

# Admiral Peter Rainier and the Command of the East Indies Station 1794-1805

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## ABSTRACT

### Admiral Peter Rainier and the Command of the East Indies Station 1794-1805.

Peter Rainier was the longest serving commander on the East Indies station by some margin, and the longest serving commander of any of the navy's stations in the long Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars.

This thesis illustrates the issues that needed to be addressed on this station and considers how successfully Rainier dealt with them. It will also suggest that he remains so little known amongst the pantheon of British admirals of the Napoleonic era because the traditional measure of value of a naval commander is success in battle. Although Rainier had a reputation as a fighting captain, as a commander in chief he saw action only in combined operations. Perhaps it is time to acknowledge that skill other than fighting battles is important. Rainier's thorough knowledge of the station, his capacity to work with people over whom he had no authority, his ability to protect a rapidly expanding and wealth creating trade, and his administrative and financial professionalism, enabled him to play an important, if secondary, part in the establishment of the Second British Empire which, arguably, had a far greater impact on British history than all but the most seminal battle.

The East Indies Station had a number of unique elements that heavily influenced the actions of its commander in chief. The two-way communication process between Rainier and the Admiralty could take a whole year. Its thirty million plus square mile area meant that communication and logistics within the station needed long term planning. It was still relatively unfamiliar to British navigators, and charting it was still in progress.

The relationship between the admiral and the East India Company, the official government of British India, could make or break the success of both the navy and the Company. With his diplomatic skills and wide experience of the station, Rainier worked with its officials and army commanders to defend current British possessions in the East Indies and India, to extend them to such an extent that, by his return to Britain, they were the foundation of the second British Empire. During this period the centre of power on the station moved eastwards as the value of trade with China overtook that with India – Rainier had to take this into account when allocating his resources. The constraints on navigation and timing caused by the narrow channels in the East Indies and by the weather made it easier for enemy vessels to know by which route the British trade would travel. Rainier had to cover potential threats off Macao, through the Straits of Bali, Banda, Sunda and Malacca, in the Bay of Bengal, off Madras, around Ceylon and between Bombay and the Persian Gulf. When possible he had to cover the French naval base at Mauritius. With a limited number of vessels,<sup>1</sup> of which some were always in need of repair, Rainier was often on the defensive. Acquisition of new colonies opened new trading routes which, together with his commitment to trade protection,

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter Eight for details of naval vessels at Rainier's disposal.

led to a steady, if often unregulated, expansion in British trade. His attention to detail and his management skills also allowed him to establish an efficient logistics, victualling and financial operation.

What Rainier achieved has to be seen in the context of the complexity of his station and the role of the East India Company. Then it stands far above the level of its absolute achievement. This thesis shows that Rainier's organization and man management skills, unruffled nature, sound strategic judgement made him a "Safe Pair of Hands", ideal for such a detached but important command.

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## List of Abbreviations

ADM	Admiralty
BL	British Library
BPP	British Parliamentary Papers
KEI	Lord Keith Papers
MM	Mariner's Mirror
NAS	National Archive of Scotland
NLS	National Library of Scotland
NMM	National Maritime Museum
TNA	The National Archive, Kew
UKHO	United Kingdom Hydrographic Office

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Thanks must also be given to the many external bodies to which I have turned for information, especially the British Optometrists Society, who kindly allowed me to reproduce their painting of Admiral Rainier, and to the owners of the private Blair Adam Family records at Kinross in Scotland.

I also owe an enormous debt to my wife, Gwenda. Her ability to help me put the stresses and strains of writing a thesis into perspective and to motivate me in the darker days, when the light at the end of the tunnel seemed so far away, have been critical. Her fine command of the English language has also been much in evidence in the many re-writes that have taken place. Finally I would like to mention two people who were of great help to me in the initial stages of my research but who died during the time it has taken me to write this thesis; Robin Craig and Anthony Farrington. They are missed in all the centres of research into the British mercantile marine and the East India Company Marine Service.



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION: WHO WAS PETER RAINIER?

The monumental tomb of Rear Admiral Sir Thomas Fellowes, which dominates a graveyard in rural Wiltshire, led the author to enquire if the admiral was a suitable subject for an MA dissertation. Research pointed the way to the relationship between the navy and the East India Company Maritime Service, Thomas having served as the fourth mate, under his brother, William Dorset, the commander of Indiaman *Royal Admiral* and the two brothers serving in both the navy and Company Marine.<sup>2</sup> Whilst the life of the admiral did not prove suitable for further investigation, an interest was awakened in the role of these two powerful maritime organisations and their roles in the East Indies. This was encouraged by the discovery of the “Bombay Diaries” in the library of the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies at Exeter University. These are transcriptions of the correspondence to and from the Bombay Presidency from 1778 to 1820. Reading these documents led to the discovery of Admiral Rainier, Commander-in-Chief (C-in-C) East Indies, and his role in protecting India during the French occupation of Egypt.

The French Wars of 1793 to 1815 were fought on a global scale. The attempt of revolutionary and imperial France to become the pre-eminent power in Europe eventually failed due to the fluid permutations of the continental powers of Russia, Austria, Prussia and Spain combining with the colonial and industrial power of Britain. Naturally the conflict centred on Europe but the colonial aspirations of Britain and France, together with the declining powers of Spain and the Netherlands, and the rising power of the United States, meant that the conflict spread to all parts of the globe. And the resources provided by the East Indies were essential to enable Britain to sustain these long and exhaustive wars. Rainier had been placed and kept in the key position to protect these resources.

The role played by Britain in the downfall of Napoleon was primarily naval and financial as its navy was by far the biggest in the world and its army comparatively tiny when compared with the manpower that could be put into the field by the continental powers.<sup>3</sup> The incipient industrial revolution gave Britain enormous wealth, which it realised through trade with other countries. Naturally the naval efforts were concentrated around the shores of Britain and the coast of Western Europe. England and Ireland had to be protected from invasion, the rapidly expanding sea borne trade of Britain had to be protected as it came to, and left, European waters, the British army had to be transported to wherever it could most effectively damage the interests of France, support had to be sent, unhindered, to Britain’s far flung colonies and, equally, succour sent by France to its colonies should, wherever possible, be frustrated. The

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<sup>2</sup>A. Farrington, *A Biographical Index of East India Company Maritime Service Officers 1600-1834* (British Library, London, 1999), p. 265.

<sup>3</sup>R. Muir, *Britain and the Defeat of Napoleon 1807-1816* (Yale, CT., 1996), p. 379, N.A.M. Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean, A Naval History of Britain 1649-1815* (London, 2004), pp. 579-80.

trade with the East Indies played an increasing part in this wealth creation throughout the war<sup>4</sup> and it had to be protected. In the previous two wars France had sent large naval squadrons to India to try and wrest control of that trade from Britain.<sup>5</sup> There was nothing to alter the view that it would do so again, which made the British government anxious about how it should defend its Indian interests.

The disposition of Royal Naval vessels, as illustrated in ADM 8 at the National Archive, shows that the greatest numbers were maintained in the western approaches, the English Channel, and the Mediterranean, where they could most effectively carry out the functions described above. The importance of the Baltic Sea as a source of naval supplies and as a route to Russia after Napoleon's invasion of that country, led to a concentration of naval power developing there in the later years of the war. The western reaches of the Atlantic saw British forces attack French West Indian colonies and later defend Canada whilst at the same time attack the United States during the War of 1812-15. The effective application in South America of liberal democratic views was hindered by Portugal and Spain becoming allies of Britain after 1807 and 1808 respectively. Therefore, apart from the Guiana campaigns of 1795-6 and 1803-4 and Montevideo and Buenos Aires 1806-7, naval activity in South America was minor. Efforts in Africa centred on taking the Dutch colony of the Cape, twice, which leads us finally to explore the role and importance of the navy in the East Indies and Far East.

Reviewing specifically the strategic situation in the East Indies, Britain maintained a small squadron primarily for trade protection and to watch for any French moves against its possessions in the region. Although at war with Britain from 1795-6, the Spanish and Dutch colonies showed little belligerence, but they did allow their bases to be used by the more combative French. As the situation at home absorbed all their efforts, the French had little ability to reinforce their possessions in the Far East. Yet, as the war progressed and France became more successful, its attack on Egypt was widely seen as the precursor to an attack on India. Portugal remained an ally throughout the wars. In some ways this was a disadvantage to Britain. Without British protection, the Portuguese colony of Goa could easily be taken by the French. But the Goan authorities would not accept direct British support. This had therefore to be provided indirectly without upsetting Portuguese sensibilities. Consequently, apart from several notable single ship actions, there were no major battles on the station. Indeed the only minor battle was a defeat for the Royal Navy [Grand Port in 1810] and the moves to extend British control over India by Governor General Wellesley were largely hidden from the government.

Indeed British actions in 1793 seem to predestine this attitude. Firstly a naval force under Rear Admiral Gardner was planned to capture Mauritius. When this was achieved he would move on to be the C-in-C East Indies. Then it was realised that French energies were being

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<sup>4</sup> See **Appendix 4, Trade Statistics.**

<sup>5</sup> Sir H.W. Richmond, *The Navy in India 1763-1783* (London, 1931).

concentrated in Europe. British troops were needed in Europe to take advantage of opportunities offered by Royalist risings in the Vendee and at Toulon. The Mauritius expedition was deferred, though it was still hoped that it might be revived at a later date. Suddenly India was seen as a backwater, as exemplified by the C-in-C, Rear Admiral Cornwallis, leaving the station in January 1794 entirely bereft of any British warships at all even though he knew war had been declared.<sup>6</sup> This was too risky, even for the Admiralty, which felt that India's naval defence should at least rest on the shoulders of a senior captain leading a small squadron. If the situation in India grew more dangerous, naval reinforcements could be sent out to India under a more senior flag officer who could assume overall command. And threats did arise; in 1795 from Dutch colonies in the East following the French occupation of the Netherlands, in 1796 with the despatch of a French naval squadron to Mauritius, and in 1798 with the French invasion of Egypt.

These threats had to be taken seriously. The trade and consequent revenue was vital to the British economy. John Bruce wrote in 1793:

The importance to the government and revenues of the British possessions in Asia, will readily be admitted, if we consider the extent of the British provinces, the number of the inhabitants, or the actual amount of the revenues. The importance of the trade will become obvious, if we advert to the tonnage which it employs, to its forming one of the most considerable branches of our foreign navigation, to the quantity of British manufactures exported to the East, to the relation between the revenues of India and the trade, to the materials which the Public derive from the imports.<sup>7</sup>

Exports to India and China, including private trade, amounted to £1,500,000 p.a. Privately owned wealth was repatriated to Britain at an estimated value of £1,000,000 p.a. The duty on imported tea raised more than £1,000,000 each year out of a total government revenue of £18,732,000 in 1794.<sup>8</sup> The tonnage of ships employed by East India Company [hereafter called the Company] was 81,000, requiring the service of 7,000 seamen.<sup>9</sup> Almost the entire amounts of saltpetre used in the manufacture of gunpowder came from India.<sup>10</sup> Indigo was another

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<sup>6</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/167, Cornwallis to Admiralty, 21 April 1794.

<sup>7</sup> John Bruce, *Historical Views of plans, for the Government of British India and the regulation of trade to the East Indies* (London, 1793), pp. 272-3.

<sup>8</sup> B.R. Mitchell and P. Deane, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge, 1971), p. 388.

<sup>9</sup> Henry Dundas, *Substance of the Speech of the Rt. Hon. Henry Dundas on the British government and trade in the East Indies, April 23<sup>rd</sup> 1793* (London, 1793), pp. 6 and 29. It is worth noting that Joseph Cotton, an Indiaman Commander, wrote in 1798 that the required tonnage for the Eastern trade was 50,000 tons and that there was 30,000 tons of merchant shipping belonging to Bengal residents employed in the Country Trade. *A Review of the shipping systems on the East India Company with suggestions for its improvement to secure the continuance of the carrying trade* (London, 1798), pp. 23 and 42.

<sup>10</sup> C.N. Parkinson, *Trade in the Eastern Seas* (Cambridge, 1937), p. 78.

product of which Britain was dependent on India since the loss of the American colonies and the move away from its production in the West Indies.<sup>11</sup>

And there was an added benefit; not only did Britain gain from the import of Asian goods but from re-exporting them also: ‘from whence other articles, paying duties, are brought in exchange ... the commerce of the country is considerably invigorated.’<sup>12</sup> The British government could not take risks with the resources and income generated in the Far East.

Understanding the challenges of commanding the East Indies Station also required understanding the Company and its role in India. During the period of Rainier’s command, 1794-1805, trade between Britain and the East Indies, including China, was a monopoly of the Company. But the energy of private merchants, both Indian and European, and their increasing wealth, needed an outlet. This was found in the “Country Trade”, carried out within the vast 30 million plus square miles that constituted the East Indies Station, between India, Burma, the Dutch East Indies, the Philippines, and China. This trade, and that between Asia and Europe, needed protecting.

The successes of the Royal Navy in battle, especially during the French Wars, have led naval historians traditionally to concentrate on those admirals, such as Nelson, who won famous victories. With the Far Eastern trade being so important to British finances, the flag officer’s role was primarily one of trade protection - much danger coming from warships and privateers operating out of Mauritius, and this function required considerable managerial and administrative expertise. Consequently the naval war in this region has largely been ignored by naval historians. However, recently, there has been a movement towards appreciating the management and organisation skills required to control large numbers of ships and men over broad expanses of sea, even if these admirals fought no major battles. Such admirals receiving attention are Admirals Keith and Saumarez.<sup>13</sup> Rainier will now receive the same consideration. For eleven of the twenty two years of almost continuous war with France, with the exception of one twelve month period, from May 1795, when the nominal commander in chief was Sir George Elphinstone,<sup>14</sup> the Admiralty allowed Rainier to remain in command. Even for this brief period it should be noted that Rainier was de facto the senior naval officer at sea in the Far East. This thesis is a study of this man, Admiral of the Blue Peter Rainier, and the rapidly changing world of imperial conquest in which he found himself.

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<sup>11</sup> J.R. Ward, ‘The Industrial Revolution and British Imperialism 1750-1850’, *Economic History Review*, vol. 47, No. 1 (February 1994), p. 48.

<sup>12</sup> Parkinson, *Trade in the Eastern Seas*, p. 331.

<sup>13</sup> K.D. McCranie, *Admiral Lord Keith and the Naval War against Napoleon* (Gainesville, FL, 2006), T. Voelcker, *Admiral Saumarez versus Napoleon: the Baltic 1807-12* (Woodbridge, 2008).

<sup>14</sup> Rear Admiral Sir George Elphinstone, Admiral of the Red, Viscount Lord Keith, served as third mate on Indiaman as a youth, captain 1775, MP 1781, knighted and rear admiral 1794, C-in-C Cape & East Indies 1795, Irish baron 1797, C-in-C Mediterranean 1799, British baron 1800, C-in-C North Sea 1803, C-in-C Channel 1810, died 1823.

The only orders Rainier received on the subject of grand strategy were those given to him at the start of his command: ‘[to attend to]...the Protection of the Trade and Settlements of His Majesty’s Subjects and ... Allies’.<sup>15</sup> It is noteworthy that trade comes before settlements and Rainier consistently placed trade protection above all other issues – sometimes to the displeasure of Governor General Wellesley. Fortunately Rainier took a wide interpretation of what constituted these goals. Protection of trade could mean offensive action - depriving the enemy of bases from which to attack.

In order to comprehend Rainier and to place him in perspective within the events of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars it is necessary to describe briefly his life. On joining the navy in 1756, aged fifteen, he sailed immediately to the East Indies where he remained until 1763, participating in both fleet actions and the capture of Pondicherry and Manila. On returning to England as a midshipman, he became the master of one of his family’s merchant vessels, sailing primarily to the West Indies and North America. Although not from an influential naval family, the Rainiers were important in the economy and politics of Sandwich in Kent,<sup>16</sup> an Admiralty borough, one of whose MP’s was Philip Stephens, the Secretary to the Board of Admiralty.<sup>17</sup> Therefore the support of the Rainier family would be extremely helpful during elections. One way to ensure its backing would be to give encouragement to the naval career of one of its members, and the correlation between Rainier’s promotions in his early naval career and the imminence of general elections was surely more than coincidental.<sup>18</sup> His brother, George, also benefitted from these contacts, being a Navy Board clerk from 1777 until his death in 1790.<sup>19</sup> As the Company agent in Deal, George also provided the link between the Rainier family and the Company. This was a key role, requiring heavy initial capital outlay as he collected and distributed the Company’s mail, corresponded with the Court of Directors and handled large sums of specie which were carried in Company or navy ships to India in order to finance the Trade.

In 1774 Rainier was sent to the West Indies, appointed lieutenant on the *Maidstone* (28), Captain Alan Gardner, whose own rise through the ranks of higher command was to provide Rainier with further influential patronage.<sup>20</sup> Steady promotion saw Rainier move to the

<sup>15</sup> T.N.A., ADM 2/1347, Admiralty to Rainier, 25 February 1794, see Appendix 9 for details.

<sup>16</sup> **See Appendix 3 for Family Tree.**

<sup>17</sup> Philip Stephens 1723-1809 (Bart. 1795), Clerk at Navy Board 1739-51, Admiralty Clerk 1751-9, serving as Anson’s personal secretary, Second Secretary to Board of Admiralty 1759-63, First Secretary 1763-95, Commissioner 1795-1806. MP for Liskeard 1759-68, MP for Sandwich 1768-1806.

<sup>18</sup> 1768 General Election, Rainier examined for lieutenant and commissioned into first ship for few months;

1774 General Election, Rainier appointed to *Maidstone* (28), Capt. Gardner, in West Indies.

<sup>19</sup> J.M. Collinge (ed.), *Office Holders in Modern Britain vol. VII Navy Board Officials 1660-1832* (London, 1978), p. 133.

<sup>20</sup> Admiral of the Red, Lord Gardner. Present at Battle of Quiberon Bay in 1759, lieutenant 1760, commander 1762, post captain 1766. Served in West Indies and North America during American Revolution, present at the Battle of the Saints in 1782. Appointed as C-in-C West Indies in 1786. Returned to England in 1790 when appointed to Board of Admiralty of which he was a member until 1795. Promoted rear admiral in 1793 and vice admiral 1794 after participating in Battle of Glorious First of June. 1797 saw him second in command of Channel Fleet. In 1800 appointed C-in-C Ireland and made an Irish Baron which was elevated to English barony in 1806. MP for Plymouth 1790-6 and Westminster 1796-1801. He never went to India.

flagship and then appointment as master and commander of the *Ostrich* (14) in 1777. He was seriously wounded the following year when the *Ostrich* captured an American privateer and he had to resign his command. This disappointment was ameliorated by his reward in being made post on October 29 1778.<sup>21</sup> It was most unusual to be promoted for capturing a non national ship and for this munificence Rainier must surely have thanked Philip Stephens, Secretary to the Board of Admiralty and MP for Sandwich.

Rainier's next step came three months later when he was appointed to the *Burford* (70), joining Sir Edward Hughes' squadron sailing for India in 1779, where he participated in five fleet actions off the Indian coast against the French under Suffren in 1782-3. As a post-captain under Hughes, Rainier was able to appreciate the need for excellent supply and victualling support from a cooperative Company. The quarrelsome Hughes rarely benefitted from this assistance and thus his freedom of action was much diminished. Rainier also learned to understand the trade routes and the importance of protecting both the routes and the key bases that lay across them, such as Trincomalee.<sup>22</sup>

A brief period of half pay on returning home ended in 1786 by appointment as captain of the *Astraea* (32) in the West Indies under Commodore Gardner, his old captain from the *Maidstone*.<sup>23</sup> Here he learned, along with his colleague Captain Horatio Nelson, the frustrations of policing the laws against smuggling with a not entirely honest local merchant class.<sup>24</sup> The end of the commission in 1790 saw him ordered home only to be appointed to the *Monarch* (74) during the Spanish Armament.<sup>25</sup> There then followed another period of half pay until the outbreak with war in 1793 when Rainier was appointed to the *Suffolk* (74) in the Channel Fleet.<sup>26</sup>

As the French wars were now to occupy Rainier until his return from India in 1805, it is worth reflecting that, since his first appointment as lieutenant in 1774, he was employed for fourteen out of nineteen years, even though only six were during wartime. This is surely a signal as to the influence of the Rainier family's Sandwich connection with Philip Stephens.

It was intended that Rear Admiral Alan Gardner would take a detachment from the Channel Fleet to become commander-in-chief of the East Indies, capturing the French base Mauritius en route and taking his old acolyte Rainier with him.<sup>27</sup> Circumstances changed with other demands for the troops and the French threat to India not seen as serious enough to send a powerful squadron to protect British interests there. Consequently only a small detached

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<sup>21</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/240, Gayton to Admiralty, 15 June 1777, ADM 1/241/ Parker to Admiralty, 17 September 1778, C. Wilkinson, 'Peter Rainier, 1741-1808', in P. Le Fevre and R. Harding (eds.), *British Admirals of the Napoleonic Wars: the Contemporaries of Nelson* (London, 2005), p. 92.

<sup>22</sup> Sir H.W. Richmond, *The Navy in India*, p. 91, pp. 181-379, pp. 189-90, p. 182.

<sup>23</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/2394, Rainier to Admiralty, 6 November 1786.

<sup>24</sup> *Asiatic Journal*, December 1819, p. 522.

<sup>25</sup> *London Chronicle*, 29 July, 1790.

<sup>26</sup> T.N.A., ADM 2/125, Admiralty to Rainier, 19 November 1793.

<sup>27</sup> T.N.A., ADM 3/129, Board of Admiralty Rough Minutes, 12 November 1793.

squadron would be sent with a senior captain in command. Gardner, also a member of the Board of Admiralty, had sufficient interest to obtain this post for Rainier.<sup>28</sup> The suitability of Rainier for this position is analysed in Chapter Two.

After initiating a naval supplies system Rainier's first offensive operation came following the occupation of the Netherlands by France.<sup>29</sup> This made all Dutch colonies enemy territory and, knowing the importance of Trincomalee in Ceylon, Rainier and a contingent of Company troops took it in 1795. The occupation of the capital, Columbo, followed the next year but the whole island was not conquered until 1818 when the Kingdom of Kandy became a British protectorate.<sup>30</sup> This success was quickly followed by the seizure of Malacca, a key defensive port in the eponymous Straits, on the major route between India and China.<sup>31</sup>

The onslaught on Dutch possessions also included the occupation of the Cape of Good Hope by Rear Admiral Sir George Elphinstone and the Admiralty's decision to combine this new station with that of the East Indies under Elphinstone's command. But Rainier and the President of Madras had already begun to assemble a force to capture the Dutch Spice Islands of Banda and Amboina.<sup>32</sup> Rainier sailed eastwards before his plans could be altered. The successful capture of these centres of the spice trade early in 1796 not only brought much prize money, but also formally opened up the region to British merchant and naval vessels, expanding the trade opportunities and beginning the move of the centre of gravity of the station eastwards.<sup>33</sup> Admiralty approval of his swift action to gain this advantage meant that on Elphinstone's return to the Cape to fend off a Dutch counter-attack and subsequent return to Britain, Rainier was again left in full command of a separate East Indies station.<sup>34</sup>

In 1797, Rainier planned to attack Manila following the declaration of war with Spain. However, news of peace between France and Austria, the depredations on British trade by French Admiral Sercey's frigate squadron and French privateers made Rainier and the Indian government fearful for the safety of India. Added to this Tippoo Sultan of Mysore, an enemy of Britain and a friend of France threatened warlike moves against British India.<sup>35</sup> This year also saw the appointment of Richard Wellesley as governor general and he was to become a key contributor to Rainier's career. He commanded many of the resources Rainier needed, he made many demands on the activities of the navy, and he had ambitions to make Britain the pre-eminent power in India.<sup>36</sup> Over the next two years Rainier's squadron was heavily engaged in supporting Wellesley in the defeat of Tippoo and in destroying Sercey's force, thereby protecting trade.

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<sup>28</sup> T.N.A., Admiralty to Rainier, 25 February 1794.

<sup>29</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/168, Rainier to Spencer, 20 March 1795.

<sup>30</sup> C.N. Parkinson, *War in the Eastern Seas 1793-1815* (London, 1954), p. 80.

<sup>31</sup> Parkinson, *War in the Eastern Seas*, p. 80.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.

<sup>33</sup> ADM 1/168, Rainier to Elphinstone, 27 March 1796.

<sup>34</sup> Parkinson, *War in the Eastern Seas*, p. 90.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>36</sup> E. Ingram, *Two Views of British India* (Bath, 1970), p. 1.

The news of Bonaparte's invasion of Egypt in 1798, with its perceived threat of overland attack on India, caused Rainier to divide his forces further. He rapidly sent two warships to the Red Sea to stifle any French attempts to leave the area by sea or to reinforce its army from the south. With the Admiralty sending a small force directly from England Rainier's role became one of logistical support from Bombay and of calming the nerves of that Presidency's government, which he did admirably.<sup>37</sup>

1800 saw another planned attack on Batavia cancelled because of the perceived threat to India following another peace treaty in Europe and Rainier's relations with Wellesley reached a low point with the former's refusal to support an attack on Mauritius.<sup>38</sup> The following year involved much logistical effort to support the movement of General Baird's army from India to the Red Sea, where it participated in the removal of French forces from Egypt.<sup>39</sup>

The Peace of Amiens from March 1802 to May 1803, initiated the rapid reduction in Rainier's squadron, leading to his belief that he might be recalled. However, his experience in an atmosphere of impending war ensured that he was kept in position.<sup>40</sup>

Part of the Treaty of Amiens was the restoration of Pondicherry to France. But the British government, fearing the benefit it would give to France if war resumed, ordered Wellesley not to return it. However, a French squadron under Admiral Linois arrived in July 1803 to claim it. Delaying tactics gave time for Rainier to bring his own squadron and anchor it amongst the French ships off Pondicherry. But Linois escaped at night leaving lights on the buoys to deceive the British. Although still at peace and without orders to attack the French, Rainier has been criticised for not seizing the French ships which went on to cause considerable damage to British shipping.<sup>41</sup> But it was almost another six weeks before Rainier was to hear officially of the outbreak of war and it is certain that, if he had taken action, there would have been a strident diplomatic reaction from France which Rainier would have found impossible to defend without having direct orders from London for such action. Nevertheless, the main objective of Rainier's move, the defence of Pondicherry, was achieved.

The remainder of the year, and into 1804, saw the struggle to protect the trade culminating in the battle of Pulo Aur the following February. Unsure where Linois was, without information from the Company as to when the China Fleet would sail, and with insufficient ships to protect all the trade, Rainier had gambled that the China Fleet would be safe. Unfortunately it was discovered by Linois. However, aggressive action by its Commodore, Nathaniel Dance,

<sup>37</sup> Parkinson, *War in the Eastern Seas*, pp. 140, 148.

<sup>38</sup> B.L., I.O.R., Home Misc. Series, H/481, Rainier to Wellesley, 20 December 1800 and Wellesley to Rainier 5 February 1801.

<sup>39</sup> B.L., I.O.R., East India Company General Correspondence, E/4/457, Abstract of Dispatches, 19 May, 1801.

<sup>40</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Admiralty, 6 October 1802, St. Vincent to Rainier, 16 November 1802, in D. Smith (ed.), *Letters of Lord St. Vincent*, vol. 2, N.R.S. vol. LXI (London, 1927), p. 265.

<sup>41</sup> Parkinson, *War in the Eastern Seas*, pp. 204-6.



drove off the French who believed the convoy was escorted by British third rates. Debate continues as to whether Rainier was correct in not attending the convoy, but with only one serviceable “64” against the 80 gun *Marengo* and its attendant heavy frigates victory would not be a foregone conclusion.<sup>42</sup>

The remainder of Rainier’s time in command, until March 1805, was largely taken up in trade protection and chasing Linois. Although the Spice Islands had also been returned to the Netherlands at the Peace of Amiens, it was believed that the pusillanimous nature of the Dutch meant that Linois was seen as a far greater threat and therefore the islands were not retaken until 1810. There were no further key events until he handed over command to Rear Admiral Pellew. Yet relief was still not at hand as his final duty was to escort the most valuable convoy ever to have left the East Indies back to England through waters in which Nelson was seeking the enormous Franco Spanish fleet under Villeneuve. Luckily they did not meet and Rainier arrived home safely.

But peace was still not at hand. The Navy Board scrutinised Rainier’s records to ensure that all his paperwork was in order. After eleven years this was not entirely the case and much communication followed until the accounts were finally settled. This friction did not stop the Navy Board from asking Rainier’s advice on the optimum organisation to ensure naval supply and accurate accounting systems in India, which he readily gave. Surprisingly no honours or awards were given to Rainier and he was not selected as the Admiralty candidate for the seat of Sandwich during the 1806 and 1807 elections. But he stood as an independent in 1807 and came first in the pole. Unfortunately he did not have long to make an impact in the House of Commons, dying in April 1808. A chronology of Rainier’s life from 1794 can be found in Appendix Two.

These studies raised a number of issues which need to be analysed; the reason he remained in India during a period when the normal posting of command was three years<sup>43</sup> when the Admiralty was keen to rotate its flag officers, when there was pressure from deserving officers to be given commands, and when there were continual rumours that Rainier was to be replaced. One also needs to answer what were the reasons he received no honours, even though there were also rumours about a knighthood. As Rainier was clearly a competent admiral who commanded for an unprecedented eleven years, one needs to answer the question as to why there is an almost complete absence of mention of him in the literature.

### **Historiography**

There has been no full biography written on Rainier. However several refer to him either in compendia or in books on related subjects. Rainier is too young for Charnock’s *Biographia*

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., pp. 229-235.

<sup>43</sup> T.N.A., ADM 8 (various), C.D. Hall, Book Review, *MM*. 95, 2009, p. 493, and Richmond, *The Navy in India 1763-1783*, p. 77.

*Navalis*<sup>44</sup> and too old for Marshall's *Royal Naval Biography*.<sup>45</sup> Brenton wrote in 1823, probably using sources who knew Rainier personally: '... by his kindness to individuals and his attention to the various duties of his station, had acquired the love and esteem of every description of person under his command'.<sup>46</sup> However, Ralfe did not even mention him in his *Naval Biography of Great Britain*, although he did find space to include 13 pages on Rainier's brother-in-law Admiral Vashon, who did not see a shot fired in anger during the French Wars and retired in 1808 after four years as commander in chief at Leith.<sup>47</sup> This fact tends to support the premise that the farther one is from London the less likely one is to be noticed. After mentioning briefly Rainier's capture of the Spice Islands, James, in *The Naval History of Great Britain* only considers at length Linois' escape from Pondicherry in 1803.<sup>48</sup> In describing the dates of the communication of the outbreak of war to India, he shows no criticism of Rainier. In his rather descriptive history of the Royal Navy, Laird Clowes was, like James, critical of Rainier's inertia after finding Linois at Pondicherry before the outbreak of war in 1803.<sup>49</sup> Neither James nor Laird Clowes explores the problems of dispersing a weak squadron across such a vast station when the enemy possesses the most powerful ship in those seas.

Writing at about the same time as Laird Clowes, Laughton's entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* was generally positive.<sup>50</sup> He described Rainier as eminently suited for the East Indies role due to his long experience there. But Laughton is not always reliable, he was mistaken about Rainier serving in the Company's Maritime Service, he did not mention his command of the *Astraea* (32) in the West Indies between 1786 and 1790, and made the common mistake that he commanded until 1804, rather than the actual March 1805.

Nor does Rainier appear much in the several biographies of Wellesley and their authors show a remarkable ignorance of the impact of the navy on Wellesley's successes. The nineteenth century biographies of Wellesley are rather more hagiographies, providing the opportunity to establish a school of thought critical to Rainier over the one issue – the only one which they thought worth mentioning. Malleon and Hutton, both writing in the 1890s, introduced Rainier only to criticise him over his refusal to support Wellesley's desire for an attack on Mauritius. The former wrote: 'But it is not given to all British admirals to possess that disregard for punctiliousness which distinguished a Nelson'.<sup>51</sup> Hutton described Rainier as: 'a martinet of the most pedantic school, who had already, on another occasion, acted without Wellesley's orders'.<sup>52</sup> If Hutton had read Wellesley's letters to Dundas he would have known

<sup>44</sup> J. Charnock, *Biographica Navalis*, Six vols (London, 1798).

<sup>45</sup> J. Marshall, *Royal Naval Biography*, Twelve vols (London, 1823).

<sup>46</sup> E.P. Brenton, *The Naval History of Great Britain from the Year MDCCLXXXIII to MDCCCXXXVI*, vol. 2 (London, 1823), p. 172.

<sup>47</sup> J. Ralfe, *The Naval Biography of Great Britain: consisting of historical memoirs of those officers of the British Navy who distinguished themselves during the reign of George III* (London, 1828).

<sup>48</sup> W. James, *The Naval History of Great Britain*, Six vols (London, 1860, 7<sup>th</sup> edition, 1886), vol. III, pp. 208-11.

<sup>49</sup> Sir W. Laird Clowes, *The Royal Navy: A History - From Earliest Times to 1900*, seven vols (London, 1899).

<sup>50</sup> Sir J.K. Laughton, *Dictionary of National Biography*, Lee, S. (ed.), vol. XLVII (London, 1909), pp. 622-3.

<sup>51</sup> G.B. Malleon, *Life of the Marquess Wellesley, K.G.* (London, 1889), p. 91.

<sup>52</sup> W.H. Hutton, *The Marquess Wellesley, K.G.* (London, 1893), p. 131.

that Wellesley did not have the authority to give orders to the admiral – a situation which he continually tried to change.

Unfortunately, Malleson and Hutton's view of the admiral even percolated into the twentieth century. P.E. Roberts in his book *India under Wellesley* made only one reference to Rainier and that, naturally, concerns his refusal to "cooperate" over the attack on Mauritius. Again he referred to the comment of Rainier about needing 'express orders from the Crown'.<sup>53</sup> Confusion arose from a misunderstanding of the inability of the governor general to give orders to the naval commander-in-chief. He quoted J. Mill to support his view:

It is impossible to avoid suspecting that he [Rainier] was influenced, however unconsciously, by a jealous tenaciousness of authority which disdained receiving orders from an East India Company Governor.<sup>54</sup>

Roberts made no reference to the other points made by the admiral; the proximity to the monsoon season, the poor accuracy of charts of the Mauritius coastline, the need for more troops than were available, and the vulnerability of the Trade that would result in so many warships being diverted from trade protection.

C.N. Parkinson from the 1930s to the 1950s is the only naval historian to have undertaken a detailed study of the entire period of the Great French War in the East Indies, both from a naval and mercantile point of view.<sup>55</sup> This makes his writings and opinions critical to an understanding of Rainier as he could fully appreciate the challenges of commanding on such a large, remote station. Yet even Parkinson failed to realise in his PhD thesis that John Spratt and Peter Rainier junior were the admiral's nephews, not his sons. In *War in the Eastern Seas* Parkinson took a positive view of Rainier's overall achievements noting especially his skills as a seaman and his extensive knowledge of the station.<sup>56</sup> He wrote in depth of Rainier's strategic abilities although he was critical of both Linois' escape from Pondicherry in 1803 and from the trap laid for him by Rainier in late 1804.<sup>57</sup> His belief was that, after ten years on station, the admiral had become rather tired. Parkinson also had some criticisms over his reactions to the near disaster of the Battle of Pulo Aur.<sup>58</sup> A detailed review of Rainier's actions around the battle of Pulo Aur appeared at the same time in Gillespie's article in *The*

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<sup>53</sup> P.E. Roberts, *India under Wellesley* (London, 1929), pp. 147-8.

<sup>54</sup> J. Hill, *History of India*, vol. VI, p. 246, quoted in P.E. Roberts, *India under Wellesley* (London, 1929), p. 148.

<sup>55</sup> C.N. Parkinson, *Trade in the Eastern Seas 1793-1813* (Cambridge, 1937), *The Trade Winds*, Parkinson (ed.) (London 1948), *War in the Eastern Seas 1793-1815* (London, 1954), *Trade and War in the Eastern Seas 1803-10*, unpublished PhD thesis (University of London 1935).

<sup>56</sup> Parkinson, *War in the Eastern Seas 1793-1815*.

<sup>57</sup> This important episode is reviewed in Chapter Four.

<sup>58</sup> The Battle of Pulo Aur, 16<sup>th</sup> February 1804. The China Trade Fleet, returning from Canton without naval escort, and under the command of Commodore Dance, was attacked by a French squadron under Admiral Linois in the *Marengo* (84). Five East Indiamen, pretending to be British 64's, attacked the French and caused Linois to flee

*Mariner's Mirror*.<sup>59</sup> Gillespie clearly demonstrated Rainier's anxiety and frustration over the lack of information about the sailing dates and course of the China Fleet, together with his actions to protect it. However he was puzzled by Rainier's orders to the small squadron he had sent on this duty not to sail further east than Penang, whereby it might have met the China Fleet. Admiral Ballard, who had long experience in the Far East 'under both sail and steam', commented on this article in a later *Mariner's Mirror*. He believed that: 'Rainier's dispositions were the best that could be foreseen'.<sup>60</sup> Parkinson showed little interest in the complex logistical requirements of the command but he did write favourably about Rainier's background and personality. There is a synopsis by Parkinson in Appendix E of *War in the Eastern Seas*.<sup>61</sup>

Whilst Parkinson did not explore fully the difficulties of commanding a squadron in the East Indies, he did acknowledge the speed with which Rainier reacted to seal off the Red Sea when Bonaparte invaded Egypt, and the skill with which he generally dispersed his ships. He also supported the admiral in his conflict with Richard Wellesley over his refusal to support an attack on Mauritius in 1801.<sup>62</sup> This is the one issue which gives Rainier the most exposure, usually via biased books on the Governor General. But Parkinson's views did not dent the pro Wellesley faction so that even John Galbraith, not renowned as a naval historian, felt he knew enough to describe Rainier as 'a recalcitrant admiral'.<sup>63</sup>

Revival of Rainier's reputation has resumed only recently in the spurt of activity stimulated by the "Nelson Decade". Wilkinson, in *Contemporaries of Nelson*, joins Parkinson, as the only authors to make an in depth study of Rainier.<sup>64</sup> Whilst admitting that the admiral was not exactly in the Nelson mould, he felt Rainier's abilities were more appropriate for the East Indies Station, being an able administrator and manager as well as an excellent navigator. It is worth noting that the book's editors, Le Fevre and Harding, chose Rainier for inclusion in the book for his 'administrative and diplomatic skills of the highest order'.<sup>65</sup> Wilkinson is also an expert in the management in the navy, the interrelationships between the various Admiralty boards and how they interacted with the station commanders; his views can be found in *The British Navy and the State in the Eighteenth Century*.<sup>66</sup> Thus he was able to appreciate Rainier's particular skills in these fields.

A forthcoming book on victualling the Royal Navy during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, by Roger Knight and Martin Wilcox, describes clearly the organisation and

<sup>59</sup> Col. R. St. J. Gillespie, 'Sir Nathaniel Dance's Battle off Pulo Auro', *M.M.*, 21, No. 2, 1935, pp. 163-86.

<sup>60</sup> Admiral G.A. Ballard, letter in *MM*, 22, 1936, p. 108.

<sup>61</sup> Parkinson, *War in the Eastern Seas*, pp. 431-6.

<sup>62</sup> Richard Wellesley, Earl of Mornington, Governor General of India 1797-1805, elder brother of Duke of Wellington whose career he launched in India; future Foreign Minister.

<sup>63</sup> J.S. Galbraith, 'The "Turbulent Frontier" as a Factor in British Expansion', in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 2, No. 2 (Jan. 1960), p. 154.

<sup>64</sup> C. Wilkinson, 'Peter Rainier, 1741-1808', in P. Le Fevre & R. Harding (eds), *British Admirals of the Napoleonic Wars: The Contemporaries of Nelson* (London, 2005), pp. 91-112.

<sup>65</sup> P. Le Fevre, & R. Harding (eds), *British Admirals of the Napoleonic Wars*, p. 15.

<sup>66</sup> C. Wilkinson, *The British Navy and the State in the Eighteenth Century* (Woodbridge, 2004).

process of this key task which enabled British predominance at sea. Appreciating the unique issues surrounding victualling in the East Indies, an entire chapter addresses how Rainier and Basil Cochrane successfully met the challenge.<sup>67</sup>

Of the literature in which Rainier is placed in a secondary role, perhaps Edward Ingram is the most important, illustrating the geopolitical aspects with which Rainier had to contend in his writings of books and articles on the beginnings of the Great Game in Asia. These describe the relationship between the Governor General, Lord Wellesley, and the Secretary of State for War, Dundas.<sup>68</sup> The study of the British government's motivations and actions in the east were reviewed by Ingram in several books and articles. His first book, *Two Views of British India: The Private Correspondence of Mr. Dundas and Lord Wellesley: 1798-1801*, is particularly useful in illustrating not only the relationship between the two individual men, but also the organisational conflict brought about by trying to manage a situation from such enormous distance with inadequate information. As part of this exercise Ingram judged the performance of the Royal Navy somewhat negatively, although not singling out Rainier for any particular opprobrium. He positioned the events in India, Egypt and the Middle East into the context of the evolution of the British Empire and the beginning of the "Great Game in Asia" whereby Britain did its utmost to defend its Indian Empire by a series of treaties with different powers. He said, somewhat provocatively, that:

... the Treaty of Amiens represented both Britain's failure to achieve her war aims and the geopolitical success of the French invasion on Egypt... in throwing the British on the defensive in the wider world. Britain returned her overseas

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<sup>67</sup> R. Knight and M. Wilcox, *Sustaining the Fleet, 1793-1815, War, the British Navy and the Contractor State* (Woodbridge, 2010).

<sup>68</sup> E. Ingram, *Two Views of British India: The Private Correspondence of Mr. Dundas and Lord Wellesley 1798-1802* (London, 1970).

— *Commitment to Empire: Prophecies of the Great Game in Asia 1797-180* (Oxford, 1981).

— *In Defence of British India. Great Britain in the Middle East 1775-1842* (London, 1984).

— 'A Preview of the Great Game in Asia – I: The British Occupation of Aden and Perim in 1799', *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 9, No. 1 (Jan. 1973), pp. 3-18,

— 'A Preview of the Great Game in Asia – III: The Origins of the British Expedition to Egypt in 1801', vol. 9, No. 3 (Oct. 1973), pp. 296-314,

— 'A Preview of the Great Game in Asia – IV: British Agents in the Near East in the War of the Second Coalition, 1798-1801, vol. 10, No. 1 (Jan. 1974), pp. 15-35.

— 'From Trade to Empire in the Near East: I: The End of the Spectre of the Overland Trade, 1775-1801', vol. 14, No. 1 (Jan. 1978), pp. 3-21.

— 'From Trade to Empire in the Near East: III: The Uses of the Residency at Baghdad, 1794-1804, vol. 30, No. 3 (October 1978), pp. 435-460.

— 'The Geopolitics of the First British Expedition to Egypt – II: The Cabinet crisis of September 1800', vol. 30, No. 3 (June 1994), pp. 435-460.

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— 'The Geopolitics of the First British Expedition to Egypt – III: The Red Sea Campaign, 1800-1', vol. 31, No. 1 (Jan. 1995), pp. 146-69.

— 'The Geopolitics of the First British Expedition to Egypt – IV: Occupation and Withdrawal, 1801-3', vol. 31, No. 2 (April 1995), pp. 317-46.

conquests not to buy relative security in Europe ... but to buy relative security in Asia by persuading the French to withdraw from Egypt.<sup>69</sup>

Some might argue that this was indeed the case as Dundas was a keen supporter of the British invasion of Egypt in 1800 in order to stop that country being used as a bargaining tool by the French. Unfortunately, at the time the peace preliminaries were signed, the British government did not know that the French in Egypt had capitulated.

Ingram's view of the navy's role can easily be discerned in his chapter: 'The Failure of British Sea Power' in his book *In Defence of British India*. In summary he said:

The failures of British sea power in the war of the Second Coalition were numerous. The navy had not protected British trade; it had not protected the British Empire, it had not protected Great Britain's allies; it had not protected British social stability; it had failed to protect Great Britain as [a] great power. An army was needed to remove the French from Egypt.<sup>70</sup>

Although he went on to praise the navy for landing the army in Egypt, this is a severe criticism, of which some must be laid at Rainier's feet if he was correct.<sup>71</sup>

N.A.M. Rodger conjoined the use of sea power to the rise of empire in his article in volume II of the *Oxford History of the British Empire*.<sup>72</sup> In his *Command of the Ocean*, he only referred to Rainier to note his relaxed attitude to Bonaparte's invasion of Egypt, the size of his fortune, and his return home in 1805 escorting a valuable convoy through French infested waters.<sup>73</sup> He summed up the admiral as 'a safe pair of hands whose sound judgement and long experience on the station had earned the trust of the Admiralty and the East India Company'.<sup>74</sup> Kenneth Breen amended Laughton's original *D.N.B.* entry with little change.<sup>75</sup> But, whilst he did acknowledge that Rainier did not return to England until 1805, he reiterated Laughton's two other errors. Meanwhile the positive attitude to Rainier has continued in Brian Vale's article on the subject of scurvy and Rainier's role in the navy's acceptance of lemon juice as a cure explored in *The Mariner's Mirror*.<sup>76</sup>

## **Primary Sources**

<sup>69</sup> — 'The Geopolitics of the First British Expedition to Egypt – IV', p. 321.

<sup>70</sup> Ingram, *In Defence of British India*, p. 76.

<sup>71</sup> The validity of Ingram's views is discussed in Chapter Eight.

<sup>72</sup> N.A.M. Rodger, 'Sea-Power and Empire 1688-1793', in P.J. Marshall, *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. II (Oxford 2008), pp. 169-183.

<sup>73</sup> N.A.M. Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean, a Naval History of Britain 1649-1815* (Bury St. Edmunds 2004), pp. 460, 523, 542.

<sup>74</sup> Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean*, p. 356.

<sup>75</sup> *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, J.K. Laughton (rev. K. Breen), 'Peter Rainier' (Oxford, 2004).

<sup>76</sup> B. Vale, 'The Conquest of Scurvy in the Royal Navy 1793-1800: A Challenge to Current Orthodoxy', *M.M.*, 94, 2008, pp. 160-175.

### Major Sources

Although Rainier was a voluminous writer of official letters, virtually none of a private nature has surfaced. Personal contact with two present day descendents, Colin Rainier in Ireland and Peter Rainier on Vancouver Island, has not proved fruitful, both reporting that they have nothing relevant to the admiral. We are therefore left with three major primary sources of documents pertaining to Rainier, all relating entirely to official matters. They are his personal papers at the National Maritime Museum, Admiralty records at the National Archive, and the papers of the East India Company, Wellesley's and Earl Spencer's private papers at the British Library. Spencer papers are also found in four volumes of the N.R.S. which illustrate the good working relationship between the First Lord and Rainier.<sup>77</sup>

It would appear that the only documents once owned by the family were given to the National Maritime Museum by Captain J.W. Rainier R.N. in 1948. These take the form of his logs, letter and order books from his time as a master and commander in 1778 until 1807.<sup>78</sup> Additionally there are also many letters of his two nephews, Rear Admiral John Spratt Rainier and Captain Peter Rainier, who both served under him in the East Indies.<sup>79</sup> Much can be discerned of the admiral's character from one letter he wrote to nephew Peter Rainier on the latter attaining post rank in 1805.<sup>80</sup> It is a weakness that there are no personal letters so his character can only be deduced from his official correspondence. Nevertheless one can surmise much of the love of detail from the voluminous nature of his letters.

The National Archive is the source for Rainier's early career which can be ascertained from the ADM 36 Muster Books, and the ADM 6 Commission and Warrant List. The majority of Rainier's official correspondence can be found in ADM 1 and ADM 2 Admiralty In and Out Letters, providing generous detail. These are also the source of data on Admirals Hughes, Keith, and Pellew. ADM 106 provides useful evidence of Rainier's relationship with the Navy Board illustrating much attention to detail, certain conflict and stress, and the attempts to reconcile the admiral's accounts after he returned to England. The key three way link between the Navy Board, Rainier, and Victualling Contractor the Hon. Basil Cochrane also benefits from study of ADM 106 and ADM 110. Cochrane's response to his alleged ill treatment by the Victualling Board can be read in ADM 7/40. ADM 7/733-748 illustrates Hughes' management of his squadron during the American Revolution, from which Rainier learned what to do and not to do as a fleet commander.

ADM 106 contains the leave books which prove that Rainier did not serve in the Company Marine Service as presumed in the previously mentioned *D.N.B./ O.D.N.B.* entries. ADM 8 is useful in defining the size of the East Indies squadron but causes confusion as to who was its

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<sup>77</sup>J.S. Corbett (ed.), *The Private Papers of George, Second Earl Spencer, vol. I*, N.R.S. XLVI (London, 1913), Admiral H.W. Richmond (ed.), *The Private Papers of George, Second Earl Spencer, vol. III*, N.R.S. LVIII (London, 1924).

<sup>78</sup>N.M.M., RAI/1-RAI/12.

<sup>79</sup>N.M.M., RAI/101-RAI/112, N.M.M., RAI/201-1202.

<sup>80</sup>N.M.M., RAI/201/8, Rainier to Capt. Peter Rainier Jnr., 2 April 1805.

commander-in-chief as the names it gives conflict with what is known from other sources.<sup>81</sup> General information can be gleaned from ADM 50, Admirals' Journals and ADM 51 and 53, ships' logs. The decision process by which Rainier replaced Rear-Admiral Gardner as the commanding officer in the East Indies can be explored in the Admiral Board minutes of ADM 3.

The British Library holds not only the records of the East India Company, but also the official correspondence of Lord Wellesley and Earl Spencer the First Lord of the Admiralty from 1788 to 1801.<sup>82</sup> They therefore include considerable documentation between themselves and Rainier. The Company's Home Miscellaneous and Maritime Series hold much of the correspondence between Rainier and the various Company officials, including the presidents of Madras and Bombay Councils.<sup>83</sup>

### Supporting Sources.

The East Kent Archive was a good source of information on Rainier's early life.<sup>84</sup> The Huguenot Library in London was of limited benefit but providing some background information.<sup>85</sup> Following on chronologically, the Hughes letter books at the Royal Naval Museum, Portsmouth, and East India Company Correspondence at the British Library, give a good insight into the issues he faced as a C-in-C in the East Indies during the American Revolution, when Rainier was one of his captains.<sup>86</sup> Also useful at the N.M.M. are the Sandwich papers for an understanding of Sir Edward Hughes' relationship with the First Lord, and the Keith papers which illustrate not only how Keith managed Rainier but also what he thought of the East Indies station, its connection with that of the Cape of Good Hope, and the advisability of conjoining the Cape and East Indies stations.<sup>87</sup> More letters of Lord Keith can be found in Perrin's N.R.S. Volume One, illustrating his experience as an officer in the Company Maritime Service which helped to form his views on the challenges of commanding in the Eastern Seas.<sup>88</sup> The complexities of navigation in the Eastern Seas come to light in the Remarks Books of various vessels sailing in that region.<sup>89</sup> They are to be found at the United Kingdom Hydrographic Office at Taunton.

As Dundas was so important in the direction of war strategy and government in India, useful papers of his can be found in the Melville papers at the British Library.<sup>90</sup> Personal letters can be found in the manuscript series. Merrick Shaw, private secretary to the Governor General, was a close friend of Captain Benjamin William Page, RN, and their correspondence in the

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<sup>81</sup> See Chapter Two.

<sup>82</sup> B. L., Add. Mss. Wellesley Papers, B. L., Add. Mss. Spencer Papers.

<sup>83</sup> B.L., IOR Series.

<sup>84</sup> East Kent Archive. R/U888, F18, F22, Sa/R/RF1 – RF25.

<sup>85</sup> Huguenot Library. Wagner & Bouverie Collections, Society's Quarto Series.

<sup>86</sup> R.N. Library, Portsmouth, 1955, 1977, 1981, Mss. 194.11987, B.L., IOR/H/141-190.

<sup>87</sup> N.M.M., SAN/F, N.M.M., KEI/5 – KEI/8 AND KEI/L.

<sup>88</sup> W.G. Perrin (ed.), *Letters & Papers of Admiral Viscount Keith*, I, N.R.S. LXII (London, 1927).

<sup>89</sup> UKHO, Miscellaneous Papers, Vols. 42, 64, 65.

<sup>90</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. Various.



British Library gives an insight into the issues facing a naval captain in Rainier's squadron.<sup>91</sup> General correspondence of the three presidencies lies in the E Series of the India Office Records, and that pertaining to naval issues and the Bombay Marine are covered in the L/MAR series.<sup>92</sup> The minutes of the Secret Committee of the Commissioners for the Affairs of India, together with its letters, give a good view of the strategic and intelligence matters of the period. They are found in the L/ P&S/ Series.<sup>93</sup> Relevant minutes of presidency board meetings can be found in Board's Collection Series.<sup>94</sup> Many documents found in these sources often directly or indirectly pertain to Wellesley and are therefore important background material. Not to be forgotten is the Fort William-India House Correspondence, edited by S.R. Kohli, which gives a useful insight into the letters written by the governors general to the Court of Directors of the Company. Especially important are those letters illustrating how the Company provided the navy with ordnance.<sup>95</sup>

In addition to the above, the author has also had access to the Bombay Diaries at the University of Exeter. The Bombay Diaries consist of a selection of all those documents covering the transactions and communications of the Bombay Presidency relating to the activities of the Company, the Royal Navy and the British Government in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Arabia. These documents give a thorough picture of what were the concerns of the governments of India and Britain at a strategic level, of the relationship between the Company and the navy, and of the issues that concerned government, company and naval officers at a local level.<sup>96</sup> They illustrate the complexities of dealing with Arab rulers, supplying ships, soldiers and sailors with the necessary materials to perform their duties in such a harsh climate, and of the problems of communication and misunderstanding so easily engendered.

The Scottish National Archive and the National Library of Scotland are prime sources of material relating to Henry Dundas who played such a large part in defining the British strategy for the war in the East Indies.<sup>97</sup> Documents relating to one of Rainier's captains, and to Basil Cochrane are also found here, as are the family correspondence of the Malcolm family, of which Sir Pulteney Malcolm was Rainier's flag captain.<sup>98</sup> One letter written by Rainier to Sir Pulteney Malcolm, after he had returned to England in 1805, one from the admiral to Sir John Malcolm in India in 1802, and one to Admiral Alexander Cochrane in 1806 are the only pieces of private correspondence discovered by the author.<sup>99</sup> The Blair

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<sup>91</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 13753

<sup>92</sup> B.L., IOR/E/ 1 – 4, <sup>92</sup> B.L., BIOR/L/MAR/1, 3, 7 and IOR/L/MAR/C.

<sup>93</sup> B.L., IOR/L/PS/1 – 6, 19.

<sup>94</sup> B.L., IOR/F/4.

<sup>95</sup> S.R. Kohli, *Fort William-India House Correspondence (Military Series)*, vols XV-XXI (Delhi, 1969-1978).

