of the navy, ensuring that the navy's personnel performed their duties based on that ethos. Articles twelve and thirteen, in particular, demonstrate this:

12: Every person in the fleet, who through cowardice, negligence, or disaffection, shall in time of action withdraw or keep back, or not come into the fight or engagement, or shall not do his utmost to take or destroy every ship which it shall be his duty to engage, and to assist and relieve all and every of His Majesty's ships, or those of his allies, which it shall be his duty to assist and relieve, every such person so offending, and being convicted thereof by the sentence of a court martial, shall suffer death.

13: Every person in the fleet, who through cowardice, negligence, or disaffection, shall forbear to pursue the chase of any enemy, pirate or rebel, beaten or flying; or shall not relieve or assist a known friend in view to the utmost of his power; being convicted of any such offense by the sentence of a court martial, shall suffer death.¹

The failure to do one's utmost to engage enemy ships and fleets was a crime punishable by death. These amendments came after the Royal Navy suffered a major defeat at the Battle of Toulon (February 22nd, 1744), where a British fleet failed to decisively engage the enemy fleet, which enabled gave the Spanish fleet dominance in the Mediterranean, a

¹ "The Articles of War – 1757," HMS Richmond, Accessed October 14, 2014.

disaster for the British war effort. ,² Following the battle, the British commander-in-chief, Admiral Thomas Mathews, and seven British captains were court martialled and dismissed from the service for failing to bring about a decisive engagement despite having a numerical superiority.³

In 1757, another admiral was court martialled for failing to do his utmost; this time, it resulted in an execution. After the French besieged Minorca (April of 1756), an important British naval base in the Mediterranean, the Admiralty sent Vice-Admiral John Byng with a hastily formed fleet to lift the siege. He claimed that his fleet was undermanned and ill-equipped due to the haste in which it was assembled, and Byng had his misgivings about the mission from the start.⁴ After a brief engagement with the French fleet off Minorca, on May 20th, 1756, Byng held a council of war on board his flagship, which consisted of himself and of the expedition's senior officers (including eleven captains and the army's commanding general). The council considered the opinions of the expedition's engineers and a previous council of war which had been held in Gibraltar, as well as the damage which had been sustained in the brief action on the 20th. The council unanimously decided that even if the French fleet was defeated, the expedition lacked sufficient strength to lift the siege. Furthermore, they decided that losses sustained by Byng's fleet could endanger Gibraltar,⁵ and so Byng and his force returned to Gibraltar, hoping to get additional ships and men to attempt to relieve Minorca.

² Ibid

³ Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 243-245

⁴ Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 265-266

⁵ John Byng, "Decisions before the Battle of Minorca, 1756: Council of War on the Flagship," *BND, Hattendorf, et al*, 380-381

Soon after the fleet's arrival in Gibraltar, Byng was arrested and court martialled (quite to his surprise).⁶ Byng was acquitted of cowardice, but charged with failing to do his utmost to relieve the siege. Many in the Admiralty and the government did not want to execute Byng, but the Articles of War dictated execution for the offense. The House of Commons passed a resolution to commute the sentence, but it was revoked by the House of Lords. Prime Minister William Pitt then appealed to King George II for clemency, but this was also refused.⁷ He was executed on the 14th of March, 1757, by firing squad. Following this, Voltaire mentioned this event in his political satirical novel, *Candide*:

"And why kill this Admiral?"

"It is because he did not kill a sufficient number of men himself. He gave battle to a French Admiral; and it has been proved that he was not near enough to him."

"But," replied Candide, "the French Admiral was as far from the English Admiral."

"There is no doubt of it; but in this country it is found good, from time to time, to kill one Admiral to encourage the others."⁸

Voltaire's commentary is interesting; he suggests that the Admiralty executed Byng for not being "close enough" to the enemy and engaging them in battle. The navy's leaders were indeed upset by Byng's failure to decisively engage the French fleet; the loss of Minorca was blamed on Byng's failure. While many regretted his execution, the decision of the court martial clearly established that the failure to "do one's utmost in engaging the enemy," as they called it, was unacceptable in the navy. This was important for the Admiralty, as the limitations of communications meant that the commanders-in-chiefs and the captains under their command often operated without direction from London.

⁶ Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 266-267

⁷ Some historians suggest that the feud between Pitt and George II over George II's Hanoverian titles caused this

⁸ Voltaire, "The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Candide*, by Voltaire," Internet Archive. January 1, 2006. Accessed February 14, 2015

The Articles of War codified an offensive ethos for the navy, and Byng's execution ensured that the presence of superior forces was not necessarily an excuse to withdraw from battle. The Articles of War were supported by the competition for promotions and appointments in the navy. Officers who failed to demonstrate their zeal by engaging in battle, even against superior odds, could face a court martial or extended unemployment. Only a few months into the war, Lieutenant Robert Graeme (captain of HM cutter *Viper*) was court martialled for many offenses, one of which was for failing to engage a lightly armed French privateer, "as he ought to have done, but ordered the Cutter under his command to be put about for the land."⁹ This combination of naval law and informal policies created a naval tradition and culture within the fleet which hinged on an offensive spirit.

Even with this offensive spirit, it was acceptable for captains or commanders of small squadrons to run from vastly superior forces. In 1801, HMS *Speedy*, a 14-gun brig-sloop commanded by Commander Thomas Cochrane, sensibly ran from a French squadron of vastly superior firepower. His court martial following the action acquitted him for the loss, and he was subsequently promoted a few months later. Naval ships facing less impossible odds would have been forgiven for running, as well. However, the navy encouraged its officers to fight actions against superior odds both through the navy's laws and through the competitive nature of promotion and appointments. As a result of this, many of the officers and crewmen of the navy actively sought out battles and were excited about the prospects of them.

For officers successful actions meant glory and recognition, an invaluable resource in the highly competitive naval officer corps. Any sort of action could give an

⁹ J. Smith, et al, ADM 2/1117

officer the potential to distinguish himself; because of the competition for promotions and appointments, it was extremely common for admirals and captains to mention their subordinate officers in their dispatches after battles. There was also the slim but highly desired possibility of being rewarded with honours and titles after successful naval actions. Prize money was also a highly desired motivation for the navy's officer corps. Success in battle, therefore, led to career, social, and financial advancements for officers. Commander Thomas Cochrane, in his autobiography, describes his disappointment at only being a spectator at the Second Battle of Algeciras, and not being able to participate in it.¹⁰ These motivations, as well as the navy's Articles of War, created a culture within the navy where the Admiralty, the officers, and the crewmen of the navy overall expected and sought engagements with enemy ships and fleets.

Sailors in the navy did not have the same incentives as officers; it was unusual, but not impossible, for ordinary seamen to be commissioned. Prize money, however, was a very important motivation for the navy's sailors. Contemporary texts do indicate that many of the navy's lower deck sailors were highly motivated to get into action, and were confident of British victory. J. Powell, a topman in HMS *Revenge*, comments in a 1805 letter to his mother on the advantages of serving in the navy as opposed to on a merchant ship, saying that: "a man of war is much better in war time than an Indiaman for we laugh at and seek the danger they have so much reason to dread and avoid."¹¹ Powell suggests that he and his fellow crewmembers would welcome a battle and were confident about

¹⁰ Thomas Cochrane, 10th Earl of Dundonald, and George Butler Earp. *The Autobiography of a Seaman*. 2d ed. Vol. 1. (London: R. Bentley, 1860): 60-72

¹¹ J. Powell, "Life in a ship of the line, 1805: Letter from J. Powell, topman in the *Revenge*, to his mother, 12 June 1805 (original spelling)," *BND, Hattendorf, et al*, 304-305

the outcome.¹² James Scott, an able seaman in HMS *Royal Sovereign*, also was confident about engaging the enemy, as he considered his ship a worthy match for any enemy ship,¹³ this despite a recognition among the crew of *Royal Sovereign* and the navy overall that she was a slow sailor.¹⁴ Battles meant prize money, but they also meant a deviation from ordinary naval duties which could be monotonous and dull.

Officers and crewmen serving in blockading fleets were often eager for battle with the enemy. Blockade duty was comparatively dull; it often consisted of sailing back and forth within a short area for long periods at a time. During the blockade of Brest, in particular, crews were subjected to frequent rough seas which made sailing much more difficult. Men on blockading fleets frequently complained about the lack of chances to acquire prize money; their longing was made worse by the presence of large French, Spanish, and Dutch fleets trapped in port. In 1796, Captain (later Vice Admiral) Cuthbert Collingwood displayed an eagerness for battle while on blockade; he complained that the French fleet did not come out of Toulon. At the same time, he remarked that the British fleet was ready for action and had been standing in close enough to Toulon that the French “may count our guns.”¹⁵ After the resumption of the war, Midshipman W. Lovell complained about his time on the Toulon blockade from 1803 to 1804, as the fleet remained at sea for over a year without returning to port. The weather made it hard work, which was made worse by the lack of any chances for prize money.¹⁶ Blockade duty was

¹² Ibid

¹³ James Scott, “Letters from the Lower Deck – James Scott,” *Five Naval Journals: 1789-* Thursfield, H. G., and H. G. Thursfield, eds. 1817, (London: Navy Records Society, 1951): 353-354

¹⁴ Robson, 127

¹⁵ Cuthbert Collingwood, “Lord Collingwood to Edward Blackett,” *Private Correspondence of Lord Collingwood*, Edward Hughes, ed. London: Navy Records Society, 1957): 74

¹⁶ Lovell, “The Water over Toulon, 1803-1804,” 126-127

among the most uneventful of naval duties; the resulting boredom fueled the eagerness for battle within the fleet.

