



*Battle of Toulon, 1744*

*The War of the Austrian Succession at Sea*  
*The Western Med.*

*1740-1748*

HISTORICAL COMMENTARY

BY IAN WEIR & DAVID HUGHES  
MAPS BY PAUL DANGEL

The War of the Austrian Succession. Bother. Do I really have to go over all that again? Go read my other works. Better yet, look over the bibliographies from my other works. What's that? You're too busy [lazy]? Sigh...

The War of the Austrian Succession was really a collection of interrelated conflicts, only two of which concern us – the so-called War of Jenkin's Ear (a name coined by the historian, Thomas Carlyle, in 1858) and what might be called the Italian War. Jenkin's Ear was a Trade War, pure and simple, though there were geopolitical reasons for it as well. The Italian War, dignified by historians into a dynastic struggle, was in great measure a glorified cat-fight between two queens. (And that is why, ladies, it was the longest-running part of the conflict).

For the rest, war raged in Germany from December of 1740 to December of 1745, in the Low Countries from the spring of 1744 to the final peace in 1748, and on the high seas around the globe until the dispatch boats brought news of the end of the European war.

### Sources

For an overview of the war as a whole, Reed Browning's *War of the Austrian Succession* is highly recommended. It is a recent work, and despite complaints from some regarding its complexity, this author has found it invaluable on several occasions (and, after all, the war is a complex subject).

As regards the historical narrative, this author is tempted to write nothing and refer the reader to Rear Admiral H.W. Richmond's books – a three volume set called *The Navy in the War of 1739-48*. The books are available online as free PDFs. Apart from being a noted scholar, Richmond was a veteran of the Great War (his career can also be found online). His work, published in 1920, is still the most comprehensive available. Unfortunately, it is written solely from the British viewpoint and tends to gloss over the failures of some of its "heroes". There also appear to be minor inaccuracies – mainly order of battle issues – which were probably inherent in his own sources. His contemporaries gave him an 'A' for meticulous research, but admitted he was biased in favour of The Service; the Navy's political "opponents", in contrast, are stripped bare. Nonetheless, Richmond remains the primary source for the narrative portion of this commentary.

*[Richmond argues that in size and technical skill the Royal Navy was already dominant, but that she lagged in the operational art (and in technology). Shades of the Jutland debate.]*

Two works by a modern author, Richard Harding, apply a corrective: *The Emergence of Britain's Global Naval Supremacy. The War of 1739-1748* and (more as an example of Richmond's 'puffing') *Amphibious Warfare in the 18th Century; The British Expedition to the West Indies* (showing an entirely different impression of land-sea noncooperation).

There is also *Naval and Military Memoirs of Great Britain, 1727-1783*, by Robert Beatson (in six volumes – volume 1 contains the pertinent information). This work was published in 1804 and is available as an online document. It lacks the accuracy of Richmond but provides some additional material (to be handled circumspectly), particularly on minor actions. Beatson felt 'British arms' should be glorified wherever possible, no matter how small the affair.

Technical information can be found in Tunstall's *Naval Warfare in the Age of Sail, The Evolution of Fighting Tactics* and Willis' *Fighting at Sea in the Eighteenth Century*. The latter is a balanced view, while Tunstall's is dominated by the Royal Navy.

To find information about the 'other side of the hill' is not easy, even in the Spanish or French languages. There is Pritchard's

*Anatomy of a Naval Disaster*, covering the French Nova Scotia expedition, which also covers politics and administration from the French side in some detail. Also, *The French Navy and the Seven Years War*, by Dull – again, useful for naval structure, but not as a source for corroborating or refuting Richmond's list of events. *La Marine Française au XVIIIe Siècle*, by Vergé-Franceschi, helps here. Older French works have been placed online: *Histoire de la Marine Française* by le Comte de Lapeyrouse Bonfils (1845) and *Histoire Maritime de France* by Léon Guerin (1844).

For the Spanish, try whistling. There is one prime English language source: *Trafalgar and the Spanish Navy*, by Harbron. Despite its title, two-thirds of the book deals with Spain's navy in the 18th Century. Information in the Spanish language lies mainly in online articles: *La campana de don Juan José Navarro en el Mediterraneo y la batalla de Sicie*, by Martínez-Valverde, and *La Armada Real al comienzo de la Guerra de Asiento*, by Santiago Gómez

There is greater information on orders of battle and the ships themselves. Stephen Manley issued a comprehensive naval OOB for the War of the Austrian Succession. His information is quite accurate, but not perfect. Other, "more learned" works include: *The Line of Battle*, by Gardiner; *British Warships in the Age of Sail, Volume 2*, by Winfield, and *The History of English Sea Ordnance*, by Caruana. Online, the best sources are probably *Three Decks*, at <http://threedecks.org/index.php>, and a comparable Spanish site, <http://www.todoababor.es/listado/index.htm>. These are works in progress, but contain much detail on all the ships of the period.

### DEEP BACKGROUND

#### Can't Tell a Player Without a Program

The War of the Austrian Succession was at bottom a dynastic war – territories swapped between royal families at gunpoint. There were grand strategic and economic factors, too, but these were subsidiary. Thus, though the war had a number of themes, most of them centred on Maria Theresa of Austria.



Maria was of the Habsburg dynasty. She was the surviving heir of the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles VI, who died in 1740. Thanks to a disastrous war against the Ottoman Empire (which hastened his death), he bequeathed her a tattered army and an empty treasury. Supposedly, she would have time to rebuild the position of their House. Charles had spent the last decade supplicating Europe in hopes of guaranteeing his daughter's accession to all his domains. It was a vain hope.

Understand, the Habsburgs did not rule a unified kingdom such as France or England. They ruled widely scattered territories, from Belgium (the Austrian Netherlands) to Transylvania, and over peoples with very different modes of governance. Habsburg rule was guaranteed bilaterally, in most cases. In their core lands, such as Austria proper, they owned the land outright. In Bohemia and Hungary, they were kings (or, in Maria's case, queens) – but since both Bohemians and Hungarians were independent-minded cusses, a certain amount of wheeling and dealing was in order.

In Italy, the focus of this work, the Habsburgs ruled as dukes and duchesses of various locales. This made them no more than the equals of the native aristocracy, and of their rivals the House of Bourbon, who were steadily encroaching upon them. Indeed, one could argue that they were 'outranked' by both the King of Sardinia (a potential ally) and the King of Naples (a Bourbon foe).

Now, the device used to form agreements with all these territories was called a pragmatic sanction. Because he had a daughter for an heir, which was 'iffy' under German law, Charles VI went further and sought external guarantors among the princes of his Empire and his neighbours. The agreement in its final form was called *the Pragmatic Sanction*. Most of those asked, signed, and most broke faith. Maria simply appeared too vulnerable; a woman, in her early twenties, with a husband who had not proven himself in war. In the end, of course, she was to prove one of the greatest rulers of her House, but no one could see it at the time.

The whole issue was complicated by the question of the Holy Roman Empire. This issue is so complicated that it will not be discussed here, except to say that the Empire carried immense prestige. Emperors outranked kings (at least in ceremonies). The imperial throne had even greater importance for the Habsburgs, since it was a prime means of securing the loyalty of their own subjects within the Empire (remember those bilateral agreements). Significantly, Bohemia, Hungary, and their lands in Italy, were outside the Empire, but even here, the authority of an emperor carried weight.

One reason Charles made Maria his heiress, instead of some distant but male relative, was that he wanted to cut said relatives out of the running for emperor, which was an elective position. The big downside to the choice of Maria was that women could not 'run' for emperor. It would have to be her husband, Francis Stephen of Lorraine, but could he inherit *through* a woman? And, if so, was he man enough for the job? The Germans wanted an emperor who could fight, or who had generals who could fight, and Francis was an unknown, stuck with an apparently ruined army.

And so it came to pass that a number of powers went to war with the Habsburgs. Maria's most powerful opponents included Frederick II, Elector of Brandenburg (Frederick of Prussia; Frederick the Great), King Louis XV of France, and King Felipe V of Spain. Charles Albert, Elector of Bavaria, was a French proxy (he was one of the relations Charles VI had tried to cut out of his will), as were a number of minor German princes who need not concern us. Don Carlos of Naples was the son of King Felipe, and he advanced the Spanish cause in Italy.

Against them were ranged the Habsburg Army, not so ruined as it appeared, many of the minor princes of the Empire, King George II of England, and the United Provinces (who were pro-French, but were bullied along by the English as the other half of an economic bloc called the Maritime Powers).

King George was, like Frederick of Brandenburg, an Electoral Prince as well as a king; he was Elector of Hanover. This is important, because British policy, including British naval policy, was subordinated to the needs of Hanover – to put it bluntly, George tried to use England as his war chest. For the British king and his Administration, Germany and Flanders were the crucial zones. The Mediterranean, though, was also important, for two reasons: a) it contained naval bases close to Spain and southern France, which needed watching, and b) if Maria Theresa were threatened with the loss of Italy to the Bourbon bloc, she would be forced to divert resources from the struggle in Germany and Flanders.

*[An Elector was a German prince who held one of the few Electoral Votes that were cast when choosing a Holy Roman Emperor. Frederick was styled King In Prussia, not King of Prussia, the implication being he was a subject of the Emperor while not in Prussia, whereas George was a king anywhere outside the Empire, and a subject within it. Frederick, by the by, was George's nephew.]*



*[Charles Emmanuel, King of Sardinia.]*

In the Italian theatre, Maria had another ally: Charles Emmanuel, King of Sardinia, of the House of Savoy. The House of Savoy originated in lands that were now French. In the 18th Century they ruled the Duchy of Savoy on the west side of the Maritime Alps, the Duchy of Piedmont on the east, and the island of Sardinia (whence their latest title). This family would ultimately become Kings of Italy. For now, they were involved in a delicate balancing act. It would be disastrous if either Bourbon or Habsburg should completely dominate Italy. Charles Emmanuel would play coy for some years, eventually joining Maria to save himself from France.

[The use of 'Piedmont' or 'Piedmontese' and the anachronistic 'Sabaudian' or 'Savoy', are this author's preference over the even clumsier 'Piedmont-Sardinia' or the confusing plain 'Sardinia'.]

The wars (the plural is deliberate) in northern Europe are not really germane to this commentary, except to say that it was the core of the conflict until 1745. Frederick of Brandenburg began it, closely seconded by the French and Bavarians. The objects of the wars were varied. For Frederick, it was an opportunity to grab new lands and acquire personal glory; in this, he was successful, though he met with severe rebuffs from Maria Theresa on several occasions, leading him to pull in his horns. For Charles Albert, and similar minor allies such as Saxony, the acquisition of extra land was at stake (in Saxony's case, it was more a hope of not *losing* any land), but Charles Albert hoped also to become Emperor, perhaps even take over much of the Habsburg possessions – he was of the House of Wittelsbach, but also of the Habsburg line.

Kings Louis XV and Felipe V were of the House of Bourbon. Louis XV was great-grandson of the famous Louis XIV, but also his immediate heir, all the others having died from a combination of epidemics and, if you believe the chronicler Saint-Simon, poison. Felipe of Spain was his uncle.



[Louis XV, c.1730.]

For France, the war was a continuation of the age-old conflict of Bourbon and Habsburg. France had to push a 'buffer zone' well into Germany to prevent 'encirclement'. Now, in reality, the geopolitics had altered since Louis XIV's day (had altered even *in* his day) and there were newer threats on the horizon, but the mindset was hard to shake. On top of it was Louis XV's intermittent thirst for *gloire*.

Louis was a young man. He wanted to emulate his great-grandfather, Louis XIV. Like the Sun King, his early years had been spent in a restrictive Regency. Now, like his ancestor, he intended to throw off the shackles of his advisors and 'be a King'. But Louis XV was a different sort of man, after all. He waffled. In the early years of the war, he allowed his aged 'first minister', Cardinal Fleury, to drive, but had a habit of trying to grab the reins when the carriage of state was rounding sharp bends.

The war in Flanders, for example, which began in 1744, could be justified on strategic grounds as an attempt a) to cut Britain off from King George's possessions in Germany, b) to establish a springboard for an invasion of Britain (France lacking large northern ports), and c) to remove all traces of Austrian influence on France's northern border (Belgium being owned by the Habsburgs at that time), but ultimately it was a war for glory: Flanders was close to Paris and the King and his courtier generals could make their names there without suffering undue hardship. French arms had also, by that time, been driven from Germany, and she was looking to salve her pride. By the end of the war the French had made tremendous gains in the Low Countries, but it was all given back at the peace.

Felipe of Spain was of the cadet Anjou branch of the Bourbons. When the Spanish Habsburg line died out, in 1701, Felipe, by a convoluted process, became the successor. This resulted in a major war, the War of the Spanish Succession, which was intended to prevent his takeover. In the end, the Bourbons did take over Spain, but Felipe was struck off the list of potential inheritors of France.



[Felipe V.]

Felipe was not a warmonger. He was a manic depressive hypochondriac who could only be stirred – and that briefly – if Bourbon honour was struck. It was his second wife, Elisabeth Farnese, who was the true power in Spain. She was Italian by birth and inclination.

The Spanish Bitch, as she was known in diplomatic circles, ruled her adopted country with an iron hand. Cultured, refined, beautiful (even after disfigurement by smallpox), and sympathetic on a personal level, ‘The Farnese’ could be ruthless in the pursuit of her goals, and as dogmatic as a Spanish Jesuit. Frederick the Great commented that she blended Spartan pride, English obstinacy, Italian finesse, and French vanity. By her, Felipe had two sons.



[The Farnese.]

The *Infante*, however – Felipe’s immediate heir – was a son by the king’s *first* wife. Ferdinand, as he was called, was Spanish in outlook and did not like his stepmother. Elisabeth understood that when her husband died the Spanish would, at best, kick her out of the country, or at worst shut her up in a convent. Therefore, much of her reign was devoted to providing for her two sons, Don Carlos and Don Felipe. Her intentions were cloaked in a more general movement toward the Spanish ‘reconquest’ of Italy that was being promoted by many of the Court nobility and the military Administration.

*[Not really a ‘reconquest’. Simply that when the Habsburgs ruled Spain the Spanish branch of the House controlled most of Italy. When the Bourbons took over Spain, the Austrian Habsburgs got Italy. The Spanish Bourbons felt cheated, and now they would try to eradicate Austrian-Habsburg influence in Italy. A bit of nationalism, and a lot of dynastic ambition.]*

### The Italian War

The Italian War pitted Maria Theresa’s forces against those of Naples, Spain, France, and the minor contingents of Modena and (later) Genoa. After Silesia, and excluding their Austrian heartland, Italy was probably the most important economic region for the Habsburgs. Nevertheless, the number of troops engaged remained relatively small, numbering around 30,000 per side – small compared to the Low Countries, where a quarter of a million men clashed on tiny battlefields.

Italy at this time was socially and economically divided along north-south lines (as it still is to some degree). The South was a

solid block, the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, which had passed through Byzantine and Norman hands to Spain, before being lost for a time. It had recently come back into Spanish-Bourbon hands.



[Above: Don Carlos in later life, as King of Spain. Below, his brother, Don Felipe, long after the war.]



The North, as an out-ride of Charlemagne's Franco-German Empire, was fragmented like its transalpine cousin, with many points of conflict between Habsburg and Bourbon. At the start of the war the Habsburgs were in the saddle, controlling most of Lombardy – the alluvial plain of the Po River and the foothills of the Alps. They treated their possessions as a tax farm and were cordially resented.

Other players in the North included the Serene Republics of Venice and Genoa, Tuscany, the Papal States, and Modena. There were more territories in the valley of the Po – Lombardy being a region and not a principality – but these were completely under the Habsburg thumb, even if not owned by them. One or two anomalous neutral states, *sans* military forces (e.g. Massa on the border of Genoa) still survived.

As potential threats to Habsburg rule, only Naples, Modena, and Genoa had armies of any significant size. Maria's future ally, Piedmont, had a comparable, and elite, force – Piedmont was sometimes seen as the Prussia of Italy.

As previously mentioned, Naples and Parma belonged to Don Carlos, son of the Queen of Spain. Though Parma was under threat from Austria, he was reluctant to participate in the war, only doing so under pressure from his parents (he was still in his early twenties). Modena, fearful of Piedmontese expansionism and mistrustful of Austria, allied with him, and Spain would send an expeditionary army by sea; she would also browbeat France into helping her with a land advance over the Alps. But more of this later.

Genoa was ruled by a committee of the city aristocracy. They were not a happy bunch. The Republic's glory days were past. Inland, they saw encroachment by Charles Emmanuel in one direction, and by the Habsburgs in another. Traditionally, Genoa favoured the Habsburgs, but because of the latter's need to conciliate Piedmont during the war, they turned to Spain. Genoa had no territorial demands. She had enough trouble with the island of Corsica, a source of timber for ship building, and bandits for unrest.

Piedmont's situation requires a book in itself. To reiterate, her dukes (recently made kings) owned the duchies of Savoy on the west side of the Maritime Alps and Piedmont on the east side, with some scattered tracts toward Lombardy. Charles Emmanuel also had designs, now that the island of Sardinia was in the fold, on the Riviera port of Finale – a Genoese possession. He already owned Nice and Villefranche, but these were small and too close to France.

The House of Savoy was French in origin and its Court had French tastes. At times, France had *owned* fortifications within Savoy and Piedmont, to guarantee passage for her armies into Italy proper. At the moment, however, these locations were all in Piedmontese hands, and King Charles Emmanuel could, with some degree of confidence, bargain with both the Bourbons and the Habsburgs – and, to play it safe, he was seeking ties with Britain as an additional lever and source of funds.

What of the Neutrals? Only two states need to be mentioned here. Venice remained neutral throughout the struggle. Her army was small and her navy decaying, and she had no money. Austrian troops could march across her vast hinterland, but preferred to transit by sea, across the Adriatic and up the Po River. This had an impact on British naval activities.

Tuscany was the possession of Maria Theresa, but it was 'in her husband's name'. Francis Stephen, being dispossessed of his family's home territory of Lorraine at the end of the War of the Polish Succession (1733-35), had been given Tuscany in exchange. One the one hand, none of the Bourbon bloc wanted to

conquer the place, because that would mean France would have to provide him yet another home – and none of the other Bourbon powers wanted to annoy France. On the other hand, Francis made a good thing out of his situation, permitting his wife's enemies to transit the duchy, and selling its produce to France and Spain; for this reason, too, his enemies did not want to rock the boat.

*[Lorraine went to the ex-king of Poland, Stanislaus Leszczynski. He just happened to be Louis XV's father-in-law, and in time, Lorraine would become French territory. This is why France was loath to disrupt the arrangement they had made with Francis.]*

## France

Now for the big boys. If the House of Savoy requires a book, France requires volumes. France, the most populous and most centralised kingdom in Europe, was a juggernaut in every sphere of endeavour. Ironically though, Spain, not France, drove strategy in the Mediterranean; France's focus was first on Germany, and then the Low Countries.

This meant that in the early years, the French were not officially involved in ground combat in Italy. They did, however, permit a Spanish army to launch attacks from French soil, and they did loan French troops as 'auxiliaries'. Unlike some instances of this practice, though, the French formations were held back, particularly when opposed by Piedmontese troops – France hoped to acquire a passage through the Alps by negotiation.

Only after Spanish arms failed to penetrate into Lombardy, and only after a change in the French Administration, did France enter the lists in earnest. The Spanish blamed France for not helping enough, and in consequence a guilt-wracked Louis XV authorised the use of a French army.

Diplomacy, not arms, was the French forte (under the wisdom that military power *in use* is both military *and* political power *diminished*). Louis' original Minister, Cardinal Fleury, had also been his tutor, and the King never disregarded his advice, even though the young bloods of his Court bayed for action. Fleury's opinion was that France was not ready for war, but if there had to be a war, let it be in Germany. But Fleury died in 1743.

His replacements were the Cardinal Tencin, who favoured direct action against England (he was an advocate of the dispossessed House of Stuart) and the Duc d'Argenson. D'Argenson was a theorist of the 'France is encircled by the Habsburgs' school, and among his many schemes was one that would turn Lombardy into a buffer zone against the hereditary foe. This was to the liking of Louis and his courtier-marshals.

*[Ironically, d'Argenson's plan required Sabaudian participation, and so he also recommended treating Piedmont with kid gloves.]*

French troops suffered a humiliating defeat fighting British troops at Dettingen in 1743. Both sides had the status of 'auxiliaries' (for Bavaria and Austria, respectively) but Louis' honour could only be satisfied by a declaration of war against Britain. Here he was advised by Cardinal Tencin, who argued that what Britain needed was a régime change. Though there was growing school of thought that war with England was both inevitable and necessary, only now, after four years of war, did France act.

In previous years, the French dispatched naval forces in defence of their overseas possessions and trade routes. As will be seen, on occasion they became embroiled in small actions with the Royal Navy. There was only one major engagement in the Med, at Toulon in early 1744. It was initiated by the Bourbons, primarily to release their fleet from the port. Apart from the attempted invasion of Britain later that year, France's maritime policy was generally a defensive one.

## Spain

Spanish goals in Italy have already been alluded to. To recapitulate, Spain as a country wished to reacquire the influence she had held in Italy under the Habsburgs. Her finance minister argued that the country needed to diversify its portfolio with some rich Italian lands, and the military backed him up. For the Spanish Queen, Elisabeth Farnese, the most important thing was to secure an Italian territory for her sons, Don Carlos and Don Felipe. In fact, why not throw the Habsburgs out of Italy altogether! Her husband being incapable, she herself would direct the war.

Don Carlos had obtained his Italian lands by the time the War of the Austrian Succession broke out. To start with, he had Parma and Piacenza. These were Farnese lands, and he held them – as a minor – by virtue of his mother’s name. But during the War of the Polish Succession, Carlos, now a man, had invaded and taken the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies – Naples for short – from the Habsburgs. At the peace, he was forced to give up Parma and Piacenza in exchange. This incensed the Spanish Queen, who was determined to get ‘her’ lands back.

She might have accepted Tuscany instead, but Tuscany was of course given to her enemies, Francis Stephen and Maria Theresa, and the French could not be shifted from their insistence that the duchy remain inviolate. So, at the moment the Queen was looking at a retirement in southern Italy. As a northerner, she probably found the prospect distasteful. This is why Don Carlos was prevailed upon to begin mobilising for an attack on Parma. As for his brother, Don Felipe, the Queen intended to get him Mantua, in the heart of Maria Theresa’s Lombard possessions, by any means necessary.

But, this is to anticipate. Spain did not enter the lists against Austria until 1742. In the meanwhile, she had to deal with Spain’s perennial foes, the Mad Dog English Heretics. Though both sides feared ‘descents’ on their homelands, this was to be a maritime struggle, and from the Queen’s point of view, all that mattered was that the silver river continued to flow from Peru to Spanish shores so that the invasion of Italy could be financed.

### THE PRICE OF AN EAR

*“Spain has never pretended to dispute our right of sailing from one of our own settlements to another: but she pretends, that in the course of that navigation, we ought not to touch upon her coasts, nor to trade with any of her subjects. We, on the other hand, admit that the Spaniards have a right to prevent any trade from being carried on by the subjects of other nations with hers, except that trade which is expressly stipulated by the Asiento treaty. But we deny that under that pretence her subjects ought to stop or search our ships.”*

*Robert Walpole, speech in the House of Commons*

As with all things English, the Royal Navy’s rise to greatness was driven by Trade. Rivalry between Britain and Spain, and between Britain and France, of ancient origin, had sprung up afresh in the late 17th Century. Spain sought to defend her vast colonial possessions; Britain and France sought to expand their own. But when Spain and France came under the same Bourbon dynasty, they took England as their common rival.

In the War of the Spanish Succession, and the short War of the Quadruple Alliance which followed (c.1718), dynastic issues took center stage. The placing of a Bourbon on the throne of Spain was disputed. Britain deployed what were for her large forces both on the Rhine and in Spain, and paid for other armies many times as large. The Navy was used to support this web of power. Gibraltar and Minorca were seized as bases, establishing a ring around Spain. An attempted Spanish reconquest of Gibraltar, long after the war – in 1727 – failed because Britain retained command of the seas.

In the War of the Polish Succession, Britain maintained a strict neutrality, and, in the opinion of her War Party, suffered the consequences, with Spanish influence in the Med increasing several-fold in just a year or two. Something had to be done, over and above letters to the *Times*. But, while the Continental Powers continued to play musical thrones, Britain’s policies should be Colonial. Striking at France and Spain directly was just too dangerous, given the size of the armies involved. She must use her Navy and strangle their sources of wealth. Spain, especially, was vulnerable, and France, thanks to the shared dynasty, was yoked to Spanish fortunes. The justification for war would revolve around the *Asiento*.

### The Contract

One of the clauses of the Treaty of Utrecht (1713) that concluded the War of the Spanish Succession was an *asiento* – literally, a ‘contract’ – that allowed British penetration of the Spanish colonial trading bloc.

*[An asiento was a specific kind of contract, between the Government of Spain and an individual or cartel, not a bilateral agreement between nations.]*

Normally, Spain operated her overseas empire as a closed system, a real Monopoly. All foreign traders were regarded as interlopers, or worse, as smugglers and pirates (well, with that attitude, of course they would be). It was possible, however, to secure limited trading rights, if you were prepared to pay through the nose, or had just defeated Spain in a major war.

*[Spain was not the only monopolist. The British Free Trade banner-men operated under laws (the Navigation Acts) that required British raw materials to be transported in British ships; by imposing exorbitant tariffs on manufactured goods the British colonies were essentially limited to shipping raw materials (and they could only ship to the mother country) – but, after all, that is what colonies were intended to be, hewers of wood and drawers of water. With regard to other nations, British Trade’s attitude was: “we don’t want any dirty foreigners carrying our cargoes, and we don’t want them trading goods at cut rate prices to our own colonies, either”. This was, with superb British irony, known as ‘Freedom of Navigation’.]*

*[The Monopoly concept lasted well after its ‘due date’ primarily because the manufacturers had the political clout to so order it – but governments took their cut as well, myopically adding Taxation Without Representation to the mix.]*

In practice of course, a country’s monopoly could not, on its own, provide everything her colonies needed. So, even without an *asiento*, the colonial authorities often turned a blind eye to the activities of the traders of other nations. Greedy governors, zealous coast guards, and unscrupulous merchants, however, could generate an infinite number of ‘incidents’. All these elements reacted on one another in the West Indies.

The *Asiento* under consideration here allowed the British South Sea Company to sell an unlimited number of slaves, and 500 tons of assorted cargo, once per year for a term of 30 years. Not so bad. A foot in the door. Except the 500 tons was supposed to be carried by a single ship. Plus there were the heavy duties laid on foreigners. So... Spain granted access to her overseas markets, while at the same time unduly restricting said trade? How dare they imitate British policy!

*[Actually, the Spanish monopoly was far more oppressive than the British one. At least some goods were exempt from the Navigation Acts.]*

In 1729, at the end of the short Anglo-Spanish War involving the Siege of Gibraltar, Spain was granted the right to board and inspect British merchantmen – the Visitation Right – as a corollary to the *Asiento*. In 1731, a ‘legitimate businessman’ named Captain Robert Jenkins was stopped by the Spanish coast guard while upon his ‘lawful occasions’ in the West Indies. The

Spanish had strong suspicions that Jenkins had indulged in piracy, as well as smuggling. Not only were his goods confiscated, but the *garda costa* captain cut off his left ear. Jenkins, naturally, claimed he had done nothing wrong. He claimed the Spanish captain had insultingly boasted he would cut off King George's ear if that monarch came to the Caribbean in the royal yacht and tried playing the same tricks as his liegeman Jenkins.

This was not the only incident, by far. British ships and their crews were frequently harassed as they went about their lawful, as well as their unlawful, occasions. Black market goods, and goods originally loaded on Spanish vessels but strangely, arriving in British bottoms, were sold extensively around the Spanish Main. Not all incidents could be dealt with at a local level. The British Government came to believe that the Spanish were infringing on their right to trade as a matter of policy, while the Spanish believed the British traders were infringing the *Asiento*, also as a matter of policy.

In truth, the South Sea Company was pushing the limits of the *Asiento*, and its lobbyists were pressuring the British Government to back them up. On the other hand, the Spanish governors on the Main, deeply involved in the black market themselves, put pressure on those traders who refused to pay kickbacks or chose to trade at ports not in the governors' pockets. They secretly sponsored privateers of their own, and conducted cargo seizures outside of territorial waters.

*[The South Sea Company also pushed for strong measures against rival British firms – mostly American colonials. There were also allegations that two British warships were illegally engaging in the slave trade (naval vessels working the Atlantic stations often patrolled the African coast for some months before rotating to the West Indies). Not that anyone thought the trade in slaves was illegal. The complaint was that the military was horning in on the South Sea Company's action.]*

Though the incipient conflict would be called the War of Jenkins' Ear, Jenkins case was not brought before Parliament until 1738. In the intervening years, the long-lived Whig (Liberal) Administration of Robert Walpole quietly supported Spain in the War of the Polish Succession – though as stated earlier, the official policy was Strict Neutrality. This was against the wishes of many in Walpole's own party, and agitation intensified for a showdown with Spain. The war party hoped not so much to gain new conquests in the New World, as to 'chastise the pride of Spain', and to acquire greater access to Spanish markets by dictating the terms of a broader trading agreement.

*[In Spain, the war is more accurately known as la Guerra de Asiento.]*

Jenkins, reputedly bringing along his ear in a pickle jar, was summoned by and questioned before a committee of the House of Commons, and his case classified with other "Spanish Depredations upon the British Subjects". The report fed war fever, and, very much against his will, Walpole was forced to act.

As a first step, in March of 1738 a Parliamentary Address was sent to King George II asking him to 'seek redress' from Spain. In reply to his 'moderate request', Spain 'insolently' demanded financial compensation for various acts of piracy. Britain then 'righteously' demanded annulment of Spain's Visitation Right, and Spain countered by annulling the *Asiento* and confiscating all British ships currently in Spanish ports.

Diplomatic stalemate led King George, in July 1739, to authorise the Navy Board to begin taking 'reprisals' against Spain. This was not war, of course, simply a 'graduated response to Spanish aggression'. But escalation swiftly followed.

A squadron commanded by Admiral Vernon left England in July, bound for the Caribbean. Authorisation for the deployment of troops to the West Indies in a defensive role had already been

given. But, Vernon had barely begun his campaign of reprisals in October before he learned there was a full-scale war on.

The opening moves of this conflict, which, despite the so-called Family Compact between France and Spain, did not involve the former power at all, took place in the West Indies. However, Spain had also been irritated ('panicked' might be a better word) by the deployment of a British squadron to Gibraltar in 1738. This squadron, under the command of Rear-Admiral Nicholas Haddock, beefed up a peacetime Mediterranean station consisting of no more than 10 ships under a Captain Clinton, whose prime directive had been to ensure the protection of the Levant trade against the Barbary Coast pirates. On paper, Haddock brought an additional nine ships and two fireships.

*[The phrase 'on paper' is used because it was commonly the case for a commander to set out when he felt he had sufficient strength, not when his force was completely assembled. In this case, Haddock's orders instructed him to leave England when he had outfitted five or six of his ships.]*

Haddock's orders were to look in at Gibraltar, and then to take up a position at Minorca, ready to repel any invasion of or raid upon the Balearics. He was also required to protect Gibraltar, continue defending the sea lanes, and to recover captured British merchants and their goods, by force if necessary. This was to prove a tall order. He began by establishing a cruising pattern between Minorca and Gibraltar.

The Spanish, meanwhile, were in a panic, sure that this reinforcement meant a descent upon their coasts. The squadrons at Ferrol, Cadiz, and Cartagena were alerted, and the Army mobilised against the Portuguese border and Gibraltar. At the same time, Haddock's presence led the Spanish to seriously seek for peace before things got out of hand.

Negotiations quickly led to the Convention of the Pardo (January 1739), which arranged for restitution on both sides. Things looked so promising that Haddock was ordered home, and Captain Clinton was to be left with all of two ships. It might have been one of the shortest wars in history.

The politicians killed the peace. The question of war was turned into a partisan debate in the House of Commons that had nothing to do with monetary compensation from Spain and everything to do with the next election. The accompanying 'attack ads' – a pamphleteer war – worked on the general public's inbred fear of 'The Dons'. The merchants insisted their 'right' to avoid being searched had not been secured. Patriots harked back to the days of Cromwell and Queen Elizabeth. On top of it all came rumours that France and Spain were working on an offensive-defensive alliance. Haddock's recall was cancelled. Spain refused to pay reparations until Haddock was recalled. And the war began in earnest.

## THE LINEUP

### The Opposing Fleets

According to Richmond, on the outbreak of war, Britain had 124 ships of the line, including 'hybrid' 40- and 50-gunners (popular in the last century, but too heavy for escort and scouting duties, and too light for the line of battle). Of the 124, some 44 ships were completely unfit for sea. Only 35 were in 'sea pay' – ready to sail. 5 of these were in the West Indies, 10 in the Med. This left 20 sail to protect home waters, and 10 of them were guard-ships permanently stationed at port.

*[Manley records 478 different British ships afloat during the course of the war, of all makes and models, including prizes, decommissioned vessels, new builds, and rebuilds.]*

Spain had 58 warships, but 8 of these belonged to the *Flota*, or royal treasure fleet, whose vessels, like the better known East

Indiamen, were technically independent of the State military. Other armed ships belonged to the Caracas Company, so that there were really only 45 military ships of 24 guns or more available. The three naval bases of Ferrol, Cadiz, and Cartagena each had a squadron, but not only were most of the Spanish sail unprepared, those that were 'in sea pay' were scattered across the globe.

France, not interested in a naval war at the moment, but always a factor to consider, had 47 ships of the line (with 42 guns or more). Very few were prepared for sea duty. Unlike the Spanish, France's ships were concentrated at her main naval bases of Brest and Toulon, with a strong detachment at the third base of Rochefort.

*[Manley gives 89 Spanish and 180 French ships afloat at some point in the war. As with the British, not all were afloat at the same time. Again, some of Manley's are armed merchantmen, ignored in other lists, and in themselves not a complete selection, merely those that were involved in action.]*

All three navies acquired auxiliaries during the war: ships of Piedmont, Genoa, and Naples in particular. Even the Knights of Malta lent a hand.

Records are scanty, but it appears Piedmont had at least four 'frigate' sized vessels of 30-44 guns, plus quite a few galleys. Hence, Piedmont's role was a supporting one, protecting friendly supply convoys and interdicting enemy ones in coastal waters along the Riviera, and around Corsica and Sardinia.

Genoa, still a source of well-built ships, may have had up to 26 vessels of war, but some she sold, some were being built under contract for other powers, and some were destroyed or impounded by the British without ever seeing action.

*[Manley states that the port of Genoa had 1,918 registered vessels in 1745.]*

Naples' fleet was a new creation, the pre-1730s Habsburg fleet having been scrapped. The local yards could only produce small ships, of 26 guns or less, so her two 74s, two 60s, and three 30s were purchased from Spain and Genoa. A 50-gun ship was transferred from Spain in 1744. Excluding some 18 galleys, she began the war with 15 warships. Though the galleys were armed, they were used exclusively as transports, and this was generally the case with the galleys of the other nations as well. The Neapolitans fought no action against the British, but some galleys were sent to French-held Antibes in 1742.

Neutral Venice (just to complete the list) appears to have had 11 or so ships of the line, but 6 were decommissioned in 1740, another 2 mid-war, and only 1 completed during the war. Guns per vessel ranged from 60-80. She appears to have had only one '50' in service, decommissioned mid-war, and 3 'fregata grossa' or 'large frigates' (oddly, classed as Second Rates; no gun numbers are available, but later Venetian ships in this class mounted 60+ guns). No light vessels appear to be recorded, but the Republic must have had some, probably galleys.

### Strategy

According to Richmond, the British were agreed that Spain could only be 'brought to reason' by attacking her trade, but that there was great argument over the method. Seize every ship? Blockade every port and choke point? Or, capture the sources of trade themselves?

Initially, it was decided that a series of 'reprisals' would be the order of the day. The war, not yet declared, would not be escalated. The Spanish Main would be the primary focus. Later, as the war opened in earnest, muddled thinking led to an expansion of goals, to include the capture of bases in the West Indies.

But conquest was not the final objective. Despite appearances, England, with a German King, remained resolutely focused on the Continent – though there were many who would have preferred either noninvolvement or colonial war for its own sake. The intent was simply to 'make Spain pay'. Later, the effort would be expanded to include France, mainly for short-term profit. France's economy was rooted in French soil and French towns, and colonies for her were the playthings of the nobility, but Spain's economy depended on the silver mines of Peru. Her creditors preferred specie. In this, the British were continuing the proven policies of Elisabeth I's day.

*[Canada, for example, became a British possession after the Seven Years War simply because the British merchant lobby wanted to unload all the captured 'sugar islands' before the price of sugar crashed. (Hence Voltaire's pun about a 'handful of snow').]*

On the Spanish side, the same equations were analysed, leading to the same result: a focus on the Atlantic, and the West Indies in particular. Though for Spain, the goal was the reverse of the medallion – trade *protection*. It was absolutely vital that the treasure fleets operate unimpeded – and in a large measure, they did (so much for British grand strategy). The ruination of Britain's meagre colonies was felt to be a waste of resources.

The French, when they came in, placed less emphasis on their colonies *per se*, regarding convoy protection, whether of traders or troop transports, as the most important objective. This was because taxes levied on the merchant ships went straight into the royal coffers – French escort commanders suffered extreme penalties for abandoning their charges, even to pursue an enemy.

If British forces could be tied down protecting their own assets against the *threat* of French attack, this would help. In particular, a large number of privateers were licensed. Ironically, from the British point of view, the French Navy – *La Royale* – appeared to be far more aggressive than she really was.

Both sides' Mediterranean forces held the status of poor relations. It was worse for the Royal Navy. In the early years of the war, her ships on the Med station were required to perform their duties *and* keep watch on Cadiz – which was technically part of the 'Atlantic theatre'.

France, in contrast, was not at war, and even when at war, could choose when to act, bearing in mind her weaknesses: a lack of crews, a lack of money, and a lack of senior commanders. For the most part, the Toulon Fleet would sortie only to protect local convoys or to augment French forces elsewhere in the world. Privateers would conduct the war against British trade.

Spain, also suffering from a lack of crews, materials, and money, maintained only a small Mediterranean contingent, except for the times she was to be engaged in convoying forces to Italy. Spanish doctrine was almost a 'point defence'. Her large fleet of *guarda costas* patrolled her own coasts, and she relied, like the French, on privateers to attack enemy shipping. This freed her battle fleet. In the main, however, the latter functioned as a 'fleet in being'.

None of the combatants conceived it possible to 'sweep the seas' of enemy vessels in order to protect their supply lines. They had too few, too fragile ships for such operations. The onus of the offensive, however, was on Britain.

And so, for the first year or so, while the British wore out their ships in constant movement, reacting to Spanish undertakings, very little actually occurred in the Med. Actions here depended on events elsewhere, and especially, on Continental European politics.

\*\*\*\*\*

## SHIPS AND GUNS

*Excursus by David Hughes*

Navies of the 18th Century divided their vessels into two groups, those “of the line”, that is capable of fighting in the line of battle, and those that could not. Many of these navies also classified them by systems, the best known being the “Rates” of the Royal Navy, ranging down from the First Rates with 100 guns to the Sixth Rates with less than 20. While convenient and widely used this definition of ship strength did have serious flaws.

In particular the number of guns carried often bore only a limited relation to the size of the ship. This was often difficult to detect since the various nations defined weight and tonnage (and even dimensions and tons!) differently. Take five ships of this period, listed first in order of the number of guns carried, and then in order of size:

<i>Guns</i>	<i>Ship in order by Rate</i>	<i>Nationality</i>	<i>Built</i>	<i>Ship in order by Size</i>	<i>Displacement</i>
100	1st Victory	British	1733	1st Victory	1921 tons
90	2nd Namur	British	1723	3rd Invincible	1793 tons
80	3rd Somerset	British	1725	3rd Princessa	1709 tons
74	3rd Invincible	French	1744	2nd Namur	1566 tons
70	3rd Princessa	Spanish	1731	3rd Somerset	1354 tons
70	3rd Kent	British	1722	3rd Kent	1130 tons

*Note:* The system of measuring tonnage (or dimensions) varied between navies and even between shipbuilders. These ships have been chosen because both the *Princessa* and *Invincible* were captured by the Royal Navy, measured and weighed and put into service. Therefore in these cases the measurements use the same system.

Of course size alone was not the prime measure of power, but a larger ship did have significant advantages. For example if two ships had the same number of guns but a different length of gun-deck (GDL), then the “longer” ship could handle its heavy guns with greater ease and be capable of pointing them through the gun-ports at a more extreme angle. As an illustration the *Princessa* had a GDL of 165 feet compared with the 150 foot GDL of the *Kent*. But there were more important differences such as that (all else being equal) the heavier ship would be built with thicker timbers, making her more resistant to shot. And of course that she would be then capable of carrying heavier guns. The last really mattered as damage to ships was directly affected by the size (that is weight of shot) of the guns. Because of this it became common for ships to be evaluated by their weight of broadside, rather than the simpler number of guns.

The present-day method of calculating this is called the “Total Projectile Weight” or TPW and a comparison of those of the *Princessa* and *Kent* is instructive, especially as the latter captured the former in 1740, though it required the assistance of her sister-ships *Lennox* and *Orford* to do so. The realisation that three to one odds were needed to achieve victory caused consternation in the Royal Navy, but is understandable when it is realised that this was not really just a case of one 70 gun ship versus three. For the TPW of the *Princessa* was 1,526 pounds, but of each of the Royal Navy ships just 1,044, giving a total of 3,122 pounds. This alone made the odds 2:1 not 3:1. However the method ignores the critical significance of the capability of various types of gun, clearly shown by comparing the two ships after the *Princessa* was fitted with British guns (a true comparison before is difficult because Spanish and British gun poundage inevitably differed). By this stage ships carried the same size of gun on each main and gun deck, plus a third type on the “upper-works” (*known as poop and forecastle*). The *Kent* carried 24 and 12-pounder guns on the decks and 6-pounder above; in contrast the rearmed *Princessa* mounted 32, 18 and 9-pounder guns. Since it was widely recognised that only 18-pounder and heavier guns could be considered “ship-killers” the discrepancy in force in seemingly identical ships becomes obvious.

There were few differences in the design of gun in the period (carronades and howitzers would not be fitted in numbers for another 40 years), though the British suffered from some especially incompetent gun designers. In particular a Major-General Armstrong of the Ordnance Board (the unfortunate Royal Navy had no hand in designing its own guns!) had developed a new “system” that promised lightness, but unfortunately also resulted in the breech blowing off due to lack of metal! This may well have affected British gunnery in the early years of the war as gunners remained wary of their weapons, even when the dangerous guns were removed.

Replacing guns proved easy since all that was needed was to emplace older guns held in storage (probably the oldest used during the war were two 9-pounder weapons on the poop of the 90 gun *Princess Royal* that appear to have been cast in 1675!). There were two primary types of gun, those made of iron and the few that were made of bronze – known in Britain as brass guns. The latter had one major weakness and two advantages. The weakness was that in that the muzzle would tend to droop after continuous firing. The advantages were that they were lighter (by about 15% on big guns) and, above all, they were much more attractive, especially if endlessly polished by their unfortunate crew. In the Royal Navy they were rare, confined to the two “Brass” First Rates, the *Royal George* and *Britannia*. As shown in the table below the lightness of brass guns meant that the lower gun-deck could carry 42 -pounders, rather than the 32-pounders carried by the other “Iron” First Rates. These guns were also present in the French navy but were not as common (for example the 64 gun *L’Ardent* carried six bronze 24- and twelve bronze 12-pounder guns), while the treasure ships in the Spanish navy were often bronze-equipped so as to allow the silver cargo to be carried in combination with a full complement of guns. In all three navies it was common for rich captains to bring aboard their personal brass guns. This habit was still common in Nelson’s time, especially with frigate captains who would replace a

pair of 9-pounder iron “chase” guns (mounted at the bow) with brass 12-pounder ones, weapons both longer ranged and cast more accurately and therefore very useful when chasing a valuable prize.

Thus in all navies the quality of a ship was determined by its tonnage, number of guns and type of gun (in addition to the obvious factors of sailing quality, captain and crew). The Royal Navy had the most detailed and rigidly controlled system, shown in the table below. The qualities of these ships will be examined, as also their design and usage and then compared with those of the other navies. The table also provides an approximation of the number of ships in each group that were active during the early years of the war with Spain.

<b>Royal Navy Ship of the Line Rates</b>					
<i>Guns</i>	<i>Rate/Decks</i>	<i>Tonnage</i>	<i># of Ships</i>	<i>Gun Types</i>	<i>Notes</i>
100	First /three decks	1800-1920 tons	5	32: 24: 12	brass ships 42: 24: 12
90	Second/three decks	1550-1600 tons	13	32: 18: 9	
80	Third/three decks	1300-1360 tons	16	32: 18: 9	
70	Third/two decks	1100-1140 tons	24	24: 12: 6	
60	Fourth/two decks	920-970 tons	31	24: 9: 6	
50	Fourth/two decks	700-980 tons	34	18; 9; 6	two groups, see below

*100 gun:* The active ‘iron’ First Rates were the *Victory*, *Royal Sovereign* and *Royal William*. Two older flagships, the *Royal Anne* and *London*, were still afloat but considered incapable of ever going to sea. *Victory*, built in 1733 is the heavier ship at 1920 tons. Note that this is not the famous *Victory* of Trafalgar fame but her predecessor, wrecked in 1744.

*90 gun:* The two heavier ships are the *Duke* and *St George* built in 1733 but carrying the same type and number of guns. *Namur* was an exception, both in gun-type and deck. The details are covered later in the text

*50 gun:* This group saw the first changes resulting from war-service. The weights and guns shown are of those built before the war. From 1743 on new 50’s were much larger, weighing 828 tons and carrying 24, 12 and 6-pounder guns. The effect was significant with the shot-weight (TPA) going up from 630 to 828 pounds.

There was much more variety between navies in the smaller ships rated as “outside the line”, especially in terms of names. For example in the Royal Navy the word “sloop” had nothing to do with its design or size – rather it was a term used to define ships so small that that instead of a post-captain they were assigned a “master and commander”. Of the other classes shown below, the 40 was not a frigate, but a small two-decked vessel that had, in the War of the Spanish Succession thirty years earlier, been still considered suitable for the line. Now they performed the role of frigates, but very slowly. The frigate would develop from the Sixth Rate but the Royal Navy was still behind Spain and especially France in building fast, scouting warships. The fireship was on the way out (it would never again serve in a major war) but the bomb was becoming a standard part of a fleet. The first bomb to be built in Britain was the *Terrible* in 1728. Another six were built in the early years of the war.

<b>Royal Navy Classes ‘Outside the Line’</b>					
<i>Guns</i>	<i>Rate/Decks</i>	<i>Tonnage</i>	<i># of Ships</i>	<i>Gun Types</i>	<i>Notes</i>
40	Fifth/two decks	600-800 tons	?	18 :9 :6	also 44 gun class
24	Sixth/one deck	350-510 tons	34	9: 3	also 20 gun class
14	‘sloop’/one deck	200-245 tons	?	4	also 10 and 8 gun sloops
c18	‘fireship’/two decks	250 tons	?	4	
c8	‘bomb’/one deck	270 tons	7	4	two mortars

*40/44 gun:* In 1741 the Royal Navy improved the class, both building and re-arming so that ships now mounted 44 guns. Those that were new builds were more heavily armed – replacing the 9-pounder on the main deck with 12-pounder guns. Note that the numbers of this class are difficult to quantify as they were often being rebuilt, even to 50-gun size.

*20/24 gun:* As the war started only six remained of the 20-gun class that was equipped with just 6-pounder guns. Note that ships of this size and smaller were also equipped with many swivel guns – essentially large bore muskets mounted on the rails and effective when boarding pirates or privateers.

*Fireship:* Two decks as this allowed more ports to be opened, so allowing the fire to spread more easily. Distinctive with some extra-large ones, known as ‘sally ports’ to allow crew to escape.

*Bomb:* The two mortars differed in size (so that targets of different range could be attacked); usually one 13-inch and one 10-inch.