<sup>96</sup> Exeter University, Bombay Diaries 45, 46, 48, 50, 53, 54, 58, 59, 62, 64, 65, 66A, 67, 68, 69, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 87, 88, 90, 93, 98, 105, 106, 107, 109, 110, 112, 116, 121, 127, 151, 158.

<sup>97</sup> Scottish Archive, Henry Dundas Correspondence, GD/51/2 & 3, National Library of Scotland, Ms. 7199, 9735.

<sup>98</sup> N.L.S., Malcolm Family Correspondence, Ms. Acc. 6990-5.

<sup>99</sup> N.L.S., Pulteney Family Correspondence, Acc. 6990-5, ff. 1-12. N.L.S., Pulteney Family Correspondence, Acc. 6990-5, ff. 1-12. N.L.S., Cochrane Family Correspondence, f. 71, Rainier to Cochrane 6 May 1806.

Adam Collection at Kelty, Kinross-shire, contains many documents pertaining to Admiral Sir Charles Adam who served under Rainier from 1796 to 1802.<sup>100</sup> The author was the first person to view these papers. The admiral's order book, copied by Adam, reveals how the squadron's captains were managed. The Red Sea campaign is also particularly well covered. Further correspondence concerning Basil Cochrane's battles with the government can also be read at the National Library of Scotland.<sup>101</sup> It indicates that Cochrane was both a friend of Dundas and also that he had the ability to command a private audience with the Prime Minister, Lord Liverpool.

St. Vincent, the First Lord between 1801 and 1804, with his explanations of why Rainier could not be replaced, gives the only feedback – however slight – as to what were the perceptions of Rainier at the Admiralty when he refused Rainier's request to be allowed home.<sup>102</sup>

For the period towards the end of Rainier's command, and during that of Pellew, the Grey family papers at Durham University and the Grenville Papers at the Huntington Library in San Marino, California, were of limited benefit but provided some background information.<sup>103</sup>

The question did arise as to how useful would be a study of those potentially relevant records residing in India. It was put to three experts on the East India Company, the late Anthony Farrington, Huw Bowen and William Dalrymple. All advised that the time that would be consumed in obtaining access, the uncertainty of actually finding anything relevant, and the fact that the vast proportion of documents pertaining to the Company are in the British Library, meant that such an expenditure of effort would be unproductive.

## **Chapter Plan**

This thesis is divided into two sections. After the Introductory Chapter the organisational environment in which Rainier operated, namely the Royal Navy and the Company and the communication and intelligence tools that were available to him on this vast station, are analysed. These are investigated in Chapters Two, Three and Four. The second section, chapters Five, Six and Seven, reviews in detail his goals and achievements and how successful he was in meeting them. His major goal was the protection of Trade; his second one was the defence of British possessions, necessitating both a defence of current colonies and, the occupation of enemy territories; his third achievement. In order to best utilise his resources across the station Rainier required an effective logistical organisation and this

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<sup>100</sup> Blair Adam Papers, Private Collection.

<sup>101</sup> N.L.S., Basil Cochrane correspondence, Ms. 1054, 2264, 2303, 2573, 5375.

<sup>102</sup> D.B. Smith (ed.), *The Letters of Lord St. Vincent 1801-1804*, I & II, N.R.S. LV & LX (London, 1922 & 1927).

<sup>103</sup> Durham University, Charles, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Grey Papers, ASC Ref Z GRE.

constitutes his fourth achievement. A Conclusion summarises Rainier's position in the wider chronicle of British admirals.

**Chapter One**, the Introductory Chapter, illustrates the key importance of the East Indies during the French Wars and gives a brief description of the important events in Rainier's life before he was appointed to command in the East Indies. It also reviews the Historiography and Sources used.

**Chapter Two** analyses how he came to be appointed to command in the East Indies. An evaluation follows of his behaviour within the naval structure, of his dealing with the Admiralty, and of his skill in managing downwards. Finally his ability as a leader and communicator is investigated.

The second organisational factor that must be understood in order to evaluate Rainier's achievements is how he cooperated with the Company. This joint stock organisation was responsible for the government of all British possessions in the East Indies. Especially important was Rainier's relationship with Richard Wellesley, the Governor General from 1797 to 1805, a difficult man to handle and one whose goal was to establish Britain as the major land power in India. How it was structured and how Rainier dealt with this unique source of power is analysed in **Chapter Three**.

Communications, both within the station and between Europe and the Indies, were difficult and complex. How they were managed, and by what means, is analysed in **Chapter Four**. Intelligence, which played a large part in shaping Rainier's decisions, naturally used these communications channels. How successful he was in the use of this intelligence, in analysing its sources and quality, and what impact it had on his decision making and assessment of priorities is then evaluated.

Having studied the environment in which Rainier operated the second section studies his achievements. **Chapter Five** describes the geographic features of the station and its weather patterns which dictated the trade routes that are then described. How Rainier protected the trade is then analysed, differentiating between the inter-continental and the intra station trade. The impact of commerce raiding concludes this chapter.

**Chapter Six** reviews Rainier's defence of British colonies and the acquisition of enemy possessions. This entails an explanation of the political situation of the army and how he cooperated with it. The first part covers the offensive period between 1795 and 1798, the second defensive period from 1798 to 1805. Not to be forgotten is the navy's role in supporting the army with coastal blockades, the transport and convoying of troops and their equipment.

In order to execute his strategy Rainier needed a well found and well manned squadron. **Chapter Seven** analyses how he maintained the effectiveness of his vessels through the

acquisition of naval supplies, ordnance, victuals and healthy crews, together with the necessary finance to enable his squadron to operate over such a vast station. The role of the Admiralty, Navy, Victualling, and Sick and Hurt Boards in maintaining the squadron is also analysed, taking into account the problems caused by the enormous distance from London.

The Conclusion, **Chapter Eight**, examines Rainier's record over the eleven years during which he was in command – a unique period of time for a commander-in-chief. It acknowledges how rapidly trade grew under his protection, what role he played in the extension of British control of India, what colonial expansion he had achieved, how well he managed the people on his station, and how efficient a logistics and financial manager he was. Given the external factors of physical complexity of the station, and the role of the Company, it emphasises how much more commendable were Rainier's achievements than if they had been made on a more traditional station. Naturally there were some events that occurred upon which there is criticism of Rainier. One major issue is that of corruption. He had a close relationship with the Hon. Basil Cochrane, the prime supplier of victuals to the squadron. The questions are asked as to whether or not the admiral manipulated the accounting system to benefit both himself and Cochrane and if there is any suggestion that suspicion in the Navy Board might have been the reason that Rainier received no sign of approbation from the government after his eleven successful years in command in India. As there is no direct evidence, the balance of probability is analysed. The arguments are examined. Finally, a decision is made as to how far he could be deemed to be a successful C-in-C, comparing the import of the achievements of a managerial and diplomatic admiral with those of the more traditionally honoured winners of battles.

## CHAPTER 2.

### **‘THE BOARD COULD NOT COMPLY WITH YOUR REQUEST TO BE RELIEVED’.<sup>1</sup> RAINIER AND THE ROYAL NAVY.**

This chapter will review Rainier’s relations with the most important of the organisations with which he had to operate, the Royal Navy. He was first and foremost a naval officer and without its active support, and its belief that he was successful, he would have been recalled. Initially one should assess the factors which led to his appointment. This will be followed by an evaluation of how Rainier used these skills in his contacts with the Royal Navy hierarchy.

#### **The Choice of Rainier.**

By early November 1793 Gardner had been assigned to succeed Cornwallis as C-in-C East Indies, having previously taken a squadron to the West Indies in March. The Board of Admiralty Rough Minutes state: ‘Alan Gardner Esq., Rear Admiral of the Blue, to be Commander in Chief of a squadron of His Majesty’s Ships and Vessels to be employed on a Particular Service’.<sup>2</sup> Although not public knowledge at the time, it is clear that there was a plan to attack Mauritius using troops sent from India by the Company. That this service was ultimately the East Indies is shown by a letter from the Admiralty to Gardner telling him that, as he is to be commander in chief in the East Indies, he was to load stores for that destination into East Indiamen and not into warships.<sup>3</sup>

The Company had a change of heart and withdrew its offer of troops intended for the attack on Mauritius because it was concerned that such a move would leave the mainland of India unprotected and the troops could only arrive at the island a few weeks before the local monsoon season.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, the newly acquired colonies in the West Indies required garrisons and ships to defend them, which meant fewer forces available for the East Indies. Calling off the entire expedition therefore meant the East Indies command was no longer senior enough for a rear admiral. Gardner remained with the Channel Fleet, possibly waiting to take up the command when more reinforcements for the Indian Ocean became available. But a small British squadron was still needed to protect British interests in the east as Cornwallis had left no naval vessels on that station. The question now was who would best fill the role of commodore until, and if, French activity in the East became so threatening that a rear admiral would be needed to command the station.

Although there would be many senior captains whom the Admiralty might have chosen, Rainier had several attributes that made him an attractive candidate. He already had extensive experience in the East Indies in two wars, while his capture of the American privateer and involvement in five fleet actions under Hughes showed he was a fighting captain. Indeed, Hughes, who rarely commented on any of his captains, did make positive remarks about Rainier in one battle report to the Admiralty.<sup>5</sup> What would be understood would be his legal knowledge, built up in the West Indies, trying to stop illegal trade between British, French and rebel colonies, and his concern for his men – an irreplaceable commodity in the Far East.

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<sup>1</sup> St. Vincent to Rainier, 16 November 1802, D.B. Smith (ed.), *Letters of Lord St. Vincent 1801-4*, vol. 2, p. 265.

<sup>2</sup> T.N.A., ADM 3/129, Board of Admiralty Rough Minutes, 12 November 1793.

<sup>3</sup> T.N.A., ADM 2/603, Admiralty to Gardner, 20 December, 1793.

<sup>4</sup> B.L., I.O.R., L/PS/19, Box 12, William Devaynes, Chairman of the E.I.C., to Henry Dundas, 17 March 1794, G.S. Misra, *British Foreign Policy and Indian Affairs 1783-1815* (London, 1963), p. 29.

<sup>5</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/164, Hughes to Admiralty, 15 July 1782.

He also knew from personal observation about the need for close relations with the Company and the army commanders. Finally, at a time when admirals were likely to complain vociferously if they thought their standing and pride had been damaged, Rainier was a man whose ego would not give pain to the Admiralty if it felt the need to supercede him at a later stage. On the negative side, he had never controlled a squadron, apart from what had fallen to him as a naval captain in command of a ship, he had no senior administrative experience with naval systems, nor with trade protection – the station’s prime responsibility.<sup>6</sup>

The *Suffolk* was already victualled and stored for ‘foreign service’, probably in readiness for the Mauritius expedition, and was close at hand at Spithead. One could believe that the choice of Rainier was not a difficult one and he would be proposed by one of his patrons at the Admiralty Board, Gardner or Stephens - probably Gardner who may have been intended to go out at a more opportune moment for the Mauritius expedition. Rainier must have had an inkling of what was to come because, on 20 February, Admiral Parker, the port admiral at Portsmouth, forwarded to the Admiralty a request from Rainier asking for a week’s leave ‘to settle some private affairs’.<sup>7</sup>

This was the last step up that Gardner was able to provide for Rainier and from now on he would need to rely on other sources for support. There is no evidence of any other officer encouraging his protégé’s career. Yet Rainier could still benefit from the presence of Stephens, still Sandwich’s MP and Secretary to the Board of Admiralty. Indeed Stephen’s promotion to full member of the Board the following year would ensure that support for the junior commodore continued at the highest level. And Rainier was able to show his gratitude to Gardner by appointing his son, Captain Alan Hyde Gardner, to command the naval forces which took Columbo in 1796, thereby acquiring a sizeable sum in prize money.<sup>8</sup>

Rainier’s orders of 25 February 1794 told him to take *Centurion*, *Orpheus*, and *Resistance*, currently cruising off the Cape, under his command, escort the China/ India convoy together with the *Swift*, sloop, to eastern waters and put himself under the command of Cornwallis. [It must be remembered that the Admiralty had no idea that he was on his way home]. If Rainier could find neither Cornwallis nor any other senior officer he was to take command himself and, after consulting with the Governor General and the Governor of Madras act so as ‘to best protect the Trade and Settlements of His Majesty’s Subjects and Allies in the East Indies’.<sup>9</sup> On the same day, a letter to Cornwallis ordered him to take Rainier under his command.<sup>10</sup>

Rainier’s knowledge of the difficulty of obtaining replacement seamen in India would be sufficient incentive for him to try any methods which might maintain the health of his crews. Whether motivated by compassion or the need to keep as many seamen as possible, his request to the Admiralty to release a deserter from the *Suffolk* who had joined the *Marlborough*, was accepted, although he was to lose his bounty.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless this action would have signaled to his crew that Rainier was not at the sadistic end of the spectrum of captains’ behaviour.

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<sup>6</sup> T.N.A., ADM 2/1347, Admiralty to Rainier, 25 February 1794, see **Appendix 9** for details.

<sup>7</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/1006, Parker to Admiralty, 20 February, 1794.

<sup>8</sup> Parkinson, *War in the Eastern Seas*, p. 91.

<sup>9</sup> T.N.A., ADM 2/1347, Admiralty to Rainier, 25 February 1794.

<sup>10</sup> T.N.A., ADM 2/1347, Admiralty to Cornwallis, 25 February 1794.

<sup>11</sup> T.N.A., ADM 2/771, Admiralty to Rainier, 12 February, 1794.

His concern for the health of his crew also paid off. His involvement with the experiment in the use of lemon juice, originally planned for Gardner's aborted expedition to Mauritius, entailed experimenting with larger amounts of lemon juice than was usual and given to all seamen, not just the sick. He arrived with a healthy crew and his report on the matter to the Admiralty formed the basis of a more rigorous application of this anti-scorbutic in the navy. It allowed him to report that he had fewer men on the sick list than when he departed.<sup>12</sup> When he had sailed with Hughes in 1779 the average sick list per ship had been well over 100. The *Suffolk* rarely had more than 30.

In the midst of Rainier's preparations Cornwallis, although he had been given leave to return to England as early as February 1792, sailed into Spithead in the *Minerva* on the 21 April to the great surprise of all concerned.<sup>13</sup> There is no account of any meeting between Cornwallis and Rainier although it must be assumed one took place. An order to Cornwallis from the Admiralty sent the very next day after his arrival, told him to pass to Rainier some of the letters he had received, which the Admiralty had expected to be delivered at some time later when they both met in India. These letters would now be needed by the new commodore.<sup>14</sup> And on the following day Rainier acknowledged to Stephens the receipt of papers given to him by Cornwallis.<sup>15</sup> They indicated that the Admiralty was still comfortable with their decision to send Rainier even though it was now certain there would be no senior officer of the station. But his exact status was demonstrated in the Admiralty letter to Cornwallis on the subject; the letters should be returned to Rainier: 'that he on his arrival in the East Indies, may as Senior Officer *for the time being* [author's italics] carry them into execution'.<sup>16</sup> But there was still confusion on the station as to who was in command. This lasted almost a year; letters from Captain Osborn of the *Centurion* (50), who had been sent out in December and was cruising off the Cape, were written on 20 November and 14 December 1794 to Gardner as C-in-C East Indies.<sup>17</sup>

Rainier sailed on May 2 1794 from St. Helens with Lord Howe's fleet, which was escorting the trade to Quebec and the Mediterranean. On the 11 May he parted company, taking sixty five sail on their journey to India and China, and leaving Howe to search for the French fleet and an incoming French grain convoy in the campaign that terminated in the victory of the 'Glorious First of June'. He did not put into the Cape but sailed directly for India, arriving off Madras on the 11 September. This was about the normal length of passage for an East Indiaman sailing alone but not with a huge convoy.<sup>18</sup> This fact was raised in the press:

[Rainier] has gained great credit among the Commanders of the India ships ... aided by his judicious management, made their passage to Madras in 4 months and 8 days. This is the only instance of so large a fleet performing that voyage in so short a time.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>12</sup> B. Vale, 'The Conquest of Scurvy in the Royal Navy 1793-1800: A Challenge to Current Orthodoxy', *M.M.*, 94 (2008), pp. 160-75.

<sup>13</sup> Parkinson, *War in the Eastern Seas*, p. 59, T.N.A., ADM 1/1006, Parker to Admiralty, 21 April 1794.

<sup>14</sup> T.N.A., ADM 2/604, Admiralty to Cornwallis, 22 April 1794.

<sup>15</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/2397, Rainier to Stephens, 24 April 1794.

<sup>16</sup> T.N.A., ADM 2/604, Admiralty to Cornwallis, 22 April, 1794.

<sup>17</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/167, Osborne to Gardner, 20 November and 14 December 1794.

<sup>18</sup> Wilkinson, 'Peter Rainier', in Le Fevre & Harding (eds), *British Admirals of the Napoleonic Wars*, p. 96.

<sup>19</sup> *St. James Chronicle or the British Evening Post*, 7 March 1795.

The Admiralty had told Rainier that he would be given extra lemon juice, sugar and medicines and also a time keeper, as he had previously requested.<sup>20</sup> As there is no reference to a marine chronometer in the *Suffolk's* log, Wilkinson surmised that there was not one aboard although a letter from the Admiralty to Rainier told him that he would get a timekeeper.<sup>21</sup> But even if he did not have one, it is almost certain that some of the Indiamen would have them and they could have told him the time by signal flags or firing a gun at midday. Whatever tools he had, he confirmed the Admiralty's perception of his navigation skills which Wilkinson describes:

There are almost no landmarks between the Equator and the Cape, which was sighted exactly when expected. Likewise, a near perfect landfall was made off the coast of India after the voyage across the Southern Ocean with frequent entries of 'all convoy in sight'.<sup>22</sup>

### **Managing Relationships.**

Rainier had to manage both downwards and upwards to keep a maximum of independence. Any orders he received would be at least three months out of date and might not be appropriate to the actual conditions in which he found himself. This section will evaluate his relations with the Admiralty, how he handled the appointment of Elphinstone as his temporary commander. Finally, managing downwards, his leadership, patronage and communications skills will be studied.

#### a)The Admiralty.

Once on station, for the first time in his career, Rainier had an independent command. He now had to communicate by letter with his direct superiors, officially the Board of Admiralty. His letters to Nepean, from March 1795 Stephen's successor as the Secretary to the Board of Admiralty, show a detailed mind much concerned with the need to maintain his ships at sea through effective administration. Rainier must have felt some comfort in communicating with the Admiralty, knowing Stephens was now on the Board. He had benefitted from his influence since obtaining his commission in 1768, just before Stephens became MP for Sandwich for the first time.

Even before he departed for the East Indies this trait was shown by his requests for more lemon juice, sugar and medicines.<sup>23</sup> The importance of Rainier's journey to the treatment of scurvy is amply demonstrated in Brian Vale's article in the *Mariner's Mirror*.<sup>24</sup> When he arrived on station, his concerns over the poor condition of stores, led him to request gunpowder from the Company, and many other commodities from the Navy and Victualling Boards.<sup>25</sup>

Rainier's epistolary efforts to keep the Admiralty and Navy Board informed of his actions, clearly allowed them to feel comfortable because he was informed that 'your Conduct subsequent to your arrival at that Presidency merits their Lordships' full approbation'.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>20</sup> T.N.A., ADM 2/772, Admiralty to Rainier, 13 March, 15 March, 17 March, 1794.

<sup>21</sup> T.N.A., ADM 2/772, Admiralty to Rainier 17 March 1794.

<sup>22</sup> Wilkinson, 'Peter Rainier', in Le Fevre & Harding (eds), *British Admirals of the Napoleonic Wars*, p. 95.

<sup>23</sup> T.N.A., ADM 2/772, Admiralty to Rainier, 15 March 1794.

<sup>24</sup> Vale, 'The Conquest of Scurvy in the Royal Navy 1793-1800', *MM*, 94 (2008), pp. 160-175.

<sup>25</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/168, Rainier to Sir John Shore, Governor General, 14 February 1795.

<sup>26</sup> T.N.A., ADM 2/1349, Admiralty to Rainier, 7 May 1795.



Unfortunately for Rainier, the sting in the tail was another letter from the same source on the same day, advising him that Rear Admiral Elphinstone was coming to take overall command of the Cape of Good Hope and the East Indies. But, as a sop, he could now have a flag captain of his own and thus remain a commodore.<sup>27</sup> Spencer, as First Lord, knew that this would not be good news to Rainier and showed his sensitivity by writing to the admiral congratulating him on his captures and confirming all the promotions Rainier wanted before Elphinstone could get involved in case ‘they might have been superceded’.<sup>28</sup> And not even Elphinstone could always obtain approval for his promotions: ‘The Admiralty refuse to confirm half my commissions’.<sup>29</sup> Yet he had already been very successful in his negotiations with the Admiralty. At his initial refusal to take the offered command of the Cape and East Indies, he had been offered a salary of £8,000 p.a. and all the patronage.<sup>30</sup>

Rainier continued to have a good relationship with Spencer. When Spencer wrote to him that he was ‘quitting’ his position as First Lord he continued by:

expressing the satisfaction I have derived from my correspondence with you ... and my hopes that when circumstances permit your return to England, I shall have an opportunity of cultivating in person that acquaintance with you.<sup>31</sup>

However, there is no evidence that this did in fact take place.

Thus the Admiral’s means and frequency of communication seem to have been appreciated. This belief is supported by a letter from Spencer to Rainier written at the height of the Egypt invasion scare. Spencer says that he has not heard from Blankett.<sup>32</sup> He continued: ‘from the measures you very judiciously placed in his hands I have no doubt that Blankett will succeed’.<sup>33</sup> This reinforced another letter written by Spencer a year earlier:

The distance of your Station from home, and the few opportunities which occur of communication with you, leave us so much in the dark with respect to the course of your Operations that it is very difficult to write anything upon the subject of them. I shall therefore confine myself to mentioning my satisfaction that the Expedition ... to Manilla (sic) did not take place.<sup>34</sup>

How well Rainier dealt with the Admiralty, and most importantly, the First Lord, is illustrated by his understanding of the rule of “no surprises for your boss”. In 1800 he refused to help Wellesley, the Governor General, when he asked for naval support for an attack from India on Mauritius. How this affected relations with Wellesley will be examined in Chapter Three. Here will be studied how Rainier communicated the disagreement to the Admiralty, in the face of a savage rebuttal by Wellesley, which included heavy criticism of Rainier’s knowledge and attitude. Rainier therefore wrote to Spencer:

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<sup>27</sup> T.N.A., ADM 2/1349, Admiralty to Rainier, 7 May 1795.

<sup>28</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 75862, Spencer to Rainier, 6 May 1796.

<sup>29</sup> N.M.M., KEI/46, Elphinstone to his sister, Mary, 21 January 1797.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 March 1795

<sup>31</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 75850, Spencer to Rainier, 17 February 1801.

<sup>32</sup> Rear Admiral Blankett, sent by Dundas with a small squadron to Red Sea in 1798 to halt French advances. Had already served in East Indies under Hughes during American Revolution. Promoted rear admiral in 1799. He died on station in 1801.

<sup>33</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 75862, Spencer to Rainier, 17 August 1799.

<sup>34</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 77862, Spencer to Rainier, 30 May 1798.

I received a letter from Lord Wellesley expressive of much Chagrin at my refusal to cooperate with His Majesty's Squadron in the project His Excellency had proposed and suggesting a variety of arguments tending to prove me in the wrong, to impress me with the idea that his public consequence and intimate connexion (sic) with His Majesty's Ministers was more than sufficient to shelter my Conduct from any degree of reprehensibility. ... in the project His Excellency had prepared ...I must confirm to your Lordship that I am not in the least convinced by His Excellency's reasoning, and have therefore forbore to make any reply to them, having neither inclination or leisure to enter into such tedious discussion. ... The Answer ... from Vice Admiral Sir Roger Curtis [the Commander-in-Chief of the Cape] and Sir George Yonge [the Governor of the Cape of Good Hope] has fully verified my conjecture expressed to His Excellency about his Plan for Mauritius.<sup>35</sup>

By this letter Rainier forewarned Spencer that there could be fallout from his refusal to assist Wellesley and, although he does not give his own reasons beyond saying that the plans were impracticable, his views were supported by Sir Roger Curtis who, as the C-in-C Cape, would be the person most directly involved in any attack on Mauritius as the island lay within his station, not Rainier's.

Rainier had some influence with the Admiralty on strategic matters. Ceylon, which he occupied in 1795, became a major naval base and Bombay was used to build ships for the Royal Navy. He had been promoting shipbuilding in Bombay for several years and it only came to fruition after his departure. Clearly it had frustrated him because he replied to Duncan's<sup>36</sup> question about the viability of building a 74 by saying that he already had been asked the same question by another official. As everything he had said had been ignored he thought it pointless to tell Duncan his thoughts.<sup>37</sup> But, by the time he returned in 1805, he had a clear view of his lack of influence concerning promotions. On 13 November 1805 he wrote to Sir Pulteney Malcolm, his old flag captain, that: 'we are at present much embarrassed by the objections the Admiralty have raised against some of my nephew's time in India to qualify him to pass for lieutenant',<sup>38</sup> and later in the same letter: 'I have no interest at the Admiralty',<sup>39</sup> [Although Stephens was still on the Board for another eleven months]. It is not known if Rainier wished for further service, after eleven years away from home and family, but his name was not mentioned by Admiral Young, Commander-in-Chief at Portsmouth, to First Lord Thomas Grenville reviewing the possible candidates for future senior command in late 1806.<sup>40</sup>

#### b) A New Commanding Officer.

After a short period of time Rainier was back with a commanding officer between him and the Admiralty although, for all intents and purposes, the physical distances between the two were almost as distant as with the previous arrangement. It will now be described how he 'managed' the upward chain of command.

Rainier had been sent out to the East Indies, largely as the default commander, but with probable hopes that he would be able to make a name for himself and thus avoid the irritant of a senior officer sent to command over him. But Elphinstone would see himself as an expert

<sup>35</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/171, Rainier to Spencer, 10 May 1801.

<sup>36</sup> Jonathan Duncan, Governor of Bombay, 1795-1811.

<sup>37</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/175, Rainier to Duncan, 23 June 1804.

<sup>38</sup> N.L.S., Malcolm Collection, Acc. 6990-5, ff. 2-3, Rainier to Pulteney Malcolm, 13 November 1805.

<sup>39</sup> N.L.S., Malcolm Collection, Acc. 6990-5, f. 4, Rainier to Pulteney Malcolm, 13 November 1805.

<sup>40</sup> Huntington Library, STG. Box 169, Folder 43, Young to Thomas Grenville, 29 November 1806.

in the region, having served as the fourth mate of an Indiaman during 1766/7, and with several relations as officers, even commanders, in the Company service. One brother, William, became a director of the Company.<sup>41</sup>

The first action was to absent himself from Madras when he knew his new commander was coming. Naturally he established a plausible reason for so doing. He wrote to Elphinstone:

...agreeable to the plans concerted with the Right Honourable the President in Council, the Commander of the Troops on the Coast, and myself in pursuance of the orders received from the Right Honourable Henry Dundas, Secretary of State, and confirmed by your own orders ...<sup>42</sup>

In this way Rainier illustrated that he had the support of the local Company command and was following the strategic directions he had received from London so it was absolutely imperative, but unfortunate, that he would not be in Madras to greet his new commander. Elphinstone demonstrated his disappointment:

The object of the Rear Admiral [Rainier] will doubtless be conducive to the British interest; but another arrangement might have retained the Naval Force more collected and prepared for Service not so remote.<sup>43</sup>

It was probable that any attack on Mauritius would begin from the Cape. Therefore it would appear that Elphinstone's comment was designed to ensure that Rainier was close at hand and under his direct control.

But Elphinstone did not appear to appreciate the many and varied claims on the 'Service'. To concentrate naval forces would have laid bare all the British shipping interests to depredations, not only by pirates, but also by French, Dutch and soon Spanish ships across the station. War could be declared in Europe six months before the knowledge reached the far corners of the East Indies. It was important to have British ships in position ready to attack the enemy and defend British trade as soon as war was declared. Information and misinformation - often from neutral vessels, such as Danish and American<sup>44</sup> - had to be evaluated and the disposition of Royal Naval vessels made accordingly. With these factors in mind a sensible interpretation of the situation comes from Parkinson: 'What other plans Rainier could have made Elphinstone omitted to suggest....it is not clear what else he could have done'.<sup>45</sup>

Unsurprisingly, Rainier discovered that the situation in the Spice Islands was worse than he had anticipated and: 'tis not possible to say what my detention there may be which must be regulated by the Force of the Enemy... (I) shall return to this Coast as soon as possible'.<sup>46</sup> He also covered himself by writing, the following month, a detailed letter (eleven pages) to Nepean. He was going to the Spice Islands:

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<sup>41</sup> Farrington, *A Biographical Index of the East India Company Maritime Serving Officers 1600-1834*, p.251.

<sup>42</sup> N.M.M., RAI/5, Rainier to Elphinstone, 14 October 1795.

<sup>43</sup> N.M.M., KEI/5/3, Elphinstone to Nepean, 23 February 1796.

<sup>44</sup> See Chapter Four.

<sup>45</sup> Parkinson, *War in the Eastern Seas*, p. 84.

<sup>46</sup> N.M.M., RAI/5, Rainier to Elphinstone, 11 October 1795.

or otherwise as *I shall* [author's italics] on my arrival judge to be most conducive (sic) to the execution of His Majesty's Commands ... after having made the necessary dispositions for the object of the expedition and protection of the Trade in the China Seas, purpose (sic) to return and join Rear Admiral the Honourable George Elphinstone as far as possible but may be detained longer than I can now foresee (sic).<sup>47</sup>

Here is a not very subtle message to the Admiralty that his new superior would be able to add nothing to the conduct of the war and he knew best how to protect the Trade – his first responsibility. He was also keeping up the pressure to demonstrate that he was so busy that he would not be able to meet Elphinstone. Again, Rainier illustrates the communication problem, and opportunities to avoid control, caused by such a large physical command:

The great uncertainty I am under with respect to the time you may arrive on the Coast and not having received any order from you since the arrival of the *Arniston* [which brought news of Elphinstone's appointment] ... have induced me to detach HMS *Centurion* and *Swift* to protect the Trades.<sup>48</sup>

Rainier gave Elphinstone no chance to argue that he was not communicating, even if it were news that the C-in-C did not want to hear: '...my presence [is] indispensably (sic) necessary, at Amboina'.<sup>49</sup> And to show the difficulties Rainier was struggling under to keep on writing: 'We are so short of Stationery I fear it will not be in my power to furnish you with a complete set of duplicates',<sup>50</sup> yet another excuse to avoid Elphinstone's authority.

But he also knew he had to maintain at least the outward signs of good relationships: 'I shall be happy to hear of your success, which have little doubt of, but am concerned it has so long been delayed from circumstances wholly out of the control of your acknowledged abilities to command'.<sup>51</sup>

As Rainier had lost approximately £25,000 because Elphinstone took the commander-in-chief's share of the prize money for capturing the Dutch Spice Islands, one has to doubt the sincerity of the sentiments. But, as Parkinson says of Rainier on learning that he had a new commander: 'Any annoyance he may have felt he forbore to express'.<sup>52</sup> However, it could be argued that Rainier's movement to the east, away from Elphinstone, was his means of expressing his anger. Another example of Elphinstone's lack of understanding of the situation in Indian waters is found in his letter to Spencer requesting permission to withdraw ships when he has destroyed the French threat: 'so large a force may not be required in India'.<sup>53</sup> It is known that the newly arrived admiral had designs on Mauritius but whether this is the "French threat" he had in mind is unclear. In fact British knowledge of the situation on Mauritius at that time was so incomplete that British forces were felt to be inadequate for such a venture. Bearing in mind the time taken to send out reinforcements to India after any new French threat was discovered, surely the East Indies was the last station on which to take a gamble on the number of French ships remaining small. Rainier's politeness and

<sup>47</sup> N.M.M., RAI/5, Rainier to Nepean, 12 November 1795.

<sup>48</sup> N.M.M., RAI/5, Rainier to Elphinstone, 6 January 1796.

<sup>49</sup> N.M.M., RAI/5, Rainier to Elphinstone, 11 April 1796.

<sup>50</sup> N.M.M., RAI/5, Rainier to Elphinstone, 6 June 1796.

<sup>51</sup> N.M.M., KEI/5/3, Rainier to Elphinstone, 6 January 1796.

<sup>52</sup> Parkinson, *War in the Eastern Seas*, p. 82.

<sup>53</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 75856, Elphinstone to Spencer, 13 November 1795.

communication with his superiors seems to have been effective because Elphinstone wrote to Nepean that the capture of Amboina and Banda ‘appear to me to be highly creditable to that excellent Officer [Rainier]’.<sup>54</sup> Of course, his opinion could have been tempered by the fact that Rainier had just obtained for him a large sum of prize money.

Whilst Elphinstone waited for Rainier in India, he had news that the Dutch were planning to retake the Cape and, knowing he had insufficient forces there, decided to return, reaching Saldhana Bay on August 12, 1796, never again to set foot in Indian waters. In fact, Spencer had already written to Rainier to this effect:

In the event of the return home of Sir George Elphinstone, Rear Admiral Pringle will have command of the Cape of Good Hope but it is intended that that should be a separate Command from the one you will have in that Case and of course you will be Commander in Chief of the Station comprised of the Asiatic Seas.<sup>55</sup>

The arrival of Elphinstone had not helped the smooth working of the chain of command in the East Indies. In July 1795 Rainier wrote: ‘As the uncertainty of my Situation may sometimes render it expedient ...’.<sup>56</sup> This was advice given to Captain Newcombe that he may not be able to rely on Rainier’s support, because of the uncertainty of his position as the senior naval officer in the East Indies. Any differences Newcombe might have when supporting the army in combined operations might need more flexibility on behalf of the navy than was usual. This shows a rare honesty when dealing with his subordinates so that they had all the information necessary to do the job, even if it admitted the weakness of Rainier’s position. But it is clear that Rainier was not a man who relished the emblems of command. In his journal describing the expedition to capture the Molucca Islands, the expedition’s chief engineer and secretary, Captain Lennon, described their arrival at Malacca. Even though it was protocol, the defeated Dutch governor did not offer Rainier the use of his official residence. But rather than ejecting the governor, Rainier merely stayed in a local private residence.<sup>57</sup>

Luckily Rainier had a high degree of self confidence. The departure of Elphinstone appears to mark the end of Rainier’s subjection to ‘local’ superior officers. However, ADM 8 does indicate another possibility. The statement that Rear Admiral Pringle was the commander of both the Cape and East Indies in January 1797 can be seen as a clerical error, as it only lasted for one month.<sup>58</sup> However later ADM 8s indicate that Rear Admiral Christian was overall commander of the two stations from October 1797 to May 1798.<sup>59</sup> Yet study of the archives shows no documents appointing Christian, no letters making reference to his overall command, and no acknowledgment from Rainier of the fact. Indeed the letter of appointment to Christian: ‘appoints you Commander in Chief of His Majesty’s Ships at the Cape of Good Hope,’<sup>60</sup> and during the period Christian is purportedly in command of both stations, he wrote to Nepean, describing Rainier as ‘Commander in Chief in the Indian Seas’.<sup>61</sup> Virtually all the letters to Pringle and Christian from the Admiralty make no reference to the East

<sup>54</sup> N.M.M., KEI/L/134, Elphinstone to Nepean, 21 September 1796.

<sup>55</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 75862, Spencer to Rainier, 6 May 1796.

<sup>56</sup> N.M.M., KEI/5/1, Rainier to Captain Newcombe, 19 July 1795.

<sup>57</sup> B.L., Home Misc., H/441, ‘Lennon’s Journal of Admiral Rainier’s Expedition to the Molucca Islands’, 1795-96, p. 17.

<sup>58</sup> T.N.A., ADM 8/73, January 1797.

<sup>59</sup> T.N.A., ADM 8/73 and ADM 8/74, October 1797 to May 1798.

<sup>60</sup> T.N.A., ADM 2/937, Admiralty to Christian, 11 September 1797.

<sup>61</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/56, Christian to Admiralty, 30 March 1798.

Indies, apart from as information. This would surely not be the case if the two stations were combined.

In fact, the reverse may be said to be true. When Christian died on station, Nepean wrote to Rainier that: ‘command of His Majesty’s Ships and Vessels at the Cape of Good Hope having thereby devolved to you.’<sup>62</sup>

However another sign of the Admiralty’s thinking, and perhaps confusion, can be noted by the fact that Admiralty Out Letters in ADM 2/937, are categorised as those to the East Indies even when they are to the Cape. There is no separate category for letters to the Cape of Good Hope.

Rainier must have been disconcerted. He wrote to Christian: ‘tis confidently said here that Sir John Colpoys is coming out to Command on this Station, if he stops at the Cape on his way, please remind him of this circumstance’.<sup>63</sup> Then there were rumours in the press; Lord Hugh Seymour would be taking his family out to India with him when he took command in the East Indies.<sup>64</sup> Whether or not this uncertainty played any part in Rainier’s decision to offer his resignation a year later is unknown but his offer might have been made to see what level of support he had.<sup>65</sup> It was not until November 1802 that the new First Lord, St. Vincent, wrote: ‘that the Board could not comply with your request to be relieved’.<sup>66</sup>

Thus, for two years, Rainier was left in a state of suspended animation waiting for a reply to his offer of resignation, not knowing how it would be received. His sense of security would not have been improved by the regular flow of information found when reading *The Times*: ‘Sir Roger Curtis is ordered to the East Indies from the Cape of Good Hope, in order to succeed Vice Admiral Rainier in the naval command on that station.’<sup>67</sup> *The Times* also wrote: ‘Lord Radstock, who is appointed Commander in Chief in the East Indies, in the room of Vice Admiral Rainier, will leave town in the course of a day or two, to proceed to his station,’<sup>68</sup> and ‘Sir Thomas Troubridge is to be appointed a Commodore to succeed Admiral Rainier in the East Indies.’<sup>69</sup> It is difficult to understand how these stories got into *The Times* if there were no thoughts at the Admiralty that these changes might occur. In June 1802 St. Vincent wrote to Dundas to warn him of potential unrest between two officers, Troubridge and Alexander Cochrane, for whom he had great respect and who had both asked for the East Indies command for themselves.<sup>70</sup> And their timing would have meant at least some of them would have reached Rainier, making him believe that his request to resign would be granted. It must have come as a surprise when it was refused.

The situation was confused by the reduction of the squadron in the East Indies station during the Peace of Amiens as its smaller size now warranted only a commodore to command, Rainier, now a vice admiral, was clearly too senior for the station. He would expect to be recalled. As he wrote: ‘... my situation is too precarious at present to trust to its conveyance

<sup>62</sup> T.N.A., ADM 2/937, Admiralty to Rainier, 25 May 1799.

<sup>63</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Christian, 27 September, 1798, *The Times*, 6 August 1798.

<sup>64</sup> *The True Briton*, 19 February 1799.

<sup>65</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/170, Rainier to Spencer, 3 September 1800.

<sup>66</sup> St. Vincent to Rainier, 16 November 1802, in D.B. Smith (ed.), *Letters of Lord St. Vincent 1801-4*, vol.2, p.265.

<sup>67</sup> *The Times*, 22 December 1800, *Lloyds Evening Post*, 8 December 1800.

<sup>68</sup> *The Times*, 20 November 1801.

<sup>69</sup> *The Times*, 3 March 1802.

<sup>70</sup> N.L.S., Dundas Correspondence, MS. 2570, St. Vincent to Dundas, 18 June 1802.

[taking his baggage home] to me as being in hourly expectation of seeing my successor.<sup>71</sup> On this particular occasion *The Times* comment of 3 March 1802, concerning Troubridge, is probably true, noting that Sir Thomas Troubridge was to be appointed commodore to succeed Rainier in the East Indies.

But authority imbued with an unusually long period of command kept Rainier's self confidence at an effective level. He was still signing orders and promotions as commander in chief up to 25 March 1805, and indeed his former title was written and then crossed out as late as 5 July 1805.<sup>72</sup> These dates are noteworthy as secondary sources, such as the *O.D.N.B.*,<sup>73</sup> all say that Rainier's command ended in 1804. It is true that the order telling Pellew to hoist his flag as Commander in Chief in the East Indies were written on 14 May 1804 but the actual handover on the station did not occur until March of the following year.<sup>74</sup> Thus it can be seen that, whilst ADM 8 implies that, apart from the period from March to September 1797, Rainier was a subordinate admiral until June 1798, and *The Times* received information on his several potential replacements, none actually occurred.

However it must have given Rainier some concern as to the solidity of his position in the East Indies, in spite of the presence of his benefactor, Philip Stephens. In the circumstances it is to his credit that he pursued his objectives without complaint and with as much vigour and commitment as he did.

### c) Rainier the Leader.

One needs to ask what kind of captain was Rainier and what was important to him. From his earlier captains Latham of the *Tyger* would have given him an example of the benefits of maintaining a healthy and happy crew.<sup>75</sup> Latham's successor on the *Tyger*, Brereton,<sup>76</sup> showed him how to command a ship in devastating battle with a third of the crew being casualties. Kempenfelt of the *Norfolk* had the reputation as a thoughtful, intellectual officer who would have given midshipman Rainier respect for the professional knowledge required to be an efficient and successful captain.<sup>77</sup>

Rainier's philosophy of the role of a leader and commanding officer can best be seen in the letter to his nephew, Peter Rainier, written in 1805, when the latter was promoted acting captain by his uncle.<sup>78</sup> This advice ranges from having good manners and behaving well in the company of ladies, to increasing his knowledge of all things, especially naval matters. His character shows itself to be quite modern:

... muster the crew in order to become familiar to their tempers, their manners and dispositions from your own knowledge and not from the information of your Officers, many of whom are not very liberal in their ideas, or are but too often

<sup>71</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/172, Rainier to Matthew Louis, 23 October 1802.

<sup>72</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/176, Rainier to Admiralty, 25 March 1805 and 5 July 1805.

<sup>73</sup> *O.D.N.B.*, J.K. Laughton (rev. K. Breen), 'Peter Rainier'.

<sup>74</sup> T.N.A., ADM 2/147, Admiralty to Pellew, 14 May 1804.

<sup>75</sup> J. Charnock, *Biographica Navalis*, vol. IV, pp. 48-50. Charnock commends Latham for his 'very judicious treatment of his people'.

<sup>76</sup> Charnock, *Biographica Navalis*, vol. IV, pp. 298-304. *Tyger* suffered 168 men killed and wounded in battle against d'Ache.

<sup>77</sup> Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean*, p. 350, describes Kempenfelt as 'a clever officer of wide reading and intellectual tastes'.

<sup>78</sup> The following six quotations are all from N.M.M., RAI/201/8, Admiral Rainier to Capt. Peter Rainier, 2 April 1805.

influenced in their description of them to you by prejudices and private animosities and resentments. Consider your self at all times their advocate ... never proceed to punishment but on the fullest conviction of proper evidence and never by simple hearsay ... Be attentive to all their complaints and relieve their little wants when it is in your power. Few are their rights but never suffer them to be infringed ... Abstain most religiously from ever reviling them with foul or abusive language, or suffer your Officers to do so ... when obliged to punish them let them see the object is the Vice and not the Man .. Never punish with too much severity.

He emphasised the need for a competent captain to prepare the mind by being ‘sensible of our ignorance’:

Presumption is the reverse of this in pretending to a knowledge we have no claim to from experience, and it is therefore a certain barrier to improvement. This remark is no more applicable to you than any other young man in your situation but certainly is not less so...

He turns from commanding downwards to managing upwards and administrative affairs;

One obvious means of gaining in your profession is by associating with your brother Officers, particularly those senior to you ... [You must be conversant with] ... the method of keeping the Ship’s Books, inspecting and auditing Warrant Officer’s accounts, weekly and monthly, the Purser’s at every time of re-victualling, and examining strictly into the particulars stated in his Quarterly account with the Victualling Office ... In short you should understand thoroughly the business of a Captain’s Clerk for whose conduct the Service holds you responsible, and it requires but a very small portion of your leisure time to become perfect in it.

The admiral’s careful personality comes out in the next sentence:

When you receive orders from a Commanding Officer don’t be content with a simple perusal of them, but look them over every now and then that you may not mistake their meaning. In cases of doubt whether as to rules of Service or professional practice always ask the opinion of your brother officers who are most competent to give you information ... Be sure to show every respectful attention to Sir Edward Pellew, [his new commander-in-chief] address him always by the title of His Excellency, I am persuaded you will meet with a friend and counsellor in him if you conduct yourself toward him with propriety. His character you know stands very high in the Service and that deservedly.

And, to ensure the efficiency of ship:

Exercise your Crew frequently, at great guns and small arms, reefing and furling sails, and (what is too much neglected) heaving up the anchor, catting and fishing them. The more active they are employed the less time they have to employ on evil and undutiful and immoral subjects, but never work of Sundays, if it can be avoided... Avoid all profane cursing and swearing, and all obscene expressions,



particularly conversation at table, for a man is certainly the worse for having listened to or read anything of that nature.

Never letting go of the concept of improvement:

You should be very attentive in the improving yourself in the Arithmetical Knowledge of it, such as the curves of Chase to come up with enemy with the least possible loss of time. And buy Clark on Naval Tactics.<sup>79</sup>

Thus we can see a man who cares for his crew and wants it to be efficient, is wise enough to see that what he is told is not always the truth and that orders can sometimes be misleading and require careful study, is considerate to his superiors, fully understands the administration of his ship, and is always desirous of learning more. It gave him a reputation as a commander that the Admiralty was prepared to trust.

Several of his letters to the Admiralty illustrate that he carried these beliefs into practice. When paying off the *Burford* in 1784 Rainier asked the Secretary to the Admiralty, Philip Stephens, to give good treatment to a marine who had been discharged from the Service due to a badly damaged hand and to get confirmation of a gunner's warrant as it might be lost in all the confusion of paying off a large proportion of the Fleet.<sup>80</sup> This ability also allowed him to handle the expected spin off from the 1797 mutinies when knowledge of them finally reached the East Indies; a theme which was also experienced in Canada and at the Cape. When the crew of the *Trident* refused to obey orders Captain Osborne spoke to the crew, reminding them of Admiral Rainier's fights for their welfare, obtaining good quality provisions and tea, and establishing a seamen's hospital at Madras.<sup>81</sup> When news of Duncan's victory at Camperdown reached India, Rainier pardoned all the mutineers who had been awaiting execution and they returned to their ships. His desire to assist those not able to defend themselves is also illustrated in copies of the *Times* newspaper which notes the donations he made, and also in the Returns of Charitable Donations,<sup>82</sup> and to the £595 he left in his will to the poor of St. Mary's Church, Sandwich.<sup>83</sup> And this concern spread to the treatment of 'native' sailors and clerks, such as when he wished one of the Company's commanders to be dismissed for the bad treatment of his lascars, and in his evidence to the Navy Board concerning the establishment of a naval administration organisation in India.

It is not surprising that his behaviour towards his subordinate officers also shows concern for their well being, their development, and the need to have them fully understand the situation. It would be more important on this station, where a ship could be months away from support, for a captain to be able to use his initiative wisely. And Rainier was cautious enough, as with Captain Cooke, not to allow them to take risks which their inexperience might not be able to calculate. Yet it would appear that certain behaviour from some subordinates did not meet with his approval. For example he did not like Home Popham's dealings with officials above his direct superior, bypassing himself, nor Popham's efforts to ingratiate himself with those he thought would be helpful to his career, or his request for a commodore's pendant which he said would make his job easier. Popham was an extreme case; his wife even wrote to the First

<sup>79</sup> Actually spelt "Clerk", J., *An Essay on Naval tactics, Systematical and Historical*, four vols. (London, 1790).

<sup>80</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/2394, Rainier to Admiralty, 12 and 19 July 1784.

<sup>81</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/169, Rainier to Admiralty, 25 January 1798.

<sup>82</sup> B.P.P., Abstract of Returns of Charitable Donations for the Benefit of Poor persons in England & Wales 1786-1788, p. 569, Accounts and Papers, 1816.

<sup>83</sup> East Kent Archive, EK-R-U888/Q1.

Lord, Thomas Grenville, asking if her husband could be given a position on the Board of Admiralty. Grenville's frosty reply stated that he would not get into such discussions with a naval officer's wife.<sup>84</sup> This mentality was completely opposite to Rainier's and he was extremely censorious about it.

Rainier also did not forget the officers of the Company whom he felt were deserving of credit:

I have the honor (sic) to inclose (sic) the representation of Ensign Grace with whose Services I have every reason to be satisfied as also the other young men in his situation and beg leave to recommend them to Your Lordship's favour, the Service has been much distressed for Subalterns and suffered much for want of the usual Complements.<sup>85</sup>

The need for making rapid appointments as commanding officer on a remote and often unhealthy station during war gave Rainier the opportunity for a high degree of patronage and he made ample use of all his opportunities. It would appear that over the eleven years of his command he controlled approximately forty nine captains, commanders and lieutenants-in-command. Of these five were lost at sea, two died in battle, two died of illness, one returned to the UK due to ill health, and one was dismissed by court martial.

Admittedly, the opportunities for naval officers to make a name for themselves were more limited after 1805. But some of those who served under Rainier appear to have enhanced their careers; seven merited an entrance in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* of whom Pulteney Malcolm, his flag captain, later had a distinguished career. Edward Cooke might have developed his great potential but he was mortally wounded whilst capturing the French frigate *La Forte* (44) in *La Sybille* (38). *La Forte*, when she had been launched in 1795, was the largest frigate in the world.<sup>86</sup> He had previously shown great daring in entering the harbour at Manila, in company with Malcolm's ship, and, whilst pretending to be French by speaking the language perfectly, obtained much intelligence from his unsuspecting Spanish visitors, and capturing three large gunboats. However, his unique daring had already caused the more conservative Rainier some concern: 'The expedition you have been pleased to project [against what not stated] as therein detailed, may be very ingenious but 'tis utterly impossible for me to give it the shadow of an approval'.<sup>87</sup> It is likely that, had he lived, both Cooke and Rainier would have found their working relationship somewhat stressful. Cooke managed to upset his admiral, even after death. Whilst ill from his wounds and before he died, he ordered extensive battle repairs to *La Sybille* without authorisation. In its usual manner the Navy Board then billed Rainier and *La Sybille's* acting captain, Lieutenant Hardyman, for the cost of these repairs, totalling £20,059 19s. 2d., because the work had been done without proper authorisation. A weary Rainier had to write to Nepean in order to get the amount taken off his account.<sup>88</sup> Of all the officers that spent some time under Rainier's command, two became full admirals, two vice admirals, four rear admirals and four post captains. Perhaps his largest leap of faith was to give acting Lieutenant Nesbit Willoughby command of a brig after he had been found guilty of insubordination at a court martial and dismissed his ship. This officer went on to experience three other courts martial in a career

<sup>84</sup> Huntington Library, STG Box 160, f (57), Lady Popham to Grenville, 30 September 1806.

<sup>85</sup> N.M.M., RAI/5, Rainier to Hobart, 24 October 1796.

<sup>86</sup> D. King & J.B. Hattendorf (eds), *Every man will do his duty* (London, 1997), p. 107.

<sup>87</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Cooke, 9 September 1798.

<sup>88</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Nepean, 22 February 1803.

highlighted by brilliant close combat operations on his way to becoming a rear admiral. Clearly Rainier felt he had the skill to manage a maverick because he could see Willoughby's inherent talent.<sup>89</sup>

The admiral needed to place much trust in his captains as, unlike those on most other stations, they were usually acting remotely with huge distances between them and their commanding officer. He was always open and honest with the ones who had been with him for long periods and often owed their ranks to Rainier's support. Where he felt he trusted the officer, he fully supported them, as when he received a complaint from the commander of an East Indiaman who had lost some of his crew to a naval press:

The Commander of the *Thetis* has represented to me that You have taken 11 men out of his Ship ... You are the best Judge whether that Ship's Company will bear that draught for His Majesty's Service.<sup>90</sup>

And again to Captain Lucas of the *Arrogant* (74) who was the senior naval officer on the Malabar Coast:

It is impossible for me at this distance to give you any particular orders, as much must depend upon circumstances as they arrive and your prudence in making every advantage of them for the good of His Majesty's Service, which I have no doubt you will do.<sup>91</sup>

In another letter to Lucas five days later, he goes into great detail to explain the big strategic picture in order that Lucas can make his best informed judgements.<sup>92</sup> Rainier described the situation on the Malabar Coast. Having castigated the greed of the Bombay merchants he then recounted the news from British newspapers given to him by a passing American ship, telling of a Dutch squadron heading for the Cape and of Admiral Duncan's search for the main Dutch fleet in the North Sea. To demonstrate that Lucas was not the only captain to receive such latitude, Rainier wrote to Captain Bathurst, who was on convoy escort duty: '...Much must depend on your Judgement in which I have every confidence from your known professional ability and zeal'.<sup>93</sup>

Even with the highly visible conflict in Egypt Rainier was able to tell Nepean that he had given orders to Blankett which allowed him as much latitude as he wanted.<sup>94</sup> Many senior flag officers in the same situation would have wanted to 'micro-manage' for fear that their subordinate would make mistakes which would reflect on them. Rainier had the confidence to give his experienced subordinates the kind of freedom to use and develop their skills, like any good manager.

However, he was careful to which his captains he gave this degree of independence as illustrated in a letter from Captain Clarke of the *Victorious* to the Bombay Presidency.

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<sup>89</sup> N. Tracey, *Who's Who in Nelson's Navy* (London, 2006), various, and O.D.N.B.

<sup>90</sup> N.M.M., RAI/5, Rainier to Lucas, 14 March 1797.

<sup>91</sup> N.M.M., RAI/5, Rainier to Lucas, 23 October 1796.

<sup>92</sup> N.M.M., RAI/5, Rainier to Lucas 28 October 1796.

<sup>93</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 13762, Rainier to Capt. Bathurst of HMS *Concorde*, 30 August 1803.

<sup>94</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Admiralty, 12 October 1799.

Replying to its request to attack a pirate base, Clarke is reported to have said that he: ‘would do as far as his orders from the Admiral permitted’.<sup>95</sup>

But Rainier did show concern for the feelings of newly promoted officers when appointed commander of a ship for the first time. In his letter to Lieutenant Douglas, assigning him to command the frigate *La Forte*, he devoted much time to give him advice as to how to buy stores and boats, keep the ship’s accounts and how to obtain sailors.<sup>96</sup>

During Rainier’s period of command he had two unwilling subordinate flag officers, Blankett and Home Popham, both of whom had been sent to the East on independent command before being ordered to put themselves under Rainier’s control. During the American Revolution, when Rainier had been a post captain under Hughes, Blankett had been a master and commander, so they were old acquaintances. But now, possibly because Blankett had caused so much alarm and frustration by taking so long to reach the Red Sea, Rainier put on the pressure to show who was in command. In December 1799 he wrote:

I could have wished you had been more circumstantial as the conveyance to be depended upon [for letters], as I am desirous of being acquainted with your reasons for quitting the Red Sea and leaving so small a Force there, as if there was nothing to be apprehended from the operations of the French Army in Egypt.<sup>97</sup>

Blankett naturally took offence at this letter and his reply caused Rainier to write again to him:

[I] cannot help expressing my surprise at your having so far misconstrued my meaning in the extract you quoted from in my letter ... as to have conceived it was indicative of my displeasure at your leaving the Red Sea ... nothing was further from my intention, being thoroughly satisfied with your conduct in so doing.<sup>98</sup>

Given Rainier’s written communication skills it is difficult to believe that he did not know how his first letter would be received. Why he made Blankett’s life more difficult and did not help him with his relationships in the Company is more puzzling. Perhaps there was some bad history between them from their time together under Hughes or perhaps it was a way of bringing Blankett under his control; he would have to look to Rainier for support as there was no-one else to whom he could turn. It might be that he resented Blankett being sent directly to the Red Sea and not immediately put under his control. But it does show that Rainier was not always the perfect commander.