In 1799, while in command of the Mediterranean Fleet, Admiral Lord Keith found himself outnumbered by the separated French and Spanish squadrons (at Brest and Cadiz, respectively); together he believed they had 48 ships of the line to Keith's 14. Despite this huge disparity in force, his correspondence with his sister and with Horatio Nelson shows that he was eager to engage the enemy. He preferred that the two fleets remained separated, but when they did in fact join up he was annoyed that they did not attempt to engage Keith's smaller fleet: "they ought all to be hanged. They had 48 ships of the line and 16 frigates!"¹⁷ Unfortunately for Keith, despite his pursuit, he was unable to catch the combined French and Spanish Squadron, and so no fleet action occurred.¹⁸

A balance was maintained in the navy between the encouragement of offensive action and prize taking mentality of the fleet, and the strategic requirements of the fleet during the war. Much of the tasks and duties which fell to the Royal Navy's fleets and ships did not provide many opportunities for prize taking or engagements. Such tasks included blockade duty and convoy protection; both offered few opportunities to engage enemy ships or to take prizes. As well, even ships deliberately hunting for prizes did not necessarily encounter any. While Commodore of a frigate squadron operating in the English Channel and the Eastern Atlantic, Sir Edward Pellew captured many prizes; HMS *Indefatigable* took nine prizes between March 11th and 20th, 1796, and at least two

¹⁷ Extracts from Letters from Keith to his sister, Mary Elphinstone, 37-38

¹⁸ Ernest Harold Jenkins, *A History of the French Navy, from Its Beginnings to the Present Day*. (London: Macdonald & Jane's, 1973): 233-235; Keith to his sister, 37-38

frigates were captured by his squadron during 1796.¹⁹ However, the vast majority of *Indefatigable's* log entries from that period do not mention even spotting enemy vessels.²⁰ Pellew and his squadron were very successful at prize taking; many ships never took prizes.²¹ These duties were necessary, however. Prize money was not an incentive to carry out convoy protection or blockade duty. The overabundance of naval officers comes into play here; because there was high competition for commands, officers knew that in order to get appointed to ships of stations where there were high chances of earning prize money or distinguishing oneself in action, they had to first do their duty. If a captain abandoned a convoy or left a blockading fleet to hunt prizes, said officer would be court martialled and would never receive another command again, assuming he was not outright executed or dismissed from the service.²²

Even when required to fulfill other duties, the men and officers of the Royal Navy were committed to the offensive tradition. When Nelson's squadron was pursuing the French Fleet en route to Egypt in 1798, Nelson recognised the importance of keeping his squadron together. To this effect, his orders to the squadron state that his captains were not to leave sight of the other ships, due to the importance of the mission at hand.²³ However, those same orders also state that they can leave the squadron when they have a very good chance of bringing an enemy to battle. It was "of the greatest importance that the squadron should not be separated," according to Nelson, yet he still gave his captains the freedom to leave sight of the squadron if there is an "almost certainty of bringing a

¹⁹ Edward Pellew, *Logbook of Indefatigable*, (1796 Mar 1-1797 Feb 28). ADM 51/1171, The National Archives, UK

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Ibid

²² Articles of War, Allen, 204–231

²³ Horatio Nelson, "To the Captains of the Orion, Alexander and Vanguard: Gibraltar Bay, 7th May" Lewis, 71

Line-of-Battle Ship of the Enemy to Action.”²⁴ This demonstrates the navy’s offensive mentality; opportunities to bring an enemy to action were considered to be important enough even when commanders acknowledged that they had very important missions at hand.

The Royal Navy operated on an offensive ethos, which was actively encouraged by the Admiralty through its written laws, its competitive promotion and appointment system, and the promise of prize money. This created a service in which officers and crewmen actively sought action whenever possible, and overall men were in high spirits when presented with the prospect of engaging in battle. Formal and informal naval regulations and policies created an offensive tradition and culture among the navy’s personnel.

Offensive and Proactive Strategy and Tactics in the Royal Navy

The Royal Navy’s overall strategy during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars reflected the cultivation of an offensive and battle-eager mentality in the navy’s officers and crewmen. The British navy’s war goals consisted of protecting commerce, as it enriched the nation, protecting British territory from invasion, and reducing enemy naval forces so that they could not pose a threat.²⁵ There were several strategies used to accomplish these goals; blockading enemy fleets, pre-emptive strikes, and attempts to bring enemy fleets to battle using innovative tactics. All of these strategies reflected the offensive ethos of the navy. Rather than defending Britain from the shores of the English Channel, the Royal Navy defended Britain’s interests by taking the war to enemy shores and seeing out the enemy.

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Z.E., “Z.E. to Editor of Naval Gazette,” Tracy Vol I, 317; Robson, 117-118

The British used blockades of enemy ports throughout their naval history, but during the Napoleonic Wars these blockades intensified. During the first years of the French Revolutionary Wars, major British fleets still spent a long time in port. This allowed French and allied fleets to get to sea often between 1793 and 1799. Many of these expeditions accomplished nothing, but these failures were often the result of French and allied failures and weather, not British efforts. The 1799 French attempt to relieve Malta and Egypt from Coalition forces was defeated because of poor French planning, leadership, and supply, and bad weather. Keith's pursuing fleet easily weathered the gales which drove the French fleet back to port, but it was the weather which defeated the expedition, not a battle with Keith's fleet.²⁶ Later in the war, however, British blockades of French and allied ports intensified, thereby preventing enemy fleets from getting to sea at all.

These blockades were a proactive strategy for defending Britain's interests. The Channel Fleet protected Britain from invasion and protected British trade in the ocean around Britain not by defending the Channel or Britain's coastline; it did so by blockading the French fleet at Brest. A major geographic handicap for France was the lack of ports capable of supporting large numbers of ships of the line; there were no such ports between Brest and Holland (which during French occupation was blockaded by the British North Seas Squadron), and outside of the Channel France only had a small number of major ports.²⁷ This meant that the French and allied fleets could only operate from either end of the Channel, whereas Britain had dozens of deep-water ports along its Channel coast. French and allied fleets had to leave the English Channel to return to port,

²⁶ Jenkins, 233-235

²⁷ Herman, 220

and only had a small number of ports to operate from. This made it easy for the Royal Navy to establish blockading squadrons outside of all of France's major ports during the Napoleonic Wars. Blockading squadrons were Britain's first lines of defense against Bonaparte's planned invasion of England, from 1803-1805. The Channel Fleet, under Admiral William Cornwallis, arrived off Brest on 18th May, 1803, the day before Britain declared war on France.²⁸ The Mediterranean Fleet initiated its blockade of Toulon immediately after news arrived from London that war had been declared.²⁹

Blockades were difficult, particularly the blockade of Brest, where the Western Squadron (during the Seven Years War) and the Channel Fleet (during the Napoleonic Wars) were subjected to harsh gales which could drive the ships off station, cause extensive damage, or drive ships dangerously close to the shore, and they were expected to keep at sea for as long as possible³⁰ They were also monotonous and dull; aside from variations due to strong weather, blockading fleets performed the same manoeuvres week after week.³¹ For men in a navy driven by an offensive spirit, it was not an exciting mission, and many eagerly hoped that the enemy fleets would attempt to get to sea, where they could be engaged and defeated.

However, the blockades were very effective. When the continuous and close blockades of France were maintained, France's fleets were effectively immobile. Small squadrons and single ships were still able to escape from ports, but during the Napoleonic Wars major French fleets were seldom able to get to sea. Britain's ability to keep the

²⁸ Robson, 102

²⁹ Lovell, "The Water over Toulon, 1803-1804," 126-127

³⁰ Z.E., "Z.E. to Editor of Naval Gazette," Tracy Vol I, 317; Robson, 117-118; Lovell, "The Water over Toulon, 1803-1804," 126-127; Cuthbert Collingwood, "Blockade Duty: Day to Day Routine, 1803: Rear-Admiral Cuthbert Collingwood to his Brother-in-law, J.E. Blackett, *Venerable*, off Brest, 9 August 1803," 422-423 *BND*, Hattendorf, et al; "Blockade Instructions to Hawke off Ushant, 1759: Admiralty Instructions to Admiral Sir Edward Hawke, 18 May 1759," *BND*, Hattendorf, et al

³¹ Lovell, "The Water over Toulon, 1803-1804," 126-127

French and allied fleets in port had two major impacts on the naval war. One was that France's ability to use its fleets was seriously hindered, as they were largely unable to escape when needed. This was one of the major barriers to Napoleon's invasion plans in 1804 and 1805. His plan called for the French and Spanish fleets to escape from port simultaneously and link up before heading to the English Channel to escort Bonaparte's invasion army to England. However, the Brest squadron was unable to escape when the Toulon fleet did. The second major impact was that while the ships of the Royal Navy were at sea, the French and allied navies remained stuck in port, while at the same time the French, Spanish, and Dutch navies were deprived of many essential naval stores from the Baltic Trade.³² Napoleon believed that the British were wearing down their ships while the French preserved theirs,³³ and some Englishmen agreed.³⁴ While the British ships received more damage at sea than the French did in port, Britain's blockade (and commerce raiding) cut off much of France's imports of naval stores.³⁵ However, the crews under blockade had little to no chance to train in sailing manoeuvres or gunnery; when these fleets did get to sea, their seamanship and gunnery (in terms of accuracy and rate of fire) was well below British standards, whose crews were well drilled due to long periods at sea.

Britain undertook several pre-emptive strikes throughout the war against nominally neutral powers to prevent resources from falling into the hands of the French and allies. One noteworthy instance was in 1804. Spain was neutral, but only because Spain paid an annual indemnity to Napoleonic France. As the Admiralty knew about the

³² Robson, 117-118

³³ Jenkins, 241-242

³⁴ Z.E., "Z.E. to Editor of Naval Gazette," Tracy Vol I, 317

³⁵ Robson, 117-118

treaty which made the payment obligatory, and recognised that Spain was likely to support France either directly or indirectly in its war against Britain, a decision was made to intercept the treasure convoy carrying Spain's indemnity to France in Spanish American bullion.³⁶ Commodore Graham Moore was dispatched with HMS *Indefatigable* (44-guns), HMS *Lively* (38-guns), HMS *Medusa* (38-guns), and HMS *Amphion* (32-guns) to intercept the convoy.³⁷ After the Spanish refused to surrender, the British frigates engaged the convoy during the Action of 5th October; one Spanish frigate exploded but the remaining three, along with the treasure, was captured. This attack brought Spain into open conflict with the British. However, the British felt that depriving France of its Spanish bullion was worth the prize of Spain entering the war, especially as Spain was indirectly supporting France to begin with.