Too often forgotten is the importance of the complex support systems needed to keep wooden warships effective. For example ships were always at risk from sea-worms that drove into their timbers while whenever at rest marine vegetation accumulated on the hull. Seemingly trivial, this was the kind of thing that drove admirals to distraction as it slowed the ship and therefore the capability of the entire line of battle. The answer was to careen the ship – exposing the lower hull, burning and scraping the tentacles of sea-weed and killing the worms. In tidal waters this was done by loading the ship to one side so that when low-tide came she would rest with much of one side of her lower hull exposed. A confident captain could even do so at sea, though this meant risk from unexpected winds and waves. But the best solution was to place the ship in a dry-dock or a careening stage (a simple version of a dry-dock). In non-tidal waters the quality of such dockyards systems was a major factor in determining control of the seas.

The dockyard system of the Royal Navy was the most elaborate. At home there were two major (Portsmouth and Plymouth) and two lesser (Chatham and Woolwich) naval ports, all complete with both dry-docks and building slips. These were supplemented by two overseas bases, Port Mahon in the Mediterranean and Port Royal in Jamaica. Port Mahon in particular rivalled some home bases in size, having three docks capable of handling Second-Rates and several careening stages (note that this was one of several reasons why the great First-Rates never appeared in the Mediterranean). The other naval bases were far inferior, Antigua still in the process of being built and Gibraltar lacking all docking facilities and very exposed to some on-shore winds. In India the Royal Navy was largely dependent on the facilities of the East India Company at Madras.

Both the Bourbon navies operated from two principal and one minor base in Europe: the French using Brest and Toulon, supplemented by Rochefort on the Bay of Biscay, the Spanish Cadiz and El Ferrol with what would eventually be the greatest of all, Cartagena, still in the early stages of construction (the protective breakwaters were in place but the dockyards and warehouses were not). However Spain also had a presence in the West Indies. Havana (always referred to as Habana by the Spanish) ranked with Port Mahon for support and also possessed several building slips that could also be used to refurbish ships. Cartagena de Indias in contrast had a superb harbour but was only capable of supporting a small squadron.

**Royal Navy Ships – Their Characteristics**

Inevitably British ships were seen as too small, old fashioned, and often over-gunned. The last factor can be seen in the sad story of the 90-gun *Namur*, the Second Rate flagship of Admiral Mathews at the Battle of Toulon (in 1744). At some point after her rebuild (a British custom to be explained later) she was designated one of the nine “standing flagships” and fitted with a heavier arsenal. The standard 90-gun ship carried 18-pounder guns on her middle and 9-pounders on her upper gun-decks. *Namur* however, was given 24-pounder and 12-pounder guns respectively, making her almost identical in firepower to First Rate ships that were 300 tons heavier. This of course was the intent – the drive to build cheaper and smaller flagships, which also converted into shorter and therefore slower ships. In this case it proved to be a mistake as the year after Toulon she was stripped of her heavier guns and the year after it was necessary to take away her upper deck and reduce her to a lowly two-decker. The problem was not so much the added weight of the guns but the impact of the larger powder charge (12 pounds versus 9 pounds on her middle deck) on the restraining ropes and then on the timbers to which they were attached. A couple of hours of continuous fire against the Spanish had fatally weakened her timbers, which later failed in a storm in 1749.

Certainly the Royal Navy had a passion for firepower, with more three-deckers in total and in proportion to the total fleet than any other navy. When the naval war started in 1739 there were no fewer than 34 in service, of the types shown below. Even if the problematic 80 gunners are discounted, this was the largest proportion of three-deckers the Royal Navy would ever possess. Of course the First and Second Rates with their large and expensive crews were docked in peacetime and there was much opposition from the Treasury to their “unwarranted” use in wartime. The worst example of this was the *London*. She was launched in 1697 and broken up in 1747 and in all that time spent just six months in active service and never left the harbour to go to sea! The table below, showing peacetime allocations, makes an interesting contrast to later ones that do the same for the Bourbon navies.

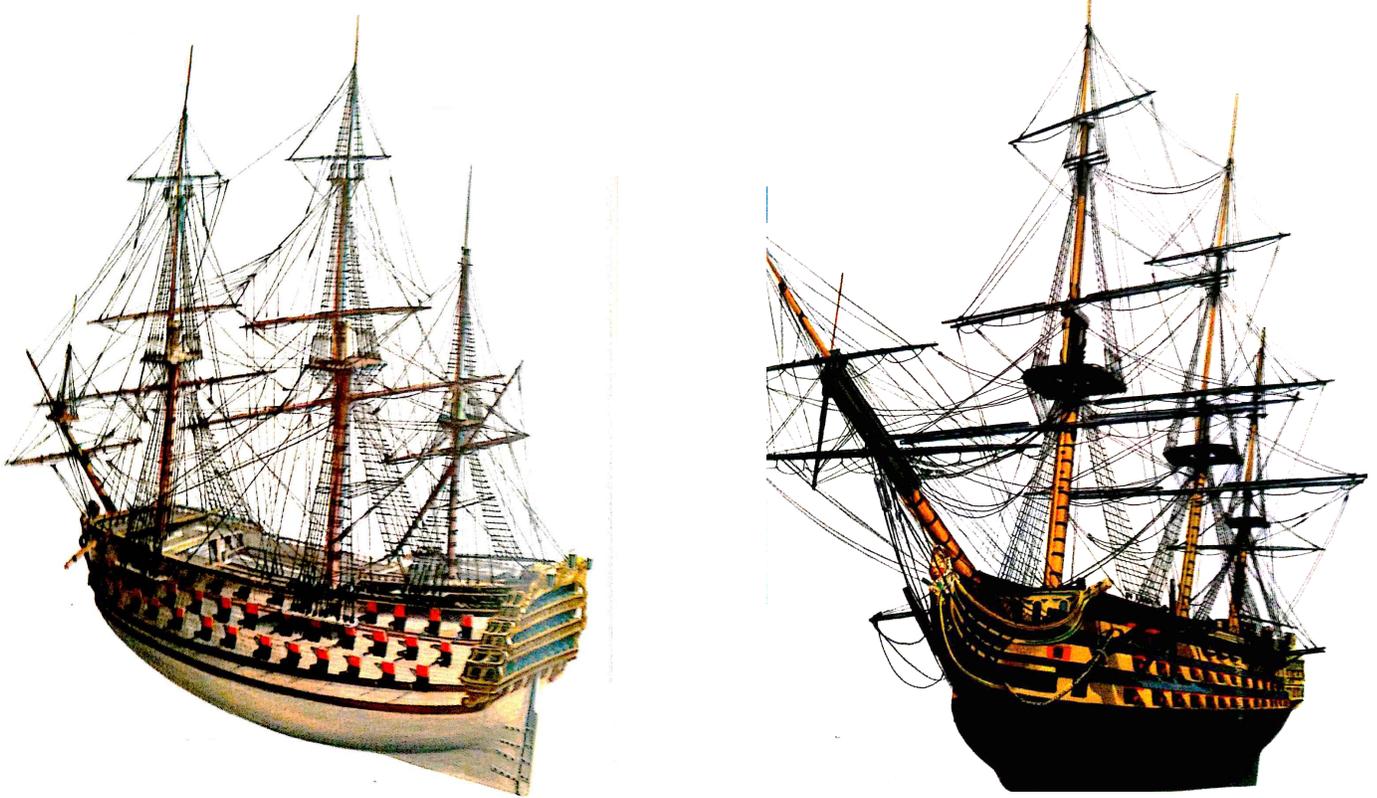
Royal Navy ships of the line distribution prior to war 1739						
	100-gun	90-gun	80-gun	70-gun	60-gun	50-gun
Home				6	6	8
Mediterranean			2	4	3	3
West Indies				1	2	2
(in ordinary)	7	15	11	14	20	18

Many problems were the result of the Royal Navy being bound by the “Rule of the Establishments”. Some 60 years earlier the Admiralty of the time made a serious mistake by giving the House of Commons the right of voting on the size, as well as the numbers, of British warships. Most British parliamentarians turned out to lack any interest in this, but it made the admirals paranoid over the charge of misleading them, leading to a tradition in which there could be no variation from the dimensions prescribed by the current Establishment. Since these rarely changed (the last in 1716 for guns and in 1719 when dimensions were laid down to the tiniest detail) and were always, to avoid charges of wasting money, conservative, the result was designs that were frozen and ships that were small.

[Comparison of a 1740s 1st Rate with a 1760s 1st Rate: HMS Royal William (1719) left versus HMS Victory (1765) right. The angles are poor, but the 'stubbinness' of the former is clear, as is the 'roundedness' of the former's hull.

Royal William: gun deck 175', keel 142', breadth 50', draught forward 14', draught aft 16', burthen 1,918 tons. Royal William was a rebuild of the 100-gun HMS Prince (1670), which had been laid up since 1692 (known as Royal William from 1692 then taken apart in 1714 prior to rebuilding). Royal William spent the entire period from 1740-1748 in ordinary at Portsmouth – probably due to a lack of crewmen, though she would also have been the flagship of one of the Home admirals (unclear who). In 1756 she was cut down to an 84-gun Second Rate and served in that capacity until 1813 – a service life of 143 years! (Not unique, by any means).

Victory: gun deck 184', keel 152', breadth 51', draught unknown, burthen 2,162. Armament lower gun deck 30x 42-pounder; mid gun deck 28x 24-pounder; upper gun deck 30x 12-pounder; quarter deck 10x 6-pounder; forecastle 2x 6-pounder; total broadside weight 1182 (numbers for 1765; she was re-gunned eight times). Victory was a new ship (her predecessor was lost at sea in 1744). She is still afloat, as a museum piece.]



To make matters worse the authority of the Admiralty in determining design had to be approved by three separate authorities. These were the Ordnance Board which determined gun design and production (and was bound by its own very rigid “Establishment of Guns”), the Victualling Board which supplied ships (and whose dilatory ways often reduced admirals to gibbering rage) and the Navy Board which, among other matters, controlled shipbuilding on the advice of the Surveyor of the Navy – equating to a modern chief naval constructor. Unfortunately there was one difference – the Surveyor held office for life and always had pliant political support. Sir Jacob Ackworth had held the office of Surveyor since 1715 and was both exceedingly resistant to change and impossible to remove. Indeed the only solution the Admiralty could achieve was to appoint the Master-Shipwright at Deptford, Sir Joseph Allin, “Joint-Surveyor” in the faint hope that when Ackworth was sick or away (for of course all decisions had to be joint when both were present!) Allin would authorise change. For in fairness to the admirals, they were well aware of the improvements being implemented in the Bourbon navies and pushed for a change in 1732. Although approved, inevitably custom and conservatism came into effect and this change failed to take place, being crushed by that most deadly of all responses by civil servants, “we must insist on the difficulty of complying with this issue at this juncture”.

The other fact which plagued the Royal Navy was caused by the Treasury. It is difficult to believe but from 1711 to 1739 zero funds were provided for shipbuilding. Instead all the money was directed toward “maintenance of ships”, with the added problem that tradition dating back to the previous century required that ships, once paid for, must remain part of the Royal Navy. Inevitably this meant that imaginative means were required if the fleet was to remain effective and the solution arrived at was the “Great Rebuild”, by which an old and rotting ship was taken apart and reconstructed. An example of this process is the 90-gun *Princess Royal*, on paper a new ship dating from 1728. In reality she was once the *Ossary*, launched in 1682, partially rebuilt as the *Prince* in 1705, fully rebuilt as the *Princess* in 1711 before her final rebirth in 1728. Exactly how new she was only the shipwrights who worked on her could have told. Even if the old timbers were unusable, or major additions made, it was still considered the original vessel.

Take the *Royal James* laid down in 1667, hastily renamed *Victory* when James II was deposed, and launched in 1695. A 100-gun First Rate, she weighed 1,486 tons and served until she caught fire in 1721. Six years later the navy decided that an additional flagship was required,

but the rules dictated that this could only be achieved by rebuilding a “name” already on the list. So the battered and burnt timbers of the *Victory* were examined and with due gravity declared suitable for a great rebuild. The ship that emerged in 1737 weighed 1,921 tons and obviously had little, except for a few planks, to do with her predecessor. But the rules had been followed and she was still the “original” *Victory* of 1695. There were a very few exceptions to this stultifying pattern, one being the 60-gun *Centurion*, launched in 1729 and the flagship and sole survivor of Commodore Anson’s expedition around Cape Horn. She was some 100 tons heavier than “normal” 60-gun ships, perhaps why she was chosen and why she alone remained afloat. Even so the voyage strained her timbers, forcing a reduction to a 50-gun ship in 1746.

The innovation and improvement that did take place was most evident in the smaller ships, especially in classes that were new, such as the bombs, or not clearly defined in the establishments. Indeed the most effective did not belong to the navy at all and therefore was not constrained by tradition. This was the cutter, the craft of the Revenue Service, designed to catch the smugglers that crossed the Channel and North Sea (the name soon became traditional for the ships of both the British and United States coastguard services) and variants were quickly adopted by the navy. Unfortunately such craft made up less than 30% of the navy and other changes only came about as the result of war. In 1742 after three years the Admiralty did manage to start to improve the line, but only at the lower end with the introduction of heavier and more powerful 50- and 44-gun ships. It would take another war before the first definitive examples of the 74-gun ships that dominated the navy of Nelson were laid down. At last the navy was building ships comparable to Bourbon vessels of the previous generation, while the difference between these and the 70- and 80-gun ships described earlier is instructive.

However the biggest problem the Admiralty faced during the current war was not the quality of its ships, but the endless shortage of seamen for them. Even the smallest ship of the line required as many men as a weak infantry battalion and the great ones needed up to 900 sailors each. It is true that only about one-half of these needed to be trained and skilled (at least two per gun and far more that could mount the masts and control the sails) but to raise them meant taking them from merchantmen. And the latter’s owners had a great deal of political influence, enough to ensure that entire crews could be issued “protections” that prohibited any navy captain from seizing them for his own ship. The East India Company vessels and the sugar ships owned by the merchants of the West Indies remained immune for much of the war. As a result the Admiralty was never able to man all the ships it wanted. As an example, in 1745 fear of French invasion persuaded the Admiralty that the First Rates *Royal George*, *Royal Sovereign*, and *Victory* had to put into service. However each required a crew of at least 850 men (and there were several Second Rates with 750 men crews also at sea in the Channel) which meant that many smaller cruisers (a 20-gun Sixth Rate had a crew of 150 men) had to be taken out of service. Which in turn increased the successes of French and Spanish privateers.

One solution was to use soldiers to supplement the crews. When the first six regiments of Marines were established in 1740 this was not the intention – they were considered to be line infantry. The name ‘marine’ was assigned to convince members of parliament, ever suspicious of any attempt by the King to increase the army, that they would be used ‘on the marine’, that is overseas in the West Indies. However Admiral Vernon took them onto his warships, as always short of men, and this was a factor in the failure of his expedition at Cartagena de Indias. This was not an unique case. Five foot regiments provided the garrisons of both Gibraltar and Port Mahon and the only active service they saw was to supplement the crews of the Mediterranean Fleet.

*[The designation of those regiments as Marines was also intended to make the concept palatable to potential recruits, since sea service was much more popular than land service – see the world without dying of disease in some tropical garrison (which is of course exactly what happened to most of the men).]*

### French Navy ships – Their Characteristics

*La Royale* atrophied in the years after the death of Louis XIV, while in 1725 the Regents of Louis XV decreed that it would now contain no more than 50 ships of the line. Since many old and weak two-deckers remained afloat, new ships were not launched for five years, but as French seapower had traditionally been limited to home waters and normally subordinated to the needs of the army, this was considered to be of little consequence.

<b><i>La Royale: Distribution of ships of the line: 1739</i></b>				
	110-gun	68-74-gun	50-64 gun	42-50-gun
Brest	1	7	12	5
Toulon		6	7	3
Rochefort		1	1	4

*Notes:* The French used a different “grouping” system that recognised the much greater variety of size and class than was the case in the Royal Navy. For example the designs embodied in the 42-50 group above all equated to the “standard” Royal Navy 50-gun ships. As can be seen, *La Royale* was the most concentrated of the three major navies.

Le Comte de Maurepas, *Secrétaire d’État La Marine* (a position that combined into one individual the authority of the Board of Admiralty and Navy Board) decided that any new builds must be larger and more powerful. This because as the colonies in the West Indies, India and the Americas became more valuable, ships needed to be designed for ocean waters, not just the Channel and Mediterranean as had previously been the practise. Long voyages meant more storage space and that in turn added displacement. Of course the value of greater power when ship numbers were limited was also taken into account. Whatever the operational inadequacies of Maurepas, he was an innovator. Knowing that elderly French ship designers were as conservative as those in Britain, he encouraged the professional growth of new men, going so far as to send them to visit the yards of the old enemies, Holland and Britain. The two greatest were Coulob at Toulon, specialising in ships of the line and Ollivier at Brest, best known for his development of the modern frigate. Despite the financial problems

of France (not least the diversion of funds to maintain the court and courtiers of Versailles) Maurepas was able to keep the French fleet close to its official strength.

Number of Ships of the Line			
	1736	1743	1746
1st Rate 80-guns	-	-	1
2nd Rate 70-74 guns	16	16	15
3rd Rate 64 guns	18	23	23
4th Rate 50-60 guns	12	9	10

Numbers alone must be qualified by the steady improvement in the quality of these ships. The first new design to appear was the 64-gun *Éole* launched at Toulon in 1733. In her case there was no change in armament, just in displacement, but the two that followed were truly innovative. Both the 74-gun *Terrible* and the 80-gun *Tonnant* were massive improvements on previous French ships of their rate. In both cases this was achieved by increasing the size and taking advantage of this to increase the number of “ship-killing” guns, while improving the stability of the ship and the strength of the upper-works through reducing the number of light guns carried high up. Unlike earlier and Royal Navy ships they therefore carried no guns on the poop (mind you should a captain or admiral wish to increase status by adding some light 4-pounder guns there Coulomb had no problem – hence the *Terrible* sometimes “growing” to a 78 or even an 82 by the placement of small guns in previously empty ports!).

The degree of improvement is best seen in the following table, which lists the older and then the newer versions of each rate (note that the French system differed to that of the British – with a 74 considered a Second Rate). The change is most clearly seen in the First Rates, the two deck 80-gun *Tonnant* having a comparable ‘ship-killing’ capacity to the earlier three-deck 100-gun *Foudroyant*. She was also cheaper to build and maintain, explaining why France would use 80-gun vessels as flagships for the next 20 years. Note however that the fleet-flagship should have been the 118-gun *Royal Louis* – burnt on the stocks in one of the fires that plagued the dockyard of Brest. In all, one 80-gun, three 74-gun and seven 64-gun ships of the new design were completed during the War of Austrian Succession.

New French Ship of the Line Designs				
<i>type of SOL</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Launched</i>	<i>GDL</i>	<i>Guns</i>
old 3rd rate	<i>Triton</i> (60)	1728	136 feet	24x 24pdr: 26x 12pdr: 10x 6pdr
new 3rd rate	<i>Éole</i> (64)	1733	144 feet	26x 24pdr: 26x 12pdr: 12x 6pdr
old 2nd rate	<i>Fermet</i> (70)	1724	152 feet	26x 36pdr: 28x 18pdr: 16x 6pdr: 4x 4pdr
new 2nd rate	<i>Terrible</i> (74)	1737	164 feet	28x 36pdr: 30x 18pdr: 16x 8pdr: 4x 4pdr
old 1st rate	<i>Foudroyant</i> (100)	1723	173 feet	30x 48pdr: 32x 18pdr: 28x 12pdr: 16x 8pdr
new 1st rate	<i>Tonnant</i> (80)	1740	186 feet	30x 36pdr: 32x 18pdr: 18x 8pdr
<i>Notes:</i> Instead of tonnage (which varied by period, method and dockyard) the Gun Deck Length (GDL) is used to compare dimensions. French ‘pounds’ are about 10% larger than those used by the Royal Navy – for example a French 36-pounder equates to a British 39-pounder. The <i>Foudroyant</i> had not been considered suitable for sea duties since 1736; most thought her timbers could not take the weight of the 48-pounder guns on her lower-deck. Consideration was given to replacing these with 36-pounders, but instead it was decided to build a new fleet-flagship. But she burnt before being ready – her details are below.				
<i>intended</i>	<i>Royal Louis</i> (118)	1740	?	32x 36pdr: 34x 24pdr: 24x 12pdr: 18x 8pdr

Smaller French ships were notably different from those of the Royal Navy, if only because they were developed for two very different sea conditions. On the Mediterranean a small galley squadron was still around and despite very limited finances two demi-galères, the *Chasse* and *Decouverte*, just 75 tons and with only two 3-pounder guns each, were built in 1742. This was to presumably retain in office and income the irrelevant and outdated officer corps of the Galleys of France. Far more effective were two other ships that were built to catch the dreaded *zebec*, these latter being fast and weatherly craft, notable for being able to convert from lateen (a form of fore and aft sail) to square rig, which made them difficult to catch and therefore a favourite of the Barbary Pirates. The *zebec*’s only handicaps were the large crew needed and a hull design that prevented heavy guns from being mounted. The French solution was the *barque-latins*, essentially a super-zebec but adding oars that allowed the crew to take her to windward; the ships also mounted fourteen 6-pounder guns. The *Sibelle* and *Legere* had been the scourge of pirates since built in 1728 and were equally deadly against British merchantmen. They were backed up by smaller tartanes: two masted ships with a lateen rig. One such was the *Diligent* built at Toulon (like the others) in 1738.

Strangely the small craft serving at Brest and La Rochelle were far less effective, probably the weakest sea-going element of the French navy. All but the newest were two deckers of from 30 to 40 guns, but even inferior in design to the Royal Navy versions, since they had an inadequate freeboard – one with a height of just four feet at best between sea level and the lower gun ports. Therefore just like the Royal

Navy 80-gun three-deckers they were handicapped in all but smooth seas. The French solution was to class these ships (11 in all) as *flutes* and operate them most of the time ‘en flute’. The expression referred to the open row of keys on a flute which matched in appearance the empty lower gun-ports of the flutes. As an example the *Seine* (most were named after rivers) of 1719 was rated at 30 guns in peace and 54 in war – in practise for most of the time she just mounted her upper-deck battery of 8-pounder guns, with the heavier and of course often unusable 12-pounders seldom mounted below. On several occasions they were used as troop transports, packing soldiers onto the empty gun-deck. As a partial replacement for these the navy adopted the lug rig (best described as a ‘square-shaped fore and aft sail’), very suited to the varying sea and wind conditions of northern Europe, using it on fast sailing ships called *chasse-marées*. But these were only suitable against small craft, being limited to a few swivel guns.

However just as Coulomb improved large ship design at Toulon, so Ollivier began to replace outdated designs at Brest. There were already several *frégates légères* in service, single-decked ships of 20 guns, mainly built at Le Havre but for service not speed. Ollivier favoured a sleeker ship with taller sails and with the *Medeé* launched at Brest in 1741 created the first of the genuine frigates, carrying 26 8-pounder guns. A year later La Rochelle completed the very similar *Volange*, also capable of out-sailing any Royal Navy Sixth Rate or sloop.

While French ship-construction improved compared with the British, the rest of the French dockyard system remained mired in corruption and strangled by patronage. Part of the problem was that while British naval ports were under the command of active admirals and captains (only the details of construction and repair were reserved to the Naval Board), ports such as Brest and Toulon were controlled by a separate set of officers. These were the ‘officers of the port’ as opposed to the ‘officers of the sword’, who may have held ranks such as *capitaine de frégate* or *lieutenant de vaisseau* but could not under any circumstances command a ship or its sailors. They had a separate hierarchy of promotion headed by the *Intendant de Levant* and the *Intendant du Ponant* (matching in rank a number of military intendants that were attached to major field armies). Each port of any size, both at home and at the colonies, was also commanded by an *intendant* and the career of a senior one, *capitaine de vaisseau* Bigot de La Motte, *Intendant de la Marine à Brest*, clearly shows that despite the military rank an officer of the port had no military status. Previously he had been, in order, principal secretary at Le Havre, commissioner at Brest, controller at La Rochelle and inspector-general of Calais and Nantes. None of this would matter were it not that La Motte was old (in his late 70’s), well connected, quite unable to control his subordinates but utterly unwilling to allow ‘officers of the sword’ to help hasten the docking, repairing and preparing of ships. Brest was particularly inefficient as the other two senior officers, the *capitaine du port* (harbour-master) and the chief constructor (the gifted Ollivier) despised each other. Since promotion was by connection and there were entire multi-generational and often mutually hostile families of port officers, little could be done to fix the problem. This situation had the greatest impact when large fleets were being fitted out, as the chaos and lack of cooperation led to delay. On several occasions this had profound effects as when the expeditions to the West Indies in 1740 and to North America in 1746 were delayed, with provisions eaten in port, leading to massive loss of life from disease and scurvy. Similarly the delay in getting the Brest Fleet to sea in 1744 contributed to the failure of the attempt to invade England that year. There were hopes that this problem could be circumvented by expanding the shipyard at Quebec in New France, but progress was slow and as late as 1743 the only ship in service built there was the *Canada* of 28 guns.

### Spanish Navy Ships – Their Characteristics

In sharp contrast, Spain took immediate advantage of the opportunities in her colonies and the greatest shipyard innovation of the 18th Century turned out to be the growth of the Havana dockyards in Cuba. This was the largest industrial establishment in the Western Hemisphere, a recognition of just how crucial the navy was to Spain in its role of protecting its treasure fleets.

Location of Active Spanish warships on the outbreak of war in 1739						
Location	114 gun	80-gun	70-gun	60-66 gun	50-60 gun	24-50 gun
Cadiz	1	1		10	7	
El Ferrol		1	5	2		
Cartagena						2
Havana						
Cartagena des Indies			1	4		
Havana				3		1
Veracruz				1	1	2
River Plate					2	
Calleo						1

*Notes:* The ships at Veracruz belonged to the *Armada de Barlovento*. The squadron at the River Plate protected shipping at Buenos Aires and Montevideo. Calleo was the principal naval port on the Pacific coast. Only ships ready for sea service are shown.

Of these by far the most important was *La Flota a Nueva España* which left Cadiz in May, sailing to Havana and Vera Cruz. The other was the *Galeones a Terra Firme y Peru*, leaving Cadiz in August and destined for Cartagena des Indes and Porto Bello. This last was in fact closed down in 1746, the treasure moving exclusively in the *Flota*, as the attention of Spain shifted to the riches of Venezuela and Argentina. It was replaced by the ships of the Caracas Company, covered in more detail later. The goods from those two areas moved in convoys, guarded both by the Spanish Navy and by the warships of private institutions such as the Caracas Company. The third ‘treasure’

was taken both from and to Spain – this was the Azogue Fleet. Fast merchantmen and their warship escorts would carry mercury ('quicksilver') from Cadiz to Vera Cruz to help smelt the raw silver from the mines, on its return the convoy would carry pure silver back to Spain. To protect the West Indies trade from privateers and pirates the navy maintained on station the *Armada de Barlovento*, the 'Windward Squadron', usually consisting of just two ships of the line. The route from Spain was relatively safe (known as the *Carrera de las Indias*), the problems coming on the return path. The only route with easy winds passed between Florida and the Bahamas and it was here that the strength of both galleon and escort was tested. Only rarely did a squadron make its way around Cape Horn to the Pacific, as there were no shipbuilding facilities on the coast of Peru and Mexico and those in the Philippines concentrated on building the Manila treasure galleons. As a result Spanish warships were widely scattered in peacetime, more so that was the case with other navies.

Just to make matters more complicated the Spanish authorities were finally starting to realise that yellow fever could only be controlled when soldiers and sailors lived for years in the West Indies, gradually achieving a degree of immunity. The army established a *fijo* (permanent or 'fixed') battalion at Cartagena and Havana and increased the number of local militia. But it was not so simple for the navy. Some measures were taken, such as assigning 'standing' crews to the *Flota* and to the *Armada de Barlovento*. However the main strength of the navy was at home so it was decided to send out a strong squadron to the Indies at the start of the war (mainly from El Ferrol) and assume that these ships (and more important their crews) would remain in the Indies. Unfortunately while common sailors could be convinced to stay in Cuba their lordly officers could not, and on their return these sometimes brought yellow fever back to Spain itself.

This emphasis on trade protection meant that the traditional features of a Spanish warship were strength, seaworthiness and guns sufficient to discourage privateers. When, however, such ships came up against vessels designed purely for battle the result was disastrous. In 1718 a smaller Spanish fleet that was grossly deficient in guns was heavily defeated by a British force at the battle of Cape Passaro. All that was left was some 20 small ships of the line scattered across the empire. The Bourbon monarch appointed Jorge Patino as Intendant of the Navy (equating to a British civilian first lord of the admiralty) with the power to reorganise and rebuild the fleet. As Spain was an absolute monarchy the administrative system was centralised – the *Junta del Almirantazgo*, and its powerful secretaries, such as José de la Quintana, acting for the King and his officials.

Command was split between that of squadrons led by admirals, and regions. Each naval port and all coastal regions were grouped into *departamento* and placed under the command of a *Capitan-General*. These varied in rank and authority, the senior being those of El Ferrol, Cadiz and Habana (Havana having its own distinct system that included management of the skilled slaves used in ship construction). Beneath these, but reporting only to the central command were the ship designers responsible for the yards in the major ports. Unlike Britain, but even more so than France, each designer had considerable latitude. As a result in the Spanish fleet it was unusual to have more than two or three ships in a class, with the designers restricted only by cost and number of guns, hence only two 70-gun *Princessa* ships (the other being the *Principe*). The largest single group were the 60-gun *Arzueta* class, all built at the Royal dockyard at Guarnizo on the Basque coast (they were the *San Antonio*, *San Carlos*, *San Fernando* and *San Luis*) the classic type of Spanish trade protection warship.

Four initiatives were undertaken: The old regional squadrons were abolished, a marine corps was established, new shipyards were built at Cadiz and Santandar and a new naval dockyard was begun at Cartagena, and new ships of new design were laid down. The traditional demand to protect *Flota* and *Galeones* remained, so the dockyards produced a highly varied fleet. This tied in with the Spanish definition of a *navios* or ship of the line having a minimum of 60 guns, compared with the contemporary Royal Navy requirement of 50 guns – those that were smaller being the *fregata*. Note that this has nothing to do with 'frigate', most *fregata* being heavy two-deckers: ships suitable for trade protection because they were not overloaded with guns and therefore more seaworthy. Of course they were dragged into fleet and squadron fights but even so their sturdy construction made them adequate combatants.

In addition Patino ordered that some 'genuine' ships of the line be built at the new yards, the most famous being the *Real Felipe*, when in service the largest and most powerful warship in the world, capable of 'seeing off' four British ships of the line, two of them First Rates, at the Battle of Toulon. Apart from size and strength the new ships of the line were characterised by longer than usual gun-decks, yet were considered under-gunned by Royal Navy standards. Note however that these were always the minority in the Spanish fleet – with only seven 70-gun, two 80-gun and the 114-gun *Real Felipe* built before the war started. Sitting uneasily between the two groups were a number of 64-gun ships, expanded versions of the 'trade' ships and built in yards that could not handle the larger designs. Fortunately at this stage the dockyards at Havana were specialising in building these, using mahogany and cedar timbers. As a result they were both stronger and more resilient than comparable ships in other countries (it also helped that these tropical woods produced far fewer deadly splinters than European wood).

<i>Rate</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>launched</i>	<i>guns</i>
1st Rate	<i>navios</i>	<i>Real Felipe</i> (114)	1732	30x 36pdr: 32x 24pdr: 30x 12pdr; 22x 8pdr
2nd Rate	<i>navios</i>	<i>Santa Isabel</i> (80)	1730	30x 24pdr: 32x 18pdr; 18x 8pdr
3rd Rate	<i>navios</i>	<i>Asia</i> (64)	1734	24x 24pdr: 26x 12pdr; 10x 8pdr
4th Rate	<i>fregate</i>	<i>N.S. del Pilar</i> (50)	1733	22x 18pdr: 22x 14pdr; 6x 10pdr
5th Rate	<i>fregate</i>	<i>Hermoine</i> (40)	1735	18x 12pdr: 18x 8pdr: 4x 4pdr

*Notes:* These are Spanish weight pounds – like the French about 10% greater than an English pound. One complicating feature of the Spanish navy was that most of its ships bore double names – that of a saint and a secular identifier. For example the *Asia* above was officially known as the *Nuestra Senora de Loreto*, while to make matters worse duplicate names were common. *Nuestra Senora de Pilar* (as in the ship above) was also the sacred name of the ship of the line normally referred to as the *Europa!*

Even the production from the new yards was insufficient and in 1740 emergency measures had to be taken. It was not unusual for warships to be bought abroad – earlier both the *Genoves* and *Fama Volante* of 52 guns had been purchased from Genoa, but this time a number of large merchantmen and privateers were hastily bought, taken to the Cadiz dockyards, given a complete second gun-deck and declared ships of the line, each mounting between 60 and 66 guns. Of course they lacked the heavy timbers and spacious gun-decks that characterised true Spanish warships and were of course less suitable for battle. One of these was the *Podor*, a converted French East Indiaman and the only Spanish ship to be lost at the Battle of Toulon. Although she was listed as a 64-gun ship, they were 18 and 8pdr weapons rather than the heavier guns in ‘true’ warships of the same class. The five surviving *navios* of this group were rapidly returned to the original owners as soon as new ‘proper’ warships were available, most of them in 1746.

The one great weakness of the Spanish navy was the lack of trained sailors. While they were adequately manned in peacetime and while *la leva* (the Spanish version of the press gang) was used, after a number of years ships were desperately short of qualified sailors. Three conditions affected this, one being the successful privateers of the Basque coast, which drained trained seamen from the navy, while the seamen of the *Flota* were protected and could not be taken. More important was disease, especially yellow fever and malaria which were pervasive both in the West Indies and, naturally, in the great ports that traded with the Americas. A famous example took place at Cartagena des Indies in 1740 when de Blaz, commander of its naval squadron was so short of sailors (by some accounts less than 1,000) that he was unable to sortie against the British, instead using his ships first as floating batteries and then scuttling them to delay entry of the British ships into Cartagena harbour. This problem cost the fleet some of its finest ships, including the 80-gun *San Felipe* and the 70-gun *Galicia*.

The solution undertaken was to add soldiers to the crew. In peacetime the men came from the marine corps established by Patino, but in war it became customary to transfer men from ordinary infantry regiments onto ships as needed. Even the Royal Navy was forced to do this on occasion, but the Armada turned it into a rule. By the end of the War of Austrian Succession at least one-third of the crew of every ship of 50 guns or more were soldiers of one kind or another. And the custom continued for the rest of the century, so that at Trafalgar anything up to half the crew of some Spanish ships were infantrymen drafted a few weeks earlier from the regiments stationed around Cadiz.

Of course the smaller ships of the navy did not have this problem, service in those vessels usually assigned to prey on British merchantmen being highly prized. The most useful design was once again based on the zebec, with its handy combination of fore and aft and square sails, and just like the French Toulon squadron the Spanish developed a specialised adaptation. This was the *jabeque-bergantin*, capable of carrying 30 small guns, classified as a *gardacosta* and the primary weapon against pirates, privateers and foreign merchantmen daring to break the Spanish monopoly of trading into what is present day Mexico, Panama, Columbia and Venezuela. The large crew was easy to obtain from sailors anxious to avoid service in the big ships. Less sophisticated were the *bergantin* and *aviso*, two-masted ships carrying 16 guns that in peacetime carried mail and messages between Spain and the viceroys that ruled in South and Central America. When war came these served as acceptable substitutes for frigates, especially as their locally recruited crews had resistance to yellow fever.

### The ‘Company’ Warships: Their Characteristics

All three countries did on occasion supplement their ‘royal’ ships with those of the great trading companies, each of which held the monopoly for long-distance trade with certain possessions. These monopolies, abhorrent to modern attitude, were accepted because of the massive investment and risk involved in these trades. Of these companies, the best known is the British East India Company. Most of their ships weighed about 500 tons in this period and carried 20-30 guns, primarily to fend off the Muslim pirates that operated in the Indian Ocean. Some were larger, up to 1,000 tons with 40 heavier (18-pounder) guns and when war came these could expect to be pressed into a line of battle.

The French equivalent was *La Compagnie française des Indes orientales*. Its vessels tended to be heavier-armed, a famous example being the *Content* of 64 guns which fought with the French line of battle against Admiral Hawke.

The Spanish had their *Real Compañía Guipuzcoana de Caracas*. This was a little different as the trade was not with the East but the West Indies, especially with Venezuela and the colonies along the River Plate. Because of the permanent threat from pirates, privateers and warships (note that British privateers were operating against Spanish ships while at peace) not only were all of its merchantmen armed, but the company also operated its own warships to escort them. Since they used the same names as the Spanish Fleet there is much confusion over the number – as an example there were four *San Antonio*’s in action at the same time, two of them company ships. The largest company ships were the *N.S. del Coro* of 50 guns, and the *San Ignacio* of 50, but over a dozen smaller vessels of 30 or less operated throughout the war. Indeed both the company and the fleet proved both resourceful and skilled and the Royal Navy, despite endless efforts, was unable to catch any treasure convoys, or far that matter any large treasure ships.

### \*\*\*\*\* OPENING MOVES – 1739-1740

*“France will never be able to enjoy any peace on earth, or return to a flourishing condition until she has curbed and enfeebled the English despotism on the water.”*

*Chevalier du Caylus, quoted in Richmond vol. 1, p. 163.*

#### Haddock’s Dilemma

Admiral Haddock, commander of Britain’s Mediterranean Fleet, had been ordered to a) protect Minorca, b) protect Gibraltar, and c) continue defending trade against sallies by the Barbary pirates. Further instructions demanded he d) execute reprisals against Spanish shipping, e) menace Spain’s coast, and f) destroy the *Flota* – the Spanish treasure fleet – now assembling at Cadiz. Seeing that the *Flota* plus the Cadiz squadron outnumbered his entire force, this was perhaps a bit of a stretch, even for the Royal

Navy. But, he was reinforced.

Additional forces had been dispatched from England as early as June 1739 in hopes of intercepting elements of the *Flota* returning home. Unsuccessful, the British forces (a squadron of 3 ships under Captain Ogle and another of 4 ships – *Kent*, *Lennox*, *Elizabeth*, and the *Pearl* frigate – under Captain Mayne) appeared in time for the official outbreak of war.

*[Readers will note the ships named above do not appear in the OOB for October. They were tasked with cruising off Cadiz and Portugal, and were technically working in the Atlantic theatre.]*

The Admiral had been cruising of Cadiz since June. He based at Cape St. Mary’s (which lay within neutral Portuguese waters), and he remained on station through August. In the middle of that month London suddenly decided to commit an act of war and

preemptively attack the Spanish in the harbours of Cadiz and Ferrol! Haddock was also told to investigate the possibility of preventing a putative attack on Minorca by sacking Cartagena and Barcelona. All these endeavours proved impractical. Critically, the British were unable to blockade both Cadiz and Ferrol simultaneously. The best Haddock could do was take 2 prizes in September – ironically worth more than the compensation demanded from Spain.

*[Richmond points out, as David has done, that Spain, just like Britain, had great difficulty finding crews; in time of peace the ships were essentially decommissioned and the crews paid off (and snapped up by the merchant marine or the fishing fleets).]*

It was August before Spain felt ready to conduct reprisals of her own, and she employed privateers, saving her main forces (at least the privateers were *crewed*). To assist the privateers, the Army would be employed in a deception role, with camps in the north of Spain threatening a descent on Britain and camps in the south threatening an invasion of Minorca and a siege of Gibraltar. The *Armada* – the name for Spain’s Fleet – would redeploy to suit. This would draw off the Royal Navy. The Spanish projected that 24 enemy warships, or virtually all of Haddock’s strength at the outbreak of war in October, could be tied down.

As yet, war had not been declared. Britain did so on October 19th (OS), 1739, and Spain responded in kind on November 17th (OS).

*[Richmond notes that with the cession of trade between the two powers, some 900 British merchant ships were denied access to the port of Cadiz alone – representing three quarters of all the trade passing through that port.]*

### War!

*“War was at last begun, and it cannot be said that it began under the most favourable auspices. The fleet was not ready, the army was not ready, and the offensive operations had not yet been determined, nor were they fully decided upon two months later... war had actually broken out before the British Administration began to consider in what manner it should be conducted.”*

*Richmond, vol 1, p.38.*

Haddock’s strength at the beginning of October was 31 ships of all rates:

2 second rates (80-gunners)  
 3 third rates (70s)  
 10 fourth rates (4 of which were 50-gunners, the rest 60s)  
 2 fifth rates (44 guns and 32 guns)  
 8 sixth rates (24s x3 and 20s x 5)  
 1 sloop  
 2 bombs  
 3 fireships

One of the 20s (*Dolphin*) was used as a hospital ship. The bomb vessels were ketches and the fireships were sloops, and a galley (*Anne*). One of the 20s (*Dursley*) was also a galley.

*[Fireships were usually hulks, and often doubled as troop ships. It is not known what tonnage the ships were, only that they were rated as sloops in most cases.]*

Obviously, the British were lacking in the light vessels needed for patrolling. Ships of the line were expensive to maintain and unfit for anything but fleet actions and blockades. Reinforcements would come in the new year: 2x 70s, 4x 60s, 5x 50s, But a 50 would return home, along with the 44 and one of the 24s, while one of the ‘bombs’ would be sent to the West Indies, creating an even more unfavourable balance between ‘workhorses’ and ‘stallions’.

According to Richmond, at the beginning of October 1739, Haddock’s forces were divided as follows:

#### Gibraltar

Somerset (80)  
 Lancaster (80)  
 Edinburgh (70)  
 Ipswich (70)  
 Berwick (70) – rotten planking  
 Augusta (60)  
 Pembroke (60) – sprung bowsprit  
 Plymouth (60)  
 Eltham (40) – enroute home  
 Dolphin (20)  
 Solebay (20) – to Mahon  
 Mercury (8.6) – fireship  
 Ann Galley (8.6) – fireship  
 Duke (8.6) – fireship  
 Salamander (6.8) – bomb  
 Grampus (6.10) – sloop

#### St. Mary’s

Canterbury (60)  
 Dragon (60)  
 Jersey (60)

#### Off St. Vincent

Oxford (50)

#### Patrolling the Strait of Gibraltar

Gloucester (50)  
 Guarlard (20)  
 Aldborough (20)

#### Convoy to Alexandria

Falkland (50)

#### Convoy to Italy

Kennington (20)

#### Italian Coast

Tygre (50) – convoy to England

#### Off Lisbon

Dursley Galley (20)

#### Cleaning at Lisbon

Greyhound (20) – to St. Vincent

*[Note the slight differences between this list and the summary above, taken from a variety of sources, including Richmond. Where guns are listed as ‘X.Y’, this is ‘guns.swivels’ – swivels being light pieces mounted on the gunwales, capable of being ‘swivelled’.]*

What of The Threat? Apart from the *Flota*’s 8 ships, the Cadiz Squadron had 16 ships, under the able Don Rodrigo di Torres. But only 2, seconded to the *Flota*, were ready for sea. The Cartagena Squadron comprised 5 ships under *Capitan General* de la Bena Maserano, and the Ferrol Squadron had between 12 and 14, of which 4 were ready for sea.

#### At Cadiz

Real Felipe (112)  
 Santa Isabel (80)  
 Sobiero (66)  
 Fuerte #2 (62)  
 San Fernando (62)  
 San Luis (66)  
 Santa Teresa (60)  
 El Retiro (50)  
 Fama Volante (52)  
 Paloma Indiana (52)  
 La Griega (30)

Iupitero (16.6)  
Marte (16.6)  
Bombarde (8) (a bomb)  
Plus 2 unnamed fireships.

#### At Cartagena

America (64)  
Andaluçia (62)  
Hercules (60)  
Aquila (23)  
Aurora (30)

#### At El Ferrol

San Felipe (80)  
Reiña (70)  
Princesa (70)  
Principe (70)  
Santa Ana (70)  
Galicia (70)  
Léon (70)  
Real Familia (66)  
San Carlos (66)  
Asia (64)  
Guipuzcoa (64)  
San Isidoro (62)  
Neuva España (60)  
San Antonio (60)  
Galga (56)  
San Esteban (50)  
Esperanza (50)  
San Hermione (40)

The Toulon Fleet, under *Amiral du Levant* de Roche-Allard (or Laroch-Allart, or La Rochelert) consisted of:

Terrible (74)  
Duc d'Orléans (74)  
Espérance (74)  
Sainte Esprit (74)  
Borée (64)  
Eole (64)  
Sérieux (64)  
Solide (64)  
Furiéux (60)  
Heureux (60)  
Toulouse (60)  
Alcion (54)  
Diamante (54)  
Tigre (56)  
Aquilon (48)  
Flore (28)  
Zephyre (30)  
Titan (12)  
Hirondelle (16)  
Rénard (8), Ardente (8), Tempette (8), Foudroyante (8) bombs  
Plus 3 fireships.

*[Some sources list de Roche-Allard as a mere Chef d'Escadre. Whatever his rank, he was the senior man at Toulon.]*

Things were relatively quiet throughout the first quarter of 1740. Then, suddenly, a crisis!

### **Outfoxed**

Haddock did not receive the notice that war had been declared until December 1739, and to start with, merely maintained his defensive watch on Cadiz and tried to harass Spanish trade. The Admiral was supposed to winter at Port Mahon in Minorca, but this would have prevented the carrying out of his other instructions, so he remained at Gibraltar, which at that date was a

poor location, lacking basic repair facilities and adequate stores – even the base hospital was not established until the outbreak of war.

Now, as already mentioned, the British forces were not sufficient to bottle up all the Spanish ports, and in consequence, both the Ferrol and Cadiz Squadrons (9 ships of the line and 2-3 frigates) 'broke out' in May 1740, headed for the West Indies – Madrid having learned the British were beefing up their forces in the islands. Worse, the French joined them, sending squadrons from Brest, La Rochelle, and Toulon. That of Toulon, which left port either in early June or on August 25th, consisted of 12-15 sail. The Spanish were commanded by di Torres, and the Toulon Fleet by de Roche-Allard.

*[Fortunately, the French were only interested in protecting their own possessions and ships, not in aiding the Spanish - even though the effort was coordinated between Madrid and Paris. Richmond says the French sailed in June, and had 12 ships. Beatson says August and 15 ships. To give an idea of sailing times, regardless of the time of departure, Beatson says the French made Malaga on the 24th of September – i.e. a month after they left port – but were through the Straits of Gibraltar in 2 days. Richmond's date is more likely, given that the French were supposed to be supporting the Spanish, and that they returned at the end of the year. Sources differ as to whether the number of Spanish ships includes both squadrons, or only that of Cadiz. Richmond says the latter.]*

What had happened was that Admiral Haddock, in desperate need to refit his ships, some of which had been cruising for 20 months straight, and receiving word from the governor of Port Mahon that a Spanish descent on Minorca was in preparation (though not imminent), had to make a choice. In his view, the enemy's *Flota* was still unfit for sea, and it was therefore worth the risk of maintaining only a token force off Cadiz for the next couple of months. An additional reinforcement of 5 ships of the line in January added weight to his decision, but it was the governor's letter that proved decisive.

Meanwhile, the Admiralty sent the Admiral two sets of orders, both of which missed him (a common occurrence in those times). In the first set, their lordships made a similar assumption that the lull was a good opportunity for a refit, but fears of a French link-up with the Spanish at Cadiz prompted them to order Haddock to concentrate there as soon as possible after conducting his refit. For some reason, Admiral Norris assumed Gibraltar had the necessary facilities for a refit, and gauged Haddock's response times accordingly. But, at a minimum, a journey between Gibraltar and Port Mahon would take 10 days, assuming the winds were favourable. It frequently took twice as long.

Contingency orders included instructions that if the Toulon Fleet passed the Straits and combined with the Spanish, and Haddock felt the enemy was too strong, he was to send 5 ships to Admiral Vernon in the West Indies (the most likely destination) with a warning. Alternatively, if the French came out and headed north, he was to leave 10 ships in the Med and return home. Clearly, fear of a French strike was outweighing the known facts – even outweighing Haddock's standing orders not to attack the French.

The second set of orders, dispatched a week later, reflected Spain's diversionary preparations – Dutch sources reported a massive buildup in both Catalonia and Galicia. Haddock was instructed to stop refitting, and divide his strength between Barcelona and Cadiz. The Admiral was to be "particularly careful" to watch Cadiz, but Minorca was his to be "first consideration".

Fortunately, Haddock was already on his way to Minorca with 6 ships of the line and several small vessels. Enroute he learned the threat from Barcelona appeared real enough, and employed his 'clean' ships in patrolling that coast. It was Captain Ogle, left behind with 5 ships to watch Cadiz, and now with two sets of

orders on his desk, who had to make the ultimate choice. In practical terms, the first set of orders needed no decision. The emphasis was on Cadiz rather than Minorca, but with the limited resources available, Ogle's force was all that could be spared for the job in any case.