However, apart from this little exchange, Rainier saw his role as the provider of as many ships as he could spare, together with supplies and money, and leaving Blankett to manage his day to day affairs without interference. Unfortunately the diplomatic skills required to co-operate with the Company Presidencies, the Governor General, the army, and Arab rulers were too much for Blankett. He died, a disillusioned and frustrated man, as Home Popham was about to take over his command.

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<sup>95</sup> B.L, I.O.R., Board’s Collections, F/4/68, Bombay Political Letter, 25 April 1798.

<sup>96</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Douglas, 2 August 1799.

<sup>97</sup> T.N.A., ADM1/170, Rainier to Blankett, 25 December 1799.

<sup>98</sup> T.N.A., ADM1/170, Rainier to Blankett, 9 January 1800.

Popham, like Blankett, had come to the notice of Secretary Dundas by writing learned papers to him. He was disliked by many of his brother officers, affecting the title of the knighthood of Malta bestowed on him by the Czar and by gaining his post rank at the request of the Duke of York for his services in charge of the ill-fated Helder expedition. He was a maverick who had traded illegally as a merchant before the outbreak of war, had been arrested and his ship confiscated at great personal financial cost. He had also been struck off the lieutenants' list for not requesting permission for his absences in the East. This was not the type of person with whom Rainier would immediately find rapport. The fact that Popham was an excellent chart maker, an expert in amphibious warfare, and later the creator of a much used signal book which became adopted by the Admiralty in 1812 would be insufficient to balance his perceived self serving publicity seeking in the eyes of Rainier.

Whilst Popham remained in the Red Sea, Rainier treated him as he had treated Blankett and left him to his own devices. But Popham had heard that the French might invade Portugal and he and the Governor General thought that Macao should be occupied. When he arrived at Penang in mid 1801, without any orders to do so, Rainier was furious. It was not the duty of a senior naval officer to move ships and men several thousand miles without orders. Rainier ordered Popham to remove all the stores he had to other ships, and to return to the Red Sea.<sup>99</sup> The admiral had already planned to go to Macao. He then wrote to Nepean saying that Popham had asked him if he thought he had acted correctly, to which he replied that he thought so but that Popham should return to the Red Sea as he had no orders to go anywhere else.<sup>100</sup> Again, Rainier had covered his tracks in case Popham had more friends in London who could turn the event into a criticism of himself. But, to Rainier's credit, when he later wrote to Wellesley, he mentioned that he had met Popham and sent him back to the Red Sea via Madras and the Bay of Bengal as he had heard there were French privateers in the region. He made no mention of any private altercation.<sup>101</sup> He also wrote to the Admiralty telling their Lordships that he had told Popham to give all his supplies to Osborne, return to Madras, re supply himself and get back to the Red Sea: 'in further prosecution of their Lordships' Orders'.<sup>102</sup>

When Popham returned to the Red Sea he heard that the Treaty of Amiens had been ratified. As he believed his career could no longer be developed there he asked Rainier if he could return to England. Unsurprisingly Rainier agreed.

#### d) Patronage.

Rainier's powers of patronage were not always effective. Rainier had promoted his distant relative, Commander Alexander Milner, to the heavy frigate *Resistance* (44) in 1799. But it was lost at sea before he could take command. Rainier wrote to Spencer asking that the First Lord view him with favour.<sup>103</sup> Evidently this request went unheard because Milner was not promoted to post captain until 12 August 1812.<sup>104</sup>

More success was found when Rainier was working for his immediate family. And for them he acted shamelessly. He appointed his eldest nephew, John Sprat Rainier, a lieutenant at the

<sup>99</sup> H. Popham, *A Damned Cunning Fellow*, p. 99.

<sup>100</sup> N.M.M., RAI/8, Rainier to Nepean, 27 December 1801.

<sup>101</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 13760, Rainier to Wellesley, 27 December 1801.

<sup>102</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/171, Rainier to Admiralty, 27 December 1801.

<sup>103</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Spencer, 17 January 1799.

<sup>104</sup> D. Syrett & R.L. DiNardo, *The Commissioned Sea Officers of the Royal Navy 1660-1815* (Occasional Publications vol.1, 1994).

age of sixteen, just after he set sail for India in 1794, and he was posted captain at the highly illegal age of eighteen on 22 December 1796. Within four months he was the captain of the 64 gun ship, the *Dordrecht*, captured from the Dutch at the Cape the previous year. Admittedly J.S. Rainier grew to be a highly competent and effective captain and he did much excellent work in the Red Sea during Bonaparte's occupation of Egypt. But there can be little uncertainty that, at the age of eighteen, he would not have been competent in such a role. That the admiral was concerned for his nephew's safety, relative to his experience, is shown by his letter just after he promoted the young officer to be master and commander:

.... Having heard from you since I am apprehensive the expedition [to capture Columbo on Ceylon] miscarried ... [there] are reports of some strange Ships being at Bornio (sic), so be upon your Guard as I hope you always are at times of seeming security.<sup>105</sup>

The letter also illustrates the cautious side of the admiral's nature which comes through many of his actions.

His second nephew, also called Peter Rainier, was born in 1784 and also moved rapidly in rank, so rapidly in fact that the dates of his lieutenant's and commander's commissions are not found in Syrett & DiNardo's book.<sup>106</sup> Whilst they show his captain's commission dated 17 January 1806, this was only a confirmation of Admiral Rainier's decision to post him into the *Caroline* (36) in April 1805, when he was only twenty years old.<sup>107</sup> Like his cousin, he was a successful officer and the next year he captured a Spanish treasure ship worth over £500,000.<sup>108</sup> The same year he captured the Dutch warships *Maria* (36), *William* (20), *Patriot* (18), *Zeephong* (14) and *Zeerop* (16), also destroying the *Phoenix* (36), all off Batavia.<sup>109</sup> Unlike his cousin, he was born too late to make flag rank, but he did become the naval A.D.C. to King William IV in 1830.<sup>110</sup>

Rainier also strove to advance the career of another nephew, son of his sister, Sarah. William Broughton had had a close relationship with Rainier, having been his first lieutenant on the *Burford* during the American Revolution.<sup>111</sup> He had later commanded the brig *Chatham* during Vancouver's charting of the Pacific North West of America. Vancouver, who had served with Rainier under Gardner in the West Indies, named Mount Rainier after his friend.<sup>112</sup>

However, the bonds of former shipmates were nothing compared to family ties. The *Providence*, commanded by Broughton with Vashon as his first lieutenant, struck a coral reef near Taiwan and was lost, although all her crew were saved.<sup>113</sup> Broughton waited until all the crew was dispersed before blaming Vashon for the loss of his ship, as he had been on watch when the incident occurred. Rainier was furious, saying Broughton had not been fair in waiting until all potential witnesses had been dispersed around the globe and in not advising

<sup>105</sup> N.M.M., RAI/5, Rainier to John Sprat Rainier, 14 May 1796.

<sup>106</sup> Syrett & DiNardo, *The Commissioned Sea Officers of the Royal Navy 1660-1815*.

<sup>107</sup> N.L.S., Malcolm Family Papers, Acc. 6990-5, ff 1-12, Rainier to Pulteney Malcolm, 13 November 1805.

<sup>108</sup> J.K. Laughton (ed.), *The Naval Miscellany*, vol. 11, N.R.S. vol. XL (London, 1912), p. 414.

<sup>109</sup> *London Gazette*, 26 April 1808.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 4 August 1830.

<sup>111</sup> T.N.A., ADM 7/738, Sir Edward Hughes' Journal, 12 January 1782.

<sup>112</sup> [www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter\\_Rainier\\_junior](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Rainier_junior), accessed 14 August 2008.

<sup>113</sup> W. Broughton, *A Voyage of discovery in the north Pacific Ocean 1795-1798* (London, 1804), pp. 195-6.

Vashon of his complaints before making them official.<sup>114</sup> He called his behaviour ‘irregular and reprehensible’,<sup>115</sup> Rainier wrote to the Admiralty that Broughton should not be employed again.<sup>116</sup>

A court martial found Vashon guilty but Rainier, employing his powers of patronage, ignored the result and reinstated him.<sup>117</sup> However, his influence with the Admiralty, away from his own Station, was shown again to be ineffective when he later appointed Vashon to post rank, the official date of which was delayed by the Admiralty.<sup>118</sup> He was also ineffective in his demands for the punishment of Broughton who continued to hold post commissions and, indeed, was present at the eventual fall of Mauritius in 1810, commanding of the *Illustrious* (74). He was the commodore and senior naval officer off Java the following year.<sup>119</sup>

When Captain the Honourable John Murray took his frigate home without permission Rainier wrote to the Admiralty that: ‘The Honourable John Murray in H.M.S. *Heroine* has deserted the Station totally, without any authority from me,’ he demanded a court martial for desertion.<sup>120</sup> On his way home Murray had stopped at the Cape and Rainier mildly admonished the Commander-in-Chief of the Cape, Christian: ‘...am a little surprised you did not order the Honourable John Murray to return to his Station, as he had no authority from me to go even to the Cape’.<sup>121</sup> The limits of Rainier’s power are illustrated by the fact that, after an enquiry into Murray’s behaviour, Spencer learned that Murray was ordered home by Admiral Christian, even though he was not Murray’s commanding officer.<sup>122</sup> With this information Spencer decided not to take the matter any further. With this information one can see that Rainier had every reason to be annoyed with Christian and frustrated at the loss of a much valued frigate.

Rainier also followed the normal procedure of helping the careers of the sons of flag officers who had helped him. Alan Hyde Gardner, son of his patron, was already a post captain when he was ordered to the East Indies, but Rainier ensured that his career and opportunities for prize money were always protected. Because Elphinstone had not hindered the meteoric rise of John Sprat Rainier, we also find that his nephew, Charles Elphinstone, promoted to lieutenant (7 August 1799) and post captain (27 February 1801) at the age of seventeen.<sup>123</sup> Unfortunately he was lost at sea when the *Blenheim* (74) foundered off Mauritius whilst bringing Admiral Troubridge home in 1807.

#### e) The Communicator.

Rainier certainly fulfilled all the expectations of him that must have been held by those who agreed to send him to the Far East. He did not take any risks, or, at least, any which led to disastrous consequences, he spent much time on the minutiae of administration which enabled him to keep as many effective ships as possible at sea; he kept their Lordships aware of all that he was doing, even though this was not always appreciated:

<sup>114</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/169, Rainier to Broughton, 24 May 1798.

<sup>115</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/169, Rainier to Broughton, 24 May 1798.

<sup>116</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Nepean, 27 September, 1798.

<sup>117</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/544, Court Martial of W. Broughton and J. Vashon, 22 May 1798, N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Nepean, 27 September 1798.

<sup>118</sup> N.L.S., Malcolm Family Papers, Acc, 6990-5, ff 1-12, Rainier to Pulteney Malcolm, 13 November 1805.

<sup>119</sup> O.D.N.B., Captain William Broughton, J.K. Laughton, rev. R. Morriss.

<sup>120</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Nepean, 27 September, 1798.

<sup>121</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Christian, 27 September, 1798.

<sup>122</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 75862, Spencer to Rainier, 17 August 1799.

<sup>123</sup> Syrett & DiNardo, *The Commissioned Sea Officers of the Royal Navy 1660-1815*.

Having always sent to Mr. Nepean regular dispatches ever since I commanded His Majesty's Ships in this Country, by every conveyance, not one of which has miscarried, I am not a little surprised at your Lordship's continuing to complain of a deficiency of the Accounts of my proceedings.<sup>124</sup>

Clearly Rainier was stung by the criticism.

He showed no overt annoyance at the appointment of Elphinstone although the move cost him a great deal. He did not complain of the various rumours of who was coming out to replace him. He was clearly not a man of great self importance and pride and perhaps he was content to fulfill the role, to the best of his abilities, in which God had placed him – he was a very religious person – and if God decided that he had completed his task, then that was sufficient for him.

Rainier was not a politician who ensured he had many allies in London to look after his interests, although his Sandwich parliamentary connection was a powerful instrument. His diplomatic skills were directed largely at those he had to work with on the station; at the Governor General, the other two Presidents, and all three Councils, together with the senior officers of the regular and East India Company armies. He also had to charm those at the Admiralty who could help him to obtain the resources he needed from England. He appears to have looked no further ahead than his current position. But Rainier never wrote to senior officials about any subject not directly relevant to his command; he clearly was not one to play politics by bringing his name to the attention of the decision makers. This was an extremely risky attitude to take in such a highly competitive Service. But he would always show deference to those in high command, sometimes in a rather oleaginous manner; in his letter to Nepean announcing the capture of Malacca, he wrote:

...being doubtful of the propriety of my conduct in not having corresponded with ... Dundas on the subject of the late expedition, in which I co-operated in Council and execution, in obedience to the King's orders by him transmitted, and as therein prescribed, (not having then even received their Lordships directions so to do, and which are also silent on that head) I have to request you will please to intercede influence to remove any culpability that may reflect upon my conduct for this omission; in which, if I have erred, it has been thro' defect of instructions and my inexperience in the receipt of such orders.<sup>125</sup>

Perhaps if this were the kind of letter that Rainier sent, few would wish to read one from him. Indeed, in his will he notes that his naval career had provided him with more than his talents would expect – not the sign of a man with great expectations or self importance. He was what today would be called “low key”.

### **Conclusion.**

Rainier's personality dictated the results of his relationships with the Navy. His uncomplaining approach to lack of resources probably contributed to his longevity on the station and ensured he was largely left to perform his role as he wished. But it also meant that

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<sup>124</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Spencer, 24 March 1800.

<sup>125</sup> Rainier to Nepean, 15 October 1795, quoted in *The Times*, 6 April 1796.



he never had the resources to destroy French power completely, which might have given him a higher profile in London and in history. The calm manner in which he managed the brief but expensive sojourn of Elphinstone in India shows great skill in not incurring his commander's wrath. Care had to be taken as two of his captains were Elphinstone's son and nephew, whilst Malcolm and Cochrane were other members of the "Scottish Mafia" with much influence in government. He understood the necessity of good communications, which must have endeared him to the Admiralty, where he had the support of Stephens as Secretary to the Board from 1763 to 1795 and Board members; Gardner from 1790 to 1795, and again, Stephens from 1795 to 1806.

As a leader he appears to have identified many capable officers. Tracy identified twelve captains and above who served part of their careers under Rainier's tutelage.<sup>126</sup> But his "modern" approach to the management and care of his men was probably untimely as naval society became more rigid into the nineteenth century.

Having investigated how Rainier worked within the rules of the navy, the next chapter will review how he obtained the support of that other organisation which was vital to the success of his enterprise – the Company.

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<sup>126</sup> Tracy, *Who's Who in Nelson's Navy: 200 Heroes* (London, 2006).

## CHAPTER 3

**‘[I AM] HAPPY TO HEAR OF THE HARMONY AND GOOD UNDERSTANDING THAT EXISTS BETWEEN YOU AND THE KING’S CIVIL SERVANTS IN INDIA’.<sup>1</sup>**

**RAINIER, THE EAST INDIA COMPANY, AND THE KING’S CIVIL SERVANTS IN INDIA.**

The relationship between the Navy, in the form of the C-in-C, and the still powerful East India Company, was one not found on any other station. Its governor general was the most important individual in India with whom Rainier had to work: serious conflict between the two would almost certainly have led to failure for Rainier. This chapter will review how he managed his relationships with the various bodies within the Company and how far he was successful in meeting its demands, without damaging the goals set for him by the Admiralty.

**The East India Company.**

The period of Rainier’s command in the East Indies saw great advances in the amount of Indian territory under British control, and in the increasing influence of India in the formulation of British government strategy. Since the admiral had first been in India, Company control over Bengal had grown in a steady, if not linear, fashion. Control over British India by the British Government had increased when the 1773 Regulating Act was passed in an attempt to reduce the corruption, perceived or otherwise, of Company rule on the subcontinent. Part of the Act stipulated that there would be in future a crown appointed ‘Governor General in Council [of the Calcutta Presidency] [who] would have superior, but not overriding powers over the Presidencies of Bombay and Fort St. George [Madras]’.<sup>2</sup> Further legislation through the India Act of 1784, the Supplementary Act of 1786, and the Declaratory Act of 1788 strengthened both government control over India and the governor general’s control of government in India.

As might be expected: ‘The small print of the Regulating Act was not well drafted; the relationship of the ‘Governor General in Council’ with his brother governors, was ill defined’.<sup>3</sup> For the next three decades this lack of clarity would create the confusion, sometimes deliberate, found in many dealings between the three presidencies and the army and navy commanders. The questions arose as to who was in overall command, if anyone, and whether the responsibilities of the political and military decision makers were subordinate to the individual presidencies or to the Crown. Richmond stated that the perilous situation in which the British found themselves in 1782 was not due so much to the abilities of the French but to the disorganised and individualistic manner in which the three presidencies fought their private wars with little thought to the common good.<sup>4</sup> However, by the time Wellesley arrived in 1798 there was at least an operational understanding that he was in command.

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<sup>1</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 75682, Spencer to Rainier, 6 May 1796.

<sup>2</sup> R. Cavaliero, *Strangers in the Land* (London, 2002), p. 50.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>4</sup> Richmond, *The Navy in India 1763-1783*, pp. 29-30.

The relationship between the Company and the British Government had been evolving since the Seven Years War, when Company ships and men were used in the capture of Manila. The government realised that here was a resource it could use as an extension of British power in the east and which, it also believed, would be at no cost to the Treasury. During the American Revolution there had been regular planning between the Company's Secret Committee and the Government, but little came of their plans because of the defensive nature of Britain's strategies in the region caused by the effective campaigns fought by her enemies. But this war saw two important developments; the Company was obliged to pay for royal troops sent out to India, which it had thought should be a national cost, and the key role of the Cape of Good Hope was first mooted – illustrating that India would need to be defended several thousand miles to the west.<sup>5</sup>

The evolution of the Company government of India impacted the relationships between it and the navy, Whereas Hughes had to struggle against the narrow interests of both the semi-independent Madras and Bombay Presidencies, with little input from Calcutta, by 1794 Rainier benefitted from a clear central command from the governor general. And this was accelerated with the arrival of Wellesley. Although the cooperation between army and navy commanders was first class in both American and French wars, the rapid expansion of the Company army during the latter led to severe stresses in its organisation and in its relations with the royal army regiments in India. These tensions were not mirrored between the navy and Bombay Marine because the disparity in size between the two was the reverse of that on land. There was no doubt that the Royal Navy was the superior force. And this juxtaposition was maintained by the close relationship which Rainier developed with all three presidencies.

The French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars saw the interconnection of forces even more closely wedded. By 1805, the armies of the three Presidencies of Bengal, Madras and Bombay had 192,000 men, compared with the 20,000 royal troops in India.<sup>6</sup> During the French wars Company troops and ships participated in attacks on Ceylon (1795), Malacca and the Moluccas (1795), Egypt (1801), Reunion and Mauritius (1810) and Java (1811).<sup>7</sup> The proposed occupation of Macao in 1808 had a less successful outcome as the Chinese government let everyone know it would not accept weak Portuguese rule of the colony being replaced by a more aggressive European power. Without these Company forces the British government would have found it impossible to conduct the war in such a proactive manner.

Dundas, as Secretary of State for War and President of the Board of Control of the East India Company, was in a position to put heavy pressure on the Company and this he did with enthusiasm, feeling that, in return for the Government's support for its monopoly position, it should give generously to the war effort. And assistance was given by the Company, even if somewhat reluctantly. Sixteen Company leased vessels were loaned for the attack on the French West Indies in 1795, £2 million was loaned in 1796 and ten East Indiamen were converted into 64 guns warships, each manned by 300 men recruited by the Company.<sup>8</sup> There were also occasions when requests went in the opposite direction. The reduction of dockyard workers in private yards during the Peace of Amiens led to a serious strike by artificers and the Company could not prepare its ships adequately for next season's convoys to China and

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<sup>5</sup> H.V. Bowen, *The Business of Empire* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 46.

<sup>6</sup> M. Duffy, 'World Wide War, 1793-1815', in P.J. Marshall, *Oxford History of the British Empire*, II, p. 202.

<sup>7</sup> Bowen, *The Business of Empire*, p. 47.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

India. It requested assistance from the craftsmen from naval yards. But feeling was so high that most refused to transfer and those that did were soon intimidated into withdrawing.<sup>9</sup>

Rainier, in his role as commander in chief in the East Indies, played a large part in making possible the growth of British power over Indian territory and, indirectly, demonstrating the importance of the Far East to Britain's worldwide interests. But how far he understood what was happening in the shifting balance of global power politics is unclear. There is certainly no sign of understanding in any of his writings. He was not a visionary in the mould of Wellesley or Dundas. He was more the traditional naval officer who saw his role as serving the Crown through the direction of his superiors at the Admiralty and he concentrated on a narrow naval interpretation of those goals. This section will attempt to identify the various elements of the East India Company that impacted on the Navy and to demonstrate how Rainier addressed them, adjudicating whether or not he did so in an effective manner. For many people it was difficult to see where the Company ended and the 'Crown' began. Indeed, Captain Lennon notes in his Journal that the Admiral had great difficulty trying to explain to a native prince the difference between the Company and the King, made worse by an understandable poor command of English by the prince.<sup>10</sup>

At this point it is worth illustrating the difference between life as a senior army officer or government official, and that of an admiral in India. The army was in fact a combination of the British regular army and that of the Company. There was continual rivalry and jealousy between the two because an officer in the former always had seniority over an officer of the same rank in the latter, even if their age and experience made this illogical. For example, a captain of 17 years' experience in the Company army was placed under the command of a regular army captain, newly arrived from England, with 26 months' experience.<sup>11</sup> Although it was never a possibility that an officer in the Bombay Marine could ever command anyone in the Royal Navy, their interaction was more limited so friction was minimised. Also, there was such a close interaction between army and government that, in the early 1790s, the governor generalship and presidencies of Madras and Bombay were all held by army officers; Cornwallis, Meadows and Abercromby respectively. Cornwallis would have felt comfortable with this approach as he had been told by Dundas in 1789 that military men were the best source for governors in India.<sup>12</sup> All European Company officers were expected to enhance their meagre army pay by participating in private trade and speculation, both legal and illegal, which meant they were less likely to give full attention to their military duties. But, in some ways, they were only following the advice of Governor General and Commander-in-Chief Cornwallis who wrote that to be a successful officer in the Company army one had to learn the language, customs and religious prejudices in order to be effective.<sup>13</sup> Making money from the circumstance in which one found oneself was certainly a custom in Indian government.

They also lived their lives close to the local Indian society which they would need to understand. They would have Indian servants, they would buy and sell with Indian merchants, they would eat Indian food and live with the smells and dust of a hot alien culture. Often they would have Indian mistresses – some of the older men would have Indian wives although this practice was declining as an increasing Christian evangelicalism scorned such

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<sup>9</sup> R. Morriss, *Naval Power and Culture* (Aldershot, 2004), pp. 51-52.

<sup>10</sup> B.L., I.O.R., Home Misc. Series, H/441, Captain Lennon, 'Journal of Admiral Rainier's Expedition to the Molucca Islands', 1795-6, p. 197.

<sup>11</sup> T.A. Heathcote, *The Military in British India* (Manchester, 1995), p. 52.

<sup>12</sup> C.H. Philips, *The East India Company 1784-1834* (Manchester, 1961), p. 67.

<sup>13</sup> J. Black, *Britain as a Military Power 1688-1816* (London, 1999), p. 256.

formal contact with the natives. Their war was waged largely against Indian armies on behalf of Indian rulers, although admittedly with many European officers. Their diplomatic and intelligence activities were carried out under Indian protocols. 'In India ... the British were forced to master and manipulate the information systems of their Hindu and Mughal predecessors'.<sup>14</sup>

Compare this world to that of a naval officer. Apart from the weather and some items of food, he would still be living in a well regulated world where all ranks and hierarchies were clearly defined and understood, duties were the same, meal times unchanged, watches were followed, everyone spoke the same language, and few were the contacts with the native population.<sup>15</sup> This difference would mean there was much less incentive and opportunity for Rainier and his senior officers to build up relationships and a deep understanding of Indian culture and practices.<sup>16</sup> Although, as commander in chief, Rainier was provided by the Company with palatial living quarters in Madras, he knew that he could always retreat to his ship – a safe and perfectly understood world over which he was in complete control. And that this was Rainier's preferred 'home' can be inferred by the fact that the most celebrated diarist of Anglo-Indian society in that period, William Hickey, does not even mention Rainier once, despite his eleven years on station.<sup>17</sup>

In fact, Hickey illustrates well the situation that Rainier's predecessor, Admiral Cornwallis left behind, saying that he had left Indian waters unprotected, which allowed much depredation of merchant shipping by the French – so much so that the Company equipped four East Indiamen and a private ship to protect them. 'This little fleet soon cleared the Bay of Bengal of privateers; then proceeded to the Straits of Malacca and China Seas, altogether proving of important use'.<sup>18</sup> He also refers to Elphinstone as that 'gallant officer' who would drive the privateers away, but he was not successful: 'two out of every three ships that had ventured to sea being captured'.<sup>19</sup> There is a slight inference here that the current naval commander was not doing his job, hence the hope that Elphinstone would be successful. Of the capture of the Dutch Spice islands by Admiral Rainier he writes: 'In consequence of this the English ships of war immediately took possession of all the Dutch Islands'.<sup>20</sup> Concerning events in late 1804, he wrote: 'In November, Admiral Sir Edward Pellew arrived ... he being nominated to the chief command of His Majesty's Squadron in the East Indies'.<sup>21</sup> Even with Rainier's frequent travels around the station, it is difficult to understand why Rainier was so invisible.

The themes of this complex relationship will be reviewed under the following headings;

- a) Rainier and Dundas.
- b) Rainier and the Governors General, Shore and Wellesley.
- c) Rainier and the Native Princes.
- d) Dealing with the Presidencies and China.
- e) The Bombay Marine.

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<sup>14</sup> C.A. Bayly, *Empire and Information, Intelligence gathering and social communication in India, 1780-1870* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 8.

<sup>15</sup> N.A.M. Rodger, *The Wooden World*, various, J. Laffin, *Jack Tar, the Story of the British Sailor*, various.

<sup>16</sup> W. Dalrymple, *White Mughals*, various, M. Bellasis, *Honourable Company*, various.

<sup>17</sup> B.L., I.O.R., Eur. Mss. G118, Hickey Journal.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 544.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 544.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 546.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 652.

Rainier's achievements in working with the army are explored in Chapter Six.

a) Rainier and Dundas.

Rainier's direct dealings with Dundas were rare but important. As the latter was the President of the Board of Control and Secretary of State for War, he was, in effect, the person who drove British strategy in India even though he was three months distant by mail. Normally Dundas would manage his strategy indirectly through the First Lord. However it is worth noting that it was very dangerous to make him an enemy. Four directors of the Company voted against Dundas' nomination of General Meadows as Governor of Bombay and he wrote to Pitt: 'As to the Directors who voted against Meadows, I hope we shall consider them as objects of vengeance'.<sup>22</sup> It can be believed that Dundas found Rainier acceptable. He wrote to Spencer in March 1796 that he feared the 'Eastern World' was the only area in which the French could attack and he was worried that the army and naval command at the Cape would not be effective. The absence of any mention of concern about the Navy in the East Indies suggests that he was satisfied with the situation there.<sup>23</sup> Because Rainier had the Admiralty, described as practising a kind of 'benevolent supervision',<sup>24</sup> between himself and Dundas, he was spared the 'micro-management' that was Dundas' trade mark. He had, for example, ordered Governor General Cornwallis [and Admiral Cornwallis's elder brother] in 1791 to make peace with Tippoo Sultan – an order Cornwallis ignored as he knew that Dundas did not have the current information to give such orders.

Although stubborn, Rainier was not an aristocratic or arrogant man, he would have had difficulties in avoiding the direction of such a strong personality as Dundas. But clearly he did manage to avoid having direct communication with Dundas. In a letter Dundas wrote to Wellesley, who knew Rainier well by this time: 'I have communicated this letter to Lord Spencer, and the instructions will be given to the *officer commanding on the Indian station*' [author's italics].<sup>25</sup> Although, perhaps Dundas did not use Rainier's name in case the latter had been superceded.

b) Rainier & the Governors General Shore & Wellesley.

The following letter from Spencer to Rainier refers to 'the King's Civil Servants in India'. As there were less than a handful at a time when those of the Company were to be found across the entire region, one must assume that he also meant to include the senior officials of the Company:

I am very happy to hear of the harmony and good understanding that exists between you and the King's Civil Servants in India which I do not doubt from everything I hear of you ... a very good inducement to me ... to be desirous of your continuance on your present Station as long as your health may allow of it and as long as an Officer of your Rank is required in that part of the world.<sup>26</sup>

It makes clear the respect that the First Lord had for Rainier from their seventeen month period of correspondence and from what others must have told him because he had never met Rainier.

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<sup>22</sup> T.N.A., Chatham Papers, vol. 157, Dundas to Pitt, 19 September 1787, quoted in Philips, *The East India Company*, p. 55.

<sup>23</sup> Corbett (ed.), *Spencer Papers, 1794-1801*, 1, p. 240.

<sup>24</sup> Philips, *The East India Company*, p. 69.

<sup>25</sup> Dundas to Wellesley, 31 October 1799, quoted in Ingram *Two Views of British India*, p. 207.

<sup>26</sup> B.L., Add. Mss., 75862, Spencer to Rainier, 6 May 1796.

The first four years of Rainier's command saw Sir John Shore as the Governor General and it was from him that Rainier learnt the protocol of working with the senior officials of the Company. Luckily, Shore was of a similar personality to Rainier; he interpreted his orders in a way that precluded adventures, he was an expert in administration and revenue gathering, and he was a highly religious person, later becoming the President of the British and Foreign Bible Society. He was also a believer in the traditional eighteenth century Company view that non-intervention was the best policy – the complete opposite view to his successor, Wellesley.<sup>27</sup> Rainier clearly managed him well. As described below, Shore believed he could control the newly appointed senior naval officer.

I think it my duty to point out to your particular Notice the Zeal and Attention of Commodore Rainier, he duly apprizes me of all his Operations, & does me the honor to consult me upon them; as long as he remains on the Command ..., no difficulties can arise on the degree of subordination due from his Majesty's Commanding officer to the Government of India.<sup>28</sup>

Within a week of his arrival, Rainier wrote to Shore telling him he had been ordered to consult with 'Your Excellency and the Governor and Council of Madras on the employment of His Majesty's Ships under my command for the protection of the Settlements and Trade of His Majesty's Subjects and Allies in the East Indies'.<sup>29</sup> Thus he told Shore of what he was expected to do and that, although he was to 'consult' with the most senior officials of the Company, he was also implying that he, personally, would be making the decisions. It is also interesting that his orders made no mention of consulting with the junior presidency, that of Bombay, where his squadron would be sheltering during the north east monsoons and where he would expect to have his ships repaired at the Bombay dockyard.

Rainier was assiduous in keeping Shore abreast of his thoughts and events on the station. In December he wrote that the Dutch wanted naval help against an expected French attack and that the China private trade was without his protection as the ship owners would not sail in convoy. He said that he would need Shore's help next year to make them more disciplined if they wanted naval protection. He was also concerned that neutral Danish ships were supplying Mauritius.<sup>30</sup> The next month he wrote agreeing with Shore that the danger from privateers was much exaggerated and also warned him of the poor quality of naval stores.<sup>31</sup> In February he wrote him a long letter describing the dispositions of all naval ships which he hoped would protect the Trade.<sup>32</sup> Thus it can be seen that Rainier was establishing a protocol for frequent, regular communication with the Governor General. Rainier showed how he interpreted his orders to the benefit of trade by another letter written just before Shore was recalled. In it he explained what he saw as the relative merits between concentrating on trade protection and an attack on the Philippines. Rainier stated that the former was his prime objective because such an expedition would be difficult from a navigational point of view, would take a long time to assemble the transports, and would leave India vulnerable to attack because so many of the Company's troops would be needed for foreign expedition. Again it

<sup>27</sup> H.L. Hoskins, *British Routes to India* (New York, 1996), p. 54.

<sup>28</sup> Shore to Dundas, 7 February 1795, quoted in H. Furber (ed.), *The Private Record of an Indian Governor Generalship*, p. 66.

<sup>29</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/167, Rainier to Shore, 19 September 1794.

<sup>30</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/167, Rainier to Shore, 31 December 1794.

<sup>31</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/168, Rainier to Shore, 27 January 1795.

<sup>32</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/168, Rainier to Shore, 13 February 1795.

can be seen that Rainier was more concerned with the unrewarding but, to him, vital duty of trade protection, rather than the career enhancing and dispatch writing opportunities arising from capturing enemy colonies.

The situation changed with the arrival of Shore's replacement. The personalities of the successive governor generals were completely opposite. Shore was a man of the old school, believing that the Company should, wherever possible, keep out of wars and avoid interference with the Indian states. Maintaining a balance of power would ensure the peace in which trade, the reason for the existence of the Company, could flourish. According to Wellesley, the situation of Mysore and the Maratha Confederacy were precarious and British India was threatened from Afghanistan by its ruler Zeman Shah.<sup>33</sup> The only permanent way for Britain to obtain a lasting peace would be to defeat the first two states. All that was needed was a *casus belli* and this was handed to Wellesley when news broke of Tippoo Sultan's attempts to form an alliance with France to oust Britain from India.

By the time that the new governor general arrived, Rainier was an experienced flag officer who had most successfully extended the territories of the British Empire and Company. Wellesley was unknown to Rainier. But this ambitious, amoral man was to be the governor general from 1798 to 1805 and the most important influence on Rainier's performance in India, together with Basil Cochrane.<sup>34</sup> Additionally he was a personal friend of Pitt, the prime minister. His personality was summed up by Cavaliero: 'He [Wellesley] had energy and brilliance and the self importance of Toad of Toad Hall. His despatches wearied all who read them, including Dundas'.<sup>35</sup> Even his biographer, Iris Butler admits:

His vanity was universal: it was essential for him to feel that he knew best and, if everyone (British and Indian) did what they were told, all could be sweetness and light. He really did believe this ideal situation could be achieved, hence the fury, frantic indignation, when ever his will was crossed.<sup>36</sup>

The differing personalities of the two governors general were also illustrated in the way in which Wellesley criticised all those who reported to him, both civil and military. But, as Ingram says: 'His real complaint against them was their having been allowed by Sir John Shore to do their jobs'.<sup>37</sup> He did not want men who could act independently, he wanted men who would obey his orders without question. Contemporaneously, Hickey wrote that Wellesley arrived: 'at once bursting forth like a constellation in all his pomp and splendour amongst us'.<sup>38</sup> Ingram describes him as: 'a bad-tempered and overbearing man', his letters reveal him as 'ungenerous'.<sup>39</sup> Wellesley's own words leave no chance of misunderstanding. 'Let me have a sober, well tempered, tractable man, and I am content'.<sup>40</sup> Fry described him as: 'manic depressive, by turns euphoric and despondent, hyperactive and lethargic, altogether difficult to work with'.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Wellesley to Dundas, 25 February 1798, 28 February 1798, 6 July 1798, 11 October 1798, 22 April 1799, 18 May 1799, 5 March 1800, quoted in Ingram, *Two Views of British India*, p. 122, 146, 150, 227-8, and B.L. Add. Mss. 13724, Wellesley to Sir Alured Clarke, [Lt. Gen., C-in-C Indian Army], 8 March 1799.

<sup>34</sup> See Chapter Seven for Rainier's relationship with the Hon. Basil Cochrane.

<sup>35</sup> Cavaliero, *Strangers in the Land*, p. 95.

<sup>36</sup> I. Butler, *The Eldest Brother: The Marquess of Wellesley 1760-1842* (London, 1973), p. 147.

<sup>37</sup> Ingram, *Commitment to Empire*, p. 136.

<sup>38</sup> B.L., I.O.R., Eur. Mss. G118, p. 586.

<sup>39</sup> Ingram, *Two Views of British India*, p. 11.

<sup>40</sup> Wellesley to Dundas, 21 April 1799, quoted in Ingram, *Two Views of British India*, p. 143.

<sup>41</sup> M. Fry, *The Dundas Despotism* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 220.



Yet the situation was such that the new governor general could put into action his plans:

Those [the Court of Directors] ... could not more prevent the Bengal Council building a road ... than they could later rein in the territorial ambitions of ... Wellesley, ... actions were always determined by men of influence “on the spot”.<sup>42</sup>

As Ingram said: ‘British India under Wellesley acted as a revolutionary state, not formulating a policy in response to local conditions but trying to create the conditions necessary for the attainment of his objectives’.<sup>43</sup> Rainier had always to take into account, when making *his* decisions, that whatever he might feel about the sanctity of the naval command process, his close colleague in the Company was the kind of person who would make whatever decision he wanted, at whatever cost, almost irrespective of what the Court of Directors of the East India Company wanted. However, Wellesley’s approach of ignoring the Court led ultimately to his downfall in 1805 as the Directors fought to have him recalled. The argument used was that he had created a new, enlarged type of government in India which did not meet with their approval and had spent vast amounts of their money fighting wars to expand British control over India. Wellesley’s influential predecessors, such as Cornwallis and Shore, were more amenable to direction from London but he:

was an enormously single minded Governor General who was reluctant to acknowledge the authority of the directors over him, and who also developed a vision of empire that was fundamentally different from most of those in London.<sup>44</sup>

Rainier was fortunate that he served his apprenticeship as commander-in-chief with Shore so that, by the time Wellesley arrived, he was more experienced, confident and self assured.

By 1786 the rivalry between the three presidencies was over and Cornwallis had established the protocol that the governor general was also the commander-in-chief of all troops on the sub continent, thus setting the scene for Wellesley’s arrival. But control of the Navy was another matter. Wellesley worked assiduously to obtain this control. ‘Remember my ideas ... [of] a power of superintending the fleet in India. Without [it], I cannot answer for anything in times of war’.<sup>45</sup> However, he came up against the natural opposition of the Admiralty and of Rainier himself. Dundas responded to Wellesley’s request by saying:

...if I was to propose to transfer from the admiralty to the governor general the whole control or power of the fleet serving in India, it would be productive of very unpleasant consequences. I am, therefore, perfectly aware of the convenience that would arise from the exercise of the authority by land and sea going on in perfect unison and understanding together, and therefore I shall endeavour to concert with Lord Spencer some argument for that purpose.<sup>46</sup>

In the same letter Dundas also explained that the army would not relinquish its control over the patronage of the British regiments in India although it was accepted that ‘every movement

<sup>42</sup> Bowen, *The Business of Empire*, p. 183.

<sup>43</sup> Ingram, *Commitment to Empire*, p. 117.

<sup>44</sup> Bowen, *The Business of Empire*, p. 206.

<sup>45</sup> Wellesley to Dundas, 12 January 1799, quoted in Ingram, *Two Views of British India*, p. 120.

<sup>46</sup> Dundas to Wellesley, 12 October 1799, *ibid.*, p. 194.

or operation' of both royal and Company troops must be under the control of the governor general. A year later he was again dampening Wellesley's hopes:

...to obtain any direct authority from the admiralty over the fleet is so impossible as to be idle to attempt it. The utmost that can be hoped for is pointed instructions to co-operate in their proceedings with the supreme civil government of the country.<sup>47</sup>

Yet, although Rainier was officially in command, he had to walk a fine line between not upsetting Wellesley and keeping his own independence from this strong willed aristocrat. That he was successful from the earliest days of their relationship is illustrated by several letters between the two of them; for example: 'The Public Service must derive great advantage from this early proof of your Excellency's inclination to cooperate with me',<sup>48</sup> and: 'Whatever measures it may be proper for me to take in consequence, the disposition of the Naval Force under my Command shall be duly communicated to Your Lordship'.<sup>49</sup>

Apart from the one instance over Wellesley's planned attack on Mauritius, Rainier managed the relationship very well. He kept the Governor General informed of what he was doing and perhaps more importantly, what were his thought processes: '... the particular plan I have marked out for the employment of His Majesty's Ships under my Command for the rest of the present, and part of the ensuing season'.<sup>50</sup> His nervousness at the late arrival of Blankett in the Red Sea led him to write:

It would afford me much satisfaction to have the Honour of a personal communication with Your Lordship on the subject of the disposition of His Majesty's Ships for the ensuing season ... what occurs to me at present on this head is to dispatch a Ship of 64 guns with one or two frigates to the Red Sea as soon as possible ... in order to supply the place of Commodore Blankett's squadron should he have failed in reaching that Station.<sup>51</sup>

This shows how well Rainier explained his ideas to Wellesley, what resources he had at his disposal, and that he was fully aware that he had to make contingency arrangements in case Dundas' plan of sending Blankett to the Red Sea did not work. In describing the complexity of his command, he further expounded his fears that the French might join the Spanish at Manila and attack the China and Country Trades. He further had to patrol the Malabar Coast to stop French supplies reaching Tippoo Sultan. He was quick to thank Wellesley for any help he gave to the Navy: '[I] am much gratified in the resources provided by Your Lordship's direction for the reception of His Majesty's Ship *La Sybille*' [Severely damaged capturing the French frigate *Le Forte*].

This letter also contains an allusion to the tension between the Navy and Company on the subject of the former pressing men out of the latter's ships:

<sup>47</sup> Dundas to Wellesley, 4 September 1800, *ibid.*, p. 296.

<sup>48</sup> B.L., I.O.R, Home Misc. Series, H/572, Wellesley to Rainier, 12 August 1798.

<sup>49</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 13758, Rainier to Wellesley, 8 December 1798.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, Rainier to Wellesley, 9 July 1798.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, Rainier to Wellesley, 17 May 1799.

... [this] will effectively obviate those difficulties that took place last Year between the Government [of India] and the captains of His Majesty's Ships respecting the raising of men for His Majesty's Service.<sup>52</sup>

Rainier consistently emphasized how importantly he took trade protection by writing to Hobart that he could only blockade Mauritius by leaving the Bay of Bengal unprotected and by noting to Wellesley that the victory at Seringapatam would allow him to allocate more ships to convoy protection as he no longer would have to patrol the Coast to stop French supplies reaching Tippoo.<sup>53</sup> This latter act would also fulfil the request he had received from the Secret Committee of the Court of Directors via the Bombay Presidency to protect merchant shipping.<sup>54</sup> Rainier was consistent over the years in showing his adherence to the concerns of the Company rather more than did Wellesley.

Rainier was clearly successful in his management of Wellesley but he was still unable to arrest the latter's desire for control. The latter had rapidly come to the conclusion that he would need to destroy Tippoo if he were to extend British control in India. He needed Rainier to concentrate particularly on this task:

Admiral Rainier has made the most full and timely communications to me of his views, and I have reason to believe that he will give a willing attention to my suggestions; but this personal attention is no security for the interests of the Government. It is absolutely necessary to place the matter on some more solid foundation than that of mere courtesy ... the Navy cannot be effective unless it shall be made the duty of the admiral at least to concert his operations with the Governor General ... the want of a controlling power over the officers of the King's Navy, has often exposed the Government here to the most disgraceful inconvenience, and impeded the Company's Trade ... Some of them [naval officers] have threatened to fire upon the Company's ships under the most frivolous pretences, and they defy the Company's Government on all occasion.<sup>55</sup>

Wellesley could not leave the issue alone:

The Admiral [Rainier] is here: he is very tractable. But I must have command of the fleet; for if a refractory spirit, such as Blankett, should succeed to the command, I could not enforce the protection either of the territory or commerce. I hope Lord Spencer will not leave Blankett here. He is a complete demon of discord.<sup>56</sup>

At this stage the Governor General had not even met Blankett, yet he was willing to libel him to the highest levels of government. Wellesley stopped at the Cape on his way out to India and Blankett had been second in command to Elphinstone during his sojourn on that station. Whilst there, he had had less than satisfactory relationships with the army. It is probable that Wellesley learnt of this at the Cape. He should also have known that Blankett's appointment had the support of Dundas himself so, indirectly, he was criticizing his own superior. In 1800, when plans were laid to attack Batavia: 'I have committed the principal conduct of the

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., Rainier to Wellesley, 8 August 1798.

<sup>53</sup> N.M.M., RAI/4, Rainier to Hobart, 19 April 1795.

<sup>54</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 13758, Rainier to Wellesley, 22 June 1799.

<sup>55</sup> Wellesley to Dundas, 1 October 1798, quoted in Ingram, *Two Views of British India*, p. 82.

<sup>56</sup> Wellesley to Dundas, 3 July 1799, *ibid.*, p. 173.

expedition to Admiral Rainier, and I have appointed Colonel Champagne to the command of the land forces'.<sup>57</sup> Here is an example of how well the Governor General thought of Rainier in that he was prepared to give him overall command of a large combined operation. And, in 1800, he was happy to send the Company frigate *Bombay* together with the rearmed *Earl of Mornington* to put themselves under Rainier's orders.<sup>58</sup> But even when relations with Rainier were at a low ebb following the aborted Mauritius expedition Wellesley was still positive:

[Rainier's] zealous disposition which you have manifested ... your remarks ... appear to me to be extremely judicious ... confirm my entire confidence in your judgement, activity and zeal.<sup>59</sup>

Wellesley's own letters to Rainier frequently read like detailed orders on how the Navy should be led for the good of the 'Public Service'. It is likely that many admirals would have had difficulty keeping their tempers, but Rainier never showed any anger at the manner in which Wellesley wrote to him – at least not on paper. At the news of the French taking Alexandria, Wellesley wrote to Rainier worrying that there might be sufficient ships at Suez to take French troops south towards India. So Rainier was told he needed to block the Red Sea and the Straits of Bab el Mandab. Wellesley thought two frigates should be sent at once and they could use Mocha as a base because there was a Company agent resident there.<sup>60</sup> The whole tone of the letter is one of a commander speaking to his subordinate. Understanding that this was how Wellesley wrote to everyone, Rainier studiously ignored his manner, complaining neither to Governor General nor the First Lord, and continued to write in a cooperative manner informing of all his ship dispositions, asking for advice and requesting Wellesley use his influence to persuade the merchants to sail only under naval convoy. The Governor General was quite at home writing directly to Rainier's subordinates too; sometimes with Rainier's approval such as when he wrote to Blankett reminding him that Rainier had told Blankett 'to attend to any suggestions which I might offer to your consideration with regard to future operations of the Squadron under your Command'. He then went on to say that all the ports in the Red Sea that were in French hands, or might be in the future, should be destroyed.<sup>61</sup> Sometimes he wrote to Rainier's subordinates without reference to the admiral as when he wrote to the 'Senior Naval Officer' off Trincomalee to 'recommend to you, in the most urgent terms, to adopt every possible means to recapture the *Kent*'.<sup>62</sup> Although Wellesley carefully uses the word 'recommend', such a strongly worded letter, coming from a governor general to a mere captain, would be very difficult to ignore. This attitude is also demonstrated when, through his private secretary, Merrick Shaw, he told Captain Paget of HMS *Caroline* that he wished the captain to communicate officially to the Governor General the orders Paget had received from Rainier.<sup>63</sup> Because the admiral was so distant from Paget it would appear that Wellesley wanted to blend his own Company plans with what Captain Paget had been ordered to do by Rainier.

Thus it can be seen that in dealing with such a personality as Wellesley, Rainier showed extreme standards of patience and political and diplomatic skill. Although, to be fair to Wellesley, he must surely have known that Paget had written to his friend Shaw telling him

<sup>57</sup> Wellesley to Dundas, 8 June 1800, quoted in Ingram *Two Views of British India*, p. 267.

<sup>58</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. Wellesley to Rainier, 24 August 1800.

<sup>59</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 13752, Wellesley to Rainier, 18 March 1801.

<sup>60</sup> B.L., I.O.R., Home Misc., H/572, Wellesley to Rainier, 12 October 1798.

<sup>61</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 13752, Wellesley to Blankett, 16 October 1800.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., Wellesley to S.N.O. Trincomalee, 13 October 1800.

<sup>63</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 13753, Merrick Shaw to Paget, 13 January 1804.

that he wished he could be under the command of the governor general: ‘...I wish upon my Heart we were under His Lordship’s Orders when so far from the Admiral. The Service would profit above all benefit’.<sup>64</sup> He did not use this letter to forward his case for control of naval activities.

The only public and serious quarrel between the two came when Wellesley asked Rainier for the Navy’s support for his intended attack on Mauritius in 1800. But, at least on the surface, there were no repercussions on their relationship.<sup>65</sup>

But he could not stop himself meddling elsewhere, he wrote to the senior naval officer in China, telling him that, if he did not hear from the admiral, he was to watch for any French designs on Macao.<sup>66</sup> And he did the same thing again in January, following the peace treaty between Portugal and France.<sup>67</sup> With all this controlling he did not forget to thank the Navy for its help. He wrote to Rainier to recommend Captain Hargood of the *Intrepid* for the rapid movement of troops from Goa to Cambay during one of the many emergencies.<sup>68</sup> And when he heard that the outbreak of war with France was again imminent he wrote to Rainier suggesting a process for passing on intelligence between the government and navy. He also mentioned that he would do everything within his power to prepare Rainier’s ships for war.<sup>69</sup> This was probably in response to Rainier’s letter saying:

I shall always be ready with His Majesty’s Squadron under my command to cooperate in any measure Your Excellency may point out for the good of His Majesty’s Service agreeable to the tenour (sic) of their Lordships’ orders.<sup>70</sup>

This demonstrates a somewhat legalistic approach by Rainier, allowing him to interpret how far any plans the Governor General might have with such phrases as ‘for the good of His Majesty’s Service’ and ‘agreeable to the tenour of their Lordships’ orders’. He might also have been warning Wellesley not to raise again the issue of attacking Mauritius. Following another act of thoughtfulness, Captain Batt of the *La Sybille* thanked Wellesley for sending to his crew some special food and drink whilst cruising off the Sand Heads.<sup>71</sup>

It would be unfair to assume that the correspondence between the two was one sided. Rainier ensured that Wellesley knew of the whereabouts of his ships and the reason for their disposition. As he travelled round the station much more than the Governor General, he was able to warn him of local issues, for example, that the garrison at Banda was dangerously weak and the island could easily be retaken.<sup>72</sup> On another occasion, whilst describing his deployments he mentioned that he had been ordered to send a ship to patrol the China Seas, he showed his own kind of foresight by returning to Madras in order to arrange for a storeship to follow so that the warship could stay on station for a longer period of time.<sup>73</sup> Whilst Rainier was always happy to receive advice from the Governor General as to the disposition of His Majesty’s Ships, he felt he could not adhere to Wellesley’s request to keep

<sup>64</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 13753, Paget to Merrick Shaw, 20 December 1803.

<sup>65</sup> See Chapter Six for detailed description.

<sup>66</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 13752, Wellesley to S.N.O. China, 20 November 1801.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., Wellesley to S.N.O. China, 17 January 1802.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., Wellesley to Rainier, 22 May 1802.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., Wellesley to Rainier, 18 May 1803.

<sup>70</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 13762, Rainier to Wellesley, 13 April 1803.

<sup>71</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 13752, Batt to Wellesley, 14 February 1802.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., Rainier to Wellesley, 10 June 1801.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., Rainier to Wellesley, 25 December 1801.

all his ships together because he had to protect Trincomalee and the Malabar Coast and cover the Trade.<sup>74</sup> This letter does demonstrate the difference between the two men; the “big picture” strategist who was following his own goals which were not entirely in line with his masters, and the more careful, defensive mind of a man who has to follow orders and keep the business of trade - his own “big picture” – moving and therefore creating the wealth that Wellesley was hoping to spend. Co-operation between two such men was never going to be easy.

No further overt differences show up in later correspondence and good humour seems to have played a role right up to the dinner given by Wellesley to Rainier on the latter’s departure for England. After Wellesley vented his spleen at Rainier the relationship appeared to be back on an even keel right until the latter sailed for England just a few months before Wellesley himself, in 1805. In 1804 he wrote to Rainier that he felt that Britain should have invaded Mauritius in 1803, when the war recommenced but: ‘I [Wellesley] have the misfortune to differ with His Majesty’s present Ministers’. This is an interesting degree of openness from the Governor General to the Admiral who had thwarted him over this very same target in 1801. He believed the island was now too strong to attack but wanted cruizers to sail off the French base to annoy them. He also agreed with all the dispositions that the Admiral had made with his squadron.<sup>75</sup> This letter indicates a developing attitude of relative closeness between Rainier and the Governor General as the Admiral’s period of command was coming to a close. The tone also implies Wellesley did not blame Rainier for the Pulo Aur incident just five months previous – Wellesley was a heavy critic of anyone whom he felt had made a serious mistake.

But over the whole period of their working together it is clear that they recognized the need for a high degree of mutual interdependence. Neither could be successful without the assistance of the other. Wellesley needed the Navy to protect the Trade, to carry and protect the movement of troops and their supplies, to stop the French from landing men and supplies on the sub continent, and to participate in conquering enemy colonies. Rainier needed the Company to supply his men and ships with almost all their needs, and to repair his ships in the Company dockyard at Bombay. Not long after Wellesley arrived in India he received a letter from Rainier asking if the dockyards could be left free in season in order that naval vessels could be repaired as quickly as possible.<sup>76</sup> But Wellesley was the more proactive, not bothered with keeping to the rules and always looking for actions that could move his secret ambition forward to make the whole of India if not directly, then indirectly, a part of the British Empire.

That Wellesley held no long term grudge against Rainier can be interpreted from the fulsome praise of the latter at his departure, surely more sincere than mere protocol would require.

I trust Your Excellency will be assured of my unfeigned good wishes for your health and prosperity, and for your safe and happy arrival in England. [I offer you] my thanks for the many acts of personal favour and of useful and important Cooperation which have Distinguished Your Excellency’s Conduct towards me at the various periods of my Administration.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> N.M.M., RAI/ 9, Rainier to Wellesley, 1 September 1803.

<sup>75</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/5121/5, Wellesley to Rainier, 8 July 1804.

<sup>76</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/169, Rainier to Wellesley, 17 September 1798.

<sup>77</sup> B.L., Add. Ms. 37283, Wellesley to Rainier, 18 February 1805.