In 1801 and 1807 Britain conducted pre-emptive strikes against Denmark – both strikes were directed against the capital city, Copenhagen. The first pre-emptive strike was the naval Battle of Copenhagen (2nd April, 1801), which occurred following Britain's failed attempts to diplomatically dislodge the League of Armed Neutrality. Britain saw the League as pro-French, and attacked the Danish fleet at Copenhagen to attempt to break up the League by force. Under the command of Admiral Sir Hyde Parker, a hard fought naval action ensued, which resulted in a ceasefire agreed to by the Danish due to threats made by Nelson (who commanded the fleet's inshore squadron, which did the bulk of the fighting). Denmark agreed to allow diplomacy to resume, and the League was subsequently dissolved (however, this was also largely a result of the dramatic change of policy of its leading member, Russia, after Tsar Paul I's assassination).

³⁶ Robson, 104-105

³⁷ Graham Moore, "Indefatigable, at Sea, 08, 6, 1804," *The London Gazette*, (October 20-23): 157

Six years later, Britain again became concerned about Denmark's role in the war. Following Napoleon's defeat of Prussia and the beginning of the anti-British Continental System, Britain became very worried about Napoleon invading Denmark to seize the Danish fleet (thereby replacing the losses at Trafalgar with new ships of the line and comparatively well-trained crews) and to cut off British trade with the Baltic (a very important source of naval supplies).³⁸ No state of war existed between France and Denmark; despite this, Britain besieged Copenhagen from 16th August to 5th September, 1807 to seize the Danish fleet.³⁹ French intervention in Denmark was not certain, but the likelihood was considered to be enough for the British to take steps to prevent Denmark's powerful naval assets falling into French hands, even though it led to a seven-year long war between Denmark and Britain.

While blockades were recognised as very successful naval strategies by the British, some argued that the best way to ensure British safety and to achieve the above-mentioned British war aims was to engage and defeat enemy fleets in battle. They argued that blockades can protect trade and keep enemies in port, but only tempting fleets into battle where they can be destroyed actually removed the threat that enemy battle fleets posed.⁴⁰ E.Z., when writing to the editor of the *Naval Chronicle* in 1804, stated that he believed that defeating enemy fleets was a war aim in and of itself.⁴¹ Many naval officers agreed with this philosophy, as the navy's officers were encouraged to seek battles for many reasons. While the blockade of Brest under Cornwallis was very tight, due to the more frequent bad weather in the Atlantic Ocean around Brest, British blockades of

³⁸ Robson, 117-118

³⁹ *Davies*, 173

⁴⁰ E.Z., "Z.E. to Editor of *Naval Gazette*," 317

⁴¹ *Ibid*

Toulon during the Napoleonic Wars were comparatively less close.⁴² In fact, under Nelson, the Mediterranean Fleet blockaded Toulon from far enough away in an effort to tempt the enemy fleet to come out, so that Nelson's fleet could engage it,⁴³ due to Nelson's strong desire to bring enemy fleets to battle.⁴⁴

Traditional naval tactics, which were based upon the line of battle, were supplanted to great effect during the war in favour of a decentralized battle approach by the British. Most naval battles fought during the 18th century were indecisive engagements; Palmer argues that fleets in these actions tended to fight in lines of battle, which were extremely limited in terms of command and control. Lines of battle were an attempt to apply Enlightenment rationalism to naval warfare, utilizing extensive signal flag systems for admirals to control fleets in action.⁴⁵ A long series of instructions for fleet manoeuvres and conduct for battles fought in lines of battle formations comprises Lord Howe's 1782 "Instructions respecting the Order of Battle and conduct of the fleet, preparative to and in action with the enemy."⁴⁶ However, these actions tended to be indecisive.⁴⁷ Some admirals used a more decentralized approach to naval battles, such as Admiral George Anson at the Battle of Cape Finisterre (14 May, 1747), Rodney at the Battle of the Saintes (9 April 1782 – 12 April 1782), Howe at the Glorious First of June (1 June 1794), and Jervis at the Battle of Cape St. Vincent (14 February 1797).⁴⁸ Both

⁴² Robson, 119; Collingwood, "Blockade Duty: Day to Day Routine, 1803," 422-423

⁴³ Robson, 119; Lovell, "The Watch over Toulon, 1803-1804," 126-127

⁴⁴ Horatio Nelson "To Captain The Hon. Henry Blackwood, HMS *Euryalus*, Victory, October 4th, 1805, Cadiz, East 17 Leagues," Lewis 142

⁴⁵ Palmer, 681-695

⁴⁶ Lord Howe, "Instructions respecting the Order of Battle and conduct of the fleet, preparative to and in action with the enemy" "Project Gutenberg's Fighting Instructions, 1530-1816, by Julian S. Corbett." Gutenberg: Fighting Instructions, 1530-1816 Publications Of The Navy Records Society Vol. XXIX. September 15, 2005. Accessed January 13, 2015. Henceforth: Gutenberg's Fighting Instructions

⁴⁷ Palmer, 695-703

⁴⁸ Ibid

Howe and Jervis ordered their ships to abandon their own line of battle to pass through the French and Spanish lines (respectively). This was done to capitalize on the superior gunnery and seamanship of British officers and crews, as when the British crossed into enemy lines the enemy formation was broken, turning the battle into a pell mell general melee where Britain's superior seamanship and gunnery made a difference.⁴⁹ The "breaking of the line" was later reflected in the Navy's Fighting Instructions; Lord Howe, in 1799, again issued Instructions to the fleet which detailed tactics to pass through and break up enemy lines.⁵⁰ The most famous practitioner was Nelson. Nelson's approach to fleet actions at the Nile and Trafalgar was to rely on the skills and insight of individual captains. Lines of battle were abandoned when the battle began, and ships were encouraged to act independently to bring enemy ships to battle. Nelson's tactics and Fighting Instructions were simplistic but very effective, and well-received by his men, in part because the navy's offensive spirit was embedded in them.⁵¹

Battles fought in a decentralized melee fashion were successful in part due to the skills and training of ships' crews. The navy needed its crews to be well trained and many efforts were taken to do so. During the rush to mobilise the fleet after the outbreak of war in 1803, First Lord of the Admiralty St. Vincent issued orders prohibiting the use of crews from commissioned warships to prepare other ships for sea, so that they would instead focus on training.⁵² The Admiralty needed to mobilize as many ships as possible to enlarge Britain's reduced peacetime navy in 1803; however the Admiralty preferred that those ships already in commission had well trained crews. Training on board ship

⁴⁹ Davies, 155-161; Robson, 16

⁵⁰ Lord Howe, "Instructions for the conduct of the fleet preparatory to their engaging, and when engaged, with an enemy," Gutenberg's Fighting Instructions

⁵¹ Horatio Nelson and Bronte, "To Lady Hamilton: Victory, 1st October 1805: Admiral Lord Nelson,"

⁵² Jervis, "To Lord Keith, 23 March, 1803" *Letters of Lord St. Vincent*, 280

could be effective quickly. William Richardson, a new volunteer in the Royal Navy, wrote that he hardened to life at sea very quickly.⁵³ He and 150 fellow new recruits who were terrible at small arms fire and gunnery when they joined the ship became excellent at both after only a few weeks.⁵⁴ The best way to train a man of war's crew was to actually be at sea, and during the Napoleonic Wars the Royal Navy's ships were at sea for long periods. Ships might stay at sea for many years without spending time in port; this was made possible by an extensive effort by the navy's victualing board and individual commander-in-chiefs to supply ships with fresh food.⁵⁵ With well-trained crew, ships were able to maintain high maneuverability and fast, accurate gunnery in battle.

The skill and calmness of the navy's officers was also an important factor in the success of decentralized tactics. Nelson provided very few orders after the battles began, and instead relied on individual captains to do the right thing, and his correspondence shows that he had complete confidence in his captains.⁵⁶ The captains under Nelson's command were very receptive to his plans; they involved minimal planning, and instead focused on encouraging captains to individually engage enemy ships at close range.⁵⁷ Success in battle, then, depended on the seamanship and tactical abilities of individual captains and their subordinate officers, and their commitment to the navy's offensive ethos. The offensive nature of Nelson's orders for the Battle of the Nile was commended by his captains. A crucial aspect of leadership was an officer's calmness and composure

⁵³ William Richardson, "William Richardson," *Every Man Will Do His Duty*, ed. Dead King and John B. Hattendorf (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997): 3-11

⁵⁴ Ibid

⁵⁵ Nelson and Bronte, "To the Respective Captains: Nelson and Bronte: Victory, off Cadiz, 10th October 1805," Lewis, 147

⁵⁶ Lewis, 123-152

⁵⁷ Nelson and Bronte, "Trafalgar The Order of Battle: Vice_Admiral Lord Nelson's memorandum on how he proposed to fight the battle, 9 October 1805," *BND*, Hattendorf, et al, 424-425

in battle.⁵⁸ Seeing an officer calm while under fire boosted the morale of men under their command. Dillon recollected that, during the Glorious First of June, shot passed so close to the captain that he went into a state of shock momentarily, while others were killed around him. He quickly collected himself, and proceeded to walk along his quarterdeck, munching on a biscuit, “as if nothing had happened.”⁵⁹ His calmness under fire inspired both Dillon (who was fighting his first battle) as well as the crew of HMS *Defense*.⁶⁰ Vice Admiral Collingwood, second in command at the Battle of Trafalgar, is recorded to have “nonchalantly munched on an apple” while his ship was being hit by a close range broadside.⁶¹ In a court martial over the loss of HMS Hannibal during the First Battle of Algeciras (6 July 1801), Hannibal’s captain Ferris was acquitted in part because of his conduct during the battle, which the court martial determined was “brave, cool, and determined...”⁶²

British naval tactics, both in decentralized fleet actions as well as in minor battles, hinged on both the navy’s offensive spirit and on close-range battle doctrine. Dispatches, correspondence, and accounts of battles demonstrate that the British frequently attempted to bring enemy ships into close action. During the Battle of Trafalgar, HMS *Victory* flew the signal “Engage the enemy more closely,” until its masts were shot away.⁶³ British captains preferred to bring their ships into battle at close range, where their broadsides could pummel enemy hulls. The goal was to damage enemy ships and crews enough so that they would surrender, or enough for the British to board and capture them.⁶⁴ The