The second missive was a bombshell. Unaware that Haddock had correctly assessed the threat from Barcelona as mere preparation, and the threat from Toulon as negligible (of 19 French 40-gunners and up, only 3 appeared fit for sea), Ogle chose to reinforce his commander against what was apparently the greater danger, even though he reported 15 Spanish sail ready for sea at Cadiz. He left that port wide open, and off went the Spanish (in the third week of March) to the West Indies.

*[Richmond states that Haddock was operating in ignorance of his own Government's views on France. He believed Spain was the only threat, while they believed French entry into the war was to be certain and soon. In actuality, France did not declare war until 1744.]*

This was the sort of mistake that could be a career-breaker. Ogle showed up with 4 ships at Port Mahon on March 29th, twelve days after receiving the orders from England. Haddock had a fit. It took two weeks for Ogle to re-victual and repair his own ships before he could be sent back post-haste to Cadiz, followed by as many of Haddock's own squadron as could be spared. Naturally, they were too late.

*[Richmond brings out the point that if Haddock had told Ogle he planned to cruise the Catalan coast, the latter would have understood that his superior would have been ready for an attack against Minorca and would not need assistance. This, Haddock did not do. On the other hand, the Admiralty's suggestion that Minorca be defended at all costs appears to have been a last-minute insertion in the text of the orders.]*

Ogle was to pay for his mistake by taking 10 ships up to Ferrol for a look-in and thence home (July 7th) before heading across the Atlantic to reinforce Admiral Vernon, leaving Haddock to watch the remainder of the Spanish fleet with 5 ships of his own.

On April 23rd, disinformation generated at Madrid 'revealed' that the Spanish sortie was intended to escort a convoy bearing an army and the Jacobite Duke of Ormonde to England! 'Ministers', as Government reporters call them, panicked – particularly the Secretary of State, the Duke of Newcastle. Haddock's current orders were to be countermanded, but incredibly (Richmond says "astounding[ly]") two weeks went by and nothing was done. It was feared Ogle was smashed off Ferrol. Even so, *another* three weeks went by before new orders were drafted. Such would become a commonplace when the Duke of Newcastle took over the Government.

As a matter of fact, Ogle was not engaged off Ferrol – the Spanish had of course left the vicinity before he appeared – and on May 27th he was ordered to join the Home Fleet. For the record, Ormonde, who had made a habit of Jacobite plotting over the years, declined to lead an expedition on account of his advanced age.

Over the summer, Admiral Haddock maintained a precarious hold in the Med with a combined fleet of 13 ships:

Somerset & Lancaster (80s)  
Ipswich (flag 70)  
Pembroke (60)  
Harwich & Oxford (50s)  
Aldborough, Kennington, Guarland, Dursley Galley (20s)  
plus a bomb and 2 fireships

This was more than enough (despite one quarter of his strength being in refit) to deal with the remains of the Spanish fleet. The sailing of the Toulon Fleet caused a momentary panic, but since the countries were not at war, Haddock considered himself safe –

and also powerless to stop the French.

For the rest of 1740, Haddock's ships cruised the Spanish and Italian coasts, temporarily blockading Cartagena and Barcelona to protect an incoming British supply convoy. Hopes of intercepting the *Flota* on its return journey were dashed when a Spanish 'advice boat' (a speedy 'dispatch' vessel) located it first and warned the convoy, which headed to Ferrol instead of Cadiz.



\*\*\*\*\*

#### Nicholas Haddock (1686 – 26th September 1746)

Was destined for the sea from childhood, being the second son of Admiral Richard Haddock.

Distinguished at Battle of Vigo (1702) as a 16-year-old midshipman.

Lieutenant at Barcelona (1706).

Captain of the *Grafton* (70) at the Battle of Cape Passaro (1718), leading the attack.

Commandant of The Nore, 1732.

C-in-C Med 1738-1742, after promotion to Rear Admiral of the Red. Promoted Vice-Admiral of the Blue in 1741 and full Admiral 1744.

Relieved due to sickness, he retired from the sea, though not from public life – MP for Rochester (1734-1746).

\*\*\*\*\*

Beatson records some minor actions: in July a Spanish privateer took a British collier bound for Gibraltar, but Captain (later Admiral) John Byng 'cut it out' of Ceuta harbour; also, Captain Lee, with the *Pembroke* (60) and *Advice* (40) made a daring entry of Salo Bay to take prizes. The bay was guarded by a fort on either side of the entrance, and the ships gave fire support while

long boats went in to tow off two enemy vessels. Only one man was killed.

Operations were shut down in mid-October (that is, a minimal force of 3 ships under Captain Byng was set to watch Cadiz while the rest made ready for the next year). At year end, de Torres and de Roche-Allard's forces returned, much battered. It is not clear, but highly likely that news of the Holy Roman Emperor's death prompted their recall.

*[Richmond's report of the storm that was raised when Parliament met in November is amusing – and shows that nothing has changed in the past 300 years. Haddock's 'orders dance' was named the "worst conducted part of the worst conducted war that was ever carried on by this nation or any other". Lord Carteret, an Opposition member, motioned that Haddock's instructions for the last two years be publicly read. Lord Newcastle, who was responsible for those orders, refused, saying it would be "of great benefit to the Spaniards" if they were made public. The Opposition jeered that the only secret that would be revealed was how to issue orders to admirals that could not possibly be obeyed. The Opposition further charged that the orders had been deliberately worded to allow for misinterpretation (most likely so that the Administration could say "we told him to do that, aren't we brilliant", or, "well, we told him not to do that", regardless of what befell). But, Newcastle was too smooth an operator to be torn down in Question Time.]*

## A DUCHY FOR DON FELIPE – 1741

### The Grand View

At the dawn of the new year, war had already begun in Europe. Frederick the Great had invaded Silesia (December 1740) and would fight his first battle on the snowy field of Mollwitz in April. Bavaria, aided by a French auxiliary corps, was preparing to invade Upper Austria before invading Bohemia (a land that gave the Habsburgs one of their two crowns – the other being Hungary).

*[The concept of an 'auxiliary' force was commonly used to preserve the fiction of a power's non-involvement in a war. Today we would call them 'military advisors'. The troops were a loan, under the control of the recipient. As in the present case, the power loaning the auxiliaries often forced the recipient to conform to its own desires – but with the risk that the aided power might not conform. So, although France was the puppet-master behind the invasion of Austria, when the Bavarian Elector chose to sit in Linz for several weeks, receiving the adulation of the multitude, rather than march on to weakly-guarded Prague, there was little the French could do about it.]*

Over the course of the year, France, Bavaria, and Prussia would press in on the core Habsburg lands of Austria and Bohemia. But the proper campaigning season would open late, and Frederick, after swiftly establishing himself in Lower Silesia during his winter blitz, would remain strangely inactive all summer, finally 'selling out' to the Austrians with a temporary truce in October (the Convention of Kleinschnellendorf). This would leave the Franco-Bavarians, who would by that time be established at Linz, capital of Upper Austria, and at Prague, capital of Bohemia, to face the Habsburg storm alone.

Charles Albert of Bavaria, newly crowned by the French as Holy Roman Emperor – without the participation of much of his Empire – would not remain seated on his throne at Prague for long. The Austrians would launch their own winter blitz and carry the war to Bavaria, before being distracted by twin enemy offensives – in Moravia and in Lombardy – in 1742.

### Clashes Off Cadiz

But the focus of the Anglo-Spanish struggle remained the West Indies. Admiral Haddock, still in command of the Mediterranean station, was forced to take this into account. He began the year with about 10 ships (8 'of the line') concentrated at Port Mahon, and, apart from lesser vessels cruising the coasts, as they did year-

round, he placed 2 ships of the line and a fireship off Cadiz. The latter were under Captain John Byng, a man already demonstrating his ability to see the worst in every situation.

At the turn of the year, the Spanish, under *Jefe d'Escuadrilla* Don Juan José Navarro, appeared ready to put out from Cadiz, but whether their destination would be the West Indies or elsewhere was uncertain. London ordered Haddock to reinforce Byng, so the former split his forces in half, retaining 5 ships of the line at Mahon.

At Cadiz were an estimated 7 large ships ready for sea, plus 7 ships of the *Flota* being converted for combat duties. Haddock also had to deal with perhaps 4 French ships ready at Toulon under the energetic Chevalier du Caylus. Roche-Allard would return from the West Indies with more vessels in January.

*[Some sources say de Roche-Allard was appointed Amiral de Levant in April of 1741, and not before.]*

Haddock knew ships had come back from the West Indies, but he was unaware they were fitting out to return there. He, and the British Government, feared they would link up with the 4-5 Spanish ships at Cartagena (under de la Bena) and act as an escort for the troops concentrating at Barcelona, whose destination (in British minds) could only be Minorca. France had not declared war on England, but she *was* on a war footing.

In the event, the French plans would soon become clear, and their goal was not Cartagena. On February 12th, du Caylus' 4 ships (the remaining vessels at Toulon were undergoing overhaul after their long voyage home) fell in with Byng's reinforcements, commanded by Captain Martin, in the Strait of Gibraltar. Martin took them for Spanish, and there was a brief scuffle. Damage was minimal, and the commodores downplayed the incident. The French continued on their way. They were off to the West Indies (where they made no attempt to help the Spanish).

On his arrival off Cadiz, Captain Martin superseded Byng, to the latter's great annoyance. After some reorganisation, the squadron consisted of the following (according to Richmond):

Ipswich (70)  
Pembroke, Plymouth, & Sunderland (60)  
Oxford (50)  
Kennington (20)  
Duke fireship

Opposing him in Cadiz were:

Real Felipe (114)  
Santa Isabel (80)  
Santa Teresa & San Fernando (62)  
Paloma (52)  
Fama & Xavier (46)  
7 armed merchants with 51-62 guns each

Farther east, Haddock's depleted forces comprised:

Somerset & Lancaster (80)  
Warwick & Dragon (60)  
Advice (40)  
Dursley Galley, Guarland, & Aldborough (20)  
Salamander, Mercury, Anne Galley (8.6) (Salamander was a bomb ketch, the others were fireships)

There were also 5 small vessels cruising.

These weakened forces, half in dry-dock, and with crews taken from the army garrison of Port Mahon, were unable to prevent serious depredations by privateers, or, worse, to prevent the 5,000-strong Spanish garrison of Majorca from being withdrawn; the camps at Barcelona now contained some 10-12,000 men.

'British Intelligence' informed Haddock that the latter *could* be destined for Italy instead of Minorca. The Bourbon prince of Naples, Don Carlos, was mobilising, and it was becoming clear Spain intended to attack Lombardy as Maria Theresa was forced to withdraw troops.

The bad news piled up. At the beginning of May, the Cartagena Squadron was astir. Since the forces at Barcelona were not yet ready, this could only mean a raid on Minorca or a sally upon British commerce. Haddock made plans to intercept. Then, word came via a (much needed) victualing convoy that the Cadiz Squadron – at least 8 sail strong – had vanished. Martin, off chasing French ships, had been caught in a Levanter and sent rocketing through the Straits, leaving the enemy port clear. The Spanish were observed making for the West Indies, but Haddock was not so sure. They might be planning to swing east with the winds, or, more likely, aiming to intercept a second victualing convoy outbound from Britain.

*[Richmond praises the captain of the Pembroke, who, separated from Martin, sent off the Kennington (20) to warn Admiral Vernon in the West Indies. Haddock approved the decision. The point being that British naval operations were not as hidebound as is sometimes made out.]*

Then, just as he was preparing to challenge what might be the combined forces of the Cadiz and Cartagena Squadrons, a convoy of 9 friendly 'Turkey' merchantmen turned up from the Levant. These absolutely had to be convoyed through the Straits. If Haddock valued his career, there was no option. He set out for Gibraltar on May 5th, battling contrary winds the whole way (it took 10 days just to reach Cape Palos, north of Cartagena, and another 10 to get to Gibraltar).

Meanwhile, news came (from a Gibraltar ship sent to Port Mahon that had chased the Admiral for days) that the Cadiz Squadron was back home. Shortly after, it was reported at sea again, now augmented to 9 ships. Apparently, the Spanish *were* after British shipping. This notion was confirmed when Haddock reached Gibraltar. Some 80 merchantmen had crowded into the harbour for protection.

Immediately, Haddock, joined by Martin's forces, undertook to escort these ships through the Straits by night. He accompanied the convoy far out into the Atlantic before turning back to hunt the Spanish. But, his elation at getting one convoy safely away was dampened by the news that the Cadiz Squadron had linked up with the Ferrol Squadron and had, doubtless by now, sunk or taken his second victualing convoy. Fortunately, the opposing groups missed each other and the British convoy arrived off Lisbon unscathed. From there they proceeded to Gibraltar and relative safety. The Cadiz Squadron, thwarted, returned to base, where it was soon observed by a couple of British frigates.

This from the British perspective. As a matter of fact, Haddock's assumptions, though prudent, were wrong. The Spanish ships had in reality been sent to protect a convoy of their own, which did not, in the event, leave the West Indies. The Spanish Treasury was empty and this convoy of bullion was their only hope of funding the expedition now assembling at Barcelona. Haddock was right to worry, though. In the process of securing their own convoy, the Spanish might easily have bumped into the British merchant ships and done serious damage.

The whole affair was resolved while Haddock was on his way back to the coast from his own escort duty. It was now early June. The enemy was back in port where he belonged, but had apparently been augmented to some 17 sail – a serious threat. Once again, the question arose, when – not if – they came out, would they be bound for the West Indies (where Cartagena des Indes was besieged by Vernon's forces) or Barcelona, where the Expedition to Somewhere was being organised?

Haddock compromised, basing at Lagos. From here he could cruise to intercept any westward moves from the Catalan coast while remain close enough to the Straits to pursue any east-bound forces.

*[One hopes the reader is by now getting a feel for the hit-and-miss nature of naval operations in the Age of Sail.]*

### **Stern Chase**

July 25th saw an action at last. Captain Barnett, commanding the *Dragon* (60), two frigates (*Feversham* & *Folkestone* (40)), and the *Mary galley* (20), encountered 3 strange sail off Cape Spartel. These fled, and the British gave chase. As they finally drew close, Barnett hailed them and demanded to know their identity. He was told they were French, and, as they were going about their lawful business, he should do the same.

*[As David Hughes has pointed out in his excursus on 'ships and guns', those 40s were not 'real' frigates. Later in the war many of the class would be upgraded to 44s. This entailed more than just adding 4 guns. The ships were rebuilt.]*

Barnett insisted on his right to board the vessels to confirm their identity, which the French thought a great insolence. All the while the ships remained cruising, the French refusing to slow down and be boarded. The British fired warning shots, which the French took as a challenge and replied (after a verbal warning of their own) with a broadside. A running fight broke out.

This was one of those incidents where both sides tell different stories, still similar enough to show that things could have been conducted in a reasonable manner if both parties had not been itching to fight. The French commodore was the same du Caylus who had left for the West Indies earlier in the year.

Caylus, commanding the *Boreé*, *Aquilon*, and *Flore*, engaged the British for about an hour before breaking contact – the British having to pause and repair their rigging. Continuing the pursuit, the *Feversham* caught up early next morning, at which time a parley was arranged before more damage was done. The captain of the *Aquilon* was blamed for provoking matters, but in his own dispatches, du Caylus played up the fact he had successfully engaged a superior British force. Casualties were 1 captain and 25 others KIA and 75 WIA for the French; 11 KIA and 22 WIA for the British.

*[Richmond points out that the British were also having trouble with the Dutch – supposedly an allied power – and others, and frequently took actions that other nations found offensive. He instances a recalcitrant Venetian ship taken at gunpoint in a Portuguese anchorage. Beatson says the incident was glossed over like the one in February, with apologies all round, but he may be confusing the two.]*

### **Invasion!**

The target of the Spanish Expedition had now been determined as Italy. Everything was in readiness. All that was needed was a window of opportunity.

Haddock's overstretched forces could not keep up the watch for long. In September, the Admiral was forced to return to Gibraltar, where 300 of his men were sent to a hastily erected hospital. Hundreds more sick stayed on board ship as they could not be accommodated. Welcome reinforcements from an Administration deeply disturbed by the Spanish manoeuvres came in the form of 4 ships under a Captain Cornewall. Less welcome were accompanying instructions to watch both Barcelona and Cadiz simultaneously. These ports were 600 miles apart. Haddock could only watch one, so he plumped for Cadiz, where the 17 enemy sail could, as always, go either east or west.

The Admiral's decision seemed the right one. At the end of September, the Cadiz Squadron made ready for sea again.

Rumour had it that the Toulon Fleet was also intending to sally, this time in concert with the Brest Fleet. But it was not until November 1st that Haddock learned 13 French ships had sailed from Toulon on October 11th. They appeared to be making for the Straits. That could mean the Admiral would be faced with a combined Franco-Spanish force of 30 sail. The attitude of the French earlier in the year suggested this move *might* be intended to announce the end of French neutrality.

In the nick of time, Haddock received 5 more ships, two of them of 90 guns, but he was still inferior in numbers to the enemy. London, meanwhile, was already aware the French, combined with ships from Cadiz, were intending to screen the small Cartagena Squadron as it escorted some 220 transports from Barcelona to Italy. However, the Administration seems to have been under the impression that Haddock was on top of the situation, because no more ships were added to the last 5 on the slate. Instead, the Admiral was instructed to go after the expedition, and, if he could not catch up before the troops were landed, at least attack the transports on their way back to Spain.

To accomplish this, Haddock would have only the worn out forces he had begun the year with. Cornwall's 4 ships had not arrived, and the additional 5 he had been promised were still at Spithead.

*[London, Richmond remarks, seemed to believe the ships moved as fast through the water as they did on paper.]*

It was all moot, in any case. By the time Haddock's orders arrived, the first convoy had landed its cargo of soldiers and a second, larger one was in preparation, to be covered by the combined forces of Cadiz, Cartagena, and Toulon. The Brest sortie was a feint.

Cornwall's reinforcements, engaged in escorting a convoy that was scattered by a gale, were nearly taken by the Cadiz Squadron as the latter swung out to sea preparatory to passing the Straits. The British were forced to flee for Lisbon, and did not actually reach Gibraltar until December. Only one ship made it through, the 90-gun *Marlborough*, and she was in no fit state to assist Haddock. The Spanish had already passed the Straits by then, heading up the Spanish coast before Haddock felt ready to pursue. The Admiral caught up with the slower enemy by Cape Palos. The first great fleet battle of the war was about to commence.

The following is taken from Richmond, vol. 1, pp 170-171.

*"Malaga Bay was drawn blank and Haddock stood on towards Cape Palos. At 3 p.m. on the 6th of December the 'Roebuck,' which was scouting ahead, made the signal to seeing a fleet, which soon became visible from the mastheads of the squadron, bearing about east. The Admiral at once crowded sail and steered in pursuit, but the wind was very light and he closed little during the night. Next morning sixteen sail were visible from the masthead at daylight. The wind was south-east by east and the enemy bore east by north and were going large to the westward of north, evidently for Cartagena [Richmond's spelling, to avoid confusion with Cartagena des Indies on the Spanish Main]. At last Haddock had his evasive enemy well in sight with every probability of being able to cut him off and bring him to action before he could gain the shelter of another port. The ships were all cleared for action, every stitch of canvas was set, and hopes ran high that the enemy would soon be brought to action.*

*About 9 A.M. a midshipman who was at the masthead of the 'Dragon' saw another four or five sail ahead. He came down from aloft and informed [Captain] Barnett, who at that time was going round the decks seeing everything clear. When Barnett reached the poop after completing his rounds he called to the mastheadman and asked if he saw any more ships ahead; he was told that seven were now in sight. A lieutenant went aloft, and returned confirming the news. Barnett at once made the signal for seeing a fleet and altered course to steer for them as the Sailing Instructions enjoined, so as to point them out to the Admiral. The Spaniards about the same time bore away more to the westward; by 10 o'clock the strange ships were visible from the poop.*

*Haddock continued in chase of the Spaniards till about noon by which time the strangers could be clearly made out. It was the French squadron consisting of eleven ships. Haddock with his thirteen sail of the line was in presence of twenty-eight sail of the enemy.*

*The relative positions of the three squadrons can now be seen. The French bore north, about fifteen miles distant and were standing towards Haddock. The Spaniards bore east-north-easterly and were about nine miles distant, steering to meet the French. The wind was about east-south-east. Whether Haddock should attempt to attack the Spaniards, cutting them off before they should be able to join the French was now the question he had to decide. There was little doubt that the neutrality of the latter could not be depended on, "not being able," as Barnett says in his Journal, "to account for their having cruised near six weeks off Cape de Gat at this season of year without supposing that it was in order to join the Spaniards and defend them, if not jointly to attack us."*

*Haddock called a council of war of his eight senior captains which decided that in view of the great superiority of the enemy it would be dangerous to continue the pursuit, and that the best course would be to keep to windward of the enemy and not to allow him to get between the British squadron and any reinforcements that might be coming.*

*For the next four days Haddock continued cruising in the neighbourhood of Cape de Gatt with easterly winds. On the 11th the wind came westerly and drove him over to the Balearic Islands, and next morning he again sighted the conjunct fleet, now numbering twentyseven sail and standing to the north-eastward under easy sail. They were to windward of the British squadron, but although it lay in their power to bear down upon Haddock they made no attempt to do so. From their abstention Haddock inferred that the French intended leaving him alone provided he did not attack the Spaniards. "I conclude," he wrote, "that the French in the present conjuncture will forbear hostilities, at present at least, but on condition we should offer to attack the common enemy under their protection." Arguing at the same time that it was now beyond the power of his squadron to prevent the expedition, guarded by so superior a force, from sailing, he steered for Minorca there to await further instructions or, better, a reinforcement. He anchored at Port Mahon on December 17th. The enemy, content with having prevented him from attacking, proceeded to Barcelona where they arrived on December 24th."*

Haddock lacked the authority to start a war with France. Even if the British had tried to engage, the French, who had previously stationed themselves off Cape Gatt to block any approach, before mingling with the convoy, though they were forbidden to *initiate* hostilities, were under orders to report any engagement as an act of war.

It was after this incident that the Spanish sent off their second convoy to La Spezia, a journey that, thanks to the weather, took seven weeks! It would be the last mass convoy to Italy. In England, a political storm raged against the Government. Even in France it was believed Haddock was under secret orders not to molest the Spanish. (They believed it was a trick to put pressure on King Charles Emmanuel of Piedmont and make him choose sides).

In reality, of course, Haddock lacked the strength to intervene. He now found himself made a scapegoat by an Administration that had failed to provide sufficient resources. (Specifically, by the Duke of Newcastle, who actually lied to Parliament about Haddock's dispositions). The other members of the Government went along with this, according to Robert Walpole, head of the Government, because,

*"You ask me about Admiral Haddock... he had discretionary orders to act as he should judge proper from his notices. He has been keeping the Spanish fleet at Cales [Cadiz]. Sir Robert says, if he had let that go out, to prevent the embarkation, the Tories would have complained and said he had favoured the Spanish trade under the pretence [sic] of hindering an expedition that was never designed."*

*Horace Walpole, quoted in Richmond, vol 1, p. 174*

The affair had one positive outcome for the British. From now on, commanders in the Med would not be held responsible for the

watch on Cadiz (though they sometimes would take part in it) or be required to interfere with Spanish overseas commerce. They would be devoted solely to assisting the Habsburg cause in Italy.

## SHOW OF FORCE – 1742

### The Grand View

In Europe, 1742 would see the conclusion of the First Silesian War, as Frederick the Great, having acquired Silesia, tried with another winter campaign to take Moravia and Bohemia, winning the Battle of Chotusitz (May 1742) but bogging down in Moravia. His official allies, the Saxons, would drag their feet and be no help at all. Frederick would not forget. His unofficial allies, the Franco-Bavarians, would, after taking Prague in November of 1741, see an Austrian army knocking at the gates of the Bavarian Elector's own capital, Munich. In the Low Countries, the opposing forces would multiply, but without an open breach between Britain and France, and in England, Robert Walpole's enemies would remove him from the helm and set up an even worse Ministry.

In Lombardy, thanks to the failure to intercept the Spanish troop convoys, 28,000 Spanish and Neapolitans would begin their first campaign against the Austrian 'oppressors' of the land. The campaign would not get underway until April, by which time, their able opponent, Count von Traun, would match them in numbers. Traun would have the edge: Charles Emmanuel would signed a deal with the Habsburgs in February which included the loan of the mobile elements of his army.

By June, the Spanish offensive would be stalled, its supply lines cut by the Royal Navy. In July, the Bourbons' new ally, Duke d'Este of Modena, fearing for his safety, would accompany their retreating army while Maria Theresa, temporarily at peace with Prussia, vowed a counterattack against Naples. A number of factors would conspire to prevent it. For one, the Pope would intervene. For another, Spanish forces left behind in Provence would employ their leisure time by invading Savoy (located, in Charles Emmanuel's view, inconveniently on the far side of the Alps) and draw the Piedmontese thither.

Counterbalancing this, the bombardment of Naples by a British squadron the day after a major earthquake, would take Naples 'officially' out of the war (at least for that year). The Spanish, down to 13,000 men, would make a last token advance to Bologna (their new commander, the Count de Gages having to do *something* or share the fate of his predecessors, recalled in disgrace) and go into winter quarters in October. Traun, with only 10,000 men himself, would already have done the same.

Unlike Germany, the deciding factor in Italy would be the Royal Navy. Tellingly, the local admiral's orders were to come from the Secretary of State, not the Admiralty. All the same, 1742 opened badly on the waters of the Med.

### Inaction on All Fronts

Haddock got his long-awaited reinforcements at the end of January, 1742. He himself was now at Port Mahon, overhauling his ships. The new arrivals were in almost as bad shape as the ships they were to augment. The flagship, *Neptune* (90), under the newly promoted Rear Admiral Lestock, had 250 sick, and had already buried 54 men at sea.

The senior admiral was ill, mainly from stress, and the entire fleet remained in port until end of March, heedless of enemy activity. At that time Haddock, still ailing, transferred command temporarily to Lestock and prepared to return home. The latter called a council of war at which it was decided they had best send out 'cruisers' to ascertain the position of the enemy. Reportedly, a steady stream of supplies and troops was passing into Italy from

Spain. The *Infante* (prince) Don Felipe was reported in France, from whence he would presumably be conveyed to Italy by sea. Charles Emmanuel remained neutral for now, blocking the Alpine passes, but who knew how long that would last, or which way he would jump.

Days passed before Haddock would or could authorise the despatch of reconnaissance forces. Suffering from a nervous breakdown, he would not retire. Stirred by his lieutenant's demand that a squadron of 12 ships be sent to Toulon to intercept the Spanish princeling, the Admiral dithered. Finally, on March 30th, Lestock relieved him of command.

Before then, the Cadiz Squadron sailed, on February 12th, carrying additional troops for the West Indies (El Coro (60) and San Ignatio (60) of the Carracas Company, supported by San Sebastian (30), San Joachim (30), and San Antonio (12); the first two were cut down to 40 guns to make room for the troops).

With Lestock in command, things now began to move. He had been sent out expressly as a result of demands from the merchant community for more action. On April 7th, a Captain Forbes was sent to cruise between Marseilles and Villefranche with the *Guernsey* (flag), *Panther*, and *Oxford* (all 50s), *Folkestone* (40), *Winchelsea* (24), and a zebec.

Lestock followed soon after with all he had remaining at his disposal – 21 ships and 5 small craft:

*Neptune*, Marlborough, & Barfleur (90)

Lancaster & Somerset (80)

Ipswich, Bedford, Royal Oak, Buckingham, Lennox, Essex, & Nassau (70)

Warwick, Dragon, Pembroke, Rupert, Plymouth, & Kingston (60)

Dartmouth, Salisbury, & Romney (50)

Guarland (20)

The British found the coast alive with enemy shipping. Though the Toulon Fleet was not ready for sea, the port contained 12 Spanish and Neapolitan vessels, including galleys. Keeping his main body off Toulon, Lestock sent off detachments to chase down anything that moved. French ships found carrying Spanish stores or men were beached and burnt, as a warning.

Ultimately, the Admiral was forced to disperse his ships as far afield as Barcelona and Cap Sicie (east of Toulon). He made Villefranche his base of operations. Nevertheless, a close watch was maintained on the Spanish squadron, and on the transports assembling at Antibes. The '50s' were stationed as signal craft, ready to pass the word up and down the coast should a sortie be attempted.

As the weeks passed, the blockade began to have its effect. The Spanish did not sortie. Coasters were reluctant to take risks. And, in Turin, capital of Piedmont, the pro-Spanish party lost heart. It became less and less likely that Charles Emmanuel would open the passes to the Bourbons.

### Change of Command

The new C-in-C Mediterranean arrived at Villefranche on May 25th or 26th, in company with the *Namur* (90) and 3 other ships. He brought a new set of orders, a secret directive, and an 'issue'. The man was Admiral Thomas Mathews, who would command in the Med, with relative success, for the next two years.



\*\*\*\*\*

**Thomas Mathews (October 1676 – 2nd October 1751)**

Joined the Royal Navy in 1690. Served in the Nine Years War (Beachy Head? Barfleure) and the War of the Spanish Succession.

Commanded a number of ships. First command in 1703. Served continuously until 1713. Distinguished as Captain of the *Kent* at the Battle of Cape Passaro (1718).

Squadron commander for two years in the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean.

Retired in 1724. In 1736 was made Commissioner at Chatham (one of the main naval bases) – a civil appointment.

In 1742 he put on the old uniform to take command in the Med, receiving a ‘back dated’ promotion to Vice Admiral of the Red. Made Admiral of the Blue in 1743 and Admiral of the White in 1744, he would be dismissed from the service as a result of the inquiry into his handling of the Battle of Toulon.

65 years old at the time he took over the Mediterranean Fleet, he had over 50 years experience. Unusually, for diplomatic reasons he operated under the authority of the Secretary of State rather than the Admiralty (he had been employed on several pre-war diplomatic missions).

\*\*\*\*\*

Mathews’ orders (taken from Richmond, vol. 1, pp. 198-199) were as follows:

*“It must in great measure be left to your discretion how and where to employ your squadron the most effectually for these purposes; his Majesty has however ordered me in a particular manner to recommend to you the procuring constant intelligence of the motions and designs of the French and Spanish Fleets; the want of doing which may possibly have been the occasion of the unfortunate accidents that have already happened; and you will from thence be able to judge whether it will be most advisable for you to attend upon the Spanish and French Fleets (now said to be in the*

*harbour of Toulon) with your whole squadron; or whether you may not (as occasion shall offer) detach part of it to destroy any embarkations that may be at any time carrying on from Barcelona, or to intercept what may be coming from Antibes, where, it is said, the Spanish cavalry, or even some of their infantry too, are to embark; or to go directly with your whole squadron or send part of it to the coast of Italy.*

*As soon as you shall arrive on the coast of Italy it is His Majesty’s pleasure that you should take the first opportunity of acquainting Mr Villetes, the King’s Minister at Turin, with it, who will be with the King of Sardinia at the Army; and you will also take some way of informing the General, who shall command the Queen of Hungary’s troops in Italy, of your arrival on that coast, and that you are ready to concert with the General that shall command the Queen of Hungary’s troops in Italy, and with such person as shall be appointed by the King of Sardinia, in what manner His Majesty’s Fleet may be the best employed for the service of the Common Cause:—viz. the protecting or defending the States and Dominions of His Majesty’s Allies and the disappointing and defeating the designs of the Spaniards in Italy, and of such powers as may join with them; and if you and the General of the Queen of Hungary’s troops and the person appointed by the King of Sardinia shall be of opinion that His Majesty’s Fleet can be most usefully employed in making an attempt upon Naples in order to make a diversion of the Neapolitan troops now joined with the Spaniards and acting against the Queen of Hungary, it is His Majesty’s pleasure that in that case you should do it: and in order thereto you v’ill take care to be provided from the Admiralty with Bomb Vessels and other necessaries for the execution of such design, without however letting it be known that you have any particular service or place in view.*

*As His Majesty has always at heart the care and protection of the Trade of his subjects, and as there is a very considerable one constantly carrying on in the Mediterranean and through the Straits, it is the King’s Pleasure that you should give the utmost attention to the security of it : and you will take care to execute that part of the directions sent to Mr Haddock by which he is ordered to have a particular attention to the security of the persons and effects of His Majesty’s subjects at Leghorn during the continuance of the present troubles in Italy...*

*If contrary to expectation the Spanish or French squadrons should separately or jointly repass the Straits in order to go to Cadiz or to proceed on any other expedition; and if by that means no naval force or only one much inferior to yours will be left in the Mediterranean, you are in that case to employ his Majesty’s squadron under your command in such manner as you may think most for his Majesty’s service and for the destruction of the Maritime force of the enemy, by pursuing or following the Spanish fleet, or any other fleet that may be joined with them, wherever they go, taking care however to leave constantly on the coast of Italy such a force as may be sufficient to oppose any naval strength that can be brought against it there and for the defence of the Dominions of his Majesty’s Allies in Italy and for the security and protection of the trade of his Majesty’s subjects.”*

Mathews was given a very important diplomatic role, in addition to his naval duties. He was Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the King of Sardinia, and various lesser lights, with full powers to negotiate and to take part in councils of war. It was for this reason that he took his orders from the Secretary of State.

The secret directive, given to him verbally, was to take any opportunity of attacking and destroying French vessels, notwithstanding the latter’s neutrality. If practical, he could even enter Toulon harbour to carry out this task. The Neapolitans, though also acting only as ‘auxiliaries’ of the Spanish, were also to be chastised.

The ‘issue’ Mathews brought with him was a set dislike of Rear Admiral Lestock, whom he had dealt with when the latter was senior officer in the Medway. Alone, each was a good officer. In tandem, their mutual dislike would bear bitter fruit.

*[Beatson records that Mathews specifically requested Lestock be recalled before he set out, but for some reason, the Admiralty agreed and then failed to act.]*

## Preparations

Meanwhile, the Admiral took stock. He had 30 ships available for combat: 21 of the line and 9 '50s', plus 2 frigates (40s), and 11 sloops, bombs, and fireships. This, he decided, was not enough to sink the combined Franco-Spanish fleet in Toulon: 17 Spanish (12 of the line) and 15 French (12 of the line), to which might be added the 4 ships of Cartagena; these numbers exclude frigates and sloops.

British Forces (June 1742)

At Villefranche: Namur (90) (Mathew's flagship), Royal Oak (70), Romney (50), Sutherland (armed hospital ship)

Cruising between Marseilles and the east end of Hydres Island under Lestock: Neptune, Barfleur, Marlborough (90), Lancaster, Princess Caroline, Somerset, Russell (80); Bedford, Essex, Nassau, Ipswich, Hampton Court (70); Plymouth (60)

Up the Adriatic: Pembroke, Warwick (60); Winchelsea (20)

Between Leghorn, Corsica and Elba: Rupert (60), Panther (50), Winchester (50)

Between Cape Delle Melle, Corsica and Spezia: Guernsey (50), Mary galley (40), Guarland's prize (6.8)

In San Soupires Bay: Salisbury (50), Mercury fireship (20)

Between Villefranche and Cape Garoupe: Kingston, Oxford (50); Ann galley (6.8), Duke fireship (20)

Off Monaco: Spence (6.8)

Between Mentone and Cape Delle Melle: Guarland (20)

Between Barcelona and Majorca: Rochester (50)

At Mahon "careening": Folkestone, (40), Buckingham (70), Dursley galley (20)

Cruising on Languedoc coast: Lennox (70)

Convoying transports with provisions from Mahon: Dragon (60)

Cruising off St Vincent and Trafalgar: Dartmouth (50)

Proceeding with despatches: Salamander bomb

The numbers do not tell the whole story. To blockade Toulon, Mathews would need a force perhaps 25% larger than what he had, so that he could rotate ships out of the line for maintenance. As it was, over 25% of his force had been in continuous service for over two years and could not be considered seaworthy, let alone battle-worthy. On top of this, ships of the line had to be detached to perform cruising duties. In any case, the French were busily fortifying the place.

Mathews felt he had enough force to counter the Spanish, should they venture out alone, and enough ships cruising to interfere with their lines of communication on the Riviera. By now, however, the Spanish in Lombardy were drawing supply from a base at Rimini, with materiel brought up the coast from the Kingdom of Naples, and shipped up from Rimini via the Po River.

## To Work

A Captain Lee was already in the Adriatic, with 3 ships. He made short work of the Neapolitan coasters, and he dealt the Spanish a crippling blow by sinking the ships carrying the Neapolitan siege train. Lee remained at his post until mid-August, when the retreat of the enemy took away his reason for being there.

Henceforth, 2-3 British ships would patrol the head of the Adriatic every year, though at first, they would do so only by request. If there were no enemy forces to engage, they could at least ferry Austrian troops. This water route, which also used the Po, significantly shortened the Austrian line of communications,

which otherwise had to pass overland through Venetian territory or come down through the rough Alpine passes.

*[In a political move typical of the age, though at war with Spain, Maria Theresa's husband, Francis of Tuscany, gave his enemies transit rights through Tuscany in his capacity as Duke – even selling them provisions – before allowing his wife's forces to batter them on the other side of the mountains. In similar vein, the Duke's minister in Tuscany refused to give Captain Lee any Tuscan pilots – needed for navigating the Adriatic – for fear of offending the Spanish, yet was enthusiastic over the British presence there.]*

Mathew's base, at Villefranche, though inadequate for major repairs – which still had to be carried out at Port Mahon – was suitable as a source of fresh water and provender. The town also contained a large quantity of naval stores destined for France, which were bought up by the British.

*[Both this town and Nice, around the next headland to the west, were under Piedmontese control, but remember, Piedmont and France were not at war.]*

Villefranche, was, however, a risky post to hold, since it lay on the coast road to Italy. One of the first things Mathews was told by the Piedmontese representatives was that enemy soldiers were being transported along the coast to Monaco (an independent state then as now) in French ships. From Monaco, it would be an easy matter to attack Villefranche from the rear.

The Bourbons, intending to transport yet a third large convoy of troops, had suffered severely from gales that winter, necessitating their basing at Toulon rather than Barcelona. The troops marched overland from Spain to Antibes, but could progress no further, with 'neutral' Piedmont blocking the passes through the Alps and the British off the coast (where the latter could also interfere with a land march through equally neutral Genoa).

*[The amount of combat triggered by a forcing of the passes against light opposition and the usual protests that would follow such an act would have been diplomatically acceptable, but the heavy fighting required to dislodge some 12 battalions occupying fortified positions would not.]*

Knowing he had the backing of his Government, Mathews began systematically capturing the French transports and unloading the soldiers back at Antibes. The Admiral also tried to fortify Villefranche, but the Piedmontese were not enthusiastic; for the next year or so, the British would hold Villefranche on tenterhooks, always fearful of being caught in harbour during a Spanish advance.

Richmond includes a typical action of the time (June 16th) commenting that the act described below brought a French protest but was nonetheless justified:

*"At 5 P.M. anchored before San Tropez in 9 fathoms: found riding here H.M. ships 'Kingston,' 'Oxford' and 'Duke,' fireship, and found in the Mould of San Tropez five Spanish galleys which Captain Norris demanded of the Governor. Made a clear sloop and brought a spring on my cable. The Commodore finding me too much exposed to the enemy ordered me to weigh and anchor further out. Weighed and anchored against Mould head in 10 fathoms water. The Commodore and 'Oxford' warp[ed] nearer in and brought springs on their cables. At 2 a.m. the galleys not coming out the 'Duke' fireship was sent in to burn them which was done accordingly by being all burnt without any damage to the French. My Lieutenant was ordered [with] the boats attending the fireship in order to bring off the officers and men belonging to her. Just as the fireship entered the Mould the galleys began to fire as did the Commodore and the rest of the ships and then left off. At 3 my boats returned with two of my men shot in her: at the same time my yawl was shot from the stern and lost with the oars and furniture in her. At 4 a.m. weighed and came to sail...."*

Similar actions occurred along the Catalan coast. Beatson records an action in the summer in which Captain Lord Forrester took a 24-gun prize off Cadiz that had aboard a Spanish bishop, priest,

general, and several other officers of his suite, all bound for Naples with rich presents for Don Carlos.

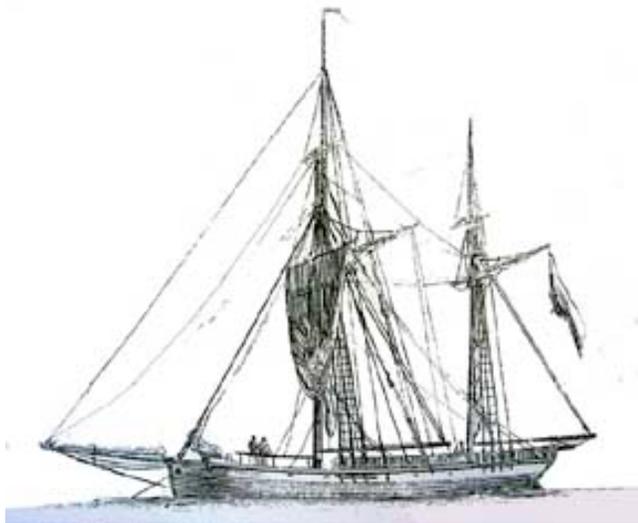
### Show of Force

Action was initiated against the port of Naples in August. As a distraction (or punitive act) it succeeded admirably. A number of British bomb ketches arrived in the Med during July, along with instructions to put them to good use.

*[A ketch is a small, two-masted ship, generally with 'fore-and-aft' rigging. Many modern sailboats are ketches. The front – main – mast is higher than the rear – mizzen – mast. The latter is located 'forward' of the rudder post; otherwise the ship is called something else. They are handy to operate, and stable. Bomb ketches had the foremast stepped back and the bows reinforced to accommodate 1-2 large mortars (making them suitable for Arctic exploration as well – two expeditions to find the Northwest Passage were undertaken during the war). The mortars were aimed and fired by anchoring the ship fore and aft in such a way that the whole could be lined up against the target. Service on board these vessels was not sought after, due to the shock when firing the pieces.]*

The squadron arrived off Naples on August 8th. It was commanded by Captain William Martin, reportedly an educated and polished gentleman, who, in this instance, employed rather rough-and-ready methods of persuasion: essentially, “do as I say or face the consequences”. His squadron consisted of:

Ipswich (70)  
Panther & Oxford (50)  
Feversham (40)  
Dursley galley (20)  
Guarland's Prize (zebec)  
Bombs Terrible, Firedrake, Salamander, & Carcass (6.8s)



*[A bomb ketch.]*

Negotiations commenced at once. Martin had to secure the disengagement of the Neapolitans from the campaign in the north. Initially, the latter, after a lot of bluster over the insolence of the demand, stalled, offering only General Burke, an Irishman, as the highest representative who would meet with the British. Burke, however, was soon convinced Martin meant business, and a written promise to remove the Neapolitan troops back into their own country was received more or less within the deadline set. As noted above, the withdrawal of the Neapolitans coincided with the

withdrawal of the Piedmontese, leading to further stalemate on the ground.

*[The text of the letter – dated August 20th – from the Neapolitan Court to Commodore Martin was as follows:*

*Sir,*

*The King had already resolved, and given orders, that his troops, which are joined with those of Spain, should withdraw, in order to the defence of his own dominions. His Majesty commands me to promise you, in his name, that he will forthwith repeat his orders, that his troops, withdrawing from the Romagna where they are at present, shall immediately return into this kingdom; and that he will not, in any manner whatsoever, either aid or assist those of Spain any more in the present war in Italy.*

*The Marquis of Salas  
Duke of Montecallegre*

*(i.e. we meant to withdraw; your threats have nothing to do with it.)*

Genoa was the next to feel Mathews' wrath. The Genoese Republic had a strong pro-Bourbon faction, and an even stronger commercial drive. Before the Admiral's coming they had been engaged in manufacturing stores for the Spanish. Initially, Mathews bought up the stores, but soon the Genoese were at it again. Captain Martin, fresh from Naples, was entrusted with seeing to the destruction of various magazines located along their coastline. If the Genoese refused or delayed more than half an hour, he was to “lay their town in ashes” and destroy the magazines himself. Genoa capitulated.

At the end of September, Mathews concentrated in the Hyères Roads, near Toulon. The threat from Antibes had gone, now that the Spanish troops looked to be spending the winter in Savoy, while word had come of a French squadron preparing to sail from Brest, possibly to enter the Med, possibly to join with a force leaving the Med.

With 18th Century courtesy, the French agreed to provision Mathews – or at least not to prevent him foraging – though they protested when his ships began interfering with the trade between Barcelona and Toulon. Ultimately, the French did not stop him. What could they, as ‘neutrals’, say, when he reminded them of the Spanish warships in their harbour.

Holding the Hyères station became difficult in October, with the advent of the Equinoctial gales. The British suffered damage on a daily basis, particularly Martin's squadron, now closely watching Toulon. Mathews' main goal, after preventing any juncture of the Brest and Toulon squadrons, was to outlast the season and prevent the enemy from sending out a convoy to bring succour to their troops in Italy. In this, ultimately, he was deemed successful, though the blockade remained very porous.

More good news was received. Charles Emmanuel, his province of Savoy overrun, came out openly on the Habsburg side. Though he did not declare war, he assured them the passes would remain closed to Spanish troops and agreed to supply auxiliary troops to the Habsburgs again in the coming year. For Mathews, there were light vessels from Piedmont's small fleet, mainly small galleys that performed well in the narrow island passages that lay along the Riviera. And, late in the year, it was learned the Spanish commander in Italy, Count de Gages, had gone into winter quarters at Bologna, rather than marching through Tuscany to the west coast as had been feared, thus further lowering the threat of additional enemy convoys.

\*\*\*\*\*

## CHASING THE WIND AND FEELING THE TIDES: THE ART OF THE SEA-CAPTAIN

*Excursus by David Hughes*

The ability to judge the force and direction of the wind was the most highly prized skill of sailing ship captains and admirals. So much so that in the Royal Navy for many years the two most important men on a warship were the *Master* who sailed the ship and the *Commander* who fought it. As requirements became more rigid the fighting leader assumed unquestioned authority over the seaman, but in turn he was then expected to be, first and foremost, one capable of navigating the ship.

This was inevitable because war at sea was governed above all by the wind. To appreciate this one has to understand what the primary weapon, the square-sailed ship of the line, could and could not do. And the greatest limitation lay in how it could sail in relation to the wind. In the parlance of the time, it could not sail closer than 'six points to the wind'. Visualise your watch face and imagine that the wind is blowing from the top – at 12 o'clock, or 00 minutes. If you were a captain and wanted to sail towards 12 o'clock you knew that the closest direction you could sail was towards 12 minutes on the right and 48 minutes on the left (note that points do not match degrees). This with a well designed ship in excellent condition, and only when the wind was not too strong. In contrast, fore and aft rigged ships like a Baltimore schooner could reach 5 points; a Barbary Coast galley could of course row directly into the wind. This is why both these vessels were so difficult to catch. (For interest a modern sailing sloop can manage 4 points and highly specialised America Cup boats might achieve 3 points).

This of course had profound implications on the war at sea since in theory a ship that started 'closer' to the wind could not be caught by another that was downwind, even if it were equally well managed. Hence the advantage of what was called the *windward* position. However, if the *leeward* ship was considerably faster it could eventually reach the other ship by a series of *tacks*, that is swinging the bow of the ship through the eye of the wind and settling on the opposing direction (in sailor parlance one would 'make from the port to the starboard tack'). This however was a tricky operation and if not carried out to perfection would result in the ship sticking head-on to the wind, its sails furiously and uselessly flapping. It was *in stays*, a condition devoutly to be avoided, especially when close to the enemy.

Of course the wind itself was not the only factor that the sailor had to contend with. When a ship was sailing towards the wind, it was subject to its force driving it laterally through the water. The taller a ship the more likely it was to *drift downwind* in this manner, with lofty three-deckers especially prone to this, the worst being the tall but stumpy Royal Navy 80-gun ships. In contrast a single-deck ship with a deep keel (like a frigate), performed well and was considered to be a *weatherly* design – hence their ability to keep watch over enemy fleets in harbour while risking an onshore wind. The worst fleet in this respect was the Dutch whose ships were forced to have flat bottomed hulls so that the many shallows along the Dutch coast could be navigated. From an admiral's point of view all this meant that the movement of his fleet was determined by the performance under sail of the *least* weatherly of his ships, and to make matters worse this varied according to both the strength and direction of a wind. As an illustration a single frigate might be caught by a theoretically slower ship of the line when both were being driven downwind in a gale – the logic being that the bigger ship had stronger masts which could carry more sail than the frigate in this condition.