Wellesley, often such a domineering and vindictive man, therefore appears not to have borne a grudge against the Admiral. He would not have many allies in attacking Rainier, who enjoyed good relationships with the Presidencies of Bombay and Madras who were happy to place the ships of the Bombay Marine under Royal Navy command. But Wellesley was a friend of Pitt and it is possible that he played a role in deciding not to give any formal recognition to Rainier for his eleven successful years in the Far East. And Wellesley could be devious. The same day that he wrote to Rainier asking for his support in invading Mauritius, he wrote to the Court of Directors. But he did not mention his invasion plan.<sup>78</sup> It seems strange that he did not mention his intention to attack Mauritius if he was so sure that he was at one with their views and intentions.

c) Rainier and the Native Princes.

One of the major roles of the Governor General was to manage relations between British authority in India and the Indian princes. Rainier therefore played a very minor role, operating under the guidance of the Company. This gave little opportunity for the admiral to engage in such relationships even if he had wanted them. Examples of such are sparse in Rainier's letter books. There is a letter to the Nawab of Arcot advising him of the provision of a naval escort to take some of his vessels to the Red Sea. And he was also close enough to be one of the many creditors of the Nawab, parliamentary papers showing him to be owed £18,810.<sup>79</sup> In between crossing from Madras to Penang and managing to avoid making contact with his successor, Rear-Admiral Pellew, he did find time to attend the durbar of the Nawab of the Carnatic in February 1805 so, whilst he was preparing for his homeward journey, he still could represent the Navy at this important ceremonial event. Further evidence of his minor role is illustrated in East India Company papers relating to the Marhatta War in 1803. There is a letter from the Company Resident at Poona requesting that Admiral Rainier fire a salute from the naval vessels in Bombay harbour on the occasion of the Peshwa of Poona being reinstated on his throne.<sup>80</sup>

d) The Presidencies of Madras and Bombay and their Outposts.

i) Madras.

The process of assisting in the movement and supply of troops, and in trade protection, was also being followed with copious communication to and from the presidencies of Madras and Bombay. It illustrates how successful Rainier was. The Madras merchants asked for a frigate to escort a convoy from the Straits of Malacca to Bengal.<sup>81</sup> Clearly Rainier was at Madras as this time as it only took him three days to reply that he would accede to their request.<sup>82</sup> The next month Bombay merchants thanked him for protecting their ships,<sup>83</sup> and Lord Hobart, Governor of Madras, thanked him for the speed with which he had transported troops and weapons of the Company to attack Vizagapatam.<sup>84</sup> Until Sir Arthur Wellesley took seriously the need for logistical support for his troops, with upwards of 100,000 bullocks in attendance at one time, the army always had too few animals to carry its supplies over difficult terrain and in an inhospitable climate. Consequently ships were a vital method of supplying the army's men and equipment to wherever they were needed. And the various presidencies

<sup>78</sup> Rev. Father H. Heras (ed.), *Fort William-India House Correspondence, 1796-1800*, vol. XVIII, p. 289.

<sup>79</sup> B.P.P., Commissioners of Carnatic Debts 1806-7, First Report, p. 16.

<sup>80</sup> B.P.P., Accounts & Papers: presented to the House of Commons from the East India Company Parliament relating to the Mahratta War, 1803-4 Session, p. 478.

<sup>81</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/168, Merchants to Rainier, 23 January 1795.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., Rainier to Merchants, 26 January 1795.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., Merchants to Rainier, 22 February 1795.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., Hobart to Rainier, 25 February 1795.

would require Rainier's squadron to escort such valuable cargoes in case of attack by enemy warships. Without doubt the Navy gave the Indian government the freedom to choose the point of attack from the sea in the same way that it did in the other theatres of war. Rainier's response to Hobart illustrates his keenness to cooperate with the Company, as well as his ability to use ten words when one would suffice:

I confess myself much honor'd by the public manner, and the polite terms in which Your Lordship in Council is pleased to acknowledge my readiness to cooperate with Your Lordship on all occasion for the good of the Honorable Company's Service, particularly in the late instance of conveying in His Majesty's Ship *Suffolk* the detachment of Troops ordered to Vizagapatnam. ... Animated by the most zealous wishes for the Success and prosperity of Your Lordship's wise and equitable Government of this most respectable establishment, I have the honor to profess myself always with every sentiment of respect and Regard.<sup>85</sup>

Rainier's relationship with the combative Lord Hobart was good for the entire period of the latter's posting. After Elphinstone criticised Rainier for attacking Malacca, Hobart defended him to the new commander in chief:

You will observe that he [Rainier] is gone in prosecution of the orders ... which directed that our military operations should be progressive and pointed out the Molucca Islands as an object to which it was expected we should turn our attentions.<sup>86</sup>

The following month he wrote:

...it was in consequence of the express order from the Secretary of State, that, in communication with Admiral Rainier an expedition was sent by the Government into the Eastern Seas and however I may regret that any inconvenience should have arisen from the ships being employed upon that Service I should hope that Admiral Rainier will stand excused to Your Excellency as he has acted in strict conformity to directions from home.<sup>87</sup>

Whilst Rainier looked primarily to the Navy Board for his financial needs, there were times when he needed the assistance of the closer, and therefore more immediate, Company in India. He wrote to Bentinck, Governor of Madras, that he had invoices for naval stores and transport and, to pay them, he had £20,000 of navy bills. Unfortunately, the discount rate was so high that his cash was running low. Whilst the number of warships sent out to India had doubled, when they arrived after such a long journey, they needed so much repair that he expected his money to run out. He asked Bentinck if he could assist by supplying Company money to help pay his bills.<sup>88</sup> Unfortunately the Company was always short of money with widespread demands on its resources. It was not even able to increase the production of pepper in Sumatra as it did not have the specie to pay the farmers and they were unhappy with promissory notes.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>85</sup> N.M.M., RAI/4, Rainier to Hobart, 24 March 1795.

<sup>86</sup> N.M.M., KEI/5/3. Hobart to Elphinstone, 4 January 1796.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., Hobart to Elphinstone, 27 February 1796.

<sup>88</sup> N.M.M., RAI/9, Rainier to Bentinck, 2 April 1804.

<sup>89</sup> J. Bastin, *The British in Western Sumatra (1685-1825)* (Hong Kong, 1965), p. xxvii.



Hobart's successor, Lord Clive, also had a good working relationship with Rainier. In 1800 he wrote to the Admiral saying that if war were declared with Denmark he would give Rainier sufficient troops to take to capture the Danish colony of Traquebar, especially as he knew it was a base from which the Danes supplied Mauritius. He also told him that the Indiaman *Rockingham* had arrived at Madras with naval stores but that the spars were so large that they could not be unloaded.<sup>90</sup> But this relationship did not mean that Clive would take any risks with his own well being. In 1803 he wrote to Rainier telling him that Wellesley had ordered him to provide some troops to be sent to protect Goa from a French invasion. But there was a lot of unrest in the Deccan and he needed all his troops for that problem, he wanted Rainier to protect Goa on his own.<sup>91</sup> This also illustrates that, while Governor General, Wellesley officially had control over the two other presidencies, in practice this was obviously not the case.

## ii) Bombay.

The potential threat to India from a French invasion of Egypt put the Bombay Council very much in the forefront of activity, it being the nearest British settlement on the Indian mainland that Bonaparte might attack. During this period, Rainier spent much time and energy working with it. In September 1798 a letter, which Rainier had sent to Bosanquet, the Chairman of the Directors of the Company, was read out during the Bombay Council Meeting, warning of the danger from Egypt. The Council suggested to Rainier that he position a frigate at the mouth of the Red Sea to stop any French or Dutch ship taking supplies to Tippoo Sultan.<sup>92</sup> The Bombay Council Meeting minutes of 28 September 1798, stated:

It [is] impossible for us to be too much on our guard as knowing India to be one of the great objectives to which France is at present directing its attention, and believing from everything that Gentlemen can collect that to the conquest of Egypt and the conveyance of a force down the Red Sea may be carried into execution by France .... [therefore sending] a pressing invitation to Admiral Rainier to send without delay into the Red Sea as strong a force as may be in his Excellency's power as in his judgement requisite for the purpose of effectively Counteracting the designs of the enemy either in collecting Vessels and Boats in the different ports of the Red Sea or in proceeding down towards India.<sup>93</sup>

The minutes also stated that the Bombay Council was sending a cruiser to the area under Captain Wilson to act as agent and to obtain intelligence. He should be contacted by any naval vessels operating in the Red Sea. Conscious of a high degree of nervousness in the Bombay Council Rainier ensured that its members knew that: 'I have already given directions to Commodore Blankett to appoint a proper convoy for the service ... to give protection to all ships, as well as Europeans, returning to India'.<sup>94</sup> Again, Rainier showed a high degree of sensitivity towards the Company's officials and also ensured the commitment of the Indian merchants whose financial support he would always need.

Yet he was careful to maintain control over the dispositions of the Navy:

<sup>90</sup> B.L., I.O.R., Home Misc. Series, H/462, Clive to Rainier, no date but 1800.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., H/468. Clive to Rainier, 11 June 1803.

<sup>92</sup> Exeter University, Bombay Diary, T66A/8, Bombay Council Meeting Minutes, 24 September 1798.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., T66A/52-53, Bombay Council Minutes, 28 September 1798.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., T72/25, Rainier to Bombay Council, 18 January 1799.

Admiral Rainier, with the major part of his own Squadron is now on this side of India and will proceed to the Red Sea as soon as the services of his Ships can be useful in that Quarter.<sup>95</sup>

Rainier would not allow pressures from the Company to force him into sending ships to counter a danger which he did not think very serious. He could leave the situation in the Red Sea to Blankett, who had sufficient resources, and concentrate on the many other issues facing him across the vastness of his command. In fact he never went to the Red Sea at all. But it continued to be a thorn in Rainier's side. Even as late as 1804 he was writing to Duncan, the Governor of Bombay, that Captain Vashon [his nephew] was trying to obtain Royal Naval deserters who had deserted at Mecca and had since become Muslims.<sup>96</sup>

Rainier also ensured that his captains knew where their priorities lay. His letter to Captain Pakenham of the *Resistance* ordered him to escort a convoy to Bombay and then:

... you are to consult with the Governor and Council as to the employment of His Majesty's Ship under Your Command for the Protection of the Trade and Settlements.

He was also to apply to the Governor for the naval stores that he required. If the Company would not give the said stores Pakenham was to buy them 'at the most reasonable rates' with navy bills.<sup>97</sup>

Relations with Duncan, President at Bombay, were clearly good. A letter to Rainier explained the orders he had received from the Secret Committee of the Company which were to try and persuade the Governor of Goa to permit British troops to land in Goa to protect it from a possible French attack. Because Duncan feared attack from the Indian princes he asked Rainier if he might send some forces to carry out the same job. There was also an exchange of warships between Duncan and Rainier. Their relationship continued to be comfortable through the years. In 1804 he wrote to Duncan supporting the building of a causeway from the mainland to Old Warren's Island at the entrance to Bombay harbour as it would enable troops to be moved more rapidly to defend the city.<sup>98</sup> Four days later he agreed to Duncan's request to transport Company troops from Surat to Bengal.<sup>99</sup>

Perim, the island at the mouth of the Red Sea, became the source of friction when it was decided to withdraw its British garrison, placed there only months before in order to deter the French from moving their troops to India via the Red Sea. Possibly it had been noted in London that the local naval commander, Rear Admiral Blankett, had written to the Bombay Council saying:

The Island of Perim is likewise objectionable as a station for Cruizers, the anchorage in the harbour is not good, the entrance is narrow ... the Straits are subject to heavy squalls.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., T73/2, Bombay Council to Court of Directors, 29 January 1799.

<sup>96</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/175, Rainier to Duncan, 31 August 1804.

<sup>97</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/168, Rainier to Pakenham, 7 January 1795.

<sup>98</sup> N.M.M., RAI/9, Rainier to Duncan, 25 January 1804.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., Rainier to Duncan, 29 January 1804.

<sup>100</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/170, Blankett to Bombay Council, 19 December 1799.

The decision to evacuate was made by the Bombay Council without any consultation with either Blankett or Rainier, who was at that time based in Bombay.<sup>101</sup> This example shows that cooperation between Bombay and the Navy was not always effective. Possibly this was due to the fact that Blankett was on bad terms with the Company army commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Murray. Blankett did not learn the skill which Rainier had perfected of maintaining good relations with those with whom he had to work closely.

However, Rainier's political skills did not leave him. And part of those skills was to show gratefulness to the positive acknowledgements he received from all branches of the Company:

I am extremely sensible of the value of your approbation of my Conduct and your politeness in conveying the address [from the Council of Bombay thanking Rainier for protecting the Trade] to me.<sup>102</sup>

iii) China.

Rainier could never forget that China was part of his station and the primary source of trade in the east by 1804. He had to work with the local Chinese rulers as well as the Company and his masters at the Admiralty. His situation was doubly difficult because the Chinese authorities refused to accept that naval power was separate from that of the Company and therefore would not deal directly with naval officers. Socially, they ranked even lower than merchants.<sup>103</sup> Yet he wrote to the 'Vice Roy' of Canton asking for his permission to obtain local pilots and supplies at that port.<sup>104</sup> Later he had to call on the Admiralty to help him get permission for his ships to anchor in Anson's Bay or Linling Road rather than Macao Road because they were safer and closer to supplies.<sup>105</sup>

That Rainier was sensitive to the feelings of the Chinese and the impact they could have on the profitability of the Company is illustrated by his concern that the arrival of three large warships at Canton might frighten the Chinese. He therefore told Osborne of the *Arrogant* to send a frigate in advance to warn the supercargoes.<sup>106</sup> A more complex matter was raised the same year by the Company officials in Canton. It was the practice of Chinese boatmen who came aboard naval vessels to steal whatever they could. The response of the warships was to fire on any Chinese boat that came near them unless on official business. For some reason this practice annoyed the Chinese and they protested to the Company's representatives. Knowing how much the Company relied on the goodwill of the Chinese government to carry on their trade the supercargoes complained to the Company in London, who complained to the Admiralty, who wrote to Rainier telling him to 'restrain the Captains of the King's Ships from firing at the Chinese Boats in the manner therein suggested'.<sup>107</sup>

As soon as Rainier captured the Dutch Spice Islands the centre of gravity of his station moved eastwards and he had to take note of the new logistical situation. As he later explained

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., Rainier to Admiralty, 15 January 1800.

<sup>102</sup> N.M.M., RAI/4, Rainier to Duncan, 28 March 1795.

<sup>103</sup> H.J. Wood, 'England, China, and the Napoleonic Wars', *The Pacific Historical Review*, vol. 9, No. 2 (June 1940), p. 140.

<sup>104</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/170, Rainier to Vice Roy of Canton, 25 August 1799.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., Rainier to Admiralty, 21 February 1800.

<sup>106</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 13760, Rainier to Wellesley, 27 December 1801.

<sup>107</sup> T.N.A., ADM 2/937. Admiralty to Rainier, 20 April 1801.

to Wellesley: 'The Straits of Malacca, all circumstances considered ... is a very central station for the strength of His Majesty's Squadron ... in the North East monsoon'.<sup>108</sup> He now needed assistance from the Company representatives in Canton. He wrote to Henry Brown, the President of the Select Committee of the Company in Canton, telling him of the capture of Amboina and Banda and advising him that he was sending some of the captured spices to Canton in order that they could be traded for supplies needed in the newly occupied islands.<sup>109</sup> This letter illustrates the wide geographical and weather knowledge Rainier needed to perform his duties most effectively; he had to calculate that it would be quicker at that time of year to get the supplies from China than going back to Bengal or Madras.

Rainier did not always receive the help he expected from the Company's representatives and he was not afraid to say so, albeit in his usual verbose manner:

I am sorry 'tis not in my power to express an equal satisfaction with regard to your exertions in complying with my request to assist Lieutenant Dobbie on his arrival at your Factory as they do not appear to me to have been made with the earnestness the Public Service required.

The Company had not redirected its homeward bound ships to Amboina, as he had requested, so he did not have sufficient forces to take Ternate, as he expected. He then went on to say that he would wait at Macao to escort the tea ships to Coromandel: 'if they will be ready in any reasonable time'. The importance of intelligence is also indicated by his request: 'You will of course communicate to me every kind of Intelligence you are in possession of for my information'.<sup>110</sup>

The importance of China rises again with the outbreak of war after the Peace of Amiens. Lord Clive felt he could write to Rainier warning him that war was imminent, mentioning that the strength of Linois' squadron was well known, and demonstrating the effectiveness of British intelligence. He also warned him of the strength of the Dutch squadron at Batavia, meaning that Prince of Wales Island was at risk. Clive did not think Macao was in danger because the Chinese would not allow the weak Portuguese to be replaced by a strong French presence. Indeed, this would be the case in 1808 when the British occupied Macao for a short time before Chinese pressure forced them to evacuate. He also warned Rainier not to lose Trincomalee and to keep his squadron together and base it at Bombay in case the French attacked.<sup>111</sup> With Clive now adding his advice to that of Wellesley Rainier must have wondered who was in command of the navy. He did well to keep control.

The rivalry between the Company and the Navy for scarce seamen was always a source of contention with the presidencies. The subject will be addressed in detail in Chapter Seven. Suffice it to say that it was a common theme between that navy and the Company.

#### e) The Bombay Marine

The Bombay Marine had been established in the middle of the eighteenth century, primarily to protect the Company's shipping. It was not meant to fight national navies and its vessels were primarily small vessels such as sloops and grabs. But in times of emergency, such as in 1794 when Admiral Cornwallis departed for England leaving no naval ships on the station,

<sup>108</sup> B.L. Add. Mss. 13759, Rainier to Wellesley, 29 September 1800.

<sup>109</sup> N.M.M., RAI/5, Rainier to Brown, 5 May 1796.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., Rainier to Secret Department of the E.I.C. at Canton, 30 December 1796.

<sup>111</sup> B.L., I.O.R., Home Misc., H/469, Clive to Rainier, 13 August 1803.

Indiamen could be re-armed to give them the power of frigates. Whilst there was peace with the European powers it had to patrol the entire region from the Persian Gulf to China. But when war broke out it could only deal with the lesser Country powers leaving the Royal Navy to play the major role against the European fleets. Even in 1772 there were two schooners based in Bussora to combat pirates in the area.<sup>112</sup> They were also used for charting the unknown waters of the station and its officers therefore built up a large volume of local knowledge which was of much use to the Royal Navy. Indeed, Rainier received much of his knowledge of the Red Sea from Company officials during the threat from Napoleon.

Rainier seems to have had a 'love-hate' relationship with the Company's private navy. He was very happy to accept the offer of its vessels – its largest two ships were frigates – as they were always in short supply. But he had to ensure that their Lordships knew how ineffective they could be:

... an estimate of their Force [is] much inferior to His Majesty's Ships of the same rate, on account of their being manned with more than half Natives and the European part of their crew are perhaps more than one half foreigners' .... 'There is something in the management of their Ships that disgusts British Sailors, and which may merit a particular enquiry being constituted by the Hon'ble Company.'<sup>113</sup>

Although what caused Rainier to have such a strong view is not mentioned. Six years later he was still writing to Spencer:

Little dependence is to be placed on any assistance from the East India Company Cruisers as your Lordship has suggested, to look after the privateers, being generally half manned with Europeans and such as pass near the Sand Heads are immediately laid hold on for other purposes.<sup>114</sup>

The Company itself had some concerns. Duncan, the President of the Bombay Council wrote to Dundas that: 'The abolition of Convoy Money has taken away the Stimulus for the Commodores of Cruisers to take care of the multitude of small Boats that compose their Convoys'.<sup>115</sup> Clearly the Bombay Marine officers required the same monetary stimulants as their naval colleagues. And not always did they show the required levels of bravery. In 1801 Captain Richardson, late commander of the *Mornington*, was dismissed his ship by court martial for 'improper behaviour' in the presence of the enemy in the Bay of Bengal.<sup>116</sup>

Rainier's concerns were not replicated in his views of the Indiamen which assisted the navy. He wrote to Commander Burroughs of the Indiaman *Earl Howe*: 'I have to express my entire satisfaction of the whole of your conduct while acting in that capacity [armed ship] under my orders'.<sup>117</sup> The *Earl Howe* was one of three East Indiamen, including the *Princess Charlotte* and the *Cornwallis*, which had been transferred to Rainier by Wellesley to give extra strength

<sup>112</sup> Anon, 'The Maritime Defences of India under the East India Company 1763-1783', *Naval Review*, vol. XVII, No.3, August 1930, p. 477-478.

<sup>113</sup> N.M.M., RAI/5, Rainier to Nepean, 12 November 1795.

<sup>114</sup> Anon, 'The Maritime Defences of India under the East India Company 1763-1783', *Naval Review*, vol. XVII, No.3, August 1930, p. 477.

<sup>115</sup> B.L., Mss. Eur. D1074, Duncan to Dundas, 19 June 1799.

<sup>116</sup> B.L., I.O.R., L/MAR/ 3/25, Bombay Marine Abstracts, 25 March 1801.

<sup>117</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Burroughs, 11 May 1799.

to the naval forces.<sup>118</sup> Rainier wrote to the Admiralty explaining: ‘that great parts of the Squadron under my Command were absent on distant services, I suggested to His Excellency ... the expediency of arming some of the East India Company’s large Ships’.<sup>119</sup> But again it illustrates the willingness of the Company to lend men and materials to the Navy when the need arose.

### Conclusion

Rainier developed a very good relationship with Sir John Shore – he knew how to work with people over whom he had no authority but who could make it impossible for him to function were they so minded. The East India Company was no small organisation which could be browbeaten by the reputation and arrogance of the navy. Rainier had to build close relationships with its officers so that they would assist the navy when it was needed. To do this he had to keep in close communication with them, try and help them meet their goals, be trustworthy, and not try to exploit them financially. This he did by transporting their troops to wherever they wanted to go, at least within the East Indies station. He also carried their supplies and ensured they were fed and watered, even at the cost of giving them the supplies of his own men. He communicated with them assiduously, letting them know what he was doing with his ships and why, and also attending Council meetings whenever he was in port. No-one could criticise him for not being a key member of the body waging the war. Yet he managed to keep his independence, even when under severe pressure from Wellesley.

Wellesley expected everyone to follow his instructions and, as a “direct report” to Dundas, a friend of the prime minister and the commander of one of the largest armies in the world, he was a powerful man. He was the antithesis of what would now be called a ‘team player’. He was a risk taker, sharing his ideas with only a small inner circle that he thought he could trust. It is to Rainier’s credit that he managed the relationship on a positive level, keeping direct control over his ships, whilst, all the time, Wellesley was trying to tell him, and his captains, how they should direct the squadron. And Rainier was successful, Wellesley describing the Admiral as ‘very tractable’. But the Governor General, in spite of this aura of cooperation, still wanted to control the navy himself and finally had to be told by Dundas that it would not happen.<sup>120</sup> Yet there were limits as to how far Rainier could be pushed: ‘The admiral, based at Madras, had the nasty habit of putting to sea when crossed’.<sup>121</sup>

Their cooperation went smoothly until the plan to attack Mauritius in 1800. Clearly Rainier was careful and, knowing he could not easily replace any losses, did not want to risk his ships and men unnecessarily if he did not think he could succeed; and he was very unsure that Mauritius was really vulnerable to the size of forces the British could put up against such an island fortress. Rainier knew he could lose his command by opposing such an important man as the Governor General, but did so because he believed that it was not in the best interest of the Country. Rainier could not be said to be a man without principles.

The senior army officers also all understood their interdependence and believed that the Admiral would always do all in his power to assist them. He had an excellent relationship

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<sup>118</sup> N.M.M., RAI/6, Rainier to Commanders of *Earl Howe*, *Princess Charlotte*, & *Cornwallis*, 7 December 1798.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, Rainier to Admiralty, 29 January 1799.

<sup>120</sup> Wellesley to Dundas, 3 July 1799, p. 173, Dundas to Wellesley, 12 October 1799, p. 194, quoted in Ingram, *Two Views of British India*.

<sup>121</sup> Ingram, ‘The geopolitics of the First British Expedition to Egypt – III: The Red Sea Campaign, 1800-1’, in *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol.31, No. 1 (January 1995), p. 148.

with the army Commander-in-Chief, General Stuart, who was on the Governor General's governing council and therefore able to influence positively relations between the Company and the navy at the highest levels in India'. Admiral Rainier having very kindly offered his old friend General Stuart and all his Staff passage to Madras, we all embarked accordingly on the *Suffolk* ... and were most kindly received by the good old Admiral at Breakfast'.<sup>122</sup> This clearly illustrates the nature of cooperation between the two forces.

Protection of merchant shipping was one of the two matters on which there was continuous friction. And it was as serious at the end of Rainier's commission as it was at the beginning. There was not the convoy discipline found in European and American waters where Lloyds would not insure any ship not in convoy. Theoretically at least, the Indiamen were sufficiently strong that they could repel any attack coming from a ship less than a fifth rate. But Rainier knew that, in practice, some Indiamen would surrender at the first shot and that convoy was the only means of guaranteeing their safety. The communication of the period is littered with letters from Rainier on one side and the Company and the Indian merchants on the other. Rainier knew he had to spend as much time as necessary – and it was a long time – to explain why he could not have ships everywhere that merchantmen might sail and why everyone in authority should persuade the merchants to sail their ships only in convoy.

The other area of contention was the supply of seamen and it is difficult not to feel sympathy for both parties. Local replacements were hard to source but it can be seen that the plan to send out replacements from England was less than successful. There were several instances of bitterness as naval vessels took men out of Indiamen that their commanders felt left them in danger. And naval officers could be rude, insensitive and arrogant when dealing with their merchant service colleagues. Letters of complaint and explanation then flew across all corners of the station and to England. But outright physical combat between merchant crews and naval press gangs of the kind seen in European waters and ports did not occur and that must, in part, be due to the manner in which Rainier managed his captains.

Whilst the West Indian merchants could cause their flag officer many headaches with their demands, Rainier was in a different position to any other commander-in-chief in that the East India Company was such an important organisation, both in London and on station. It was a key element of the City with its demand for money through bonds and loans, and, at other times, as a provider of finance, men and materials for the government. The Chairman of the Board of Control which oversaw the activities of the Company on behalf of the government was headed by Dundas, arguably the second most powerful man in the government and the main director of the war against France. It had a Company army of 192,000 men in 1805 and it had its own fully serviced dry dock at Bombay – the only one available to the Royal Navy outside the United Kingdom. There was clearly no other organisation which any flag officer might deal with which had so much power and influence in Britain and abroad.

To the credit of both parties, they recognised their mutual dependence in that the army could not move or be supplied without the Navy, that the trade with Britain and around the East Indies would collapse without the Navy's protection, that the Navy was a major source of intelligence and communication and that the Navy was a powerful symbol of the strength and reach of Britain's and the Company's sway when dealing with local rulers.

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<sup>122</sup> Lachlan MacQuarie 1799 Journal, 1 June 1799, [www.lib.mq.edu.au/digital/lema/1799/1799june.html](http://www.lib.mq.edu.au/digital/lema/1799/1799june.html), accessed 21 July 2007.

Rainier equally knew his ships could not function without the Bombay dockyard, without the naval stores which were brought out from England in the Indiamen, without the Company's financial muscle in India itself, without its network of agents around the station who could always obtain supplies and intelligence for naval vessels working remotely.



## CHAPTER 4.

### ‘A CONSIDERABLE TIME HAS ELAPSED SINCE WE [HAD] NEWS FROM EUROPE’.<sup>1</sup> COMMUNICATION AND INTELLIGENCE – ITS SOURCES AND USES.

Having demonstrated in the previous two chapters the necessity of operating effectively within the navy and with the Company, this chapter will explain the methods by which Rainier communicated with these bodies. A major reason for this communication was the transfer of intelligence. The sources and uses of this intelligence will be explored, together with some examples of how its quality impacted upon Rainier’s actions. It is necessary to analyse how he interpreted and used it. Obtaining intelligence in a thirty million square mile station presents enormous challenges as does evaluating its quality and knowing what to do with it when it is received.

#### **Communication.**

As Parkinson has said of communications between London and India:

Messages ... could go by the overland route, but there was always an element of risk ... A duplicate was always sent by sea ... and usually a triplicate by another ship, to provide against shipwreck.<sup>2</sup>

From the late seventeenth century, with the Cape of Good Hope settled by the Dutch, the journey to India via deep sea routes, was well accepted and understood. It also suited the British attitude to long distance trade, keeping well out of the way of potential enemies. Apart from the risk of shipwreck or enemy action, the major drawback was the time taken – usually around six months from England to India – although a fast non-stop frigate might, with luck, reduce this to four. However, the cost of sending a warship solely to send a message was not one that could be regularly contemplated. This contrasted with an average three months overland.

There were two general alternatives to the all-sea route.<sup>3</sup> One was overland via Vienna, Constantinople, Aleppo, Baghdad, to Bussora and hence by sea to Bombay. The other went via the Mediterranean to Egypt, going overland to Suez, and then sailing down the Red Sea and into the Gulf of Arabia, or by sea to Alexandretta, north of Damascus, and then overland via Aleppo. The former was preferred by the Company as it could utilise the banking house channels of communication. However, it was inoperable during the periods Austria was in alliance with France.<sup>4</sup> During these times sea transport would go directly to Constantinople. But both these routes were unusable between 1796 and 1798 when the British had evacuated

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<sup>1</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/173, Rainier to Admiralty, 10 December 1803.

<sup>2</sup> Parkinson, *Trade in the Eastern Seas*, p. 305.

<sup>3</sup> See **Appendix 10c**.

<sup>4</sup> H. Furber, *Private Fortunes and Company Profits in the India Trade in the Eighteenth Century* (Aldershot, 1997), p. 263.

the Mediterranean. Most people had originally seen the route as primarily one for trade, but some prescient merchants realised that it could also be an efficient route for communication. The most notable example of using Egypt was in 1778 when news of the declaration of war by France against Britain reached Madras from London in sixty eight days. This enabled British forces to capture the French possessions in India before the French even knew they were at war.<sup>5</sup> The main issue with the Constantinople route was still its expense. In 1801 a single packet from the Governor of Bombay to London cost nearly £800.<sup>6</sup>

Whilst there were possibilities of picking up trade on the Suez route, the religious and political volatility meant that it was frequently unstable. It also concerned the Company that if the route became well accepted then goods could be sent from India to Suez, transhipped across Egypt and then loaded onto one of the many European ships using Alexandria. This would hit the Company's monopoly of trade with India and it therefore discouraged the concept. This fact was at the root of the dichotomy between trade and communication: 'Sending goods overland would subvert its monopoly; on the other hand, dispatches unaccompanied by goods, might become ruinously expensive'.<sup>7</sup> But even as a communication channel there were problems from the outbreak of war. Company Agents Manesty at Bussora and Hartford Jones at Baghdad wrote to Sir Robert Ainslie, the ambassador to the Ottomans:

It is with particular Concern that we inform Your Excellency that we have unfortunately experienced consequential difficulties in the transmission to India of the before mentioned public packets, and of the Important Intelligence of the existing War between Great Britain and the French Nation.<sup>8</sup>

But Wellesley was not concerned with costs and he asked Dundas if he could receive from London:

...every month, by overland dispatch, a short statement of all such events and movements, or preparations of the enemy in Europe, as appear likely, in your opinion to have any influence upon the safety of the British possessions in India.

Wellesley also wanted the information sent in code.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately there was not the organisational discipline to carry this through.

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<sup>5</sup> H.L. Hoskins, *British Routes to India* (New York, 1966), p. 18.

<sup>6</sup> Chairman of the East India Company to Duncan, 15 June 1801, *The Correspondence of David Scott relating to Indian Affairs, 1787-1805*, ed. C.H. Philips (London, 1951), I, 126, quoted in Ingram, 'A Preview of the great game in Asia – IV: British Agents in the Near East in the War of the Second Coalition, 1798-1801', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (January 1974), p. 16,

<sup>7</sup> Ingram, *In Defence of British India*, p. 26.

<sup>8</sup> Exeter University, Bombay Diaries, T46/27, Manesty & Hartford Jones to Sir Robert Ainslie, 18 July 1793.

<sup>9</sup> Wellesley to Dundas, 4 September 1798, quoted in Ingram, *Two Views of British India*, p. 66.

Although the route through present day Syria and Iraq was preferred, there were still dangers on the sea sector, between Bussora and Bombay, as when Dundas complained:

The overland dispatch dated the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July has been lost on board the *Pearl*, taken by a French privateer [in the Persian Gulf]. I trust you will in future direct all important overland dispatches in time of war to be forwarded in duplicate, and to be sent by two separate conveyances from Bussora to Bombay.<sup>10</sup>

But circumstances could change rapidly. Early in 1804 the Bombay presidency wrote to London that it had to suspend the actual overland route via Bussora because the situation was too dangerous due to the presence of robbers and religious upheaval.<sup>11</sup> It would appear that, up to this time, most letters were being sent via Bussora or Suez. And Rainier understood the importance of this route. At the end of 1803 he wrote to Nepean that he had sent ships to the Gulf of Persia not only to protect trade but also to ensure that the “overland” route would be kept open on its last leg to Bombay.<sup>12</sup>

But opposition from the Porte to Christians sailing up the northern half of the Red Sea and the whimsical attitude of Egyptian rulers to freedom of passage and taxation of travellers meant that the route was largely given up by the end of the American Revolution. Sir Robert Ainslie suggested a land route through Mesopotamia via Aleppo and Baghdad and down the Euphrates to Bussora: hence by sea to Bombay. However, this route also had its dangers as the local Arabs were not as interested in the fact that British messengers had passports from the Porte, but were rather more interested in robbery. So whilst a trial run took place, the actual route was not used until the late 1790s.<sup>13</sup>

The success of Bonaparte on land meant that the British could not use the overland route through Egypt to Suez but could use that through Syria and Baghdad. Nelson sent Lieutenant Duval to India to give news of his victory at Aboukir Bay by boat to Alexandretta, then overland, via Aleppo and Baghdad, to Bussora. There he found a British packet that took him to Bombay for a total journey of approximately 70 days. This modified route, starting in Constantinople, then crossing Syria and what is now Iraq, and down to Bussora and the Persian Gulf, became the common communications route together with the all sea one round the Cape. But it was dependent on the political situation with the local Arab rulers. In fact, in 1798, a Company Resident, Hartford Jones, was appointed to Baghdad to ensure the cooperation of the local ruler and to facilitate the movement of letters. As will be seen, he played a very important role in ensuring the government and military forces in both the Mediterranean and Indian arenas were kept up to date with the latest intelligence.<sup>14</sup> Because

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<sup>10</sup> Dundas to Wellesley, 29 November 1799, quoted in Ingram, *Two Views of British India*, p. 212.

<sup>11</sup> B.L., I.O.R., L/PS/6/16, Political Dept. of Bengal to Court of Directors, 27 February 1804.

<sup>12</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Nepean, 10 December 1803.

<sup>13</sup> Hoskins, *British Routes to India*, p. 21.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

of the fluid political and religious influences in that region, the Baghdad Resident had to be ‘a man of wisdom, courage and experience’.<sup>15</sup>

Rivalry between Hartford Jones in Baghdad and Manesty in Bussora was so great that from 1800 the Bombay government sent duplicate mails, one through Baghdad and the other through Aleppo, and then up to Istanbul, to see which was the faster. In time Baghdad was superior.<sup>16</sup> From the Gulf the mail would usually be sent to Bombay. Depending on the season the next stage would either be overland, across India, to Calcutta, or round the coast via Madras.

Even after the departure of the French army from Egypt, the situation for British communications through that country was not much improved. This was due to the ongoing struggle between the local ruling Beys and their Ottoman rulers. But such was the importance with which the British now viewed the need for a safe and reliable overland route that Lord Elgin, the Ambassador to the Grand Porte in Constantinople, and successor to the pro Turkish Sir Robert Ainslie and Sir Robert Liston, was ordered to ensure Turkish support for such a route both in Europe as well as Asia. And he was soon able to report to the Court of Directors that the residents at Aleppo, Bussora and Baghdad could now ensure a rapid and regular alternative flow of mail. These developments meant that Rainier not only had another channel for his letters to his superiors, but also he could be kept up to date with all the manoeuvrings taking place in the Ottoman Empire, Persia and Afghanistan, which could impact the disposition of his forces in Indian waters. Yet, even by 1803 and before war broke out again with France, it was still noteworthy for Rainier to tell Wellesley that he had received communication from London via Bussora.<sup>17</sup> Growing reliance on the overland route is also indicated by the end of the same year when Rainier wrote to the Admiralty that, in spite of the huge demands on his ships, he had felt it necessary to send a ship to the Gulf of Persia to look for mail for India via the overland route because:

a considerable time has elapsed since we have received any news from Europe ... either by land or sea ... [the] last advices by the former only reaching to (sic) May 28 from London.<sup>18</sup>

Thus it can be seen that Rainier had not heard anything for seven months and, in spite of his now seven years of remote command, he was still anxious about the lack of information.

Although the Ottoman powers were suspicious of Britain’s intentions, it was not the policy of the Company to seize territory, but only to ensure that trade could take place. It had already learned that the occupation of land meant heavy expense and administration - which had

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<sup>15</sup> Hoskins, *British Routes to India*, p. 65.

<sup>16</sup> C.H. Philips, ‘The Establishment of the East India Company Residency at Baghdad, 1798-1806’, *The Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol.30, No. 2, 1967, p. 334.

<sup>17</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/173, Rainier to Wellesley, 13 April 1803.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, Rainier to Admiralty, 10 December 1803.

never been its goal. However the French were looking for a way to counter British influence in the East and saw that occupation of Egypt could give France a valuable lever with which to frustrate British expansion in that region. So, in 1783 and 1784, several French officers had studied the possibility of developing a communication route between France and India via Egypt.<sup>19</sup> The French ambassador to the Porte was even asked to draw up a table as to the relative merits of the two routes via the Red Sea and via Bussora.<sup>20</sup> It was clear that the French saw there were two other routes for communication with India, besides the long sea journey round Africa, and they were putting in more effort than were the British, whose naval superiority could more easily ensure safe passage via the Cape.

The French efforts had been rewarded with a secret treaty in 1785 between France and the Beys who ruled Egypt, nominally under the command of the Ottoman emperor. This treaty allowed France to send sealed messages through Egypt and gave French merchants complete freedom to transport any goods they wished across the country with only minor fees and duties. However Turkish anger at this show of independence by the Beys led the Ottomans to distrust French motives and, in turn, French distrust of the Egyptian authorities meant that the treaty had little practical effect. But it did show Britain how much it had to watch French activities in that region.

George Baldwin, the official communications agent in Egypt for the East India and Levant Companies, continued to stress the benefits to Britain of these routes so assiduously fought for by France and in his book, *Political Recollections Relative to Egypt*, stated: 'France, in possession of Egypt, would possess the master-key to all the trading nations of the earth.... England would hold her possession in India at the mercy of France'.<sup>21</sup> Baldwin's strictures were heard and, in 1786, he was made British Consul in Egypt with the usual British governmental trait of ensuring that his salary was paid for by the Company. It was thus able to ensure that Baldwin's goal was primarily that of ensuring communication, not trade. However, by 1793, the cost was being borne by the Foreign Office which body had been trying to have him recalled as it was felt he was an unnecessary expense. Yet his skills enabled him to ensure British India received news of the outbreak of war before the French and Cornwallis was thus able to capture Pondicherry before the French even knew they were at war. Thus was his value recognised.

The efforts of both Baldwin in Egypt and Ainslie in Constantinople to open up a reliable communication path were thwarted by an Ottoman *firman* banning all Christian ships from sailing in the Red Sea. The weak nature of Ottoman control over both the Egyptian Beys and the local rulers along the coast of the Red Sea meant that no-one knew how effective this ban would be. The lack of a clear decision led the British government to announce the closure of

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<sup>19</sup> Hoskins, *British Routes to India*, p. 28.

<sup>20</sup> P. Masson, *Histoire du Commerce Francais dans le Levant*, p. 576, quoted in Hoskins, *British Routes to India*, p. 28.

<sup>21</sup> G. Baldwin, *Political Recollections Relative to Egypt* (London, 1802), p. 79, quoted in Hoskins, *British Routes to India*, p. 34.

its Egyptian consulate in 1792, just as the French were doing the opposite. But realisation seeped in and its mind was changed the following year before the closure could take place.

Whilst Britain had the security, given by its naval strength, of its sea route to India via the Cape, French planners realised that their lack of naval power would make it extremely hazardous for them to attempt to send large numbers of ships and men via the same route to India. The route through Egypt was therefore viewed as a major opportunity which had to be developed. In line with the views of Ingram and his “Great Game in Asia”, Bonaparte said: ‘The times are not distant when we feel that, in order really to destroy England, it will be necessary to seize Egypt’.<sup>22</sup>

The negative side, for Rainier, of using the Red Sea was, if ever he had to carry out naval operations or keep open a communication channel there, he would be in difficulty. He would have to contend with both the weather patterns, as described in Chapter Five, and lack of charts. And, although there were many large areas on the globe uncharted, none were as important in the political and strategic battles between France and her enemies. But when Rainier heard that Bonaparte had definitely invaded Egypt, he had the confidence and presence of mind to act without waiting for orders from London – perhaps one of the reasons he had been allowed to remain in post. Realising he needed more intelligence from Egypt and in order to supplement that which he was receiving from the Bombay Council, he sent the *Centurion* (50) and the sloop *Albatross* (18) directly into the Red Sea. They could watch for signs of the French and show the local Arab rulers that Britain had the power to thwart French ambitions during the long period before Commodore Blankett arrived from England.

The role of the Cape should be noted on the route to India. Although its anchorages were open to the winds and there was nowhere for repairing vessels, it was the only convenient port between Brazil and the East Indies. Its importance in the early stages of the war was held high in London:

The Cape is a situation of unusual importance that a very respectable naval Force should always make its Head Quarters, and as the French have sent some strong frigates to the Mauritius, we have also sent out some of our best frigates for their annoyance, and the protection of our trade. ... I hope that the force you will have by the time this letter reaches you, will enable you to give them a good reception; their having no force in the Eastern Seas of any consequence will make it more easy for you to be prepared for them about the Cape.<sup>23</sup>

It was able to provide all kinds of food and water and act as a hospital for the recuperation of sickness, especially scurvy, on the long journey eastwards. However it was not necessary for

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<sup>22</sup> Baron I, de Testa, *Recueil des Traités de la Porte Ottomane*, vol. 1, p. 516, quoted in Hoskins, *British Routes to India*, p. 55.

<sup>23</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 75856, Spencer to Elphinstone, 8 August 1796.

fleets to visit as Rainier showed in 1794 when he sailed directly from England to India without touching land. But it could be dangerous in French hands as a base from which to raid British shipping between Europe and India. For this reason it was taken in 1796 although returned to the Netherlands at the Peace of Amiens. In 1799 evidence of the Cape's benefit was described by the Governor General of India: 'We have received [from the Cape] an effective force of 3,000 testimony (if any were wanting) to prove the solid advantages of that useful possession'.<sup>24</sup>

But actual events can disprove Wellesley's opinion that not having the Cape would make it impossible to hold Ceylon 'for any long period of time'.<sup>25</sup> It was left in Dutch hands for three years after war broke out again in 1803 without causing the catastrophe that he feared. Clearly Ceylon was more important than the Cape when it came to the negotiations at Amiens. Indeed, Lord Hobart, Secretary for War and Colonies said in 1801 that the Cape had already cost a million pounds and that it was 'a peculiarly expensive, insecure and extremely inconvenient port of refreshment'.<sup>26</sup> Lord Nelson agreed, now that Indiamen, as well as warships, were coppered, they had less need for refit and the Cape was merely a 'tavern on the passage' which added considerably to the total journey time to India.<sup>27</sup>

Admiral Rainier believed that he had physically to cover his command in person and therefore the many letters he wrote almost invariably show from their headings that they were written from his ships. It would appear that Rainier was very loath to commit himself to the vagaries of life ashore, even though he had palatial quarters provided for him by the Company, with a huge domestic staff, in Madras. He seems to have been much more comfortable in the plain, orderly environment of a third rate, than in the opulence of an Indian palace. He could be in harbour in Bombay, or, in summer, off Madras or the Sandheads, the dangerous area at the mouth of the Hooghly. It was here that most warships would wait to communicate with Calcutta and to protect from French privateers the many merchant ships that went through the area. He could be protecting the trade between Calcutta and Madras. He could be in Canton, dealing with the Company super cargoes in order that they felt their ships were being adequately protected, or writing to the "Hoppo", the chief Chinese minister in Canton, to ensure his warships were able to obtain supplies. Since the early 1790s relations with China had not been good because the Chinese believed that the successful invasion of Tibet by Nepal in 1791 was due to the support of, and participation by, British troops which led to Macartney's failed diplomatic mission to Peking in 1793.<sup>28</sup> Alternatively Rainier could be cruising in one of the several straits between the Indonesian islands through which the China trade to and from India and Europe navigated. He could be waiting at Prince of Wales Island, for ships to congregate before moving off in convoy. And, of course, during the

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<sup>24</sup> Wellesley to Dundas, 13 May 1799, quoted in Ingram, *Two Views of British India*, p. 148.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, Wellesley to Dundas, 28 February 1798, p. 43.

<sup>26</sup> House of Lords Debate, 3 November 1801, *Parliamentary History of England*, xxxvi, p. 190.

<sup>27</sup> House of Lords Debate, 3 November 1802, *Parliamentary history of England*, xxxvi, p. 185.

<sup>28</sup> M.J. Kunwar, 'China and War in the Himalayas, 1792-3', *English Historical Review*, vol. 77, No.303, Apr. 1962, pp. 283-97.

northeast monsoon he could be anywhere on the western side of India, keeping his ships away from the lee shore.

Hence the four to six months of a normal sea journey out to India could be almost doubled when added to the time taken to find the actual intended recipient. Rainier noted in a letter to the Admiralty that a missive sent to him by the Navy Board, and dated 12 August 1803, finally reached him on the 19 July 1804 – over 11 months after sending.<sup>29</sup> He noted to Spencer that a letter the First Lord had written on 6 May 1796 had not reached him until 6 March 1797 – a total of ten months.<sup>30</sup> A later communication from Spencer took 14 months to return. As an insurance policy, copies were sent to one or more of the Presidencies in case he arrived there.

The problems with delayed communication did not only relate to the management of the war. Rainier, who was having difficulty with the Victualling Board due to its unhappiness with the victualling contract with Basil Cochrane, wrote to Cochrane in March 1804 that he had not heard from the Victualling Board since 6 January 1803, over a year ago.<sup>31</sup> Such delays do make it difficult for the commander in the field to run effectively a large, disparate organisation when ‘head office’ makes a criticism and then plays no part in indicating what it wants to be changed.

Illustrating that the Admiralty understood this problem, Admiral Christian at the Cape received the following advice from London concerning a letter to be forwarded to Rainier:

... addressed to Rear Admiral Rainier, to such places in India as from the Intelligence you may have been able to collect you may have reason to suppose the rear admiral may be.<sup>32</sup>

A letter from the Secretary to the Bombay Governor sent to Captain Lewis of the Company Cruiser *Teignmouth* ordered him to find Rainier: ‘if he is not at Trincomalee, sail up the Coromandel Coast. If he is still not found, leave a message for him at Madras with Lord Clive, the governor there, and return to Bombay’.<sup>33</sup> It is clear that relying on communication from the authorities in Britain to guide one in one’s duties as commander in chief could only lead to disaster. Self reliance was the only answer. Indeed Governor General Shore also suffered from poor communication complaining to Dundas that he received neither ‘Public or Private Letters’ and that: ‘It is of much more Importance to us than you seem to be aware of to know what was happening in Europe and what are the plans of the government’.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>29</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/174, Rainier to Admiralty, 11 November 1804.

<sup>30</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 65862, Rainier to Spencer, 24 April 1797.

<sup>31</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/173, Rainier to Basil Cochrane, 7 March 1804.

<sup>32</sup> T.N.A., ADM 2/1353, Admiralty to Christian, 19 June 1798.

<sup>33</sup> B.L., I.O.R., Home Misc. H/479, Grant to Lewis, 5 August 1803.

<sup>34</sup> Shore to Dundas, 13 September 1797, quoted in Furber (ed.), *The Private Record of an Indian Governor – Generalship*, p. 128.



Another example of the difficulty of finding Rainier is illustrated by Rear Admiral Pellew's letter to the Admiralty describing his first meeting with the man from whom he was to take over command of the station. When Pellew arrived in Indian waters he went to Madras where he was told Rainier would be. He was not. Pellew then set off for Penang whither he was told Rainier had sailed. He was not there but had returned to Madras. Pellew turned round and followed him to Madras only to miss him again and be told that Rainier had returned to Penang. On his next journey to Penang, Pellew finally met Rainier.<sup>35</sup> Pellew's frustration was somewhat assuaged by learning that Rainier was spending so much time in the east because he was escorting the China fleet back from Canton via the Straits of Malacca, as he told the Admiralty.<sup>36</sup>

Any attempt to enter the Indian Ocean during the winter months, contrary to the monsoon, could add two to three months to the journey for a well manned warship and seriously contribute to heavy wear and tear on the ship. Merchantmen would not even attempt the journey. As an incentive to merchantmen not to risk such a journey, insurance policies were voided from 1 May to 1 September on the Malabar Coast.<sup>37</sup> This ensured that, outside these specific periods dictated by the winds, the overland route was by far the quicker. But if the overland mail route were used via the Red Sea, its particular wind patterns meant that no ship could exit after the beginning of September until the following spring – clearly of no use for the carrying of letters. But if they were out before that date then the southwest monsoon carried them rapidly to Bombay. Naturally, the return journey was best made during winter when the voyage from Bombay to Suez could be carried out in three to four weeks. This would mean that the optimum route, for mail and intelligence, with the least dependence on the weather, was the one through the Mediterranean and then overland from Alexandretta in Syria to Bussora. Clearly bulk goods as shipped by the Indiamen could not be carried overland and were restricted to the sea route round the Cape.

For the return journey from India, six months again would be usual: 'four months would be thought very creditable and a passage of five months would be described as good'.<sup>38</sup> It was usual to stop at St. Helena, sometimes for several weeks, and it was here that convoy escorts were often increased for the dangerous run home through the Western Approaches. During this period the quickest journey was by the frigate *Medusa* (32) which arrived in England just eighty four days after leaving the Hooghly in 1805-6.

### **Intelligence.**

Intelligence was a vital element in Rainier's decision making and its difficulties should not be underestimated:

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<sup>35</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/174, Pellew to Admiralty, 11 December 1804.

<sup>36</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/176, Pellew to Admiralty, 25 January 1805.

<sup>37</sup> Parkinson, *Trade in the Eastern Seas*, p. 109.

<sup>38</sup> Parkinson, *Trade in the Eastern Seas*, p. 112.

Our information of their movements at the Isle of France, derived through neutral bottoms, has been always defective and oftentimes untrue, while theirs transmitted [to] them thro' their friends at Traquebar, has been always to the point.<sup>39</sup>

a) Cooperation between the Navy and the Company.

The intelligence cooperation between the navy and Company cannot be overestimated. The Company knew how important was the role of the navy. Although all the French possessions in India had been occupied as soon as war was declared, many Indian princes had armies officered by Frenchmen:

there was always the fear that ... they would march against English ... possessions, whilst it was almost certain that the appearance of a French squadron would set them in movement.<sup>40</sup>

In 1799 Governor Duncan of Bombay wrote to Rainier that his staff had discovered letters between the merchants of Muscat and the brother in law of the Nabob of Bengal. They were plotting against the British and were using French sailors on their ships.<sup>41</sup> The Residents at Baghdad [Hartford Jones], Bussora [Manesty], and Mocha [Wilson] provided a continual stream of information about relations with Arab rulers, news from Constantinople and the Gulf of Arabia, as well as the official communications from London, both from the Admiralty and Company. Snippets came from such sources as the Company's broker at Muscat, who wrote to Rainier telling of the visit of a French sloop to that port.<sup>42</sup> The exchange of information between the Governor General and Rainier appears to have been of a consistently high level. There are no instances of one complaining of the other. There are many letters from Rainier explaining to Wellesley the disposition of his ships and the reasons therefore. This is also the case with the Madras Presidency but not with Bombay where the stresses of dealing with the threat from the Red Sea occasionally frayed nerves. For example, when the Bombay Council decided to withdraw from Perim, both Rainier and Blankett were not involved although the move would impact the navy's ship dispositions: 'My opinion or that of the rear admiral was not consulted on either occasion'.<sup>43</sup> However it did improve as when Duncan in Bombay wrote to Wellesley that there were two French privateers off Bombay and giving him a description of the one of them, *La Nymphé*, so that it could be passed onto the shipping community of Bengal.<sup>44</sup> Bombay was also the focus of information and intelligence coming down the Persian Gulf from Bussora and Baghdad. Yet at the other end of his station Rainier sometimes complained that he did not receive sufficient information from the Canton Supercargo about sailing times. He was also keen to ask them for any intelligence they

<sup>39</sup> ADM 1/171, Memorandum on Trade Protection, author unknown, 1 September 1801.

<sup>40</sup> Misra, *British Foreign Policy and Indian Affairs 1783-1815*, p. 28.

<sup>41</sup> Exeter University, Bombay Diary 85/18, Duncan to Rainier, 8 May 1799.

<sup>42</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/175, Rainier to Wellesley, 11 January 1804.

<sup>43</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/170, Rainier to Admiralty, 15 January 1800.

<sup>44</sup> B.L., I.O.R., Home Misc. H/475, Duncan to Wellesley, 24 January 1801.

could provide.<sup>45</sup> His request was evidently successful as a year later he thanked them for the information they had sent him.<sup>46</sup> Other Company agents in the east of the station, based in Penang, Aceh, Bencoolen, Batavia, Amboina, and Manila also provided information.

The Company was also the conduit for intelligence with the local Indian rulers. They were a good source of intelligence although the changing complexity of their relationships with the British meant that its quality was difficult to ascertain. The best intelligence came after years of establishing relationships and networks within the Indian ruling castes.<sup>47</sup> No naval officer would have the time to spend ashore to make this possible. The normal Company channels were therefore operated by the various British “residents” whose role was to ensure good relationships between the Company and the princes, and also to keep the Governor General informed of developments. There are virtually no letters of Rainier in direct communication with local rulers and it appears that he relied primarily on the Company’s channels. And he had access at the highest levels. The tone of his letter to Sir John Malcolm, who was, at this time [1802], Wellesley’s chief advisor, indicates that Malcolm and Rainier were friends.<sup>48</sup> This relationship was probably strengthened by the fact that Sir John’s brother, Pulteney, was Rainier’s flag captain, and another brother, Charles, had just been promoted to master and commander [and four months later would be raised to post captain] by Rainier.<sup>49</sup> Major Alexander Walker, Secretary to Wellesley, also wrote detailed reviews of the happenings with the native princes on the Malabar Coast, even offering Rainier the use of his bungalow.<sup>50</sup> Occasionally the admiral was able to return the favour. The previous year he had written to Wellesley about the probability that French gunners were serving on Persian warships – a fact that might help John Malcolm on his mission to Persia.<sup>51</sup> Captain Wilson of the Company was also adept at working with the Arabs; in 1798 he wrote to the Sheriff of Aden telling him that three visiting “Armenians” were actually French and he would be better served working with the British against the French.<sup>52</sup>

Rainier did not want to exclude intelligence coming from any source, even the logistics focussed Naval Officer in Bombay: ‘You will not omit to forward intelligence from the Red Sea, or any other of importance, with the utmost expedition’.<sup>53</sup> Another letter to a G.M. Gillis, the Sub Collector for the Centre Division [tax collection] at Malabar, acknowledged intelligence received from the British Resident at Travancore, in southern Kerala.<sup>54</sup> Looking for confirmation of the outbreak of hostilities with France in 1803, Rainier wrote to the Admiralty that he had received intelligence from Mr. Stratton, who was the Ambassador to

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<sup>45</sup> N.M.M., RAI/5, Rainier to Secret Committee of Supercargoes, 30 December 1796.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 6 January 1797.