⁵⁸ Wareham, *Star Captains*, 161-168

⁵⁹ William Dillon, “The Glorious First of June, 30 May-1 June 1793,” Lewis: 13-30

⁶⁰ Ibid

⁶¹ Robson, 128

⁶² “Naval Court Martial for the Loss of H.M.S. Hannibal,” Tracy, Vol II, 227-228

⁶³ Robson, 126

⁶⁴ Nelson and Bronte, “Trafalgar The Order of Battle,” 425

focus on capturing enemy vessels was good for officers and crew, who would receive prize money for captured ships, but also for the Admiralty, as most captured warships were taken into the Royal Navy.⁶⁵ Many felt that bringing the enemy into close action was a good way to bring about decisive victories.⁶⁶ The French Navy, by contrast, preferred to fight at longer ranges. French battle doctrine emphasized damaging enemy rigging in battle through long-range fire. The aim was to restrict enemy ships from maneuvering, allowing French ships to out maneuver the enemy ships in battle or to escape from them.⁶⁷

The frequent use of carronades by the Royal Navy, compared to other naval forces, demonstrates the navy's preference for short range engagements. While most ships were armed primarily with long guns, most ships had a few carronades, short range but devastating guns. Carronades had several advantages over long guns, including being lighter and easier to aim.⁶⁸ Their light weight meant that ships could fire much stronger broadsides than ships armed only with long guns. A sloop which was capable of carrying 4-pounder guns, due to the strength of its timbers, could potentially carry 18-pounder carronades instead, giving it a broadside over 4 times as strong.⁶⁹ The downside was the short range, but since the navy preferred to fight at close range anyway, this was not too much of a concern. In 1780, shortly after the invention of the carronade in Scotland, Philip Stevens, Secretary of the Admiralty, as well as the members of the naval Board of

⁶⁵ "The Dear Knows" "Napoleonic Era Naval Warfare Tactics: French vs. British." The Dear Surprise. May 4, 2010. Accessed March 31, 2015. <http://www.thedearsurprise.com/napoleonic-era-naval-warfare-tactics-french-vs-british/>.

⁶⁶ E.Z., "Z.E. to Editor of Naval Gazette," 317

⁶⁷ "The Dear Knows,"; Robson, 123-145; Davies, 57-71

⁶⁸ Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*: 420-421; Lardas: 23-39

⁶⁹ "The introduction of carronades, 1780: The Navy Board to Philip Stephens, Secretary of the Admiralty, 18 December 1780" *BND*, Hattendorf, et al, 496-498

Ordinance believed carronades were useless to the navy.⁷⁰ Rather than reject carronades, the Navy Board instead experimented by arming ships with carronades to determine if they were as effective in battle as long guns “at the common distances at which ships generally begin to engage.”⁷¹ Captain John MacBride, whose ship carried carronades, informed the navy board that the carronades were extremely effective at close range. While the enemy fought with muskets at close range (along with their long guns), his crew utilized both muskets and carronades, the latter proved to be more effective than any amount of enemy musketry when firing grape or canister.⁷² Carronades were very effective short range guns, which gave the British an advantage in short range battles. As the Royal Navy preferred to fight at short range, carronades were quickly added to most ships in the fleet. Comparatively, other navies were slower to introduce carronades, and this was because of contrasting battle tactics in enemy fleets.

Offensive Tactics, Strategies, and Expectations in Fleet Actions

The fleet actions fought by the Royal Navy during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars demonstrate the offensive nature of British naval tactics, as well as the offensive mentality of the navy. Accounts of fleet actions show the fleet’s eagerness to get into battle and the high expectations for victory within the fleet. British and French accounts also demonstrate the contrasting nature of French tactics and the poor morale and poor cooperation of the French and allied fleets.

⁷⁰ Ibid

⁷¹ Ibid, 497-498

⁷² “The effects of carronades, 1781: Captain John MacBride to the Navy Board, 12 January 1781” *BND*, Hattendorf, et al, 499

Glorious First of June

By 1794, the famine in France (which had set the French Revolution in motion) had not subsided, and the French Republic found itself waiting eagerly for a grain convoy from America to arrive. The convoy was so vital that in May the entire French Atlantic Fleet set out from Brest to escort the convoy. The British Channel Fleet, under Admiral Lord Howe, set out to intercept the grain convoy and its naval escort. A limited engagement was fought on May 29th after weeks of maneuvers, and the main battle was fought on June 1st.⁷³ William Dillon, a midshipman on HMS *Defense*,⁷⁴ describes an eagerness for battle among the officers and crewmen of his ship and also among the other ships in Admiral Howe's fleet. After Lord Howe signalled the fleet to give chase to the recently sighted French ships on May 29th, Dillon witnessed "a state of excitement as manifested totally beyond my powers of description. No one thought of anything else than to exert himself to his utmost ability in overcoming the enemy."⁷⁵ He describes that the sight of the enemy battle fleet seemed to cheer up the Defenses,⁷⁶ and removed many of their sulky looks. Dillon's narrative even shows that he and the crew became disappointed when an increasing wind obliged them to reef their topsails and thereby slow their progress towards the enemy.⁷⁷ When the skirmish on the 29th ended as the two fleets drifted apart, Dillon and the other Defenses were astonished that Howe did not signal to renew the action.⁷⁸

⁷³ William Dillon, "The Glorious First of June, 30 May-1 June 1794: Midshipman William Dillon, HMS *Defence*," Lewis, 13-30; Robson, 11-18

⁷⁴ Dillon, "The Glorious First of June," Lewis, 13-30

⁷⁵ *Ibid*

⁷⁶ Crews of naval vessels were referred to by the name of their ship.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*

⁷⁸ *Ibid*

His description of June 1st, when the major battle took place, describes similar sentiments of confidence and cheerfulness. Despite being overawed by the carnage among his own ship,⁷⁹ Dillon recollected that he was confident that the enemy had been soundly beaten, and received far more damage than the British had. Many of the Defenses, including his fellow midshipmen, were very cheerful after the battle, even one who had been covered in a wounded man's blood during the fighting. Such was their confidence that, once again, they were surprised and disappointed that Admiral Howe did not order a pursuit of the fleeing French fleet. The British crews were highly confident of victory; Dillon suggested that, had the action been renewed, "the most splendid victory ever achieved on the ocean over our enemy," and many other officers agreed.⁸⁰ Lord Howe himself expressed disappointment that his fleet was unable to pursue the enemy further in his letter to the First Lord.⁸¹ Many in the fleet felt that Howe's elderly age and lack of energy and zeal were the reasons for which the British Fleet did not pursue the enemy; they would have preferred the action to have been renewed.⁸²

Howe's plan for the battle on the 1st was for each British ship to tack out of the British line and pass through the French line. Each British ship would then engage an enemy counterpart and cut off their retreat downwind. The aim was to force as many of the French ships as possible to surrender, thereby destroying the French Atlantic fleet and depriving the grain convoy of its naval escort.⁸³ However, not all ships passed through the French line; some were too damaged from the last battle to do so, and some captains

⁷⁹ The sheer amount of spent shot which had lodged itself on the quarterdeck of the *Defense* made Dillon question how anyone had survived the battle

⁸⁰ Ibid, 28

⁸¹ Lord Howe "Ill-Feeling after the Glorious First of June, 1794: Admiral Lord Howe to Lord Chatham, First Lord of the Admiralty, 19 June 1794," *BND*, Hattendorf, et al, 543

⁸² Ibid

⁸³ Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 430

misunderstood or ignored Howe's signals.⁸⁴ The battle became a confusing melee quickly, and this gave the British an advantage. The French ships were comparatively poorly led and manned, and by the end of the action seven French ships had been lost, whereas no British ships were lost. During the battle, many French ships focused on escaping the British attackers so they could safely get their convoy to Brest; this was done by firing in an attempt to damage British rigging enough for the French ships to escape, which was a common French tactic.⁸⁵ The British, meanwhile, focused on forcing the French ships to surrender, and fired into enemy hulls rather than into their rigging.⁸⁶ Dillon's account describes more rigging damage on British ships than French ships, a result of differing gunnery tactics. Twice during the battle, a French three-decked ship of the line was in a perfect position to rake HMS *Defense*, and times the broadsides damaged HMS *Defense*'s rigging, but did little or no damage to the ship's hull or crew.⁸⁷

The grain convoy was vital for the French Republic, as the famine which instigated the Revolution had not yet abated. Therefore, the objectives of the French fleet were to escort the grain convoy to ensure it arrived in France safely. The convoy did in fact arrive safely, and, despite the tactical defeat of the Atlantic Fleet, the campaign was considered a success in France.⁸⁸ The British, meanwhile, considered the battle to be a great success due to their tactical victory. The Royal Navy was more concerned about successfully engaging the French fleet, rather than the escape of the grain convoy.⁸⁹ Some controversy did develop in Britain, but it was not related to the grain convoy; it

⁸⁴ Robson, 15-18

⁸⁵ Robson, 12-16

⁸⁶ Ibid

⁸⁷ William Dillon, "The Glorious First of June," Lewis: 13-30

⁸⁸ Robson, 16-18

⁸⁹ Ibid

was because some, including many in the fleet, felt that an even greater victory could have been achieved.⁹⁰

Battle of the Nile

Following Sir John Jervis' (he was titled Lord St. Vincent for his victory) victory at the Battle of Cape St. Vincent (14 February, 1797), he dispatched newly-promoted Rear Admiral Horatio Nelson with a small squadron to hunt down the French Toulon Fleet, which had departed Toulon with an army expedition commanded by General Napoleon Bonaparte, heading to a location unknown to the British. Nelson did not know where Bonaparte's fleet was headed, and constantly complained in his correspondence about his lack of frigates.⁹¹ Despite the setback of not having any scouts for his squadron (the primary role of frigates in large squadrons), and a storm which completely dismantled Nelson's flagship, his correspondence shows that he remained committed to hunting down and engaging the enemy. His pursuit was so thorough, in fact, that he had arrived at Bonaparte's intended location before the French had arrived themselves, resulting in Nelson leaving before the French arrived (as he assumed they had gone elsewhere).⁹²