The other two sea-conditions that governed war at sea both in peace and war, were the tides and the currents. Obviously tides were only a factor when in harbour or close to the shore but both had the same annoying feature – that their strength and direction could not be correctly measured. This was because the only way of measuring speed (and therefore position) in the open sea was by calculating passage *through* the water using a line dropped behind with knots at fixed intervals, paid out with the movement of the ship. This gave the speed, measured in 'knots' (in passing ships of the line in this period rarely made more than eight knots and under reduced 'battle sails' considerably less). But this gave no idea as to the speed of a current or tide, hence the risk of sailing in certain areas, such as the Gut of Gibraltar, near the Balearic Islands and the seas around Corsica and Sardinia. It also explains why so many ship-captains preferred to sail the 'inshore path' rather than the open sea. At least then, when unsure of position, he could gingerly sail towards the nearby shore and determine where he was. The best known example of dangerous currents was the Straits of Messina, between Sicily and Italy, dreaded in Roman days and still only sailed in the daylight by the ships of the 1740's. For in the mid 18th Century navigation was still very much an art rather than a science. Latitude could be determined with considerable accuracy by using a sextant to determine the elevation of the sun or moon or stars. The newly invented octant, which was bought by wealthy and concerned captains (it would take years before it was distributed by official channels), was even more precise. However longitude was uncertain and while research was underway to design a chronometer capable of very accurate measurement at sea (they would allow local time to be compared with, for example, London time and therefore distance to the west or east) it would be many decades before they came into general service.

With all this it is not surprising that admirals were very cautious when sailing along a coast or blockading a port. Apart from anything else the ships had not yet been improved in certain critical ways – the most important being those that would allow efficient tacking against strong winds. Two changes were slowly being implemented. The most obvious and significant was by replacing the triangular lateen-mizzen sail at the stern with a fore-and-aft sail. At the same time the '*headsails*' the triangular jibs at the bow were doubled or tripled so that as the ship passed into and through the wind they were shifted to the other tack, in this case forcing the bow around. Admirals and captains with ships so equipped would feel much more secure about sailing along a coast when the wind might shift and blow them towards it. As a result, within 15 years of the War of the Austrian Succession, Royal Navy admirals were sailing in ways that had previously been considered exceedingly risky (the best example being in 1759 when Hawke entered Quiberon Bay on the coast of France in a gale). Of course nothing was certain and not even the best ship or fleet were safe against the passions of nature. But in the wars of 1739-1748 such would be regarded as extremely risky and best left to expendable small ships. As a result a blockade could only be maintained when the right seasonal winds were blowing or when a sheltered anchorage was nearby

*[On 11th October 1744, the First Rate ship, HMS Victory – not Nelson's famous ship, but its predecessor – was lost in the Western Approaches, it was believed off the treacherous Casquets rocks. The points David has brought out above were deemed the cause. The ship was not weatherly – with any kind of breeze she had a pronounced list thanks to her tall masts and high sides. Moreover, with the lack of a chronometer it was assumed her navigators were off in their reckoning, or her commander disagreed with their findings, to his own cost. So it was believed. She was the flagship of Admiral of the White Sir John Balchen, a very experienced seaman indeed, returning from Gibraltar on his last voyage before his retirement. She sank with all hands – 1100 men. (And 4 tons of gold coins, to boot). For centuries her fate was unclear, though she had obviously been wrecked, since bits and pieces of her were picked up from time to time. Then, in 2008, the wreck was discovered lying in open water, some 50 Km from Les Casquets. So, it would appear that faulty navigation was not an issue, but the ship's poor design certainly was. It is now believed she simply capsized in high seas. There is also speculation that some of her timbers were rotten – like most of England's big ships, she was a rebuild, utilising wood that had already been in service for a hundred years or more.]*

All regions had such winds and all their own peculiarities – the West Indies the threat of hurricane, the Channel fog, fluctuating winds and complex tidal currents. The Mediterranean was noted for its remarkable mix of winds, some of them blowing constantly in one direction,

though at varying force and known as *prevailing* winds. Others appeared only at certain times. These were the *seasonal winds*, often accompanied by storms and high seas. These two types determined the pattern of sailing ship warfare in the Western Mediterranean.

The winds of the region resulted from the interaction of two geographic conditions. The most important was the effect of the North Atlantic, as an endless series of depressions governed the *trade* (the term for reliable and predicable air currents) winds that drove across southern France and through the Straits of Gibraltar. In the Mediterranean these became reliable winds that blew towards the north-east. The other factor was the contrast between the always hot and often arid southern shore flanking the Sahara and the cooler, wetter region to the north, which produced winds blowing from local high to low pressure areas across the Mediterranean. Had these been the only factors navigation would have been easier, but the islands and peninsula of the Western Mediterranean and its varied topology, with high mountains such as the Alps and Apennines broken by wide river valleys, meant that conditions could change suddenly and often for the worse. While being touted as blue and calm in most paintings (the tourist brochures of the time), in reality the Mediterranean was both troublesome and unpredictable to sail – especially since natural dangers were matched by human ones like the pirates based in what is modern-day Algeria, Tunisia and Libya. For many centuries merchants had refused to sail in the winter, a time when the pressure contrast between the Sahara Desert and the cold uplands of Europe was at its greatest. It was then that the seasonal winds made the Mediterranean one of the most dangerous places in the world for sailing warships.

Of these the most famous and influential is the *Mistral*. This is one of a group of regional winds triggered by a sharp contrast in pressure – low over the sea to the south and high when a cold front passed over central and northern France. This winter Mistral (there is a much weaker summer Mistral as well) is a powerful wind that sweeps down from the north and made stronger by being compressed in the valley of the River Rhone between the uplands of the Central Massif to the west and the Alps to its east. While often welcomed on land (it brings clear, cold, clean air) it is very dangerous at sea, especially to ships sailing from Marseilles or trying to blockade Toulon. Onsets are sudden. Once it reaches the warmer sea it absorbs moisture and therefore becomes even stronger, sweeping across the Mediterranean and even reaching North Africa. Even when ships had oars they were compelled to go where the Mistral dictated – a famous example being in 1569 when the Galleys of Spain, commanded by the Grand Admiral of Castile, leaving Marseilles for southern Spain, were caught and driven towards the coast of Sardinia, some even forced to run as far as Malta.

Matching the Mistral in the Adriatic Sea was the *Bora*. This was even stronger, with recorded speeds of 200 kph (equal to that of a major hurricane) that could ruin shipping along the coast of present-day Croatia and Bosnia as it drove down from the north-east. To make matters worse there were very, very few sheltered anchorages on the eastern coast of Italy so that ships caught at sea could only escape by beating into the wind in the hope of reaching the Gulf of Otranto where the Adriatic met the Mediterranean. Not as strong but often widespread in its effect was the *Gregale* which blew from the north-east in the winter across Sicily, Sardinia and Malta. Because southern Italy was warmer in the winter this wind was weaker, but still gave rise to choppy seas and unpredictable winds. Just to the north was the last of the major winter winds, the *Tramontana*. This was really a series of winds, all characterised by blowing from the north, down mountain passes to the sea, and bringing cold air. The best known variants blew along the Spanish-French border and from the west coast of Italy towards Corsica.

Summer brought a new set of seasonal winds, on balance milder but still capable of driving ships well off course. The most prominent was the *Sirocco*, brought by dry, hot air blowing out from the Sahara which picked up speed as it absorbed moisture from the Mediterranean, reaching gale force approaching Sicily and Sardinia. Like most seasonal winds it was at its strongest in the spring and autumn – the periods that flanked those when the prevailing winds were dominant and blew mainly from the south-east. The *Levanter* was similar in season, duration, and warmth, but instead blew across the Mediterranean from the east. It was especially strong when compressed in its passage through the Straits of Gibraltar. The Bourbon fleets found it very useful when heading for the Atlantic from either Cartagena or Toulon, while the British discovered that it could force them to abandon any thoughts of a close blockade of Cadiz. On the other hand Spanish treasure convoys heading home from the West Indies would try to avoid its headwinds as they neared Cadiz, diverting to El Ferrol to the north when they were too strong.

Many of these winds were related in the sense that the conditions that triggered one would then result in another. A classic example is the *Vandaveles* – a strong south-west wind that also blew through the Straits of Gibraltar. It would normally develop as opposing winds died down, as high-pressure drove winds east to the area that had generated the passage of the *Levanter*. Similarly the *Tramontana* bringing cold air offshore in the winter was balanced by the summer *Marin* which blew warm, wet air onto the shores of southern France. Since this was normally a gentle wind it was much appreciated by British ships blockading Toulon, as it prevented a French sortie while its calm nature meant that the blockaders would suffer little if any damage. In the Adriatic, the northwesterly summer *Baestro* mirrored the Bora, bringing fine weather and light clouds. And, over Corsica and Sardinia the *Tramontana* and *Gregale* could be countered by the year-round southwesterly Libeccio which brought squalls and high seas.

As can be imagined a keen understanding of these winds was essential. So much so that in some navies ‘Mediterranean specialists’ were identified, men who were encouraged or ordered to operate in these waters for much of their career. For as well as the wind, they also needed to appreciate the effect of the currents of the Mediterranean (though no doubt grateful for its lack of tidal variation). Most currents were weak by world standards (up to two knots) but this needs to be put into perspective when it is realised that a ship of the line under ‘ordinary sail’ would average no more than five to six knots. The power came from the surface current running from the Atlantic through the Straits (there was a deep counter-current going the other way – but that was irrelevant until 200 years later and the invention of the submarine!), stronger in the summer as the Mediterranean evaporated. A smaller but more dangerous set of currents ran along the southern shores of Italy, the best known being through the Straits of Messina, the more powerful (reaching three knots) in the southern Adriatic.

[Tidal action in the Med is minimal – the water is too shallow and too small a body to achieve ‘resonance’ from the Moon’s pull, However, the upper Adriatic and the Gulf of Gades do see some tidal action from evaporation (without constant replenishment from the Atlantic the Med would be bone dry by now)].

\*\*\*\*\*

## SECOND FRONT – 1743

### The Year in Review

*“It will not be in my power to hinder the French and Spanish fleet coming out of Toulon except I totally neglect all other services; for to be able to hinder effectually the combined fleet putting to sea, I must keep my whole strength together: if so, I cannot have any ships on the coast of Italy. Should that be the case, I cannot prevent any embarkations taking place; besides which, I must take leave to acquaint your Grace that it is not possible in the nature of things to keep ships perpetually at sea without their being fitted and careened; being when all together but barely a match for the combined fleet will not admit of my parting with any ships of force, and the want of them being refitted, etc. must inevitably prove in the end the ruin and destruction of this squadron: without I have more ships I dare not part with any: it would be good husbandry and greatly for the service if I had constantly with me a sufficient number of ships to keep two or three constantly a-refitting, or that the great ships were relieved every year. I know but one inconvenience attending my proposition, viz.: the fresh ships being generally sickly whereas the other crews are seasoned men, consequently better able to do their duty.”*

*Mathews to Newcastle, February 1743, quoted in Richmond vol. 1, pp. 221-222.*

Admiral Mathews’ objectives for 1743 remained constant: protect British shipping, harass enemy shipping, monitor the enemy battle fleets, assist the land campaigns. With regard to the latter, it was a relatively quiet year.

The war would go on in Germany. Prussia, temporarily on the sidelines, would allow the Austrians to continue to drive back the Franco-Bavarians. A secondary campaign, led by King George II in person, would meander up the Main River and back again, incidentally provoking the Battle of Dettingen. Although the English elements of his army would enter the arena via Flanders, the Low Countries would remain peaceful, though troops continued to pile up on both sides of the French border.

In Italy, a winter offensive would culminate in the Battle of Campo Santo (February 8th), pitting de Gages’ 15,000 men against von Traun’s 12,000. The battle would turn in the Habsburg’s favour thanks to a timely counterattack by some Piedmontese ‘auxiliaries’. After Campo Santo, the Spanish would withdraw south from Lombardy. Both sides would then maintain a defensive posture from March until September, when a new Austrian commander, von Lobkowitz, would replace the successful von Traun and order a drive down the Adriatic coast. Unsupported by the overtaxed British, this attack did not get beyond Fano, and active campaigning was over by late October.

*[Maria Theresa replaced the experienced Traun because he failed to pursue de Gages aggressively. His successor was a change for the worse. Conversely, Gages clung onto his job by launching an offensive he knew would fail; at least he obeyed his queen.]*

On the political front, Spain and France would sign the Treaty of Fontainebleau (sometimes, the Second Family Compact) in September. By this treaty, France would undertake to declare war on Piedmont and Austria; this would occur on October 25th. France, in the person of Louis XV, was embarrassed at the successive failures to aid his uncle, the King of Spain, and annoyed that the Piedmontese had been stringing them along. (Dettingen would provide an additional burr under the saddle, leading to a separate declaration of war against England a few months later).

On the ‘Coalition’ side, the big news would be the Treaty of Worms, also signed in September, by which Charles Emmanuel would pledge to help drive the Spanish from Italy.

On the Alpine front, the campaign always opened late; the passes usually did not open until July. The early failure of the Lombardy offensive would doom the Alpine one as well. Led by the Spanish,

with a corps of French auxiliaries, the Bourbons would try to force the central passes of the Maritime Alps very late in the year, losing half their army (15,000 out of 30,000) in the retreat and barely making it out before the snows came.

### On the Water

Admiral Mathews’ problems did not end with the campaigning seasons. He, at least, was obliged to continue operations. Thus, as 1742 turned into 1743, he tried as best he could to maintain the blockade – cordon might be a better word – on the Riviera.

*[Richmond notes that the masking of Spain’s ports forced their army to march overland, suffering much attrition before it even reached the Alpine front.]*

The Piedmontese galleys were withdrawn due to the weather. With many of his own ships still in need of repair, the Admiral found himself employing ships of the line as merchant escorts. Not only was this demeaning for the captains, it was inefficient. Richmond notes that the admiral’s requests for small ships were routinely denied, while the Admiral was as routinely faulted for not doing a better job at protecting Trade. Only in June, 1743, did the Mathews receive 5 light vessels.

Given the overall military situation narrated above, however, Mathews found himself free, in the early months of the year, to concentrate to a greater degree on cruising and escort duties, though the force at Toulon still loomed large. By now, the Spanish were fit for sea, and the French, though apparently not outfitted, kept a tight grip on their crews.

Mathews now had 46 ships of all sizes, including 20 of the line and 8 ‘50s’. One squadron of 5 ships was on the Catalan coast, another of 6 was off the Italian coast. Forces also screened Cadiz. The bulk of the heavies were at Hyères. The rest of the light ships and 50s were either refitting or off on various duties:

4x 90-gun second rates  
18x 70- and 80-gun third rates  
14x 60- and 5-gun fourth rates  
2x 44-gun fifth rates  
6x 20- and 24-gun sixth rates  
3x sloops  
1x zebec  
4x bombs  
2x fireships

*[Richmond lists the 50s twice, once as ships of the line and once as ‘cruisers’.]*

The enemy had 32 ships of the line in Toulon, of which 19 – roughly the same as Mathews – were ready for sea. *Teniente-General* Navarro commanded the Spanish contingent, and *Lieutenant Général* du Court, Comte de Bruyère commanded the nominally neutral French. Cartagena and Cadiz appeared inactive.

*[Unfortunately, the movements of the Spanish and French are poorly documented. So it is unclear when Navarro, who was commander of the Cadiz Squadron after the departure of de Torres, arrived at Toulon. It appears, however, that the Bourbons had more freedom of movement than British writers credit them with. Thus the Spanish were able to shift their battle fleet between the three ports fairly freely, restricted more by strategic intent, the weather, and general wear and tear.]*

Mathews complained,

*“Ten sail is barely sufficient for the coast of Italy, besides two or three for the Adriatic, two perhaps for the Archipelago, besides all the coast of Catalonia and Provence.”*

*Richmond vol. 1 p. 223.*

London was unsympathetic:

*"If you compare the squadron you had then [i.e. when he left England] with that which is now under your command you will find the former inferior both in force and number; tho' the Spanish squadron is fewer and in general in worse condition than at that time both in respect to men, stores and provisions. So that they cannot see any foundation for the constant complaints you have made on that head when it appears that notwithstanding the many other services which call for his Majesty's ships they have not only supported the same strength you set out with, but have rather increased it."*

*Richmond vol. 1 p. 223.*

Richmond points out that the main difficulty was the Admiralty Commissioners, nearly all of whom were civilians and political "jobbers". One, Lord Winchelsea, made it a habit to ignore the advice of experienced seamen, merely, it would seem, from the principle of the thing! Moreover, with Mathews under the Secretary of State's direct orders, the Admiralty felt ignored:

*"Though their Lordships think it incumbent on them to keep up the strength of Mr Mathews' squadron by supplies of fresh ships in the room of those disabled, they cannot take upon them to send out an additional force of ships to him without express direction, as they are not informed of the reasons or necessity for it."*

*Richmond vol. 1 p. 235.*

Of course, they were fully aware of the situation. Office politics.

The Campo Santo campaign caused Toulon to stir, and by chain reaction, the British. But it came to nothing when de Gages retired. The French fortified their coasts and made obvious efforts to improve their training. This meant the British got no rest; Mathews even requested he be relieved, due to the strain, but was refused.

*[He had spent 38 weeks continuously on board ship.]*

Mathews had more trouble with his allies. Piedmont and Austria, working out an alliance, were each suspicious of the other; Charles Emmanuel with more reason, since the Habsburgs were being cagey about his 'price of admission' to the war. He was also being offered the Milanese by France (assuming the latter ever managed to take it). Within the King's Court, opinion was divided. Thus, although the Admiral urged a seaborne invasion of Naples to take her completely out of the war, he was listened to respectfully... and ignored.

*[From Piedmont's point of view, taking Naples out of the war would give the whole of Italy to the Habsburgs, which would be as bad as giving it all to the Bourbons, if not worse. As late as July, Mathews was writing home to ask what he should do if the proposed Treaty of Worms fell through and Piedmont allied with Spain.]*

Uncertain of the political situation, Mathews prudently kept his fleet concentrated, but in consequence he was unable to protect Trade, and that noisy lobby began to squawk.

## Genoa

As with Naples, so with Genoa. Once again the republic began to push the limits of neutrality. This time, not only were the Genoese accumulating stores for Spain, they were contributing volunteers to serve as sailors aboard Spanish ships. When a report came in that the *San Isidro* had recruited soldiers in Corsica – a Genoese possession – and transported them to Italy, Captain Martin was sent to sink the ship.

*"Martin sailed from Hyeres on the 13th of February [with Ipswich, Revenge, and the Ann galley] and anchored off Ajaccio on the afternoon of the 18th. The ship... was at anchor in the harbour. Her Captain, a French officer named de Lage, prepared to resist and hauled himself close in to the batteries. Martin weighed at 4 A.M. next day, warped in to her and anchored with a spring on his cable to bring his broadside to bear;*

*the 'Revenge' did the same, about 300 yards from the Spaniard. De Lage boldly opened fire, the British vessels returned it, and in a very short time the 'San Isidro' was in flames. At noon she blew up, and Martin returned to Hyères. The Corsicans, very impatient of Genoese misrule, made no protest."*

*Richmond vol. 1 p. 229.*

Minor actions occurred throughout the spring. Beatson records the taking of a Spanish *barco longo*, the *N.S. del Carmen* (4.10) by the *Rupert* (60) and *Feversham* (40) off Valencia on March 1st. A second vessel was pursued to Vineros, where the port was bombarded and the vessel taken; 16 other small craft were taken or sunk in similar affrays around the same time. Most were carrying weapons, ammunition, or food for the troops at Toulon and in Italy.

*[A barco is an oared transport or fishing boat, smaller than the typical galley, also equipped with sails, and having a low freeboard. 'Longo' indicates the small version.]*

An incident on the 10th of April shows the state of Anglo-French relations. A large party of British sailors from the main fleet was given shore leave in France, and wanted to walk into Hyères. They were refused admittance and a scuffle began. 500 militia were rushed up from the town and things escalated until in the end there were 30 French and 120 British dead. But the governor of Toulon absolved Mathews of blame and said he would report things in that light to Paris.

In June, Genoa gave more trouble. An enemy shipment of gunpowder had been run into the port to avoid capture, but the Senate would neither hand it over nor impound it. Mathews himself took 6 ships and 3 bombs to the port, and, with the usual threats, got the materials transferred to a Corsican fortress where it could be watched over.

*[Even the Pope played the same game, permitting Spanish artillery to be landed on Papal territory; Mathews paid him a visit, too, resulting in the destruction of a number of galleys.]*

Other actions were the taking by the *Romney*, off Cadiz, of a Spanish merchant with a cargo of mercury (for use in the extraction of silver), the sinking of a 22-gun Spanish privateer by the *Guernsey* off Cape Gatt, the rounding up or scattering of small convoys of zebecs and settees carrying stores, and the capture, by the *Salisbury*, of a Spanish ship carrying 150,000 pieces of eight.

*[Spanish currency was designed to be snapped into pieces. A 'piece of eight' was a dollar. A quarter dollar, or 25¢, was thus 'two bits'.]*

As mentioned before, on September 13th, the Treaty of Worms was signed. Among the important clauses detailing the numbers of men to be raised, the limits of engagement, and what territories would be swapped, the Habsburgs agreed to award the Riviera port of Finale to Piedmont. One minor point – really, almost an inconsequential point – was overlooked. Finale did not belong to the Habsburgs, it belonged to Genoa. The Republic drifted even further into Spain's orbit, and began raising an army of 10,000 men for 'defensive purposes'.

The entry of Piedmont into the war meant an even greater need to hold Villefranche, so the rest of the year was spent in additional fortification. The *Barfleur* (90) and *Norfolk* (80) convoyed soldiers from the garrisons of Gibraltar and Port Mahon to the town, and the *Rochester* (50) contributed its lower gun deck to a shore battery. But, as has been explained, the Bourbons marched via the inland route this year.

## The Storm Breaks

As should be evident by now, until 1743, France's position was ambivalent. True, she gave support to Spain – more than a proper Neutral ought – but there was a strong party in the Government

that desired peace with England, if only to prosecute the German war without distraction.

In January, 1743, however, the head of the Doves, Cardinal Fleury, had died. His replacements were a clique headed by Cardinal Tencin, a strong supporter of the exiled British Stuart dynasty (their influence in Rome procured him his cardinal's hat), and the Marquis D'Argenson. On June 27th, Britain and France fought the Battle of Dettingen on the banks of the Main River. Both were technically auxiliary powers, each serving an Imperial candidate, but the fiction deceived no-one. Moreover, France suffered what she regarded as a humiliating defeat.

So, by the time Spain and France signed the Treaty of Fontainebleau in September, French ground forces were already poised to join with the Spanish army on the Riviera, and French ships were ready to do more than just screen Spanish convoys or arrest British privateers. Fontainebleau, of course, said nothing about Britain openly, but privately, France agreed to declare war as soon as preparations for an invasion of England were ready. This would be early in 1744.

Admiral Mathews learned in November that all French squadrons were preparing to take to the water in January, the presumption being that they were to draw off British strength so that Spain could reinforce her army in Italy. Either that, or by blocking the Strait of Gibraltar, prevent any reinforcements reaching Mathews – 7 ships sailed from Brest, and 5 from Rochefort as early as the end of November. The Treaty of Fontainebleau was still unconfirmed rumour, but by now, the legality of any combat was of minor importance.

This enemy activity earned Mathews the first reinforcements he had seen in some time: the *Burford* (70), *Boyne* (80), and *Chichester* (80). But still no light vessels. And the ships named were only pricked down on paper. They still had to be got ready and sent to him.

British forces were distributed as follows December 19th:

At Minorca refitting and cleaning: Marlborough (90), Princessa (80) [captured from the Spanish]; Elizabeth (70) Kingston (50); Norwich (50); Winchelsea (20); Folkestone (40) [unserviceable]; Berwick (60) [with 200 men sick]

Cruising off Malaga, Cape St Vincent and Lisbon: Dragon (60); Newcastle (50); Guernsey (50)

In the Adriatic: Dartmouth (50), Seaford (20)

On the coast of Calabria: Feversham (40)

On the coast of Romagna: Oxford (50), Kennington (20)

At Genoa: Salisbury (50)



[Port Mahon.]

The admiral's position is stated at length in a letter recorded by Richmond:

*"My last letter to your Grace was dated the 13th instant. I only hinted at some particular things which I judged absolutely necessary to be for his Majesty's service, but as I send this to your Grace through Germany I shall speak plainly. I have received certain intelligence that orders are come to Toulon to fit out with the utmost expedition all the ships great and small in that port; their number is twenty-one. One of the persons I have had for a considerable time in pay was about ten days since seized and carried to prison, but after searching his person and house and not finding one scrip of paper by which he might be discovered he was after twenty four hours confinement released, but I have reason to believe is narrowly watched in regard he has quitted the Spanish service in which he was a master of one of their ships, on purpose to serve me.*

*...Mr Villetes [the Piedmontese representative] writes me that he believes a meeting will be agreed to soon. I shall therefore continue here some few days longer, but I shall send away tomorrow morning all the great ships to prevent Mr Lestock's being surprised. When they join him he will have the ships in the enclosed list which I am of opinion are sufficient at present for any number the French can put to sea in three weeks. I daily expect ships from Minorca but I am apprehensive that it will not be prudent to send any more ships there to refit, etc. I shall govern myself in that agreeable to such intelligence as I shall be able to get, having sent another person for fear the former should be refused admission or should be detained. They talk confidently that they are to be joined by twelve sail from Brest. My man writ me that he had read a letter from Brest to one of the Master-Builders at Toulon giving him an account that two were actually sailed.*

*I must now take leave to state facts, at least those I judge must be such in a little time. The French will have twenty-one sail at Toulon only. The Spaniards have eighteen great and small and I take it for granted that the scheme I formerly mentioned to your Grace was talked of at Toulon will now take place, viz. : the French to take some of the Spanish ships and to man them, without which, it is my opinion, that all the Spanish ships cannot possibly get manned. And the strength that I can depend upon having with me against January is twenty-eight, fifty gun ships included, and they all to be in a condition to keep the sea; and then all other parts of his Majesty's commands must be totally neglected, by the Spaniards and French having the whole coast of Italy open to them to carry by small embarkations recruits into Italy. That is not all, for when the conjunct fleet is kept ready for the sea, how shall I, or the person his Majesty shall judge proper to relieve me, be able to assist at the reduction of the Kingdom of Naples? To divide the fleet will be imprudent and he would justly deserve to be censured as no officer that should do so. Therefore one of these two things must inevitably happen, viz., either the conquest of Naples must be postponed if the assistance of the fleet should be absolutely necessary (as it is generally thought to be); or the conjunct fleet must be left at liberty to go and do what they please In the latter case they may transport what troops they please to Port Especia [Spezzia] and thereby endanger the liberty of Italy, and after all if joined by any number of ships from Brest, may come and make me (or as I have said before, whoever may be appointed to command) a visit, the consequence of which is submitted to your Grace.*

*I flatter myself that I have fairly and honourably stated the facts in regard to the present situation of affairs without magnifying the strength of the conjunct fleet. The French ships will be in good order and well manned. The Spanish ships are generally speaking in bad order and ill-manned, and except they should be greatly assisted by France (as I have said before) they will be incapable of putting to sea. They have eight sail in sufficient order and these they can man to put to sea for a short expedition. That number is full sufficient to prevent his Majesty's commanding officer to divide his present strength, and I think it my indispensable duty to acquaint his Majesty in order to undertake the attacking Naples by sea in regard they have put it in the best posture of defence it possibly can be; having been at work in raising batteries all along the coast, and fortifying the Mole heads ever since Captain Martin was there, it will require at least fourteen sail of capital ships besides frigates to protect the bombs. With a less number, according to the account given me of the additional works made, I should be unwilling to undertake the expedition, because I judge that with a less force I should not have any probability of success. I send this by express messenger and must entreat your Grace to lay what I have now the honour of writing before his Majesty for his consideration and farther instructions before the expedition takes place.*

*As to his Majesty's commands in regard to Finale, I flatter myself that a few of the small ships will be sufficient for that service, though Consul Birtles [the British Consul to Genoa] acquaints me in his letter of the 30th inst. N.S. that the Republic has got and is getting together 10,000 men and that they are determined to dispute it with the Savoyards, inch by inch; these are his words. Should that be the case I am of opinion that my going with the bombs to Genoa will be the surest method for saving the King of Sardinia's troops, and the most expeditious way of reducing that Republic to reason. I shall therefore propose it to his Sardinian Majesty when his Majesty's commands are to be put into execution. I sincerely wish the severe reflections the Lords of the Admiralty were pleased to make in their letter of the 1st of August may not soon be retorted upon them, by their being convinced that what I have all along complained of, viz. want of ships to enable me to execute his Majesty's commands, was not without just grounds: which in my humble opinion they cannot justify but by confessing they are unacquainted with the different services to be performed by virtue of his Majesty's commands. And I must take leave to*

*add, that severe manner of writing is grounded upon notorious mistaken facts as will plainly appear to any sea-officer in the list of ships I sent your Grace with my letter of the 30th ultimo, wherein are the dates when ships were detached from me, and when those sent out joined me. By their Lordships' manner of representing things one would imagine that the ships ordered out to me were to join me the very day they received their sailing orders, when God knows I never saw any of them until ten weeks or three months after; and then they were so sickly, and some disabled in their passage out, that they have been useless for a considerable time after, particularly the 'Cambridge,' 'Stirling Castle,' 'Newcastle' and 'Nonsuch.' I am not afraid to declare that the discouragement and severe treatment I have constantly met with from their Lordships, not to mention the difficulties I have laboured under, greatly to the prejudice of the service, has not assisted to the bettering of my constitution."*

*Letter of Admiral Mathews to London, December 1743. Quoted in Richmond, vol. 1, pp. 236-238.*

\*\*\*\*\*

## FLEET TACTICS – THE ART OF THE ADMIRAL

*Excursus by David Hughes*

Whether fighting a fleet action or a single-ship duel, leaders at sea in the 18th Century were always constrained by three issues driven by the wind and the sea. The most significant has previously been covered – whether one was in the windward or leeward position. But there were two others that had a major impact on the fighting capability of ships. One was how much the ships were heeling. Unless a ship was moving with the wind directly behind, she always heeled away from the wind, the degree of heel depending on how much sail was being carried, the strength of the wind and the design of the ship. When firing at another ship, heel had a significance, because in the ship firing downwind the guns had to be tilted up and were easier to roll back into position after recoil, while in the other ship the conditions were reversed. This has led to some amateur beliefs that the downwind ship (usually French) had to fire at the sails and the upwind ship at the hull. However this perception is flawed.

For, the easiest way of destroying the rigging of an enemy was to fire not at the sails, but at the hull. This, because the masts were held in position by shrouds and stays (known as the standing rigging), which led to metal connectors (the chainplates) attached to the upper hull. Knock those out and the masts were left unsupported. Also the masts themselves were an easier target (thicker and less flexible) in the lower sections. And of course any captain knew that all he had to do to stop his ship heeling was to briefly loose some sails and the ship would level for the time needed to fire a broadside. In reality, rounds designed to wreck sails, known as 'dismantling shot' were few in number: a French 64-gun ship carried 1,440 24-pounder standard shot but only 120 dismantling shot. Normally, they would be used to slow down valuable prizes whose hull needed to be kept intact.

The other effect was rolling – the result of the ship swaying as large waves passed under it. This was a much more significant factor as a captain could do little to check it, and because the degree of roll was unpredictable. The impact on gunnery was serious, as a captain would have to rely on the guns to judge the roll, and fire when the ship was level. Not an easy thing to judge when looking through a smoke obscured gun port. The best example of this effect in action is Trafalgar. Nelson, holding the windward position, led his ships (under full sail and therefore a large target) straight at the broadsides of the French-Spanish fleet. Under normal conditions this would be suicidal, which is why, in the Battle of Toulon, Mathews, as we will see, made an angled approach towards the Bourbon fleet. But Nelson's opponents were sailing at a right angle to the waves sweeping in from the Atlantic and therefore rolling quite badly. When firing in those conditions gunners were ordered to fire high – then the shots would at least hit something, even if only a sail, rather than being wasted in the sea. Hence heavy damage to the sails of the *Victory* but much less to her hull. Nelson was also aware that the enemy was sailing 'close-hauled' – that is into the wind – and therefore was limited in their ability to change speed and direction. So the British ships were able to pass between the enemy and rake them, causing major damage to guns and heavy losses to their crews. At Toulon, although the wind and sea condition was similar, the Bourbon fleet was sailing against the waves, which reduced the degree of roll.

Of course the ships of 1805 were much more seaworthy than those of 60 years earlier and both larger and more resistant to enemy fire. At Toulon the Royal Navy was seriously affected by the waves. Since Mathews approached at an angle, his ships were in no better position than the enemy fleet, while the low freeboard of many of them became a serious handicap. For example the 80-gun *Dorsetshire* rolled so badly at the Battle of Toulon that the sea entered the forward gun ports, compelling her to fight with a much reduced broadside. So admirals were faced with the problem of reconciling two essential rules: Fleets must be kept together and Fleets must attack the enemy. Both of these rules were delineated in documents such as the Fighting Instructions of the Royal Navy, and all admirals (but notably British ones) knew that they faced court-martial if they did not abide by them. However, one should note that these rules were not as rigid as sometimes suggested, with admirals including their own Additional Instructions. Then, too, the need to fight the enemy was often considered an excuse for not following the Fighting Instructions to the letter.

This is shown by the pattern of guilty verdicts in the flood of court-martials that followed Toulon. Mathews himself was not found guilty of transgressing the Instructions; but he was found guilty of failing to call a council of war, and also for not making his intentions clear before the battle. The only captains found guilty were those in Lestock's division who made no attempt to close on the enemy – the fact that Lestock himself had failed to do so being no excuse. On the other hand, Lestock was excused, and we have no idea what happened at his trial, since all records were kept secret by the Admiralty. Unfortunately, this verdict led to confusion, and poor Byng was shot for not closing the enemy a decade later, despite the belief that one should not close unless the Fleet was together. In reality he could never have closed, as the well-sailed French showed what could be done with a leeward position and good gunnery. In this case they did shoot at the upper-hull line (as in fact the British did), dismantling sails while maintaining distance by drifting downwind.

[Byng's fate may have something to do with his failure to protect the Lerin Islands in 1747. He acquired a reputation for being risk-adverse to the point of paralysis, and someone who preferred a cushy billet – though as a captain he performed well enough, even aggressively. Perhaps he was simply promoted beyond his level of confidence. From the facts it appears, as David says, that the farce at Minorca in 1756 was not his fault. He was rushed out as a 'Mediterranean expert' by an Administration that was (as usual) unprepared for war. They gave him inadequate forces and insufficient time to prepare. A common fault of British governments throughout history.]

Fleet battles were very rare events since they could normally only take place if both sides welcomed, even if they did not initiate, a fight. More common was the 'defend' encounter, essentially where an outnumbered side was forced to fight, but not necessarily in the line of battle. Both Battles of Finisterre in 1747 fell into this category, where heavily outnumbered French ships allowed themselves to be attacked in order that the convoy they were protecting could get away. Other encounters between small squadrons tended to follow the same pattern as did major battles, an example being the Battle of Havana in 1748. In terms of results it was a slight British victory and like Toulon it resulted in anger during the battle – the Spanish admiral firing on one of his own ships when it tried to surrender – and after, when the British admiral claimed that many of his captains were 'shy'. For when battle commenced what mattered most was the skill of a captain and his crew, tempered by the size and quality of his ship, and in this age they were far more closely matched than in the Napoleonic period. Perhaps the best indicator is that it was very rare for a Bourbon vessel in this period to be raked, almost the normal condition in the battles that Nelson fought. Of course, by his time the Spanish navy had been ruined by incapable kings and their corrupt advisors, while the French navy lost its entire senior officer corps in the Revolution.

\*\*\*\*\*

## CLASH OF MONARCHS – 1744

*"You know the King's principal views and intentions in sending so considerable a naval force into the Mediterranean, viz.: the destroying of the Spanish ships and embarkations and the fleets of France and Spain acting together or in any manner aiding or assisting each other, and to assist, protect and defend the states and dominions in Italy belonging to the Queen of Hungary and the Great Duke, his Majesty's allies."*

*Admiral Mathews' orders, quoted in Richmond, Vol. 2, p.6.*

### The Big Picture

1744 was supposed to be the Year of Decision. On the Riviera, France and Spain would overrun Nice, then shift their army by sea to link up with the "Napolspan" forces in Italy. Both armies would then drive north into Lombardy. On the other side of the hill, the Habsburgs would launch their own offensive against Naples, relying on the British to prevent any enemy reinforcement, and on the Sabaudians to both hold the Alps and augment the Austrian offensive. So much for pipe dreams.

But, the year would witness the only large naval battle fought in the Med. Like the Battle of Jutland 200 years later, it would be an indecisive affair, claimed as a victory by both sides. The Bourbon attempt to break the British blockade would fail, and though the Spanish ships locked in Toulon could return to Spain, their Army would have to climb the mountains, once again preventing the possibility of a swift campaign along the Po. At least they would have French help this time.

But, because they needed to cover Toulon, and because the Bourbon offensive would overrun their base at Villefranche, the British would be unable to provide support to the Austrian advance, while the Sabaudians would be fully engaged in the Alps. The Habsburgs, under von Lobkowitz, would manage to penetrate as far as Velletri, south of Rome, before retreating at the end of the season.

Elsewhere in Europe, armies would be on the move. A French declaration of war against Britain in March would be accompanied by an abortive attempt to deposit upon England Bonnie Prince Charlie, the son of the exiled Stuart 'king', James 'III', and 10,000 French troops. After this failure, France would open up the war in Flanders, making modest gains (as she was to do in each subsequent year, until Holland was in danger of being overrun).

In Germany, the Franco-Bavarians would make one last attempt to seize the initiative in concert with Prussia, beginning the Second Silesian War. Since they were starting from positions on the Rhine, the French would only succeed in distracting the

Habsburgs. Austria would fail to retake her lost duchy, but Prussia would lose 30,000 men in a punishing war of attrition in Bohemia, while the Franco-Bavarians would merely gain land on the east bank of the Rhine.

### Initial Moves

Admiral Mathews began the year in conference with his allies. As noted above, the Austrians pushed for a major offensive against Naples, but the Navy demurred, since it was clear a breakout from Toulon would be attempted, and though the French might attempt a link up with the Brest Fleet rather than cover a Spanish invasion, either way Mathews needed his fleet where it was. For similar reasons, Piedmont had no troops to spare. The front line ran along the Var River on the border of the County of Nice, and if this line was penetrated, the French would soon be at Villefranche, Mathews' base.

France did intend to concentrate her ships. For the French, Italy was still relatively unimportant. There was a large enemy army in Flanders, and they wanted to remove its most vital element, the British, with the distraction of a civil war. They would need every ship if they hoped to ferry French soldiers to Britain in safety. For the Spanish, a combined sortie from Toulon might clear the seas of the British for a time and ease their supply situation. And so, the news of the arrival of the *Amiral de Levant* (du Court) at Toulon on the 20th, and the subsequent sailing of the Brest Fleet on the 26th (or 30th) of January, led Admiral Mathews to concentrate his forces in the Hyères Roads. A few days later, the enemy struck.

Technically, Britain and France were not at war, but they soon would be. The Bourbons had calculated, not entirely accurately, that the British were of equal strength to themselves – roughly 27-28 sail. However, they were expected, at this time of year and so far from their base at Port Mahon, to be in poor shape. Reconnaissance showed them to be in the roads, no doubt engaged in maintenance. If the Bourbons were spry, they could catch their enemy in harbour and hold the weather gauge against him. The nature of the roads was such that there were only two exits. If the Bourbons entered by one route and blocked the other, the British would be trapped.

The Bourbon fleet was led by *Lieutenant-Général* Court de la Bruyère, with *Chef d'Escadre* de Gabaret in the van and *Jefe de Escuadra* José Navarro – senior *Armada* officer in the Med – commanding the Spanish in the rear. The French had 16 ships of the line; the Spanish 12. In addition there were 8 frigates and fireships.

Their sally was planned for February 3rd, but here the weather took a hand, preventing them from leaving Toulon until the 8th. This allowed time for Mathews to augment his strength from 16 ships of the line and 4 '50s' to 20 ships of the line (adding *Berwick*, *Marlborough*, *Elisabeth*, *Princessa*) and 4 '50s'. *Somerset*, *Warwick*, and *Dragon* were on their way (arriving on the 3rd), and 2 more (*Boyne*, *Chichester*) on the 10th, with the *Royal Oak* showing up on the 11th. His picket boats were alert, and he was swiftly notified of the enemy's movement.

The Bourbons suffered further delay. While the French got away from Toulon before nightfall, the Spanish, emerging later, had to anchor for the night and did not join the French until 10 AM the next morning, at which time Mathews made sail and tried to bring his fleet out of harbour to meet the foe...

The following account is lifted in its entirety from Richmond, Vol 2, pp. 9–44. This author feels a rewrite of the same facts would lean toward plagiarism without adding to, and possibly detracting from the history. Richmond's account is very clear, though his conclusions can be disputed.

### **The Battle of Toulon, Feb. 19 – 22 (NS) or 9 – 12 (OS) 1744**

*The whole of the combined [Bourbon] fleet did not manage to get to sea. The van, composed of the French squadron, cleared the land, but the Spaniards who formed the rear were obliged to anchor for the night, and it was not until 10 o'clock on the 9th that they were again under sail. The British frigates as before informed Mathews, who weighed at the same time on a light north-westerly wind, and proceeded to form line of battle ahead with the starboard tacks on board, to work out of harbour. The wind however veered to S.W. during the forenoon, and fell very light, an easterly current ran through the anchorage, and the combined effect of these two causes was that the ships could not fetch the entrance on one board. The whole day was spent in beating over 30 large ships to windward in the restricted waters of Hyères Bay. The difficulty of the operation can be well understood. Twice the fleet had to tack in order to get sufficiently to windward to draw out of the entrance, but they were unable to get clear. Jumbled together, taking each other's wind, they drifted and fouled each other without making progress. At 3 in the afternoon, the 'Warwick' fell on board the 'Nassau' in going about and ran ashore; and an hour later Mathews, seeing that it was hopeless to work out in such circumstances, signalled to the fleet to anchor.*

*All that night the frigates kept touch with the enemy and signalled their positions continually by firing guns. At daylight next morning Mathews again weighed, this time with a fresher and more favourable breeze from the W.N.W. By 6 the fleet was under sail and began to form in line ahead on the Vice-Admiral's division, which, by the line of battle, was appointed to lead with the starboard tacks on board. But the flattering breeze proved disappointing. It lasted only a short while, and by the time the fleet, still in no kind of order, reached the entrance, it had died away altogether and boats had to be hoisted out to tow the ships away from each other and from the shore, upon which many of them very nearly drifted. In going out the ships, making use of every puff, had all stood regardless of order for the entrance, and the confusion was increased by the calm being followed by a breeze from the eastward, accompanied by a heavy westerly swell.*

*Mid-day found the fleet nearly clear of the island, though in no semblance of order. The 'Boyne' and 'Chichester' appeared from the eastward at this time. Arriving at this moment the reinforcement had the appearance of being providential, for they might well have run into the enemy's squadron on the 8th or 9th and suffered capture.*

[See Diagram 1.]

*The wind having now established itself in the eastward, the line of battle became reversed. According to the orders issued, Vice-Admiral Lestock was to lead on the starboard tacks, Rear-Admiral Rowley with the port tacks on board. The 'Revenge' followed by the 'Buckingham,' had therefore been among the leading ships while going out of harbour, and the remainder of Lestock's division had endeavoured to form in the van. Now it became necessary to invert the line, and Mathews, after standing to the southward in a rough line ahead under easy sail, far enough to give room and clear the land, brought to at 2 o'clock to allow the rear to pass ahead of the centre. The wind was light, the swell heavy, and the movement was*

*naturally a protracted one.*

*Until about noon, when the first puffs of the easterly breeze were felt by the British fleet, the enemy held a westerly wind and stood before it towards the British, but when the easterly wind established itself, they went about and stood away, first to the southward and later to the south-westward. Mathews, fearful lest they should make away, did not wait to complete the new formation, but at 3 p.m. made the signal for the line of battle abreast and stood towards them, steering between S.W. and W.S.W. The Vice-Admiral, to prolong the line to the northward, steered more northerly, and the Rear-Admiral crowded sail to extend his division to the southward of the centre: but though the signal for line abreast was made and kept abroad all the afternoon, the fleet did not get into a correct formation before dark. The Admiral was ahead of the line throughout the remainder of the afternoon, nor was the line formed with any regularity. This is but natural; the variable wind, the inversion of the order of sailing, all contributed towards this result. The rear – Lestock's division – was astern throughout: and it is to be observed that the Vice-Admiral did not make all the sail he could, attaching more importance to keeping his ships in correct station in their division, than to bringing the division up to its bearing from the centre. More than once he shortened sail during the afternoon to allow lagging ships to come up.*

*The enemy's fleet in the meantime was better formed. The French division having cleared the harbour the evening before, there was a lesser number of ships to work out of the anchorage, and the fleet was able to stretch away to the southward and form a fair line ahead before bearing away in line abreast, so that the alignment of their fleet had a better opportunity of being corrected.*

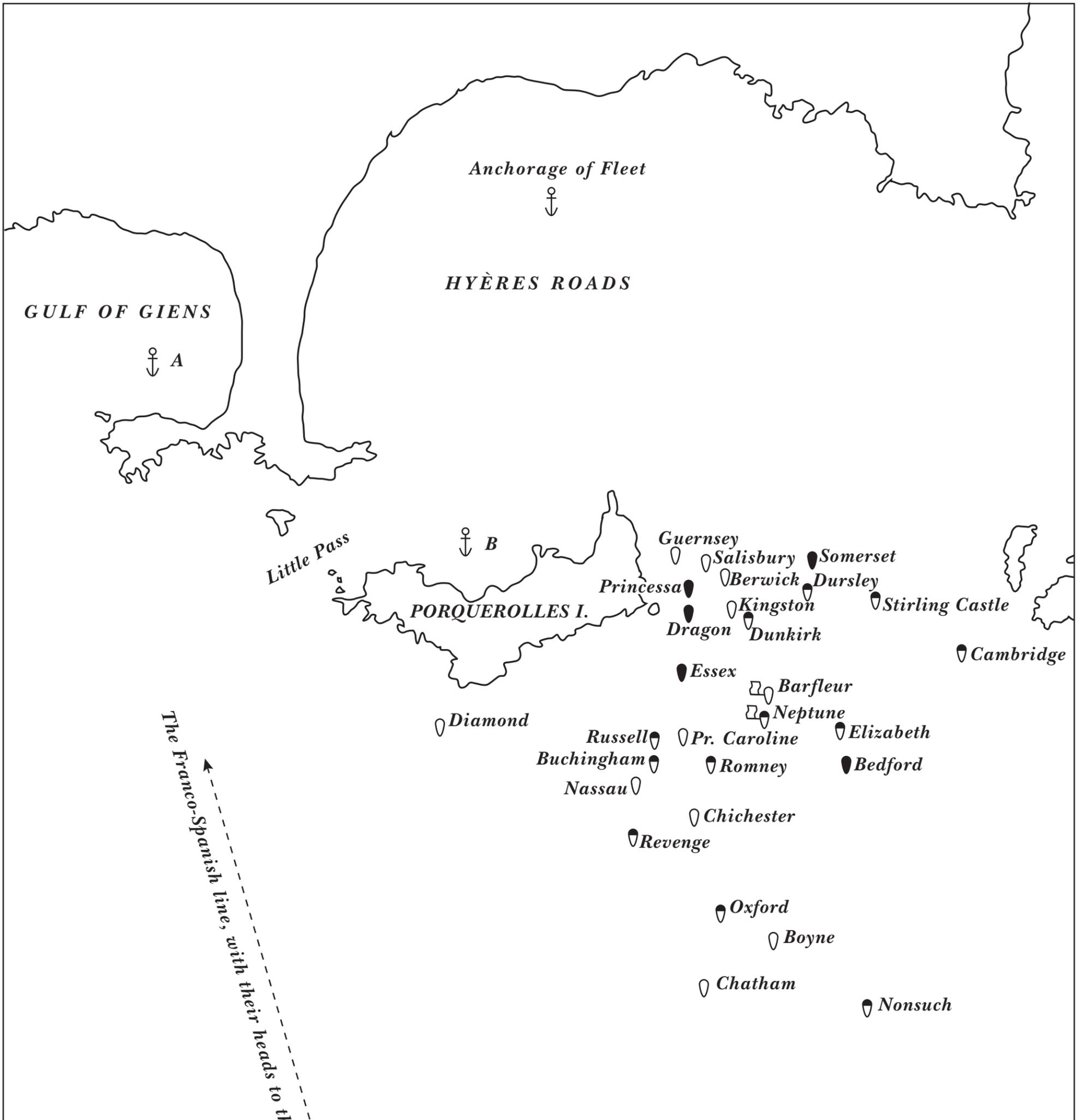
*At 6.30 p.m., the signal for the line abreast being still abroad and the enemy's fleet about 4 to 6 miles distant, Mathews signalled the fleet to bring to, for he had no wish to give hostages to fortune in a night battle. The centre division was at this time ahead of both of the others, the van was but a little way to windward, the rear a long way both to windward and to the northward.*

[See Diagram 2.]