<sup>47</sup> Bayly, *Empire and Information*, p. 97.

<sup>48</sup> R.E. Frykenberg, *Sir John Malcolm*, O.D.N.B., J.A. Hamilton (rev. R.E. Frykenberg), ‘Sir John Malcolm’.

<sup>49</sup> B.L., I.O.R., Home Misc., H736, Rainier to Sir John Malcolm, 8 August 1802.

<sup>50</sup> N.L.S., Walker of Bowland Papers, MS 13605, Walker to Rainier, 9 July 1800.

<sup>51</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 13759, Rainier to Wellesley, 14 September 1799.

<sup>52</sup> Blair Adam Papers, Sir Charles Adam, Box J, No. 281, Wilson to Sheriff of Aden, 12 December 1798.

<sup>53</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Philip Dundas, 25 April 1799.

<sup>54</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/175, Rainier to Gillis, 25 February 1804.

the Grand Porte.<sup>55</sup> The complexity of the routes through which information might flow is described in a letter from Rainier to Christian at the Cape [itself showing that the admirals kept each other up to date]:

Our latest intelligence which was communicated by the Consul of Smyrna and forwarded by his Colleague at Aleppo to Bussora, was received from a Venetian at Latillea in rather indifferent English; he had it from a Turkish Aga to whom it was related by some common person.

Rainier went on to repeat the rumour that Bonaparte was heading for India but the Resident at Baghdad [Hartford Jones] did not think he would succeed. The pressures on the disposition of his ships were noted in that he was not sending any more ships to the Red Sea and also by the fact that the *Resistance* (44) had blown up after being struck by lightning, with only five survivors.<sup>56</sup> Moreover the Admiralty did not want to be excluded from the intelligence gathering industry. In 1798 Nepean wrote to Blankett telling him that Captain Blair had been sent overland to Judda (sic) and the Red Sea in order to obtain intelligence.<sup>57</sup> It was also interesting for Rainier to receive information on the French in Egypt. Manesty described how bad were conditions for the French there, of a rumour that Bonaparte had been assassinated and that the French were trying to curb Muslim practices.<sup>58</sup>

#### b) Mauritius.

The quandary of how to use intelligence from neutrals will be examined later in this chapter. But they did make up a large proportion of that information he received. Data on Mauritius was much treasured and, because it was the base for French attacks on British shipping, it was Rainier's main concern before Bonaparte's invasion of Egypt. As it was a French island, intelligence was hard to come by. A report from the American ship *Washington* stated that morale on Mauritius was low, there were few supplies, the negroes were restless and they were expecting a British attack.<sup>59</sup> But two years later Lt. George Gordon of the Bombay Army wrote from Mauritius of the high state of efficiency of the French naval squadron there and its plans to take troops and cannon to the Indian mainland. He was also able to give intelligence of French intelligence concerning British warships off Madras.<sup>60</sup> Only judgement and possibly corroboration could help Rainier decide which intelligence to act upon. Cartel ships, bringing British prisoners back from French custody, were another good source of information. Decaen had been wise by holding back the cartel ship, *Glasgow*, from leaving Mauritius because, as soon as it returned to the Cape, Elphinstone was able to tell his captain blockading the island which ships were away cruising, their number of guns, and the one ship still in harbour.<sup>61</sup> He also kept the explorer Flinders a captive on Mauritius for almost eight

<sup>55</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/173, Rainier to Admiralty, 25 July 1803.

<sup>56</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Christian, 16 December 1798.

<sup>57</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/169, Admiralty to Blankett, 2 July 1798.

<sup>58</sup> Exeter University, Bombay Diary 72/20, Manesty to Bombay Council, 29 November 1798.

<sup>59</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/167, Intelligence Report, no date but December 1794, p. 510.

<sup>60</sup> B.L., L/PS/19, Box 12, Gordon to Bombay Presidency, 19 June 1796.

<sup>61</sup> Perrin (ed.), *Keith Papers*, vol.1, Elphinstone to Spranger, 4 October 1796, p. 467.

years in order that he might not report back the strength of French defences. The Danes again figured in Rainier's reports when he told the Admiralty that they were selling 'Sea Papers' to ships trading with the enemy in the Eastern Seas to protect them from arrest by the British. This was especially helpful [to the French] in ensuring that the French trade between Mauritius and Batavia had sufficient vessels.<sup>62</sup> Captain Newcombe of the *Orpheus* wrote an undated affidavit stating that he had captured a Danish ship taking supplies to Mauritius. The vessel only had one Dane aboard and all the officers were British. He had therefore seized it as not really a neutral ship and he had sent it back to England for a legal ruling.<sup>63</sup> But, on other occasions, Rainier was able to tell Wellesley that he had heard from a passenger who had visited Mauritius how many privateers were in the harbour,<sup>64</sup> and later, from neutral merchant ships visiting Mauritius that there were no warships there.<sup>65</sup> The Danish colony of Tranquebar was also a centre of intrigue and intelligence exchange. It was so well used by the French that Wellesley complained to the Danish governor in 1799 and, two years later, located a British agent there to watch over French activities.<sup>66</sup>

### c) The Arab World.

Rainier was clearly concerned about the quality of that intelligence coming from the Arab world:

I have wrote by the late ships to Commodore Blankett ... to be more upon their guard against the wily Artifices of the Arabian Governments, as the Enemy, as well as their own particular interest might have had a design in fabricating the information they had received.<sup>67</sup>

Blankett also, with much more immediate experience, illustrated the reason for hesitating to believe what intelligence came from Arab sources. He explained that the Sheriff of Mecca was trying to obtain his independence from the Turks and:

he is not without suspicion that from our connection with the Porte, we might be led to endeavour to restore the lost power of the Grand Vizier in these Seas ... he will assist the French in their establishment at Cairo.<sup>68</sup>

But as communication via Egypt became impossible, the already established route through Aleppo, Baghdad and Bussora grew more important. Cooperation with Arab rulers also became necessary. As has been seen, Samuel Manesty, well established as the Company's

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<sup>62</sup> N.M.M., RAI/11, Rainier to Admiralty, 15 February 1798.

<sup>63</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/167, Affidavit by Captain Newcombe, no date but October 1794, p. 452.

<sup>64</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/169, Rainier to Wellesley, 17 September 1798.

<sup>65</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/173, Rainier to Wellesley, 4 May 1803.

<sup>66</sup> M. Martin, *Despatches, Minutes and Correspondence of the Marquess Wellesley, K.G., during his Administration in India*, vol. V, pp. 36-40, and vol. 11, pp. 418-9, quoted in S.P. Sen, *The French in India* (New Delhi, 1971), p. 577.

<sup>67</sup> N.M.M.RAI/7, Rainier to Admiralty, 16 April 1799.

<sup>68</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/170, Blankett to Admiralty, 30 June 1800.

agent in Bussora and married to an Armenian, was joined by Hartford Jones in Baghdad. The decision to appoint him was made by Dundas on hearing of Bonaparte's expedition to the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>69</sup>

Indeed, my opinion is, that the measure which has been taken of placing Mr. Jones at Baghdad, as a centre of negotiation and intelligence with India, will have the effect of informing you of every transaction in the Mediterranean and the Levant fully as soon as we learn them at home.<sup>70</sup>

It was a pity that Hartford Jones was a proponent of an alliance with Afghanistan as a buffer to French or Russian expansion southwards, rather than an alliance with Persia, which Wellesley favoured. Given the Governor General's requirement that all his subordinates should think as he did, this difference of opinion meant that Hartford Jones' opinion was suspect on all issues. Dundas had long been concerned about French intentions in Egypt and how they might affect India. In 1784 he asked the ambassador at Paris to find out any plans of the French in the east, able to be furthered by a connection with Paris.<sup>71</sup> The ambassador replied that the French had no immediate plans, but were seeking a fast and reliable route overland for despatches and agents, as a means of intervening more effectively in the politics of the Indian states.<sup>72</sup>

As the war progressed, intelligence was sent overland from the Mediterranean and added to by British Government Residents:

It will be the business of Mr. Jones at Baghdad, and the other residents in that part of the world, to convey to us such information as they can collect ... and we may act differently from what theory and a well-digested policy may suggest.<sup>73</sup>

This was a description of Hartford Jones, for which Rainier and the Royal Navy were very grateful. However, Wellesley had a different opinion:

Mr. Jones (apparently a man of talents and activity) is not in a position to acquire speedy or correct information. My most useful sources of intelligence have been Constantinople, Aleppo, Bussora and our own in this place my most earnest and

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<sup>69</sup> M.E. Yapp, 'The Establishment of the East India Company Residency at Baghdad, 1798-1806', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. 30, No. 2, Oct. 1978, p. 326.

<sup>70</sup> Dundas to Wellesley, 23 March 1799, quoted in Ingram, *Two Views of British India*, p. 140.

<sup>71</sup> L.G.W. Legg (ed.), Instructions to Dorset, January 9 1784, Royal Historical Society: *British Diplomatic Instructions, 1689-1789* (London, 1934), vii, 306, quoted in 'From Trade to Empire in the Near East -1: The End of the Spectre of the Overland Trade, 1775-1801', quoted in Ingram, *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 14, No. 1 (January 1978), p. 7.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., Hailes to Camarthen, 28 April 1784, Dorset to Camarthen 22 July 1784, Royal Historical Society: *Despatches from Paris, 1784-1790* (London, 1909-10), i, 5, 16, quoted in Ingram, 'From Trade to Empire in the Near East - 1, The End of the Spectre of Overland Trade, 1775-1801, in *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 14, No. 1 (January 1978), p. 7.

<sup>73</sup> Dundas to Wellesley, 18 March 1799, quoted in Ingram, *Two Views of British India*, p. 127.

anxious entreaty that the dispatch overland from England may be established on a proper foundation.<sup>74</sup>

Captain Wilson, the Company agent in Mocha, was sent there by the Bombay Presidency on the news of Bonaparte's invasion of Egypt. Rainier built up an excellent partnership with him. He provided not just intelligence, but interpretation and advice for the admiral, and arranged for the re-supply of stores for naval vessels. Even Blankett was impressed: '... he claims every regard from myself and every officer of the squadron'.<sup>75</sup> Rainier's reliance on Wilson is indicated by his letter to the Admiralty noting that Wilson believed that:

there was no likelihood of the French Army having crossed to Suez, neither had Commodore Blankett, or the *Albatross* been heard of in that Neighbourhood. The Turkish accounts are of so extravagant a cast that little reliance can be placed on them.<sup>76</sup>

Wilson was also able to take in hand the diplomatic negotiations with the local Arab rulers, a task that did not come as easily to Blankett. This relationship was an excellent example of how well the Navy and Company could work together when egos and self interest permitted. And these were characteristics whose absence in Rainier's personality enabled him to be more effective than many of his contemporaries. He continued to feed the Bombay Council and the Admiralty with information; in March 1799 he advised them that the French had erected some fortifications at Suez and Kosire and were now assembling some vessels at the former. In the same letter he illustrated another source of negative intelligence mentioning that a frigate had arrived from the Cape with no news of Blankett.<sup>77</sup> In November 1798 Wilson received a letter from the Bombay Council telling him how pleased it was with his work in changing Arab attitudes to being anti French and pro British. It also told him: 'the account you have transmitted of the Tonnage in the Red Sea is very acceptable and has been forwarded to Admiral Rainier'.<sup>78</sup>

#### d) Intelligence & the Cape Station.

The importance of keeping open the communication channel between the Cape and India as a route between the Admiralty, the Cape flag officer and the East Indies can be seen in a letter from the Admiralty to Christian:

Though no mention is made in your Despatches of your having sent any Advices to India, their Lordships are led to hope that you, or Mr. Pringle, the Company's Agent at the Cape, will have devised some means of conveying Information of

<sup>74</sup> Wellesley to Dundas, Letter No. 11: 23 March 1799, quoted in Ingram, *Two Views of British India*, p. 251.

<sup>75</sup> Exeter University, Bombay Diary 83/54, Blankett to Bombay Council, 17 August 1799.

<sup>76</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Admiralty, 23 February 1799.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., Rainier to Admiralty, 15 May 1799.

<sup>78</sup> Exeter University, Bombay Diary 74/1798, T74/5, Bombay Council to Capt. Wilson, 4 November 1798.

Tippoo's Disposition to the presidencies on the Coasts and also to warn Admiral Rainier in order to put them on their guard.<sup>79</sup>

The Admiralty took this opportunity to remind Christian how important was the exchange of intelligence between different stations. It does appear that this particular route worked well. In order to ensure that intelligence reached everyone, the Admiralty's letter to Rainier telling him of Bonaparte's impending attack on Egypt and Blankett's squadron, was evidently copied to Christian at the Cape, copied again and sent onto Commander Charles Adam, a junior captain in Rainier's squadron, in order that he received the information as soon as possible.<sup>80</sup> In 1801 Curtis was able to inform Rainier that he had detained a French ship carrying the nephew of the Governor of Mauritius and who was tricked into telling Curtis that the French were reinforcing the island's garrison.<sup>81</sup> The benefits of the Cape as a source of intelligence are also demonstrated during the time that Rainier reported to Elphinstone. The latter was able to send copies of intelligence about French and Dutch movements, advise Rainier to protect Malacca and Prince of Wales Island and not to send any more ships to cruise off Mauritius as he will cover it from the Cape in future.<sup>82</sup> This is the first reference to the French island not being part of the East Indies station whilst the Cape station was extant.

#### e) Intelligence from the Enemy.

After receiving intelligence from neutrals, the navy, and the Company, there was one other source - the enemy. This would come from captured warships or merchantmen. Because there were relatively few enemy vessels operating on his station, most information came indirectly via naval forces in the Mediterranean. Captured letters written home by French soldiers gave useful information as to what was happening in Egypt. They talked of the danger of Muslim assassins, of the lack of wine, but sufficiency of other supplies, and what would be the army's next destination. The interrogation of a captured French soldier was copied by Wilson and sent to Bombay and the Senior Naval Officer off Alexandria. Asked if Egypt were merely a staging post en route to India, the Frenchman replied:

There was some talk of Men going to India, but everyone was at a loss to know how that was to be affected. They had no ships in the Red Sea ... it was the firm opinion of all that they were to remain in Egypt, and that it was to be their future country.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> T.N.A., ADM 2/1353, Admiralty to Rainier, 19 June 1798.

<sup>80</sup> Blair Adam Papers, Sir Charles Adam, Box J, No. 244, no date but probably August 1798.

<sup>81</sup> B.L., I.O.R., Home Misc. H/476, Curtis to Rainier 5 February 1801.

<sup>82</sup> N.M.M., KEI/L/136, Keith to Rainier, 31 May 1796.

<sup>83</sup> Exeter University, Bombay Diary, Wilson to SNO Alexandria, 27 February 1799.



### **How Rainier used Intelligence.**

Rainier had scarce resources but much territory to defend. Intelligence was fundamental to the deployment of his resources. Indeed it was one of the keys to successful command.

It was exceedingly difficult to interpret this information yet he had to make his plans based on such a weak foundation. Some was intentionally false, some was mistaken, some was merely wishful thinking, and some was true. Rainier's skill was in calculating which was which, often using his thirty two years of naval experience, and a total of twenty two years in the East Indies. An example of the difficulty can be seen in Rainier's letter to Governor North of Ceylon. He had received conflicting intelligence from 'an English Gentleman' in Mauritius and from American merchant ships as to whether or not the *Marengo* was carrying troops, and therefore sailing to attack some undefined British possession. So that the enemy could not obtain information on his movements, he thought that foreigners should be excluded from Trincomalee.<sup>84</sup> In another letter to North Rainier tells that an American ship believes that Linois had sailed north, but Rainier's judgement said they had sailed east.<sup>85</sup> In this case he was wrong and the Americans were correct, much to his chagrin as this was the last opportunity to bring the French squadron to action before he sailed for home the following March.

On the other hand, it was well known that intelligence coming from neutrals could be particularly untrustworthy because of their vested interest in circumventing the British blockade. For example, Elphinstone at the Cape passed onto Rainier that Dutch ships were sailing under Danish colours and Dutch cargoes were being carried in American ships to avoid seizure by the British. As an aside he also told him that he had heard that French reinforcements were heading for the East Indies from France.<sup>86</sup> An example of American intelligence being false was illustrated in a letter from Rainier to Wellesley, informing him that the American ship *Ganges* was not to be trusted.<sup>87</sup> Yet American vessels could also be helpful as when the Canton supercargoes told Rainier that an American ship reported that six French frigates had been seen heading east from Mauritius.<sup>88</sup> It was also sometimes necessary to take a decision as to which conflicting intelligence was correct:

Dispatches have been received ... from Captain Wilson, who has been sent by the government of Bombay to the Red Sea. But the tenor of these dispatches has since been contradicted by advices from Constantinople.<sup>89</sup>

Rumours of another escape of French ships from Brest, in early 1801, show Rainier interpreting intelligence with excellent results. The time was still one of great naval and

<sup>84</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/175, Rainier to Governor North, 15 August 1804.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., Rainier to Governor North, no date but August 1804.

<sup>86</sup> N.M.M., KEI/7, Intelligence Report from Denmark, 6 July 1795.

<sup>87</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 13760, Rainier to Wellesley, 23 June 1801.

<sup>88</sup> N.M.M., RAI/5, Rainier to Christian, 10 January 1797.

<sup>89</sup> Wellesley to Dundas, 16 March 1799, quoted in Ingram, *Two Views of British India*, p. 122.

military activity in the Red Sea so Rainier sailed for Bombay in order to cover the sea routes thereto.<sup>90</sup> But by July he felt the threat had decreased from one of a potential battle squadron to one of commerce raiding and he feared for the exposure of Popham's supply lines to the Red Sea. He therefore sent HMS *La Sybille* to the Seychelles and surprised *La Chiffonne* (36) at anchor in Mahé harbour taking her after a brief seventeen minute struggle.

In another letter to the Admiralty he noted that he had heard the French had reached Suez, but the information was from a Turkish source and he could not trust what they said.<sup>91</sup> He was also nervous about the impact on his line of communications of a Wahabi uprising which he feared might lead to the fall of Baghdad and Bussora.<sup>92</sup> Indeed, from his very first days on station, he wrote to Spencer that he knew that French ships in Mauritius were short of provisions but he had no idea where they might be going.<sup>93</sup> Some rumours could be wild; Manesty wrote to the Governor of Aleppo: 'I cannot believe the death of Buonaparte, (sic) nor the Turks cutting to pieces 30,000 of [the French]'.<sup>94</sup> The Governor General could obtain strange intelligence: 'A report has reached me (which however on every calculation appears impossible) that Bonaparte had passed Basra on his march to Moulton with 35,000 men, and would join the shah at Delhi'.<sup>95</sup>

Besides receiving information, Rainier also had an obligation to pass it on, as early in 1795 when he told Sir John Shore that there were rumours of French ships and troops coming to seize Batavia.<sup>96</sup> However obtuse the source, Rainier believed that intelligence should be communicated; to Elphinstone he wrote that he had heard from the master of the freighter *Transfer* who had heard from a Malay proa, that Spanish and Dutch warships had been seen in the Straits of Banca.<sup>97</sup> He also acted as a communications medium with Blankett telling him that he had heard there were no troops embarked on the French ships that had recently left Brest,<sup>98</sup> and again to Christian, that Blankett was moving up the Red Sea to stop the French transporting troops across from Kosseir to Arabia.<sup>99</sup> Keeping the Governor General up to date, he passed on all Blankett's reports concerning matters in the Red Sea, which included evidence of the lack of communication between Colonel Murray, commanding the troops on Perim, and Blankett. Blankett had visited both Aden and Perim only to discover Murray had moved but had not left a message as to where he was going.<sup>100</sup> At a later date he wrote to the Governor of Ceylon passing on intelligence, discussing whether the Dutch and French at Batavia would combine to attack British possessions, and telling him how he had

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<sup>90</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/171, Rainier to Admiralty, 30 March 1801.

<sup>91</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Admiralty, 23 February 1799.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., Rainier to Admiralty, 17 May 1799.

<sup>93</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/167, Rainier to Spencer, 11 September 1794.

<sup>94</sup> Exeter University, Bombay Diary 72/T/15, Manesty to Governor of Aleppo, 17 January 1799.

<sup>95</sup> Wellesley to Dundas, 26 November 1798, quoted in Ingram, *Two Views of British India*, p. 113.

<sup>96</sup> N.M.M., RAI/4, Rainier to Shore, 19 April, 1795.

<sup>97</sup> N.M.M., RAI/5, Rainier to Elphinstone, 14 January 1796.

<sup>98</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Blankett, 8 October 1799.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., Rainier to Christian, 18 October 1799.

<sup>100</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 13759, Rainier to Wellesley, 19 August 1800.

allocated his ships to counter them.<sup>101</sup> Not forgetting the other side of his station, the same month he wrote to the Lieutenant Governor of Penang, Robert Farquhar, that he was immediately sending a large convoy from Madras to China with another one departing a few days later.<sup>102</sup>

Intelligence had to be protected from the enemy. Therefore much secret communication was sent in code, which, in itself, caused problems. Rainier wrote to Philip Dundas, the Naval Officer at Bombay, that he feared the capture of the Indiaman *Woodcott* would mean that both naval and Company code and signal books might have fallen into French hands.<sup>103</sup> All the relevant people needed informing of codes or they would be worthless. This was unfortunate as Rainier had only just received new code books from London for use between the Company and Navy.<sup>104</sup> He thought it politic to keep Wellesley informed: ‘I take the liberty to enclose to Your Excellency a set of signals made out to be used between His Majesty’s Ships and the Settlements in India’.<sup>105</sup> Code was also used for communication between the army and navy, as when Rainier advised Colonel Clarke, commanding British troops at Goa, of a new signal system. Not only could the codes be captured but some might not be very good:

At present the cipher you use in corresponding with me is the India House cipher, which I understand is a bad one; and besides, I may not choose that the gentlemen of Leadenhall Street [East India Company] should know the content of my private correspondence with you.<sup>106</sup>

The admiral’s skill was in sending intelligence to the Admiralty in a manner which, whilst noting the dangers and problems, would not cause panic or a belief that their admiral in the East Indies did not know what he was doing:

Please to inform their Lordships that Affairs continue in a tranquil State on this Station ... save that three or four Privateers have been too successful ... ‘Tis reported here that the French Army have evacuated Egypt. But I have no official account of it ... [I] hope it (sic) will receive confirmation, as it will allow me to withdraw the Frigates and Sloops from the Service in the Red Sea to assist in defending the trade of this Country from the depredations of the Enemy’s Privateers.<sup>107</sup>

He carefully noted that he understood that his main role was to protect the Trade, which was not too badly affected by enemy privateers, and he would be able to do an even better job

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<sup>101</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/ 175, Rainier to Governor of Northern Ceylon, 27 February 1804.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., Rainier to Farquhar, 12 August 1804.

<sup>103</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7 Rainier to Philip Dundas, 3 August 1798.

<sup>104</sup> T.N.A., ADM 2/1352, Admiralty to Rainier, 20 March 1798.

<sup>105</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 13759, Rainier to Wellesley, 29 September 1800.

<sup>106</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/175, Rainier to Col. Clarke, 16 February 1804.

<sup>107</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/179, Rainier to Admiralty, 29 April 1800.

when he had proof that the French threat from Egypt had been eradicated. However, he would not act until he had solid intelligence that the French threat was at an end. He would not take that risk.

He continued to be selective with what he told the Admiralty. The following year he told them that he had heard of a French naval force at Brest, possibly arming for the East Indies. The Admiralty would certainly know this already but Rainier was probably just informing them that he had alternative sources of intelligence. For this reason he was heading for Bombay as the optimum place to wait for any French ships as, with the north east monsoon, he could easily run south to attack them. He also mentioned that Wellesley had requested a ship to bring bullion from Canton to Calcutta.<sup>108</sup> Although this was just a week after he had received the angry tirade from Wellesley over his refusal to support an attack on Mauritius, he did not mention it to his naval superiors. Even though he had told Spencer privately about the difference of opinion, he was astute enough to know that the matter should not be raised in official documents which might become public.

Rainier's leadership style, whereby he allowed his captains the confidence to use their own intelligence, is illustrated during the early months of 1797. In January he was concerned about the vulnerability of British merchant shipping. He had told the supercargoes not to use the Straits of Banda, Sunda or Malacca. Yet they ignored his advice and used Sunda Straits. With most of Rainier's ships in the Moluccas protecting the newly acquired Dutch possessions and the Trade, there was a large hole in the British defences from Madras to the Hooghly. A French schooner, left by the French commander, Sercey, off Ceylon, was captured by HMS *Carysfort* (28), Captain Alexander, who learnt thereby of French plans to head north. Knowing how vulnerable British shipping was, Alexander cleverly fed information to Sercey via a neutral merchant vessel that there were four line of battle ships at Madras. Not wishing to face such odds Sercey therefore headed east towards Sumatra. Emphasising the role of chance Sercey came across the *Victorious* (74) and *Arrogant* (74), both having been on separate convoy duties. The ensuing battle was inconclusive but the damage inflicted on Sercey's frigates meant that the French had to call off their cruise to refit in the Mergui Archipelago off the Burmese coast. Wintering thereafter at Batavia Sercey awaited the return of the China fleet from Canton. Rainier escorted the first section of this fleet through the Straits of Malacca but the second half, with no escort, was met by Sercey. Pretending to be Royal Navy ships, the Indiamen caused the French to flee, Sercey, not wanting to receive more damage which could not be repaired. And it was quite reasonable for the French admiral to think he was faced by Rainier as his intelligence told him that Rainier was in the area but not exactly where. He had already been surprised by the *Victorious* and *Arrogant*; he did not want to make the same mistake again. Thus it can be seen that intelligence was a two edged sword. Sometimes it could ensure an easy victory but at other times it could lead one to make serious mistakes when it was not entirely reliable.

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<sup>108</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/171, Rainier to Admiralty, 30 March 1801.

### **Four examples of the role of intelligence.**

Whatever the source of intelligence, it can be categorised into two parts; that intelligence concerning the enemy's intentions and thereby responded to defensively, and that which shows the enemy's weaknesses and can be exploited offensively. The first example is clearly one of intelligence to which Rainier had to react. Second and third examples illustrate Rainier's making decision in the absence of intelligence for which he was criticised by those experts using the benefits of hindsight. Without this advantage it is difficult to see what else he could have done. The fourth example demonstrates Rainier planning offensive action and using his experience and knowledge of the region. The one piece of intelligence he receives he discounts as he views it as unreliable and not fitting in with his plans.

#### **a)The Red Sea, pre and post 1798.**<sup>109</sup>

The Red Sea played a key role in how Rainier was effected by, and used, intelligence. Before Bonaparte's invasion of Egypt, the role of the Middle East in Rainier's consciousness was confined to its value as the overland communications route between India and London. The trade with that area was threatened only by pirates and the dangers were covered by the Bombay Marine. The news that started to filter into India from mid 1798 changed all that.

News of the build up of a French fleet and transports at several Mediterranean ports had been followed in London by puzzlement as to their intended destination. Canning, at the Foreign Office, was busy sending news to the Admiralty from diplomatic sources.<sup>110</sup> Skilled French misinformation allowed for a number of possibilities; Ireland, Britain, Portugal, Naples or Alexandria. This last possibility came with the added element of a march across the desert to Bussora or a march to Suez and then down the Red Sea. The force would then attack British interests in India. But the sheer size of such an undertaking meant that it was not initially taken seriously. However, talkative French academics that specialised in antiquities in the Middle East started to give credence to the idea.<sup>111</sup> As the President of the Board of Control for India, and Secretary of State for War, Dundas had a vested interest in keeping the interests of India at the forefront of British defensive actions and, on June 16 1798, he wrote to Wellesley advising him of the squadron of warships he was sending to the Red Sea and the extra troops he was sending to India from the Cape.<sup>112</sup> Given the four to six month by sea and optimistic [in time of continental upheaval] three month overland journey time, it is clear that both Indian land and sea forces would be totally in the dark about this impending storm if they had to rely on news from London.

However, Malartic, the Governor of Mauritius, issued a proclamation on the 19 January 1798 inviting Frenchmen to join Tippoo Sultan in his objective to eject the British from India. This news had soon reached Madras and therefore both Wellesley and Rainier would have been at

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<sup>109</sup> See Appendix 10e

<sup>110</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/4176, Canning to Nepean, 24 and 28 May 1798

<sup>111</sup> M. Duffy, 'British Naval Intelligence 1798', *M.M.*, 84, 1998, p. 283.

<sup>112</sup> Dundas to Wellesley, 16 June 1798, quoted in Ingram, *Two Views of British India*, pp. 46-48.

least mentally prepared to hear that the French were soon to threaten India. Spencer wrote to Rainier on 30 May that there was a rumour of a French attack on Egypt which would then flow down the Red Sea and thence to India. But Spencer did not give ‘much credit’ to the rumour.<sup>113</sup> On the 17 June he wrote again to Rainier confirming the French plans and telling of Blankett’s squadron sailing for the Red Sea. He was clearly optimistic that Rainier would hear from other unmentioned sources because: ‘I have however the fullest Confidence that you will before the receipt of these Dispatches have been induced to take some precaution of a similar nature’.<sup>114</sup> That the Admiralty was concerned about the smooth flow of intelligence is illustrated by its acknowledgement of Christian’s letter from the Cape telling of Malartic’s proclamation: ‘Though no mention is made in your Dispatches of your having sent any Advices to India, their Lordships are led to hope ... [that this was done]’.<sup>115</sup> The Secret Committee of the Company also wrote to the three Presidencies that Egypt was Bonaparte’s goal and they were sending out 4000 troops immediately.<sup>116</sup> But there were still doubts in the mind of Samuel Manesty:

Local knowledge, which have derived from a personal visit to Egypt, convinces me that any attempt made by Europeans to conquer that Country, would be attended with difficulties, almost insurmountable ... The Nature of the Inhabitants of Egypt is Savage, daring and treacherous, their Antipathy to foreign Christians is violent ... the Climate ... is inimical to the European Constitution. The French from their long Intercourse with Egypt, are well acquainted with the above mentioned Facts; and they must well know ... they could not ... command the means of fitting out from Suez the Sea Port ... Expeditions adequate in Military and Naval Force, to Successful attacks on our Eastern Possessions.<sup>117</sup>

However, by the date Manesty wrote this letter, Bonaparte had already been in Egypt for ten days and Nelson would be victorious at the Battle of the Nile in another ten. Only six days after this victory, captured French correspondence was already in British hands telling of how vulnerable the French were to be murdered in Alexandria and that: ‘Soon the Canals which are in existence will be cleaned and Navigable, then the Commerce of India may once more have its emporium in Egypt’.<sup>118</sup> All this information would be of great benefit to Rainier, anxiously wondering what was happening, the key was to get it to him.

It is unclear when Rainier first heard of Bonaparte’s actual attack on Egypt but by September 17 he clearly realised the situation was serious, although he made no actual reference to Egypt. Rather more he was perhaps concerned that a French naval squadron might round the

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<sup>113</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 75862, Spencer to Rainier, 30 May 1798.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, Spencer to Rainier, 17 June 1798.

<sup>115</sup> T.N.A., ADM 2/1353, Admiralty to Christian, 19 June 1798.

<sup>116</sup> B.L., I.O.R., L/PS/2/1. Secret Committee to the Presidencies of Calcutta, Madras and Bombay, 9 June

<sup>117</sup> Exeter University, Bombay Diaries, T64/8, Manesty to John Spencer-Smith, Charge d’Affairs to Constantinople, 11 July 1798.

<sup>118</sup> Exeter University, Bombay Diaries, Diary 67/ 45-53, 1798, Cesar Inard de Mont Pellier to Unknown, 27 July 1798.

Cape and head for Tippoo's base of Mysore on the Malabar Coast. He wrote from Madras Roads to Wellesley:

... the apprehensions that may be reasonably entertained of the inimical; designs of Tippoo Sultan, and the cooperation that may be afforded him on the part of the French ... I propose proceeding to the Malabar Coast with [the] *Suffolk* and *Trident*.<sup>119</sup>

Accurate intelligence had reached India around the same time because the Bombay Council Meeting Minutes of the 21 September confirmed news of the French landings, and their occupation of Alexandria and Cairo. It also noted rumours of a British naval victory at Aboukir Bay and that copies were being sent to Rainier.<sup>120</sup> Then came news of the activities of French agents in Baghdad.<sup>121</sup> But the admiral was still on the Coromandel Coast and news would take at least a month to reach him. Information began to flow thick and fast into Bombay; intelligence indicated that the French were heading for India, French agents were in Baghdad, a captured letter written on the 15 May 1798 stated that: 'a great army ... will proceed, by the Red Sea to India, to Bengal [and] make alliance with Tippoo Saib (sic) and other powers in those parts, and raise all India against them'. A letter from a 'respectable Native' at Bussora related that he had heard of a French plan to dig a canal 'thro the Isthmus of Suez by which they say the communication with India will be much facilitated'.<sup>122</sup> Rainier was also informed that Captain Wilson, the Governor of Bombay's aid de camp, was being sent to the Red Sea in a Company cruiser in order to obtain intelligence.<sup>123</sup>

It was evident that the Company's intelligence network was springing into action and that it viewed Rainier as a major recipient. But firstly it had to reach him. Fortunately the season was on the cusp of change and he would already be on his way to Bombay. Probably he would now receive data in less than a month – a period that would be reducing as he approached Bombay – the nearest British base to the Red Sea. Unfortunately this had the added effect of moving him further away from the centre of military and political decision making – the Governor General, based in Calcutta. And his political skills would be called into play by a Bombay Council, normally the minor Presidency, but now the key front line in the defence of India.

Rainier must have been worried. He had limited intelligence of what was happening, navigational knowledge of the area within the navy was scant, wind patterns severely limited freedom of action, the Admiralty had sent a squadron of warships to the Red Sea pointedly not under his control, the climate put severe strains on ships and men, the government was seriously worried about French ambitions towards India, and the Company would demand his

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<sup>119</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/169, Rainier to Wellesley, 17 September 1798.

<sup>120</sup> Exeter University, Bombay Diary T66A/1, Bombay Council Meeting Minutes, 21 September 1798.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., T66A/47, Bombay Council meeting Minutes, 10 July 1798.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., T66A/51, Bombay Council Meeting Minutes, 27 August 1798.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., T66A/ 53, Bombay Council Minutes, no date but September 1798.

services paying little heed to the wider strategic concerns of the station as a whole. Rainier knew that whatever he did would come under the closest scrutiny in London.

Rainier's first requirement was intelligence – in a region in which the navy and Company were poorly represented. He also had to establish a line of defence in the Red Sea in case Bonaparte's successes allowed him to march rapidly to Suez. Blankett left British waters in mid July, unaware of the frustrating journey ahead of him. At this time those commanding British forces in India were blissfully unaware that Bonaparte had already landed in Egypt on the 1 of July.

Rainier, now in Bombay and attempting to obtain the latest news, was learning how to handle the officials of the Bombay Presidency. He wrote to Wellesley:

The Bombay Government under this apprehension [of a French attack] press the expediency of my detaching as large a Naval Force as may be in my judgement adequate to the purpose of counteracting the designs of the enemy of the Coast of the Red Sea.

In this same letter he advised the Governor General that he has heard of the French landing in Egypt:

its primary object, which is generally conjectured to be the conveyance of a strong Military Force to this Country by way of the Red Sea, to co-operate with Tippoo Sultan in an attack on the British Settlements.

He also said that he was expecting a frigate and sloop from England so clearly had no idea that Blankett has been sent out.<sup>124</sup> It is noteworthy that, at this late date, Rainier still thought it necessary to tell Wellesley of the French landing. However, nine days later in another letter to Wellesley, he noted that he wanted the Bombay Government to arm two of their ships: 'to be sent to reinforce Commodore Blankett in the Red Sea where he may be in danger of being overmatched by the junction of the French and Dutch'.<sup>125</sup> In this letter he also mentioned Captain Wilson, the Company's agent at Mocha, from whom he expected intelligence. Rainier's appreciation of Wilson and his understanding of problems of communications can be seen in his letter to Captain Adam of the *Albatross* when he told the former to work with Captain Wilson to stop the enemy's progress and to leave advice of where he is going so that other senior officers will know where he is. He must also send frequent reports to Rainier.<sup>126</sup> The tensions in Rainier's state of mind come through in his letter to the Admiralty of 2 December. He told them that the *Centurion* would be leaving for the Red Sea on the 7 December and listed the dispositions of his other ships. He then turned to intelligence and his

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<sup>124</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 13758, Rainier to Wellesley, 2 November 1798.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., Rainier to Wellesley, 11 November 1798.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., Rainier to Wellesley, 8 March 1799.



meaning is unclear, showing how confusion was caused by the wide variety of intelligence sources:

Certain intelligence, VIZ. Buonaparte getting possession of Cairo – Admiral Nelson’s Victory – the French had not reached Suez the 25<sup>th</sup> of August last, nor was there the least apprehension of their penetrating through Persia in the middle of last month, on the contrary, the attempt is deemed utterly impracticable. Intelligence received from Bussora but not authenticated; burning of the Ships at Alexandria by Captain Troubridge, successive defeats and massacres of the French Army in Egypt by the Arabs – Buonaparte ... had reached Suez with 8000 men.<sup>127</sup>

At least now he was keyed into the intelligence network that was beginning to provide lots of data – he just had to decide which was correct. However the Red Sea weather patterns allowed him the time to take stock:

Being well assured that no well found Ships can get out of the Red Sea before the middle of March. I shall defer for the present sending any further succours that way in our present uninformed situation of affairs there; concluding nevertheless that Commodore Blankett must have arrived on that Station by this time.<sup>128</sup>

He was clearly growing more anxious about the lack of news concerning Blankett’s progress because only three days later he wrote:

We have no news from the Red Sea ... we are hourly expecting a dispatch from Bussora and in case no satisfactory information is received ... I shall move this Government [the Bombay Presidency] to send a cruiser to endeavour of open communication with Commodore Blankett.<sup>129</sup>

The detail of Wilson’s work is illustrated when he wrote to Captain Adam of HMS *Albatross* that he had heard that a dhow had been rented by three Europeans who were perhaps French; could Adam check?<sup>130</sup> Two days later he confirmed that they were French.<sup>131</sup> The same day he wrote to the Imaum of Senna to warn him of French activity. If he could seize any Frenchmen please send them to Wilson in Mocha and he would be rewarded.<sup>132</sup> The intelligence continued to flow, Captain John Sprat Rainier wrote: ‘The conduct of the Arabs hath hitherto been friendly, but I suspect they would not be very hostile to the French, if assured of their own safety’. He continued that a “Bazaar report” said the Imam of Senna had ordered the Governors of Mocha and Hodenda to help the ships of any nation. He might

<sup>127</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/169, Rainier to Admiralty, 2 December 1798.

<sup>128</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Christian, 16 December 1798.

<sup>129</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 13758, Rainier to Wellesley, 19 December 1798.

<sup>130</sup> Exeter University, Bombay Diary 76/24, Wilson to Adam, 10 December 1798.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., Wilson to Adam, 12 December 1798.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., Wilson to Imaum of Senna, 12 December 1798.

therefore have to remain up the upper reaches of the Red Sea to hinder the French so will require supplies being sent.<sup>133</sup>

By now he should have expected to hear something of Blankett but his continued absence made Rainier anxious. A letter as late as May 8 the following year noted that if he did not hear from Blankett soon, he would think him captured by the French or having suffered a natural disaster.<sup>134</sup> It also meant he must leave his ships in the area to the detriment of his other duties. By this time he probably would have received his orders from the Admiralty, dated 30 September 1798, telling him to arrange his ships as to stop Bonaparte but not to risk the Malabar Coast and the Bay of Bengal – not the most useful or helpful order Rainier would receive.<sup>135</sup>

Rainier's frustration with the lack of intelligence concerning Blankett and the uncertainty this placed on the admiral as to what should be the disposition of his ships comes through from his letters. He wrote to the Admiralty that he had a letter from Captain Wilson of the 11 March telling him there was still no news of Blankett but he gave him intelligence that the French had erected some fortifications at Suez and Kosire and had collected and repaired some craft and that Captain John Spratt Rainier had despatched the *Albatross* to join two Bombay Marine cruisers that would destroy the vessels and attempt to do the same with the fortifications. He ended the letter by saying that HMS *Imperieuse*, just arrived from the Cape to Madras, 'brings no intelligence of Commodore Blankett'.<sup>136</sup>

Around this period he also received orders to help the Company occupy the island of Perim which Dundas felt would seal off the mouth of the Red Sea. The island could not do this; it had no water and the west channel was too wide for artillery from the island to cover all of it. How far Rainier realised this is not known but it was not politic to question the plan, coming from so senior a level of government as Dundas. The Bombay Council was aware of the situation on Perim. It had a survey from Lieutenant White of the Bombay Marine which stated that it was deserted, without any water 'or useful produce of any kind ... but had a harbour where ships might safely lie'.<sup>137</sup>

The following July, when he moved back to the east coast of India, he wrote to the Admiralty of the situation at Perim. The dates of the letters are illustrative of the time taken for intelligence to reach the admiral, even within his station. He told Nepean that Blankett had written to him from Mocha on the 17 April and 8 May respectively. The letters had been sent to Bombay and then redirected to him and he received them on the 24 June, over two months later. He was now writing to the Admiralty on the 10 of July. It would take a minimum of three months for his letter to reach London overland. Blankett would have sent copies of his

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<sup>133</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 13758, John Spratt Rainier to Peter Rainier, 8 March 1799.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., Rainier to Wellesley, 8 May 1799.

<sup>135</sup> N.M.M., RAI/11, Admiralty to Rainier, 30 September 1798.

<sup>136</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Admiralty, 17 May 1799.

<sup>137</sup> Exeter University, Bombay Diary 74/56-7, Report to Bombay Government, no date, c. March 1799.

letters directly to London and the Admiralty would therefore know of the situation on Perim before it received Rainier's opinion. In this letter he described the faults of Perim, the untrustworthiness of the Arabs and the bad weather:

... our next intelligence from that quarter may afford more information ... as well as on the particular situation of the French in Egypt and, at Suez ... when I shall be able to form a judgement of the Strength of Naval Force that Service will hereafter require.

He also advised that he was sending an escort back to England with the China Fleet, as the Bombay Council had requested.<sup>138</sup>

Rainier had already had example of Arab animosity from John Sprat Rainier telling his uncle that he mistrusted them and that a pilot ran the *Centurion* ashore near Mocha.<sup>139</sup>

Perim continued to be a sink of resources in men and materials until finally, in December 1799, the Bombay Council wrote to Colonel Murray agreeing with his plan to evacuate the island and return to Bombay.<sup>140</sup> The time delay for information reaching Rainier is illustrated by his letter to Wellesley agreeing to the evacuation of Perim dated over four months after the original order to Murray:

I understand from Rear Admiral Blankett that Your Excellency has given direction to the Bombay Government to withdraw the detachment under Colonel Murray's orders ... a measure of much propriety in my humble opinion.<sup>141</sup>

By this time Blankett was fully in command in the Red Sea and intelligence primarily flowed through him. The sources sending intelligence to him were the captains of RN and Bombay Marine vessels, Company employees such as Hartford Jones, Manesty, and Wilson, and occasional trusted local merchants and officials. With the usual practice of copying letters, Rainier would receive the information but, of course, it would normally be much later, having been sent via Bombay. He understood sufficiently that his own role was no longer one of immediate action as he was too far away and he did not want to confuse Blankett:

... proceed to the Red Sea with all convenient dispatch with a view to the further prosecution of the Orders you have received from the Rt. Hon. The Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Admiralty, 10 July 1799.

<sup>139</sup> Exeter University, Bombay Diary 77/49, J.S. Rainier to Admiral Rainier, 11 March 1799.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., Bombay Diary 85/57, Bombay Council to Murray, 15 December 1799.

<sup>141</sup> B.L., Add. Ms. 13759, Rainier to Wellesley, 22 April 1800.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., Rainier to Blankett, 3 February 1800.

There was a steady flow of intelligence from Blankett to Rainier, for example; the Convention of El Arish, by which the French army would evacuate Egypt, had been abandoned, Blankett believed the Sheriff of Mecca had been in negotiation with the French all along, he had heard that Kleber, [commander of the French army since Bonaparte's departure], was dead and that the French were in 'much confusion'.<sup>143</sup> By this time Rainier had other important matters requiring his attention. He was ordered by the Admiralty to inform the Tax Office of all men under his command who earned over £60 p.a. in order that they might be assessed to pay the new income tax.<sup>144</sup>

Rainier's role was now mainly one of logistics support. He had plugged the entrance to the Red Sea as soon as he heard of Bonaparte's invasion, he had worked with the Company to establish the intelligence networks in the region, and he had ensured the political communication between himself, the Company and the Admiralty remained effective and trusted. Further evidence of Rainier's attention to intelligence is seen in his reply to Wellesley acknowledging news of the Convention of El Arish. He hoped the Bombay Government had told Blankett so that he could leave the Red Sea which was very expensive, as supplies were difficult to obtain.<sup>145</sup>

Thus it can be seen that the skill with which Bonaparte hid the destination of his expedition thwarted Rainier from preparing his forces to meet the new threat and also delayed the naval reinforcements which London sent. But the timing was fortunate for Rainier – he was about to sail to Bombay for his winter quarters and no enemy ships could leave the Red Sea before the following March at the earliest. He needed to obtain intelligence from the area quickly but had only the Company agent Manesty, in Bussora. This was remedied by Rainier sending the *Centurion* and *Albatross* and the Bombay Presidency sending Wilson to Mocha. He was then able to make his plans based on a steady flow of intelligence although he could not always be certain of its accuracy. His main frustration continued to be ignorance of Blankett's whereabouts. When he finally learned of his arrival he could leave the detailed control of naval activity in the region to Blankett and return to what he knew had been dangerously neglected, the protection of the trade.

#### b) Pondicherry 1803.<sup>146</sup>

It is probable that the confused manner in which war again reignited, and how the uncertainty of whether he was in a state of war or peace as communicated by the government, caused Rainier to allow the French squadron to escape at Pondicherry.

Whilst still at peace, the French frigate *Belle Poule* landed 180 troops at Pondicherry on 21 June 1803. The French authorities had been striving to obtain possession of that city from the British under the terms of the Peace of Amiens but the British were proving somewhat

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., Blankett to Rainier, 30 June 1800.

<sup>144</sup> N.M.M., RAI/11, Admiralty to Rainier, c. June 1799.

<sup>145</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 13759, Rainier to Wellesley, 18 May 1800.

<sup>146</sup> See **Appendix 10b.**

obdurate in refusing to withdraw, knowing that the French reoccupation of their major possession on the mainland could become a threat to Madras. On 5 July Rainier's squadron anchored at Cuddalore, twenty miles down the coast from Pondicherry. Rainier then sent the *Trident* (64) and a sloop to anchor next to the *Belle Poule*. Soon they were joined by Linois with the *Marengo* (84), two more frigates and two sloops. The power game continued when Rainier arrived with his squadron, which anchored close to the French ships. Linois would expect that Rainier would hear first of an outbreak of war, which they were both expecting, due to his superior communications. Knowing he needed to act before war broke out, he slipped his cables on the night of the 24/ 25 July, leaving lights on his buoys. When dawn came, Rainier found no French ships in sight. He did not follow them, but remained on the Coast for two more weeks then fell back to Trincomalee as the best focal point from which to watch French actions. One of the French transports, *Cote-d'Or*, was seized by Rainier but then released after French objections as to the legality of the action – another sign of Rainier's discomfort at making strictly illegal moves.

He gave a factual report to the Admiralty of how Linois had escaped and was able to secure their Lordships' approval of his actions.<sup>147</sup> It is easy to criticise Rainier for not chasing Linois. But it must be remembered that there was still no war and, legally, he would have had no defence in law if he had attacked the French. He had protected Pondicherry and ensured it did not fall into French hands, which was his prime objective. Rainier would also know that, in 1792, his predecessor, Cornwallis, had been engaged in a diplomatic incident in which *La Resolue* (36) had surrendered to the *Phoenix* (36) when the former tried to stop the latter inspecting two French merchantmen suspected of bringing supplies to Tippoo, with whom Britain was at war. As this occurred during a time of peace the incident could have led to a major break with France but, in 1792, the French government had more important matters on its mind.

However, the fact that Linois' escape figured in a debate in the House of Lords would suggest that there was more to the episode than was mentioned in official documentation.<sup>148</sup> The Earl of Carlisle accused the government of not advising Rainier in sufficient time to seize Linois: '... if the English admiral had been apprised of the probability, much less the actual commencement of war, he would, as it would have been his duty, detained the whole of the French squadron'. Lord Hawkesbury's reply in defence of the government's speed of communication did not even query the legality of attacking the French before war was actually declared. Adding to the debate Lord Spencer, the former First Lord, noted that the frigate taking news of war out to India had been firstly ordered to escort a convoy to Lisbon, thus losing sixteen to eighteen days. He had no doubt that, had the situation been reversed, the French would have seized any British vessels. What Hawkesbury meant before the days of electronic communication by his reply is difficult to understand: 'In fact, Admiral Rainier was apprised of the probability ... of war when the French squadron arrived at Pondicherry

<sup>147</sup> N.M.M., RAI/8, Rainier to Admiralty 30 August 1804.

<sup>148</sup> B.P.P. House of Lords Debate 19<sup>th</sup> April 1804.

and it was actually under consideration to detain Admiral Linois when he was fortunate as to make his escape'. This point is difficult to believe as the day after Linois' escape Rainier wrote to the Admiralty describing news he had received from Ambassador Stratton at Constantinople and asking for confirmation of the declaration of war.<sup>149</sup> Lord Carnarvon stated that Rainier was: 'without instruction for his conduct and that this omission enabled Admiral Linois to escape ... from a situation in which he might have been detained'. This, he thought, was gross negligence on behalf of the government. Carnarvon believed that: 'private information did arrive in time but not of sufficient authority to enable Admiral Rainier to have detained Admiral Linois' squadron in port'. The vote against the government was carried by thirty one to thirty.

The Admiralty's approval of Rainier's actions can now be seen in a different light. Any criticism of him would also be an implied criticism of its own tardiness. Rainier clearly knew war was imminent but felt that he did not have the authority to act illegally, remembering Cornwallis in 1792 – although the House of Lords debate would indicate a less sensitive approach to the legality of the situation by the British government. One wonders if a Nelson or Pellew would have been so cautious. Possibly an example of when the "safe pair of hands" is too safe and perhaps an example of changing times when the British government was growing less fastidious over legal niceties; *vide* the seizure of Spanish treasure ships in 1804 and of the Danish fleet in 1807, both before the declaration of war, although both these events were authorised by the government. As there is no criticism of Rainier to be found in the literature, and certainly not in contemporary official documentation, perhaps this thesis should allow the admiral the credit of keeping Pondicherry in British hands without giving diplomatic ammunition to Napoleon.

The actual timetable shows that the government tried its hardest. War was declared on 18 May, 1803. Less than twelve weeks later the Bombay Presidency ordered the Bombay Marine brig *Teignmouth* (16) to take 'secret intelligence' to the Governor of Ceylon, Rainier, the Governor of Madras and the Governor General.<sup>150</sup> On the 4 September Rainier wrote that he had just received news of the outbreak of war from 'a fast brig'.<sup>151</sup> It had taken only four weeks for the *Teignmouth* to sail from Bombay to the Coromandel Coast, having stopped at Trincomalee. This timetable illustrates that the government did its utmost to get news to India and there is no way that Rainier could have been advised of the war any earlier. Interestingly, the *Teignmouth* was not as rapid in reaching Calcutta because, on the 14 September, Wellesley wrote to Rainier that he had still not heard of the official declaration of war.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/173, Rainier to Admiralty, 25 July 1803.

<sup>150</sup> B.L. Home Misc. H/479, Bombay Government to Capt. Lowe, 5 August 1803.

<sup>151</sup> N.A., ADM 1/173, Rainier to Admiralty, 4 September 1803.

<sup>152</sup> B.L. Add. Mss. 13752, Wellesley to Rainier, 14 September 1803.

c) Intelligence and Battle of Pulo Aur.<sup>153</sup>

The battle of Pulo Aur was an example of Rainier making a decision with no intelligence at all, merely working on assumptions. The China Tea Fleet, under Commodore Dance, and carrying cargo valued at £8 million, left Canton in January 1804 with no escort. Linois, with the *Marengo* (84), two heavy frigates and two sloops, met it the following month. With the Peace of Amiens, the Britain Government had initiated its usual practice of immediately denuding its fleet to reduce costs and the East Indies was no exception. Rainier had been ordered to return several ships and mostly he was left with old and worn out vessels. Therefore he concentrated his ships as best he could in order to have with him a reasonable force in case he met Linois, which meant he had insufficient ships for convoy duty. His problem was that, due to necessary dockyard repairs to *Tremendous* (74) and *Trident* (74), his only available line of battle ship was the *Lancaster* (64). Unfortunately he did not know where the French admiral was, so he concentrated on what he saw as the weak points of India's defences, Goa, Trincomalee and Bombay.

He could not afford to allow frigates alone to protect convoys against a powerful French squadron and risk their capture as well as the merchantmen they were supposed to protect.<sup>154</sup> Castlereagh informed Wellesley that St. Vincent had told him that St. Vincent: 'will be prepared, if necessary, to reinforce it [the East Indies] so soon as the Channel arrangements are completed'.<sup>155</sup> This intention, probably decided in June 1803,<sup>156</sup> would require ships to be fitted out, then sail to India. So St. Vincent's plan to send three third rates to reinforce Rainier could not arrive to help Rainier until March 1804 at the earliest, too late for the China Fleet. However, Rainier had been forewarned of this problem. In April 1803, the Admiralty had written to him saying that the Government and Parliament wanted to keep as many ships as possible in home waters. He was therefore advised to keep his ships together as much as circumstances would permit.<sup>157</sup> How he might do this given the demands for trade protection, he was not advised. In fact the *Albion* (74) and *Sceptre* (74) were sent out and missed the Battle of Pulo Aur by two weeks. They were followed, not long after, by the *Russell* (74), and *Grampus* (50).