On August 1, Nelson's squadron returned to Egypt and found Bonaparte's fleet anchored in Aboukir Bay. Both fleets had the same number of ships of the line – thirteen. However, many in Nelson's fleet felt that the French force was superior to their squadron. John Jup, an ordinary seaman on HMS *Orion*, remarked in a letter to his parents following the battle that the French were of superior force to the British squadron.⁹³

⁹⁰ Lord Howe "Ill-Feeling after the Glorious First of June, 1794" *BND*, Hattendorf, et al, 543; Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 432

⁹¹ Horatio Nelson, "To Lord St Vincent: Vanguard, June 11th" "To Earl Specner To Lord St Vincent: Vanguard, off the Island of Ponza, 15th" "June To Lord St Vincent: Vanguard, 12th June" Lewis, 76-78

⁹² Robson, 54-56; Horatio Nelson, "To Lady Nelson: Syracuse, July 20," Lewis, 83

⁹³ John Jup, "Battle of the Nile: John Jup, ordinary seaman, to his parents, Orion, 26 November 1798 [original spelling]," *BND*, Hattendorf, et al, 421-422

Captain Edward Berry, Nelson's flag captain, wrote that the French fleet was superior in firepower, and were situated in a secure and formidable position.⁹⁴ The French Fleet was anchored close in to the shore, seemingly allowing the French to be able to concentrate on fighting on only one side of their ships. The ships of the line were flanked by shore batteries as well as the fleet's frigates.⁹⁵ French victories on the Continent had given French artillery a very impressive reputation.⁹⁶ And while the two fleets had the same number of ships of the line (without counting the four French frigates), the French had a superiority in firepower; Britain's ships were all seventy-four-gun ships, aside from one sixty-four-gun ship and one fifty-gun ship. Comparatively, the French had no ships of the line with fewer than seventy-four guns, and instead had three eighty-gun ships and a hundred and twenty-gun flagship.⁹⁷ This gave the French fleet a much larger combined broadside weight than the British squadron, and those on board the British squadron recognised they were out gunned.

Regardless of this disparity in force, the men of the British squadron were enthusiastic about getting into battle. Nelson himself was determined to either perish or destroy the enemy.⁹⁸ George Elliot, the signal midshipman of HMS *Goliath*, shared his admiral's enthusiasm. He was disappointed that another ship signalled that the enemy was in sight before he was able to, which deprived his ship of that "little credit."⁹⁹ *Goliath* and HMS *Zealous* both raced each other into the bay in determination to be the first into action; Berry described the two leading ships as having "the honour to lead

⁹⁴ Edward Berry, *The Battle of the Nile: The Captain's View*, 1 August 1798: Captain Sir Edward Berry, HMS *Vanguard*," Lewis, 87-90

⁹⁵ Ibid

⁹⁶ Ibid

⁹⁷ Davies, 104

⁹⁸ Berry, "The Battle of the Nile: The Captain's View," Lewis, 87-90

⁹⁹ George Elliot "The Battle of the Nile: The Midshipman's View, 1 August 1798: Midshipman the Hon. George Elliot, HMS *Goliath*," Lewis, 85-87

inside and to receive the first fire from the van ships of the enemy...”¹⁰⁰ The French’s strong position seemed formidable to the approaching British ships, although the navy’s offensive spirit encouraged the British crews.

As the British ships approached the French line, many in the fleet, including the officers on HMS *Vanguard* and HMS *Goliath*, noticed that there was enough room between the French ships and the shoreline for British vessels to pass through.¹⁰¹ Several ships, including HMS *Goliath*, passed between the French ships and the shoreline and engaged the French on the landward side, while the remaining vessels, including HMS *Vanguard*, engaged on the seaward side. The British ships anchored within pistol-range of the French ships, initially holding fire as they got into position despite suffering enemy fire.¹⁰² In doing so, the British ships concentrated their fire on half of the French line. Nelson provided very little direction once the battle began; he ensured that every captain knew Nelson’s general plans and objectives before the battle,¹⁰³ and Nelson allowed his captains to use their own judgement during the action. His plans were the result of his confidence in the skills of his captains and their crews.¹⁰⁴

Accounts of the battle demonstrate the contrast between British and French morale during the battle. Before the battle, many in the British Squadron were confident of a British victory, despite superior French forces. As the battle raged, the British confidence translated into high morale. Elliot’s account describes how, when HMS *Theseus* passed HMS *Goliath* (engaged with a French ship) the *Theseuses* gave the

¹⁰⁰ Berry, “The Battle of the Nile: The Captain’s View,” Lewis, 87-90

¹⁰¹ Elliot, “The Battle of the Nile: The Midshipman’s View,” 85-86

¹⁰² Berry, “The Battle of the Nile: The Captain’s View,” 87-88

¹⁰³ Ibid

¹⁰⁴ Horatio Nelson, “To the Captains of the Ships of the Squadron: Vanguard, off Mouth of the Nile, 2nd Day of August, 1798: Admiral Sir Horatio Nelson,” Lewis, 98

Goliaths a resounding three cheers. Hearing this, a French officer attempted to match this by calling for his own crew to give three cheers. It was a feeble attempt, and resulted in a weak cheer and laughter from the British vessels.¹⁰⁵ French morale during the battle was poor. One of the HMS *Goliath*'s gunner's mates, John Nichol, contrasted the poor French morale after the battle to French morale during the American Revolutionary War. During the American War, Nichol remembers captured French seamen being in very high spirits; "they were as merry as if they had taken us," rather than the other way around.¹⁰⁶ French prisoners taken during the Battle of the Nile, however, were sullen and downcast, "as if each had lost a ship of their own."¹⁰⁷

Nelson's victory was a result of superior British gunnery and seamanship. Overall, the British crews were better trained at both sailing and gunnery than their French counterparts. The British ships received very little damage as they approached the French line while under fire,¹⁰⁸ and French officers complained about the lack of experienced seamen in their fleet.¹⁰⁹ By allowing his captains to act independently, Nelson ensured that as his ships anchored alongside the French van and centre each French ship was being attacked by a superior force in terms of guns and rate of fire.¹¹⁰ After three hours of fierce gunnery, the ships of the French van and centre had either surrendered or been destroyed.¹¹¹ The ships of the rear of the French line, under *Comte-Admiral* Pierre-Charles Villeneuve, then attempted to escape. British ships attempted to

¹⁰⁵ Elliot, "The Battle of the Nile: The Midshipman's View," 85-87

¹⁰⁶ John Nicols, "The Battle of the Nile: Gunner John Nichol in Action, 1 August 1798: John Nicols, HMS *Goliath*," Lewis, 90-91

¹⁰⁷ Ibid

¹⁰⁸ Blanquet, "So Disproportioned a Struggle": A French Officer at the Battle of the Nile, 1 August 1798: Rear-Admiral Blanquet," Lewsi, 92-98

¹⁰⁹ Ibid

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 93

¹¹¹ Ibid; Berry, "The Battle of the Nile: The Captain's View," 90

pursue, but due to rigging damage sustained during the battle, the British ships were unable to prevent Villeneuve escaping with two ships of the line and two frigates.¹¹² The British Squadron captured nine ships of the line and destroyed two, depriving Napoleon's army in Egypt from its naval protection.

Battle of Trafalgar

The most famous, and last, fleet action of the Napoleonic Wars, Trafalgar was one of the most decisive uses of decentralized British battle tactics. The battle was fought by a fleet eager to do battle with the enemy, commanded by zealous and determined officers, and overall dominated by the navy's offensive ethos. Vice-Admiral Nelson, as commander-in-chief of the Mediterranean Fleet, expressed an eagerness to bring the French Fleet to battle long before October 1805; in a letter to the captain of HMS *Euryalus*, Henry Blackwood, Nelson tells Blackwood that he desperately wants to bring about an action with the enemy: "I pant for by day, and dream of at night."¹¹³ For this reason, Nelson's blockade of the French at Toulon was very loose – Nelson hoped to tempt the French under Villeneuve to come out so that he could destroy them in battle. This resulted in Villeneuve escaping and, after a sortie to the West Indies, linking up with the Spanish at Cadiz. Despite Villeneuve's previous escape, Nelson continued a loose blockade at Cadiz, still hoping to engage the Franco-Spanish squadron. In October, Villeneuve (after hearing about his imminent sacking for the failure of Napoleon's invasion campaign) and the Combined French and Spanish fleet set sail from Cadiz. Nelson's fleet quickly caught up with the French, who had by now turned to sail back towards Cadiz.