*The battle which followed next day was so greatly affected by the manner in which the fleet brought to, that attention must be given to this point. It was now just dark; the signal for the line abreast had been flying all the afternoon and had not been hauled down. No night signals for the line abreast existed, and when Mathews made the signal to bring to – four lights in the foreshrouds and the firing of eight guns – the Vice-Admiral contended that it cancelled the line abreast and that his duty was to bring to at once, regardless of whether he were in station in the line abreast. In his subsequent defence he did, as a matter of fact, argue that at the time the signal to bring to was made he was correctly on his bearing; but the evidence to the contrary is so overwhelming that, although the Court in the subsequent trial found that he was if anything to the westward, it is beyond all shadow of doubt that he was very considerably to the north-eastward of the centre and separated from it by three miles at the very least. There can have been no doubt in Lestock's mind that his Commander-in-Chief intended him to bring to in the line of battle for which the signal had been flying since 3.30, which signal had never been cancelled. Lestock's argument was that being a day signal, it ceased automatically to be operative when daylight came to an end, and that his duty was to obey the last signal he could see. Mathews, on the other hand, expected him to stretch on and complete the formation of the line abreast before bringing to...*

[Richmond here digresses into an analysis of what Lestock's peers and subsequent analysts thought he should have done, and that he was wrong to stick to the 'letter of the law'. It is noted the Rowley brought up the van *without* Mathews having to send a boat to tell him the obvious. Richmond ends by noting that night manoeuvres were neglected in the period, but that, given the circumstances, everyone ought to have striven to arrange the line of battle, whatever the cost.]

*The fleet brought to, approximately in the formation shewn in Diagram 2, with the ships' heads to the south, the wind being about E.S.E. at that time, and the 'Winchelsea' and 'Essex' were detached to be on the flagship's lee beam, the former inside a mile, the latter outside her to report the enemy's movements during the night. The allied fleet also brought to after dark, in*



**THE BATTLE OF TOULON**

**Diagram 1**

Approximate positions of the Fleets. Noon Feb. 10th

- ⚓ **A** Position from which *Diamond* and *Winchelsea* observed Toulon
  - ⚓ **B** Position of *Essex*, *Dunkirk*, *Kingston*, *Chatham*, *Feversham* when sent to support *Winchelsea*, &c.
  - Ships of Van Division
  - " " Centre "
  - ◌ " " Rear "
- } Only those whose noon positions are recorded are shown

The weather, nearly calm, with patches of a light easterly breeze: heavy swell off Forquerolles: some ships with boats out towing clear of land and of each other.





Cape Sicie

THE BATTLE OF TOULON

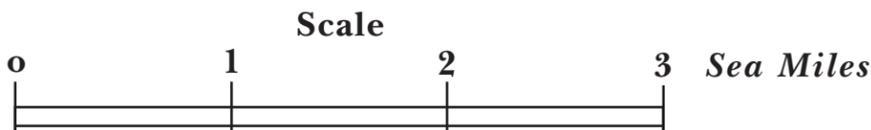
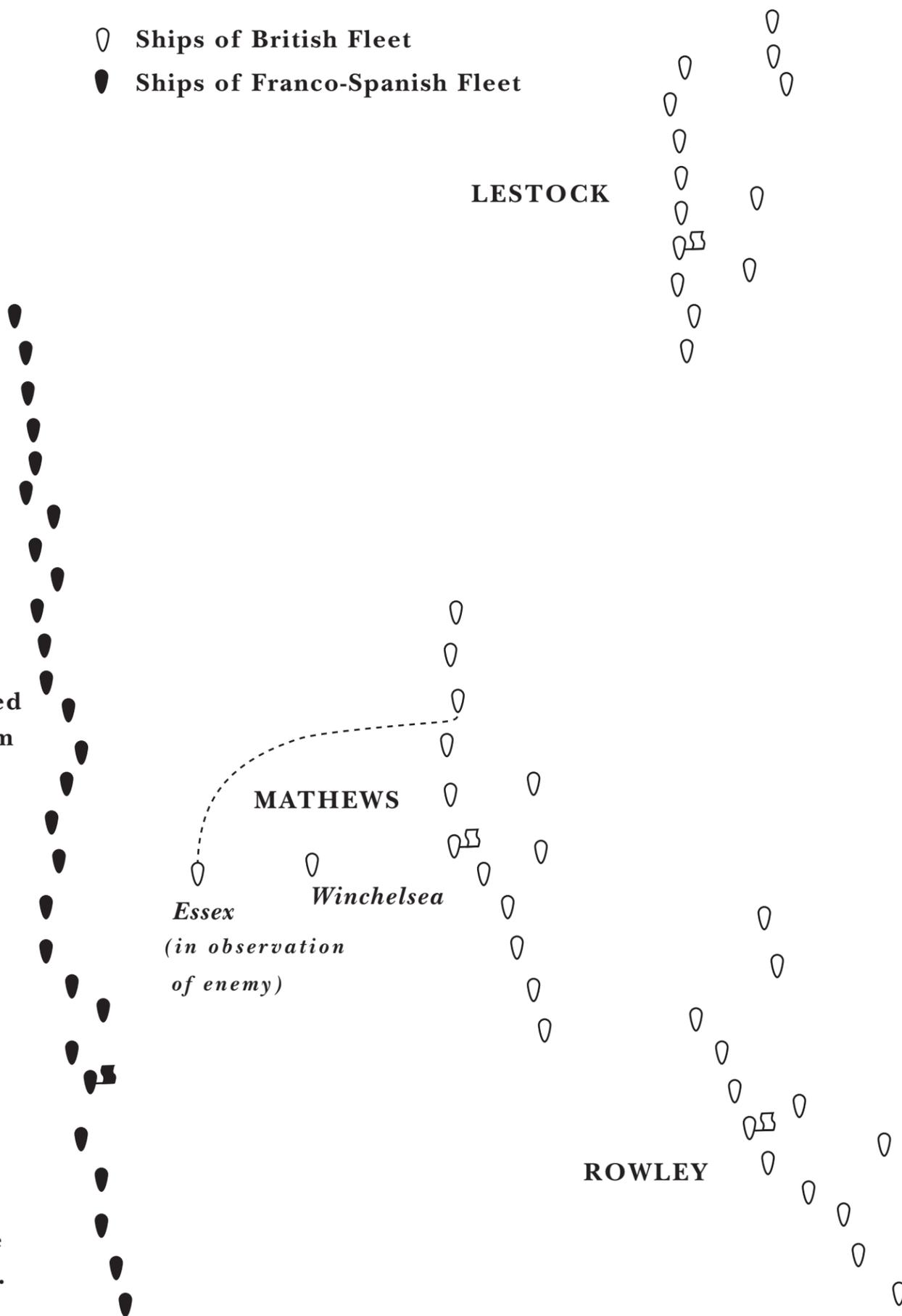
Diagram 2

Sunset Feb. 10

Showing the fleets brought to for the night. The distance between center and rear increased during the night. The van may have been a little further to the eastward.

- ◊ Ships of British Fleet
- Ships of Franco-Spanish Fleet

Approximate position of enemy's line. The line appeared very regular from the British fleet and lay between the positions shown for the van and rear ships: it was probably much less well formed than shown, and the positions of individual ships are only put in to give a general indication of the locus of the line.



a line stretching approximately N.N.E. and S.S.W., the centre of which was nearly abreast the British centre and about three miles to leeward of it. During the night both fleets were carried some distance to the westward, but the enemy, either on purpose or more probably owing to a difference of sail set or helm used, drifted more quickly, somewhat to the south-westward. During the same time the rear of the British fleet was set a little more to the eastward, and its position was thus rendered worse than it had been on bringing to. The currents on this part of the coast are variable and depend largely on the wind. Westerly winds had blown freshly for two days before the 11th and an easterly current was evidently running. Inshore the currents are strongest, and they weaken with every mile to seaward. The result was that the whole of the rear division experienced more current than the centre, and was set more to the eastward, while the most northerly ships of the rear were more set than the southerly ones, and the line of bearing, which had been somewhere near N.N.W. and S.S.E. while chasing in line abreast during the preceding afternoon, was twisted to the northward and now lay north and south. The drift during the night, whether due entirely to current or to different sail carried during the night – for Lestock, though claiming to be able to do nothing without instructions, double reefed topsails on his own account – amounted to about two miles, so that by dawn the rear was even more separated from the van than it had been on bringing to. Here again arises a matter of principle: Lestock gave no orders to keep his division in station and disclaimed all responsibility for keeping it so, whatever might happen during the night.

With daylight the British fleet made sail. The rear, which was now some 7 or 8 miles from the centre, did so first, closely followed by the centre and van—it will be observed that Lestock's reading of the powers of a junior commander did not prevent his doing so without orders—and the fleet, forming line abreast, stood to the south-westward where the combined squadron was standing to the southward under easy sail.

During the night the 'Royal Oak,' which had been endeavouring all the preceding day to join, nearly reached the fleet and all the ships of the line that were expected, except the 'Burford,' were now assembled. The lines of battle are shown in the diagrams. It will be noticed that the 50-gun ships are attached to the van and rear only and are put under the orders of the divisional Admirals to be placed against ships of equal force in the enemy's line: and here it may be remarked that while Rear-Admiral Rowley called the 'Chatham,' 'Salisbury' and 'Guernsey' into the line, Lestock employed the 'Oxford' and 'Nonsuch' as reinforcing ships to the end ship of the line, stationing them both on her quarter to support her against the 'Santa Isabel,' an 80-gun ship. The British fleet had two fireships, the enemy had three. One British fireship was attached to the centre division and, with the repeating ship 'Winchelsea,' the hospital ship and a barcolongo, completed the light auxiliaries of that division. A fireship was attached to the rear; and both the van and rear had frigates for repeating ships. The light frigates were also intended for use against the enemy's fireships.

Mathews made sail about 6, Lestock having already done so. Rowley quickly followed suit and hastened to get into station. At 7.30 Mathews signalled to the van to make more sail and lead large to form the line, and immediately afterwards made the same signal to the rear, and sent an officer, Lieutenant Jasper, to Lestock to desire him to make more sail. Lestock was then making sail, but not crowding; and half-an-hour later, not being satisfied with the way in which the ships astern of the centre were coming up, nor with the advance of the rear, Mathews sent another officer, Lieutenant Knowler, in an eight oared boat to order the ships of his own division to close their next aheads with the least delay, and also to desire Lestock to make all the sail he could and join the centre. Knowler went down the line and delivered his messages, reaching the 'Neptune' about 10 o'clock. He went on board and gave Lestock the directions he had received. "Look up Tom," said Lestock, "You see what sail I have abroad. I have all set but my studding-sails and they will be in the way." Knowler was subsequently uncertain as to the studding-sails, but the evidence goes to shew that the topmast studding-sails had been set before and later, though whether they were abroad at the time Knowler was on board is not certain; there is no doubt that the lower studding-sails were not set. Lestock in his defence gave his opinion that they would have been dangerous, and would have served no purpose; but many officers thought that the swell would not have dripped the lower studding-sail booms of the large ships – the only argument from the point of view of danger – and that the sails would have stood and would have brought the ships up quicker. Rowley's division was also to windward, and thus the attack on the enemy was seriously delayed owing to the Vice and Rear-Admirals

having considered it unnecessary to bring to in line, and to the Commander-in-Chief having failed to order them to make sail when they did not do so of their own accord.

At the same time as he sent Knowler to the Vice-Admiral, Mathews signalled for Captain Mackie of the 'Ann' fireship to come on board, and when he arrived, ordered him to prime and be in constant readiness. Mackie was told that in case any ship of the enemy should be disabled, the 'Ann's' signal would be made, and the 'Essex' and 'Enterprise' barcolongo would escort her down to the line and cover her approach. With these orders Mackie returned to his ship soon after 10 and began to make her ready for the service. Shortly after – about 10.30 – the 'Royal Oak,' which had been working to get into position from the day before, joined the fleet.

Very impatiently Mathews watched the forenoon passing by. The enemy stood on to the southward under an easy sail about three miles to leeward, the British centre steering to come up with the French centre, Mathews's intention being to attack the French flagship. Rowley, under a press of sail, drew up towards the line; Lestock gained, but very slowly. Knowler having delivered his message at 10 had left the 'Neptune' at about 10.30, yet at 11 Lestock deliberately took a reef, or two reefs, in his topsails; a slight squall was coming down at the time, but so far as safety to spars and sails was concerned, there was no necessity to reef. Mathews, who was already checking the way of the centre division by shivering his sails, settled his topsails and some of his division reefed, but this was with the object of enabling the rear to draw up, and he kept the signal flying for the rear to make more sail. Lestock, in his subsequent defence, denied that he reefed, but added the rider that, if he did so, he was correct in following motions. The subsequent Court Martial found that if Lestock had reefed, he would have been correct to do so "as if any accident had befel [sic] the 'Neptune' from not reefing when the Admiral set the example, the Vice-Admiral must have been responsible for it." To such a point can men be led by a blind acceptance of the principle of following of Admiral's motions! The Admiral had sent two verbal messages to him to make more sail; both the intention and the signal were clear; it is astonishing to find that a majority of officers should be found to approve this action of Lestock's, and to support it by arguments so destructive of initiative and freedom of command of subordinate leaders...

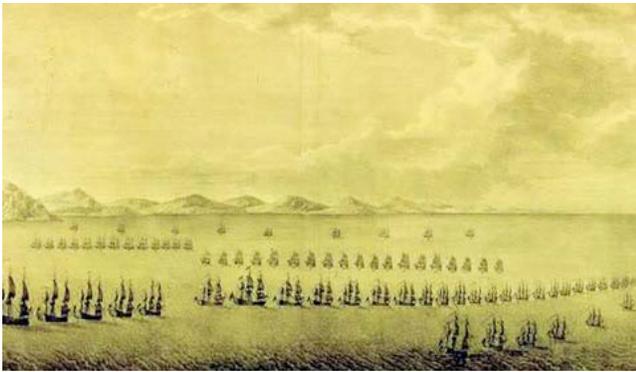
[Richmond digresses on Lestock again regarding the question of the deployment of various sails, ending by condemning Lestock's tardiness in the latter's own words.]

This however does not complete the tale of Lestock's conduct. At a later hour he took in his topmast studding-sails, and justified his action in so doing by the argument that it was improper to go into action with them set, "the old practice having been to furl the mainsail to prevent the firing the ship." Yet in spite of this being the accepted practice, Forbes in the 'Norfolk' crowded into action with his mainsail set so as not to be out of station: and moreover, at the time Lestock took in his studding-sails he was still at least three, more probably four, miles from the enemy, and a full hour and more must elapse before he could be in action with the nearest Spaniard.

While the commander of the rear division was behaving in this perverse manner, the French were playing with the squadron. Till about 11 they proceeded under an easy sail—topsails and staysails only and found they could do as they liked, having the heels of the British fleet. When Mathews shortened sail for his rear to come up, the French shortened also, but still went ahead; and when he once more made sail, the French made more sail. When Mathews steered to close them, they bore up, kept their distance, then drew ahead again. These alterations had the effect of throwing out the allied line. Though the French fairly preserved their distances, the Spaniards, less well drilled, soon began to straggle through not making sail quickly enough, and two gaps began to open up in the Spanish line, one between the second and third Spanish ships, and another between the 'Real's' second astern and her next in the line. The former gap was about threequarters of a mile, the latter nearer two miles long.

At 11 Mathews hoisted the signal to engage, a red flag at the main. He kept it flying for a quarter of an hour and then struck it and hoisted the signal for the line in its place. He was now getting very uneasy, for he could see no possibility of bringing the enemy to action, and the tactics which the French were employing convinced him that their intention was to avoid fighting and to entice him away from the coast so as to permit the invasion of Italy to take place behind his back.

The situation of the fleets at this time – between 11 and 11.30 –was as follows. The combined fleet was standing a little to the eastward of south, steering by the wind, which was east to E. by S., with the French line in good order; but the Spanish somewhat drawn out as described already. The British centre, in fair order, was about three miles to windward and nearly parallel to the enemy's line and a little in advance of its centre, the 'Terrible' rather before the 'Namur's' beam and the Spanish flagship on 'Namur's' quarter. The van was still to windward of the line, the more northerly ships being nearly up to the line of the centre, but those to the southward of the 'Barfleur' were stretched considerably to the eastward. The rear was both to windward and astern, so that fully three miles separated its leading ship – 'Dunkirk' – from the rear ship of the centre. The wind was light and the centre was not going better than two knots, and there appeared small probability that the Admiral would be able to form his line in a sufficiently advanced position to enable it to bear down as one body, with the van ships steering for the van of the enemy.



Mathews had now before him the choice of at least three things. He could wait for the rear to come up, and when his line was formed, engage in the prescribed manner; or he could crowd sail in the centre and van, leaving the rear behind, and try to fetch up to the centre and van of the enemy and engage them, trusting to the rear coming up in time to bring the Spanish rear to action; or he could bear down at once and cut off the Spaniards.

So far as the first alternative was concerned, he was influenced by the information he had as to the intentions of the enemy to draw him away from the coast. The rear was coming up so slowly that there was little probability they would be joined in time to fight on that day and the fleets would then stretch further away from the coast during the night. Mathews felt he would be playing the enemy's game if he fell into what he considered was a trap, and permitted himself to be enticed away from the coast. The longer the enemy could keep him thus employed, the better would their ends be served, particularly as the winds being easterly he was running to leeward all the time and would have the harder task to regain his station. Besides this, there was the Brest squadron to consider. One of the last pieces of information he had received before quitting Hyères was that this squadron was coming to the assistance of the allied fleet, and the enemy might now be declining an engagement until they should be joined by that reinforcement. Where that squadron might now be he could not tell, but if it were coming to the help of the combined Toulon fleet, the sooner he brought the latter to action the less chance he gave for the junction to take place. Even a night's delay might be of supreme importance.

So far as the second alternative was concerned, he would, by adopting it, run the risk of separating his fleet, with the added possibility that he might not be able to come up with the French. The proceedings so far had shown him the French had the heels of him; if he should have crowded sail, it lay in their power to do the same and to draw away from him as rapidly under studding-sails as they did under topsails and courses. The Spanish ships in the rear were clean ships and might draw away as fast as the French, and the British van and centre might find themselves separated still more from their rear and engaged in a Horatian combat with the whole of the three divisions of the enemy.

The third alternative, to bear down and attack the Spanish rear, had fewer inconveniences. It presented the great tactical advantage of throwing a superior force on to a portion of the enemy. The French would then either have to leave their allies to their fate or go about and come back to their help, in which case a general engagement would be brought about, and the evasive tactics, whether their object were to draw him down into the

jaws of the Brest squadron or to favour the transport of the Spanish troops to Spezia, would be rendered ineffectual.

Pacing the deck with the master, he remarked: "The French go from us with their topsails and if we do nothing to-day, we shall do nothing to-morrow, for I am sure they will run from us": and turning to Captain Russell, his flag captain, he said: "Look you there, if I engage the Spanish Admiral, if the French have any inclination to engage, it will oblige them to shorten sail and bring on a general engagement. If not, I shall cut off the Spanish squadron and Mr Lestock will take up the ships astern."

With this idea in his mind, he went into the stern gallery with Russell and hailed Captain Cornwall of the 'Marlborough' who was close astern. After greeting him, Mathews asked "What do you think of Mr Lestock's being so far in the rear?" "I think," replied Cornwall, "he is too far astern to come up and engage this afternoon before six or seven, and we shall lose all the joy of the day," and added "we have the 'Real' here to leeward and we can cut her off and those Spanish ships astern." On this Mathews decided to attack the 'Real' at once, and telling Cornwall he was going to do so—the time now was within a few minutes of noon—he put his helm hard up, shivered his mizen topsail and set his foresail, and bore down dead before the wind for the Spanish flagship. The 'Marlborough' did the same; Cornwall put his helm hard up and brought the wind on his starboard quarter so as to open the distance slightly between the two ships, and when a little abaft the beam of the 'Namur,' bore up again and ran down with her for the Spanish line. The subsequent movements of the van centre and rear will best be followed separately.

So far as the ships of the centre division ahead of the 'Namur' were concerned, the problem as to what they should do was not difficult. There were five ships in the British line ahead of their Admiral, and there were five Spanish ships ahead of the 'Real.' Each ship therefore had her opposite, and so soon as they appreciated that Mathews was steering for the commander of the Spanish rear instead of for the commander of the centre they had only to bear up and engage them. Their captains grasped the situation at once. Captain John Forbes in the 'Norfolk,' the 'Namur' second ahead, followed suit immediately and engaged the 'Constante,' the 'Real's second ahead, a very few minutes after the 'Namur' got into action. The 'Princessa,' Captain Pett, bore down on the 'Poder,' the 'Somerset' on the 'Neptuno.' The 'Dragon' and 'Bedford' rather later bore down towards the 'America' and 'Oriente,' but these ships being a full mile ahead of the 'Neptuno' the two British ships could not bear down so freely, and going upon a lasking course were longer in coming into action. These two Spanish ships, crowding sail to join the French, thus received no more than a few shots from their opponents of the British centre division.

['Lasking' is a means of 'bearing down' on another formation. Starting to windward, the ships put themselves on the enemy's 'tack' or direction of travel, gained speed and overtook the other formation, then headed downwind toward the enemy at an angle. Executing this tactic contributed to the confusion – there was no single pennant for indicating the move. Mathews had to hoist two: 'tack' and 'close on the enemy'. It appears this signal was not prearranged...]

[See Diagram 3.]

The 'Norfolk' engaged the 'Constante' most warmly and after about an hour and three-quarters drove her out of the line. Forbes however did not feel himself free to pursue the Spaniards in consequence of Article 21 of the Fighting Instructions. "We in the 'Norfolk' bore down and engaged the Spanish Admiral's second ahead 'til we made her sick of it and to take to her heels with all her sails abroad; not daring however to follow her, but compelled to keep in the line of battle—a great uneasiness to our brave captain, all the officers and men, to continue in this manner idle spectators." The 'Princessa,' Captain Pett, was less fortunate. As she came down she, like the ships astern of her, received the raking fire of the Spanish line. She was badly cut about aloft, and when she rounded to within half musket shot of the 'Poder,' her mainmast, foretopmast and mizen mast were shot through and her main topsail was split from clew to earring. The 'Poder' ran ahead of her, and Pett, in order to overhaul her, got his main tack aboard. This threw the 'Princessa' up into the wind, and although her captain hauled up his mizen, shivered his mizen topsail and flattened in his head sails, she fell off on the other tack. She was thereby thrown out of action for the time.



Revenge  
 Oxford  
 Elizabeth  
 Romney  
 Buckingham  
 Russell  
 Mercury F.S.  
 NEPTUNE  
 Feuersham  
 Torbay

St. Isabel  
 Soberbio  
 San Fernando  
 Alcon  
 Brillante

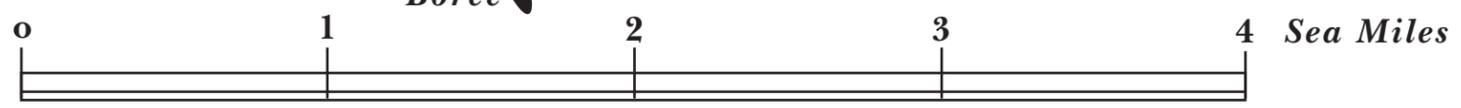
Cambridge  
 Dunkirk

**THE BATTLE OF TOULON**  
 Diagram 3  
 Noon Feb. 11th

Mathews, seeing the French are making away so that he cannot fetch the *Terrible* for which he has been steering throught the forenoon, decides to bring the Spaniards to action, and puts his helm hard up and steers for the *Real*. Ships ahead of *Namur* steer for those ahead of *Real*.

Hercules  
 F.S.  
 Constante  
 Poder  
 Neptuno  
 América  
 Oriente  
 Sérieux  
 St. Esprit  
 TERRIBLE  
 Ferme  
 Diamant  
 Solide\*  
 Aquilon  
 Heureux  
 Tigre  
 (? Solide) Eole  
 Alcion  
 F.S.  
 Trident  
 Atalante  
 Esperance  
 Duc d'Orleans  
 Toulouse  
 Borée

Royal Oak  
 Rupert  
 Essex  
 Dorsetshire  
 Ann F.S.  
 Marlborough  
 NAMUR  
 Winchelsea (repeating)  
 Norfolk  
 Spence  
 Princessa  
 Somerset  
 Dragon  
 Bedford  
 Berwick  
 Kingston  
 Salisbury  
 Guernsey  
 P. Caroline  
 Diamond (repeating)  
 Boyne  
 Chichester  
 Nassau  
 Chatham  
 Warwick  
 Stirling Castle



\* M. Castex places *Solide* 7th in the line, other accounts place her 11th.

Captain Sclater of the 'Somerset' stood for the 'Neptuno,' which was about half to three-quarters of a mile ahead of the 'Real.' He engaged her so closely, at about musket shot, that the Spaniard after half-an-hour's engagement got her tacks aboard and made sail, at the same time bearing up and running out of the line. She drew rapidly away from the 'Somerset,' who followed her a short distance, but seeing the 'Poder' astern disengaged, owing to the disablement of the 'Princessa,' Sclater backed his main topsail and awaited her, engaging her warmly when she came up until the Spanish ship's foretopmast was shot away. The 'Poder' thereby threw up into the wind and passed under the 'Somerset's' stern, subsequently making a sternboard which carried her out of the line to leeward and Sclater did not continue to engage her. For one thing she was now disabled and could be left to the ships astern to pick up while his own ship could better be employed in reinforcing the van where the enemy were in superior strength. For another, he was influenced by the article in the Instructions which provided for maintaining the cohesion of the fleet until a decisive stage of the action had been reached. The same article affected the conduct of the next two British ships ahead, the 'Dragon' and 'Bedford.' Steering for the 'America' and 'Oriente' they opened fire upon them; but the Spanish ships crowding sail, the British ships were not able to get into close action with them for some time, nor when they did come up with them could they engage them long, as the Spaniards bore away and to pursue them would have carried the British ships to leeward, and was contrary to doctrine.

[A 'sternboard' means the ship 'turns on her heel' – a bit like backing a car out of a stall. The ship's motion is in the direction of her stern, with the helm over so the ship turns and catches the wind. Useful if the wind is in front.]

Thus in the preliminary phase of the engagement the leading ships of the British centre had done what lay in their power against their Spanish opponents. The 'Constante' had been definitely driven out of the line, the 'Neptuno' forced to make sail ahead and to leeward, and the 'Poder' partly disabled; while the 'America' and 'Oriente' had avoided action and crowded to join the French van, giving their assailants only an indifferent opportunity of engaging them. No fault was found with the conduct of the captains of the 'Dragon' and 'Bedford'. It was recognised that they were not able to engage the retreating enemy more closely than they did, and though the captains of the 'Somerset' and 'Princessa' were tried for not engaging closely, both were honourably acquitted, the Court emphasising their complete satisfaction with the conduct of Captain Pett in particular, saying that "he could not have acted other than he did."

The Spanish Admiral, Don Navarro, behaved in a manner very different from his captains. When he saw the 'Namur' and 'Marlborough' bearing down upon him he prepared to receive them warmly, and directly Mathews brought to alongside him at half pistol shot he backed his own main topsail and returned the 'Namur's' broadsides. The first Spanish broadside shot off the British Flag Captain's arm and thus deprived Mathews of the services of a captain throughout the engagement.

A furious cannonade at this close range followed, in which the numerous armament and thick sides of the 'Real' gave her a great advantage. Although she was engaged by both the British ships, neither was able to bring her whole broadside to bear. The 'Marlborough' lay about half a cable's length astern of the 'Namur' and fired into the Spaniard's quarter, the British flagship being rather before her beam. Here there may have been some misunderstanding, for Cornwall is said to have believed that he in the 'Marlborough' was intended to attack the 'Real.' If he had known – so said his nephew who succeeded to the command after he fell – that the Admiral was going to take the 'Real,' he would not have presumed to interfere with the Admiral's opponent, but would have brought to abreast his second astern, the 'Hércules.'

After about an hour's engagement, the 'Marlborough' forged ahead and was seen from the 'Namur' to be coming close on board her. The approach was gradual, due probably to external causes; the effect was that those in the 'Namur' suddenly saw the 'Marlborough' close on board them and a collision imminent. In the heavy tumbling swell, the result of two large ships coming together in this manner would have been serious, and Mathews gave the order to fill the flagship's maintopsail. The 'Namur' then drew ahead, and when clear of the 'Marlborough' the Admiral brought to again, this time a little ahead and to windward of the 'Real,' but lying so that his broadside guns could no longer bear. He was however able to fire his stern guns, but these could afford little assistance to the 'Marlborough,' who now received the whole of the 'Real's' fire. The

'Namur' herself was badly damaged aloft, her main and mizen masts and all three topmasts were wounded and tottering, her main yard cut in the slings, her starboard shrouds all shot away but two, and for some time her men were employed securing the spars sufficiently to enable her to get into action again. A little time after 'Hércules,' drew ahead of the 'Real' through her lee, giving the 'Namur' an opportunity to open fire on her, which she did at once. The 'Hércules' immediately dropped astern again and to leeward, and took no further part in the fight.

[See Diagram 4.]

While the Admiral and his seconds and the leading ships in the centre were thus engaging the enemy at various degrees of closeness, the ships astern were acting in a very different manner. The 'Dorsetshire,' Captain Burrish, bore down, making the 'Hércules' his mark, and came into action soon after the 'Namur' and 'Marlborough,' but at a greater distance. She engaged the 'Hércules' for about an hour, but Burrish did not force a close engagement, nor when the 'Hércules' dropped to leeward and drew ahead towards the lee quarter of the 'Real,' did he follow her and force the fighting. He was conforming to the canons, which imposed the necessity of keeping in a line with the Admiral and forbade following a small body of ships; the result was an indecisive engagement between the two ships, terminated by the 'Hércules' running out of action and leaving the 'Dorsetshire' without an opponent for the time. Burrish could now have assisted the 'Marlborough,' but he did not do so.

[Captain Burrish was later cashiered].

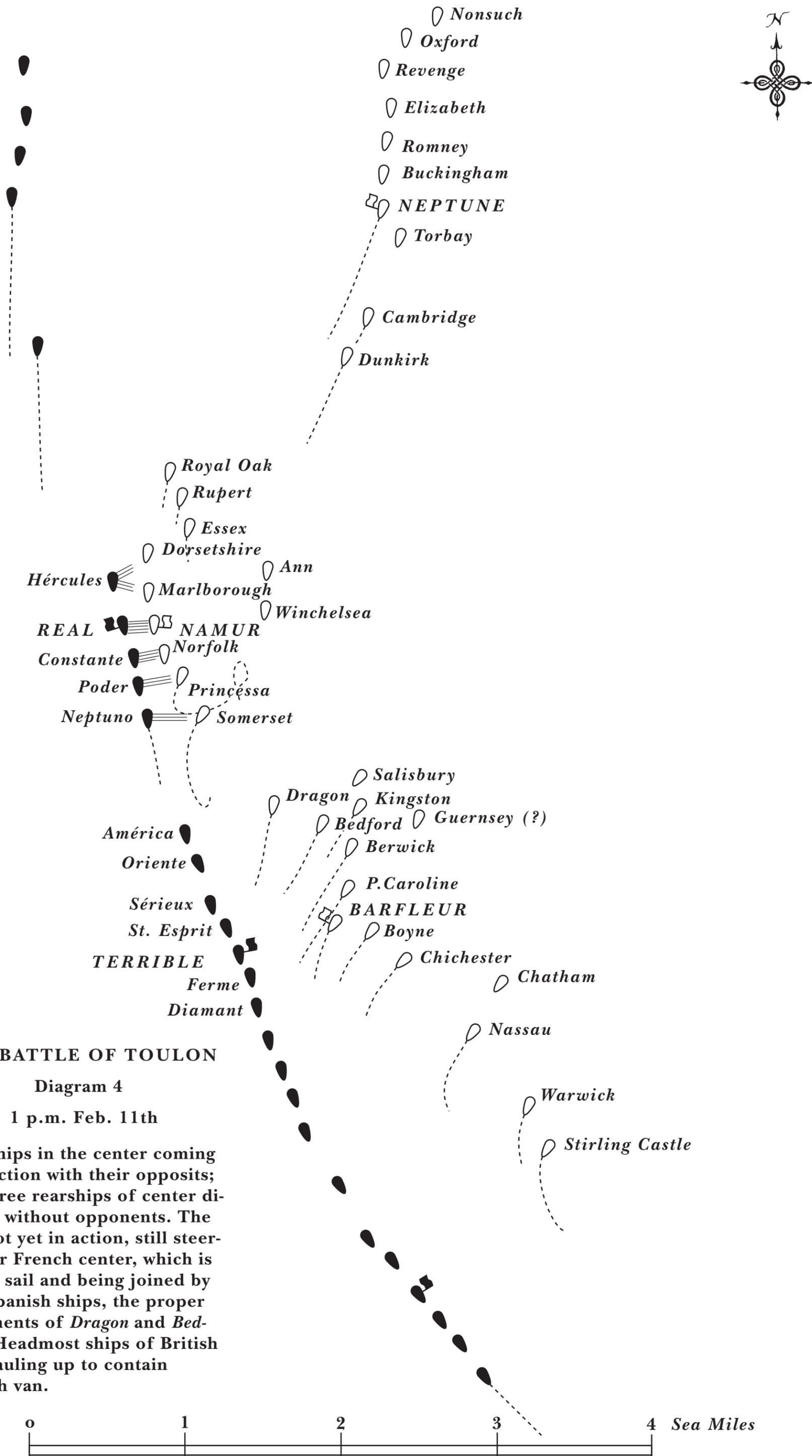
The ships astern of the 'Dorsetshire' were the 'Essex,' 'Rupert' and 'Royal Oak.' When Mathews bore down there was a considerable gap astern of the 'Hércules'—something between three and five miles. So far therefore as these three ships were concerned, there was an element of uncertainty as to what the British ships should do. The duty of each ship was to bear down and engage her opposite, taking station from the flagship. The ships ahead had each their opponent, but for these rearmost ships of the division there were no opponents nearer than the five Spanish ships astern, and in the light wind then blowing, there appeared little possibility of their coming up for some time. While their subsequent inaction may be condemned, the question of what they should do immediately must be considered, and the difficulties, such as they were, appreciated.

All three ships bore down with the Admiral but did not go so far as he did. They had then various steps they might take. They might stretch ahead and assist the Admiral and his seconds to crush the 'Real' and her second astern; or put their helms up and go away large with the wind on the starboard quarter and bring the five Spaniards in rear to action as quickly as possible; or jog down on a lasking course under easy sail, dropping astern of their leaders and falling in with the five Spaniards as they came up. If the first of these alternatives had been chosen, the Spaniards in rear might have been left to Lestock to deal with, and undoubtedly the assistance that would have been given to the centre would have been invaluable. But it must not be forgotten that no precedent existed for such a step, and though we may say that men should rise superior to convention and grasp the essentials of a situation, it must not be forgotten that it is not easy at any time to throw aside the accepted doctrines governing action, especially in a matter where the instructions were so definite as they were at that time. It is impossible to exact rigid obedience to instructions and at the same time to expect the average officer to develop and employ initiative. Exceptional men may do so, but it is the average man who has to be considered.

To bear away large would also have been an extreme step to take, though some officers considered the three ships could have steered northerly to meet the approaching Spanish rear; it was open to the objection that in doing so three ships would be taken down to engage five. Although Lestock's division was coming up it might be some time before it could afford help, and in that time the enemy's superiority might assert itself with evil results. Both these former alternatives imply however that all three ships should act as one: either all three captains must act upon a common thought or one captain must take command and carry the detachment either ahead or astern. No such powers were vested in any captain; none could act independently of his divisional commander.

['Bear away large': break contact into the open and increase speed.]

The other alternative of bringing to at once and allowing the enemy to come up and engage them, while promising neither so effectual nor so

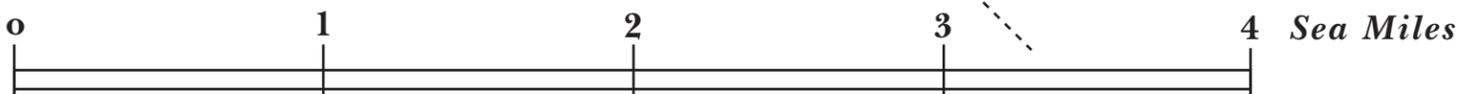


**THE BATTLE OF TOULON**

**Diagram 4**

**1 p.m. Feb. 11th**

The ships in the center coming into action with their opposits; the three rearships of center division without opponents. The van not yet in action, still steering for French center, which is under sail and being joined by two Spanish ships, the proper opponents of *Dragon* and *Bedford*. Headmost ships of British van hauling up to contain French van.



speedy a result as either of the others, was the one most in conformity with naval thought of the day, and was what the majority of officers considered the three ships should have done. To a certain extent it is what they did do, but they brought-to to windward of their own line, and a very long way to windward and ahead of the rear five ships of the enemy. The 'Essex' behaved worst. From the beginning she remained on the weather quarter of the 'Dorsetshire' and in that position she brought to. Captain Richard Norris, her commander, made no effort to support the 'Marlborough' although her plight could clearly be seen. "The 'Essex's' people were quite mad to go down to her assistance and cried out that it was a shame to see a ship in such distress and not go down to her assistance." Lieut. Bentley suggested to Norris that he should bear down. Norris replied that if the Admiral wanted him to do so he should make a signal. He brought his main topsail to the mast and remained with his helm a-lee for hours. His conduct needs no discussion for he tacitly admitted that no defence could serve him. The son of the Admiral of the Fleet was for a time protected by interest at a travesty of a trial under the presidency of Rowley; but when he was ordered home to be court-martialled he deserted and was never seen again.

The 'Rupert,' Captain Ambrose, brought to to windward of the 'Dorsetshire,' having the 'Essex' on her weather bow. In defence of his inaction Ambrose argued that he could not press on and assist the 'Marlborough' or attack the 'Hercules,' as by so doing he would have been taking the place of the 'Dorsetshire' and 'Essex,' to whom the duty of succouring [sic] the 'Marlborough' should properly have fallen; and, as to the enemy astern, he contended they were so far out of action that even if he had carried his ship further to leeward, they would still not have come up to engage him for a long time—arguments which afford no justification for not doing what others were leaving undone, or for not trying to get quicker into action. The fourth ship, the 'Royal Oak,' Captain Williams, bore further down than the 'Rupert' and then brought to, a long half mile astern and to leeward of her, and therefore nearer the approaching enemy. He at least did his best to place his ship in a situation ready to engage the enemy when they drew up.

The Spanish rear was straggling, with the leading ship, the 'Brillante' a good mile ahead of the 'Alcon' and drawing up fairly fast. About 2 she came abreast of the 'Royal Oak,' and shots were exchanged, though at a long distance and the 'Brillante' promptly bore up, and running a little to leeward of the line, kept all her sail abroad to join her division. As she passed the 'Rupert,' at a still longer range than she had passed the 'Royal Oak,' Ambrose fired some shots at her which were wholly ineffective. Williams, observing that the other four ships continued to draw up under all sail, and that neither the 'Rupert' nor the 'Essex' shewed any sign of coming down to leeward to help him, hauled his wind and ran up under the 'Rupert's' lee quarter and hailed Ambrose, "Why don't you edge down nearer, Captain Ambrose?" he called out. Ambrose, who was in the quarter gallery, made no reply. His guns fired some more short shot, and Williams, stamping his foot and crying "God damn it, you may as well throw your powder and shot into the sea," put up his helm again and bore away alone. If he then remained at too long a range some excuse is to be found for a single ship which is opposed to four of the enemy without any immediate prospect of assistance.

The captains of the leading ships of the rear division, the 'Dunkirk' and 'Cambridge,' were also uncertain as to how they should act. They were some distance ahead of their division when Mathews bore down on the enemy, but were in line, or very nearly so, with their Vice-Admiral. Captain Wager Purvis of the 'Dunkirk,' when he saw the Admiral going down, turned to Mr Hughes, his first Lieutenant, and said "What are we to do now?" Hughes replied "Bear down, Sir, and attack the leading ships of the enemy's rear." But Purvis replied that he dared not break the line, and held on his course followed by the 'Cambridge.' The Vice-Admiral did nothing to send these ships into action.

[Captain Williams was pensioned off (permanent half-pay) and Ambrose cashiered and docked a year's pay (regarded as a mild punishment).]

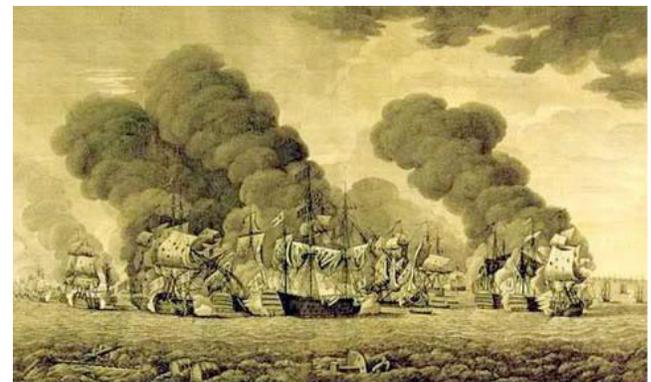
The movements of the van during the approach and opening phases of the battle are of the utmost importance. By noon, when Mathews steered for the 'Real,' the British van was not yet formed in line. Although the leading ships were nearly abreast the French van in bearing all the ships ahead of the 'Barfleur' were still stretched away on her weather bow, the 'Stirling Castle,' the wing ship, being about two miles from the Rear-Admiral. The French line reached a long three miles ahead of the 'Terrible,' de Court's

flagship, and was in good order, going under topsails and stretching away from the Spanish ships in the rear of the line.

The British van consisted of nine ships of the line and three 50 gun ships. Rowley called the latter, which were to windward, into the line when he bore down, so that he had twelve ships in his division with which to engage the sixteen ships of the French squadron. In any case, therefore, he must leave four ships of the enemy without opponents.

When the Commander-in-Chief began the attack the frigates were still to windward of the line and the van division was not in a sufficiently advanced position to allow the leading ships to steer for the head of the enemy's line. The Rear-Admiral had no intimation of what the Admiral's intentions were and had thus to make up his mind quickly as to how he would attack. He could bear up at once and engage the nearest ships of the enemy that he could reach, or he could hold on his course until he had drawn far enough ahead to fetch the leading ships. Rowley does not appear to have hesitated to decide that the attack having begun his duty dictated that he should join in it at once, and he put his helm up and bore down towards the French line. Whether he endeavoured to stretch as far ahead as possible, or whether, like Parker at the Dogger Bank, he followed the ancient formula that flagship should engage flagship, does not appear in any of the Journals or evidences. The 'Barfleur' eventually rounded to abreast the 'Terrible.' This position had an unfortunate effect upon the subsequent course of the action. It brought the five ships astern of 'Barfleur' abreast of only two French ships, their only alternative objectives, except the opponents of the flagship and her second astern, being those Spaniards for whom the leading ships of the British centre were steering; and, while this so crowded them that they could not develop their whole fire, the British ahead of 'Barfleur' were opposed to the remaining thirteen ships of the French squadron.

The 'Barfleur' and 'Princess Caroline' came to a warm engagement with the French Admiral and his seconds. Hawke in the 'Berwick,' according to his station astern of the 'Princess Caroline,' should have had the 'Serieux' as his opponent, but apparently he was not able to fetch her, and he came into action with the leading Spanish ship, receiving the fire of the 'Serieux' upon his lee bow. He had no better fortune with his Spanish opponent than the captains astern had had with theirs. She passed him as they had passed them and ran to leeward out of range. When the 'Neptuno' came up she served him in a similar manner. "I ordered the foresail to be set," he wrote in his journal, "with an intent to go alongside the Neptune...and bore down upon her to come to closer action, which she observing made more sail and bore away under the lee of the French, upon which finding I could not come nearer to her without going ahead of the Carolina, obliged me to give over that design." Thus Hawke, like the others, respected the line and was bound by the established rules.



How the ships ahead of the flagship should act was now the question for their captains to decide. The 'Barfleur's' second ahead, the 'Boyne,' had a straightforward matter to solve; her obvious opponent was the 'Terrible's' second ahead, the 'Ferme' 74. The 'Chichester,' 80, taking her cue from the 'Boyne,' and, it may be said, in accordance with Mathews's manuscript addition to the Fighting Instructions which directed ships to take station from the Admiral, pointed for the 'Diamant,' 56, an unequal distribution of force resulting from Rowley not having had time to adjust his line, in accordance with custom, so that ships should engage the enemy of the same force. The Rear-Admiral's 50-gun ships had not yet been able to get into the line. The remaining ships had, however, a less easy solution. So far as instructions could guide them they had two, and these in the circumstances of the particular case were contradictory, as instructions

which attempt to provide for all situations are bound so frequently to be. Article 19 of the Printed Fighting Instructions directed the van of the fleet to steer with the van of the enemy's and there engage them; by this Article the headmost ships should steer for the headmost ships of the enemy ; but by so doing they would have contravened the manuscript addition made by Mathews to Article 1, which ran: "Every ship is to observe and keep the same distance those ships do which are next the Admiral." That is to say, if the Admiral's seconds kept a half cable from the flagship, each ship in succession was to keep a half cable from her next astern or next ahead as the case might be: and this expressly forbade their stretching away and opening the distance so as to enable them to engage the headmost ships. The 'Chichester,' as we have seen, interpreted the movement in accordance with Mathews's addition; but the remaining three ships, the 'Nassau,' 'Warwick' and 'Stirling Castle,' seeing that the headmost ships of the enemy if left free could double on the British line astern – always a very favourite design of the French – after standing down to within about a mile of the enemy, hauled their wind and stretched with the ships at the head of the French line with the object of containing them. When Captain Cooper of the 'Stirling Castle,' who had expected Rowley to come further ahead, saw him bear away for de Court's flagship, he turned to his first Lieutenant, Matthew King, and said he was puzzled what to do and how he should act to avoid censure. He could not bear down alone and have the whole of the French van upon him. He saw no way of assisting by fighting, but he considered that by keeping the wind he could prevent the enemy from tacking and doubling on the Rear-Admiral.

[‘Double on’ as the words imply, means simply that the excess ships on one side combine their fire instead of each ship taking on its own opponent by itself. This term especially implies bringing up another division of the fleet, rather than simply engaging two-on-one.]

Temple West in the 'Warwick,' the second ship in the line, was of the same opinion. He saw that this was one of those unforeseen circumstances for which detailed instructions cannot provide, and boldly took the line that, as the instructions applied to a situation different from that in which he found himself, it was his duty to ignore them. "Had the headmost ships of the English van," he reasoned during his subsequent Court Martial, "gone down to the headmost of the French, would not as many of their line as they had thought proper to bring upon us have had it in their power to have engaged us, and the remaining part of doubling upon our Rear-Admiral? Or had our foremost ships gone down upon the sternmost of the French that were not engaged, would not their whole line ahead have had it in their power to have brought the van betwixt two fires?...And was this to be done in strict obedience to the signal abroad, and, out of a pretence of endamaging his Majesty's enemies, give up his Majesty's ships to them? No. These officers (i.e. the commanders of the three van ships) knew no signals directing such conduct, and as they knew what was their duty to their King and Country, so they had a spirit to act up to it in all opposition to all the senseless observances insisted on by Mr Lestock. I call 'em so, as the 11th and 12th Articles of War from which this discipline is taken directs no such conduct as is here required. It is true that the former of them enjoins obedience to be paid to the commands of the Admiral, as well for the assailing of the enemy as for whatever else he may direct, but the nature of that obedience can only be judged by the order or signal that commands it, and which describes under what circumstances you are to perform the required services." This defence of West's fully shews the motives which governed his conduct. The object of the Captains of the 'Stirling Castle,' 'Warwick,' and 'Nassau' was quite clear to all of them, namely, that as the division had gone down on the rear ships of the French van, it was in imminent danger of being doubled on, and that this movement might be delayed, if not actually prevented, by keeping to windward of them.