In the event, Dance, with six of his Indiamen pretending to be third rates, chased off the powerful French squadron.<sup>158</sup> If Linois had seen through the bluff he could have captured the entire fleet. Rainier's reputation would not have survived such a loss. Although the China Fleet was a priority, he had received no intelligence as to its departure date.<sup>159</sup> Secondly there was no intelligence as to which channel the China ships would use to return from Canton.<sup>160</sup> Rainier was expecting reinforcements from England, and, indeed, they were already at

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<sup>153</sup> Pulo Aur is a tiny island off the east coast of Malaya c. 150 miles north of Singapore. See **Appendix 10d**.

<sup>154</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/175, Rainier to Wellesley, 11 January 1804.

<sup>155</sup> B.L., I.O.R., H/505, Home Misc., Castlereagh to Wellesley, 19 March 1803.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, Castlereagh to Wellesley, 23 June 1803.

<sup>157</sup> T.N.A., ADM 2/1360, Admiralty to Rainier, 7 April 1803.

<sup>158</sup> Col. R. St. J. Gillespie, 'Sir Nathaniel Dance's Battle off Pulo Auro', *MM*, vol. 21, 1935, No. 2, pp. 163-86.

<sup>159</sup> N.M.M., RAI/8, Rainier to Admiralty, 17 May 1804.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, RAI/10, Rainier to James Drummond, President of the Canton Supercargoes, 14 August 1804.

Madras. And it was usual for a warship escort to accompany the China Fleet to and from Canton.

...The Protection of the Trade of the Company to, and from China, I apprehend will be provided for by the Admiralty, agreeable to the mode generally adopted during the late war. ... I do not conceive myself authorized to detach any part of the Squadron on that Service as things were circumstanced when the intelligence of the commencement of Hostilities was first received.<sup>161</sup>

The usual route when heading towards Bengal was through the Malacca Straits. But because it was well known as a potential trap, it was usually avoided by going through one of the more easterly passages such as Bali or Lombok. In fact Rainier noted that the Straits of Malacca had only been used once in the last war and that was when he personally was the escort commander, otherwise it was too dangerous to use.<sup>162</sup> A more direct route if heading solely for Europe was through the Sunda Straits, between Sumatra and Java. Because Bali and Lombok were less frequently used there was less chance of the enemy lying in wait. However, they were narrow and less well charted for such a large and valuable convoy. Unfortunately Rainier was as much at a loss as to which route the convoy would use because no-one had told either him or his senior naval officer in the Moluccas. In fact, he had not even been asked to provide an escort, either for India- or England-bound ships. He assumed that the Admiralty had sent out an escort with the China Fleet and that it would have stayed in Canton in order to escort it back to England. He did not know where Linois was, and, because of the monsoon, he himself was on the Malabar Coast. He was therefore predisposed to believe that the Admiralty would extricate him from his dilemma of needing to protect the China Fleet so that he would not have to take on the duty for which, in any case, he did not have the ships.

Wellesley appreciated Rainier's predicament on the resumption of war, rather more than the Admiralty, when he told Rainier that he would give every assistance possible to prepare his ships for war.<sup>163</sup> The *Albion* and *Sceptre* arrived in Indian waters in January 1804 with sick and worn out crews. With orders only to wait at Madras until they learned of Rainier's commands, they waited to recoup until news of Linois' raid on the British base at Bencoolen panicked the Governor of Madras, Lord William Bentinck. He persuaded the two ships to rush off to the east to protect British interests. This action infuriated Rainier. Although the governor could not officially give orders to the Royal Navy, it would be a brave captain, especially newly arrived on the station, who would ignore suggestions from such a high ranking official. So Rainier did not blame his captains. Instead he wrote to Bentinck to 'express to Your Lordship the deep and sensible regret' for sending his ships 'so far from my

<sup>161</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/175, Rainier to Wellesley, 11 January 1804, Parkinson, *Trade in the Eastern Seas*, p. 308.

<sup>162</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/176, Rainier to Bentinck, 21 March 1804.

<sup>163</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 13752, Wellesley to Rainier, 18 May 1803.



reach'. This had seriously weakened his forces and he could not now provide an escort for the Bombay Presidency for its troopships.<sup>164</sup>

Not only could the two reinforcements not arrive in time to protect the China Fleet but, more frustratingly for Rainier, they would end up being too far to the east to reinforce his squadron for potentially a period of months.

When everyone had calmed down after Pulo Aur, Rainier followed up his campaign to protect his reputation in a letter to the Canton supercargoes:

... but for want of information of Your arrangement for the sailing of the Homeward bound Ships both to Europe and to this Country, and from mistakes that followed, they [Rainier's warships] were mostly dispersed with Convoys before the intelligence was announced of the Enemy being on the look out for them so near the Eastern entrance of the Straight (sic) of Malacca.

He ended by urging them in future to tell him and the local senior naval officer, when and by what route, they were sailing.<sup>165</sup>

Naturally, Rainier wrote to the Admiralty to explain what he had done to protect the China ships before Pulo Aur. He tried to blame Captain Bathurst of the *Terpsichore* who he had sent to Penang to protect the ships coming from China and who he felt had disobeyed his orders to wait for the entire fleet of country ships but, instead, had followed the request of the governor general to escort just the first division of the country ships. But even if he had waited at Penang he would have been too far north to have had any effect on the action. It would appear that Rainier used this deviation from his orders, and Bentinck's 'orders' to the *Albion* and *Sceptre* sending them out of his reach, as somewhat disingenuous excuses for the China Fleet having been left unprotected. He also criticised Captain Page of the frigate *Caroline* who: 'would have been a very acceptable considerable reinforcement to me ... but he preferred Cruizing according to his own Caprice'. However, it would seem that the Admiralty understood his dilemma and did not, at least officially, note his 'smokescreen' of excuses because, in the usual manner of replying to admirals' despatches, in the corner was written that the Admiralty approved of his actions.<sup>166</sup>

The impact of Rainier's protestations about convoys and the near disaster at Pulo Aur would seem to have had little lasting impact because, in February 1805, Pellew wrote to the Admiralty that eight Indiamen had been told by Rainier to come in convoy with the departing admiral. But, in the night, they had broken free and were never in convoy again.<sup>167</sup> And in the 1806-7 season, there were still no escorts available for the journey from Canton to Bombay

<sup>164</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/175, Rainier to Bentinck, 14 March 1804.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., Rainier to James Drummond, President of the Canton Supercargoes, 10 August 1804.

<sup>166</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/174, Rainier to Admiralty, 17 May 1804.

<sup>167</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/176, Pellew to Admiralty, 24 February 1805.

and four ships had to take the voyage unescorted. They knew how dangerous it was and had taken out double insurance.<sup>168</sup> The gains of such unilateral trade clearly overcame the obvious risks.

It is interesting to note that study of the factors affecting Rainier's decision could still lead to a difference of opinion. Gillespie, in his article in the *Mariner's Mirror* believed that the admiral had made: 'quite good arrangements beforehand for meeting the China Fleet, but these failed. I do not think he was a Nelson'. Gillespie also noted the puzzle as to why Rainier did not order his small squadron, which he sent to Penang, to travel further into the Straits of Malacca, especially as this would give the British more chance of obtaining the intelligence which Rainier needed.<sup>169</sup> It is possible that he wanted to avoid the risk of these two frigates, one en flute, and a sloop, meeting Linois with his 84 gun *Marengo*, aided by two heavy frigates and two sloops. This would only lead to their capture by the French. And Rainier only had one ship, the *Lancaster* (64), in his entire squadron with which he might contest directly with Linois, which ship was with him on the west coast. On this part of his disposition he had the support of Admiral Ballard who wrote in the *Mariner's Mirror* following Gillespie's article: 'I adhere to my view that Rainier's dispositions were the best that could be foreseen, and that he was justified in remaining on the Malabar side'.<sup>170</sup> On balance Rainier's judgement in the absence of intelligence seems logical, but it turned out to be wrong. Therefore, practically, Rainier had no alternative but to keep his forces on the Ceylon/ Malabar Coast. He clearly knew in how much danger this placed the China Fleet and he was worried. But atypically, he made positive assumptions that the Admiralty would already have sent out escort ships to China and that the Canton supercargoes would have the intellect not to send the Fleet through the Straits of Malacca. He was faced with the choice of defending only one of the two vulnerable targets which he was supposed to protect. With his cautious nature he felt that India was the more important and in this he was correct. His understandable error was in overestimating the dangers to India and underestimating those to the China Fleet.

A letter written by St. Vincent, stating that his successor in the Mediterranean should have 'temper and good nerves', has been used to conclude that the most supportive way for a commander to have these traits would be to be able to make 'considered decisions' from high quality and timely intelligence.<sup>171</sup> Given the size and complexity on his station, it was almost impossible for Rainier to benefit from these attributes. Yet only during the aftermath of the battle of Pulo Aur did he appear to manifest a degree of loss of 'temper and nerves'.<sup>172</sup> A reflection of this was an implied criticism of the Admiralty in not telling him if they had sent out an escort with the outward bound China Fleet, which they could easily have done and which was a common practice. That he only learned of the absence of an escort from the

<sup>168</sup> A. Bulley, *Free Mariner – John Adolphus Pope in the East Indies 1786-1821* (Putney, 1992), p. 180.

<sup>169</sup> Col. R. St.J. Gillespie, 'Sir Nathaniel Dance's Battle off Pulo Aur', *M.M.*, XXI, 1935, p. 169.

<sup>170</sup> Admiral G.A. Ballard, Letter in *M.M.*, XXII, 1936, p. 108.

<sup>171</sup> Duffy, 'British Naval Intelligence and Bonaparte's Egyptian Expedition of 1798', *M.M.*, 84, 1998, No. 3. pp. 278-290.

<sup>172</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/174, Rainier to Admiralty, 17 May 1804.

newspapers illustrates the level to which he was sometimes reduced in order to obtain his information.<sup>173</sup>

d) The Disposition of Rainier's Squadron: autumn 1804.

The fourth issue was one in which he had years of experience – assessing what might be the French admiral's intentions. Parkinson's views appear contradictory; on one hand he says: 'if his guesses were unfortunate, it does not appear that anyone else had proved a better prophet' but he also says: 'In a game of hide and seek it sometimes happens that imagination is more needed than experience'.<sup>174</sup> No doubt the scars from the near disaster of Pulo Aur had coloured Rainier's mind. He expected Linois to attack the China fleet again so he positioned his ships in a manner to catch the French Admiral amongst the Java archipelago. But then he heard that Linois had been seen in the Bay of Bengal, in the path of the Calcutta trade and there were no British defences capable of stopping the *Marengo* with its two heavy frigates. His sources of intelligence had failed him and he had put the Country Trade at risk. He rapidly returned to Madras and sent Captain Williams of the *Russell* to Penang, taking the sloop *Victor* with him. If he obtained news he was to return himself or send his consort.<sup>175</sup> The one piece of intelligence he had, from an American ship, he ignored as it did not fit with his preconception. But he had many years of experience of American misinformation so he can be exonerated for not believing it in the absence of any other news. The incident is a good example of the challenges Rainier faced when interpreting intelligence in the light of decades of experience in the East Indies; it was never complete, it was rarely up to date, it was often unreliable.

**Conclusion.**

The intelligence picture was more of an incomplete jigsaw puzzle than the basis for action. Intelligence, if it came at all, arrived from a great variety of sources, covering many subjects. Rainier's challenge was to decide what was valuable and what not, taking into account the source, the subject, and whether or not it was out of date. Arab opinion on the state of the Ottoman army would always need a strong filter. But only his own experience could help him judge whether American and Danish data were valid. He needed to understand if Company officials' information was accurate or had they been tricked by their enemies. Information from the Admiralty might have been accurate when it was sent, but nine months later might be totally out of date.

Of the examples above concerning the use of intelligence, that concerning the Red Sea was clearly a success. It is difficult to criticise Rainier for the escape of the Linois at Pondicherry in 1803 if one takes a purely legalistic point of view – he had no intelligence of the outbreak of war and therefore an attack on Linois would have been illegal. His memory of the furore caused by Cornwallis's fight with a French frigate in 1792, before war was declared, would

<sup>173</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/175, Rainier to Council of Supercargoes at Canton, 10 August 1804.

<sup>174</sup> Parkinson, *War in the Eastern Seas*, p. 246.

<sup>175</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/174, Rainier to Williams, 3 August 1804.

have predicted Bonaparte's diplomatic skills casting him as a villain in the eyes of Europe. Ballard answers the critics over Rainier's actions prior to the battle of Pulo Aur but clearly, whatever the logic of his actions, he would have received no mercy if it had gone the wrong way. His misreading of Linois' intentions concerning a possible attack on the China Trade in October 1804 had no long term repercussions, apart from denying Rainier the kudos of a final victory in battle. But it does illustrate the difficulties of offensive operations with poor intelligence.

But, given these caveats, it would appear that Rainier had, on balance, a true appreciation of the importance of intelligence, asking for it from such disparate sources as the Naval Officer in Bombay and the Supercargoes in Canton, seeking to evaluate its worth, be it from an American merchant ship or an Arab trader, and passing intelligence to the Governor General, the Admiralty, and the C-in-C Cape. He gave recognition to those who supplied it as with his praise of Captain Wilson at Mocha. He always took it seriously, even if he mistrusted it. With great skill, and a certain amount of good fortune, as in the timing of Bonaparte's invasion of Egypt, he used this key tool to ensure that his squadron was most effective at thwarting French ambitions, supporting the expansion of British rule in India, and in protecting the Trade.

Understanding the weather and communications, how the Company was both a vital resource and a hindrance, and how effective he was in operating with the navy and Company, this chapter has analysed the pros and cons of the intelligence available to Rainier. The next three chapters will demonstrate how well he achieved his goals taking into account the environment in which he functioned.

Looking at the elements of this relationship it is clear that there was much scope for dissention and internecine warfare, especially with the conflicting interests that would arise during a world war. In some ways it would have been easier if the Governor General had had command of the Navy. But, given the world of cooperation rather than command in which they operated, it can be seen that Rainier managed to wage the war against a complex set of enemies with consummate skill.

## CHAPTER 5.

**‘[YOUR ORDERS ARE] TO BEST PROTECT THE TRADE ... OF HIS MAJESTY’S SUBJECTS AND HIS ALLIES IN THE EAST INDIES’.<sup>1</sup>**

### **THE GEOGRAPHY OF MARITIME TRADE AND ITS PROTECTION.**

It is the contention of this thesis that Rainier’s achievements can be identified under four categories; trade protection, the protection and expansion of British colonial possessions, the growth of British power in India, and the establishment of a logistics structure for the navy. This chapter will address the first achievement. But before one can appreciate the matter of trade protection it is necessary to understand the context in which it took place. One must understand the physical features of this enormous station, including its primary weather patterns,<sup>2</sup> and the trade routes which formed the skeleton of British interest and power in the region.

#### **The Station’s Geographic Features.<sup>3</sup>**

The actual area which Rainier covered consisted of more than thirty million square miles. It stretched from Canton in China down through the Philippines to Sydney in Australia, then west across the Indonesian archipelago and Bay of Bengal to India. Onwards over the Indian Ocean it went northwards into the Red Sea. Its western boundary depended on whether or not the Cape of Good Hope was in British hands. When it was, Rainier’s command stopped short of the African coast south of Madagascar and the key French islands of Mauritius and Reunion. Before the Cape was taken in 1795, and after it was returned to the Netherlands in 1801, Rainier had the doubtful privilege of covering the entire sea lanes westwards to South Africa.

Unfortunately the station’s geographical features were not well known and this had a serious impact on the trade and naval operations during Rainier’s command. According to Parkinson: ‘English charts, based on hearsay and legend, were, and were known to be, utterly unreliable’.<sup>4</sup> In fact Elphinstone wrote to the Admiralty when he heard of Rainier’s expedition to the Moluccas, that because of Dutch pusillanimity: ‘the navigation of those seas appears to me to be the greatest risk attendant on the Rear Admiral’s undertaking’.<sup>5</sup> Rivalry between the European powers meant that charts were treated as secret documents, and religious rivalry meant that the same attitude applied in the Red Sea. Because the Netherlands was an ally of Britain care was taken not to irritate Dutch sensibilities. And because Britain had no wish to extend its colonies it only required access to harbours for supplies and minor

<sup>1</sup> T.N.A., ADM 2/1347, Admiralty to Rainier 25 February 1794, see **Appendix 9**.

<sup>2</sup> See **Appendix 10f**.

<sup>3</sup> See **Appendix 10a**.

<sup>4</sup> Parkinson, *Trade in the Eastern Seas*, p. 104.

<sup>5</sup> Elphinstone to Admiralty, 24 June 1796, in Perrin (ed.), *Keith Papers*, vol. 1, p. 419, see **Appendix 10d**.

repairs. Consequently the navy's only experience of the Eastern Seas would be to escort the Trade to and from Canton. Even after 1815 it was clear that the route through the Straits of Sunda was poorly charted. En route to Canton in 1817 HMS *Alceste* (44) hit a coral reef off the island of Gaspar just north of Sunda and "bilged". Immediately before it hit there were fourteen fathoms of water.<sup>6</sup> Four years earlier HMS *Volage* (22), passing to the other side of Gaspar, noted a 'very dangerous' uncharted rock'.<sup>7</sup> The dangers of this area were also described by Robert Sawyer:

...till the extent of the dangers off the South end of Banca are better known, the approach of it must be dangerous and we seem to be equally ignorant of what dangers may lie off the numerous islands lying to the south east.<sup>8</sup>

Voyaging to his new station in 1794 Rainier entered the Indian Ocean from the west with a journey of 4,600 miles from the Cape to Bombay. He would know that suitable naval bases along the way were rare. In the western sector the most suitable were the two French islands, Reunion [Isle de Bourbon] and Mauritius [Isle de France]. Madagascar had a good harbour at Fort Dauphin but was too far west to be an effective naval base. A small French settlement there provided food and slaves for Mauritius.

Mauritius was the main French base with a population averaging over 82,000 between 1804 and 1825.<sup>9</sup> It also had an excellent harbour in Port Louis. The prime drawback was that it could not feed itself, sustenance coming primarily from Reunion, 130 miles to the south west, from French and neutral vessels sailing from Europe and the United States, and from Madagascar. Naval stores had to come from France or from British prizes captured by the many privateers and warships based there. Its distance from India [2500 miles] meant that an effective blockade would require more ships than were available to the Royal Navy. Its unique weather patterns gave it a hurricane season:

The island is subject to hurricanes, and in the stormy months, which are January, February and March, they are sometimes very violent ... when the velocity of the winds ... exceeds 140 feet in a second, nothing is able to resist its fury.<sup>10</sup>

This narrowed the period that a blockade or full invasion could be organised and its rocky coastline gave no easy landing points - at least until detailed surveys were made in 1810 when a suitable landing site was discovered. But even these surveys did not solve all problems. In 1812, HMS *Nisus* (44) noted that the position of the southern tip of Mauritius on

<sup>6</sup> U.K.H.O., Misc. Papers, vol. 65, Remarks Book HMS *Alceste*, p. 617.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., vol. 64, Remarks Book HMS *Volage*, p. 571.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Sawyer, *The Oriental Navigator or New Directions for Sailing to and from the East Indies* (London, 1794), p. 454. It is worth noting that, in this book, Sawyer describes the routes with the word "dangerous" 156 times.

<sup>9</sup> Parkinson, *War in the Eastern Seas*, p. 16.

<sup>10</sup> Sawyer, *The Oriental Navigator*, p. 74.

the charts was incorrect.<sup>11</sup> However, not all opinions about Mauritius were positive. “The Isle of France was and will always be fatal to the establishments that the French have in India”.<sup>12</sup> Although it was a haven to which the French navy could retire from Indian waters at the first threat of defeat, it was too much of a diversion from more important locations on the mainland, such as Pondicherry. And to a resourceful admiral it was not necessary. Suffren did not once return to Mauritius during the entire course of the American Revolution.

Moving eastwards, the next important piece of land was Ceylon with its excellent harbour of Trincomalee, in 1794 a Dutch colony. This harbour was so situated that it could be used year round. It had been utilised by Suffren in the previous war and Rainier appreciated its significance; it was his first target when the Netherlands were occupied by France in 1795. Its drawback was that it had no productive hinterland so could not provide a naval squadron with much more than water and firewood. However, its location was optimum for moving up either side of India, depending on the circumstances and wind, and for meeting convoys either coming from England or to assemble the Trade coming from the Bay of Bengal, prior to returning to Europe. Yet its navigation was not always easy. As quoted in a document from the Remarks Books of HMS *Leopard* and *Trident*: ‘Admiral Rainier in August and September gained very little ground with very hard beating [it was] difficult to round Ceylon to westward in the south west monsoon’.<sup>13</sup> In 1802 Ceylon became a Crown colony, no longer under the control of the Company. Potentially at least this made it a self-sufficient Royal Naval base of its own where admirals and captains would no longer have to “kow tow” to Company officials in order to make their vessels ready for operations. Dundas appreciated Ceylon’s importance saying that, should France seize it, the French Minister of War ought to lose his head if France had not taken all British possessions in India within four years.<sup>14</sup>

To the north the Red Sea formed the limit of Rainier’s station.<sup>15</sup> It was primarily a Muslim sea. Therefore the local rulers tried to exclude Christian sailors and merchants because of its economic importance, as a conduit of grain from Egypt to Arabia, as a route for passenger traffic, and its religious importance for carrying pilgrims to Mecca and Medina. The extreme Sunni Wahabi sect sacked the Shia holy place of Karbala in 1801, and seized Mecca and Medina in 1806. These acts did not help the cause of Christian influence in the Red Sea region.<sup>16</sup> And prior to these events the Egyptian trade associated with the *haj* was thought to be worth £3 million to Egypt alone, as much as British trade with Bengal.<sup>17</sup> This was too large a sum to be risked by allowing Christians the opportunity to disrupt the traffic.

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<sup>11</sup> U.K.H.O., Misc. Papers, vol. 64, Remarks Book, HMS *Nisus*, p. 424.

<sup>12</sup> Sonnerat, *Voyage aux Indes Orientales et a la Chine*, vol. 11, p. 366, quoted in Sen, *The French in India 1763-1816*, p. 534.

<sup>13</sup> U.K.H.O., Misc Papers, vol. 64, “Remarks on a voyage to the Red Sea in 1798 and to India in 1805 by HMS *Leopard* and *Trident*”, p. 670.

<sup>14</sup> Fry, *The Dundas Despotism*, p. 192.

<sup>15</sup> See Appendix 10e.

<sup>16</sup> C.A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: the British Empire and the World 1780-1930* (London, 1989), p. 36.

<sup>17</sup> Bayly, *Imperial Meridian*, p. 232.

Consequently the Sea was largely uncharted: ‘I do not think there is any place of large extent so little surveyed or known’.<sup>18</sup> A local opinion elaborated on this concern:

... Ships are every Night obliged to put into some Place of Safety, for fear of striking upon the Rocks; they sail in Day time only, and all the Night ride fast at Anchor. This Sea, moreover, is subject to very thick fogs, and to violent Gales of Wind, and so has nothing to recommend it, either within or without.<sup>19</sup>

Therefore it is understandable how frustrating Blankett found operating in the area and how important was the relatively local Bombay dockyard for repairing all the hulls of ships damaged by grounding. Ports able to support a naval squadron were few, consisting primarily of the trading port of Mocha in the south, Jeddah further up the eastern coast and sensitive because of its role as the gateway to Mecca, and Suez in the far north, the departure point for pilgrims and grain southwards.

The entrance to the Red Sea, Bab-el-Mandab, is only twenty miles across and that is divided by the island of Perim.<sup>20</sup> The west channel is sixteen miles wide and the eastern one two miles. When the winds were from the north, between April and September, it was impossible to leave and when the winds were from the south, between October and March, it was impossible to enter the Sea.

The Persian Gulf was important because of the trade between Bombay and Muscat, and because mail and intelligence flowed from London, Constantinople and the British representatives in Baghdad [Hartford Jones] and Bussora [Manesty]. Intelligence would primarily be carried in Bombay Marine or naval vessels for security and speed. The trade was usually carried by Arab vessels although it was often escorted by the Bombay Marine as pirates were active in the area.

Rainier never visited the sector. Apart from during the French occupation of Egypt it was not an area of concern. He managed his operations there from Bombay to ensure British manoeuvres were adequately supported and to ensure the communication routes with Britain remained open.

On the sub continent itself, the centre of British government, Calcutta, at the head of the Bay of Bengal, was not ideal from a naval point of view.<sup>21</sup> The problem was that, during the north east monsoon, India was to the leeward so any emergency that required naval vessels to head east would be struggling against the wind. And Calcutta was eighty miles up the river Hooghly – a river of currents that could rise to eighteen knots, a tidal range of twenty two

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<sup>18</sup> A. Bissell, *A Voyage from England to the Red Sea and along the East Coast of Arabia to Bombay* (London 1806), p. 67, quoted in Ingram, *In Defence of British India*, p. 21.

<sup>19</sup> Abu Zaid Hasan ibn Yazid, *Ancient Accounts of India and China* (London, 1733), quoted in M. Pearson, *The Indian Ocean* (Abingdon, 2003), p. 17.

<sup>20</sup> See Appendix 10e.

<sup>21</sup> See Appendix 10b.



feet and with daily shifting sand banks. Many ships were lost travelling both up and down the river, and even moored, they could be swept aside by the current.

The other major presidency, Madras, was situated some 800 miles further south on the eastern side of India. Its eminence was due primarily to its position on land, close to some of the important Indian rulers, and due to its proximity to Pondicherry, which had been France's main possession on the mainland before being taken by the British in 1793. Although the strongest of French mainland possessions, Pondicherry was seen as incapable of supporting an offensive campaign without the assistance of Tippoo.<sup>22</sup> Madras was also the main British naval base on the east coast of India during the south west monsoon, so was a location well known to Rainier. If Madras were to be threatened by any enemy, the ability to reinforce it from Calcutta was heavily dependent on the season. During the north east monsoon, between October and March, the journey might take five days, but in the south west monsoon, between April and September, the journey could take more than five weeks. As a naval base it was poor, with no harbour, just an open roadstead, and a lee shore for half the year. As described by Parkinson: 'there was no harbour at all, just an open roadstead, a dangerous lee shore for half the year and an inconvenient landing place during the rest'.<sup>23</sup> It was described in a contemporaneous navigation guide:

... you lie exposed to all winds ... with a large swell perpetually rolling ... which makes ships labour very much. Your ship must be watered by the country boats, as none other can land, on account of the surf.<sup>24</sup>

And as one visitor wrote:

I am detained here by the tremendous surf, which for these two days has been mountains high: and it is extraordinary, that on this coast, even with very little wind, the surf is often so high that no boat dares venture through it; indeed it is always high enough to be frightful.<sup>25</sup>

Clearly this meant that it was also difficult for merchant ships, both to land stores and as an anchorage during the north east monsoon. The authorities did not want to encourage shipping during the most dangerous period. Such was the danger that the flag-staff, by which vessels took their bearings before anchoring, was struck each year on 15 October, and was not erected again until 15 December. HMS *Nisus* noted that, between 30 April to 2 May 1811,

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<sup>22</sup> Archives National, Guerre, A1, 3765, Souillac to Castries, 15 Sept 1785, quoted in H. Furber, *John Company at Work*, p. 73. Tippoo Sultan, ruler of Mysore, son of Hyder Ali and inveterate enemy of British rule. Killed at Siege of Seringapatam in 1799.

<sup>23</sup> Parkinson, *War in the Eastern Seas*, p. 12.

<sup>24</sup> Anon, *Sailing Directions for the East-India or Oriental Pilot, and for the navigation between England and the Cape of Good Hope* (London, 1781).

<sup>25</sup> J. Kindersley, *Letters from the Island of Teneriffe, Brazil, the Cape of Good Hope and the East Indies* (London, 1777), quoted in Pearson, *The Indian Ocean*, p. 26.

112 vessels were lost off Madras during an unexpected typhoon in the supposedly safe season.<sup>26</sup>

It is an indication of how few suitable harbours there were on the eastern side of India that Madras was the major summer naval base in the region.

The third major Indian base for the navy was Bombay. It had many positive assets. It had a safe harbour during the north east monsoon, October to March, and this is where the navy preferred to stay through this period. Thanks to the East India Company, it had excellent dry dock facilities. It was well positioned to cover any threat from the Red Sea and Arabian Gulf and was the eastern terminal of the overland mail route from England. It was from this base that Rainier coordinated the naval activities against Bonaparte's perceived threat from Egypt.

Formerly important locations that had lost their eminence included the Portuguese possession of Goa, which had been founded in 1510. Its vulnerability and Rainier's dilemma are noted in Chapter Four. A letter from Rainier to the Admiralty in 1799 tells of his negotiations with the Governor of Goa to obtain his agreement to allow the British to help him if the French were to attack.<sup>27</sup>

Moving east across the Bay of Bengal towards China there was therefore much activity to find a suitable base to windward.<sup>28</sup> Cornwallis, Rainier's predecessor, spent much time charting the Andaman Islands but was frustrated by the common drawback to all the islands to the west of Java – they might have a good, safe harbour, but they lacked the population and resources to meet all the demands of a naval base. The solution was Penang, an island in the Straits of Malacca. Not only could it support a population of over 10,000 people, it was on the main route from Calcutta to China at one of its bottlenecks and could thus deter enemy ships from waiting in that area, and it could perform minor repairs. Acheen, on the northern tip of Sumatra, although controlled by local rulers, was regularly used as a base by French commerce raiders. Indeed Suffren had used it to great effect during the American Revolution. Penang was useful as a centre from which to cover this threat. In 1795 the port of Malacca, to the south of Penang, was taken to provide a base for ships covering the Trade through the Straits of Malacca.

Rainier's experience to the east of India – the Dutch East Indies – had been minimal, apart from sailing through to attack Manila in 1762. All five of the battles against Suffren had been fought in the narrow area between Madras and Ceylon. This was not unusual as the Dutch were keen to maintain a monopoly of that region's trade. But the French occupation of the Netherlands made the islands Rainier's third target after Trincomalee and Malacca. To the south east of Penang, the large island of Sumatra had the small British base of Fort Marlborough, otherwise known as Bencoolen. Even this harbour was dangerous: 'In this

<sup>26</sup> U.K.H.O., Misc. Papers, Remarks Book, HMS *Nisus*, p. 332.

<sup>27</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Admiralty, 17 May 1799.

<sup>28</sup> See **Appendix 10d**.

Road the sea sometimes came in so heavy that, on account of the vessels rolling, we were obliged to lash the sheets in the steerage ... between September and March'.<sup>29</sup> The next large European centre was Batavia, the "capital" of the Dutch East Indies, on the island of Java. It had a safe harbour and an excellent dockyard, providing its own timber from the hinterland. And it had powerful forts defending it. A population of 160,000 is estimated to have been in residence in 1805.<sup>30</sup> Unfortunately it had a reputation of being the most unhealthy place in the east, although it is believed its 10% mortality rate was no higher than in Bengal.<sup>31</sup>

At the extreme eastern limit of the station lay Manila in the Philippines. As Spain was, in theory at least, an enemy for much of Rainier's period of command, he had to monitor developments there.<sup>32</sup> Across the bay from Manila lay Cavite, the naval base. It could hold a large squadron and, as the Spaniards were ever pusillanimous, Rainier had to watch this potential threat which was just 500 miles from the mouth of the Pearl River whence the China tea Fleet sailed.<sup>33</sup> Here was the entrance to Canton, the only Chinese port with which foreigners were allowed to trade. At the mouth was the Portuguese colony of Macao. Since the sixteenth century Macao had been a place of refuge for European ships recovering from long voyages or trying to trade with the Chinese. Unfortunately the Portuguese were now weak and threatened with occupation by France.<sup>34</sup> Britain could not allow France to become influential with the Chinese court and so was prepared to occupy Macao to forestall such an event.<sup>35</sup> However, the Chinese authorities were sufficiently wise to see the dangers of having either France or Britain in power over the tiny colony and they ensured that it remained under Portuguese hegemony.<sup>36</sup>

To the far south east, of the station lay Sydney in Australia. Whilst there was no strategic importance to Rainier he would have been aware that the first ship left India in 1793 with supplies for the new colony, followed by four others in 1794-5; a clear sign that many of the necessities of life for this nascent European culture would be supplied by one of the world's oldest cultures.<sup>37</sup>

Japan, notable merely because of its isolation, was never a country that required attention from Rainier. Apart from the visit of a Royal Navy frigate in 1808 to Nagasaki, there was no mercantile or naval contact with the xenophobic empire during this period.

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<sup>29</sup> Anon, *Sailing Directions for the East India*, p. 102.

<sup>30</sup> Parkinson, *War in the Eastern Seas*, p. 26.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 26-7.

<sup>32</sup> B.L., I.O.R., Add. Mss. 13757, Rainier to Wellesley, 21 September 1800.

<sup>33</sup> Parkinson, *War in the Eastern Seas*, p. 259.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 315.

<sup>35</sup> H.J. Wood, 'England, China and the Napoleonic Wars', *The Pacific Historical Review*, vol.9, No. 2, June 1940, p. 141.

<sup>36</sup> B.L., I.O.R., Add. Mss. 13762, Rainier to Wellesley, 13 April 1803.

<sup>37</sup> Pearson, *The Indian Ocean*, p. 196.

### **The Impact of Weather Patterns on the Station's Communications and Trade Routes.**

It is beneficial to understand the wind patterns as they often dictated the relative usefulness of occupied territories and the movement of warships and the Trade. Penang was convenient because, during the north east monsoon, it could cover the Bay of Bengal. During this time any ships to the west of the Bay could take months to reach the eastern side. This season also meant it was impossible to maintain Rainier's squadron on the east coast of India as it was a lee shore. Therefore the navy moved round to the west coast, and to Bombay in particular, where its ships could be refitted. When Trincomalee was in British hands its harbour, being the closest base to Madras, could be used safely during both monsoons.<sup>38</sup>

The main wind system in the region is the monsoon. From October to March the north east monsoon blows and between April and September the south west monsoon replaces it. However, they can only be relied upon for four of the six months because of variability during the changeover period. South of Mozambique the monsoon winds disappear.<sup>39</sup> The "Roaring Forties", well to the south of the Cape, and far from the French base of Mauritius, always blow to the east. This allows ships bound directly for China to head due east past India before turning north to Canton through one of the straits of the Indonesian archipelago.

The ships for China and India would usually leave England between December and May in order to catch the summer south westerlies up the east coast of Africa.<sup>40</sup> Most convoys would stop at the Cape to replenish food and water, especially if carrying troops.<sup>41</sup> These convoys would usually be escorted by warships sent out to the East Indies as replacements or reinforcements, especially if carrying bullion to finance the trade.<sup>42</sup> Occasionally those Indiamen heading for India had no escort, then they would be watched past Mauritius by warships based at the Cape, when the Cape was in British hands, and, if Rainier felt there were dangers, they would be picked up by his ships to the south of Ceylon and escorted to Madras and Calcutta.<sup>43</sup> The occasional vessels heading for Bombay would normally be under insufficient risk to warrant any escorts. The China ships, almost always escorted the entire return journey, would sail more southerly into the Indian Ocean, around forty degrees [the Roaring Forties] to catch the westerlies which would take them almost to the west coast of Australia and up through one of the Indonesian Straits, usually Sunda, to Canton.<sup>44</sup> Very occasionally they would even sail past Australia and head up the west coast of the continent

<sup>38</sup> See Appendix 10f, Parkinson, *War in the Eastern Seas*, p. 12, *Trade in the Eastern Seas*, p. 66.

<sup>39</sup> Parkinson, *Trade in the Eastern Seas*, pp. 198-102, pp. 105-9.

<sup>40</sup> See Maps in Appendix 10 for Details.

<sup>41</sup> Parkinson, *War in the Eastern Seas*, p. 32.

<sup>42</sup> T.N.A., ADM 2/141, Admiralty to Rainier, 7 May 1801.

<sup>43</sup> Anon., 'Trade Defence in the Indian Seas', *Naval Review*, vol. XVIII, No. 1, February 1930, p. 67.

<sup>44</sup> G.S. Graham, *Great Britain and the Indian Ocean* (Oxford, 1967), p. 42.

and sail into Canton via the South China Sea. Both routes had the added benefit of passing far to the south thus avoiding predators.<sup>45</sup>

During the south west monsoon ships heading for India would pass through the Mozambique Channel, called the “Inner Passage” and then through either the eight or nine degree channels between the Laccadive and Maldivian Islands. At any other time the winds were so contrary that this route could not be followed, therefore ships took the “Middle Passage” to the east of Madagascar which was closer to the dangerous [for British ships] French islands. The lower route, through the “One and a Half Degree Channel”, below the Maldives, was not discovered by the British until 1811 and this cut nearly 1000 miles from the journey.<sup>46</sup> Consequently British vessels aimed to arrive in the Indian Ocean during the south west monsoon in order that they could use the “Inner Passage”. The importance of choosing the right time to make the journey is illustrated by Blankett’s voyage to the Red Sea in 1798-9.<sup>47</sup> Bad weather and delays in Portsmouth meant that he did not round the Cape until October 1 and therefore had to struggle up the western side of the Indian Ocean against the north east monsoon. This gave him a total journey time of ten months. If the French had been quicker to the Red Sea and if Rainier had not immediately sent ships there from India, thereby making Blankett’s squadron less important, the impact of Bonaparte’s Egyptian adventure could have been much more serious.

The shipping routes through the Indonesian archipelago were varied but dangerous and poorly charted.<sup>48</sup> The Sumatran coastal route being described by Sawyer:

You are generally obliged to turn it hereabout, you must make the best advantage you can of the tides and be very cautious ... it may be considered as the most dangerous in these straits.<sup>49</sup>

Ships from north east India tended to go through the Straits of Malacca but those from Europe, Bombay and Madras tended to use the Straits of Sunda. Other routes further east, used primarily in war, were the Straits of Lombok and Bali. Given the tea crop preordained sailing times to and from China, and with few possible routes, it was relatively easy for predators to lie in wait across the possible courses to be taken by the merchantmen. Britain tried on different occasions to occupy certain islands to give support to its convoys. Bencoolen, situated on Sumatra, near the Strait of Sunda, was the most important. But even it declined in importance by 1801 when it was placed under the control of Prince of Wales Island, as Penang was called. Occasionally, when the threat of enemy privateers was particularly serious, vessels would take the “Eastern Passage” which went south of the Moluccas, north of New Guinea and then northwards to the west of the Philippines. Vessels

<sup>45</sup> R.P. Crowhurst, ‘The Voyage of the *Pitt* – A Turning Point in East India Navigation’, *MM*, vol. 55, 1969, No. 1, pp. 43-55.

<sup>46</sup> Parkinson, *Trade in the Eastern Seas*, p. 106.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>48</sup> **See Appendix 10d.**

<sup>49</sup> Sawyer, *The Oriental Navigator*, p. 430.

for Canton would then sail north, to the west of Borneo and the Philippines. The Dutch and Spanish showed little enthusiasm for war, concerned that any warlike moves could invite retribution from British forces. They had evidence that this was within Britain's power, remembering its attack on Manila in 1762. But Rainier had always to plan for what they might do, and their bases at Batavia and Manila would have made any attacks on British shipping easier, being so close to the trade routes.

With timing dictated by the tea harvest, ships from Canton would depart between January and February using the north east trades to take them down to about 15 degrees south and follow the south east trades, which are almost continual all year round, then south west much nearer the dangers of Mauritius to round the Cape and follow the south east trades to St. Helena, where they would usually pick up fresh supplies, and thence home to England.

Those bound for India from China would take the north east monsoon south through one of the Indonesian or Malacca Straits, depending on the risks of enemy action, and then use either wind on a port or starboard tack up to India. Some China ships bound for England would not return directly, but would go to India to join with convoys at either Madras or off Ceylon. On these return journeys, both to India and back to England, they would usually be escorted by naval vessels at least through the Straits of Sunda and Malacca.

Finally, the challenges of sailing in the Red Sea were magnified by its unique wind system.<sup>50</sup> There are separate patterns between the northern half, above Jeddah, and below Jeddah to the mouth of the Sea. North of Jeddah the wind is northerly for the entire year. This makes sailing north to Suez very difficult. In the southern half the wind is still northerly during the south west monsoon, but during the north east monsoon, the wind is a southerly one. This provides a reliable wind to reach Jeddah but makes it difficult to sail further up the channel. Such journeys were normally executed in smaller ships which could sail closer to the shore and use offshore and onshore winds. Due to the shape of the mouth of the Red Sea, this meant that the Sea could not be entered when the wind was from the north and exited when it was from the south.

### **Trade Protection.**

Before analysing the effectiveness of Rainier's efforts at trade protection, it is necessary to describe the Trade and how it changed during the period in which Rainier commanded.

The pattern of trade formed two inter-dependent parts; the intercontinental trade between Britain and Asia, and the intra station trade. On such a wide station all trade was vulnerable to commerce raiding and this was Rainier's main preoccupation throughout the tenure of his command.<sup>51</sup> Suffice it to say that, in spite of fluctuations, total UK imports and exports grew

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<sup>50</sup> See Appendix 10e.

<sup>51</sup> See Appendix 4.

over the period 1794 – 1805, imports from the East Indies and China grew, whilst exports to the East grew or were static, depending on the statistics reviewed.<sup>52</sup> This is due to whether or not the export of silver is included. However, as the demand in China for opium expanded, less silver was required to be transferred, thus reducing British “exports” even further. More frustratingly, as the opium came from India in private vessels there is no accurate measure of the volumes or value involved. The three-way nature of trade between Britain, India and China is illustrated by British exports to Bengal from 1794 to 1805 almost doubled as its taste for British goods and luxuries grew, largely financed by the profits from the opium trade. This allowed India to increase tenfold her import of British manufactures and: ‘to pour abundant revenue into the British Exchequer and benefit the nation to an extent of £6 million yearly’.<sup>53</sup> ‘...without the Indian transfers Britain could have required mounting foreign borrowing in 1772-1820, to seemingly unsustainable levels after 1809’.<sup>54</sup> Thus one can see how vital was Rainier’s defence of this trade.

As important to the British economy as UK-Far East Trade was that within the East Indies Station, namely the Country Trade, which is described between pages 119 and 123. An example of its rapid growth can be seen in Appendix 4f, describing the expansion in private trade between Calcutta, the centre of British power in India, and various locations in the region. In spite of wild swings from year to year, the trend is clearly positive, especially to the important entrep t centres of Penang and the Maldives.<sup>55</sup> The enhanced activities at Penang are supported by the increased ship movements illustrated in Appendix 4g. Appendix 4h shows that, whilst imports to Canton are largely static, exports to other parts of the region grew dramatically, thus stimulating the shipping companies, shipbuilders, and agency houses.

Thus we can see that, whilst great care must be taken in giving too much credence to individual trade data, there is sufficient information from around the region to indicate that both trade between Britain and the East, and within the region itself, grew sufficiently rapidly to enhance Britain’s ability to finance the war. Rainier’s role in this phenomenon is described below.

a) East Indian Trade: Britain and China/India.

The friction and challenges described below need to be put into perspective. The problem facing Rainier grew bigger and even more nationally significant as imports, both from India and China grew steadily during this period, in spite of the continual state of war.

Trade protection was a continual source of conflict between Rainier and the Company and merchants throughout his entire period of command and it applied to both the intercontinental and intra-station trade. From the very beginning of his command, Rainier stressed that the

<sup>52</sup> See Appendices 4a, 4b and 4d.

<sup>53</sup> S. Warren, *Opium* (1839), quoted in M. Greenberg, *British Trade and the Opening of China 1800-42* (Cambridge, 1969), pp. 106-7.

<sup>54</sup> J. Cuenca Esteban, ‘The British balance of payments, 1772-1820: India transfers and was finance’, in *Economic History Review*, LIV, 1 (2001), pp. 58-86.

<sup>55</sup> See Appendix 4g for increase in shipping volumes at Penang.

best way for his warships to protect the Trade was by them all sailing in convoy. Unfortunately this was not something the merchants wanted and he often complained that they desired protection but were not prepared to accept the discipline to obtain it. Admittedly, masters had good incentives to avoid naval “protection”; they might lose sailors pressed into warships and, if sailing together, would lose the potential advantage of being first to market. Also, within the station, some of the Trade was not entirely legal. Even on his journey out to India in 1794, the admiral complained about the behaviour of merchant captains not keeping in convoy. He passed on his comments to the Admiralty which in turn wrote to the Court of Directors, enclosing Rainier’s complaints of the Company ships on the journey out to India.<sup>56</sup> He also told the governor general his thoughts:

The private Trade of China I experience to be so very irregular in their movements I am at a loss how to act by them and shall request your Excellency’s interference next Season if they expect the protection His Majesty’s Ships.<sup>57</sup>

That the admiral was under pressure from the merchants, in spite of the criticisms, is shown in this letter to the Governor General. He spent much time communicating directly with the merchants, as well as with the presidencies, to tell them what he was doing with his vessels and why. This he did in a letter to some Bombay merchants after they had complained to the President of Bombay.<sup>58</sup> Sometimes the protests of the merchant shipping community caused even the calm and composed Rainier to lose his temper, noting: ‘what these people have had the presumption to call my inconceivable conduct’ when he was replying to yet another questioning letter from the Admiralty.<sup>59</sup>

The Company was always ready to retaliate to the admiral’s criticisms by demanding from the Admiralty more naval protection. The admiral had therefore to spend his time writing back to the Admiralty explaining his actions.<sup>60</sup> The merchants wanted frigates to cruise at the danger points, such as the Straits of Malacca and Rainier agreed, explaining to Nepean that he had been heavily criticised the previous year for the losses incurred.<sup>61</sup> Although this approach was contrary to Rainier’s wishes for trade protection he probably felt it necessary to accede to the merchants’ request to eradicate just one of the many complaints they were making against him. But overall, Rainier was clearly successful as indicated in a letter to Dundas in 1799 stating that insurance rates for British ships sailing in convoy were 15-22% cheaper than the rates for neutral vessels.<sup>62</sup>

Rainier’s somewhat pedantic nature probably annoyed Wellesley on one of the times the latter was concerned about trade. A French privateer had taken a number of merchant vessels

<sup>56</sup> T.N.A., ADM 2/608, Admiralty to Court of Directors, 16 January 1795.

<sup>57</sup> N.M.M., RAI/4, Rainier to Sir John Shore, 31 December 1794.

<sup>58</sup> N.M.M., RAI/9, Rainier to Fawcett, Smith & Hanson, 26 November 1893.

<sup>59</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Admiralty, 23 March 1800.

<sup>60</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/170, Rainier to Admiralty, 23 March 1800.

<sup>61</sup> N.M.M., RAI/ 5, Rainier to Admiralty, 5 January 1797.

<sup>62</sup> B.L., I.O.R., Misc. H/405, Unknown to Dundas, 11 April 1799.



after the Peace of Amiens was signed. Wellesley wanted legal action taken against the French. But the admiral supported the French in a lengthy legal letter stating that the French had been within their rights as they had not known about the Peace when they made their captures. Whilst he might have been correct, his position would not have been well received by merchants who might have lost considerable amounts of money, if not been bankrupted. However, Rainier was also signalling that the same rules would apply to British ships taking enemy vessels in the same situation, thus paving the way for his own officers to continue to profit from prize money when knowledge of the state of war or peace was uncertain.<sup>63</sup>

Rainier's concerns over the merchants' recalcitrance was continual as illustrated by his earlier letter to Admiral Christian at the Cape, telling him he had spoken to an American vessel which told him they had seen six heavy frigates heading east from Mauritius. He was therefore trying to persuade the merchants to send their ships under his protection through the Straits of Malacca to Prince of Wales Island.<sup>64</sup> This is a good example of the steady flow of communication and openness with which Rainier treated his colleagues at the Cape. But it could not solve the problem of those who would not use the convoy system. The importance of China played heavily on Rainier and he was constantly thinking ahead of how to ameliorate the situation. He wrote to the Admiralty at the end of 1799 asking them to request the Company to send out their China ships early so that they could join his own convoy of Country ships to China and then go through the Straits of Malacca together.<sup>65</sup>

However, Rainier was hampered in his attempts to engender cooperation between the merchant service and the navy by the usually negative relationships between Indiaman commanders and naval captains.<sup>66</sup> The latter, usually younger and less experienced in the ways of the Eastern Seas, would often treat with disdain their colleagues brought up in "Trade". Managing a convoy required much patience and tact – attributes which were not readily taught in the navy. So it is no surprise that, for many Company commanders: 'the Navy had become in itself an object of dislike, embodying ... all the arrogance, stupidity and ill-breeding they had endured while sailing with convoy'.<sup>67</sup> Yet the Company was keen to ensure rewards for those responsible for capturing privateers. Captain Adam of *La Sybille* and Commander Frost of the Company cruiser *Mornington* were both presented with valuable swords by the insurance company of Calcutta for capturing French warships and privateers.<sup>68</sup>

Although, to be fair, the period is littered with letters of complaint from merchants about the lack of protection provided by the navy, it never got out of hand. This could have been because Rainier had been a merchant ship master himself, had some empathy with them and understood their ways of thinking. It must have reduced at least slightly the natural animosity between the two parties. The insurance market never got too overheated and there were no

<sup>63</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 13760, Rainier to Wellesley, 3 June 1802.

<sup>64</sup> N.M.M., RAI/5, Rainier to Christian, 10 January 1797.

<sup>65</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Admiralty, 10 December 1799.

<sup>66</sup> East Indiamen captains were referred to as "commanders", never as "captains" or "masters".

<sup>67</sup> Parkinson, *Trade in the Eastern Seas*, p. 316.

<sup>68</sup> B.L., I.O.R., Records of the Board of Commissioners for the Affairs of India, F/4/134, 28 September 1803.

formal complaints to the Admiralty, as there were with his successor, Pellew, who was the subject of a 'Memorial' which is shown in full in Hickey's *Memoirs*.<sup>69</sup> The feelings in India about Pellew can be inferred from Hickey:

Certain it is that ... Pellew who commanded upon the East India Station during the period of unheard-of losses therein stated, having soon after completed the object of his voyage to the East by making a handsome fortune, returned to England, where instead of being censured for any omissions or neglect of duty ... was received by the members of the administration in the most flattering manner ... This gallant Admiral, however, did not prove a successful smuggler, having had contraband goods to the amount of several thousand pounds seized by the Custom House officers on board his ship...<sup>70</sup>

The *schadenfreude* shown by Hickey is quite palpable. Rainier did not generate such feelings by never allowing relations with the merchant class to deteriorate to that level.

The merchantmen had a mixed reputation for protecting themselves. Some fought lengthy battles and others surrendered without a fight. Rainier saw the problem was worse when the crews consisted mainly of lascars, who were not a warlike community. He told Spencer that it was a mistake to arm trading vessels because their crews would not fight and therefore, when they were inevitably captured, they were already sufficiently well armed to be put immediately into action as privateers against the British.<sup>71</sup> It must have appeared to Rainier that the merchants wanted their individual ships each to be protected by their own individual naval escort. The Bombay merchants wrote to Duncan, the President of the Bombay Council saying they wanted protection for the Canton Trade.<sup>72</sup> But they would not fit in with Rainier's convoys.

However, larger Indiamen were rarely lost to enemy action. It should be noted that these ships were the main commercial outlet of British and Company trade to Europe. The figures compare very favourably with the experiences under Pellew and his successor, Drury. In fact, the losses of the most valuable Indiamen speak for themselves; Rainier's ten years of war saw seven lost, [0.70 p.a.] Pellew lost three in four years [0.75 p.a.] and Drury lost six in two [3.0 pa.]. When taking into account that French commerce raiding was much more prevalent during Rainier's command, the figures stand rather more in his favour. Perhaps some of this was due to the disdain with which they treated the merchant classes.

This was not the case with the Country Trade, especially those vessels trading from Bengal which were often targeted by privateers cruising around the Sandheads, at the mouth of the river Hooghly in the Bay of Bengal.

<sup>69</sup> A. Spencer (ed.), *Memoirs of William Hickey* (London, 1948), pp. 413-419.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 422.

<sup>71</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 75834, Rainier to Spencer, 18 December 1799.

<sup>72</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 13762, Bombay Merchants to Duncan, 21 April 1804.

b). The Expansion of Trade within the East Indies Station.

The Country Trade was important for four reasons; it assembled goods for the intercontinental trade, it dispersed British goods from the main arrival points, and it generated profits in India which could be used to pay for tea, thus reducing the demand for bullion to be sent from Britain.<sup>73</sup> ‘A sum ... not less than one million pounds annually has for many years been sent from this country to purchase the teas’.<sup>74</sup> With the demand for British bullion to finance continental coalitions against France, any new source of money would be seized upon. It was also the main wealth development and dispersing tool which made the East Indies trading empire work. The Dutch had been keen to exclude competition but now Royal Naval presence encouraged merchants to seek new markets. Indeed, British policy had been to avoid offending the Dutch so as not to give them any reason to support France in its rivalry with Britain. But once France occupied the Netherlands, this reason disappeared.<sup>75</sup>

Intra station trade received a boost from Rainier’s capture of the Spice Islands and knowledge of the relatively unknown waters of the East grew: ‘From the conquest of the Moluccas a new line of rich Commerce is opened’.<sup>76</sup> Whilst trade figures can be obtained between India and China,<sup>77</sup> that within the Malayan and Indonesian Archipelagos has not been recorded, much of it in British vessels and including illegal opium. Foreign ships were also involved. In 1800 their numbers visiting Calcutta doubled from the previous year.<sup>78</sup> And Cornwallis’ reforms of the early 1790s prohibiting Company servants from private trading, gave the opportunity to free merchants who benefitted from the opening of new markets and led to the expansion of the agency houses, from fifteen in 1790 to twenty nine in 1803.<sup>79</sup> This, in turn, brought: ‘a well established British system of administration and control’.<sup>80</sup> Trade between Calcutta and Madras expanded with the role of the former as a grain supplier to the Coromandel which could no longer feed itself.<sup>81</sup> Yet the vagaries of war could always impinge on trade. In 1801 the demand for merchant shipping to take Indian army troops to Egypt meant that there were no private British ships between Bengal and China.<sup>82</sup>

Much of the navy’s traditional trade protection had centred around escorting ships sailing between Britain and India and China, with only occasional forays into the Gulf of Arabia and to China covering its commerce with India. The combination of factors, including the growth of the financial markets in India, the demand for cotton and opium in China, and the opening

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<sup>73</sup> Bruce, *A Historical View of Plans, for the Government of British India and the Regulation of Trade to the East Indies*, pp. 214 and 578.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.* p. 214.

<sup>75</sup> H.T. Fry, *Alexander Dalrymple (1737-1808) and the Expansion of British Trade* (London, 1970), p. 149.

<sup>76</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/171, Memorandum on Trade Protection, author unknown, 1 September 1801.

<sup>77</sup> **See Appendix 4.**

<sup>78</sup> A. Webster, *The Twilight of the East India Company* (Woodbridge, 2009), p. 47.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 25-6.

<sup>80</sup> S. Arasaratnam, *Maritime Commerce and English Power (Southeast India 1750-1800)*, p. 267.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 258.