¹¹² Robson, 61-62

¹¹³ Horatio Nelson "To Captain The Hon. Henry Blackwood," Lewis, 142

Nelson's plan for the Battle of Trafalgar was based on the principle of decentralized tactics which were detailed in his October 9th 1805 Memorandum (itself based on ideas from an earlier memorandum written in 1803, during Nelson's first days commanding the Mediterranean Fleet).¹¹⁴ It declared that a battle fought in a line of battle formation would be indecisive, and could allow the enemy to escape. Therefore, the British fleet would instead sail in two columns towards the enemy; they would abandon the line as they approached so the British ships could pass through and break up the French line of battle. The British ships would capture or destroy the French ships in the centre and rear divisions.¹¹⁵ By the time it took the enemy van division to tack and come back into the battle, Nelson was confident that the British would have defeated the French centre and rear.¹¹⁶ Nelson was to command one of the columns himself, and Vice-Admiral Lord Collingwood, his subordinate, was to command the second column; he gave Collingwood complete freedom to direct his column as he saw fit after he received Nelson's initial orders before the battle. He also encouraged his captains to use their own initiative during the battle, both in the memorandum and in person. Above all, he encouraged his captains to engage the enemy directly at close range; "But, in case signals can neither be seen or perfectly understood, no captain can do very wrong if he places his ship alongside that of an enemy."¹¹⁷ Nelson's goal was to annihilate the enemy fleet, and he was confident in his captains' abilities to do so if they used their own judgement. His fleet was made up of officers and crewmen who were eager to fight the enemy, and preferred to do it at close range, where their guns were most effective. It was for that

¹¹⁴ Gutenberg's Fighting Instructions

¹¹⁵ Nelson and Bronte, "Trafalgar The Order of Battle," *BND*, Hattendorf, et al, 424-425

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*

reason that Nelson kept the signal “Engage the enemy more closely” flying from his flagship’s masts until they were shot away in the heat of battle, which was a common trend in the Royal Navy in battle.¹¹⁸

Memoirs and correspondence from the Mediterranean Fleet before the Battle of Trafalgar again demonstrate the eagerness of British officers and crewmen to get into action, but also the fear and uneasiness expected before a battle. Midshipman William Badcock’s account begins with an assertion that his ship, HMS *Neptune*, was a very poor sailor, but remarked that the crew sailed her faster the morning of the Battle of Trafalgar than he had ever seen her sail.¹¹⁹ A marine officer on board HMS *Ajax* describes the gun crews of the ship as very anxious to get into battle; many crammed the heads out of gunports to glimpse the enemy fleet, while others discussed the individual French and Spanish ships, as many had been engaged by the British before.¹²⁰ As the two fleets loomed closer, some of the early eagerness among the crew gave way to fear and apprehension. C.R. Pemberton describes the general silence which prevailed below decks on one of Nelson’s ships, as well as and his own fear: “but don’t you imagine, reader that I was not frightened in all this.”¹²¹ His ship had cleared for action hours before the first guns opened fire, and the long wait and anticipation of the coming carnage seemed to quell any excitement among the crew that is demonstrated by other accounts.¹²²

As the twenty-seven British ships of the line approached, the thirty-three French and Spanish ships of the line opened fire on the leading ships (HMS *Victory* and HMS

¹¹⁸ Davies, 160

¹¹⁹ William Badcock, “The Morning of Trafalgar at 10am: Midshipman William Badcock, HMS *Neptune*,” Lewis 158

¹²⁰ Ellis, “The Morning of Trafalgar: The Scene Below Decks on HMS *Ajax*: Second Lieutenant Ellis, Royal Marines,” Lewis, 158

¹²¹ C.M. Pemberton, “The Morning of Trafalgar: British Gun Crews Stand by for Action: C.M. Pemberton,” Lewis, 160

¹²² Ibid

Royal Sovereign). Despite being under fire for a long period, neither ship suffered much damage until after it had passed through the Combined Fleet's line. In fact, at least one French sailor, master-at-arms Pierre Servaux, considered the long-range French gunnery to be "our bad habit in the French navy," as it essentially was wasted ammunition. Marquis Giequel des Touches, of *Intrepide*, commented that since the British approached the Combined Fleet at a very slow pace, logically they should have been torn to pieces by the Combined Fleet's gunnery. However, he admits that the French gunnery was not on par with the British, stating that: "Nelson knew his own fleet – and ours."¹²³ The British, meanwhile, held fire until they were within a very short range, and their opening broadsides were much more effective. HMS *Royal Sovereign*'s initial broadsides were not fired until she had passed through the French line, and quickly did considerable damage to the *Fougueux*, Servaux's ship, and *Santa Ana*. Later in the battle, HMS *Victory* was engaged in a heated close-range action with *Redoubtable*, commanded by captain Jean Lucas. *Redoubtable* held its own against *Victory*,¹²⁴ (Robson argues that *Redoubtable* had the best trained crew in the entire Combined Fleet¹²⁵) but HMS *Temeraire*, coming to *Victory*'s aid, fired a devastating close-range broadside into *Redoubtable*. Following the battle, Lucas wrote: "it is impossible to describe the carnage produced by the murderous broadside of this ship." Thanks to the blockade in 1803 and 1804, the French and Spanish crews, on average, could not maneuver as well as their British counterparts and could not match their rate of fire. Because of this, Nelson's strategy produced a decisive victory; by ordering his ships to break up the enemy line,

¹²³ Giequel des Touches, "Lay her head for the *Bucentaure!*": The Solo Attack of *Intrepide*, 2pm: Marquis Giequel des Touches, *Intrepide*," Lewis, 176-178

¹²⁴ A marine in the maintop of *Redoubtable* fired the shot which killed Nelson

¹²⁵ Robson, 133

Nelson produced a general melee. This enabled his captains to use the superior gunnery and seamanship, as well as the offensive spirit, of themselves and their crews to overwhelm the enemy fleet.

The British captured and destroyed a huge portion of the Combined Fleet, and did even greater damage to the French navy's already depleted morale. While Britain did not lose any ships, France and Spain each lost eleven, and only one third of the Combined Fleet's ships of the line escaped. Tactically, Nelson's victory at the Nile had been more decisive, but Trafalgar is rightfully remembered as a British tactical and strategic victory.

High morale and eagerness among the British fleet did not dissipate after the battle, nor after the storm which sunk most of Britain's prizes. Captain Edward Codrington, when asked about the condition of his ship, told Collingwood that "we had knotted out rigging, fished our wounded foremast, and helped ourselves out of the prizes to many articles for which we were much distressed, and that we were then fit and *ready* for any service whatever."¹²⁶ However, in a letter to his brother, Codrington admitted that if he had been honest, he and his ship would have been sent back to England. His ship had been significantly damaged in the battle, but due to his zeal he lied to the admiral about his ship's condition.¹²⁷

Offensive Tactics, Strategies, and Expectations in Minor Actions

While there were only a handful of fleet actions during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, there were many minor actions, including single ship duels,¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Edward Codrington, "Captain Edward Codrington of the Orion to his brother, William Bethell, 15 November 1805," *BND*, Hattendorf, et al, 426

¹²⁷ *Ibid* 426-427

¹²⁸ Single ship duels are actions fought between two opposing naval vessels, which are concluded before any other ships appeared on the horizon

small squadron actions, and amphibious assaults. Single ship battles were very rare, however, as most naval actions involved more than one ship on each opposing side. Between 1793 and 1814, 45 duels were fought by British and French frigates, and others were fought between British ships and Dutch, Spanish, Danish, and American ships. However, hundreds more battles involving small numbers of ships were fought during the same period. Like with fleet actions, these battles also demonstrate the nature of the navy's offensive ethos.

Many British captains, commodores, and admirals fought engagements where their forces were heavily outnumbered. During the Action of 6 May 1801, the brig-sloop HMS *Speedy* (commanded by Commander Thomas Cochrane) captured a xebec-rigged¹²⁹ frigate *Gamo*, while only losing three men.¹³⁰ The battle occurred when the Spanish frigate was dispatched to hunt down the *Speedy*, as under Cochrane the sloop had taken dozens of prizes. *Gamo* carried seven times the broadside weight as *Speedy*, which was armed with 14 four-pounder guns. The *Gamo* carried 30 guns, 8 and 12 pounders, and two 24-pounder carronades, and had six times the crew as *Speedy*. Despite the disparity in force, Cochrane engaged and captured *Gamo* by flying false colours to get in close, and subsequently (after flying British colours) utilizing *Speedy's* superior maneuverability to offset her inferior firepower.¹³¹ Shortly following this, Rear Admiral Sir James Saumarez fought two engagements in Algeciras Bay, on July 6th and July 12th-13th. During the first action, Saumarez's six ships of the line attacked an anchored French squadron of three ships of the line and one frigate; the French accounts emphasize that

¹²⁹ A Mediterranean style ship with lateen rigging

¹³⁰ Cochrane, 60-72

¹³¹ Ibid

Saumarez's fleet outnumbered theirs,¹³² but Saumarez's dispatches point out that the French were supported by many gunboats and shore batteries.¹³³ Both sides were heavily damaged, but the British withdrew after one of their ships (HMS *Hannibal*) ran aground and was captured.¹³⁴ *Hannibal's* captain, Solomon Ferris, was court martialled for his ship's capture during the battle, but he was acquitted because when his ship ran aground, the court considered the move to be a "gallant and well-judged attempt."¹³⁵ Despite the loss of *Hannibal* and his squadron's damaged state (one ship of the line was unable to re-rig its masts), Saumarez set out again six days later after making only hasty repairs after a Spanish force arrived to rescue the French squadron. Saumarez chased and engaged the combined squadron of nine ships of the line and three frigates by encouraging each captain to sail and engage the enemy independently. His success was the result of the speed and efficiency at which his ships were able to make repairs, and the "zeal and intrepidity of the officers and men" of his squadron.¹³⁶

While typical frigates during the latter eighteenth century were armed with between 28 and 38 guns (usually no larger than 18-pounders), in the 1780s France began building frigates carrying 40-44 guns, with main batteries consisting of 24-pounder guns; *Pomone* (44 guns) was one of the first to be launched.¹³⁷ Initially, the Admiralty was concerned, and began to acquire their own heavy frigates. Three British 64-gun ships (*Indefatigable*, *Anson*, and *Magnanime*) were razed into 44-gun frigates, but keeping

¹³² Rear Admiral de Saumarez, "Two Actions in the Straights: From the French Official Paper, The Moniteur, Paris, July 11," Tracy, Vol II, 219

¹³³ James Saumarez, "Victory and Defeat: From the Biographical Memoirs of Sir James Saumarez, Bart." Tracy Vol II, 219-224

¹³⁴ James Saumarez, "Copy of a letter from **Rear-Admiral Sir James Saumarez**, to Evan Nepean, Esq. dated on board his Majesty's ship Caesar, at Gibraltar, the 6th of July." Tracy, Vol II, 224-226

¹³⁵ Halloway, "Naval Court Martial for the Loss of H.M.S. *Hannibal*," Tracy, Vol II, 228

¹³⁶ James Saumarez, "Rear Admiral Sir James Saumarez: Casear, off Cape Trafalgar, July 12, 1801," 229-231