[West & Co. were apparently cashiered, but then restored to rank.]

A fairly wide gap soon formed between the French and Spaniards. When the engagement began between the 'Barfleur' and 'Terrible' both ships had brought to, but their action was not copied by the ships ahead. The French ships engaged by the 'Boyne' and 'Chichester' remained under way, and, although receiving no heavy fire, put up their helms and edged sail to leeward and so began to make a curve in the line ahead of the 'Terrible.' De Court did not lie to for long ; as the ships ahead of him kept under sail and drew ahead, he soon filled his topsails and followed them. The ships astern of him followed suit, and the whole French line, sailing faster than the British, gained on them. One of the Spanish ships –

'Neptuno' or 'Oriente' – came ahead from her engagement with the 'Bedford' and received the 'Berwick's' fire, and bore away to leeward.

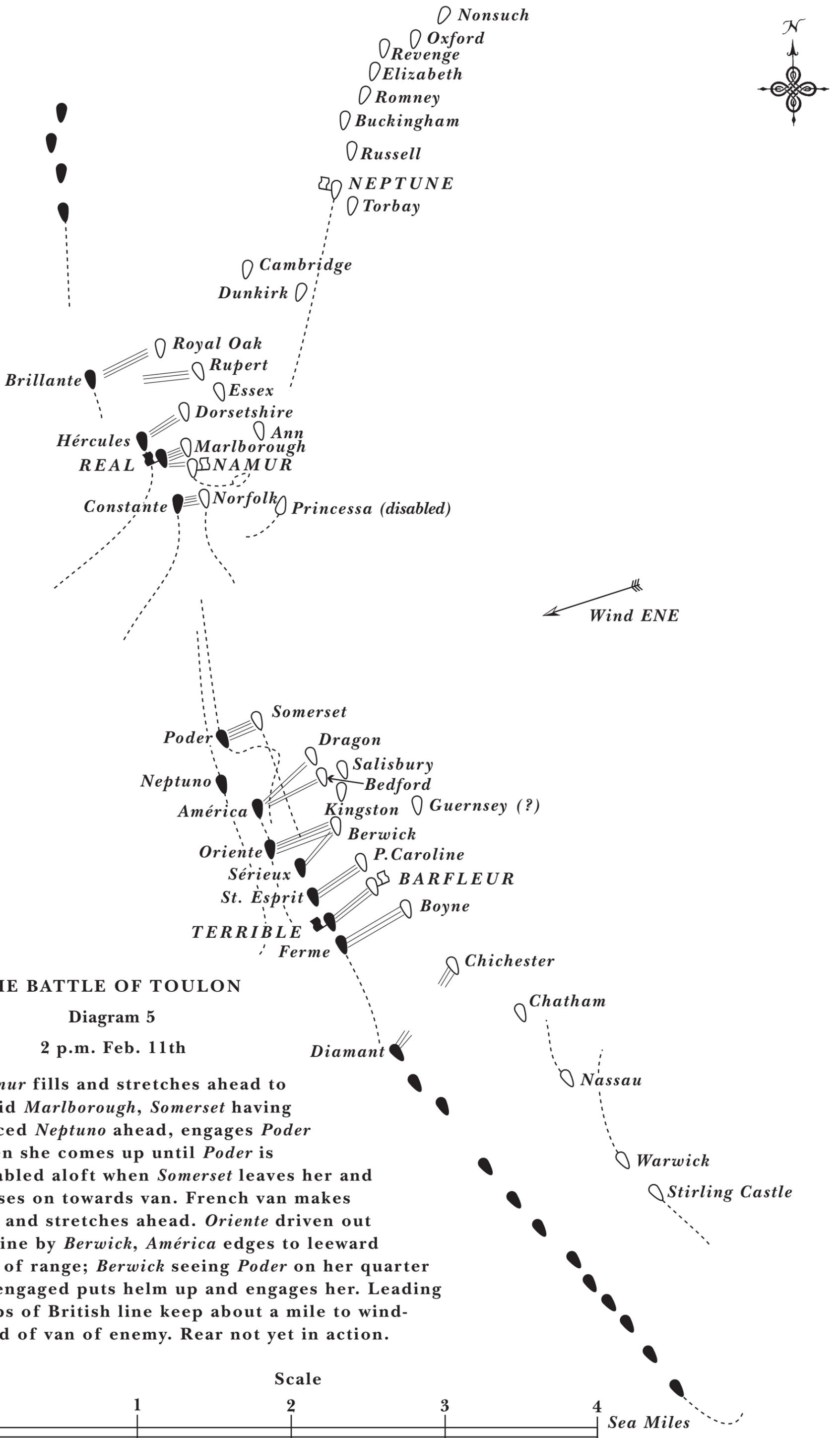
It was at this stage of the action, a little after 2 o'clock, that the 'Poder,' which was engaged with the 'Somerset' and had also received the fire, first of the 'Princessa' and subsequently of the 'Dragon,' 'Bedford' and 'Kingston' as she drew away from them, lost her foretopmast. The 'Somerset' was at this time abreast her and sailing at about the same rate. The loss of her head sails threw the 'Poder' up into the wind, and she passed under the stern of the 'Somerset,' who got her main tack on board to go about. Before the 'Somerset' was round, however, Hawke in the 'Berwick' saw her, and having now no antagonist, since the remaining French and Spanish ships had gone ahead, he at once put his helm hard up, ran down to the 'Poder,' and engaged her hotly at pistol shot for nearly two hours. Soon after the 'Poder' surrendered. Her main and mizen masts were shot away, twelve guns were dismounted, and over 200 men were killed and wounded.

[See Diagram 5.]

In the rear, meanwhile, Lestock's division was gradually coming up. Although the Vice-Admiral saw the action between the 'Marlborough' and the 'Real' going seriously for the British ship, and that the five Spanish ships in the rear were drawing up to join their Admiral, he neither made all possible sail nor detached any of his ships to assist the 'Marlborough' or cut off the approaching Spaniards. For not assisting the 'Marlborough' he may be excused, seeing that there were three disengaged ships which had it in their power to do so; but that he should throw away his opportunity of cutting off the rearmost Spaniards is inexcusable. His reasons carry no conviction. He argued that he was bound to keep his division together and bring it up in good order, and that, consistent with that requirement, he steered a proper course to cut off the Spanish rear. His own correspondence with Barnett condemns him on the first point and the evidence of reputable witnesses at the subsequent Court Martial showed that he neither carried all the sail he could nor steered the quickest course. His conduct has been ascribed to his personal dislike of Mathews, and it is not to be wondered that his behaviour, otherwise incomprehensible, should have been so interpreted in the fleet.

We left the 'Namur' lying ahead and somewhat to windward of the 'Marlborough' repairing her damages aloft preparatory to returning to action. The 'Marlborough' meanwhile had suffered heavily. Cornwall, her captain, a man of great promise, lost both his legs early in the action and his nephew, Frederick Cornwall, was severely wounded; over 40 men were killed and 125 wounded. At 3 p.m. her masts went by the board, and Mathews, seeing the distress she was in, sent his 2nd Lieutenant, Bentley, to the 'Dorsetshire' to order Burrish to close and assist the 'Marlborough,' and stop the rearmost Spanish ships from coming up, and when he should have delivered that message, to go on to the fireship and order her to bear down at once and burn the 'Real.' The signal for her to do so had already been abroad but had not been obeyed as the 'Ann' for some reason was not ready, though Mackie had been given his orders to prime at about 10 a.m. ; another half hour passed without the 'Dorsetshire' making any movement. Then Bentley went on board a second time and repeated his message, and, having noticed that Burrish had still taken no steps to stop the Spanish ships, he went on board the 'Essex' and told Captain Richard Norris that he thought that if the 'Essex' were taken down to stop the Spanish ships it would please the Admiral. Norris enquired if it were the Admiral's "order" he should do so; and finding it was not, but an independent opinion of Bentley's, he did nothing. Thus when at about 4 the 'Ann' began to come down before the wind, she was unsupported by either the 'Dorsetshire' or 'Essex.'

The 'Real' had now put before the wind and was lying to leeward of the 'Marlborough,' no longer engaging, and the headmost ships of the Spanish rear were just within gun shot. Seeing the situation, Mathews put his helm hard up and ran down towards the 'Real' to cover the fireship's advance; but he was too late to be of any help. The Spanish ships astern opened fire on the 'Ann' but she crept forward through their falling shot uninjured. Seeing the imminent danger of his situation the captain of the 'Real' sent out a launch to tow the fireship away before she could get alongside, but a well directed musketry fire from the 'Ann's' fore-castle prevented the Spanish crew from getting a hawser on board. Then the 'Ann' was hit. A shot from the 'Real' pierced her below the water-line forward and she began to settle by the head, still moving towards her goal from which she was separated by a few yards only ; hope that she might reach it still remained. But in this position, so near the attainment of her object, her



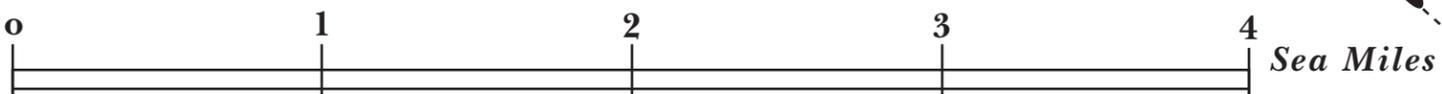
**THE BATTLE OF TOULON**

Diagram 5

2 p.m. Feb. 11th

*Namur* fills and stretches ahead to avoid *Marlborough*, *Somerset* having forced *Neptuno* ahead, engages *Poder* when she comes up until *Poder* is disabled aloft when *Somerset* leaves her and passes on towards van. French van makes sail and stretches ahead. *Oriente* driven out of line by *Berwick*, *América* edges to leeward out of range; *Berwick* seeing *Poder* on her quarter disengaged puts helm up and engages her. Leading ships of British line keep about a mile to windward of van of enemy. Rear not yet in action.

Scale



end came. Her priming was fired – whether by a shot from the enemy, from accident, or purposely by Captain Mackie, was never established – and she blew up carrying all on board her to destruction. So the attempt failed.

The Spanish ships from astern had now joined the 'Real,' and Lestock's division was just drawing up with the rear. His leading ships, the 'Dunkirk' and 'Cambridge,' had already been engaged, though at long range, with the Spaniards; his flagship, the 'Neptune,' opened an ineffective fire at random shot at about 4 o'clock. Lestock's forbearance from engaging was noted by Captain Long, who stated with the greatest definiteness that the Spanish rear could have been engaged at this time; and a conversation overheard by both the surgeon, Mr Savage, and the purser, Mr Hargood, at an earlier hour in the afternoon makes it seem that he could have done so even sooner. Lestock at that time was sitting in an arm-chair on the starboard side of the quarterdeck, observing the rearmost Spaniards. Calling Lieutenant Cockburn, "Cockburn," says he "we must bear down to those five ships." The Lieutenant replied "You may, if you please, Sir, but if you do you will then have them all upon us." Lestock did not bear down, nor did he do so at 4 o'clock; instead, he hauled his wind and kept out of action.

The action now, at about four in the afternoon, took a new turn. Earlier in the engagement the French Admiral had desired to tack in order to weather the British line, but for some reason had been unable to get his signal through. His three leading ships did, however, go about and made a short board to the northward, a movement which was copied by the three headmost ships of the British van. The three French ships stood no longer than a few minutes on the starboard tack, when, seeing that the remainder of their line was not coming with them, they again stayed and stood to the southward, now being rather to windward of their line. The 'Stirling Castle' and her two next astern did the same.

[See Diagram 6.]

Shortly after 4.30, when the 'Poder' had surrendered and the arrival of the British rear was making the situation of the 'Real' precarious, de Court again signalled his division to tack together, this time with success. The whole French line went about and hauled their wind on the starboard tack and stood to the northward as though to cut the British line at about the 'Princess Caroline.' Rowley at once went about and stood to the northward. His three van ships, although they went round as soon as they saw the French line in stays, were rapidly overhauled by the faster sailing French, and it appeared for some time as if they would be caught by superior force; but just as the French wing ships came up close under the stern of the 'Stirling Castle,' de Court bore away for the 'Real.' Most singular of all, the French did not fire a shot, though they passed under the sterns of the leading British ships so close that they almost touched!

The 'Berwick' was at this moment alongside the 'Poder.' She had put a prize crew on board under Lieutenant Edward Vernon, who were busy getting juremasts rigged to carry her away. The sudden turn of the French gave Hawke no time to recover his men, and he was obliged to leave his prize and hasten to rejoin the line to avoid being cut off by the advancing French who retook the 'Poder.'

The respective vans and rears were now standing towards each other. Not more than a short hour's daylight remained, and Mathews, judging a confused night action would be all to his disadvantage, ignorant as yet what damage the van had received, wore with his division and steered to the northward in order to collect his ships together and place his fleet between the enemy and Toulon so that they could not return to their harbour. The ships of the British centre and of Rowley's division passed the Spanish rear on opposite courses and exchanged hot broadsides at a fairly effective range, but as they separated no further fighting took place.

[See Diagram 7.]

Nightfall thus saw the British squadron repairing damages and reforming to the northward, the enemy doing the same thing between five and eight miles to the southward of them. The 'Namur' was so much wounded aloft that Mathews shifted his flag on board the 'Russell' in order to be able to renew the engagement next day.

At daylight next morning the enemy were still in sight, but further to leeward, the French rather nearer the British line than the Spaniards. The 'Hércules' was astern of the remainder and was lying between the two fleets, and the 'Somerset,' which had become separated from the main

body through having "built one or two Chapells" during the night, lay near her. Captain Sclater made sail and attacked the Spanish ship, but the latter succeeded in rejoining her main body after a short running fight.

Mathews made sail with the whole fleet and followed the enemy, who were steering away to the westward before an easterly breeze. As he pursued them his ships straggled, and while his leading ships had gained considerably by 2 in the afternoon, those with damaged spars had dropped a very long way astern. The French, finding that the leading British division was coming up, dropped the recaptured 'Poder' which was delaying their retreat, and made more sail to join the Spaniards. Mathews then decided that he could not risk continuing a chase in such extended order as his fleet then was, and he shortened sail to bring up his rear, or enough of them to deal with the compact force with which the enemy were able to oppose him. At 4 the British fleet came up with the deserted 'Poder,' near which one French 70-gun ship was still lying. The 'Berwick' and 'Diamond' were ordered by Rowley to rescue her, and at the same time Mathews detached the 'Essex' to burn her as she was too disabled to join the fleet and he could not spare frigates to tow her to Mahon. The 'Poder' was therefore destroyed, greatly to the dissatisfaction of her original captors. The reason why Mathews felt he could not spare frigates to tow her was that he believed that the enemy was now making an effort to join the Brest squadron, and he expected the two forces to effect a junction at any moment. It was therefore necessary to retain all his frigates with him, and to keep all his fleet concentrated.

[Of course, the Brest Fleet was nowhere near the Med. It was probing the defences of the British homeland, before going up The Channel to clear a way for the flotilla that was to carry a French army from Boulogne to Dover.]

At 5 p.m. the British rear was such a long way astern that Mathews brought to. Although he had pursued with all the sail he could carry consistent with keeping his force together he found that by that time he had gained but little. He was now absolutely convinced, both from the manner of their behaviour on the preceding day, and from their steady retreat of the 12th, that the enemy would not fight until they had effected their junction with the Brest squadron, or drawn him away far enough from the coast to enable some design to be executed in connexion with the transport of troops, concerning which the last intelligence he had from Paris, Toulon and Marseilles clearly indicated some such intention. "It was confidently said," he stated, "that the Brest squadron was coming to the Mediterranean and I knew for certain the day they put to sea. Had they come to the Mediterranean and His Majesty's fleet been separated, it is very obvious what would have been the consequence of the separation...And I must here in particular take notice," he concluded, "that the preservation of Italy was esteemed of such great consequence to the common cause, that it was the next thing given to me in command from His Majesty to the destruction of the enemy's fleet." In his opinion, the utmost he could effect was the capture of the 'Real,' which a continuation of the pursuit might have obliged the enemy to drop. Should he, for the sake of that triumph such as it was, so far short of the destruction of the enemy's fleet, leave open the whole coast which had been committed in so particular a manner to his charge, and thus risk prejudicing the campaign in Italy?

So far as he made the transports of the enemy his objective he was not departing from an established doctrine, a doctrine which in later times may be said to have become traditional. But he had not only those transports to consider; there were also the nineteen Piedmontese battalions at Villefranche whose secure retreat he had promised to arrange for at the earnest request of the King of Sardinia. If Mathews had possessed the frigates and small craft for which he had pressed ineffectually for the last 18 months, the defence of the coast need have weighed little with him and he could have left it in their hands: but his light frigates and sloops were few, and he needed all his heavy frigates with the fleet in case he should meet the Brest squadron. The only vessels which were in a position to deal with an attempt at invasion were the two sloops he had left on the coast of the Riviera and Provence.

Mathews had still another reason which might incline him to return to the coast of Italy. If he should follow the Franco-Spaniards down the coast, they would be continually drawing him towards their reinforcement, from Brest, and he might find himself, with his wounded fleet, opposed to a superior force composed of perfect ships. Undoubtedly he might expect that if the Brest squadron got away, a British force of similar strength would follow it and reinforce him; the Duke of Newcastle had indeed told

# THE BATTLE OF TOULON

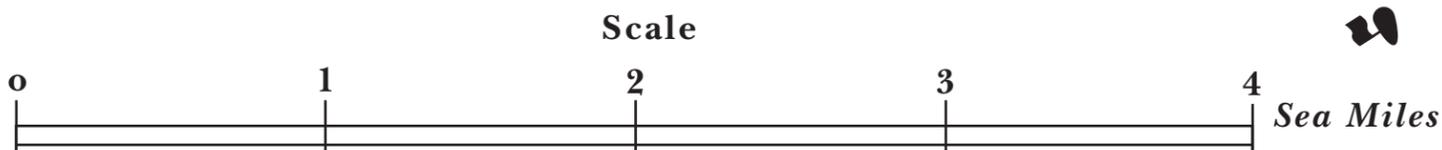
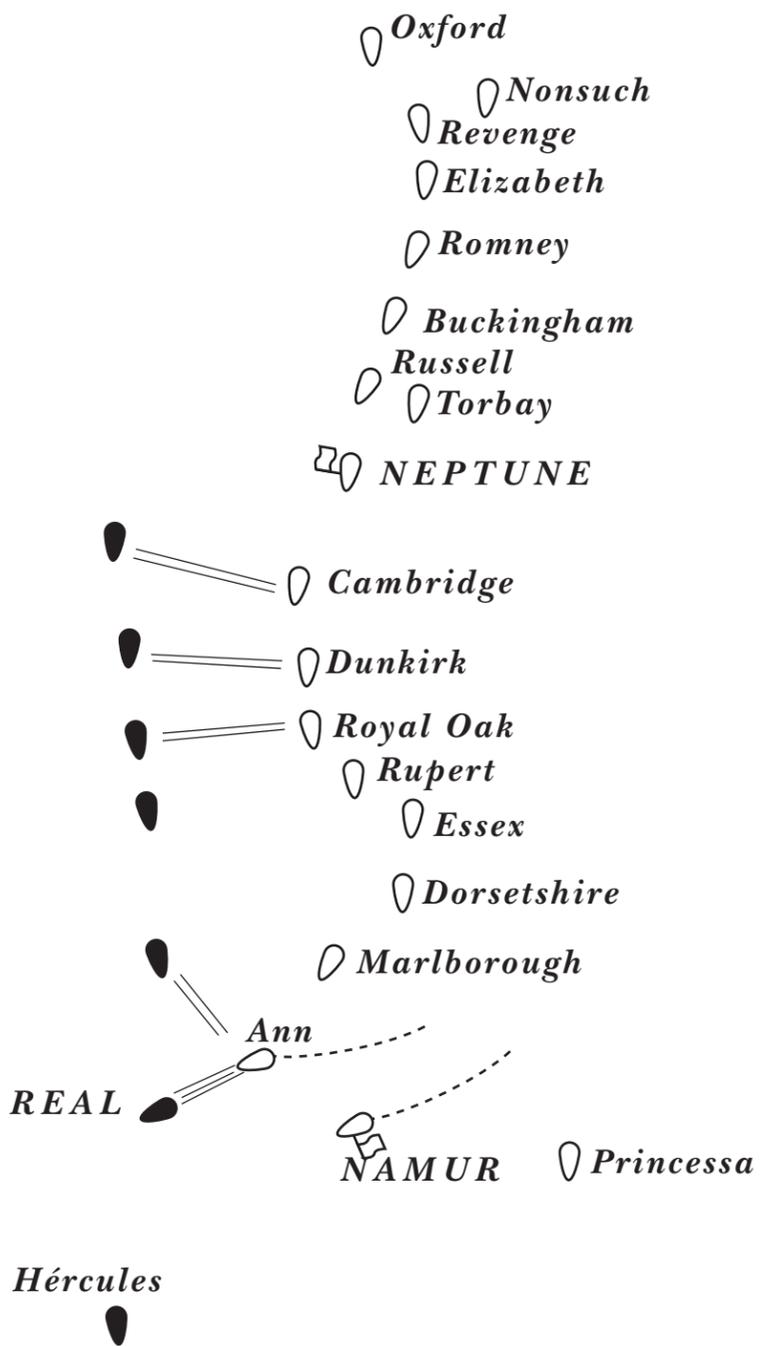
Diagram 6

4 p.m. Feb. 11th

*Real* and *Marlborough* disabled, *Real* lying stern to wind. *Ann* ordered to burn her, going down to do so. *Dorsetshire* ordered to cover *Ann*, but does not bear up; *Namur* puts before the wind to assist *Ann* but is too late. Leading ships of Spanish rear fire ineffectually at *Ann*, who is blown up when close to *Rael*.

*Terrible* has made sail out of reach of *Barfluer*. *Berwick* is engaging *Poder* to leeward of line. De Court has tried to tack his van "par contremarche" but signal not seen except by three leading ships, who went about, but seeing themselves not followed returned to their previous course.

All rear French and leading Spanish out of range.



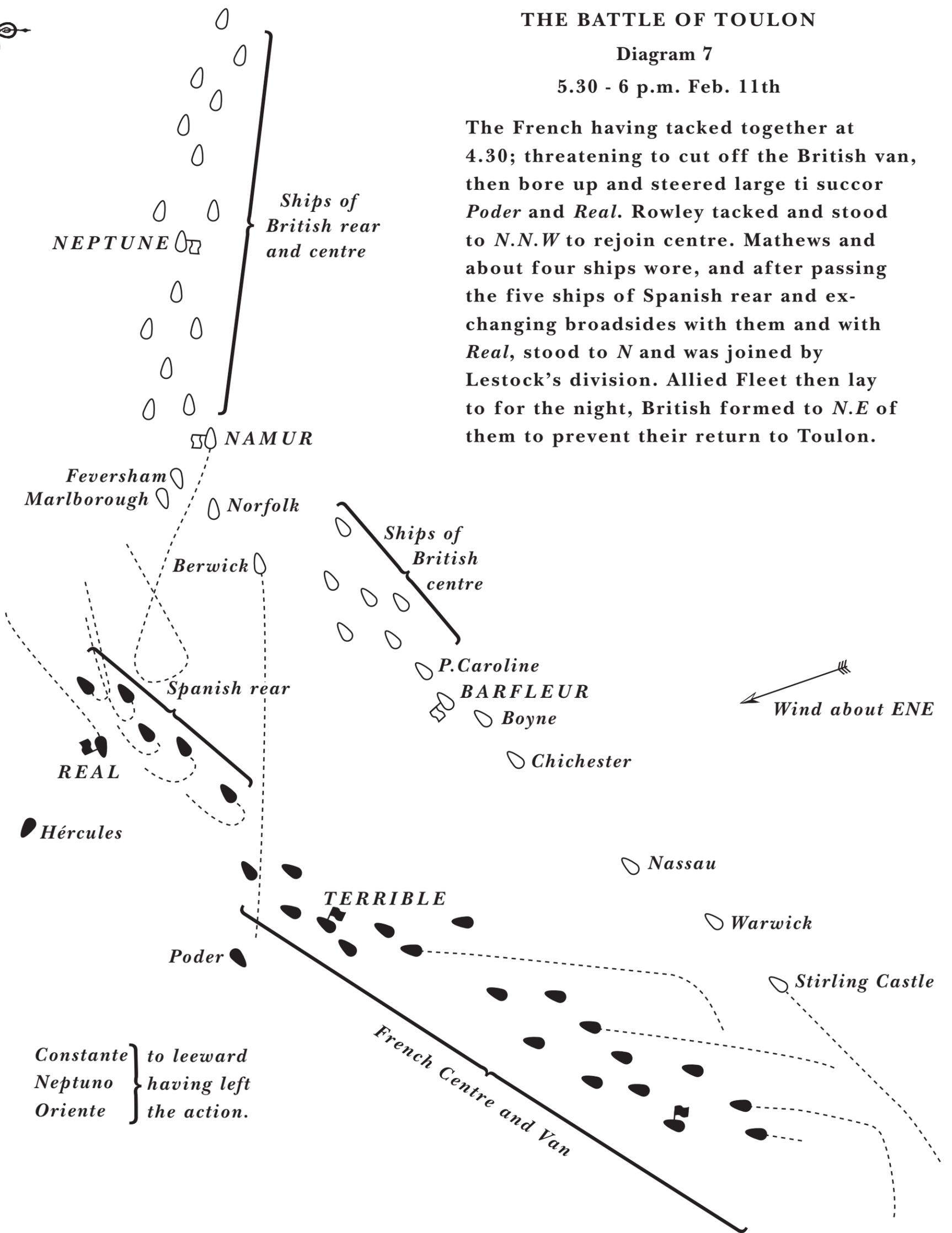


# THE BATTLE OF TOULON

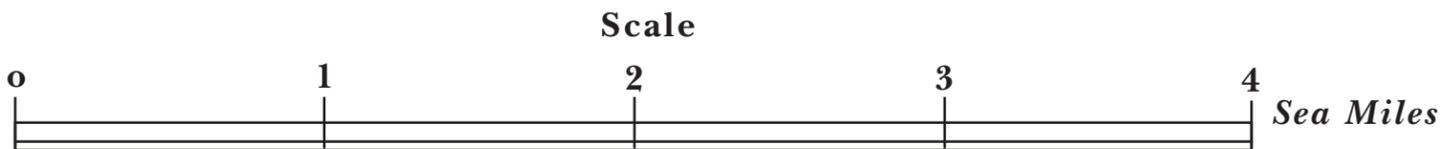
Diagram 7

5.30 - 6 p.m. Feb. 11th

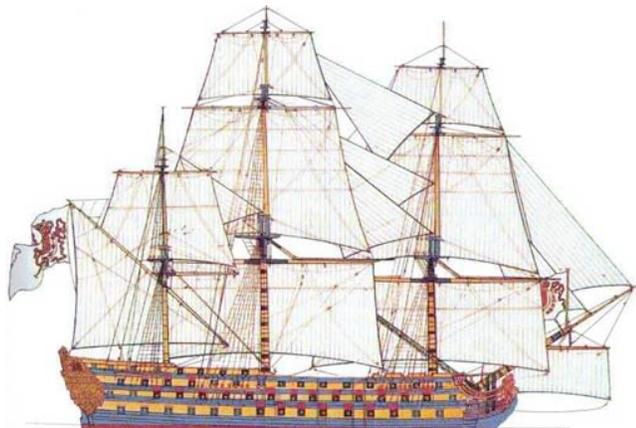
The French having tacked together at 4.30; threatening to cut off the British van, then bore up and steered large to succor *Poder* and *Real*. Rowley tacked and stood to N.N.W to rejoin centre. Mathews and about four ships wore, and after passing the five ships of Spanish rear and exchanging broadsides with them and with *Real*, stood to N and was joined by Lestock's division. Allied Fleet then lay to for the night, British formed to N.E of them to prevent their return to Toulon.



Constante } to leeward  
 Neptuno } having left  
 Oriente } the action.



him that step would be taken. But a long time might pass before the home authorities were sure of whither the enemy was gone. With such a start as they would thus have they might join the Toulon fleet long before Mathews's reinforcement would reach him, and in such case the worst thing he could do would be to meet them on the open sea. He might go into Gibraltar and await them there, as indeed he had at one time contemplated; but while he did so Italy would be exposed. If, however, he returned to the coast, he not only maintained the blockade so essential for the European war, but he gave more time for the reinforcements from England to reach him. The extra time added in working up to the Gulf of Lyons from the Straits would all be in favour of the British squadron which would be hurrying out to join him. With these views in his mind Mathews decided to secure his spars aloft and return to Italy.



[The Real Felipe.]

As a matter of fact, the British attempted one last pursuit on the 13th, this time led by Lestock, but the vice-admiral was recalled fairly soon, when it became evident that the Bourbons would not engage. The latter proceeded to Cartagena, where they secured their damaged ships before returning to Toulon. It was decided not to repeat the attempt, however, and preparations were begun for the land campaign that eventually took place – overrunning Villefranche would at least drive the British away from the Riviera, which was all that had been intended in any case.

[Richmond concludes his section on the battle with a discussion of whether Mathews was wrong to break off the action. (Richmond also downplays the skill of the French commander, whose style of 'fighting withdrawal' later became a common French ploy). First, he points out that the Spanish were badly damaged, and had been cut to half their strength with the loss of the Poder, the disappearance of the Hércules, and the separation of Neptuno, Oriente, and Constante; Richmond contends the Spanish had also become separated from the French and were returning to Spain. In this however, Richmond errs. His argument that a vigorous pursuit would have secured Italy just as well as a static defence is specious. It should be noted, however, that Mathews' contemporaries found him guilty on such grounds. Other factors were poor planning, and poor coordination – especially, the relations between Mathews and his senior subordinate admiral, Lestock, were cited as avoidable factors. Richmond notes that many blamed Lord Newcastle for putting the two men together. Mathews had a low opinion of Lestock from an earlier working relationship, and after the battle had him suspended and sent home; Mathews followed him home and their animosity became public. The court martial, or series of courts martial, involved him, Lestock, and 11 of the captains. They lasted until 1747. Lestock was acquitted and Mathews condemned. Both had fallen short, but Mathews bore the higher responsibility. And besides, Lestock was a Whig.]

Beatson gives the casualties as:

#### British

Namur – heavily damaged, 8 KIA including the captain, 12 WIA

Marlborough – heavily damaged, 43 KIA including the captain, 120 WIA (20 of whom later died)

Norfolk – heavily damaged, 9 KIA, 13 WIA

Barfleur – 25 KIA, 20 WIA

Princess Caroline – 8 KIA, 20 WIA

Princessa – heavily damaged

#### Bourbon

Real Felipe – ship nearly wrecked, 500 casualties, including captain (KIA) & Navarro (WIA)

Neptuno – 200 casualties, including captain (KIA)

Isabella – 300 casualties

Other ships are not mentioned.

Beatson has some comments on the Frenchman, du Court. In his opinion, Court would have preferred not to engage, if he could manage to get free of Toulon (since the primary objects were a) to help the Spanish escape, and b) to link up with the Brest Fleet intact) but had definite orders to do so (Versailles expecting him also to 'clear the Med' of the British). Therefore, the French admiral did not attack aggressively. Mathews, in consequence, assumed he was trying to gain sea-room and keep the prevailing winds, and thus rushed his own attack.

The 79 year old de la Bruyère was hailed as a hero and then fired due to internal politics at the *Ministry de la Marine* – the Minitser, de Maurepas, was interested in advancing his own creatures. His partner Navarro was also hailed as a hero and promoted. (The Spanish always regarded the battle as a victory). Beatson claims Navarro was displeased with de la Bruyère's 'meagre' relief attempt – though it decided the battle by chasing off the British – and was the man responsible, through the Spanish Court, for having him fired. As proof, Beatson cites a passage in de la Bruyère's letter of complaint to an influential friend at Court but it merely accuses Navarro of having got into difficulties through his own fault and says that he (de la Bruyère) saved the day. As a matter of fact, the French and Spanish appear to have coordinated their efforts skilfully and without rancour. The Spanish ships were slower than the French (and probably staffed with a lot of landsmen), that is all.

[Navarro would probably have felt insulted if he had seen the letter, though. But it was common in that age to have friendships with people and yet attack them privately if it would help one's own career. Not that the practice is confined to that age, but it was socially acceptable then.]

\*\*\*\*\*

#### Court de la Bruyère: Vice-Amiral du Ponant

Like most French admirals of his generation Bruyère saw a great deal of service in his youth, which spanned from before the Nine Years War and through the War of the Spanish Succession. Entering the navy at a young age his first recorded action was in one of the endless attempts to check the Barbary Pirates, at the Siege of Tripoli in 1685. His first encounter with the Royal Navy came in July 1690, as part of the force that landed at Teignmouth in Dorset, the very last successful attack by the French against England. In the next war he was 'lent' to the Spanish navy, now under the control of the new Bourbon king, the grandson of Louis XIV of France. He was highly praised for both his actions at the Siege of Barcelona and his service in helping to protect the Spanish silver trade in the Atlantic and at Vera Cruz in the West Indies, also assisting in the long attempt to reclaim Gibraltar from the British.

He had been promoted to *Capitaine de Vaisseau* in 1694. He commanded his ship at Vélez-Málaga in 1704, the greatest naval battle of the War of the Spanish Succession and one with more

ships involved than Trafalgar. The French fleet (which included no fewer than ten 90- and 100-gun ships) and the British/Dutch battered each other throughout the day with heavy casualties on both sides. As usual when sailing fleets were equally matched no ships were lost. Presumably Bruyère continued to perform well (that he is not mentioned is not surprising since seven French admirals were present) and when the war ended he finally got his flag, being promoted to *Chef d'Escadre* in 1715.

In the long peace that followed he continued to prosper (it should be noted that although of humble birth he had amassed a considerable fortune by capturing most of a convoy in 1696) and was promoted again to *Lieutenant-Général* in 1729. So when France became in effect an ally of Spain in her war against Britain, Bruyère with his Spanish connections, was the obvious choice as the admiral of the French Mediterranean fleet, and then from 1742 on of the joint Spanish/French fleets in Toulon. Most accounts emphasise the excellent relations he had with the Navarro, the proud Spanish aristocrat leading the Spanish element.

The battle of Toulon was the culminating point of his life. Now 78 years old, he led the combined fleet out of Toulon and engaged the Royal Navy under Mathews. The deciding point of the battle came when Bruyère, commanding the all-French van, ordered his ships to reverse tack and come to the aid of the heavily engaged Spanish centre. This forced the British to withdraw, allowing their sole prize, the *Poder* to be retaken. The contrast between this and the behaviour of Rear-Admiral Dumonier, placed in the same situation at Trafalgar is striking. Dumonier hesitated and a tactical British victory was turned into a triumph.

Alas although the *Lieutenant-Général* was praised in France for his 'victory' (it was at the least a tactical success since it broke the blockade of Toulon and allowed the Spanish fleet to retire to Cartagena) his reward was dismissal. At the same time as Navarro was being praised in Spain, his French commander was forced to resign in a trumped-up charge involving the charity work of the wife of Maurepas, the Minister of Marine. In truth this was just a device to clear the navy of senior officers so that Maurepas'

followers could be promoted. This was widely recognised and as soon as Maurepas himself fell from office in 1748 Bruyère was reinstated and awarded the position of Vice-Admiral of the Ponant two years later. He died in 1752.



\*\*\*\*\*

**THE BOURBON VIEW OF THE BATTLE OF TOULON**

*Excursus by David Hughes*

Richmond is an excellent historian but is, despite all his efforts, inevitably biased by his attachment to the Royal Navy. So his basic assumption when discussing the Battle of Toulon is that the Royal Navy would have obviously won being in superior strength (that being its habit!), had it not been for the incapacity and incompetence of two admirals and several captains. Apart from the fact that the previous battle between comparable Britain and Allied Bourbon fleets had also been indecisive, his analysis pays little attention and gives less credit to the performance of the Bourbon admirals.

The contrast between the two sets of leaders was evident long before the battle. While Mathews and Lestock were engaged in partisan and venomous attacks against each other the French and Spanish leaders had developed a close working relationship. This is best evidenced by the fact that Mathews was found guilty of failing to hold a formal meeting before the battle at which his proposed actions were defined and debated. In contrast la Bruyère and Navarro exchanged visits to each others flagships and jointly drew up and agreed upon the order of battle and tactics. Of course it helped that both were fluent in each others language, while la Bruyère had fought with Spanish forces in the War of the Spanish Succession.

*[Amiral la Bruyère is generally known as du Court in most older sources.]*

A clear example of this co-operation is evident in the assignment of ships to squadrons. It was normal practise when two nations of equal status fought together that the 'junior', measured in terms of ships of the line, would take the Van, with the 'senior' taking the Centre (this dating back as far as Solebay Bay in the previous century). The relative seniority of admirals was ignored, since differing promotion systems (such as the lack of commodores in the Spanish Navy) made this awkward. But Navarro and his ships were assigned to the Rear, with the Van instead under the second French flag-officer. For all were aware of the different qualities of the ships – the French known for light and fast ships of the line, the Spanish for heavy and sometimes sluggish ones. These distinctions were common knowledge – as with the Spanish *Princessa*. much respected for her staying power and gunnery when captured by the British, but considered 'an uneasy and sluggish sailor' while in Royal Navy service as the *Princess*. She served at Toulon and was heavily damaged.

Fleet tactics were simpler than those open to a single ship, if only because they were governed by both the speed of the slowest, and the quality of the least weatherly, ship. The *line* was all important as in a ship of the line 95% of her guns could only fire on the broadside. Similarly, close mutual support was critical as the vulnerability of the stern and bow to raking fire down her length meant that ships had to check enemy vessels from passing between them. Note that Trafalgar was very much an aberration in this respect, with the loose and undisciplined formation of the Franco-Spanish fleet allowing British ships to 'break the enemy line' and rake its ships. In contrast no ships were raked at Toulon. So important was this, that in all three navies a failure to support a neighbour was an automatic court-martial offence. Although possession of the wind-gauge was important, it was also less so than in single-ship combat, its principal advantage being that (in theory) it allowed one to close with the enemy. 'In theory' because there was nothing to stop the leeward fleet from following the same course and simply sailing downwind at the same speed. Indeed there were serious advantages to the leeward position – the most important being that damaged ships could allow themselves to simply drift out of the battle, while those of the windward fleet had to stay in place, relying on other arriving ships to succour them. And this is what happened at the Battle of Toulon.

When the Bourbon fleet left Toulon it did so in a light wind with the intent of doing battle but with its commanders certain that the British would attack. When attacking, there were two methods. One was in a series of columns (as at Trafalgar), the other by slowly closing with the entire fleet at an angle as Mathews tried to do at Toulon. The latter was the norm as it meant that the ships could fire when closing. In both cases the attacker sailed downwind, hoping to strike just part of the enemy line, hopefully wrecking it by force of numbers. The defenders' task was to counter this move by bringing those ships that were not under attack to the rescue of those that were. The method was simple, the execution tricky. It was easier for the rear squadron, since it just continued to sail forward, a task suited to the heavy Spanish ships. For the ships in the van (or those forward of the attack) it was more difficult. They would have to reverse direction, either at once or in succession, and sail back to attack the enemy, and this probably while under fire. Here also there were two methods. The easiest was to turn downwind, passing the stern through the wind, a process known as *wearing*. This was easy but it did mean that the ships would finish up far downwind from the battle. The other was to turn into the wind and tack – a process made more difficult by the probability that the enemy would be firing at the tender but essential headsails. However, if it worked it would be a battle winner as the ships would now be sailing back upwind of the main battle area and therefore capable of hitting the enemy from both sides – a most desired tactical position known as 'doubling'.

But for this to work three conditions had to be met. First, the course the fleet was following had to be at right-angles or more to the wind – otherwise after they tacked the lead ships would be sailing slowly into the wind, instead of with the wind on their beam. Also one needed a Van commander who would follow orders, and, finally, ships capable of easily tacking under both light and heavy winds. Hence the placing of the French ships in the van commanded by an experienced and reliable flag-officer.

In the battle the Bourbon plan worked, though of course greatly assisted by the lack of co-ordination among the British. The Royal Navy Centre engaged towards the rear of the enemy fleet. There were two reasons for this – one being sluggish sailing, the other the desire of Mathews to engage the enemy admiral, who he assumed to be in the most powerful enemy vessel, the 114-gun *Real Felipe*. This resulted in a bloody close-range battle between the British Centre and Bourbon Rear, which both sides claimed to have won. The Bourbon claim was based on how the *Real Felipe* fought off three British heavy ships, the British claim on how the new 70-gun *Berwick* captured the converted merchantman *Podor*. But while all this was going on the last ships in the Spanish squadron, including the 80-gun *Santa Isabel*, slowly closed on the fight, little impeded by the dawdling ships of the British van. At the same time Admiral la Bruyère ordered the decisive move. He signalled Gaveret, commanding the Van to tack to port, in succession, realising that its opposing British Rear was too distant and spread out to stop the move. Once it became obvious to Mathews that the French had reversed course he had no option but to retreat. This was tricky as ships that had lost sails and masts had to beat upwind exposing their sterns and quarters, which resulted in even more damage. The only prize, the *Podor*, had to be abandoned as utterly incapable of movement and was recaptured by the French.

The Royal Navy claimed a tactical victory, largely based on the recaptured *Podor* eventually being scuttled, while Richmond among others claimed that a new attack on a heavily damaged Bourbon fleet would have brought victory. The latter is questionable. Although the damage to the *Real Felipe* meant that she was in dockyard hands for the next two years, the rest of the Bourbon ships freely sailed to and from Cartagena. In strategic terms the Bourbon fleet had broken the blockade of Toulon and returned the Spanish ships to their base at Cartagena. And, regardless of the outcome, it is clear that the performance of the Bourbon admirals had been far more professional and skilled than those of the Royal Navy. The difference is perhaps better seen by comparing this Franco-Spanish fleet with that at Trafalgar, where any chance of even a draw was ruined when the French admiral in the Van fatally hesitated, so that by the time his ships did tack all was over.

\*\*\*\*\*

For the rest of February and well into March, Mathews was thwarted by the weather from returning to his station. Battered, his ships congregated at Port Mahon for repairs. Fortunately, 3 ships were able to reach the Riviera, where they found 14 troop transports at San Tropez preparing to take men to Villefranche; the port was blockaded.

Word of the Brest Fleet's real actions arrived in March, confirming France was now truly hostile, and reconnaissance placed Mathews' 'personal' enemies near Cartagena; they, too, had been unable to regain Toulon due to the weather. The enemy's circumstances persuaded the admiral they did not intend to leave the Med but to carry on supporting the Bourbon forces in Italy.

Regaining the Riviera at the end of March, Mathews' forces endured days of fierce gales that drove them eastwards, and in some cases, nearly onto the rocks. To his mortification, the same gales allowed the Bourbons to slip into Toulon without his being

able to prevent it. The Bourbon land advance had already begun (March 13th), and by the time the British regained their base at Villefranche, in the first week of April, the enemy were beginning their investment.

Villefranche is a typical Riviera town, nestled at the base of the hills that surround it and cut it off from the other, similar towns along that coast (Nice being a short walk to the west). The Sabaudians had fortified the hills and manned the entrenchments with several battalions. Charles Emmanuel himself and his main army lay at Sospello, on the road leading to the northeast; the Bourbons surrounded the town to prevent any relief.

The main assault against the town's formidable entrenchments took place on April 8th and 9th. After two counterattacks, the Piedmontese regained some ground, but their main batteries had been lost and they were spent. Admiral Mathews spent the 8th on shore, observing. It was decided to evacuate the town, except for

a rearguard of 400 men. This had been marked down as a possible contingency long ago, and the proper resources – a fleet of transports – were already waiting in the wings. Everything had been arranged. The only question was whether there would be sufficient time, and if so, would the weather cooperate. It did, and so, covered by the guns of 8 ships, the defenders embarked. Only 650 men were rounded up by the Bourbons during the whole defensive operation. Some 4500 were saved. The Bourbons, who had attacked 5,000 defenders with an army of 20,000, lost over a quarter of their strength.

The British transferred the soldiers to Oneglia, further east, and after returning to Toulon in case the enemy had any further ideas, rebased to Vado Bay, where Mathews ordered provisioning to take place. The fleet, which relied to a great extent on ‘victualing convoys’ dispatched from Deptford in England, was growing short of supplies, since the latest convoy had been penned up in The Channel, first by the weather, and then the French. So many merchantmen were accumulated that the authorities could not find enough escorts for them. Fortunately, the Piedmontese were able to provide basic supplies. Even so, the British position was deteriorating.

Essentially, the Brest Fleet had cut their lines of communication. By April, the victualers were at Lisbon, but unescorted. Mathews would have to go fetch them, which he could not risk doing with 24 enemy vessels still at Toulon and his own ships in bad shape. Piedmont would only guarantee food supplies for another six weeks, while naval stores were nearly nonexistent.

Mathews kept the pressure on as best he could. On the 21st of May, the Essex encountered and chased a munitions convoy of 26 zebees and settees off Cassi Creek, near Toulon, forcing them to scatter. Many were beached and burnt. On June 14th, a similar action forced 11 zebees to beach. These were carrying reinforcements for Italy. According to Beatson, by September 1st the French had suffered damages of 1,700,000 *louis* and 17 merchants of Marseilles had filed for bankruptcy.

The Habsburgs again requested the aid of a British squadron in their offensive against Naples. Maria Theresa was nothing if not persistent. Besides, Don Carlos, the King of Naples, had with some justification reneged on his promise not to leave his own domains. As the Spanish were continuing their drive along the Riviera (Oneglia was now threatened and the pro-Spanish Genoese were assembling an army ‘behind the lines’), this seemed a ludicrous time for Mathews to split his dwindling strength. The Admiral’s reconnaissance of Toulon showed an enemy fleet of 25 ships (4 Spanish) all fitted out for action. On top of operational considerations, the British were constrained politically – the Queen of Naples was the daughter of the Elector of Saxony, who was currently an ally. They could not press the Neapolitans too aggressively.

Mathews sent patrols along the Genoese coast to eradicate their latest stockpiles. Next, Captain West took a squadron to Oneglia to assist the Sabaudians. Sea conditions did not allow him to inflict much damage on the Spanish, who easily took the town, but his landing parties managed to sneak in and spike the town’s batteries, rendering them useless to the Bourbons.

Mathews remained at Hyères, screening Toulon. In early June he was forced to detach 4 ships of the line under Captain Osborn to go and fetch his long-delayed victualing convoy from the mouth of the Tagus, just as the French appeared ready to sail. This left him with 32 ships of the line and 6 frigates facing 24 ships of the line at Toulon and 12 more (plus 4 ‘heavy’ frigates) at Cartagena. But, he was granted a reprieve. Word came that the Spanish had given up on the Riviera offensive.

The French opposed the thrust of the operation from the start, since any delay would put the Bourbon army on the wrong side of the Alps come winter. If the British remained in place, the army would be isolated. They favoured an inland advance against Piedmont. The Spanish had got it into their heads that Genoa was about to rally to them, and the Queen of Spain was even more wilful than the Queen of Hungary. For now, however, the French had won the argument. The Spanish suffered heavy losses withdrawing from their exposed salient.

*[The Spanish queen chose the Riviera route herself, basing her judgement on a journey she made in the opposite direction as a sixteen-year-old girl setting off to marry the King of Spain; on that occasion she rode in a sedan chair – now, obviously, if a sixteen-year-old’s sedan chair could negotiate the route, so could an artillery train! Any general who thought otherwise must be incompetent or in Austrian pay.]*

These circumstances allowed Mathews to send belated aid to von Lobkowitz after all. Captain Long was dispatched to the Tiber River with *Nonsuch*, *Leopard*, *Antelope* (all 50s), 3 bombs and 3 Piedmontese galleys. In addition, Long was to take command of the *Chatham*, *Newcastle* (50s), *Feversham* (40) and *Kennington* (24), now cruising that section of coast.

Long arrived on July 14th. The opposing armies lay near Velletri, just south of Rome, in virtual stalemate. Lobkowitz asked for transports for 3000 men who would could be ferried down to Naples. It was believed that Don Carlos faced serious opposition from within his own régime, and this move was to be both diversionary, and in aid of a rising of the nobility.

The transports had to be requisitioned at Leghorn. Meanwhile, Long was asked to provide some heavy guns to destroy an opposing battery. This was swiftly done by a party of British sailors who marched up from the coast with cannon from the squadron.