<sup>82</sup> Jardine Matheson Archive Letter Book, 25 July 1801, quoted in Greenberg, *British Trade and the Opening of China 1800-42*, p. 84.

of the Dutch East Indies, meant that Rainier had to take much more notice of the eastern side of his station than had previous naval commanders. The clamour of Indian merchants trading with the East when French privateers cruised the Bay of Bengal is a sign that Rainier could not ignore this relatively new “Country Trade”, even if he had wanted to. But he did not, as his voluminous correspondence on the need to protect this sector of the station, and the irresponsibility of the merchants who would not sail in convoy, indicates that he did acknowledge that his responsibilities had moved eastwards.

The Great Wars against France were fought on a global scale and, although Rainier was far from the centre of the war, the strategy which he exercised was very much based on what was happening in Europe and the Middle East. This is especially demonstrated by the reaction to Bonaparte’s invasion of Egypt – which showed that an army can have just as much impact on naval dispositions as naval operations can have on that of an army. As the French occupation of Egypt pulled the Royal Navy eastwards in the Mediterranean in order to break the link between France and Egypt, the navy in the east was pulled westwards towards the Arabian Gulf and the Red Sea to counter the danger to India from that quarter. Thus, in 1798, Rainier had to ignore the Sand Heads at the mouth of the Hooghly and the Strait of Malacca as he had insufficient vessels. This gave Surcouf, the most successful French privateering captain, the opportunity to take advantage of the absence of British warships to capture the Indiaman *Kent* (800 tons). Yet Rainier was clearly annoyed. He wrote to Wellesley that there was no need for the *Kent* to be taken as it had refused to sail under naval escort.<sup>83</sup> The following year Surcouf practically blockaded Calcutta, taking another Indiaman, the *Triton* (800 tons).<sup>84</sup>

The expansion of trade was also due to the demand for opium, indigo, copper, tin, lead, woollens and cotton in China, the availability of finance and insurance in India, the construction of larger European-style merchantmen less vulnerable to piracy, the absence of Company monopoly, and the relative safety of the seas patrolled by the Royal Navy.<sup>85</sup> The actual volumes of trade are difficult to measure but are believed to have quadrupled in ten years up to 1793.<sup>86</sup> ‘The independence of the Country service was of its essence, its lack of definition and freedom to engage in unsupervised action, its strength’.<sup>87</sup> Its very nature, sometimes illegal, makes it impossible to give accurate data as to its volume and rate of growth. What is not in doubt is that, by 1800, China had a one million pound p.a. trade surplus with India.<sup>88</sup> This trade was carried out around the vast coastline of India, the Malaysian peninsular, to and between the Indonesian Islands, especially Batavia which was an entrepôt centre for the opium trade, and between India and China. The trade between Bombay and Persia and Arabia was carried out primarily by native ships but this did not mean that it was left to the tender mercy of pirates and privateers. The Navy’s escort duties

<sup>83</sup>B.L., Add. Mss. 13760, Rainier to Wellesley, 22 August 1800.

<sup>84</sup>P. Crowhurst, *The French War on Trade: Privateering 1793-1815* (Aldershot, 1989), pp. 100, 115.

<sup>85</sup>H.J. Wood, ‘England, China, and the Napoleonic Wars’, in *The Pacific Historical Review*, vol. 9, No. 2 (June 1940), p. 139, H. Furber, *John Company at Work* (Harvard, 1951), p. 185.

<sup>86</sup>B.L., I.O.R., Eur. Mss. 281.

<sup>87</sup>Bulley, *Free Mariner – John Adolphus Pope in the East Indies 1786-1821*, p. 34.

<sup>88</sup>Greenberg, *British Trade and the Opening of China 1800-42*, p. 11.

were not restricted to protecting British ships. In a letter to Hobart, Rainier mentioned that *HMS Swift* (16) had escorted three of the Nabob of Arcot's ships out of the Red Sea and damaging itself in the process on an uncharted rock coming out of Jedda.<sup>89</sup>

The Country Trade was not carried in ships owned by the Company but in those owned by local Indian and European individuals and partnerships. These were the kind of businesses that worked on narrower margins than the Company and where speed to market was more important. The fine ships built in Bombay could reach over 1000 tons over three decks and with a crew in excess of 140. Although pirates were prevalent off the Sumatra and Malayan coasts, such vessels, armed with eighteen pounder guns, feared little from their depredations. Even if there were no naval escorts, the more common smaller vessels, more susceptible to piracy, would sail in convoy with them for protection through the most vulnerable areas. The Calcutta trade was not always legal, often carrying contraband and "illegal" opium which had not come from Company sources, so no owner would want to be convoyed by a naval vessel by which it might be arrested. The trade between Bombay and China tended to be bulk cotton and very predictable in its timing. The owners of these vessels were more comfortable with naval protection and consequently accepted the convoy system more readily than their Calcutta brethren.

The cotton trade from Bombay to Canton began to boom in the late 1780s. From 1802 it was suffering from higher quality cotton from Bengal.<sup>90</sup> But even with this competition volumes of 80,000 bales in 1801 had still grown to 150,000 in 1805. And between 1795 and 1807 private traders shipped more cotton from Bombay to China than did the Company.<sup>91</sup> Return cargoes included chinaware, sugar, rhubarb, alum, camphor, raw silk, tea and cassia lignia. Some of these goods were transhipped in India for passage to Britain. Opium had been grown in Bengal as a Company monopoly and then sold on the open market through auction. Through the period of Rainier's command the trade was steady at around 2000 chests per annum but a further 2000 chests were smuggled into the Malay Archipelago.<sup>92</sup> As the physical volume was much less than cotton the vessels used were much smaller. Opium's impact on the overall volume of business came from its high price and use to fund the enormous tea trade.

Financing the trade was very fluid. Agents often managed the process of dealing with the Chinese by becoming partnerships, such as Jardine Matheson. The often illegal profits made in Canton were paid into the Company Treasury there in return for bills on both the governments of Bombay, Madras and Calcutta, and the Company in London.<sup>93</sup> These bills of exchange became a market in themselves and were traded 'anywhere between Burma and

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<sup>89</sup> N.M.M., RAI/ 4, Rainier to Hobart, 13 September 1795.

<sup>90</sup> A. Bulley, *The Bombay Country Ships 1790-1833* (Richmond, 2000), pp. 104-5.

<sup>91</sup> Bulley, *Free Mariner – John Adolphus Pope*, p. 157.

<sup>92</sup> Furber, *John Company at Work*, p. 183.

<sup>93</sup> Greenberg, *British Trade and the Opening of China 1800-42*, p. 12.

Canton'.<sup>94</sup> The owners themselves would even raise loans on the value of their ships and cargoes. Not only were Free Merchants and Company officials involved,<sup>95</sup> but also Indian bankers, *shroffs*, and even the Parsee shipbuilders themselves, who financed the trade with the profits made from ship building. British traders who could not obtain licences from the Company, found a loophole by becoming consuls for other powers, such as Austria, Prussia, Sweden, and even non-existent Poland.<sup>96</sup>

From the beginning of the war, the French island of Mauritius harboured French national warships and privateers. In 1795 the Dutch colony of Batavia became a potential enemy base, as did Manila in 1796 when Spain went to war with Britain. Rainier was not to know that only the first of these would be a real threat, the others being merely occasional bases which French vessels could use for repair and replenishment. The privateers were particularly successful; 25 were licensed by the Mauritius authorities and between 1793 and 1802 they took 200 prizes, compared with the 40 taken by national warships.<sup>97</sup>

### **Rainier's Defence of the Trade.**

The defence considerations of the trade routes that Rainier had to protect are succinctly described in a memorandum, author unknown, but which was sent by him to the Admiralty in 1801.<sup>98</sup> As its editor in *Naval Review* says: 'The fact that it was considered by Rainier worthy of the attention of the Admiralty is a testimony to its value, for Rainier was an officer with an exceptional acquaintance of those seas'.<sup>99</sup> It also shows the depth of Rainier's study of the subject. The report was written from the point of view of someone based in India and highlights the following danger points;

1. The Straits of Malacca.
2. The south east Coast of Ceylon.
3. The Malabar Coast.
4. The Sand Heads. [at the head of the Bay of Bengal].
5. Straits of Banca and Sunda.

To defend each of these areas the following resources are recommended;

1. Not less than three frigates.
2. Two line of battle ships.
3. Can be protected by the ships based at the summer headquarters off Madras.

<sup>94</sup> Furber, *John Company at Work*, p. 175.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166.

<sup>96</sup> Greenberg, *British Trade and the Opening of China 1800-42*, pp. 25-28.

<sup>97</sup> Pearson, *The Indian Ocean*, p. 197.

<sup>98</sup> Anon., 'Memorandum, dated 1801, enclosed by Admiral Sir [sic] Peter Rainier on the Defence of Trade in the Indian Ocean' in 'Trade Defence in the Indian Seas', anon, in *Naval Review*, Vol. XVII, No. I, February 1930, pp. 63-69, [n.b. Rainier was never knighted]. This document is also found in ADM 1/171, dated 1 Sept. 1801, no named author but says he had been a prisoner on Mauritius.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

4. Two frigates between November and April.
5. Not less than two ships.

Additionally a force from the Cape should be ‘constantly cruising’ to protect ships rounding the Cape from the predators based at Mauritius. This is a much smaller force than was to be recommended by Pellew but does not include vessels employed in convoy, occasional Persian Gulf-Red Sea trade, and those required for offensive operations. Taking into account the distances involved, the poor charts, weather patterns, easily blocked choke points, a lack of cooperation from the merchants and ships masters, and uncertainty about the enemies’ intentions, one can see the complexities of Rainier’s challenge in the light of this memorandum:

...the precise Force necessary must depend upon the extent of our Naval Power in India, regarding that of the Enemy, the immense extent of Coast we have to guard ... and the French [practice] of sending all their frigates to cruise together.<sup>100</sup>

From a defensive point of view Rainier had two alternatives for the allocation of his ships; he could either position them at the various choke points and shipping highways, such as the Ceylon, the Straits of Malacca, Sunda, Bali and the Bay of Bengal, or he could escort the trade using the convoy system.<sup>101</sup> The former was preferable to the merchants as it gave them the greatest flexibility of sailing times. But this solution would require more vessels and Rainier was not over endowed with warships.<sup>102</sup> It has to be remembered that, over the time of his command in Asia, he had many other demands on his resources; there were the attacks on Trincomalee and the Spice Islands,<sup>103</sup> the planned but not executed attacks on Batavia and Manila,<sup>104</sup> there was the defence of the Red Sea and Goa,<sup>105</sup> and the support of the army against Tippoo and the Marathas varying from coastal blockade to the movement of troops and their supplies.<sup>106</sup> Added to these actions was the pursuit of French forces, including the occasional blockade of Mauritius, to achieve all the above goals.<sup>107</sup>

With the relatively small number of ships involved on both sides and the huge distances involved on the station, it is no surprise that there were no fleet actions during the whole period of Rainier’s command. The more visible threat came from French warships, notably the squadron of six heavy frigates under Rear Admiral Sercey who arrived at Mauritius in 1796. It took three years of heavy merchant ship losses before all the ships of this squadron were finally accounted for, two taken and one destroyed in single ship actions with British

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>101</sup> B.L., I.O.R., Add. Mss. 73761, Rainier to Spencer, 13 March 1800, Add. Mss. 13751, Wellesley to Rainier, 9 July 1804.

<sup>102</sup> B.L., I.O.R., Add. Mss. 13757, Rainier to Wellesley, 2 January 1800.

<sup>103</sup> **See Chapter Six.**

<sup>104</sup> Parkinson, *War in the Eastern Seas*, p. 165 and 114.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., Add. Mss. 13758, Rainier to Wellesley, 11 November 1798, Add. Mss. 13752, Wellesley to Rainier, 17 January 1802, Home Misc Series, H/689, Duncan to Rainier, 20 October 1801.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., Add. Mss. 133757, Rainier to Wellesley, September 1799.

<sup>107</sup> Parkinson, *War in the Eastern Seas*, p. 74.

frigates, and three returned to France in need of repair that could not be completed in the East.<sup>108</sup> This illustrated the handicap that France suffered in not having full repair facilities in the region. In 1803 Rear Admiral Linois arrived to continue the battle with one third rate and three frigates. Linois continued to trouble Rainier's successor, Pellew, until finally defeated in 1806 in the Atlantic.<sup>109</sup> The French third rate the *Marengo* caused more concern than one might expect because convoys were usually escorted by frigates or sloops and these could not take on the *Marengo's* 80 guns, far more powerful than even a British 74 or 64. Consequently, whenever Linois was feared to be in the vicinity, Rainier had to detach one of his own third rates to convoy escort duty. And Linois understood Rainier's dilemma. He heard that the British were being reinforced by two 74's making Rainier's total squadron much more powerful than that of France.

But there are many points to guard, their forces must be greatly stretched. That gives me hope to do them much harm by moving the great distances within the different parts of the Indian Seas.<sup>110</sup>

This meant that, although Rainier knew what needed doing, he did not have the resources to do it. This conflict is illustrated in a letter to Lord Hobart, President of Madras, when he said that he could only blockade Mauritius by leaving the Bay of Bengal unprotected.<sup>111</sup> In accepting that the centre of the region's trade was moving eastwards, he wrote to Spencer that the pressures from the Red Sea to the west meant that the trade between India and China was at risk.<sup>112</sup> Another letter to the Admiralty indicated his dilemma; when escorting troops to Trincomalee ready for the invasion of Egypt in 1800 that he had no ships for trade protection.<sup>113</sup> And into 1803, he explained to Wellesley that he could not concentrate his own ships to fight Linois' squadron because he needed to protect the Trade, Trincomalee and the Malabar Coast.<sup>114</sup>

His general concerns can be seen in a letter to the Admiralty in 1798 in which he tells them that four ships would be sent to the Malabar Coast to stop French supplies reaching Tippoo, as requested by Wellesley, and he would keep one 74 at Malacca and send two frigates to China.<sup>115</sup>

His letters indicate that a major worry was the China Trade because of the ease by which it could be attacked travelling through the Straits of Malacca and the Dutch East Indies. And when told that there was no protection for the returning China Trade, he sent the *Orpheus* and *Swift* to Malacca and he personally sailed in the *Suffolk*, accompanied by the *Resistance*, to

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<sup>108</sup> Parkinson, *War in the Eastern Seas*, pp. 112-31.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid. pp. 250-75.

<sup>110</sup> Archives Nationales, BB4 185, Campagnes. 1803. vol. 19, Linois to Ministre de la Marine, 25 frim, an XII.

<sup>111</sup> N.M.M., RAI/4, Rainier to Hobart, 19 April 1795.

<sup>112</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 75862, Rainier to Spencer, 20 May 1799.

<sup>113</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/170, Rainier to Admiralty 27 December 1800.

<sup>114</sup> N.M.M., RAI/9, Rainier to Wellesley, 1 September 1803.

<sup>115</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/169, Rainier to Admiralty, 27 September 1798.



Prince of Wales Island to cover their return.<sup>116</sup> The major bottleneck on the journey from Canton, was Malacca, both geographically and temporally. Because of the predictability of departure from Canton, Rainier would usually provide an escort until the China Fleet returning via India was close to Madras. Added to these facts was the knowledge that East Indiamen were large, well armed vessels with large crews. They should, theoretically, be able to fight off most privateers on their own, especially if they were in convoy. So it was not as important to escort them unless it was known that a French naval squadron was at sea. The result of attempting to reconcile the conflicting demands of protecting the Country Trade and escorting the China Fleet led to Rainier's decision in 1804 to protect the former thus leaving the latter without an escort. The resulting battle of Pulo Aur, its origins and results, have been described in Chapter Four. But it is an excellent example of Rainier's dilemma of how to allocate inadequate resources against the balance of probability of which ships will be attacked. In January he wrote to the Admiralty telling them he had sent three ships to China.<sup>117</sup> Yet by November he was concerned that he had no vessels to protect the China Trade.<sup>118</sup> Even as late as 1804 Rainier showed extreme nervousness about this route. In June he told Wellesley that he was sending three ships to escort the China convoy as the supercargoes had requested. But he could only cover one convoy to Canton, which he knew would upset the merchants as: 'they would wish to have a convoy for every two or three ships'. The remainder of his squadron was protecting shipping on the Coast, and between the Straits of Malacca and the Sand Heads. Yet he still found it necessary to organise two convoys to cover the trade between Bombay and Madras. He personally would sail to Malacca to cover the return of the China convoy the following Spring.<sup>119</sup> In July he wrote to Wellesley telling him he wanted the merchantmen to assemble off Madras and then be convoyed to China,<sup>120</sup> and in October he kept Wellesley informed by telling him that he would be escorting the China convoy through the Straits of Malacca.<sup>121</sup>

The following month Rainier was escorting the China Trade and bringing together as many ships as he could around the Straits of Malacca, hoping to catch any French or Dutch ships trying to prey on British merchantmen and probably to ensure there would be no repetition of Pulo Aur.<sup>122</sup> His letter to Duncan at Bombay illustrates that he was also keeping the senior officials of the Company informed of his movements as he noted that, as he had missed Pellew at Madras he felt he must go eastwards to protect the returning China ships.<sup>123</sup> Thus it can be seen that Rainier had not given in to the lethargy of impending succession by Pellew and, to the very end, he was protecting the trade and trying to bring the French to battle. Indeed, as his period of command grew to a close his reports back to London grew longer and more filled with minutiae. It is possible that he actually was reluctant to relinquish his

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<sup>116</sup> N.M.M., RAI/4, Rainier to Spencer, 20 March 1795.

<sup>117</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/170, Rainier to Admiralty, 15 January 1800.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, Rainier to Spencer 30 September 1800.

<sup>119</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/175, Rainier to Wellesley, 14 June 1804.

<sup>120</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/5121/5, Rainier to Wellesley, 4 July 1804.

<sup>121</sup> T.N.A. ADM 1/175, Rainier to Wellesley, 20 October 1804.

<sup>122</sup> N.M.M., RAI/8, Rainier to Admiralty, 1 November 1804.

<sup>123</sup> N.M.M., RAI/10, Rainier to Duncan, 11 December 1804.

command with its status, authority and relative certainty, to return to an England which he had left eleven years ago and where he would know few of the people in command at the Admiralty.

Concern over the depredations in the Bay of Bengal are also illustrated by a letter Rainier sent to the Admiralty on 15 January 1800 when he told them he was keeping two frigates in the Bay of Bengal. Within the next six days he evidently had a change of mind because he told Wellesley he was keeping just one frigate there. He was dispatching the second frigate to Madras there to consult with the President as to the best way to protect the trade in that region.<sup>124</sup> This is a good example of the need to be constantly reviewing the situation in the light of news. Uncertainty of the whereabouts of Linois in 1804 also led to concern about French activities in that region. In January Rainier's drive to keep Wellesley informed led to a sixteen page letter advising of the disposition of his ships, including two Bombay Marine sloops and a frigate in the Bay of Bengal, where he thought the French were operating, and of the threat from the Dutch at Batavia. He again asked for Wellesley's help in persuading the merchants to adhere to the convoy system.<sup>125</sup> In October the number in the Bay was increased to two frigates.<sup>126</sup> There was clearly concern in Calcutta because the same day Wellesley wrote to Rainier telling him that he had stopped all ships leaving the city because of worries about Linois.<sup>127</sup>

With Linois at sea Rainier also feared that the French might intercept his successor, Pellew, as he arrived in Indian waters. He sailed for Madras with two third rates and a frigate, knowing that this was the most likely port of call for Pellew. He had guessed correctly as to where Linois might be but he just missed him as the French admiral decided to sail north towards the Bay of Bengal. 'An hour or two's difference would have brought on a collision between the two admirals'.<sup>128</sup> Even with his superior force Linois did not manage to take the *Centurion* which he found at Masulipatam on his way northwards. The British ship put up a spirited defence during which it was able to retreat to shallow water.<sup>129</sup> But although pleased at the competent way in which the *Centurion* had been handled, Rainier was still thinking of what might have been. He wrote to Wellesley: 'How unfortunate I was in my conjecture of the French Admiral's ... object'.<sup>130</sup> He had expected that Linois would make another attack on the China Fleet; a reasonable assumption and one perfectly feasible to the French, but he guessed incorrectly. If he had caught Linois it would have raised his profile so much in Britain and perhaps have given him the recognition which was his due. Yet it does show that he was still keen on bringing Linois to battle, right to the end of his command.

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<sup>124</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 13759, Rainier to Wellesley, 21 January 1800.

<sup>125</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 13762, Rainier to Wellesley, 11 January 1804.

<sup>126</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/175, Rainier to Wellesley, 20 October 1804.

<sup>127</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 13751, Wellesley to Rainier, 20 October 1804.

<sup>128</sup> Parkinson, *War in the Eastern Seas*, p. 243.

<sup>129</sup> N.M.M., RAI/8, Rainier to Admiralty, 18 October 1804.

<sup>130</sup> N.M.M., RAI/10, Rainier to Wellesley, 4 October 1804.

Perhaps Rainier would have been more fortunate if Linois had been more aggressive. Napoleon described his admiral as ‘thoroughly second rate’ but felt that the antipathy between Linois and Decaen, the Captain General of all French possessions in the East, would cause Linois to remain at sea for as long as possible. This was the only way that trouble would be caused for British shipping. ‘Activity and boldness is what is wanted in the East’.<sup>131</sup> Clearly Napoleon did not think that he was getting it.

The reference to Bombay Marine vessels indicates that Rainier was short of warships, and this was not uncommon. In 1800 he suggested to Wellesley that he maintain a Company frigate and an armed Indiaman off the Straits of Malacca as there were no naval vessels available.<sup>132</sup>

Whilst this activity was taking place to the eastwards, the demands on Rainier’s attention are also illustrated by activities in the north west of the station. As early as 1795, Rainier was escorting the merchant ships of the Nawab of Arcot from the Red Sea.<sup>133</sup> And in 1803 he had vessels protecting the trade in the Gulf or Persia and looking for the mail ships bringing communications from London.<sup>134</sup>

Concerning the depredations of piracy, as opposed to privateering, this appears to have been primarily a responsibility of the Bombay Marine to counter. The sources of disruption of this nature were the Arab pirates of the Gulf of Arabia, the Indians based on the Gujurat coast to the north of Bombay, and in the Indonesian Archipelago. The Arab pirates did not receive much notice from Rainier, given the other demands on his attention, and he appears to have left patrolling the area to the Bombay Marine apart from in 1803. They were finally attacked in 1808 by combined naval and Company forces.<sup>135</sup> The Indian pirates did come to his notice in 1805, and he despatched Captain Vashon of the *Fox* (32) with a Bombay Marine cruiser, to destroy them.<sup>136</sup> Those pirates in the east appear never to have caused Rainier sufficient annoyance for him to take any actions against them.

## **Conclusion.**

The sheer size of the station, its often uncharted waters, and routes affected by changing wind patterns, made communication between the admiral and London an unreliable process. Not only had Rainier to interpret his orders and intelligence in view of what had happened in the months since they were written, which might change their impact, he often had to operate without information at all, using his own judgement and that of the people with whom he

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<sup>131</sup> Archives Nationales, BB4 239, Campagnes. 1805, Napoleon to Ministre de la Marine, between 29 pluv. An XIII – Iniv., an XIV.

<sup>132</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 13759, Rainier to Wellesley, 1 July 1800.

<sup>133</sup> N.M.M., RAI/4, Rainier to Hobart, 13 September 1975.

<sup>134</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/173, Rainier to Admiralty, 14 December 1803.

<sup>135</sup> S.M. Al-Qasimi, *Arab Piracy and the East India Company encroachment in the Gulf 1797-1820*, pp. 185-220, University of Exeter PhD thesis, 1985.

<sup>136</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/173, Rainier to Admiralty, 5 April 1803.

consulted. Thus we can see that what the C-in-C East Indies station needed were great navigational skills and a deep understanding of his environment, together with self confidence – knowing that he would have to take responsibility if they were wrong because distance and time meant that no-one else could be involved.

Ideally Rainier would have organised convoys for all major shipping routes, but the opposition of the merchants and the other claims on his ships meant that this was not possible. He could have stationed vessels at the various choke points and shipping lane junctions mentioned above but again, he had insufficient ships. He could occasionally rely on the Bombay Marine and up-gunned Indiamen but they would likely be ineffective if French national warships were involved. Consequently he had to balance the intelligence he received as to the likelihood of threats with the political pressures he was under and allocate his resources accordingly. That the trade continued to grow and insurance rates were stable indicates that he was successful. And faithful to his principles to the end, his final task was to escort the Trade from India back to England between March and September 1805. The convoy consisted to fifty vessels with cargo valued at £15 million. Its destruction would have had a severe impact on the British Treasury and the City of London. It arrived home without loss.<sup>137</sup>

Thus we have seen how Rainier adhered to his primary objectives of trade and territory protection together with the supporting objective of taking enemy possessions. In having to make compromises as to the allocation of his inadequate resources in order to meet these goals, he was never likely to win the undying support of all those who demanded protection from him. But, on balance, one can see that the trade continued to expand and the ships losses were always bearable. One should not underestimate the importance of this trade to the British war effort. It was central, directly through taxation and indirectly through the remittances of profits to Britain, and the intra-station trade covered the massive trade deficit with China.<sup>138</sup>

The next chapter will chart the success of two more of his goals, the protection of British possessions in the East and the expansion of territory controlled by Britain, both in India itself and within the wider station.

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<sup>137</sup> *The Morning Post*, 9 September 1805.

<sup>138</sup> J. Cuenca-Esteban, 'Fiscal and military dimensions of Britain's regulated trade with Asia 1765-1812', paper given to XIV International Economic History Congress, 25 August 2006.

## CHAPTER 6

### ‘[YOUR ORDERS ARE] TO BEST PROTECT THE ... SETTLEMENTS OF HIS MAJESTY’S SUBJECTS AND HIS ALLIES IN THE EAST INDIES’.<sup>1</sup>

#### THE DEFENCE AND EXPANSION OF BRITAIN’S OF BRITAIN’S EASTERN EMPIRE

Among the leading reasons for Rainier keeping his command for so long was the Admiralty’s recognition that he was not a commander so paralysed by caution as to confine himself purely to static defence. He was always ready, whenever realistic opportunities occurred, to act offensively. This chapter will analyse the steps he took to defend British interests in the East Indies not only by defensive measures, but by the capture of Dutch colonies across the station. It will explain how growing French military successes across the globe forced Rainier to act more defensively. An analysis will follow of the navy’s support of Wellesley’s activities to expand British control of India which, by 1805, had ensured that British domination of India would not be seriously endangered for 140 years.

#### The Defence of British Possessions.

British territory was protected by the actions of both the army and navy, often in combined operations, of which Rainier became expert. It could be effected by both the direct defence of colonies and through the offensive action of depriving the enemy of potential bases from which to attack British interests. This section will analyze the complex relationships between the two armed forces and then review how their strategy was implemented, both defensively and offensively.

#### Political Control of the Army.

Because of the time taken for letters to reach Rainier, he was, to all intents and purposes, in an independent command. As the Governor General was, *de facto* and *de jure*, the commander-in-chief of the army, Rainier had to use his own judgement as to the optimum method of cooperation on behalf of the navy. He could not pass on his problems to a more senior officer and he could not bow to Wellesley’s authority and power as that would be an abrogation of his own position. His original orders from the Admiralty had enjoined him to consult with the Governor General, implying that he was not to take orders from him. This was not an easy situation in which to find himself. He had also to remember that Wellesley had a huge army at his disposal, far larger than in any other arena of war. Potentially the imbalance between this huge force and the relatively small squadron at his disposal could cause conflict with the Company, as in 1800 when Wellesley wanted to invade Mauritius. It was relatively easy for the Company to find enough troops for the attack but not for Rainier

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<sup>1</sup> T.N.A., ADM 2/1347, Admiralty to Rainier, 25 February 1794, see **Appendix 9 for details.**

who believed he had insufficient ships to protect both the Trade and current British possessions, his primary objectives, as well as escort an invasion force to far off Mauritius.

Wellesley always wanted more troops for India. In July 1800 he wrote to Dundas that the current numbers of royal troops was only 14,000, which, when taking into account sickness and other duties, left only 10,500 in the front line. He thought he needed 30,000 in total. Naturally, he also needed more artillery and cavalry.<sup>2</sup> The British government at this time was desperately short of money to finance both the war, now in its eighth year, and British allies on the Continent. A letter from Dundas, demonstrating this financial scarcity, crossed this request on its journey to Wellesley:

... I cannot omit the present opportunity of expressing to you the anxiety I feel on the extent of the military establishments in India, and the little prospect hitherto held out of such a reduction as to give a prospect of any substantial useful surplus from the revenues of India.<sup>3</sup>

He went onto say that he wanted to reduce the number of royal regiments from seventeen to fourteen and that the Company army should also be reduced. By 1805, Dundas had managed to keep royal troop numbers down to 20,000, but Wellesley had managed to create a Company army of 192,000 men.<sup>4</sup> This debate had an impact on Rainier because the number of available troops and ships would dictate how risky would be attempts on enemy colonies. After the capture of the Spice Islands it was believed that there were insufficient troops both to protect British possessions from the threat of enemy attack and to initiate operations against Java and Mauritius. Therefore, for the remainder of Rainier's period of command, he stayed on the defensive with regard to joint operations with the army.

Given the size of the Indian army it is difficult to accept the suggestion propounded by Ingram that it: 'was meant to act as a splendid symbol of British power rather than as an effective instrument'.<sup>5</sup> His argument that it was rather more an imperial police force seems more the kind of hyperbole which Ingram used to make a point. Whilst its exploits in the attack on Egypt were not those of a dynamic, fast moving force such as the new French army, its successes in taking the numerous enemy possessions from the sea, and often in difficult physical conditions, showed great fortitude. It has also been the perceived wisdom that victories over the native Indian armies were easy. But the training of the Mysorean and Maratha armies was first class. With their modern artillery and cavalry, they were formidable on their own territory, as several victories over the British attested. The final demise of these two Indian armies by Generals Arthur Wellesley and Lake illustrate a level of competence

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<sup>2</sup> Wellesley to Dundas, 13 July 1800, quoted in Ingram (ed.), *Two Views of British India*, p. 275.

<sup>3</sup> Dundas to Wellesley, 15 July 1800, quoted in Ingram (ed.), *Two Views of British India*, pp. 279-80.

<sup>4</sup> Duffy, 'World Wide War 1793-1815', in Marshall, *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, II, p. 202.

<sup>5</sup> Ingram, *In Defence of British India*, p. 5.

and tenacity which at least equated with the exploits of the regular British army in its struggles in other parts of the globe.<sup>6</sup>

Whereas the Bombay Marine could never challenge the navy with regards to size or influence, the three Company armies, one for each presidency, were much bigger than the royal one. They therefore carried a much heavier burden of campaigning. Yet, as with the navy, their officers' status was always lower than that of the royal army, irrespective of experience of the officer. It should be pointed out that the royal army officers needed a private income in order to maintain their standard of living. The Company officers were in their positions because they did not have private means and therefore were looking for ways to make their fortunes in the service of the Company in India. This social difference was the basis of much of the conflict. In this instance the Company officers were more like the royal naval officers who, at this time, came largely from the British middle classes and were in the navy to make their fortunes. And the risks that the Company cadets took were illustrated by the fact that, of approximately 280 cadets sent out each year from England between 1793 and 1808, only one in four returned.<sup>7</sup> And at the top of the hierarchy, Company officers could see that the head of the army in India was always a royal officer, never a Company one, as Dundas refused to appoint one from the latter's officer corps.<sup>8</sup>

Because of the size of the military presence in India its levels of efficiency and cost were highly visible to Dundas. He had asked the retiring Governor General, Cornwallis, brother of the admiral, to create a reform plan. This caused so much unrest, especially in Bengal, whose army would be most impacted, that there was talk of arresting the current Governor General, Shore, and the army commander, Abercromby. Shore was so concerned that he asked Rainier to stand by to bring troops from Madras to quell any potential mutiny.<sup>9</sup> Fortunately changes were made to the plan and the furore died down. However, this took place in late 1794, when Rainier had only just arrived. One can imagine that, in the pre 1797 naval mutiny world, Rainier must have been concerned at how useful would be the military forces in India. Again, it is to his credit that he showed no public concern or distrust and this helped him to build up his good relationships with the army's senior officers.

The Admiral's respect was probably enhanced by the army's evident prowess, especially that of Bengal. In Bengal high quality recruits came from areas which had been used by the Mughals since the fifteenth century to raise its armies. Now these young soldiers looked for work from the Company, especially since its pay was both high and regular – unlike the local armies. They were also well trained by their European officers. Earlier religious concerns had stopped their use outside India but these had been overcome by the time they were sent to

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<sup>6</sup> For description of Mysore and Maratha Wars see C.A. Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 79-105, Ingram, *Commitment to Empire: Prophecies of the Great Game in Asia 1797-1800* and *In Defence of British India*, and G.J. Alder, 'Britain and the Defence of India-The Origins of the Problem 1798-1815' in *The Journal of Asian History*, vol. 6, 1972, pp. 14-44.

<sup>7</sup> Ingram, *In Defence of British India*, p. 51.

<sup>8</sup> Dundas to Wellesley, 6 September 1800, quoted in Ingram (ed.), *Two Views of British India*, p. 293.

<sup>9</sup> T.A. Heathcote, *The military in British India* (Manchester, 1995), p. 58.

Egypt in 1801. Their cavalry and artillery improved greatly during this period to make the total army such an impressive force that its use on the west coast of Central/ South America was even considered.<sup>10</sup>

#### The Relationship between the Army and the Navy.

At a grand strategy level, probably understood only by Wellesley, and perhaps by Pitt and Dundas, Britain had a potentially powerful tool, the Indian army, the like of which no other European country possessed. Dundas wanted a strong force based permanently in India which could occupy all French possessions in India at the outbreak of war, to defend British territory, and be available for operations elsewhere in Asia.<sup>11</sup> The debate with Wellesley was primarily about how large this should be. It is frightening to imagine what Napoleon would have done if he had an army of 192,000 men based in the Middle East. Its initial reluctance to fight outside the shores of India were overcome in 1789 when Governor General Cornwallis persuaded them to be used at Bencoolen on Sumatra. This was followed in 1795 by their use in the capture of the Moluccas, in 1800-1 in the Red Sea, Macao in 1808, and Mauritius and Batavia in 1810-11. Thus developed an increasingly effective strike force which had no equal in the Far East.

Occasionally the army provided soldiers to act as marines on board ship, although it was not obliged to do so. Indeed, Rainier was keen to give thanks when this happened as when he thanked Wellesley for providing troops for Cooke's *La Sybille*.<sup>12</sup> He also asked General Stuart<sup>13</sup> for troops to act as marines on the French frigate *La Chiffonne*, captured by *La Sybille*.<sup>14</sup> But, otherwise, it could be argued on a superficial level that Rainier did not need the army, but the army needed him. He could go about his business of protecting trade and chasing enemy warships and privateers but the army needed the navy to carry its troops and supplies, to protect the transports performing the same function around the coastline of India and to keep reinforcements from reaching Britain's East Indian enemies by sea. This support gave the army the ability to strike at the enemy unannounced anywhere, as long as it was close to the sea. 'The most serious deficiency of the army was not its performance in the field, but the time it took to get there'.<sup>15</sup> The confidence of the army in the navy was expounded by Major-General Stuart, commander of the Madras army in 1798, when he stated in considering Bonaparte's arrival in Egypt:

I confess that my firmest hopes of Security are grounded on a prompt disposition of the Navy, and the arrival in time of Men of War from England; for if they have ... taken up a position in the Red Sea, I am of the Opinion that they will

<sup>10</sup> C.A. Bayly, *Indian Society and the making of the British Empire* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 85-86.

<sup>11</sup> T.N.A., Cornwallis Papers, 30/11/1787, Dundas to Cornwallis, 22 July 1787.

<sup>12</sup> *The Times*, 12 August 1798, Rainier's despatch copied from London Gazette.

<sup>13</sup> General James Stuart. Served in both America and India during American Revolution. Fought against Tippoo Sultan 1790-2 and 1799. Participated with Rainier in capture of Ceylon. Commanded Madras army against Marathas in 1803. Returned to England in 1805. Promoted general in 1812.

<sup>14</sup> N.M.M., RAI/9, Rainier to Stuart, 7 October 1801.

<sup>15</sup> Ingram, *In Defence of British India*, p. 55.



effectively prevent any considerable number of French Troops or vessels arriving by this Route to India.<sup>16</sup>

It should be noted that this missive was not sent to a naval officer in order to gain his support so it can be deemed to be an honest representation of what the army thought of the navy – and a view whose veracity Rainier wished to maintain. Wellesley was also aware of the importance of the navy during his campaigns against Tippoo, thanking Rainier for his ‘cordial cooperation in the Mysorean War’.<sup>17</sup>

However, a closer view would show that the enemy needed its own bases from which to attack the British and Rainier would be foolish not to acknowledge that working with the army to neutralise potential enemy bases would greatly assist his chances of protecting the trade. There was also the additional benefit of prize money if any potential capture was a thriving trading centre. Thus, whilst Mauritius was a serious threat, its position of strength was such that it would need far more resources to capture than were available in the East Indies. However, the occupation of the Dutch Netherlands by France meant that their bases at the Cape, Trincomalee, and Malacca could now be used by the French to threaten British shipping routes to India and China. Rainier knew that they would have to be taken if only as a defensive measure.<sup>18</sup>

### **Rainier and the Army on the Offensive 1795-8.**

Rainier’s low profile personality and combined operations experience in the East Indies made him an ideal naval commander to work with the army. He had participated as a midshipman in the capture of Pondicherry in 1761 and Manila in 1762, had served with Hughes at the capture of Trincomalee in 1782, and then its subsequent loss, and had seen the benefits of Hughes’ excellent relationship with the army commander Eyre Coote. He was therefore comfortable with the concept of combined operations. He had perceived that the act of capturing Trincomalee in 1782 was insufficient in itself to ensure its continued occupation. He had also noted that the Madras Presidency’s refusal to reinforce the base, as requested by Hughes, meant that its weak garrison quickly surrendered to Suffren. His experience of combined operations was clearly understood in the army. An unknown officer wrote of the proposed attack on Manila in 1797: ‘Admiral Rainier...will collect his force, and as he is always ready, there will be no delay in that department’.<sup>19</sup>

Although there are no records of his hearing of it officially from the Admiralty, Rainier probably heard of the French occupation of the Netherlands in June 1795. His memory of the capture and loss of Trincomalee, and the use made of it by Suffren during the American Revolution, is possibly the reason for his immediate journey to Madras, to consult with its

<sup>16</sup> Exeter University, Bombay Diary 67/29, Stuart to Bombay Council, 2 October 1798.

<sup>17</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 13751, Wellesley to Rainier, 29 September 1800.

<sup>18</sup> **See Chapter Four for these colonies’ role in communication.**

<sup>19</sup> Letter from unknown army officer in *St. James’s Chronicle or the British Evening Post*, 21 December 1797.

President, Lord Hobart. Hobart had already received orders from London to take Trincomalee, Malacca and Amboina, as he was later to write to Rainier.<sup>20</sup> And Rainier had written to Stevens that when he met Hobart the latter had already decided that Trincomalee should be the first target.<sup>21</sup> He and Hobart therefore agreed on a plan to take both Trincomalee and Malacca, a city that sits at the northern end of the Straits of Malacca, and through which the China Trade generally sailed, being therefore easy prey to any waiting enemy vessels. The confidence that Rainier had already built up with Hobart is indicated by the latter detaching two companies of Company soldiers under Rainier's command. The fact that he wrote to Dundas, telling him what he had done shows Hobart thought this a positive move.<sup>22</sup> And later in the year he wrote to Dundas that: 'The cooperation of the Navy has been very serviceable'.<sup>23</sup> The fact that this sensitive letter was sent via an American ship shows great faith during a time of difficult relations between Britain and the United States.

Dundas had already briefed Elphinstone as to the intention of putting the Cape under British protection before the latter had left for the East. As early as March 1795, Elphinstone wrote to Dundas that it might not be possible to attack Trincomalee from the Cape if the Dutch offered any resistance as the season would be too far advanced. In this case might it be possible to launch an attack from Madras?<sup>24</sup> And Elphinstone, writing to Rainier before he even left Spithead, told him to 'collect the strongest Force which can be spared from attention to Trade to be in readiness to act with the land forces',<sup>25</sup> although it did not specify for which operation they would be employed. So the admiral was probably not taking a big risk with his political masters in using his initiative, and, indeed, he had sailed before these orders arrived. There was an understanding in London that offensive operations would be undertaken in the East Indies as soon as possible. However, it should be noted that, there are no specific orders in ADM 2 concerning what should be his specific targets. Elphinstone's decisions would be formed solely from discussions held with Dundas and, presumably, Spencer.

Whilst everyone knew that the capture of Mauritius would be of great benefit to the safety of British trade, as the original plan to attack it in 1793 indicated, its continuing existence in French hands could not easily destroy British India. Yet Rainier knew that Ceylon in French hands would be like a pistol at the head of British India, lying in the path between the Royal Navy's summer and winter bases of Bombay and Madras and on the sea route to Europe. It should be pointed out that, with British encouragement, in January 1795, the Stadtholder of the Netherlands sent out a letter to the governors of all Dutch colonies usually carried by the very British forces that he was telling them to accept in their territories.<sup>26</sup> Not knowing how this document would be received, British forces had to be prepared for any response from immediate surrender, as at Banda, or to fierce opposition, as in certain parts of Ceylon. It is

<sup>20</sup> N.M.M., KEI/5/1, Hobart to Rainier, 29 September 1795.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, Copy of letter from Rainier to Stevens, 20 July 1795.

<sup>22</sup> B.L., I.O.R., MSS. Eur., D1074, Hobart to Dundas, 3 March 1795.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, Hobart to Dundas, 11 October 1795.

<sup>24</sup> N.M.M., KEI/5/1, Elphinstone to Dundas, 14 March 1795.

<sup>25</sup> N.M.M., KEI/46, Elphinstone to Rainier, 31 March 1795.

<sup>26</sup> B.L., I.O.R., L/PS/2/1, Secret Minutes of the Commissioners for the Affairs of India, 9 February 1795.

uncertain as to how much this letter brought about the decision to attack Ceylon but certainly Rainier knew from experience how important Trincomalee was geographically with its excellent harbour which could be used year round, irrespective of the trade winds and monsoons. It 'had the advantages of complete shelter, at all times of the year, in one or other of its two bays; the protection of its batteries; and an ample supply of water and fuel'.<sup>27</sup> The inland geography was such that an army would find it impossible to attack from the landward side so that, with a reasonable garrison, it was almost impregnable. Its prime drawback was that it could not supply itself with food and the garrison had to live on salt provisions. He therefore knew that it was correct to use the available forces to take Trincomalee – which he did.

Whilst Rainier was collecting his forces to attack Trincomalee, he despatched Captain Newcombe of *HMS Orpheus*, together with Major Brown leading Company troops, to capture Malacca. His orders to Newcombe illustrate his priorities:

You are always to cultivate from your Example and Influence the most perfect harmony between the two Services as the Success of every joint operation will much depend thereon.

Rainier went on to mention a letter addressed to himself and Major General Abercromby requesting that the navy help the army: '...you are at all times to pay them due attention complying with every requisition therein made to the best of your Judgement and Ability according to existing circumstances'.<sup>28</sup> His trust in his subordinate is clear when he ordered Newcombe to decide for himself after he has taken Malacca, if he is able to take any other Dutch islands. But he must not risk losing it again to the French and allowing them to use it to threaten the China Trade. This letter is a perfect example of Rainier's beliefs in how to work with the army but also how the navy must never lose sight of the fact that trade protection was its first priority.

Trincomalee surrendered to Rainier on the 30th August, approximately two weeks after Malacca fell to Newcombe. The losses taking the former were fifteen killed and fifty four wounded royal and Company troops and one killed and six wounded sailors. These were small losses for so important a prize.<sup>29</sup> Worthy of note is the fact that, instead of the 5000 troops that Elphinstone wanted to attack Mauritius, Rainier, with a 74, a 50, and two frigates of 44 and 32 guns respectively, took Trincomalee with two European companies and a battalion of Sepoys, approximately 900 men. These operations were relatively easy against a weak enemy and could be seen as useful training operations for the future. Cooperation between the army and navy was very smooth with Rainier lending the army three of the *Suffolk's* guns as its own were faulty.<sup>30</sup> He also sent sailors 'in parties of one and two

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>28</sup> N.M.M., KEI/5/1, Rainier to Newcombe, 19 July, 1795.

<sup>29</sup> Clowes, *The Royal Navy: A History- From the Earliest Times to 1900*, IV, p. 282.

<sup>30</sup> N.M.M., RAI/4, Rainier to Admiralty, 30 August 1795.

hundred' to haul the cannon into position and a group of artillerymen under the command of one of *Suffolk's* midshipmen. He had organised a party of 300 seamen and marines under Captain Smith of the *Diomede* who were prepared to storm the fort if it had not capitulated. This meant that the Navy provided one third of the land forces. Ever sensitive to the benefits of praise he wrote to the Admiralty of Colonel Stuart that the capture 'was so judiciously planned by Colonel Stuart and the work so ably executed as to do amazing execution'.<sup>31</sup> And Stuart wrote of Rainier 'I am beyond measure indebted to Commodore Rainier for his cordial cooperation and the active assistance of the Navy in every department of the public service'.<sup>32</sup> It is not surprising that relations between the two continued to ensure cordial cooperation between the army and navy. And Wellesley agreed with Rainier's opinion: 'Stuart<sup>33</sup> is unquestionably the best officer in India'.<sup>34</sup> The admiral remained on good terms with the General. Major Lachlan Macquarie, on the staff of General Stuart, wrote in his journal in 1799:

Admiral Rainier having very kindly offered his old friend Genl. Stuart and all his staff a passage to Madras ... we were most kindly received by the good old Admiral at Breakfast.<sup>35</sup>

During the same year other combined operations took the Dutch colonies of Jaffna and Galle in Ceylon, Cochin on the Malabar Coast, Perak on the Malayan Coast, and Padang in Sumatra. Rainier was certainly acting without orders and using his initiative and speed of operation to take as many Dutch colonies as possible. How far the incentive was to deny bases to the French or to obtain prize money is difficult to ascertain. Nevertheless, his actions were such that Black was able to write: 'Rainier ... proved a capable defender of British interests'.<sup>36</sup>

In the same month as Trincomalee was captured, Elphinstone captured the Cape and advised Rainier that he, Elphinstone, was now the commander-in-chief.

Apparently ignoring this change to the command structure, and with the agreement of Hobart, Rainier sailed to attack the Dutch Spice Islands, leaving Madras on the 15 October 1795.<sup>37</sup> Rainier was sufficiently bullish that he intended to follow their capture with an attack on Batavia, the capital of the Dutch East Indies, which he believed would fall easily. And he had

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<sup>31</sup> N.M.M., KEI/5/1, Rainier to Admiralty, 30 August 1795.

<sup>32</sup> *London Gazette*, 7 January 1796, quoted in *The Times*, 8 January 1796.

<sup>33</sup> General James Stuart, (1741-1815), served in America during the Revolution, was posted to India 1782, where he spent remainder of his career, participating in the Second, Third and Fourth Mysore and the Second Maratha Wars. He commanded all British land forces in India from 1803 retiring to England in ill health in 1805.

<sup>34</sup> Wellesley to Dundas, 21 April 1799, quoted in Ingram (ed.), *Two Views of British India*, Ingram, p. 143.

<sup>35</sup> Lachlan Macquarie Journal 1799, [www.lib.mq.edu.au/digital/lema/1799/1799june.html](http://www.lib.mq.edu.au/digital/lema/1799/1799june.html), accessed 21 July 2007.

<sup>36</sup> J. Black, *Britain as a Military Power 1688-1815* (London, 1999), p. 244.

<sup>37</sup> N.M.M., KEI/L/136, Elphinstone to Rainier, 31 May 1796.

to move rapidly because of the impending monsoon season which would make naval operations very difficult.

Rainier felt that he could take sufficient ships for the expedition because he had been given control of the Bombay Marine vessels *Bombay*, *Swift*, *Queen* and *Drake*. These would protect the Coromandel Coast and blockade Columbo which still refused to surrender.<sup>38</sup> He also assumed that Elphinstone would soon arrive in India with his own squadron and thus add to the security of merchant shipping around India. Moving with commendable speed, he arrived at Malacca in November 1795. His carefulness is again demonstrated by the fact that he wanted to plan for the attack on Amboina to take place after preparations at Malacca, rather than go straight in after a long journey from India.<sup>39</sup>

His planning was rewarded by the capture of Amboina in February 1796 and Banda a month later.<sup>40</sup> Persistence was also recompensed with the taking of Columbo in Ceylon by the son of Rainier's old mentor, Captain Alan Hyde Gardner.<sup>41</sup> Although Ceylon was not finally conquered until 1815, the occupation of both Trincomalee and Columbo signalled the effective beginning of British control of the island. The importance of Ceylon is illustrated by the fact that it was one of only three possessions kept by Britain at the Treaty of Amiens, the others being Trinidad and Tobago.<sup>42</sup>

This same month Elphinstone returned to the Cape to face a Dutch attempt to retake the colony leaving Rainier once more in command of his own destiny. It is clear that Rainier took seriously the confidence of Shore in giving him command of the Company forces as well as his own. On the army's landing at Amboina he issued an order to the troops 'exhorting them to an exact observance of Discipline and Sobriety'.<sup>43</sup> He realised that there were insufficient troops to garrison the island so he took the original decision to put a company of Dutch soldiers under the Company's control, telling the Madras Council that it could decide whether or not to make the decision permanent.<sup>44</sup> He also had much to do to maintain the discipline of the army during debates over the allocation of prize money – his diplomatic skills were again in demand.<sup>45</sup>

These moves did not meet with Elphinstone's approval: 'The object of the Rear Admiral will doubtless be conducive to the British interests; but another arrangement might have retained the Naval Force more collected and prepared for Service not so remote'.<sup>46</sup> In a letter to Rainier, he took a more defensive stance, telling Rainier that he should protect Malacca and

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<sup>38</sup> Parkinson, *War in the Eastern Seas*, p. 83.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 93-4.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>42</sup> Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, p.472.

<sup>43</sup> B.L., I.O.R., Home Misc., H/441, p. 77.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88-99.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>46</sup> N.M.M., KEI/5/3, Elphinstone to Admiralty, 23 February 1796. This was probably a euphemism for being out of Elphinstone's control.

Penang and not send any ships to Mauritius as he, Elphinstone, would cover the French island from the Cape – so he was not expecting Rainier to help him attack the French island. It is possible that Elphinstone felt Rainier's expeditions to the east were both a diversion from more strategic goals and an opportunity for Rainier to maintain his own independence of action. However, he was only too willing to take the prize money which Rainier earned for him without any efforts on his own part. But approbation came to Rainier from the Admiralty to confirm he had acted correctly: 'Their Lordships ... very highly approve of the Measures which were taken by you for the reduction of those Settlements [Dutch East Indies]'.<sup>47</sup>

As Elphinstone developed his knowledge of the region he noted the dangers emanating from Mauritius and felt that it should now be given attention.<sup>48</sup> This island had indeed been the proposed first goal of the squadron the British government had planned to send out in 1794 under Gardner. With his own experience during the American Revolution against Suffren, Rainier knew the dangers of Ceylon and the East Indies being in French hands should they arrive with a battle fleet. But as a current French base Mauritius was clearly the most dangerous thorn in a British Indian Ocean. Rainier's cautious nature would lead him to avoid joint expeditions which he felt might not succeed and received wisdom was that Mauritius would be very difficult to take. Rainier's more easterly targets were always logical and more easily taken, even though none were as large a threat as the French island. And it would appear that Rainier held the same view as more important people in the government; Dundas' opinion, that an attack on Mauritius would fail, was given to Elphinstone in a letter from the Admiralty.<sup>49</sup>

Rainier could not rely on reinforcements being sent to his command because British government strategy was still in a state of flux following the outbreak of war with Spain. In January 1797, when apparently an attack on Mauritius would consume too many resources, the Admiralty asked Pringle at the Cape to look at the idea of attacking Spanish South America.<sup>50</sup> This uncertainty continued as, two months later, the plan was cancelled.<sup>51</sup> But Rainier was not a man to panic. Knowing that he had to rely solely on his own resources, on 8<sup>th</sup> December 1796, he ordered Captain Pakenham of the *Resistance* (44), together with three sloops, to remain in the Moluccas. Here he was to protect the new British possessions, add Great Timor (which he did in July 1797) and survey the surrounding waters to see how accurate were the Dutch charts. The Admiral seems now to have put on his trade protection hat as he sailed to Macao to pick up the China Fleet and escort it back to Madras. Although Rainier did not yet realise it, events in Europe had ensured that there would be no more combined operations in the eastern part of the station during Rainier's command.

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<sup>47</sup> T.N.A., ADM 2/1350 (Part 2), Admiralty to Rainier, 15 April 1796.

<sup>48</sup> T.N.A., ADM1/55, Elphinstone to Admiralty, 30 July 1796.

<sup>49</sup> T.N.A., ADM 2/937, Admiralty to Elphinstone, 18 November 1796.

<sup>50</sup> T.N.A., ADM 2/1352, Admiralty to Pringle, 26 January 1797.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 March 1797.

Still in offensive mood, the declaration of war with Spain in 1797 allowed Rainier to think of repeating the 1762 capture of Manila, at which he had been present. With Rear Admiral Pringle situated at the Cape with seventeen vessels he need not fear danger from the west. Shore had already been told by the Court of Directors to plan such an attack and Hobart approached Rainier to obtain his views. The Admiral was very keen and began preparing for the expedition, which he knew would take many months to organise. But by August the first transports were making their way to Penang. The land forces consisted of 2059 men, European and Sepoy, and the escorting squadron comprised of 4 third rates, one 50, and three frigates. Additionally there were five Indiamen each carrying between 34 and 36 guns. The size of this force can be compared with that capturing the city in 1762, 2000 men and fifteen warships.<sup>52</sup> Rainier had been able to collect such a large squadron because he had taken an unusual risk for him, leaving only one frigate off the Indian coast to protect the trade. He was relying on being covered from the Cape in the west, and on luck that the French would not be competent enough to cause more than acceptable losses in the Trade.

Before the attack could take place, however, news of the Peace of Löben made Rainier and Shore realise that French victory in Europe would allow their enemy to concentrate on other theatres of war, in particular India, with their potential ally, Tippoo Sultan. In a letter of 10<sup>th</sup> August Rainier reviewed the pros and cons of attacking Manila or remaining on the defensive. He noted that the Philippines were distant from India if he needed to bring troops back rapidly, navigation around the area was difficult, and there were more French ships active in the Indian Ocean.<sup>53</sup> Consequently Rainier, returning to a more traditional risk profile, and supported by the Governor General, cancelled the attack on Manila and went on the defensive to protect India and its trade.<sup>54</sup> Again, an enemy colony was saved by events far away in Europe. The episode also illustrated Rainier's usual risk aversion when his primary roles – to protect British Indian possessions and of China/ India Trade – were in jeopardy. It also demonstrated that the possibility of gaining enormous wealth through prize money would not influence his decision making when he had responsibilities elsewhere.