¹³⁷ Mark Lardas, *American Heavy Frigates, 1794-1826*, (Oxford: Osprey, 2003): 11

their 24-pounder main batteries. Others, like HMS *Endymion* and *Cambrian*, were purpose built 24-pounder heavy frigates.¹³⁸ However, during the French Revolutionary Wars it quickly became apparent that Britain's smaller 18-pounder frigates were more than capable of defeating France's heavy frigates.¹³⁹ Of the 45 single ship frigate duels fought between British and French frigates between 1793 and 1814, nine of Britain's 35 victories¹⁴⁰ were against French ships with superior broadsides (up to 250% the firepower of the victorious British frigates), and Britain won every frigate duel where the two sides had even firepower.¹⁴¹

Because 18-pounder frigates were able to defeat French heavy frigates, and had the benefit of being cheap and required small crews, Britain's heavy frigates became less prioritized in the navy. When the fleet was rearming in 1803, HMS *Endymion* (a 44-gun 24-pounder armed frigate) was placed on a low priority. Lord St. Vincent explained to Lord Uxbridge in late May that because *Endymion* required much larger crews than 18-pounder frigates, the British preferred to man multiple smaller frigates rather than to man one heavy frigate.¹⁴²

The British Royal Navy and public were shocked and outraged in 1812 and 1813, after three British frigates (*Guerriere*, *Macedonian*, and *Java*) were defeated by two of America's heavy frigates, USS *Constitution* and USS *United States*.¹⁴³ These three

¹³⁸ Lardas, *American Heavy Frigates*, 11

¹³⁹ Lardas, *British Frigate vs French Frigate* 69

¹⁴⁰ Britain won 35, France won 3, and 7 were inconclusive, having no clear winner. Lardas, *British Frigate vs French Frigate* 69

¹⁴¹ Lardas, *British Frigate vs French Frigate* 69

¹⁴² Sir John Jervis, Lord St. Vincent, "To Lord uxbridge, 26 May, 1803," In *The Letters of Admiral of the Fleet the Earl of St. Vincent Whilst First Lord of the Admiralty, 1801-1804*. Vol. II. David Bonner Smith (London: Navy Records Society, 1927):

¹⁴³ Sawyer, "Copy of a letter from Vice-admiral Sawyer to John Wilson Croker, Esq, dated on board H.M.S. Africa at Halifax, the 15th Srptember 1812," Tracy, Vol V, 113-114; Henry Hotham, "Marine Law: Commodore Henry Hotham, Captain of the Fleet, President," Tracy, V, 118-119; D. Chads, "Lieutenant D.

frigates were essentially armed with fifty guns and carronades, with main batteries of 24-pounders.¹⁴⁴ British commentators described these vessels as having the broadside weight of a 64-gun ship, and outclassed the British frigates stationed in American waters.¹⁴⁵ They were designed to be able to run from anything they could not fight, and be able to take on any enemy frigate. A writer to the *Naval Chronicle* in 1812 criticised the Admiralty for not stationing Britain's heavy frigates on the American coast when relations between Britain and the United States began to break down. The reason was that Britain was confident that their regular frigates could handle America's heavy frigates, as they did the French. However, the American ships were well-crewed and well led, and proved more than a match for the British. Still, this did not diminish the British offensive spirit. During the court martial over the loss of HMS *Guerrire* to USS *Constitution*, *Guerrire*'s captain Dacres, while he acknowledged the importance of the American's superiority in firepower (described by Vice admiral Sawyer as nearly double that of *Guerrire*¹⁴⁶), he argued that the American victory was mostly due to fortune, and asked for the chance to command another frigate of *Guerrire*'s firepower to enable him to challenge the *Constitution* again.¹⁴⁷

By mid-1813, after the loss of three frigates and several sloops, the Royal navy was desperate to bring one of America's frigates to battle. It was for this reason that HMS *Shannon*, commanded by Captain Philip Broke, encouraged the American frigate USS *Chesapeake* to come out of Boston while *Shannon* was blockading the port alone. Broke

Chads to J.W. Croker, Esq: United States Frigate *Constitution*, off St. Salvador, December 31, 1812," Tracy Vol V, 116-117

¹⁴⁴ Mark Lardas, *American Heavy Frigates*, 3-13

¹⁴⁵ R, "The American Super Frigates: "R" to the Editor, October 13, 1813," Tracy Vol V, 114-115

¹⁴⁶ Sawyer, "Copy of a letter from Vice-admiral Sawyer," 113-114

¹⁴⁷ "Captain Dacres' Defence," Tracy Vol V, 113-114

sent a letter ashore to Captain James Lawrence, inviting him to come out from Boston to engage the Shannon in even combat, and admitting that Shannon will soon be forced to quit the blockade due to a shortage of provisions. His letter demonstrates his eagerness to engage in battle

As the Chesapeake appears now ready for sea, I request you will do me the favour to meet the Shannon with her, ship to ship, to try the fortune of our respective flags. [...] You will feel it as a compliment if I say that the result of our meeting may be the most grateful service I can render to my country; and I doubt not that you, equally confident of success, will feel convinced that it is only by repeated triumphs in even combats that your little navy can now hope to console your country for the loss of that trade it can no longer protect.¹⁴⁸

Lawrence never actually received the letter, as USS *Chesapeake* was already heading out from port to engage the British before the letter arrived. The resulting engagement was quick; after fifteen minutes of gunnery, the British had boarded and captured the frigate, and the victory was celebrated in the British press. In the announcement of Broke's baronet in 1814, the *Chesapeake* is described as being of superior force to Broke's Shannon;¹⁴⁹ in fact, the two frigates were fairly even matched, with the *Chesapeake* having only a mildly stronger broadside.

Conclusion

Throughout the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, the influence of the navy's offensive ethos was dominant. It was present in the nature of the Navy's Articles of War, in the culture of naval personnel, and in the nature of naval strategy and tactics. The Navy utilized many strategies and practices which were defensive and reactive in

¹⁴⁸ Philip Broke, "From Captain Philip Broke to Captain Lawrence: His Britannic Majesty's Ship Shannon off Boston, June 1813," Tracy Vol V, 162-163

¹⁴⁹ "Whitehall, February 1, 1814 : Announcement of Broke's Baronetcy." (*The London Gazette*, February 5, 1814): 280

nature, such as convoys¹⁵⁰ and coastal defense (through the Sea Fencibles). Overall, however, the Admiralty felt that an offensive-minded fleet could best protect British interests. The Admiralty encouraged and expected offensive action in the fleet, and the personnel of the navy subscribed to it. Engaging the enemy meant prize money, promotion, and career advancement. This meant that the ships of the navy actively sought to bring enemy ships to battle, and by degrading enemy naval power, the security and economic prosperity in Britain was assured. It also ensured that Britain could afford to finance the European Coalitions needed to offset Britain's army inferiority during the war against the French Republic and Empire.

¹⁵⁰ "Convoys: Instructions and signals for keeping company, 1783," *BND*, Hattendorf, et al, 415-418

Conclusion

How important was the Royal Navy during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars? Edward Ingram argues that the impact of the Royal Navy on the course of the war and the defeat of Napoleon was minimal.¹⁵¹ However, many contemporaries, including Napoleon, and many modern naval historians seemed to recognise the importance of Britain's naval power during the Napoleonic Wars.¹⁵² The Navy enabled Britain to achieve its war aims throughout the conflict. The Navy, though by no means Britain's only line of defense, protected the British Isles from invasion, the British economy from the ravages of economic warfare, and allowed Britain to offset the weakness of its army.

Critics argue that Napoleon's 1805 invasion of England was cancelled because of the entry of Russia and Austria into the war, not because of the Battle of Trafalgar (which was fought after the invasion was called off, unknown to Nelson).¹⁵³ At the same time, even after Austria and Russia declared war, Napoleon still planned to invade England quickly while his enemies in the east prepared for war. It was the indecisive Battle of Cape Finisterre (22nd July, 1805) which stopped his invasion, as Villeneuve's fleet, after being heavily damaged by a British squadron under Vice Admiral Robert Calder, gave up on its mission to sail to the English Channel and instead returned to Cadiz.¹⁵⁴¹⁵⁵ Realizing that time was running out, the outraged Napoleon marched his army to deal with Britain's allies, and by 1806 had defeated Austria and Prussia, and secured an alliance with

¹⁵¹ Edward Ingram, "Illusions of Victory: The Nile, Copenhagen, and Trafalgar Revisited," *Military Affairs* 48, no. 3 (1984): 140-143.

¹⁵² Robson, 3; Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery* (London, 1976), 146; Herman, 371-417

¹⁵³ Herman, 371-394

¹⁵⁴ Robson, 114-118

¹⁵⁵ While the battle resulted in the end of Napoleon's Invasion Campaign, Calder was nonetheless court martialled for failing to fight and win a decisive battle

Russia.¹⁵⁶ But he was unable to invade Britain due to the material and morale losses sustained at Trafalgar.¹⁵⁷ He instead turned to the Continental System, in an attempt to starve Britain's economy of its European markets. However, due to the British blockade, it was the French economy (and those of other European powers) which suffered more. Russia responded by withdrawing from its alliance with France and reopening trade with Britain. Napoleon responded in turn with an invasion which cost him over 600,000 men.¹⁵⁸

Britain's army was able to achieve success in small, limited campaigns (such as the many colonial campaigns undertaken throughout the wars or the attack on the French army in Egypt), but had no major success in campaigns on the continent until Sir Arthur Wellesley's campaign in the Peninsular War (there supported by the Portuguese Army and the Spanish guerillas). Britain could, and did, seize most of France's colonial possessions during the war. But its role on the continent, where the vast majority of French army strength operated, was limited. Instead of direct military intervention, Britain used its financial resources to encourage and finance anti-French coalitions which could do the land-based fighting in Europe that Britain's army was not capable of until the end of the wars. Britain's financial strength, along with its ability to project power in colonies away from Europe, was a credit to the activities of the Royal Navy.