*[This use of naval personnel in land operations was quite common. The British, especially, otherwise relied on civilian teamsters and technicians, who were prone to run away.]*

Lobkowitz’s ‘reverse Salerno’ might have been a great coup, or it might not (the notion that a ‘party of discontent’ was on the verge of breaking out was wishful thinking), but it never happened. The field marshal thought he could make an even bigger coup. On July 31st, Don Carlos was the target of a night assault made by the Habsburgs on the Neapolitan camp! He narrowly escaped and the inevitable counterattack nearly unhinged the Austrian position. What with the time taken in preparation, and in fighting, and in restoring order, the weather broke and a naval descent was no longer feasible.

Thanks to the weather, Long’s squadron had to ‘stand off the coast’ for a while. When he reappeared in mid-August, another invasion was planned. This time, a Bourbon breakthrough in the Alps cancelled it, as all of von Lobkowitz’s Sabaudian troops, augmented by Austrian battalions, were rushed north.

Initially they were to be transported aboard Long’s squadron, offloaded at ‘neutral’ Genoa and marched inland from there), but the Habsburgs suddenly decided on a general withdrawal and Long, ordered off to deal with a naval crisis, found he only had room for the wounded. The Austrians were grateful he could provide at least this much aid, as otherwise the casualties would have had to be abandoned.

\*\*\*\*\*

**Juan Jose Navarro, Marqués de la Victoire, *Director-General de la Armada***

Born in Sicily in 1687, he followed his father, a captain of infantry in the Spanish Army, into the military when the Viceroy of Sicily appointed him to a cadet vacancy in an infantry regiment stationed in Milan – at the age of 10! Navarro saw action during the War of Spanish Succession, first in Italy and then after his battalion was forced to leave Milan and return to Spain in the amphibious assault on Oran led by the Marqués de Valdencanos. This proved a disaster, for Navarro especially, as he lost both his brother and father in the affair. Returning with the survivors to Spain, he took part in the campaigns in Catalonia, fighting for the Bourbon king. The Bourbon Army defeated twice by the English and Austrian army led by Guido Starhemberg, Navarro ended up a prisoner of war. Although when peace came he assumed the captaincy of the company of foot that had once been that of his father, he switched to the naval service in 1717. Initially serving (logically) as a commander of marines, he fought in the conquest of Sardinia and Sicily, eventually reaching the rank of lieutenant-colonel.

Under the patronage of José Patino Rosales, the *Intendente General de la Marina*, Navarro prospered, transferring from marine to sailor and being promoted to *Capitán de Fregata* (commander) in 1728 and to *Capitán de Navio* and commander of the *San Fernando* of 64 guns the following year. He also became known as an intellectual sailor, his best known work being on the duties and obligations of a naval captain. Action next arrived in 1732 with Navarro part of another expedition against the Barbary pirates based in Oran and in 1737 he was promoted to *Jefe de Escuadra* at the age of 52, after 42 years of continuous service to Spain as boy and man. In the same year he started to work on additional books, one on manoeuvre at sea and the other on the



application of mathematics to navigation. When the new war with Britain came in 1739, Navarro was given command of the *Escuadra de Cádiz*. In the first two years this was essentially a reserve command as the main conflict was in the West Indies. However when the Queen of Spain asserted the right of her sons to territories in Spain, Navarro and his fleet became the core of Spanish naval activity.

Whatever the feelings of the Royal Navy, the Spanish regarded the Battle of Toulon as a victory, not least by seeing the fight between the *Real Felipe* and Navarro against three British three-deckers as having decided the battle. The wounded Navarro was hailed a hero on his return, promoted to *Teniente General* and taken into the aristocracy with the evocative title of *Marqués de Victoire*. Two years after the war ended, in 1750, he became the executive leader of the Spanish Navy and commander of its largest dockyard and fleet as *Capitán General del Departamento de Cádiz* and *Director-General de la Armada*. He may have taken equal pride when made a member of the Royal Academy of Spain upon the publication of his last major book, a compendium of naval architecture and construction.

His final duties at sea were ceremonial, such as when in 1759 bringing the new ruler of Spain from Sicily in the *Real Fénix*, the 80-gun fleet-flagship that replaced the shattered *Real Felipe*. His years as director-general saw a steady improvement in both the number and quality of Spanish warships; he died in 1772 at the age of 84, the most respected and admired Spanish admiral of his time.

\*\*\*\*\*

Meanwhile, the French had come to the conclusion that ‘*grande guerre*’ at sea was not going to work. Richmond states this was because their ports were strongly watched (i.e. if Mathews felt he was outgunned, so did his opponents). But there were stronger reasons, based on internal politics at the *Ministry de la Marine*. As explained in the excursus on the three powers’ command structure, France ran out of admirals in 1744 when Rochambeau (at Brest) died and du Court (at Toulon) was fired.

In consequence, the Toulon Fleet was reorganised into 3 squadrons, each under its own captain/commodore. Henceforth they were to focus on commerce raiding and cruising. Richmond makes the point that the use of ships of the line in this role was highly inefficient, and pretty much nullified the Toulon Fleet both as a deterrent and as a force capable of clearing the seas so that the campaigns in Italy could be adequately supported.

The squadrons were organised as follows (initial instructions are also given):

1st Squadron, M. de Piosin.

- Tonnant (80)
- St Esprit (74)
- Eole (64)
- Tigre (50)
- Zephyre (30)

“To cruise between Spartel and the African coast, intercept outward and homeward British convoys, attack and protect trade, intercept ships going home from Mathews's squadron which being foul and ill-manned should easily be captured.”

2nd Squadron, M. du Caylus.

- Esperance (74)
- Trident (64)
- Serieux (64)
- Diamant (54)
- Aquilon (42)

“Proceed to Malta, cruise in the Straits of Malta for a month, then go to Cadiz. Endeavour on his way to attack the squadron detached by Mathews to Naples. Escort any homeward trade as close to Marseilles as he shall consider necessary.”

3rd Squadron, M. de la Jonquière.

Terrible (74)  
Boree (64)  
Leopard (64)  
Alcion (50)  
Atalante (30)

“Escort trade from Toulon to the Levant; meet the convoy expected to be returning with Caylus and see it into safety. Attack any British ships met with about Malta. Cruise until the end of November and return to Toulon not later than beginning of December. The most important service, if he has no convoy, is to seek detached British ships which will be engaged on protecting supplies to Rowley's squadron from Barbary, Sardinia or Italy.”

Detached division, M. de Vaudreuil.

Heureux (60)  
Flore (26)  
Hirondelle (16)

“Cruise in the Levant against British privateers or detached ships and for protection of commerce by convoy and cruising.”

Richmond gives Piosin's instructions (vol. 2, p. 139), showing the French perspective:

*"He is informed that Admiral Mathews, to whom a reinforcement of four or five ships has been sent to replace those which have been long at sea and are in bad condition, will soon send these latter to England. There is reason to believe that these ships which have been long off the ground will sail ill and that they will be short-handed, as the Admiral will be obliged to retain the best of his seamen in the largest number possible in order to strengthen the crews of the ships, which are lacking. His Majesty expects that M. de Piosin will take every possible step to meet these ships on their homeward journey. . .and endeavour to take them."*

Beatson says Spain was displeased with the new arrangement. They still hoped for a general fleet action under the right conditions.

Mathews' of course, was not aware of this change in strategy for some time, but his blockade ought to have prevented one strategy as well as another. The Bourbons did not make it easy for him. First, 9 Spanish sail left Cartagena in late July; it turned out they were bound for Italy, but they might have been after the British victualers and/or a homebound convoy of 24 merchantmen assembling at Port Mahon. Then, 5 French ships broke out of Toulon in mid-August. Were they going to link up with the Spanish? Or leave the Med? It was de Piosin, and he was indeed outbound, but Mathews reacted by concentrating 17 of his ships, plus Long's forces, at Leghorn, where he was by accident poised to deal with the second French squadron, under du Caylus. However, that would be Admiral William Rowley's job. With a lull in the action and everything squared away, Mathews, whose request for relief had finally been approved, took himself off.

The new C-in-C Med was faced with an immediate crisis. News was received that the long-delayed victualing convoy was blockaded at Lisbon by a force of 12 enemy warships. It seemed clear that the various movements over the past month had been in aid of concentrating a large force – perhaps as many as 41 ships – outside of the Med; furthermore, new troop concentrations were reported at Barcelona and that made it likely the enemy 'grand fleet' would return to escort another convoy into Italy. Rowley determined to concentrate his own forces and sail west to meet the threat, leaving only a token presence on the Italian coast.

*[Mathews retired from the sea. On June 16, 1746 his court martial came due and he was condemned and cashiered. Personally, he felt this was a political decision that did not reflect on his abilities. Richmond champions him, blaming Lestock and even more, the Government of the day.]*

### William Rowley (c.1690 – 1st January 1768)

Another second son, he joined the RN as a volunteer in 1704.

Promoted to Captain in 1716 (*Bideford*). Commanded the *Lively* in 1719.

On half pay from 1728-1741.

In 1741 was made Captain of the *Barfleur* and served as commander of the Van at the Battle of Toulon (1744).

C-in-C Med in 1745, replacing Mathews. Mixed success against the Spanish and French. Was replaced for political reasons in 1746.

Rear-Admiral of the White in 1743.

Vice-Admiral of the Blue in 1744.

Admiral of the Blue in 1747.

(Honorary) Rear-Admiral of Great Britain in 1749.

Entered Parliament in 1750 as MP for Taunton, and became MP for Portsmouth in 1755 (to 1761).

Lord Commissioner of the Admiralty in 1751.

Admiral of the Fleet in 1762.

As a consequence, the Piedmontese troops, as mentioned above, had to retreat with von Lobkowitz and could not aid their comrades in the Alps. Fortunately, the Bourbon offensive had bogged down in a string of siege operations. The British were able to take off several thousand sick and wounded soldiers, allowing the Habsburg army to retire north at speed and avoid its own destruction. Rowley, meanwhile, left the Italian coast on September 3rd.

The British concentrated at Port Mahon, the Admiral arriving there himself on September 13th. Here he could refit and be ready to intercept the feared Spanish convoy with its massive escort. If he was given time, the admiral was confident he could match them in strength.

It was believed there were 17 enemy sail at Cartagena and 16 at Toulon, possibly already at sea, plus 14 French at Cadiz, in addition to any Spanish ships at that port. Rowley had 27 ships of the line on hand, but he was supposed to send 5 home immediately, and another 5 soon after – things at home were heating up.

*[Beatson says Rowley took command at Genoa on the 8th, and that the fleet was there also. He lists 34 ships of the line and 7 frigates, plus bombs, fireships, and sloops.]*

Some good news came at the end of the month. Admiral Balchen, who was responsible for the Biscay area, had undertaken to escort the victualers to Gibraltar, after which he had blockaded Cadiz. Unfortunately, he was forced to raise the blockade and sail home, leaving Rowley with the job of escorting 29 merchant ships beyond the Straits before he could pick up his victualers, 'whilst and at the same time' trying to prevent a Spanish convoy from reaching Italy. It was 1741 all over again.

Speed was of the essence, but the weather did not let Rowley depart until the first week of October. With him went 30 ships of the line, 6 frigates, and perhaps 40 merchants. Scouts discovered the Spanish at Cartagena – 22 ships – in harbour. They appeared

to be waiting for the British to get out of the way and did not sally.

Rowley made good time. He was through the Straits by the 18th, and off Cape Spartel on the 20th. Captain Osborn's escort squadron of 8 ships was picked up and another, under Captain Cooper, dropped at Cadiz to observe the enemy.

The danger was less than the Admiral had feared. The French had been cruising in the Straits, but scattered on his approach. They did not flee, but, operating under their new strategy, chased Cooper's small squadron into Gibraltar. This was the last action of the year. Rowley got his victualers to Port Mahon without interference, the Spanish stayed at Cartagena, and perhaps 12 French ships, but no more, rebased at Toulon. Rowley sent 13 ships under Osborn to Vado Bay where a supply of cattle was waiting. The rest of his ships entered refit, rotating their repair time with small cruises up and down the western Med. Osborn was to victual and cruise until December 15th.

*"If in your passage to Vado you should meet with any certain intelligence of any squadron of the enemies' men-of-war, convoy of merchantmen, or transports, you are to use your utmost endeavours to take, sink, burn or otherwise destroy them. Should you meet with any of the enemies' men-of-war or convoy of transports in any port or place on the coast of Italy or places belonging to any of the Princes or States of Italy (Genoa and Leghorn excepted), you are to use your utmost endeavours to destroy them. If you meet with any ships or vessels belonging to any Prince or State joined with the enemies of his Majesty you are to seize the same and bring them to me."*

*"And as I have received certain intelligence that there is a convoy with a fleet of French merchantmen coming from the Levant, as soon as the ships under your command shall be watered and ready for sea, and joined by your ships from Genoa, you are to proceed in quest of the same convoy as far as the island of Malta, if you shall judge proper, sending ashore to the Consul for intelligence, and according to what accounts you shall gain from him of the enemy's ships you must govern yourself either to go in quest of them or to lie to intercept their cruising off the said island or the coast of Barbary, continuing on that station if the service requires it for ten days and then make the best of your way to Port Mahon to join me."*

*Rowley's instructions to Osborn, quoted in Richmond, vol. 2, p.237.*

Richmond points out that, now that all the armies were in winter quarters (the Alpine campaign had fizzled and the Bourbons were back on the western side of the Alps) Rowley had some freedom of choice, but, he chose to pursue – unsuccessfully as it turned out – a French convoy, rather than blockade Toulon or cover Cartagena. This resulted in the escape of a French squadron from Toulon in November.

*[Beatson cites an action not mentioned by Richmond. He states that on September 20th, Chef d'Escadre Gabaret sailed from Toulon with 16 ships of the line and 4 frigates in a massive operation involving the Cartagena Squadron and the French squadron at Cadiz. They were to provide protection for the largest treasure convoy of the war. He gives this as the reason for Rowley's manoeuvres rather than the need to protect a British convoy from roving French patrols. Some of his dates appear to be out of sync with the actions of the forces described.]*

## YEAR OF DECISION – 1745

### The Wider War

1745 was the pivotal year of the war. The Imperial Election would be held this year, resulting in a win for the Habsburg Candidate, Francis Stephen – France's unilateral appointment of Charles Albert to that post being generally laughed at, especially now that the Bavarian Elector was a French pensioner in exile. Indeed, Charles Albert would be dead by year's end, and a devastated Bavaria would sue for peace.

France, her policy now guided by the ambitious Marquis d'Argenson, would shift focus from Germany to the Low Countries, and to Italy. Frederick of Brandenburg, after roundly defeating his erstwhile allies, the Saxons, and their Habsburg friends in three battles – Hohenfrieberg, Soor, and Kesseldorf – would retire from the game for good, his prestige greatly enhanced.

In Flanders, siege operations would bring on the inconclusive and bloody Battle of Fontenoy. A few months later, most of the British troops would be streaming home to deal with the untimely landing of the Young Pretender, Bonnie Prince Charlie, and Flanders would be ripe for the plucking.

In Italy, d'Argenson's anti-Spanish mindset would clash with the increased influence of the latter when the *Infanta* Maria Theresa (of Spain) married the Dauphin (prince) of France. He would be persuaded to 'go all out' in the Alps by the attitude of Genoa. The Republic, after secret negotiations with Spain, would sign the Treaty of Aranjuez, promising to attack Piedmont if the Bourbons made it through the passes.

*[Traditionally, Genoa was a Habsburg ally – witness the proposal to land Piedmontese troops there in the previous year – but she feared Piedmont's expansionism – hence the warlike preparations. The awarding of Finale to Piedmont by Austrian fiat did not help matters.]*

This would make a second advance along the Riviera a more attractive option. Neither the Sabaudians, whose counter-thrust would have to traverse a barren wilderness, nor the British fleet, whose excuses were flimsy indeed, would offer any opposition, and the offensive would flower into a life-or-death struggle for Lombardy.

Naples pressured to help the family, but constrained by the same Saxon connection that limited British action against her, would be warned to expect another visit by the Royal Navy if she openly went to war again. She would contribute an army of 10,000 'auxiliaries' and keep her word to both sides.

The Habsburgs, bereft of reinforcements while Maria Theresa tried vainly to reconquer Silesia, and led by General von Schulenburg – von Lobkowitz would be dismissed in May for failing to intercept a flank march by his opponent, de Gages – would be hard pressed.

But, by the end of the season, it would be the Bourbons who were stretched too thin. November would be the high water mark. Milan would fall to the Spanish. Likewise most of the Piedmontese fortresses to the French. But, Charles Emmanuel would still hold out, threatening the Bourbon lines of communication running down into Parma. Schulenburg's manoeuvring and the aid of 30,000 reinforcements under General von Browne, rushed south from Austria in mid-January, would change the tide.

## What of the Navy?

In all these moves, the British played a minor role. In the Adriatic, they could help by ferrying men and material up the Po. On the Riviera, they could have done more. But something went wrong.

Rowley, concentrated at Minorca, spent the winter refitting. Osborn's squadron that had been sent to intercept the French Levant convoy, was especially beaten about by the weather.

From his cruisers, however, the admiral learned that the French appeared to be redeploying out of the Med altogether. At the end of January, only 4 ships of the line remained in Toulon. Du Caylus had taken 6 to the West Indies, and 8 more French ships plus a variable number of Spanish were working out of Cadiz as convoy escorts. In all, the Bourbons appeared to have 12 major ships at both Cadiz and Cartagena supported by a handful of frigates (Beatson say 12 French at Cadiz alone; the difference may be between the total and the serviceable).

*[Escorts were not normally required to accompany their charges across the oceans, though the treasure fleets seem always to have had protection. Apart from the difficulty of maintaining contact, there was no need. The enemy had no means of detecting ships on the high seas except by pure chance. Typically, escorts would try to rendezvous with a convoy about 100 miles out from land. The likelihood of locating the ships was fairly high, since they would be on one of only a few approach routes. The enemy could also be waiting, but would usually be behindhand, since they would have to watch for the escorts to leave port, then assemble themselves before going in pursuit.]*

This new distribution of the enemy changed Rowley's orders:

*"By the disposition of the French fleet, it is supposed there can be few or no French ships left at Toulon and that the Spanish squadron at Carthage[n]a [sic] may proceed through the Straits to join the French ships at Cadiz. Should this be so the squadron under your command, consisting, as I am informed by the Admiralty, of 35 ships of the line of battle, will be many more than can be wanted for any service, to be performed in the Mediterranean or on the coast of Italy. It is therefore his Majesty's pleasure that you make careful enquiry as to what strength the French have at Toulon, and if you find, as we are informed here, that the French squadron, or the greatest part of it, has gone through the Straits and that there are but few French or Spanish men-of-war at Toulon, that you proceed with the greatest part of your squadron off Carthage[n]a, leaving a sufficient strength under the command of Commodore Osborn, or such other officer as you may think proper; to perform all services on the coast of Italy that may be necessary for the security and defence of the states of the King of Sardinia, the Queen of Hungary and the Great Duke of Tuscany; and you will make the proper disposition of the ships so to be left for obstructing the passage and motions of the Spaniards as far as may be practicable, and for preventing the landing of any fresh troops from Spain into Italy; for which purpose a few ships of the line with the smaller ships of your squadron may be sufficient. But you will be best able to judge of what may be necessary for this important service, which you will take care in all respects may be effectually provided for."*

Lord Newcastle to Rowley, January 18th, 1745. Quoted in Richmond vol. 2, p.239.

*[According to Beatson, the Spanish at Cartagena intended to assist the Pretender by joining with the Brest Fleet, but were prevented by Rowley's close watch.]*

If Rowley found Cartagena empty, or if that squadron sailed to Cadiz, he was to concentrate his strength against the latter port instead. As a further contingency, if the enemy appeared to be concentrating at Brest, the admiral was to send 10 ships of the line home. Additional instructions covered the expected appearance of a force arriving from the West Indies.

To accomplish his mission, Rowley had 31 ships of the line:

90-guns x3  
80-guns x8  
70-guns x10  
60-guns x5  
50-guns x8 (out of which 1 was unserviceable and 2 had gone home)

However, these instructions ignored what was happening on the Riviera. While Rowley was at Port Mahon, the Spanish had been ferrying troops and supplies into Genoa – 4,500 men – while the rest of their army was poised to march along the coast as in the previous year. Now that Genoa was openly friendly, fielding nearly 14,000 men, and since Oneglia was still in Spanish hands, a thrust here was likely to succeed.

Rowley countered by sending the *Berwick*, *Lowestoft*, and *Leopard* to the Riviera. (His main concern was still the enemy concentrations at Cartagena and Cadiz). It was not enough. In February, 3,000 more troops travelled all the way from Barcelona to Genoa. Rowley reacted by sending a large squadron of 7 ships of the line and 10 small craft to the Riviera, and 5 ships of the line to cruise between Barcelona and Ivica.

At the end of March, the admiral himself put to sea with his 26 remaining ships and headed for Barcelona. Here the enemy seemed to have 16 or so ships ready to sail. Rowley sat down in front of the port, but sent 10 ships under Captain Osborn to Cadiz, to act against an equal number of French operating out of that port. Off Cadiz, Osborn rendezvoused at the end of April with a much delayed victualing convoy and its escort. The latter passed into the Med safely, and, after seeing his charges safe to Port Mahon, the escort commander, Rear Admiral Henry Medley – the new second-in-command – joined up with Rowley.

The British now had the following (according to Richmond):

Off Cartagena, facing 16-18 Spanish sail (Rowley): Neptune, Marlborough, Princess Caroline, Dorsetshire, Berwick, Royal Oak, Cambridge, Stirling Castle, Burford, Nassau, Boyne, Kingston, Russell, Norfolk, Ipswich, Jersey, plus Diamond, 2 bombs, & 1 fireship. (3 of the ships of the line were always rotated out for victualling).

Off Cadiz facing 12 French and Spanish Sail (Osborn): Barfleur, Elizabeth, Chichester, Dragon, Worcester, Princessa, Hampshire, Revenge, Torbay, Dartmouth, Essex, Antelope. (The Bourbons had left for the Canary Islands while Osborn was dealing with the incoming British convoy, but were expected back).

Italian Coast (Ambrose): Rupert, Bedford, Dunkirk, Guernsey, Nonsuch, Chatham, plus Roebuck, Liverpool, Seaford, Kennington, Feversham, 2 bombs, & 2 small craft.

Captain Ambrose was required to observe Toulon, where the French were believed to have 6 ships, patrol off Genoa, patrol off Naples, and cruise the Adriatic.

Despite the many duties required of it, this was an impressive command for a secondary theatre, but Rowley asked for more. London, however, ordered 7 ships home (Neptune, Marlborough, Barfleur (all 90s), Chichester, Torbay (both 80s), Elizabeth (70), Dragon (60), Kennington (24)). Herein lies the explanation of how the Riviera came to be "abandoned".

The instructions from London crossed with his own request, so it was still spring when Rowley was forced to make some adjustments to his dispositions. He decided he could only maintain two squadrons. One remained on the Riviera. The Admiral would have to make a choice for the other: Cartagena or Cadiz. He chose Cadiz.

The reason for this odd choice (remember that Cadiz was supposed to be an Atlantic responsibility) was that the Bourbon fleet based there – still at sea – was believed to be rendezvousing with a Spanish treasure fleet that included 5 warships. Rowley intended to attack this fleet (assuming it made for Cadiz) with about 20 sail of his own. He left only a small detachment to observe Cartagena.

Richmond believes the admiral was lured from his post by the glitter of prize money; he had that sort of character. On the other hand, he says, attacking Spain's lifeline could not be faulted on strategic grounds. To compare Rowley and Mathews, Mathews had a wider outlook through his previous diplomatic experiences, while Rowley was a typical product of the Navy. Engaging the enemy was top priority. If there was prize money to be had, so much the better. Rowley would probably have fought a better Battle of Toulon, but in the present case, he fatally ignored the strategic situation.

All that happened, of course, was that the French, under de Piosin, headed for the Biscay ports. Meanwhile, the Bourbons had only to face a small and much divided force. In June, Rowley ordered two ships, under Captain Cooper, to the Adriatic, where they were effective in reducing the amount of enemy shipping. The inadequate forces along the Riviera were similarly able to disrupt traffic to and from Genoa and Naples, though not to stop it. In particular, de Gage's army was denied the use of its heavy artillery, which sat aboard ships in Naples Harbour for months.

Even more telling, half of the remaining Toulon Fleet – 3 ships under de Lage – were intercepted and blockaded in Villefranche. This effectively halted the Spanish advance along the coast. The French had been escorting transports needed to supply the cavalry, and these were either turned back or bottled up with the French.

At San Remo there were three passes lying close to the shore. These the British were able to dominate, with the guns of their smaller ships preventing the movement of wagons. There was a bypass road, but it was only useable by mules, and added eight days to the journey.

On the flip side, Bourbon supply vessels were able to sail from Barcelona to Genoa by passing the British position 'over the horizon'. That said, many small vessels were taken or bottled up at the various ports. In the period from June 1st to June 7th alone, two British ships captured 20 transports off Genoa.

Then in early July Rowley lost 6 more ships, this time to the West Indies (*Dorsetshire, Princessa, Ipswich, Worcester, Kingston, Hampshire*). At the same time, Genoa declared for the Bourbons. A Coalition diplomatic mission travelled all the way to Gibraltar to implore Rowley's return to the Riviera. At the same time, he received orders from London to do so. The Admiral decided he would take his whole force up to Cartagena and make a display, then send 14 ships (11 of the line) back to Cadiz under Rear Admiral Medley while he took direct command in the Med.

*[Medley's squadron: Russell, Princess Caroline, Boyne, Norfolk, Cambridge, Berwick, Nassau, Revenge, Burford, Jersey, Dartmouth, plus 3 light vessels.]*

Around this time, the *Jersey* and the *Dartmouth* engaged a small French convoy escorted by the *St. Éspirit* (74) with some success, forcing the French warship to retreat to Cadiz and taking one or two of the merchantmen. This is not impossible; ships were in constant motion.

*[Beatson does not always give dates.]*

Rowley still perceived the threat (or opportunity) to be outside the Med. In defence of his choice he cited the possibility of a force from Brest coming south, the possible return of the Toulon Fleet,

and the potential arrival of the Spanish treasure fleet. Medley's orders were to prevent the enemy from passing the Straits. He was only to join Rowley if the French broke into the Med.

It was early August before these moves could be implemented, and meanwhile, 4 more ships had to be sent home as a convoy escort, leaving Rowley with a total of 23 ships of the line, (including 6 '50s').

The display of force was made off Cape Palos on August 12th. Medley headed south and Rowley headed to Port Mahon with the remainder of his force – 4 ships of the line and 4 frigates. On the 27th, Rowley proceeded to the Italian coast, arriving on September 6th. Enroute he had picked up Cooper with 4 sail. The Admiral now had:

*Marlborough* (90), *Essex*, *Stirling Castle*, *Bedford* (all 70s), *Dunkirk* (60), *Chatham*, *Nonsuch*, *Leopard* (all 50s), *Seaford* (20), *Terrible*, & *Carcass* (both bombs).

**"Ces messieurs, tonnent volontiers sur les choux"**

*[Comment by the Commandant of Toulon]*

Rowley proposed taking La Spezia as a base, but was voted down by his captains. Instead, the British would demonstrate against Genoa and see if they could not influence matters in that way. As previously described, the Bourbons had broken through the Alps. Genoa's joining the cause eased their supply situation and gave them additional manpower. Then, the French and Spanish had a difference of opinion which led to the latter pushing on to conquer Lombardy while the French hunkered down in Piedmont.

The British demonstration was weakened by the dispatch of Cooper with 4 sail to Hyères in hopes of intercepting de Lage and a convoy of 12 Levant merchants ("Turkey Merchants" as they were called). A bombardment of Genoa on the 17th of September had little effect. Another bombardment at Finale on the 18th was dubious, and a third at San Remo on the 20th only netted 5 "settees" (small provision boats). On the 26th, Cooper rejoined Rowley with empty hands. All in all, Rowley's operation had done little to hinder the Bourbon land campaign. It even, in the end, failed to prevent the shipment of siege artillery from Naples and Toulon to Genoa. In mid-October, the British pulled back to Oristano Bay, in Sardinia. Rowley had been recalled to Britain.

*[According to Richmond, it is unclear if the recall was due to his poor performance (perhaps requested by the Allies) or due to his mishandling of a court martial against Captain Norris at the beginning of the year. Norris was the son of the incumbent Admiral of the Fleet, and 'a bit of a black sheep'; he was let off easy and deserted, never to be heard of again.]*

Rowley left for Britain with 4 ships (*Stirling Castle, Dunkirk, Chatham, Roebuck*) on October 30th, leaving Captain Townshend in temporary command (Medley being at Gibraltar) with 4 ships of the line and a variety of smaller vessels (*Bedford, Essex, Nonsuch, Leopard, Antelope, Nazareth* fireship, *Dragon's Prize, Enterprise* fireship, and the bombs *Terrible, Carcass, Firedrake, & Lightning*). The admiral took a further 2 ships with him when he left Gibraltar at the turn of the year.

*[Rowley took no further part in the war. However, during the 1750s he served as a Commissioner of the Admiralty, and, in 1762 became Admiral of the Fleet. His performance in the Med leaves one with the persistent impression that he was out of his depth in a theatre requiring the blending of 'plain sailing' naval operations and quasi-political 'allied assistance' missions.]*

Better success was had in Corsica, where on the 18th and 19th of November, Cooper, with 15 ships, bombarded the defences of Bastia in Corsica, forcing the Genoese rulers to flee to the mainland. 5,000 balls and 500 shells were fired. The local insurgents, who fumbled a 'coordinated' land assault and might

have been repulsed, instead found the forts leaderless and took 400 of the garrison prisoner (many enrolled themselves in the ranks). Cooper took his ships to Leghorn for minor repairs.

## RIVIERA PARADISE – 1746

### Lombardy

In 1746, the Bourbon position in Italy would collapse. Chiefly, France and Spain could not agree on strategy, and the Habsburgs, under new management, fielded an energetic army against them. As mentioned earlier, the French curtailed their advance in mid-1745, spending the rest of the year reducing fortresses and bargaining with Charles Emmanuel. The King of Sardinia was wooed with the promise of an alliance to push Austria out of Italy and a large chunk of the Milanese.

D'Argenson, the French 'First Minister', envisioned a series of buffer states along the French frontier, of which Piedmont was to be one. Charles Emmanuel strung him along, but felt there were too many practical difficulties. The King was more interested in a somewhat toned down second offer, but after many convoluted negotiations with his allies and their enemies, chose to keep faith with the Habsburgs. His decision was reinforced by the fate of the Spanish army in Lombardy.

Although the other Bourbon parties were not to be done out of their own objectives, these negotiations were kept secret from the Spanish because the latter had a very different approach. Guided by the will of Elisabeth Farnese, the Spanish had driven on, deep into Lombardy, until Milan itself fell (that city not being particularly fond of the Habsburgs). On December 19th, 1745, Don Felipe had entered the city in triumph, to be proclaimed King of Lombardy.

In reaction, the Habsburgs had rushed an army over the Austrian passes in the dead of winter. They were free to do so because Prussia had finally made peace. By mid-February, this army was poised to counterattack, and would commence a series of flanking operations along the Po to force the Spanish back. Stubbornly insisting the French move up and help them hold Milan, the Spanish would refuse to acknowledge the precariousness of the Bourbon position.

The French and their Genoese allies would not come forward, since they would be bound in a quasi-armistice, positioned to lay siege to Alessandria yet not doing so while the negotiations were taking place (since the Spanish knew nothing of the talks, they were puzzled). Then, in early March, Charles Emmanuel would trick the French into abandoning the 'siege' before declaring the armistice over and attacking them at Asti. With their entire line of communications at risk, the French would be unable to move. The Spanish would have no choice left but retreat. In a series of brilliant manoeuvres, de Gages would extricate his army back to Piacenza. Here, after the French managed to send reinforcements, a battle would be fought on June 16th. On the 27th, after failing to cripple the Austrian army, the Bourbons would begin a complete retreat, followed but not engaged by their opponents.

Even now, the Spanish would want to fight, but their allies would overrule them by simply marching away. Then, on July 9th, King Felipe V of Spain would die. His heir, Ferdinand VI, the son of his first wife (and a nephew of Charles Emmanuel), would completely alter Spanish aims in the war. Ferdinand would feel that Spanish interests were not being served and resolve to extricate his army, and the Neapolitan forces, as speedily as possible. However, implementing this change of strategy would take some time. Especially, though Don Felipe no longer had a role to play, he would not be recalled to Spain; it would have been politically embarrassing (as well as dangerous) to have him home.

Thus, the Spanish expeditionary army would remain in being, useful as an obstruction to any Austrian advance.

By September, the Bourbons would be retreating along the Riviera. On September 23rd, they would stand at Ventimiglia while the bulk of the army regrouped at Nice. The Spanish, if at all possible, wanted to hold on to the County of Nice for Don Felipe. But on October 18th, the French would make the decision to fall back behind the Var River.

Now it would be the Coalition's turn to fall out over strategy. Maria Theresa would be keen to hammer Naples. Charles Emmanuel, sick with the smallpox, would desire the curtailment of all operations. The British, however, would put their foot down. To take the pressure off Flanders, where the war was going badly, they wanted an invasion of Provence. Taking Toulon out of the picture would be a major blow. Though the British had done little militarily in 1745, they had, as will be explained, been of great use during the counteroffensive. Bottom line, though, they were paying for the war.

Initially the British plans would be aided by the enemy. The Spanish would, in November, march into Savoy. They hoped to hold the duchy as a bargaining chip. The Neapolitan forces that had retreated with them would be shipped home (without interference, since Don Carlos was pulling out of the war as well). This would leave the French with only 11,000 men facing about 30,000.

The Coalition would cross the Var on November 30th. The Royal Navy's support would be important, but limited to logistical assistance until Toulon was reached. Toulon, however, would not be reached. The dynamic *Maréchal* de Belleisle would trade space for time and assemble his forces before counterattacking in turn, in the spring of 1747. In this he would be aided by the situation in Genoa.

After the Bourbon retreat, Genoa would be occupied by the Habsburgs. The man chosen as Governor would be an irascible Genoese exile named Botta d'Adorno who would do everything in his power to inflame the Genoese against the occupiers – not because he was a secret patriot, but because he was a jerk. Genoa would experience a general uprising in December of 1746 that would last until the end of the war and the Austrian withdrawal. Unfortunately for the Coalition, Genoa would be their supply hub for the invasion of Provence; they would now be forced to blockade and siege it.

*[D'Adorno had previously been the Habsburg ambassador to Russia. He was now on their Most Wanted list. In those days, the Russians could hand down 'shoot on sight' orders simply because of an objectionable personality, but it may have had something to do with his written descriptions of the Tsaritsa, which fell into her hands.]*

### Vice-Admiral Medley

Medley took formal command of the Med theatre at the beginning of 1746. His orders, however, were dated July 25th, 1745. They were "to act in such manner as shall be concerted and agreed with the King of Sardinia, the commander of the Queen of Hungary's troops in Italy, and Mr Villetes *[the Sabaudian representative]*."

*[Richmond, vol. 3, p.150]*

The Navy's first job came early in January, when the Austrians requested assistance in ferrying troops and supplies across the Adriatic. Medley dispatched the *Feversham* (40) and *Seaford* (20), which arrived too late to guard the transports but were able to interfere with enemy shipping and protect future shipments.

On the Riviera, Medley had some success in interdicting the Bourbon supply lines, but, as had been the case throughout the war, lacked enough small craft to do a completely thorough job.

Unlike his predecessor, the Admiral felt that Cadiz, though dangerous, was not critical to operations within the Mediterranean. 7 ships under Captain Cooper had remained off that port until the end of the year, but now they were withdrawn to operate against Cartagena. Medley's own squadron of 13 ships of the line were to be based on the Riviera.

The British main body set out from Port Mahon in March, 1746. First stop was Cartagena, where it was seen that the Spanish, of 13 sail, were unprepared for sea. Captain Townsend was then detached with 12 sail for Cagliari, while Medley and the rest of his ships cruised between Cape Palos and Cape Gatt.

#### Spanish at Cartagena:

Real Felipe (114), Leon (70), Constante (60), America (60), San Fernando (60), Hercules (60), Oriente (60), Brillante (60), Soberbio (60), Neptuno (60), Alcon (52), Xavier (50), Retiro (50), Paloma (50), Galga (50), and Aurora (30).

Returning to Gibraltar at the end of March, Medley spent the summer ranging the Spanish coast between Cartagena and Cadiz with 16 ships of the line. Cadiz took the limelight again in September; the French squadron based there appeared to be making preparations. Cartagena, in contrast, remained inert.

#### Corsica

An additional wrinkle was added to British concerns by the situation in Corsica. By 1745 the island was in virtual revolt against its Genoese overlords – as recounted, the government of Bastia had fled the island when Cooper bombarded the town. Charles Emmanuel had long coveted the island, and he now pressed the British for aid in overcoming its garrison. This was agreed upon, and Captain Townsend was sent with 12 ships to aid the locals in reducing the coastal defences.

Medley declared it “an ill-concerted scheme”, but complied with his orders. London's local representative was enthusiastic over the project. The difficulty for the Admiral was that this reduction of his strength left Toulon open and French Captain de Lage's 3-6 active ships the freedom to come and go as they pleased. Medley could have better employed his own forces by covering the offshore route to Genoa. The Corsican affair dragged on, too, since it was conducted by a motley assortment of indigenous militias ('bandits' would be a more accurate description).

Townshend left the main body on March 19th, put in to Port Mahon to collect siege materials and arms for the Corsicans, then made for the disputed island. At this point he had 8 ships: *Bedford*, *Essex*, *Leopard*, *Dartmouth*, *Antelope*, *Liverpool*, *Firedrake*, & *Carcass* (the latter two being bombs)

On March 30th, Townsend, sailing ahead with 2 ships of the line and 2 bombs (plus the usually unmentioned bomb-tenders) fell in with one of de Lage's ships. Pursuit brought them face to face with 4 enemy ships, so Townsend withdrew and resumed course. At Cagliari (in Sardinia) he collected the *Nonsuch* and *Antelope* (which had travelled independently with despatches) and set off to try and find the French again.

The French captain, in command of *Oriflamme* (54), *Diane* (30), and *Volage* (30), had already skirmished with a British ship enroute to Cartagena (*Stirling Castle*). Temporarily losing *Volage* to the British (the captain of the *Stirling Castle* was docked of his captain's pay and reprimanded for failing to scuttle the prize and so assisting its recapture by the French), de Lage avoided further contact and returned to Toulon on April 18th. According to Richmond, the Frenchman's cruise had been to no purpose.

*[Townshend was courtmartialled for 'lack of aggression' in this affair; but it was shown that, because of garbled sighting reports, the additional enemy ships might not even have been really there, and that in any case he*

*could not have abandoned his bombs to engage an enemy; he was however, made to write to the Admiralty and beg forgiveness for his sloppy despatches.]*

April and May saw Townshend 'cooperating' with the Corsican insurgents. Since most of them were bandit chiefs and their personal bands, nothing was accomplished. At the end of May, Medley received instructions to abandon the Corsican operation. Townshend was now free to add his force, plus some Sardinian galleys, to the meagre forces (6-7 ships) that had been trying to keep the Riviera closed.

*[To his credit, Charles Emmanuel did not whine. He had wrongly believed the British would have enough ships to do both jobs, but recognised that their interdiction mission was the most important.]*

Townshend's force now consisted of: *Bedford*, *Essex*, *Nonsuch*, *Antelope*, *Dartmouth*, *Liverpool*, *Postilion* & *Terrible* (sloops), *Carcass*, *Firedrake* & *Lightning* (bombs). 2 other frigates, *Diamond* and *Lowestoft*, were sent to attack the French trade in the vicinity of 'Candia' – that is, Cyprus. Additionally, he had *Leopard* careening. The *Feversham* was on call to return from the Adriatic if required.

#### The Riviera

While the land campaign was being waged in Lombardy, the British contribution was of course limited to interdiction, but as the Bourbons began retreating along the Riviera in August, the Navy began to conduct shore bombardments. Unlike the year before, they were quite effective in forcing the enemy to divert to the rougher inland passes and inflicted a substantial amount of 'attritional losses'.

Richmond (vol. 3, p.162 note 1) quotes a typical log entry:

*“August 23rd. Anchored between Menton and Ventimilla, with bower and stream and brought broadside against the Pass Menton; at 7 fired 3 shot at some of the French and Spanish troops passing along the pass, the 'Leopard' and 'Carcass' bomb cannonading the camp about a mile to the west of the town of Menton; at 6 they broke the camp up... Fired 12 shot at the troops passing the Pass.*

*At 9 P.M. on the 24th made a signal for seeing the troops coming into the pass. Fired several Round and Grape Shot at 4 a.m. and 4 vollies [sic] of small arms.*

*From 1 p.m. on the 25th till 6 fired several shot at the troops passing the pass; they fired several small arms from the hills and wounded 2 men... at 7 we discovered a great number of them passing up on the hill in the New Road they had made out of the reach of our cannon. Saw their lights on the new Road at night and saw great numbers of them marching in the day, but none passed the old Road.”*

Other actions involved the taking of prizes or the destruction of enemy transports: 3 French *pollaccas* taken by *Diamond* and *Lowestoft*; 3 Genoese and 5 Papal ships destroyed by *Leopard* in their own roads; 16 French ships taken in the Levant by the privateer snow *Fame* – including 2 ships sent to deal with the privateer.

*[Pollaccas were three-masted vessels with galley hulls, similar in other respects to zebecs. Snows are two-masted brigs equipped with a third 'stepped' (detachable) mast behind the main mast that carried a trysail.]*

#### A Year in Provence

Late in August, London, already planning for the invasion of Provence, ordered Medley to concentrate on that coast. Unfortunately the orders did not reach Medley until October (he was believed to be in Corsica), but (*fortunately*) Townshend acted on his own initiative.

Medley returned to Port Mahon in October to repair his worn out vessels. He left a few ships at Gibraltar to protect trade. It was here that he received word that the Coalition was set to invade

Provence. Even now – October 24th – his orders had not arrived, yet he prepared to lend his assistance. Townshend’s squadron was now under Captain Hughes (given that the former captain was being courtmartialled); Medley sent 5 ships to reinforce him.

British forces (as of November 20th, per Richmond):

At Villefranche: Russell (flag), Burford, Boyne, Revenge, Leopard, Phoenix, Lowestoft, Terrible bomb, Duke fireship, a barcolongo.

At Mahon or just going there for repair: Norfolk, Princess Caroline, Dartmouth, Bedford, Essex, Chatham, Firedrake.

Off Toulon and Marseilles: Stirling Castle, Royal Oak, Rupert, Nonsuch, Antelope, Roebuck.

Off Cape Garoupe: Nassau, Guernsey, Conqueror fireship.

Convoy to Genoa: Diamond, Liverpool, Carcass bomb.

Coming from Adriatic: Feversham, Seaford

At Gibraltar: Jersey, Dunkirk, Spence sloop, and Enterprise fireship.

In addition 4 ships were being sent out under Admiral Byng to help Medley cover Cartagena (where enemy inactivity and the political situation justified a relaxed watch).

The Lightning bomb was lost in a gale off Leghorn.

Hughes based at Villefranche, once again in Sabaudian hands. He had charge of a vast fleet of transports. When the 5 reinforcing ships arrived on November 5th, Hughes sent off 6 ships to intercept enemy shipping between Marseilles and Toulon.

*[Excepting, however, corn ships from Tuscany. As noted elsewhere, the Duke of Tuscany, was at war with France in his capacity as Maria Theresa’s husband, but was prepared to do deals with the enemy. The duke*

*felt it worth the risk of giving his allies apoplexy because the Imperial war machine needed the funds! He had cut similar deals with Frederick of Brandenburg, selling foodstuffs to the latter’s army.]*

The crossing of the Var was to commence on the 15th, but heavy rains delayed it until the 19th. Meanwhile, Medley himself arrived, with 6 more ships. Positioning themselves in the dark, the British light vessels and bombs (*Phœnix, Terrible*, a barcolongo, and 8 pinnaces), commenced a dawn bombardment of the French seaward positions along the Var. Carpenters and seamen were already ashore and at work upon a pontoon bridge. Simultaneously, other small ships landed Austrian troops in the rear of the French, unhinging the position.

In addition to this major operation, 5 ships (*Nassau, Burford, Revenge, Diamond, Phœnix*, under Captain Strange) assisted in the capitulation of the port of Savona just before a Genoese relief corps could reach it. The Hyères Islands were captured after a short bombardment (the French had a castle there). More might have been done – Antibes was next on the list – but at this moment (November 24th) the Genoese Rising broke out, denying the Coalition the use of the additional siege cannon that would be needed to crack the Antibes defences. This had a cascading effect, as the town now had to be invested by the Austrians, critically delaying their advance. General von Browne, commanding the advance, would be forced to retreat from Provence in the Spring of 1747.

#### **Henry Medley (1687 – 5th August 1747)**

Joined the Royal Navy in 1703. Governor of Newfoundland in 1739. Rear-Admiral of the White in 1744. Vice-Admiral of the White and C-in-C Med in 1745 (technically: appointed in July 1745 his duties actually commenced at the start of 1746). Vice-Admiral of the Red in 1747. Died on board ship that year, as a result of fever.

## **ADMIRALS AND COMMODORES: LEADERSHIP AT SEA**

*Excursus by David Hughes*

### **The Royal Navy**

The best known hierarchy is undoubtedly that of the Royal Navy as described in the novels of Patrick O’Brien and C.S. Forester – a time when a fortunate (meaning well connected) officer like Nelson would be posted captain at an early age and then remorselessly progress through the ranks of flag officer, filling the posts of seniors who died, regardless of capability or health.

This sequence was created during the Commonwealth and the Restoration, that period of the 17th Century that spanned the rule of Lord Protector Cromwell and King Charles II, and a time when the gigantic war-fleets – often with over 100 battleships per side – of England and Holland fought in three great wars. Before then admirals had been either the designated substitute of the ruler as leader of the navy or temporary squadron leaders, as when the fight against the Spanish Armada was led by Lord High Admiral Howard, supported by his vice and rear admirals, Drake and Hawkins.

However when Cromwell fought the Dutch it all changed, not least because a new generation of leaders, the majority previously commanders of armies and regiments, were in charge. These were the ‘Generals At Sea’, the best known being Blake, who quickly realised the need for a naval hierarchy with the same authority as that on land, especially as fleets now fought in solid lines, rather than the vague groupings that had followed men like Drake. As before the Centre was led by the Admiral, the Van (the front) by the Vice-admiral and the Rear, obviously, by the Rear-admiral. And this worked well while the fleet numbered no more than some 30 great ships. However once the numbers expanded more leaders were needed (this was a function of distance, since messages from flag to subordinate were usually made at this time by voice or message-boat) which in turn meant that the hierarchy needed to be redefined.

The solution was to rename sections of the fleet into formal squadrons, each identified by one of the three colours in the Union Flag. That of the Red was the centre, of the White the van and of the Blue the rear. Each ‘coloured’ squadron had three admirals so that, for example, the van was commanded by the Admiral of the White, supported by the Vice and Rear-admirals of the White. The final step was the creation of the office of the Admiral of the Fleet (the Lord-Admiral when a member of the royal family), but since his position was at the very centre of a fleet it occupied that of the Admiral of the Red – which rank then vanished. The final result (one whose sequence was still valid in the days of Nelson) was a hierarchy that began with the lowly Rear-admiral of the Blue and finished with the lofty Admiral of the Fleet. And since rank is a precious possession, it soon became the rule that promotion also followed the same step-by-step procedure, with no step missed: Rear-Admiral of the Blue, then White, then Red; Vice-Admiral of the Blue, then White, then Red; Admiral of the Blue, then White, then Red.

Of course matters soon became more complex, as at the battle of Solebay in 1672 when the French (allied against the Dutch) were the van and therefore the White squadron, with the English forming the other two. But the ranks were maintained so that when the Dutch, brilliantly led by De Ruyter, concentrated on the flagships of the British rear it was the admirals of the blue that paid the price. The Earl of Sandwich, Admiral of the Blue, died when his flagship the *Royal James* burnt and the Vice-admiral of the Blue in the *Royal Sovereign* only survived through the gallantry of his 'seconds' (the term given to the ships on either side of a flagship) both of whose captains were killed. And once the Royal Navy found itself fighting at the same time in the Channel and the Mediterranean the neat symmetry of squadrons vanished for ever. But the ranks remained. Throughout, in order to identify a squadron all ships in it would fly the ensign of its admiral; the Battle of Toulon being exceptional in that by coincidence all ships were commanded by admirals of the white squadron (which must have created great confusion since both the French and Spanish also flew white flags!). With a single exception (Hawke at Quiberon Bay) this remained the rule until Trafalgar where Nelson ordered the ships of Collingwood (Vice-admiral of the Blue) to shift to the White flags of his own squadron – an act many contemporaries considered to be arrogant in the extreme. Tradition later dictated that this would become the flag of the Royal Navy, the Red that of the Merchant Navy and the Blue that of the Royal Navy Reserve.

*[The reason why the flags of so many nations in the British Commonwealth are, or were, based on naval ensigns, is because their ships and shipping offices flew such ensigns and it was thus the most recognisable symbol of a colony, which would lead to it being adopted as the national flag. The blue ensign is the most common, because those nations were served by government vessels. Canada's old flag was a red ensign, as used by merchant ships, because the merchantmen of Canada were entitled to an Admiralty warrant. Canada's red ensign was not enshrined by law, but it flew everywhere. In contrast, the Maple Leaf, vehemently opposed by 'loyalists', is a legal national flag (and incorporates the red ensign in its colours)].*

There was one major variable and that was the number of officers who could hold each of the nine ranks of admiral at any one time. Initially it was just one, so that at the start of the War of Jenkins Ear in 1739 there were nine, each of whom could be assigned to one of the nine 'designated flagships' (mainly 90-gun Second Rates with two 80-gun Third Rates nominated for distant service). By 1741 their number had been reduced by the death of senior officers such as Charles Stewart, the Vice-admiral of the White. As late as 1743 there were still only nine and in practise fewer as those who were too ill to serve (such as Haddock when he retired from the Mediterranean command) remained on the list until death. Eventually it became apparent that they system needed changing and additional admirals were appointed, though against the opposition of the Treasury (extra money) and many current flag-officers (their rank would be demeaned). By the end of the war in 1747 there were at times over twenty admirals on the books, though as many as half were disqualified by age, service at the admiralty, or recognised incompetence. All this resulted in some strange promotion patterns.

For example up until 1749 the position of Admiral of the Fleet was held by Sir John Norris. Born in 1674 he obtained his first command in 1690 and made his mark as flag captain (in effect the chief of staff) to Admiral Rooke which earned him promotion to Rear-Admiral of the Blue in 1705. Five years later he had been promoted six times to become an Admiral of the Blue, clearly because in a time of war with many squadrons in action, extra appointments were being made to each rank. He reached the rank of Admiral of the Fleet in 1734 on the death of Sir George Byng. To add confusion his highest rank was in fact achieved in 1740 when appointed Vice-Admiral of Great Britain (politics in action here – this 'royal' or prestige title allowed him to override the orders of an unpopular Admiralty!), and his greatest service was to command the Channel Fleet in the years when the French were attempting to invade England.

When he died in 1749 he was succeeded in the rank by Sir Charles Ogle. Widely regarded as a good sailor with a passionate desire for wealth (in 1721 he got away with what seems to have been a massive swindle of gold in West Africa) he too was promoted at a rate poor Nelson would have envied (note that Ogle was a baronet – meaning that his knighthood was hereditary, not awarded). He became Rear-Admiral of the Blue in 1739 in the Mediterranean, but spent the rest of his service in the West Indies. Vice-Admiral of the Blue in 1742 he was promoted each year until Admiral of the Blue in 1744 and finally Admiral of the White in 1747. When Norris died he inherited the position of Admiral of the Fleet, but died a year later in 1750. To put all this in perspective Nelson became Rear-Admiral of the Blue in 1797 and died eight years later as a mere Vice-Admiral of the White, and then only after accelerated promotion achieved by creating vacancies for his less capable seniors to move into.

The implication is that in the opening years of the war there were very few flag rank positions, the consequence being habitual rivalry or jealousy (and too often hatred) between flag officers. The most notorious episode was at the Battle of Toulon where Lestock, the Vice-Admiral of the White, had developed such distaste for his superior Mathews, the Admiral of the White (who also held the 'royal' rank of Rear-Admiral of Great Britain) that he failed to support him. In contrast Rowley, the Rear-Admiral of the White, was sufficiently junior (he had only become an admiral the previous year) and therefore new to the flag ranks that he instinctively supported Mathews in action.

Therefore when war came after a peace of 20 years it proved necessary to 'fudge' the strict rules of promotion, creating precedents still being employed by the Royal Navy in the Second World War. One was to adjust the rank of senior officers who had left the navy proper, but were urgently needed to serve as fleet commanders. For example Admiral Mathews had left the active service in 1736 when a senior post-captain serving in what we would today be called a civil servant job – that of Commissioner of the Navy at the Chatham Dockyards. In 1742 he was called back to active service as Vice-Admiral of the Red, this being the rank that he would have achieved by strict seniority had he stayed in the service. The more famous Admiral Vernon was similarly appointed directly as a Vice-Admiral of the Blue, without ever serving in more junior positions. Admiral Lestock was to benefit from another need when jumped from Rear-Admiral of the White to Vice-admiral of the White (serving only one day in the intervening ranks!) when required to take over command of the Mediterranean Fleet when Admiral Haddock was forced to leave due to illness. As when Lord Louis Mountbatten was jumped from commodore to acting admiral in charge of South-East Asia in 1943 this was a matter a national prestige, coupled with the need to ensure that the British supreme commander ranked those of lesser powers and other services!

This initial shortage of admirals meant that it was necessary to create substitute flag-officers or Commodores. These were local appointments (the 1st and 2nd Class Commodores that Nelson would have known were created much later) to command local squadrons, but indicated that the holder was a senior post-captain. A captain serving as a commodore (the official phrase was as an 'established commodore') was considered equal to a brigadier-general in the British Army – no doubt to end various unseemly squabbles over relative rank. Commodores played important roles, such as those of Martin in the Mediterranean and Brown in the West Indies. The problems generated by the lack of flag-officers was recognised early in the war and after the inevitable delays (paying off vested interests, convincing

the King, etc.) multiple appointments to the same rank started to be made. When the next war started in 1755 there were large numbers of admirals in service, even in peacetime, and this practise then became the norm.

It should be noted that the operational command of the Royal Navy was vested in the Board of Admiralty and that at this time its 'lords' could be either civilian or navy members (the distinction between a civilian First Lord and a naval First Sea Lord came much later). In the early years of the war the Board was, to be charitable, dysfunctional in the extreme. It was not until Admiral Anson was appointed First Lord that efficiency became the expectation, but even then politics played a major role in the appointment of admirals and in judging their conduct – hence the divisive court-martials that followed the indecisive Battle of Toulon.

### La Royale

On the surface the French system appears similar to the British – the same rigid progression of rank and a limited number of admirals. And the navy also had a flag system to distinguish squadrons, White for the centre, White and Blue for the van and Blue for the rear. But the admirals were designated by regional title, not colour, while two factors of immense significance had profound effects on their service. The nation was governed by hereditary aristocrats operating under their particular priorities, which were – reducing a very complex system to the very simplest – that all actions were judged purely in terms of 'service' and 'honour'. Of course wealth and material goods mattered, but organisations, including the French Navy, rewarded according to degree of service, so that the annual salary of flag officers increased in perfect symmetry with their rank and therefore service. Just to make matters more complex a third feature was also often in play – 'privilege' – implying that either rank of nobility or previous precedence had major claims on posts of service and honour. Hence in the War of the Austrian Succession every single French admiral had a territorial title, while there were no noble British admirals, and the vast majority were not even dignified with the lower title of knight. The Navy was however handicapped by its lack of '*gloire*' compared with the Army, victorious under Maurice De Saxe and lesser commanders. In contrast the Navy could point to but a few ship-to-ship victories. To make matters worse power flowed from proximity to the King, his mistresses and his Court at Versailles. As a result those who sought power tended to stay with the Court, those who sought honour preferred to be with the Army – especially as Louis XV sometimes served with it, whereas as far as is known he never honoured a French warship with his presence at sea.

At the very top stood the *Amiral de France* (in rank equating to a Royal Navy Admiral of the Fleet). This was very much an office of prestige, of great antiquity and for much of its history of limited connection with the sea, let alone the Navy. Indeed an Admiral of France had charged English archers on the battlefield, alongside the Constable and the Marshal! In 1651 the title was awarded to César de Bourbon, the illegitimate (but legalised) son of Henri IV – the man 'who thought Paris was worth a Mass' and from then on it remained within that offshoot of the Bourbon family. In 1737 the title of *Amiral de France* was assumed by Louis Jean Marie de Bourbon, Duc de Penthièvre, on the death of his father. He showed no interest in the Navy (other than collecting his salary of 24,000 livres and many other benefits), his primary concern being to expand his famous collection of watches. His inheritance does illustrate one other principal that bedevilled the Navy, that of 'survivance' – that on the death of a father one assumes his property but is also entitled to inherit his positions of state or rank.

The most senior 'serious' naval rank was that of *Vice-Amiral de France* (comparable to a Royal Navy Admiral). There were two of these positions – 'of the Levant' (meaning the Mediterranean) and 'of Ponant' (Biscay and the Channel). In later years two more would be added – 'of America' and 'of Asia', the latter a lifetime reward only for the great Suffren, for his actions in the Indian Ocean. Both were held for life and both appointed as rewards or as inheritance, normally resulting in agéd and ineffective holders. For example Sainte-Maire, Vice-Admiral of the Levant, died in 1744 aged 89 and Luzern-Bricqueville, *Vice-Amiral du Ponant*, two years later aged 85. Saint-Maire's successor died at a mere 81, and managed to hold office for six days! There was one exception to this pattern. The Marquis d'Antin had previously acquired the Ponant at the age of 28. This was one rare case where survivance produced good results, as d'Antin inherited it on the death of his uncle d'Estrées, whose family had occupied the rank of *Vice-Amiral du Ponant* since its creation in 1669. His nephew turned out to be a gifted sailor, leading the combined Brest and Toulon squadrons to the West Indies in 1740. His death from disease the following year was a disaster for the Navy.

With *Vice-Amirals* absent it became the job of the *Lieutenant-Général de la Marine* (matching a Royal Navy Vice-Admiral – most confusing!) to be the active leaders of the fleets. There should have been eight in service, as usual adorned with territorial titles such as Normadie and Picardie (these were essential for status in an age when wealth and power were associated with land) but most were in their somnolent 70's and some had not been to sea for forty years. In reality, only two served afloat at any one time, one in each of the major fleets. For much of the war Toulon was commanded by Court de la Bruyère, born in 1660 and a *Lieutenant-Général* since 1728. At Brest was the Comte de Rocquefeuil, born in 1665 and given his rank in 1741. Both vanished in 1744, the former dismissed and the latter dying at sea, leaving no senior flag-officers in the entire navy!

The junior flag rank was that of *Chef d'Escadre* (Rear-Admiral), appointed at the King's pleasure from senior and deserving captains to the twelve positions available (as usual these were named – the earliest created being 'of Bretagne' and 'of Guyenne'). As many as five were still capable of service and commanded in *Vice-Amiral* d'Antin's great fleet, sent to the West Indies in 1740, but their number dwindled drastically as age crippled their sea-going capacity. Those who remained were often careful to ensure that they also served as their own flag-captain, purely of course for financial gain. While a *Lieutenant-Général* made 12,000 livres, a *Chef* made 6,000 but as a *Capitaine de Vaisseau* (post-captain) another 3,000 plus 300 for sea-duty! By 1745 the entire situation reached crisis point – all too many flag-officers were utterly incapable of service – some having never served (a classic example being Salaberry de Benneville born in 1663, made *Chef d'Escadre* in 1728 (aged 65), *Lieutenant-Général* in 1736 and *Vice-Amiral* in 1750). And then the last two *chef d'escadre* died, Rochambeau at Brest and Gaberet at Toulon, which meant that there no admirals whatsoever active in the fleet!

Two promotions, both made in 1745-46 when it was realised that the Navy was in this state, illustrate both the good and weak points of the French approach. Note that the key distinction was that a Royal Navy officer, once made post-captain, would, if he stayed alive long enough, become an admiral and then be employed purely at the discretion of the Admiralty. However in France that appointment to admiral was at the whim of the King and his minister. The first example is the Duc d'Anville, appointed *Lieutenant-Général* by his close kinsman Maurepas, Minister of the Marine, even though he had never previously served in a vessel of *La Royale*. The excuse used was that he was already a *Lieutenant-Général*, though of the Galleys of France (a job which he had just happened to inherit from his father) As far as can be

determined his sole 'sea' service was a few trips in his galley around Toulon and Marseilles. Appointed to lead the expedition to reclaim Louisburg after it was taken by Americans he perished in his flagship on the coast of Nova Scotia. It is believed that he died of apoplexy brought on by sustained and severe sea-sickness.

In sharp contrast is La Jonquière, born of middle-class parents, who joined the navy in 1708 and by consummate service was promoted to *Capitain de Vaisseau* in 1731, at the age of 46. There he became part of the group regarded as the core of the Navy, professional ship-captains often used to nurse less qualified aristocratic seniors. La Jonquière was particularly respected and chosen by admirals to captain their flagships – such as the *Saint Esprit* carrying Vice-Admiral D'Antin to the West Indies in 1740 and *Le Terrible* with Court de la Bruyère at the Battle of Toulon. In the Royal Navy his age would have prohibited him from ever serving as an admiral at sea, but the one saving grace of the French system was that nothing could prohibit a King or his ministers from promoting whoever they chose. Fortunately for La Jonquière, *Le Terrible* had captured a wealthy prize so poverty was no longer an automatic disqualification. Promoted *Chef d'Escadre* in 1746 he immediately made his mark, taking over from the incapable d'Anville on his death, protecting a huge convoy from the British by fighting to the utter end and ending his days in Quebec as a respected Governor-General of New France, with a marquise to pass on to his descendants.

### Armada Española

The Spanish Navy mirrored many of the features of the French Navy, a tendency accentuated when the Bourbons of France became Kings of Spain in 1702. But the differences were very significant, starting at the very top. While the office of Admiral of France was held by an ineffectual and irrelevant aristocrat, the matching office in Spain, that of *Capitan General de la Armada* was held by the *Infante* of Spain, the heir to the throne. This signified the much greater importance of the fleet in Spain, especially its role in guarding the vital convoys that brought the wealth of Central and South America across the Atlantic to Cadiz. Next came the *Almirante*, the title of the professional head of the Navy (the Spanish were the first to use the rank of Admiral – taken from the Arabic *amir-al-bahar* meaning 'prince commanding on the sea'). However operational authority rested in *La Junta Almirantazgo*, established just two years before the war by the *Infante* in emulation of the Admiralty in London. This meant that the navy was run by picked *Teniente-Generale*, including Rodrigo di Torres, the senior officer afloat in the early years of the war, rather than by a civilian minister and his cronies, as was the case with the French Navy. Most of the active flag-officers held the rank of *Jefe de Escuadra*, while a few others were *Brigadiers*. The latter were equal in status to commodores in other navies, but unlike them did not command small squadrons. Rather this was treated as the title given to both flag-captains and later to many captains of three-decker ships of the line. In practise they were considered 'jefe in waiting' and could exercise separate command when required.

One further distinction was that all admirals were collectively known as *Generals de Armada*, with the actual rank only used when being assigned to a specific task. For example Blas de Lezo, famous for the successful defence of Cartagena de Indias, previously held the titles of *Jefe de la Escuadra del Mar del Sur* (that is of the Pacific and the seas around what is now Argentina) and *Jefe de la Escuadra del Mediterráneo*. Compared with the British and French navies, Spanish leaders were often 'under-ranked', a classic example being Don Jose de Navarro at the battle of Toulon. While the Royal Navy was led by an Admiral and La Royale by a *Lieutenant-Général* (Vice-Admiral) the Armada had to make do with a lowly *Jefe de Escuadra* or Rear-Admiral. Which of course is why the French held the formal command of the Bourbon forces. In addition while the others were supported by junior flag-officers, Navarro was the only Spanish admiral in a fleet of twelve ships of the line.

The active element of the Spanish Navy was also distinguished by the amount of sea-service it saw, if only because of the supreme importance of guarding in peace and war the treasure fleets that passed from Spain to the Indies and back every year. A famous example is *Jefe de Escuadra* Jose de Pizarro. When it was discovered that Commodore Anson was heading for the Pacific he was ordered to pursue and attack him. Although this obviously never happened it is clear that the seamanship of the Spanish was much superior to that of the British. Pizarro overtook Anson and, despite twice passing around Cape Horn 'only' lost two ships ('only' in contrast to Anson who lost all but one). Pizarro indeed had some of the qualities of a fictional captain. During his return from the River Plate on the Asia many of her crew, being pressed natives from the pampas of Argentina, mutinied. It only ended when Pizarro killed the ringleader in a sword fight! Even junior officers were given major responsibilities. In 1737, *Capitán de Navio* Daniel Hunoni was appointed *Éscorta de Azogues*, the duty of taking the incomparably essential mercury fleet from Spain to the Indies where it would be used to extract silver from the mines of Mexico and Peru. Such a fleet normally consisted of anywhere from two to six fast ships (often naval or private company frigates) escorted by two ships of force, in this case the *Léon* and *Lanfrancesco* (a ship of the Caracas Company). As always, one was the *Capitana*, in this case of the *Léon*, and the other the *Almiranta*. This indicates a highly successful Spanish custom by which the flag-ship was always the *Capitana* and that of the second-in-command the *Almiranta*. (The seeming reversal of ranks is because 'capitana' relates to a captain-general, a rank senior to that of many admirals). At the Battle of Toulon for example, the giant *Real Felipe* of 114 guns served as the *capitana*, while the other great ship, the *Santa Isabel* of 80 guns, was stationed at the rear and acted as the *Almiranta* – even though there was no flag-officer aboard.

The other common rank in Spanish service was that of *Capitán General* – normally given to the commander of one of the major naval ports. However this was a flexible service and, as an example when war broke out in 1739 the defences of Cadiz were organised by *Jefe de Escuadra* Francisco Liano, who on his own authority ordered the *Santa Isabel* (80) and *San Fernando* (62) moored as stationary batteries, supported by the 'frigates' *San Francisco Javier*, *Fama Volante*, *Paloma Indiana* and *Nuestra Senora de Atocha*. Although the last was indeed of just 30 guns, the others all mounted 52 or more, evidence of one more difference in approach. While all other navies ranked ships with 50 or more guns as ships-of-the-line the Spanish had a different system. They called ships of 60 or more guns *navios*, those with less *fregata* – in other words classifying ships by size rather than function, hence some confusion in comparing naval strength. In reality many Spanish 'frigates' were larger than Royal Navy 60-gun ships of the line, since a primary function was to carry part of the goods of the treasure-fleets they escorted across the Atlantic, trading cargo-space for gun ports. It was this emphasis on protection of essential institutions that gave the leaders of the Spanish Navy their character – professional but with a tendency towards defensive tactics and strategy. This was also in part affected by the existence of the other Spanish 'navy'. The sea-captains of the Basque provinces of northern Spain were the scourge of the British trade-routes, balancing the more measured and conservative approach of the admirals of Spain. There was one other hidden factor. While the peacetime sailors of Spain were second to none, when war came many of these fled the service to

the more profitable decks of the *bergantin* and *patache* based in the small ports on the Bay of Biscay. As a result in the later years of the war the fleet was much more cautious in its movements at sea, though with one major exception. In the West Indies the fleet based at Havana was active in the latter years of the war, at least partly because the Royal Navy had managed to make life there as a privateer very uncomfortable!

\*\*\*\*\*

## THE END OF THE AFFAIR – 1747/1748

The Med was the longest-running European theatre of war, but in the final year and a half, activities gradually wound down. In the late winter, the Coalition would be forced out of Provence as Maréchal Belleisle launched a massive counterattack that the defenders, with some 56 battalions locking down Genoa, could not halt.

*[The theatre commander, von Schulenburg, took over the siege from d'Adorno in January; as a 'siege' the operation was more than the simple investment of a city, because the Genoese also held the surrounding hills.]*

The French offensive would begin in May. Prior to that time, the Austrians, with reluctant Sabaudian support, would fail to make any progress in Provence. The Royal Navy, as mentioned above, would be unable to effectively assist with the siege of Antibes. Likewise at Genoa, where action would commence in April. Here, the Navy would impose a tight blockade, yet not bring the city to its knees.

By the end of June, Ventimiglia would fall to the Bourbons and French troops would be the top of the Alpine pass called the Col de Mont Genève. The Austrians would (temporarily) raise the siege of Genoa to deal with the threat. Fortunately for the Coalition, the Spanish, nominally involved in the operation, would drag their feet (each question of strategy having to be referred to both Paris and Madrid). Then on July 19th, the French would assault a key mountaintop position called the Col d'Assiette; Belleisle's brother would be one of the casualties. Failure here, plus the death of the marshal's brother, would kill the offensive. And the Austrians would have raised the siege of Genoa for nothing.

In the latter half of the year, action would be limited to a reinvestment of Genoa and a siege of Ventimiglia. A simultaneous attempt to reoccupy Nice would fail in the face of strong French opposition. By the end of October, the siege of Ventimiglia would have to be abandoned as the French reoccupied the intervening territory before both sides would go into winter quarters.

In the following year, 1748, the war would go on for another six months, ending on June 15th, but the only operation of note would be the siege of Genoa. Given that operations could not commence until May, the city would hold out until the end.

### The Navy

For the Royal Navy, 1747 began well. Of course, there was the aforementioned failure at Antibes, though this was hardly the Navy's fault, since, as noted, it was the Genoese rising that curtailed any chance of success in Provence. But with regard to that rising, Medley was having some success. His ships scoured the coast, sinking or impounding many vessels, including allied Dutch ones. The blockade of the city was tightly imposed (the ships consisted of *Antelope*, *Leopard*, *Revenge*, & *Feversham*); in March a convoy of 40 troop transports, bound for Genoa out of Toulon, was ravaged.

*[Holland was another country playing a double game; as a member of the Pragmatic Sanction, she contributed troops to the fighting in the Low Countries (and would actually be invaded this year), yet she continued to supply the French with vital materiel, much of it naval stores.]*

Because a renewed Coalition offensive was planned, Medley kept the bulk of his command at Vado Bay, where the stockpiles were building up. Now that Spain – though not the Infante's army –

was effectively out of the war, only a minimal watch needed to be kept on her ports. Toulon was watched from the Lérin Islands.

### The Lérin Islands

The Lérin Islands of St. Marguerite and St. Honorat, located off Cannes, were occupied at General von Browne's request at the turn of the year. As well as a safe anchorage for ships watching Toulon, the islands were an ideal forward base for assisting a land offensive.

St. Marguerite, fortified with an old castle, was assaulted by 300 Austrian troops, supported by a battery of 4 guns on the mainland and the fire of a British bomb ketch. 140 prisoners were taken, and 40 cannon. The castle was demolished. A garrison of 500 Austrians was installed, and the British placed the *Roebuck*, 2 feluccas, a barcalongo, and 2 unspecified small craft under the Austrian general's authority. They also landed a large quantity of supplies and naval stores.

*Maréchal* de Belleisle devoted considerable effort to retaking the islands. The first attempt was made on February 18th, and the second on the 22nd, but the vigilance of the local commander, Captain Weller, scotched both. In the first attempt, Belleisle's men lacked fire support. For the second, they assembled a battery of 9-10 guns and 4 mortars. Both times, Weller sailed inshore and did considerable damage to the boats assembled there, though he lost the barcalongo to the shore batteries, and suffered multiple hull hits on the *Roebuck*. To prevent any further attempt, Medley augmented Weller with the *Bedford*, *Essex*, *Revenge*, *Dartmouth*, *Diamond*, and a settee.

On March 17th, the French attempted to boost the morale of the Genoese by sending them a real French field marshal – *Maréchal* Boufflers. He was accompanied by a troop convoy and escorted by 9 zebecks and a frigate. The British intercepted and scattered them however. Boufflers, covered by a fog, escaped to Toulon, the frigate to Genoa, with *Phœnix* in hot pursuit. Some time later, Boufflers and his men were winkled into the town in small packets.

This squadron was again augmented in mid-April (*Superbe*, *Nonsuch*, *Colchester*) when the small Toulon Fleet made ready for sea. The situation now required an admiral, and the job was given to Sir John Byng, who had just arrived from England with a packet of reinforcements. If sound effects could be embedded in text, this would be an appropriate moment for a few ominous notes suggesting impending disaster. Byng's father was a revered war hero, an excellent admiral; not so the son. This is the same Byng who would be shot in 1757 for failing to save Minorca. He was about to lose the Lérins.

The man had 9 heavy ships at his disposal, to no more than 6 French. Admittedly the enemy had a lot of galleys, but these had yet to prove dangerous after several years of war. Weller had kept the initiative with only one 40-gunner. But two days after he arrived at the islands (April 25th), Byng was already thinking of throwing in the towel:

*"I am greatly afraid they will soon make themselves masters of these islands without having it in my power to prevent them... all I can do is to keep ships plying about the island."*

*Quoted in Richmond, Vol. 3 p.171*

He was intimidated by the coastal fortifications and despaired of holding any of the many landing sites on the islands. According to

Byng, the position was hopeless. Unlike Weller, Byng cruised out to sea, away from the ‘deadly’ shore batteries, and made no attempt to interfere with any enemy preparations.

Inevitably, the weather played its part. Byng’s squadron was driven east in a gale, leaving the islands unprotected, and on May 15th the French retook St. Marguerite. As Richmond says (Vol. 3 p.172): “It would be hard to find a more striking example of the effects of a purely defensive strategy devised and executed by a man with that type of temperament which sees lions in every path.” The Hyères were likewise lost in May, and Byng was now forced to cruise continually off Toulon.



\*\*\*\*\*

**Sir John Byng (October 1704 – 14th March 1757)**

Son of a famous admiral, Sir George Byng (Viscount Torrington).

Joined the Royal Navy at 13 (1717) and participated in the Battle of Cape Passaro. Served mainly in the Med until 1739.

Enjoyed rapid promotion thanks to his father’s fame and political standing.

Lieutenant in 1723 (age 19). Captain at 23 (*HMS Gibraltar*).

Commodore-Governor of Newfoundland in 1742.

Rear-Admiral in 1745.

Vice-Admiral in 1747. C-in-C Med after the death of Admiral Medley until the end of the war in 1748.

MP for Rochester in 1751.

Was serving in The Channel at the outbreak of the Seven Years War. With Port Mahon under siege, as a ‘Mediterranean expert’ he was rushed to the scene with inadequate forces. Engaging the French covering fleet, he allowed them to slip away after they inflicted considerable damage (it was a similar encounter to the

Battle of Toulon), then retired to effect repairs. Relieved of command before he could aid the garrison, Minorca fell to the French and Byng received full blame, being found guilty of not ‘doing his utmost’. Under the Articles of War, this meant execution by firing squad. It was hoped King George would exercise his prerogative and spare his life, but the King was having a political tiff with the House of Commons and refused in order to spite them.

His punishment is still the subject of debate and his family still petitions for a pardon. The sentence was excessive, but given his track record in the War of the Austrian Succession, a court-martial somewhere along the line should not have been unexpected.

\*\*\*\*\*

With the seaward flank secure, Belleisle began his advance. There would be no renewed offensive by the Coalition. However, despite this setback the British still had command of the sea. Ventimiglia was held for a time because a squadron under Captain Strange prevented the French from moving up heavy artillery by sea. Genoa was in a stranglehold. But Medley was forced to keep most of his ships at Vado Bay against the chance of a late season Coalition advance that never came. On August 5th, the Admiral died of fever.

Admiral Byng took over. His first duty was to select 9 ships and send them home. London had decided there was no need to keep so many ships in the Med now that Spain was inert, and they were badly needed elsewhere. The admiral sent 5 home in mid-September, and the rest somewhat later. He was left with:

- 3x 80-gunners
- 2x 70-gunners
- 2x 60-gunners
- 1x 50-gunners
- 1x-40 gunners
- plus various small craft

Against this the French were reported to have 7 ships at Toulon (ranging from 64 to 80 guns) and the Spanish 15 at Cartagena. Only 8 of the Spanish were ready for sea, and they were unlikely to do anything. Yet 3 of them did transfer to Cadiz, and Byng, his heavy ships now spread out to cover the coast at the request of his allies, could not stop them. At last, London, stingy as always, gave permission for the purchase of local craft and Byng enjoyed the unexpected luxury of 10-12 small craft suitable for coastal patrolling.

*[The Spanish ships were destined to be escorts for the Caracas trade. The 7th French ship was a new build.]*

Though the armies went into winter quarters in early November, the British remained at work blockading Genoa and generally interfering with coastal traffic.

*[Beatson mentions an action off Cadiz – no date – involving the Jersey. This ship took the St. George (30) and a Venetian ship carrying treasure to Genoa.]*

Dispositions as of October 5th:

At Vado Bay: Boyne (flag), Burford, Princessa.

Cruising between Cape Noli and off Genoa: Revenge, Superbe, Conqueror.

Between Cape Delle Melle and Villefranche: Guernsey, Royal Oak, Nonsuch.

Between Calvi and Cape Corse: Liverpool, Phoenix

Between Mallorca and Cape Corse: Litchfield, one zebeck, one bomb-vessel & a settee.

Off Toulon: Leopard.

Between Sardinia and the Barbary Coast: Essex.

Between Matapan and Candia [Cyprus]: Roebuck, Lowestoft.

In the Adriatic: Seaford.

At Gibraltar: Jersey, two sloops, one zebeck.

At sea on various services: Nassau, Antelope.

At Leghorn: one sloop, one fireship.

At Mahon, refitting: Dunkirk (going home), Rupert, Colchester, Feversham, Lynn.

At Lisbon (servicing Gibraltar and Port Mahon.): Dartmouth.

At Orbitello covering Savona: Stirling Castle, Chatham.

### The Last Gasp – 1748

By year's end, the blockade was having an effect, not just at Genoa, but along the entire coast. The French troops assisting the Genoese (those that had run the blockade) were forced to invade neutral Massa (on the southeast border of the republic) so they could acquire food shipments being sent to that state. A lucrative, if risky, business was conducted by the neutrals; Naples, now neutral herself, repeatedly sent ships to run the blockade, and the Spanish contracted shipments out to ships of other nations. Richmond records the use of a Maltese 64-gunner as escort to French merchants bound for Marseilles.

The French still had resources (as of January 1748):

At Toulon: 1x 80-gun & 3x 64-gun (all new construction), 1x 74-gun (preparing), 1x 64-gun, 1x 60-gun, 2x 54-gun, 1x 36-gun (all serviceable). In ordinary: 2x 74-gun, 1x 64-gun.

In the Levant: 2x frigates

But the Bourbons made no aggressive moves. In February it was reported that the French were to send out ships (*Conquérant* (74), *Content* or *Fièrè* (64s), *Oriflamme* (54)), but these were supposedly destined for the West Indies. Still, Byng could have intercepted them. He chose not to, citing Lord Newcastle's injunction to make the Italian coast the priority. It turned out the French ships were headed to India and could have had a significant impact there. Luckily the endeavour, involving ships from Brest as well, was crippled by a combination of the weather and the Western Squadron.

This 'non-action' was the last naval event of significance in the Med. Planning was underway for Coalition attacks against Spezia and Corsica, and at Genoa the Spring saw a renewed attempt to break through the ring of hills around the city, but on April 19th the preliminaries of the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle were signed, suspending hostilities. Though ships at sea were allowed 6 weeks grace, May 27th was the date of the last movement of vessels.

Admiral Byng returned home on July 12th, leaving the Med on a peacetime footing, with only 7 ships (*Superbe* (60), *Litchfield* (50), *Severne* (50), *Lynn* (40), *Crown* (40), *Margate* (20), *Enterprise* (8)). Newly promoted Rear Admiral of the Blue John Forbes now commanded. He would play a greater role in the Seven Years War.

### The Prize

The Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle (18th October 1748) satisfied no one. After suffering crippling losses to her merchant marine, France was forced to hand back all her gains in the Low Countries, plus Madras in India. In compensation she reacquired Louisburg in Nova Scotia. This annoyed the American colonists.

Austria permanently lost Silesia, and had to hand over Parma, Piacenza, and Guastalla to Don Felipe of Spain. Modena and Genoa had to be restored to independence.

Spain had not regained either Minorca or Gibraltar. The *Asiento* was renewed. It would last until 1751, when the British were bought out by a payment of £100,000.

Of the lesser powers, the Dutch gained nothing. Piedmont regained Nice and Savoy, and a small section of Lombardy, but did not gain the port of Finale. Italy gained a stability that would last until the French revolution, but one wonders if the Italians enjoyed it.

Only Britain can be said to have done well, though not to have gained, *per se*. Her *causus belli* – freedom of navigation – was not even mentioned in the treaty. But at least her trade had not suffered, while her opponents' merchant and naval forces were badly damaged. With only eight years to go before the next conflagration, her Navy would still be in fighting trim.

## THE BARBARY COAST

The Barbary Coast (Barbary = Berber) is that section of the North African coast stretching from Morocco to Libya. The term had a political connotation between the 16th and 19th Centuries. During this period, the principalities of the coast were nominal members of the Ottoman Empire, but enjoyed a high degree of autonomy.

For centuries, the local rulers, of whom the most important were the Beylerbey of Algiers, the Bey of Tunis, and the Bey of Tripoli, licensed privateers who roamed as far as the North Sea, mainly in search of slaves. In 1736, one exceptionally large vessel was reported off Cuba! People and goods taken by these pirates were either sold to the Ottomans or ransomed.

The rulers of Algiers controlled a territory roughly equivalent to modern Algeria. The Regency of Algiers was founded around 1525 by the famous Ottoman Admiral (and pirate) Hayreddin Barbarossa. Barbarossa accepted Ottoman suzerainty in exchange for help against the Spanish who had, after expelling the Moors from Spain, already begun to encroach on the Moors' (or Berbers') homeland.

Throughout the 16th Century, the Beylerbeys (provincial governors, sometimes called Deys) of Algiers were 'appointed' by the Ottoman Sultan, though the position was actually hereditary. The Ottomans provided a garrison of regular troops, and saw Algiers as an outpost against the might of Spain (just as the Spanish sponsored the Knights of Malta against the Ottomans). The Beylerbeys functioned as Ottoman admirals. By the end of the century, however, peace with Spain led to greater Ottoman control over Algiers. Ironically, though, the maritime endeavours of the Brethren became exclusively piratical, and for-profit.

In the 17th Century, Algiers became a cooperative base of operations for not only Turkish, but English and Dutch pirates! Their common target was, of course, the Catholic powers of the Mediterranean. Most of the English were 'professional' corsairs who were forced to operate in places not affiliated with England to avoid embarrassing their Government – the Stuart régime outlawed piracy. The Dutch were especially aggressive; this was the time of the Dutch Revolt against Spanish rule. Many of these European pirates converted to Islam. Many also became very wealthy and received pardons, retiring to their home countries (where as like as not they ran for Parliament).

By the 18th Century, however, the pirates of Algiers were more or less 'indigenous'. Punitive bombardments by the British, French, and Spanish reduced but did not eliminate the threat. Toward the end of the 17th Century the British were able to obtain exemption

from attack, officially by treaties with each of the ports, though in reality through a policy of 'zero-tolerance' and vigorous gunboat diplomacy.

[Americans were protected by these treaties until the Revolution, but by 1800, an astounding 20% of the young Government's national expenditures went to ransom payments.]

Tunis and Tripoli followed roughly the same pattern, though they were rated only as districts, not provinces (hence ruled by a Bey and not a Beylerbey) and their resources were correspondingly less. They 'capitulated' to the British and other powers well before Algiers, which did not completely cease its activities until the French conquest in 1830.

Salé, on the Atlantic coast had a similar history, but was not considered one of the Barbary Ports. Its 'Salee Rovers' could be found as far away as the Americas. Salé was an ancient Phoenician town that became a base for pirates in the 17th Century. Today it is virtually a suburb of Rabat. Most Salee pirates were Moriscos – Iberian Christians of Muslim descent. Unlike the Barbary Coast towns, Salé was founded as a republican city state with a ruling council of pirate captains, but it was absorbed by the Sultanate of Morocco before the end of the 17th Century, at which point its fortunes declined and its piratical enterprises became restricted to excursions to the Canaries and the Iberian coast,

During the War of the Austrian Succession, piracy by the Coast was at a low ebb (perhaps because Christian pirates could get official sanction as privateers, but more likely because a) convoys were instituted and b) there were a lot more battlewagons floating around the Med). The 'trade' would expand again later in the century. Nevertheless, at least one naval attack was made on the Coast – by the French in 1742.

This was a *coup de main*, the brainchild of a French naval lieutenant, Saurin de Murat. The *Ministry de la Marine* gave its blessing, and on the night of the 3rd or 4th of July, 2 brigantines, the *Assuré* and the *Inconnu* (sister ships, both of 4.6 guns), supported by 9 Genoese 'coralines', descended on Tunis. In some way they were surprised or betrayed, and in under an hour, de Murat had lost 2 officers and 100 men. He himself was abandoned as the French fled, and spent nine months in prison and seven in chains. To add insult to injury, he was forced to disavow France's complicity and say the action was undertaken for personal gain.

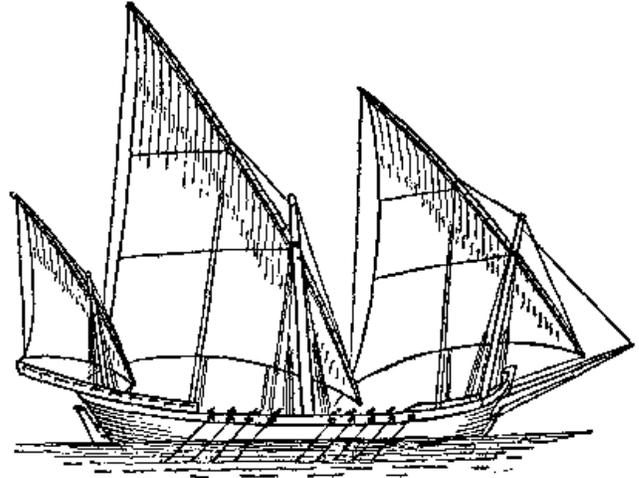
All the corsairs of the Coast were feared and loathed by the Europeans, but the worst were those licensed by the Bey of Algiers. Their ships were fast, heavily-armed, and packed with armed men. A captain had to be in command of an elite vessel if he hoped to catch an Algerine, let alone subdue it. The Moroccan pirates were less of a threat. Their ships were frequently small galleys, only lightly-armed and poorly constructed.

The corsairs not only chased down ships, they conducted *razzias* or raids on coastal towns – again, recorded as far away as Iceland. Their depredations were so severe that many coastal regions in the Mediterranean remained depopulated until the scourge was ended in the 19th Century. Algiers alone was said to contain 20,000 captives. The rich could procure ransoms, but the poor were set to work in the galleys, or sold farther east.

The most common pirate vessel was the zebec (*xebek, xebecque, xebeque, zebeck, zebecque, chebec, shebeck, xebec, chabec, chebec, zabeque, jabeque, enxabequem xabeco, sciabecco, zambecco, stambecco, sciabécco, shabbak, sunbeki*) shown below. Usually no more than 200 tons, they could have two or three masts. Some might be nearly as well armed as a small frigate, with a crew of 300-400 men. Note the overhanging bow and stern. Below the waterline the hull was narrow, for speed, but above, it

was wide, allowing more sail to be carried.

The zebec depicted could also be termed a *felucca*, indicating it uses only lateen sails. A *poleacre-zebec* would also have a set of three 'square-rigged' sails on the mainmast (in addition to the lateen sail. These vessels were extremely fast and manoeuvrable, and the oars allowed them to overtake (or escape) when there was no wind. The lateen sails, by the way, could be brought perpendicular with the direction of travel (notice the stays attached to the center of the sails and the points where the yards are fastened to the masts).



## THE KNIGHTS OF MALTA

The Knights Hospitallers of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem were the last of the three great orders of monastic knights (the others being the Templars and the Teutonic Knights). Originally founded in 1023 to run the Pilgrim's Hospital (at that date already 400 years old) in Jerusalem (*prior* to the First Crusade), its mission was expanded after the Christian Conquest to include the 'care and defence' of the Holy Land – essentially acting as armed escorts to pilgrim bands.

[The Teutonic Knights live on, after a fashion, in the German Regiment Hoch und Deutesmeister, which, in its original incarnation as an Imperial Habsburg unit (KuK), recruited in the Order's Swabian lands.]

The Knights retreated from Jerusalem to Tripoli (in Lebanon) when the former kingdom was taken in 1291, and from Tripoli to Cyprus in the same year. To disentangle themselves from Cypriot politics, their Grand Master negotiated a move to Rhodes. (This involved a two-year campaign of conquest; also taken were some outlying islands and ports on the Anatolian mainland, and they later held a strong fortress at Halicarnassus (which incorporated stone from the famous Mausoleum).

The Order received an influx of wealth from the defunct Templars and were able to establish powerful fortifications in their new home. It was at this time that they became 'knights of the sea', waging war on Muslim pirates; in the 15th Century they beat off two separate invasions, by the Sultan of Egypt and the Ottoman Sultan.

In 1522, however, Suleiman the Magnificent assaulted the 7,000 knights with an army of 200,00 men. Driven out after a six month siege, the Knights were allowed to settle in Sicily.

1530, Charles V of Spain, who was also King of Sicily, gave Order the islands of Malta (and the North African port of Tripoli – soon lost to the Ottomans). In exchange, they were to pay an

annual tribute of one (1) Maltese Falcon (though there is no record the birds were ever jewel-encrusted).

In 1565 came the Great Siege. Annoyed by the Knights continued harassment of Muslim pirates (and shipping in general), the Ottoman Sultan, Suleiman, resolved to destroy them. Something like 40,000 Ottomans descended on Malta, which was defended by about 700 knights and 8,000 men. They failed miserably. Unaided by Europe (though benefiting from the enemy's poor camp discipline and divided command), the Knights forced the Ottomans to withdraw after suffering 25,000 casualties; the defenders were down to 600 able-bodied men.

Their position secure, however, the Knights found they had lost their reason for existing. There would be no more crusades. To begin with, they reinvented themselves as the Mediterranean's policemen, but, with the collapse of their fiscal policies, they took more and more to piracy (against Muslims, of course). Wealthy once more from plunder, they began hiring themselves out as mercenaries, took wives, and in general, abandoned the monastic discipline. Possessions were acquired in such locations as the West Indies, when wealthy Knights in the pay of one power or another were awarded lands and governorships. In consequence, the Powers saw not need to continue subsidising the Order (thus perpetuating its funding 'by other means').

*[As an example of what this meant, realise that many Knights applied to serve in the French Navy. Now, not only did this mean they might find themselves fighting against another Catholic power, but at this time, the French were often in collusion with the Ottoman Empire – a Knight might thus find himself commanding a French squadron escorting Turkish merchantmen safely past his brethren at Malta!]*

The Order's final decline began after Napoleon took Malta in 1798. Displaced and scattered, many knights took refuge at the Russian Court (the second most favoured destination for adventurous knights after France). For a while, 90% of its funding was Russian.

The Order still exists, but, like the Papacy, its temporal power is gone. Based in Rome, it is now a purely religious order, specialising in welfare, refugee, and hospital work (particularly on the battlefield). However, it maintains its claims and has diplomatic relations with some 104 countries, including in some cases ambassadors, its own currency, stamps, passport, and even vehicle registration!

By the 18th Century, the Order was well past its heyday, but still engaged in its traditional roles of policeman and pirate. Information about the Knights naval resources during the war is incomplete, but it appears they had at least the following ships of the line available:

San Giovanni (64)  
San Giorgino (San Giorgio) (64) – until 1741.  
San Vincenzo (52)  
Santa Caterina (64) – possible  
San Antonio di Padua (52/64)

All were Maltese-built.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Strategy & Tactics

Tunstall, Brian. **Naval Warfare in the Age of Sail, The Evolution of Fighting Tactics, 1650-1815**. Annapolis, 1990. There have been a large number of books (usually large, highly illustrated and very expensive) about sailing warfare, especially its tactics. This is probably the best. Like most books of this type it concentrates on the Royal Navy and its Fighting Instructions, often to the exclusion of all other navies.

Willis, Sam. **Fighting at Sea in the Eighteenth Century**. Rochester & Woodbridge, 2008. This has the benefit of covering the entire century in a balanced manner and adds much instructive detail on winds and waves, on both sailing and fighting a ship, and on the factors that governed fleet actions. A most valuable source.

Harding, Richard. **Amphibious Warfare in the 18th Century; The British Expedition to the West Indies 1740-1742**. Rochester, 1991. The history is only germane as 'out-of-theatre concurrent activity', but the book is useful as a description of strategic method.

Pritchard, James. **Anatomy of a Naval Disaster**. Montreal, 1995. The only book in English on the French Navy in this period is a study of its failed expedition to Nova Scotia. But it also deals with the politics, the finances and the command structure of the navy in fascinating detail.

Dull, Jonathan R: **The French Navy and the Seven Years War**. (paperback version 2007). Although the title would suggest otherwise, the work by Dull provides useful insights which are equally applicable to the earlier war. Also available online.

Vergé-Franceschi, Michel. **La Marine Française au XVIII<sup>e</sup> Siècle**. Paris, 1996. Politics and command is covered in even more detail. The work also includes a list of all the senior French naval officers active in the century.

### Period History

There is a huge difference in the amount of material available on the three navies. The Royal Navy is by far the better documented in English and one work is indispensable. This is:

Richmond, Rear Admiral H.W. **The Navy in the War of 1739-48**. Cambridge, 1920. Three volumes. Available online in several formats. The only weaknesses of this masterpiece are that Admiral Richmond, when writing in 1914 had a natural tendency to emphasise the significance and success of the Royal Navy, but also being unable to document the activities of the two Bourbon navies with the same detail. Professor Harding has corrected some of the conclusions made by Richmond. In the first work listed below he concentrates on the West Indies campaign, amending the view that the army was invariably the villain and the navy the hero. In the second he studies the wars from the point of view of the British political leadership, drawing attention to the problems experienced in finding competent admirals who could work with each other. He also evaluates the great weakness of the Royal Navy in the war, its inability to overcome vested interests and obtain sufficient seamen.

Harding, Richard. **The Emergence of Britain's Global Naval Supremacy; The War of 1739-1748**. Woodbridge, 2010.

Browning, Reed. **The War of the Austrian Succession**. St. Martin's Press. New York, 1995. Essential reading for anyone interested in this war.

Two much older general histories (both in French) can be obtained from Google Books. The sections on the 1740-1748

period offer an interesting contrast to the British versions of the naval history of the war.

Lapeyrouse Bonfils, Comte de. **Histoire de la Marine Française**. Paris 1845. Also available online.

Guerin, Léon. **Histoire Maritime de France**. Paris 1844.

Harbron, John D. **Trafalgar and the Spanish Navy**. London, 1988. There is even scantier coverage of the Spanish Navy in English. Fortunately the only recent work is essential reading, covering ships, officers, trade and command. The title is deceptive. Although the last third of the book does cover the Spanish admirals and captains at Trafalgar, the rest reaches back as far as 1718.

The remaining material can be found on the internet at the **Revista de Historia Naval** site. A number of detailed articles have been written on the war the most useful being:

Gómez, Santiago: **La Armada Real al comienzo de la Guerra de Asiento**.

Martinez-Valverde: **La campana de don Juan Jose Navarro en el Mediterraneo y la batalla de Sicie**.

*[Note that 'Guerra de Asiento' is the Spanish name for the War of Jenkin's Ear and 'Cap Sicie' is used for the Battle of Toulon.]*

## **Ships**

There is often more material on the ships of these navies than their histories but most tend to concentrate on national navies, the Royal Navy as usual being especially well covered. The only general work covering warships of all sizes and purposes from most nations is:

Gardiner, Robert (Ed). **The Line of Battle**. London, 1992.

Winfield, Rif. **British Warships in the Age of Sail, Volume 2, 1714-1792**. Barnsley, 2007. This describes the building and rebuilding of every single ship, from large to small, adding details on where and when they operated.

Caruana, Adrian B. **The History of English Sea Ordnance 1523-1875 Vol II**. Rotherfield, 1997. This details the actual (as opposed to theoretical) assignment of guns to various ships.

There is far less on the other navies, but most fortunately one internet site exists that documents in great detail the sailing warships of all nations. It also covers battles, officers, flags and shipbuilding!

<http://threedecks.org/index.php>

A Spanish site of similar quality is:

<http://www.todoababor.es/listado/index.htm>



*The King & Queen of Spain in 1739*

Commentary by Ian Weir & David Hughes. Maps by Paul Dangel.  
©2011 Ian Weir & Red Sash Games.