The Royal Navy, during the eighteenth century, was managed in a decentralized fashion. This did not change during the 22 year period of warfare with Revolutionary and Napoleonic France and its allies. Communication was slow, and commanders-in-chief of distant stations (even those as close as the Mediterranean) had to act relatively

¹⁵⁶ Robson, 118-119

¹⁵⁷ Robson, 142-143; Herman, 411-413

¹⁵⁸ Merhamn, 411-412; Esdaile, 478-479

independently, with only a few direct orders from London. If a crisis ensued, there was not time to turn to London for orders when operating in the Indian Ocean. This meant that admirals, captains, commanders, and even lieutenants would often have to make decisions independently, so it was important for the navy to be effectively led. The Royal Navy had a series of formal and informal rules, regulations, and traditions which ensured that the navy's officers and men were effective, motivated, and energetic in fulfilling their duties.

Naval rules and traditions regarding prize money and prize taking were vitally important. The British Navy was made up of a diverse group of personnel – its crewmen, while largely from Britain or the British Empire, came from all around the world, and from a variety of backgrounds. While the officer corps was more entrenched in Britain's elite society, many middle-class members of the officer corps could be found, and a minority were not from Britain (such as the American-born Benjamin Hallowell or the former Jamaican slave John Perkins). Prize money, while heavily weighted in favour of officers, was an important motivator for all members of the Royal Navy, regardless of nationality, class, or individual loyalties or feelings of patriotism. Officers and crewmen desired to be stationed in lucrative prize hunting grounds, such as the West Indies.

Naval rules, formal and informal, as well as long standing traditions ensured that the naval officer corps was a competent and effective body of men on the whole. Midshipmen could only become officers in the navy after successfully completing a rigorous oral examination, which tested skills of seamanship and leadership. Not even the influence of the King could advance an officer's career if he was truly incompetent. The influence wielded by Britain's social and political elite was limited by promotion and

appointment rules and traditions. The most powerful sort of influence was that of professional influence (the patronage of the navy's senior officers) which was directly linked to a young officer's merit. The Royal Navy was not a true meritocracy, but the rules, regulations, and traditions of promotion ensured that the navy was effectively led. This can be seen in contrast to the officer corps of the British Army (where commissions were purchased by the elite) and British society more generally, where class divisions were deeply entrenched. Middle class officers were not uncommon. Many of the period's famous officers (such as Lord St. Vincent, Sir Edward Pellew, or Graham Moore) were from the middle class, and some, such as John Perkins, even rose from the lowest classes of British colonial society.

Entry into and promotion in the navy was relatively unregulated by the Admiralty. The Admiralty took very little official notice of young officers before they were commissioned as lieutenants, and promotions often did not take into account the actual demand for officers of each rank. This created an abundance of officers within the naval service. Attaining promotions and appointments was very competitive for naval officers. In order to get ahead and be noticed by the Admiralty, officers had to fulfill their duty, but also had to distinguish themselves in action. This encouraged captains to take training and discipline seriously, as unhappy crews or poorly trained crews did not make victory easy, and could potentially ruin an officer's career. Upon reaching the rank of lieutenant, officers received half-pay when not employed, and upon reaching the rank of post-captain they would automatically be promoted to rear admiral (due to the seniority promotion system) if they lived long enough. However, very few officers would be

content with living ashore on half pay, so many strove to compete with their peers in order to advance careers in the navy's active service.

Above all, the Royal Navy encouraged and expected an offensive ethos in the fleet. This created a culture in the navy which emphasized that ethos. This was closely linked to prize money and the competitiveness of the officer corps as motivations. Officers and crewmen eagerly sought out enemy engagements. As Britain won the vast majority of these engagements, British morale in the fleet was high, leading to British sailors expecting victory even against superior odds. This expectation was impacted by Britain's naval defeats during the War of 1812, but did not diminish.

The guiding offensive ethos of the Navy was central to its grand strategic goals. Britain's war effort and national security relied on dominance of the Royal Navy at sea during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. Reducing enemy merchant fleets degraded enemy finances and resources, and capturing enemy privateers and naval commerce raiders helped to protect Britain's own trade (which was also protected by convoy escorts). The main fleets of the navy spent much of the war blockading French, Spanish, and Dutch naval bases, preventing enemy fleets from getting to sea, training on the open ocean, and threatening British territory or trade. Many British leaders preferred a decisive engagement and destruction of enemy fleets to simply blockading them, as it reduced enemy naval strength and therefore reduced the potential threat to Britain's interests and security. By encouraging the development of the offensive spirit in the navy, the Admiralty was able to motivate its officers and crewmen to actively seek to fulfill Britain's wartime goals and to play an important role in the downfall of Napoleon.

Appendix A: Social and Class Backgrounds of the Royal Navy Officer Corps, 1793-1815

Family backgrounds of British Naval Officers during between 1793 and 1815, From Wareham's *The Star Captains*, 93

Titled: 12%
Gentry: 27.4%
Public Office: 5.7%
MP: 1%
Navy: 24.1%
Army: 7.3%
Church: 8.7%
Medicine: 2.8%
Others: 11%

Appendix B: Selected Chronology of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars

1789	May	Estates General in France meets for the first time since 1614
	June	Conflict between Estates leads to the Third Estate forming the National Assembly
	July	The Storming of the Bastille
	August	Feudalism Abolished in France
1791	June	French Royal Family attempts to flee France, but caught and returned to Paris
	September	The Kingdom of France became a Constitutional Monarchy
1792	April	France declared war on Austria and invaded the Austrian Netherlands. Prussia join the war as Austria's ally
	July	Coalition Army invaded France
	September	Coalition advance halted at Valmy. Kingdom of France was replaced by the First French Republic
1793	January	King Louis XVI executed

	February-March	French Republic declares war on Great Britain, the Dutch Republic, and later Spain
	September	The Terror begins
	June	British Victory at the Glorious First of June
1794	July	The Thermidorian Reaction: The Terror Ends
	January	French Conquest of the Netherlands
1795	February	British Channel Fleet nearly wrecked in Torbay
	August	The Directory assumed power in France
	October	Napoleon Bonaparte quelled a Paris counter-revolutionary insurrection
	October	Spain declared war on Britain, following its defeat against France
1796		Britain evacuated its Mediterranean Bases
	February	British victory over Spain at the Battle of Cape St. Vincent
1797	April	Outbreak of the Spithead Mutiny
	July	Nelson's unsuccessful assault at Santa Cruz de Tenerife
	October	British victory over the Dutch at the Battle of Camperdown
		Treaty of Campo Formio between Austria and France, following Bonaparte's victories in Italy
	August	British victory over the French at the Battle of the Nile
1798	November	British Conquest of Minorca
	May	Bonaparte's Siege of Acre abandoned
1799	November	Bonaparte staged a coup against the Directory and established the Consulate
	June	French victory over Austria at the Battle of Marengo
1800	February	Treaty of Lunéville between France and Austria
1801	July	Two Battles of Algeciras
	March	Treaty of Amiens between Britain and France
1802	August	New Constitution adopted in France – Napoleon becomes First Consul for Life
	May	Britain declared war on France, began the blockade of major French ports

1803	December	Napoleon, in company of the Pope, crowned himself Emperor
1804	July	Battle of Cape Finisterre: French Invasion of England cancelled
1805	October	French Victory over Austria at Ulm
		British Victory over France off Cape Trafalgar
	December	French victory over Austria and Russia at the Battle of Austerlitz
1806	July	Formation of the Confederation of the Rhine in Germany as a French Protectorate
		Holy Roman Empire Abolished – Former Holy Roman Emperor declared himself Emperor of Austria
	September	Prussia joined Britain and Russia in a Coalition against Bonaparte
	October	French Victories at Jena and Auerstadt against Prussia
	November	Berlin Decree – Continental System Initiated
	June	Treaty of Tilsit between Russia and France
1807	October	France and Spain agree to divide Portugal in a secret treaty
	May-July	Following a Portuguese Revolt against the Continental System, French Troops turn on Spain and installed Napoleon's brother Joseph as King of Spain
1808	July	Austrian defeat at Wagram
1809	October	Treaty of Schönbrunn between France and Austria
	June	Following Russia's withdrawal from the Continental System, Napoleon Invades Russia with over 600,000 men
1812	June	The United States declares war on Great Britain
	July	Anglo-Portuguese Victory at Salamanca
	August	USS <i>Constitution</i> captured HMS <i>Guerriere</i>
	September	Russia Evacuates Moscow, suffers an indecisive defeat at Borodino
		France occupies Moscow
	October	French Army begins the Great Retreat from Moscow
		USS <i>United States</i> captured HMS <i>Macedonian</i>

	December	Shattered Remnants of the Grande Armée are expelled from Russia
	January-March	Sixth Coalition against France is formed
1813	June	Anglo-Portuguese victory at Vitoria, French troops expelled from Spain
		HMS <i>Shannon</i> captured USS <i>Chesapeake</i>
	October	Decisive Coalition victory at the Battle of Leipzig
	March	Battle of Paris
1814	April	Bonaparte Abdicates. Louis XVIII is given the French Crown by the Coalition
	May	Following the Treaty of Fontainebleau, Napoleon Bonaparte is exiled to Elba
	March	After escaping from Elba, Bonaparte takes power in Paris
1815	June	Battle of Waterloo, Restoration of Louis XVIII
	October	Napoleon is exiled to Saint Helena

Appendix C: Royal Navy Rating System

Ships of the Line

Rate	Guns	Gun Decks	Crew	Number in Commission 1794	Number in Commission 1814	Comments
1 st Rate	100+	3	850	5	7	
2 nd Rate	90-98	3	750	9	8	
3 rd Rate	64-80	2	650	71	103	74-guns was the most common
4 th Rate	50-60	2	450	8	10	Considered to be Obsolete

Frigates and Post Ships

Rate	Guns	Gun Decks	Crew	Number in Commission 1794	Number in Commission 1814	Comments
5 th Rate	32-44	1-2	200-300+	78	134	Includes “heavy” frigates
6 th Rate	28	1	200-300	22	None	
Post Ship	20-24	1	150-200	10	25	Smallest ships commanded by post-captains

Unrated Vessels

Rate	Guns	Gun Decks	Crew	Number in Commission in 1794	Number in Commission in 1814	Comments
Sloops of War	14-18	1	90-125	76	360	Commanded by Commanders
Cutters and smaller vessels	4-12	1	20-90	N/A	N/A	Commanded by Lieutenants

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