Apart from the capture of Tidore in the Maluku Islands and Menado on the island of Sulawesi, both in 1797, and Ternate in the Molucca Islands in 1801, this early flurry of offensive activity was the limit of British eastward expansion until 1810. To make matters worse, all these Eastern conquests, apart from Ceylon, were returned to the Dutch at the Peace of Amiens in 1801. In view of its importance the Cape was retaken in 1806 but Amboina and Banda were not recovered until 1810-11, when both Mauritius and Batavia were finally taken. Plans were made to occupy Manila, Batavia, Mauritius, Tranquebar and Goa at different times during Rainier's command but all were postponed. The primary reason for halting these attacks was the perceived threat to India following French successes in the European war. Once French military power was omnipotent on continental Europe, it would be free to make forays onto other continents to harm its only worldwide foe, Britain.

<sup>52</sup> E.L.Rasor, *English Naval History to 1815: A Guide to the Literature to 1815* (Westport, CT., 2004), p.130.

<sup>53</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/168, Rainier to Shore, 10 August 1797.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, Rainier to Admiralty, 3 September 1797.

Bonaparte might send ships and troops to India and, if he did, British forces needed to be available in India itself, rather than mopping up Dutch and Spanish colonies thousands of miles to the east. Thus ended Rainier's offensive period. It was rather early in his command but he could not avoid being buffeted by events in Europe. After war broke out again in 1803, even Wellesley could see no opportunity for acquisition: 'It appears to me not to be practicable to attempt any Expedition for the purpose of recovering the Eastern islands from the Dutch'.<sup>55</sup> The *Marengo* was still at liberty, the Trade needed protection, Rainier had insufficient serviceable vessels, the second Anglo-Maratha War was still in progress and the Dutch were not making any warlike noises. There was no need to be territorially aggressive even if Rainier had wanted it.

### **Rainier and the Army on the Defensive 1798-1805.**

British possessions in the East Indies often had small garrisons whose troops would stand little chance against the efficiency of the French army – if it could be brought to these colonies. They were the centres of British trade with their finance, shipbuilding/repair and logistics facilities. If lost then Britain's interests would be severely damaged. There were two attack routes which Rainier had to counter; from Egypt down the Red Sea and directly from France, possibly via Mauritius, having broken the Channel blockade. The changed tenor of Rainier's approach to meeting his strategic goals came in 1798 with Bonaparte's attack on Egypt. If, as was suggested, the French ultimate aim was India, then the first British possession to become vulnerable was Bombay. Here was the Indian end of the overland communication route to Britain and the wintering home and dockyard of Rainier's squadron. The Bombay Presidency would also make sufficient noise as it demanded naval protection. Rainier knew he would have to keep the Admiralty informed of his actions to show that he was in control of the situation.

#### **a)The Threat from Egypt.**

The campaign which showed Rainier's strategic and political skills at their best was that of the Red Sea in 1798-99. It illustrates his appreciation of the varied forms in which French threats could arise, how to judge their probability, and how to allocate his resources accordingly. He was far too politically adept to question how serious was the danger to India from Bonaparte's invasion of Egypt and we do not know his true feelings on the matter. However, there had been considerable discussion as to whether or not the French initial goal was Egypt, followed by an attack on India. Indeed, the impression coming directly from the Admiralty was not very threatening:

Their ideas are so extravagant, and their successes on the Continent of Europe have rendered them so very sanguine, that though such a scheme is not, at first sight very probable, I do not think it quite unworthy of some attention. The naval part of any such expedition must necessarily be of inconsiderable force and would

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<sup>55</sup> T.N.A, ADM 1/175, Wellesley to Rainier, 14 June 1804.



therefore require but small exertion in comparison with the importance of the object to defeat it.<sup>56</sup>

So, before he had received any orders from London he despatched, under the command of his nephew, John Sprat Rainier, the *Centurion* (50) and the *Albatross* (18) to the Red Sea to watch for any French activity. It was as well that he did because the small squadron, consisting of a 50 gun fourth rate, a frigate and a sloop, sent out from London under Commodore Blankett in July 1798, did not arrive at Mocha until the following 13<sup>th</sup> April. Dundas, ever anxious about the security of India, also despatched 4,500 extra royal troops to the sub-continent. Although, as Parkinson said:

The idea of sending a small squadron to watch Suez was not ... as brilliantly original as all that. Rainier had already thought of it himself ... and had acted early in December with calm efficiency.<sup>57</sup>

Parkinson also noted that it would have been normal to send orders and reinforcements directly to Rainier's command and indeed it would have been quicker if Dundas had done so. But the admiral was not one to take a slight at the actions of his superiors. He also showed his initiative by refusing his order to send home the *Intrepid* (64): 'as their Lordships were not then apprised of the Expedition of the Enemy to Egypt, or the War since undertaken with the Tipu Sultan'.<sup>58</sup>

He told the Admiralty that he had to allocate his ships between the Coromandel, covering Madras, the Bay of Bengal, covering Calcutta, and Bombay whence he could watch the Red Sea. He therefore had to give up any further long term offensive plans against Manila or Java.<sup>59</sup> It was a fine judgement he had to make as to where was the most pressing danger to British interests, and trade protection was uppermost in his mind.

It was also possible that a French squadron could slip past the English Channel blockade, with troops and supplies for Tippoo, and sail round the Cape. Illustrating Rainier's good relations with the Commander at the Cape, Admiral Christian, he asked if the Cape could spare a frigate to escort the China fleet as all his were tied up watching the Red Sea. And Christian wrote to the Admiralty: 'it will therefore be my object to hold in readiness the means for supporting Rear Admiral Rainier if the occasion should require it'.<sup>60</sup> Meanwhile the demand for vessels on other parts of the station continued. The following year Rainier wrote to Blankett that: 'I am desirous you should keep no greater force with you than what is

<sup>56</sup> Richmond (ed.), *Spencer Papers*, IV, N.R.S. LIX, Spencer to Rainier, 30 May 1798, p. 168.

<sup>57</sup> Parkinson, *War in the Eastern Seas*, p. 143.

<sup>58</sup> N.M.M., RAI.7, Rainier to Admiralty, 23 February 1799.

<sup>59</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Admiralty, 17 May 1799.

<sup>60</sup> N.M.M. CHN/3/1, Christian to Admiralty, 31 March 1798.

absolutely necessary as these Seas [Bay of Bengal] begin to be much infested with Privateers'.<sup>61</sup>

At this distance from London, Rainier was able to control the timing and content of his communication with the Admiralty and officers of the Company, thus enabling him to exploit his diplomatic strengths. For example, he wrote:

I am assured by the Bombay government that there is an absolute certainty of being duly informed of any attempt of the French to invade Persia in time to send a detachment of the King's Ships to oppose the French in their attempt to procure transports in that Gulf. We are more alarmed about their possible progress in the Red Sea, than in any other quarter. It is therefore absolutely necessary to keep a respectable force on the Malabar Coast, as the French may have got out of the Gulf of Mocha.<sup>62</sup>

And the Admiralty was evidently happy with Rainier's actions:

We have as yet heard nothing from Admiral Blankett ... from the means you have very judiciously placed in his hands, I have no doubt we shall hear of his having completely succeeded in obtaining command of that important point.<sup>63</sup>

At the same time Rainier was calming nerves in London:

I conceive a force of two frigates or so will be sufficient to be stationed in the Red Sea to support the garrison on Perim and to prevent supplies being conveyed to the French army by that channel, as in addition to the little probability there exists at present of the Enemy's being able to effect an embarkation in the Gulf of Suez, the French General will be farther deterred from such an attempt when he receives news of Tipu Sultan's death, and the success of his Majesty's Arms in the entire conquest of his whole Dominion in India.<sup>64</sup>

Not having authority over the movements of the Royal Navy, the officials of the Company, were more anxious than Rainier and put more pressure on him as their fears of a French attack increased:

The General Tenor of these advices leading to a well-grounded Supposition that the French may attempt to Convey a large force to India by the Channel of the Red Sea ... we beg leave most earnestly to Submit to Your Excellency's Consideration the propriety of immediately detaching as large a force as may be

<sup>61</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/170, Rainier to Blankett, 12 December 1799.

<sup>62</sup> Richmond, *The Spencer Papers*, IV, N.R.S. LIX, Rainier to Admiralty, 1 December 1798, p. 187.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, Admiralty to Rainier, 17 August 1799.

<sup>64</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Admiralty, 23 July 1799.

in your Power or in your judgement requisite for the purpose of effectually counteracting the designs of the Enemy.<sup>65</sup>

However the circumstances and Rainier's calmness played their part and by the New Year the Council was saying:

Admiral Rainier with the major part of his own Squadron is now on this side of India and will proceed to the Red Sea as soon as the services of his ships can be useful in that quarter.<sup>66</sup>

A further example of the Council's faith in Rainier and their working relationship is shown in its letter to him telling him that all the transports for Perim were ready to sail and they were awaiting his orders.<sup>67</sup>

As noted above, General Stuart placed all his faith on the navy defending India before any French troops got to the mainland – again, an indication of Rainier's ability to engender a feeling of calmness, trust and competence. His understanding of the conditions faced by troops on the Red Sea also appeared to be deeper than that of his army opposite number as he would not support Stuart's idea of sending troops up the Sea to Kossire to eject the small French garrison there. He knew the heat and the supply of all the necessary equipment from the sea would be very difficult, as much could be achieved, and more cheaply, [always a concern of Rainier] by a heavy bombardment.<sup>68</sup>

Although never going to the Red Sea he had borne the brunt of bottling up any French forces there during the first few months before Blankett arrived. He had sent warships and supplies to the region, moved most of his ships to the west of India, blockaded Tippoo Sultan's Mysore coast to stop supplies reaching him, protected convoys where possible – all with limited resources that required him to use his judgement as to what the French might do and dispose his ships accordingly. He cooperated with the officials of the Company, especially the Bombay Council and Governor General, to ensure they knew what he was doing, to ask their advice, and to explain why he could not do everything they wished. This helped the Company to assist the navy with supplies, ships, cash and intelligence whenever possible:

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This cooperation would seem remarkable in any age, knowing the strong likelihood of any two organisations to squabble, even when nominally on the same side.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Exeter University, Bombay Diary 66A/57, Bombay Council to Rainier, 28 September 1798.

<sup>66</sup> Exeter University, Bombay Diary 73/2, Bombay Council to Court of Directors, 28 January 1799.

<sup>67</sup> Exeter University, Bombay Diary 75/4, Bombay Council to Rainier, 29 March 1799.

<sup>68</sup> Scottish National Archive, GD 51/31/1/56, Minute of Rainier, 4 August 1799, on memorandum of Stuart, 31 July 1799.

<sup>69</sup> P.A. Ward, 'The Response of the Royal Navy East Indies Command to the Invasion of Egypt in 1798 up to the Peace of Amiens in 1801', University of Exeter M.A. dissertation, p. 37.

Even though the threat within the Red Sea had greatly diminished by 1801, Rainier was still concerned over the possible attacks to the British line of communication. He estimated that the Seychelles would be a likely place for French raiders to base themselves and sent *La Sybille* (38) to investigate. As Parkinson said, this was an ‘astute move’.<sup>70</sup> She found the new French frigate *La Chiffonne* (36) and quickly captured her. Thus we see another example of Rainier’s ability to calculate likely French moves and, on this occasion, he was correct.

b) Thwarted attacks on Batavia & Mauritius.

In May 1800, both Wellesley and Rainier received orders from their respective masters to seize Java. Both agreed on this plan and Rainier, taking personal control, began a blockade of Batavia as a precursor to invasion. The whole expedition was to be organised from Calcutta where Wellesley was situated and which was not the usual base, it being eighty miles up the river Hooghly. Rainier viewed this as an important operation which needed his own presence. There could be many reasons for Rainier believing he should command; this would be a large operation and his only other flag officer was Blankett, who was not a favourite of the Governor General. Rainier was comfortable with the senior army commanders – which Blankett was not. He also knew well the waters around Java and, whilst there, he would be near the centre of his command, able to detach ships, if necessary, to cover any threats to the China Trade. Rainier appears never to have seen the danger from the Red Sea as too serious, believing it more a two frigate operation.<sup>71</sup> Whilst Rainier was now sufficiently wealthy not to need further prize money, it is possible he felt his presence on the operation would allow him to place his nephews in optimal positions to make their own fortunes.

The other pointer to the importance given to the expedition by Rainier was his decision to keep two ships from the Cape command under his control. Wellesley’s confidence in Rainier’s military skills shows by telling the admiral to consult with the army officers on the attack on Batavia, but if there are any differences, he was to make the decisions.<sup>72</sup> That this is a personal sign of trust is shown by the fact that, when Wellesley learned that Rainier might send Blankett to Batavia rather than go himself, he told the admiral that, if this were the case, he would transfer the negotiating with the Dutch from the naval commander to Colonel Champagne.<sup>73</sup> This attitude of Wellesley towards Blankett is a little strange because, as Rainier reported to the Admiralty, the governor general had told Blankett that Perim and Aden were being evacuated and Blankett could use the troops thus relieved however he wished.<sup>74</sup>

Then, in the midst of all these preparations Rainier received a letter from Wellesley telling him that Java was cancelled and the plan was now to attack Mauritius.<sup>75</sup> He must have felt absolutely certain of Rainier’s support as he had recently written to the Court of Directors

<sup>70</sup> Parkinson, *War in the Eastern Seas*, p. 178.

<sup>71</sup> Exeter University, Bombay Diary 82/2, Rainier to Bombay Council, 9 August 1799.

<sup>72</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 13751, Wellesley to Rainier, 9 May 1800.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 6 June 1800.

<sup>74</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Admiralty, 29 April 1800.

<sup>75</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 13752, Wellesley to Rainier, 29 October 1800.

that he found the admiral in ‘uniform spirit of cordial cooperation’ with the ‘utmost degree of alacrity of judgement’.<sup>76</sup>

The threat from the French island had suddenly become pressing. An Indiaman, the *Kent*, had been taken off the Sand Heads and HM Sloop *Trincomalee* (16) had blown up during a battle with a French warship in the Persian Gulf. Rainier had known for a long time that Mauritius was a serious problem. It was the key French base from which to attack both the Country and the European Trade and, in 1799, Rainier had written to Spencer asking if either he or Curtis at the Cape could be given sufficient ships to enforce a permanent blockade of the French island.<sup>77</sup>

So sure was he that it would take place, Wellesley even mentioned it in a letter to Captain Pulteney Malcolm of the *Suffolk* giving his thoughts that:

I have the fullest confidence that his Excellency [Rainier] will concur both in the necessity of the determination which I have formed to relinquish the Expedition concocted between us [Java], and in the plan of measures which I propose to adopt in consequence of the recent advices from Europe and Egypt.

He wanted Malcolm to escort the troopships down to Trincomalee ready for the attack on Mauritius.<sup>78</sup> Wellesley was clearly feeling confident as he told Malcolm that he had even sent his dispatches to Rainier by an American brig. At the end of November he suggested to Rainier that he send some ships down to Mauritius to assist Curtis who had a small squadron from the Cape blockading the French island.<sup>79</sup> A week later he wrote:

The same motives of respect and confidence which induced me to solicit your Excellency’s assistance in the prosecution of the measures intended against Batavia, render me equally desirous of securing the same advantage on the present important occasion.<sup>80</sup>

He continued:

[I] submit to your Excellency’s consideration a general view of the plan which appears to me most eligible for the purpose of enabling us to act offensively and defensively, as the case may require, to frustrate any attempt of the French, either for the relief of their army in Egypt, or for the disturbance of our possessions in India, and to answer the expected demand of his Majesty’s Minister for our co-operation in Egypt in the approaching season.

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<sup>76</sup> Kohli (ed.), *Fort William-India House Correspondence (Military Series)*, XVIII, p. 585, Wellesley to Court of Directors, 20 October 1800.

<sup>77</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 75834, Rainier to Spencer, 10 December 1799.

<sup>78</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 13752, Wellesley to Malcolm, 4 November 1800.

<sup>79</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 13752, Wellesley to Rainier, 29 November, 1800.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 6 December 1800.

A general outline was then made, explaining how few and poor were the troops on the island as reported by a 'seafaring gentleman who had been a short time a prisoner there'.

Rainier was not convinced; just cutting one buoy, and thus destroying possible safe approaches to the treacherous Mauritian shore, would thwart the plans. Additionally he was concerned that the season was too far advanced and there was little chance of the required secrecy if they had to wait until the next season. Even after the island had been charted and captured, the Remarks Book of HMS *Ariadne* (20) stated: 'As soundings with hand lead cannot be got above ½ mile off the Reefs I do not recommend running along shore for the Anchorage at night'.<sup>81</sup> So Rainier was wise to be concerned for the navigational aspects of attacking an island not even rudimentally charted. Because of the artillery required, and because the island was short of supplies, more ships would be needed for the equipment to be carried to bring stores. The people who had been given the responsibility of organising the transports had, in his estimation, too little experience of such a complicated exercise. The inability of the British to remove the French army from Egypt meant that the threat was still present and it was feasible that the British government would request an Indian army to be transported to Egypt via the Red Sea. He simply did not have sufficient ships to cover the Trade as well as these impending expeditions. He would also have agreed with Curtis, who told Spencer that it was unlikely that the colonists would greet the British with open arms, as Wellesley believed. He also knew that Mauritius received many of its supplies from the Isle de Bourbon because it could not feed itself. Therefore, if British forces were to take Mauritius they would also have to capture its granary island, which Curtis thought was almost impregnable.<sup>82</sup> Rainier wrote to Nepean that he would keep his ships stationed off Java until he heard otherwise: 'from their Lordships or other competent authority'. In fact Rainier could not understand why the Batavia attack had been called off at all. If it were acceptable to attack Mauritius, then surely it was also acceptable to attack the Batavia.<sup>83</sup> It would seem that this interpretation of Rainier's was correct because, in Wellesley's next letter to him, Wellesley said that he expected the Batavia expedition to be renewed with the transports to be ready to take troops there in the second or third week of November.<sup>84</sup> His idea that Mauritius could be subdued in two months maximum and that the British ships, troops, and equipment would be sufficiently robust then to attack the headquarters of the Dutch East Indies, perhaps the most unhealthy European colony in Asia, shows a level of ignorant optimism that would confirm all Rainier's fears of the Governor General's military skills. The total campaign which captured Reunion and Mauritius in 1810 took five months. Rainier wrote to Spencer with these concerns and his sensitivity is illustrated by his last paragraph:

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<sup>81</sup> U.K.H.O., Misc. Papers, Remarks Book, HMS *Ariadne*, p. 117.

<sup>82</sup> Corbett (ed.), *The Spencer Papers*, I, Curtis to Spencer, 28 November 1800.

<sup>83</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/170, Rainier to Admiralty, 25 August 1800.

<sup>84</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 13751, Wellesley to Rainier, 29 August 1800.

I beg leave to repeat to your Lordship my assurance that I have been wholly actuated in my resistance to the above measure by a principle of duty, sensible of the delicacy of the situation I have placed myself in by opposing one of his Excellency's exalted rank, and deservedly high estimation in the eyes of his Majesty's Ministers ...<sup>85</sup>

Clearly there was some slight suspicion that all was not well because Wellesley noted to Rainier that: 'It is my intention to prosecute the Expedition to the Isle of France independently of any assistance from Your Excellency, if I should unfortunately fail in obtaining your cooperation'.<sup>86</sup>

Then came the bombshell from Rainier. It is therefore not surprising that Wellesley was astonished by the response of the 'tractable' admiral:

I am concerned to inform Your Excellency that I am withheld from giving my concurrence to the Expedition projected, and so strenuously recommended and urged by Your Excellency ... no such enterprise can with propriety be undertaken, unless by the express command of the King ... with much regret as being the only instance of a difference of sentiment on plans of public service, that has arisen within the length of time I have had the honour to correspond with Your Excellency for the good of His Majesty's Service.<sup>87</sup>

It is likely that the prime reason was that a cautious Rainier was less sanguine about the possibility of success and he was using this as an excuse.

There followed from Wellesley a barrage of letters explaining the need for the invasion, which obviously Rainier would understand. He had listened to all the Governor General's suggestions and acted upon them in the past so, on this occasion, the Governor General could not understand why he would not do so when the case was so clear. Apparently Rainier's logic and Curtis' negative critique could not sway the ambition of the Governor General. He was not used to anyone opposing his plans and he replied with a twenty three page diatribe against his naval colleague. He said that Rainier's letter was:

a subject of the deepest regret, and of the most severe disappointment to my mind. I cannot admit the force of any such rule to be so great as to impose on Your Excellency the duty of frustrating or impairing ... the reasonable annoyance of the enemy.

He continued to criticise Rainier for taking so long to reply to his letter and pointed out that local commanders had the duty to use their initiative in the light of local circumstances. As

<sup>85</sup> Richmond, *The Spencer Papers*, IV, N.R.S. LIX, Rainier to Spencer, 27 December 1800, pp. 246-50.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 24 January 1801.

<sup>87</sup> B.L., I.O.R. Home Misc., H/1/481, No.9, Rainier to Wellesley, 20 December 1800.

someone close to the leaders in government he knew the strategic demands of the war far better than Rainier did.<sup>88</sup> He reacted to Rainier's refusal to assist him by telling him that he had written to Curtis at the Cape, asking for his support to attack Mauritius, although he did not imply that he would automatically receive it.<sup>89</sup> And, it should be noted, Mauritius was physically within Curtis's command so this action would seem appropriate.

Whether or not Rainier originally specifically agreed directly to an attack on Mauritius, or whether Wellesley just took it for granted is impossible to ascertain. There are many letters between the two but none in which Rainier actually agrees to such a plan. It is therefore probable that, because the Admiral had been so "tractable" in the past, Wellesley never imagined that he might not be so in the future when the case was so obvious to the Governor General.

Further communication followed; Rainier should prepare to send ships to the Red Sea and they should also address the more the fundamental issue of who was in charge:

... the important principle at issue between Your Excellency and me should be settled upon permanent grounds, for the guidance of those who may succeed Your Excellency and me in the arduous situations we respectively occupy.

He also told Rainier that: 'I consider the French Islands to be an outpost of the Army in Egypt'.<sup>90</sup>

Rainier clearly knew he had to inform Spencer of the latest developments:

'[I] received a letter from Lord Wellesley expressive of much chagrin at my refusal to co-operate [in the expedition to Mauritius] ... and suggesting a variety of arguments tending to prove me in the wrong, and to impress me with the idea that his public consequence and intimate connection with his Majesty's Ministers were more than sufficient to shelter my conduct from any degree of responsibility in the issue. I must confess to your Lordship that I am not in the least convinced by his Excellency's reasonings and have therefore forborne to make any reply to them, having neither the inclination nor leisure to enter into such tedious discussions ... I feel no small satisfaction in the reflection that my application to your Lordship to be superseded preceded the period when this difference of opinion on public service appeared'.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 13752, Wellesley to Rainier, 5 February 1801.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 10 February 1801.

<sup>91</sup> Corbett (ed.), *The Spencer Papers*, I, N.R.S. XLVI, Rainier to Spencer, 10 May 1801.



In fact, Rainier had ordered a continued blockade of Batavia but it had to be called off because, even at sea, disease was so fierce that it left insufficient men to man the ships.<sup>92</sup> The received wisdom of the period was that the French garrison on Mauritius was strong, with well trained troops and effective artillery. Almost ten years later, when the island was finally overcome, it was discovered that the French forces were greatly overrated and the actual conquest took only five days. If a more careful reconnaissance of the island had taken place in 1800, it is possible that Wellesley would have been proven correct and an assault on Mauritius would have had more chance of success than an attack on Batavia.

It is noteworthy that, in his official report to the Admiralty, Rainier did not mention the attack on him by Wellesley, thus keeping their dispute private, but did say that the Governor General had asked him for a ship to transport some bullion from China to India,<sup>93</sup> indicating that the navy was still supporting Wellesley in his role as protector of British India.

Longford, in her biography of Wellington, whilst misunderstanding the command relationship between the army and navy, nevertheless was able to show what the great general thought of the venture: 'It was true that Rainier had declined to serve under Arthur on the hair brained Mauritius venture (since Stokes, its lynchpin, turned out to be a pompous ass) and his plan, as Arthur agreed, "the greatest nonsense"'.<sup>94</sup> Further corroboration is found in a letter from Arthur Wellesley to his brother Henry: 'I never entirely approved of the Expedition to Mauritius'.<sup>95</sup>

Clearly Rainier was already feeling the strain of such an arduous command before the disagreement with Wellesley, hence his earlier request for replacement.<sup>96</sup> The tone of the letter is not one written by a content man. He also saw the seriousness of his difference with Wellesley in that, if he had offered his resignation after their quarrel, then people would have believed that his offer was made for that reason, which it was clearly not.

This proposed combined operation was the only one on which there was a serious difference of opinion between Rainier and the head of land forces in India, namely Wellesley himself. It is important to note that Wellesley had never served even as a junior army officer, but his own self belief, probably fired by the victory over Tippoo Sultan, won primarily by Generals Lake and Wellesley, clearly overruled such a minor impediment to competence. His knowledge of the situation on the island came from a Mr. Stokes, a merchant who had been briefly imprisoned there. Wellesley planned to make him the government agent of Mauritius after its capture so he had a vested interest in the campaign. But Rainier clearly saw that it

<sup>92</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Admiralty, 27 January 1801.

<sup>93</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/171, Rainier to Admiralty, 30 March 1801.

<sup>94</sup> E. Longford, *Wellington: The Years of the Sword*, p. 73 footnote, Longford's quote 'the greatest nonsense' is unattributed.

<sup>95</sup> Duke of Wellington (ed.), *Wellington. Supplementary Despatches, Correspondence and Memoranda of Field Marshall Arthur, Duke of Wellington, K.G.*, II (London, 1858), Arthur Wellesley to Henry Wellesley, 26 May 1801, p. 408.

<sup>96</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/170, Rainier to Spencer, 3 September 1800.

was an amateur leading an amateur and he was not interested in risking either his ships or the army. Although there is no public record of any military opposition this is not surprising given Wellesley's antipathy to anyone who did not think as he did. His brother did not say anything negative at the time. Whilst Rainier had previously been prepared to invade Mauritius the circumstances had been different. The islands were so far to the west of his command that they were indeed outside his station and he would need Admiralty permission to leave his command. Also, the greatly increased China Trade and the capture of the Dutch islands meant that the centre of gravity of his command had moved far to the east. If therefore he concentrated his squadron to the west he would leave the valuable trade, which he saw as his first priority, exposed to French, Dutch and Spanish attack. Under Governor General Shore the Indian sub-continent had been relatively quiet but the territorial ambitions of Wellesley had agitated the native princes. Rainier knew that moving the large number of troops that would be needed to take Mauritius would leave exposed British territories in India to attack, especially from the Marathas. Rainier's inherent conservative and careful nature would interpret these factors as creating too big a risk.

But it is worth pointing out that during his offensive period of 1795-7 Rainier had shown that he was not totally negative and defensive-minded if he saw the opportunity for gain without the likelihood of serious losses, both in the actual action and from leaving the station exposed to French commerce raiding elsewhere. Yet this attribute was forgotten by those historians with a more superficial study of the region and period in their desire to support Wellesley's view that the capture of Mauritius would be easy.

This serious difference between Rainier and Wellesley was the most important during the entire period of their cooperation. But it does illustrate that Rainier would not be swayed by extreme pressure from what he believed was in the nation's interest, even if it would damage his own career. And his arguments were all logical and well thought out; as viewed from tactical, strategic and logistical points of view. Wellesley now revived the plan against Batavia. But, within a week Rainier and Wellesley received orders to prepare a force to attack Egypt from the Red Sea and the Admiral was able to write to Spencer that he felt his stand had been vindicated.<sup>97</sup>

The Peace of Amiens restored Dutch and French colonies to their former masters except Ceylon, which the British government must have realised was too important to the security of India to be allowed to fall into an enemy's hands. Although Rainier had received his prize money, his thoughts on all the efforts he had made to enhance the security of British possessions in the Far East must have been frustrating. But, being the private man he was, his views were not made public. He had orders to return the majority of his squadron to England, which would reduce the East Indies command to one for a commodore, two ranks below his current one. This meant he would expect a recall himself in the near future.

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<sup>97</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/171, Rainier to the Admiralty, 10 May 1800.

Whilst Europe lay in an uneasy peace, war in India continued under the guise of the Second Maratha War. By this time the Indian Army had reorganised its commissary, with bullock trains of over 100,000 animals. Much of the fighting was inland and Generals Lake and Wellesley proved able to defeat their enemies without support from the Navy. There was no likelihood of French reinforcements being sent to India so there was no need for a naval blockade. Consequently Rainier played only a minor part in this conflict. The remainder of his time in the East Indies was taken up with trade protection and trying to catch Linois.

### c)The Direct Threat from France.

The unreliability of naval blockade also meant that, however Rainier felt about his local naval superiority, he could never be sure that units of the French navy might not escape the blockade of the French coast and reach Indian waters. His attitude to such possible events was somewhat sanguine. As he told Blankett, if the French sent a battle fleet, British reinforcements would undoubtedly follow and he had merely to wait for them to arrive before tackling the French squadron.<sup>98</sup> He had to accept that the French Wars were primarily European wars, although with a global dimension that was much larger than in any previous conflagration. Communication was regularly sent to him of the latest rumours and actual facts, and, in spite of what he said to Blankett, his natural caution caused him some stress:

The almost constant alarm I have been kept in ... of a French squadron being destined for these Seas has made me cautious of making any separation of the line of battle ships.<sup>99</sup>

Given the problems for such news finding him, he always needed a plan to rush naval units to whatever part of his vast station required protection. It must be remembered that Rainier did not remain at one headquarters, or even in a close sea area such as the Western Approaches, the weather patterns and the sheer area to be covered meant that, as described in Chapter Five, he could be anywhere from Bombay to Canton.

Under this threat Rainier was primarily in the hands of the navy in home waters. Vice Admiral Sir Charles Middleton, soon to be a member of the Board of Admiralty, described his own view of the French counter strategy as it would impact Britain's Indian possessions and trade:

They will probably have flying squadrons in the East Indies, strong enough to intercept our China and India ships, and may attempt, at an early period of the war, the capture of St. Helena and the Cape.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/170, Rainier to Blankett, 29 September 1800.

<sup>99</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/171, Rainier to Admiralty, 30 June 1801.

<sup>100</sup> Vice Admiral Sir Charles Middleton, draft memorandum, undated [October 1793], in *British Naval Documents 1204-1960*, J.B. Hattendorf, R.J.B. Knight, A.W.H. Pearsall, N.A.M. Rodger, R. Till (eds), N.R.S. CXXX1, 1993, p. 339.

Indeed, in 1796 and 1800-1 Villeneuve and Ganteaume respectively had been rumoured to be arming squadrons to depart France for the Indian Ocean. The Admiralty's strategy was to have only a small squadron, based in the East Indies, which could be reinforced from Britain as circumstances dictated. Consequently in 1803, after the recommencement of war, St. Vincent was only prepared to consider reinforcing the East Indies squadron after he had rebuilt naval strength in the Channel and Western Approaches, where imminent invasion threatened. Castlereagh wrote to Wellesley: '[St. Vincent] will be prepared, if necessary, to reinforce it [the East Indies] as soon as the Channel arrangements are completed'.<sup>101</sup> As Colin Gray has said: 'Sea Powers, used to waging war abroad, are singularly sensitive to the peril of invasion'.<sup>102</sup> Thus the emphasis on concentrating naval strength in home waters meant that the East Indies squadron would never be a large one: '... sea power was only dispersed into distant waters in a limited and subsidiary form'.<sup>103</sup> Indeed, given the difficulty of finding enemy ships once they arrived in the vastness of the East Indies it was probably easier to catch them in the Channel, even taking into account the impact the weather could have on the blockade. If they failed to catch them in the Channel then sufficient reinforcements could be sent out to India to reinforce Rainier to meet the new challenge. Hence resources should be in position in the region to cover any reasonable possibilities.<sup>104</sup>

#### d)The Threat from India and Overland from the North.

By definition, the role of the navy in countering attacks by land was somewhat limited. The danger could arise from native rulers, such as Tippoo Sultan of Mysore, or the Marathas of central India. Secondly, there were rumours that the French army in Egypt could march east, thus avoiding the Royal Navy, entering India via Persia or Afghanistan.

How far Wellesley really believed in the threat to British possessions is unclear. Alder believed that, when Wellesley arrived in 1798, he did take seriously the danger 'from Tippoo Sultan in Mysore, from the Nizam of Hyderabad, from the Marathas and from the French, apparently in league with all the other three'.<sup>105</sup> Whether or not he did feel threatened is immaterial to the result of a consolidated position of Britain as the major power in India by 1805.

Wellesley was able to carry out his aims by persuading Dundas that the threat to British interests from the native rulers was so great that they had to be destroyed. This was especially the case if they were allied to France and thereby receiving French supplies and troops. Dundas would remember that this had been a considerable threat during the American Revolution. They could also provide bases from which French forces could attack British possessions. In 1787 Tippoo had sent an embassy to France to show to the world that he was

<sup>101</sup> B.L., I.O.R., H/505, Home Misc., Castlereagh to Wellesley, 19 March 1803.

<sup>102</sup> C. Gray, *The Leverage of Sea Power: the Strategic Advantage of Navies in War* (New York, 1992), p. 65.

<sup>103</sup> Rodger, 'Sea Power in the Eighteenth Century', in Marshal, *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, II, p. 181.

<sup>104</sup> P. Mackesy, *War without Victory-the Downfall of Pitt 1799-1802*, p. 98-100.

<sup>105</sup> G.J. Alder, 'Britain and the Defence of British India - The Origins of the Problem 1798-1815', *Journal of Asian History*, vol. 6, 1972, p. 16.

friendly with a powerful European nation and, although no treaty was agreed, trade agreements were reached in 1788. In the subsequent years before 1793, there were many visits and communications between Tippoo's representatives and French officials in Pondicherry and on Mauritius. But France's finances were too weak for active assistance, tellingly as Tippoo requested it when attacked by Britain in 1792. The main result of the ties between Mysore and France was the presence of Frenchmen in Tippoo's army and the beginning of its training to high French standards.

These developments, implying a common desire to destroy Britain's power in India, were well known in London where any sign of an alliance between the two powers would be credible.

The period of most concern in London for events in India occurred during the period in which the French army was ensconced in Egypt. Their long term aim was seen as marching from Egypt to India and there destroying British power, fighting in alliance with the native rulers, primarily Tippoo, whose own powers and independence were threatened by France's old enemy. Once Wellesley was ensconced in India, how far he believed the seriousness of this threat is not known although Ingram believes he was not: '...he had never been alarmed by the French expedition to Egypt'.<sup>106</sup> Certainly Longford believed Wellesley was not fearful: 'He almost certainly did not believe it possible, but he acted as if he did'.<sup>107</sup> Yet it did present an ideal opportunity for him to persuade Dundas, who did believe it was serious, to permit him to destroy Tippoo before he could grow any stronger with French support. A letter from Bonaparte to Tippoo was obtained by the British at Jeddah before it could reach its intended recipient. It showed French intentions but not how they would be achieved: 'You must already have been informed of my arrival on the coast of the Red Sea with a large and invincible army, filled with a desire to deliver you from the iron yoke of England'. There were no details of how Bonaparte would give succour to Tippoo.<sup>108</sup> Yet against a French army, estimated somewhat generously by John Udney, the British Consul at Leghorn, of 50,000 men,<sup>109</sup> British India would be seriously threatened. With all Britain's other commitments Dundas was only able to send to India an extra 4,500 men garnered from the Cape, Gibraltar and Portugal, together with a small squadron consisting of the *Leopard* (50), *Daedalus* (32), and *Orestes* (18). These vessels were under the command of Commodore Blankett and were sent to the Red Sea.

The threat from Egypt continued until the French army's evacuation at the Peace of Amiens. Yet it would appear that Wellesley lost all interest in Egypt after Amiens, seeing it as part of the European strategy which had no impact on him and he therefore turned his efforts towards destroying the Marathas. Although there is no evidence of any opinion voiced by

<sup>106</sup> Ingram, 'A Preview of the Great Game In Asia: 1: The British Occupation of Perim and Aden in 1799', *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 9, No. 1 (January, 1973), p. 13.

<sup>107</sup> E. Longford, *Wellington, the Years of the Sword* (London, 1969), p. 50.

<sup>108</sup> F. Charles-Roux, *L'Angleterre et l'Expedition Franciase en Egypte*, vol.1, p. 256, quoted in S.P. Sen, *The French in India*, p. 556.

<sup>109</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/4176, Canning to Nepean, 3 May 1798, enclosed letter from Udney.

Rainier, it would appear from his actions that he viewed Egypt in the same way – this was an issue to be dealt with directly from Britain.

The government tried to hold on to Malta which it saw as a useful base for the fleet to watch French activities in the Eastern Mediterranean. Its planned surrender under the terms of the treaty, and under pressure from Russia, was not welcomed by the navy.<sup>110</sup> Wellesley's view of the situation was confirmed by Sir Charles Whitworth, the British ambassador to Paris, when he wrote that he 'doubted whether the French had made plans to challenge the British in India, which was beyond their strength'; General Decaen 'possesses no very shining talent' – beyond acute Anglophobia – and the French navy lacked the capability to operate so far from home waters.<sup>111</sup> Whitworth concluded that the French: 'intend rather to improve the possessions they already have in India, than to extend them by conquest or intrigue'.<sup>112</sup> Although of no direct concern to Rainier, the outbreak of war in 1803 focussed British diplomacy on French plans for Egypt, which the government saw as a serious threat to India. It appears that the aim was to stop France in the Mediterranean rather than build up naval strength in the East Indies, and Malta would be an important key in that defensive plan.

Possible attacks on India overland, via Syria to the Persian Gulf, and thence by sea to India, or via various routes entirely on land, through a combination of Persia and Afghanistan, continued to exercise Wellesley and there were several attempts to ally with either or both of these regional powers. In the event of such threats, Rainier's role would be one of blockading the coast to stop reinforcements of men and/or materials reaching the enemy and of moving British troops and supplies by sea, the most speedy and efficient method of doing so.

### **Rainier's Logistical Support Role.**

The role that the navy played in the defeat of Tippoo Sultan in 1799 was an important one. It blockaded the coast to ensure that no supplies reached Tippoo from Mauritius or the Red Sea, and escorted troops and supplies around the coast to attack where Tippoo was most vulnerable. Whilst Rainier could not take credit for the successful campaigns of Arthur Wellesley and General Lake during the second Maratha War he could also not be seen to have a hand in the defeats of the Kandyan War of 1803, when the British garrison at Kandy was massacred as it retreated to the coast, and of the more than 2000 men killed and wounded of the force under General Lake as he tried to capture the fort of Bharatpur. The former illustrated the vulnerability of a regular army to guerrilla tactics and the latter to forgetting the importance of siege artillery. Rainier had been able to provide artillery cover for the

<sup>110</sup> St. Vincent to Addington, 9 April 1801, in D.B. Smith (ed.), *Letters of Admiral of the fleet the Earl of St. Vincent, First Lord of the Admiralty, 1801-4*, I, N.R.S., LV (London, 1922), p. 214.

<sup>111</sup> Charles Decaen, 1769-1832, Major General, Governor of Mauritius 1802-1810.

<sup>112</sup> Whitworth to Hawkesbury, 11, 14 and 31 January, 3 February 1803, in O. Browning (ed.), *England and Napoleon in 1803: Being the Despatches of Lord Whitworth*, pp. 43-4, 56,59, quoted in E. Ingram 'The Geopolitics of the First British Expedition to Egypt – IV: Occupation and Withdrawal, 1801-3, *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 1, No. 2 (April 1995), p. 336.

attack on Trincomalee but when the objective was deep inland, the limits of naval power were obvious.

In the major expedition to send the Indian army to Egypt via Suez in 1800-1 to complement Abercromby's attack from the Mediterranean, Rainier's role was very much that of logistics provider. Rainier would play a minor part in the Egyptian exercise but he moved to Bombay in order to ensure the smooth collection of the resources necessary for such a large number of troops. And he knew it would be a difficult task; Blankett wrote to him that supplying the army as far north as Suez would be very difficult, especially with the lack of fresh water. There was a great need for cash to keep the Arabs on side – those at Mocha were friendly but not those at Jeddah where they were 'not fond of even touching a Christian'.<sup>113</sup> That both Dundas and Wellesley now wrote directly to Blankett indicated that they saw the operation as not being in Rainier's hands. Popham was sent out to replace Blankett with what Rainier believed to be sufficient ships. He therefore decided not to send any of his squadron with the Red Sea operation.

Apart from his own personal experience, he now knew what actions were important to ensure the success of the attacking forces and these he provided for Blankett and Popham. These consisted of providing escorts for supply ships to the Red Sea,<sup>114</sup> of sending supplies from Trincomalee,<sup>115</sup> of ensuring Blankett and Colonel Murray had sufficient ships and stores to capture Perim,<sup>116</sup> and by sending supplies from Madras to Popham in the Red Sea.<sup>117</sup> How successful he was is illustrated by the ability of Baird's army of 5822 men, brought both from India and Popham's squadron, to travel in luxury, with all the baggage to be expected in the train of an Indian potentate. So luxurious were their conditions that Hutchinson, the army commander who was in overall command and who had arrived from the Mediterranean, refused to allow the two armies to meet in case the poor, bedraggled northern army saw what their Indian comrades possessed. The comparison even came down to actual money when Hutchinson asked Baird: 'If you could lend us ten or twenty thousand Pounds it would be a great object, everything is in arrear[s] ... this arises from most of the Ports of Europe being shut against us'.<sup>118</sup> Even the loss of the precious frigate *La Forte*, hitting an uncharted rock on entering Jeddah harbour, and full of supplies for the army, did not impact its relative life of ease. Although it did make Rainier extremely angry as he felt that Blankett had been careless.

The remainder of Rainier's contact with the army consisted of supporting its advances and retreats on the Indian sub continent, of moving troops and supplies and escorting transports. Sometimes he had to provide supplies from his own naval resources. For example, on writing to Elphinstone to tell him of the capture of Amboina and Banda, he mentioned that he had to

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<sup>113</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 13760, Blankett to Rainier, 8 October 1800.

<sup>114</sup> T.N.A., ADM 2/1358, Admiralty to Rainier, 10 October 1800.

<sup>115</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/168, Rainier to Basil Cochrane, 24 May 1797.

<sup>116</sup> Exeter University Bombay Diary, T74/54, Rainier to Bombay Council, 11 March 1799.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 108/1801, Bombay Council to Home Popham, 27 May 1801.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 112/53, Hutchinson to Baird, 3 June 1801.

give some of his arrack and biscuits to the troops.<sup>119</sup> On the other hand, he did benefit from detachments of troops being sent aboard his warships to replace marines lost through the ravages of disease and occasionally, war.

Apart from Abercromby's actual expedition to Egypt, there were two combined operations to the Red Sea during Rainier's command. But, again, his role was purely secondary, concentrating on ensuring that there were adequate resources in ships, supplies and men. This first operation carried out by the East Indies command was the occupation of the island of Perim in June 1799.<sup>120</sup> Perim lies at the mouth of the Red Sea in the Straits of Bab el Mandeb. The military force came from the Bombay Presidency under Lieutenant Colonel Murray and the naval contingent was commanded by Commodore Blankett who had just arrived from England. Rainier's role was a logistics one in which he ensured Blankett and the troops had the supplies he needed. In this role Rainier excelled; in five days in April 1799 he told the agent for the *Blake*, transport, to take supplies to Colonel Murray and that she would be escorted by the Indiaman *Princess Charlotte*.<sup>121</sup> The next day he wrote to Captain Prescott of the *Princess Charlotte* to ensure that the soldiers received the same level of victuals as the sailors and four days later he was telling Captain Stuart of *HMS Fox* that the ships operating in the Red Sea did not have sufficient cash or credit in order to buy water. He told Stuart to obtain 5000 rupees from the Bombay Victualling Agent.<sup>122</sup> Rainier's was also a diplomatic role in which he assured both the Bombay Presidency and the Admiralty that the navy was doing all that was necessary to ensure a successful operation. Rainier's close relation with Bombay is shown by the letter from the latter that tells Rainier the military forces are ready for sea and they just await the admiral's signal to sail.<sup>123</sup> This letter followed Rainier's of the 11<sup>th</sup> saying he was ready to give the navy's support whenever they wanted.<sup>124</sup> Thus the expedition sailed, occupied the island and erected a battery with which, theoretically, to cover the sea lanes around the island.<sup>125</sup>

Once in possession of the island it was discovered that land based artillery could not cover the entire sea passage out of the Red Sea so warships were still necessary to be based at the island. The other problem was that there was no water on the island so supplies had to be brought at great expense by sea from Mocha. Blankett realised that he would have to make extra patrols and also bring water from Mocha – both activities which would detract from what he saw as his prime role of searching out French activity in the Red Sea. Rainier also learned that Blankett did not have the same cooperative skills as he did and Blankett built up a level of animosity with Murray that lasted for the entire period of the occupation. For example, Blankett told Murray that he could not guarantee supplying the island with water if his ships would be needed to watch for the French, to which Murray replied that he was not

<sup>119</sup> N.M.M., RAI/5, Rainier to Elphinstone, 27 March 1796.

<sup>120</sup> See Chapter 4 for a more detailed description of the strategic situation and **Appendix 10e**.

<sup>121</sup> N.M.M., RAI/6, Rainier to Thomas Blast, agent for the *Blake*, transport, 2 April 1799.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, Rainier to Prescott, 3 April 1799, Rainier to Stuart 7 April 1799.

<sup>123</sup> Exeter University, Bombay Diary 75/4, Bombay Council to Rainier, 29 March 1799.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, T74/54, Rainier to Bombay Council, 11 March 1799.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, T74/ 66, President's Minute to Council Meeting, 15 March 1799.



very happy and wondered why Blankett could not give him some of the ships' water.<sup>126</sup> The island was finally totally evacuated in March 1800 by which time both Rainier and Wellesley felt safe in acting on their intuition that there was no risk to British India from the Red Sea.

But even with this uneasy relationship, Murray was sufficiently certain of the power of the navy to take his troops anywhere. He wrote to the Bombay Council telling it that he wanted to keep his troops in the Red Sea in case they were needed for further offensive operations.<sup>127</sup>

Even after the Perim adventure Blankett continued to have high hopes of getting the army to listen to him. But he was disappointed. On the moves to send an Indian army expedition to attack Egypt from the Red Sea he caustically commented to the Admiralty:

There appears to be a[n] ... impropriety in sending out a squadron of ships to an unknown Sea where an Admiral Commands without ordering them at least to follow his advice, but it appears the direction is left to General Baird.<sup>128</sup>

There was then a certain amount of *schadenfreude* when he further told the Admiralty that he has received orders from General Hutchinson to send more troops into Egypt. But as the wind was now set from the north, he could not obey.<sup>129</sup> The unwritten comment was that any competent sailor would know it was impossible and should therefore be listened to by the army commanders. Surprisingly the Bombay Council also seemed to ignore the naval command, telling Captain Hardie of the Company frigate *Cornwallis* to remain at Mocha until either General Baird or Colonel Wellesley arrived to take command.<sup>130</sup>

It is difficult to understand why Rainier did not take a more active part in helping Blankett in his relationship with the army. The two had already served together during the American Revolution. He might have felt less helpful due to the initial independent nature of Blankett's command when he had been sent out to the Red Sea from England. Rainier's letters are not as friendly as they are to other senior officers. An example of Rainier's strange behaviour towards Blankett is shown in a letter to the admiral from the Bombay Council. Blankett had complained to the Council that he had not been informed of the initial plan to seize Perim. The Council reminded Rainier that it did not know when Blankett would arrive and, as Rainier was fully involved in the discussions on the subject, they assumed he would communicate with Blankett – as indeed one would.<sup>131</sup> Rainier clearly thought he had communicated with Blankett because, in August 1799 he wrote to the Bombay Council:

I have before expressed to you my surprise at the dissatisfaction Commodore Blankett has expressed on your not having advised him of [the plan to] take

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 79/51-53, Blankett to Murray & Murray to Blankett, 8 May 1799.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 81/19, Murray to Bombay Council, 9 July 1799.

<sup>128</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/171, Blankett to Admiralty, 17 May 1801.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 6 June 1801.

<sup>130</sup> T.N.A., Bombay Council to Capt. Hardie, copied with ADM 1/171, Blankett to Admiralty, 6 June 1801.

<sup>131</sup> Exeter University, Bombay Diary 80/57, Bombay Council to Rainier, 27 June 1799.

possession of Perim, and am utterly at a loss to account for his reasons for so extraordinary a proceeding which I shall acquaint him with the first opportunity.<sup>132</sup>

But Blankett's somewhat petulant nature, with which Rainier had to contend, is illustrated in a letter to Colonel Murray. The colonel has previously asked for Blankett's opinion as to the possibility of withdrawal from Perim. Blankett replied that, as he had not been told why Perim was to be occupied in the first place, it was impossible for him to give any comments on its evacuation.<sup>133</sup>

With evidence such as this to frustrate any naval commander-in-chief, it is clear that Rainier showed great patience and diplomatic skill in order to engender cooperation with the army whilst maintaining friendly relations, although, as shown above, he was either unwilling or unable to assist Blankett in achieving the same success.

### **Conclusion.**

Rainier was always steadfast in his belief in the need to protect British India and played an active part in defending it – even when it was a secondary one supporting the army on the mainland or supporting the Red Sea operations. Yet he also knew when it was the opportune time to go on the offensive to protect British interests. As a fighting captain he had shown that he had sufficient aggressive qualities. But he was sufficiently cautious not to take too great risks, knowing he was far from any support if a situation went disastrously wrong. There had to be sufficient troops to carry out the operation, there had to be adequate transports and logistical support to ensure that the operation would not have to be cancelled, the season had to be sufficiently long that there was enough time to carry the objective, and the threat to his other responsibilities from the enemy had to be covered by his other resources. His cautiousness came through in his dealings with Wellesley over the attack on Mauritius. Here he felt that there were just too many factors operating against a successful conclusion and, added to the fact that the operation would take place outside his own station, he felt he had to deny his support. This would have been extremely difficult to do against a Governor General so overbearing, dogmatic, well connected and so used to having people do as he wished. It showed his courage was not only to be found in battle. But it also illustrated that one of the reasons for choosing him to go to the East Indies in 1794 was valid – he could be aggressive but only when the circumstances gave him a good chance of success and he would not be risking his resources which he needed to perform the other prime element of his objectives, namely the protection of the Trade and control of the sea.

His occupation of Trincomalee and Malacca gave much security to trade routes in their areas and occupation of the Dutch Spice Islands enhanced the opportunities for British trade across

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 82/1, Rainier to Bombay Council, 9 August 1799.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 80/83. Blankett to Murray, 21 May 1799.

the region. These successes could not have been achieved without close cooperation with the army and Rainier again showed a personality which engendered the support of the decision makers in other organisations without whom success would have been impossible. Rainier's collegiate style of cooperation with the army was very successful. He had a good relationship with the senior army officers, in spite of the difficulty of dealing, in effect, with two armies whose own structures led to conflict within the land forces. He also tried to encourage the same approach in his own subordinates, apart from with Blankett who was too old a dog to be taught new tricks. His success in this matter, and his evident pride, is illustrated in a letter he wrote to Lord Bentinck, the Governor of Madras, in which he mentioned Bentinck's predecessor, Lord Hobart. 'The Confidence Lord Hobart then placed in me by putting the troops of the Presidency ... under my Orders claimed my lasting acknowledgements'.<sup>134</sup> This confidence in Rainier should be put into a context of less than perfect reliance which Dundas placed on the First Lord of the Admiralty, Spencer:

There is a backwardness somewhere in somebody under you in forwarding what they might not approve of, or have not themselves suggested. The responsibility of the naval department rests with you and you only, and your colleagues in the cabinet can look nowhere but to you for the rapid and prompt execution of what is resolved upon.<sup>135</sup>

It should be remembered that when Rainier was carrying out his successful operations in 1795-6, he was continuing a long history of successful British combined operations in the Far East, using both Company and royal troops. He continued the practice, success meeting every attack which he made. This conflicts with Hall's contention that the period 1793-98 was a failure for the strategy of colonial expansion.<sup>136</sup>

Having analysed three of the four major achievements of Rainier, the next chapter will describe his fourth success, the maintenance of his squadron at sea through an effective system of logistical support.

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<sup>134</sup> N.M.M., RAI/10, Rainier to Bentinck, 20 March 1805.

<sup>135</sup> B.L., Add. Mss., Dundas to Spencer 40102, quoted in 'A Preview of the great game in Asia – IV: British Agents in the Near East in the War of the Second Coalition, 1798-1801, *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 10, No. 1 (January 1974), E. Ingram, p.17.

<sup>136</sup> C.D. Hall, *British Strategy in the Napoleonic War 1803-15* (Manchester, 1992), p. 77.

## CHAPTER 7.

### **‘THE DEFENCE OF THE COMPANY’S POSSESSIONS IN THE EAST INDIES DEPENDS IN A VERY GREAT DEGREE ... ON THE SUPERIORITY OR EXERTIONS OF HIS MAJESTY’S SQUADRON.’<sup>1</sup>**

#### **MAINTAINING THE SQUADRON AT SEA.**

Having examined Rainier’s achievements in the diplomatic, military and naval arenas, his abilities as an administrator will now be explored. Experience had taught him how difficult it was to keep his ships at sea and to achieve the maximum sea time. He knew he needed to maintain an adequate supply of naval supplies, victuals, seamen and money. This chapter will describe the situation Rainier found when he arrived in India, what resources were available, how he obtained them, how he used them and what limitations their availability put on him. It will be shown that his administrative and managerial skills enabled his squadron to operate in an effective manner across the entire station and enabled the admiral to create an infrastructure which, after eleven years of refining, his successors could use to continue to extend British control of the region and protect the Trade.

Rainier was new to the role of independent command and he had much to learn. At least he had in-depth experience of his vast station of thirty million square miles and appreciated what could go wrong during the 15,000-16,000 mile journey out from England. In theory there were some naval supplies held for him in Madras and Bombay by the Company, there was a private victualling organisation under a contract held by the Honourable Basil Cochrane, that held food for the Navy in Madras, and there was the Bombay Dockyard, the only one available to the Royal Navy outside Britain. The yard could hold three 74’s simultaneously and was owned by the Company. The Admiralty Boards had little knowledge of the East Indies – it being numerically the smallest station and it is important to note that Rainier could expect to receive little or no help from them.

#### **Primary Concerns.**

But when Rainier actually arrived at Madras in September 1794 he found himself in the unique position of having no resident Royal Naval forces and a minimal shore based organisation. The lack of naval stores was an immediate concern. As a captain under Hughes, Rainier would have noticed the way in which logistical problems with naval stores hindered the navy’s moves against the French. He appreciated the need for detailed planning to ensure that the stores and equipment he required were always available when needed. Within two weeks of arriving in Indian waters at Madras, he wrote to James Moseley, the Marine Storekeeper at Bombay, requesting an inventory of all Royal Navy stores in Bombay.<sup>2</sup> And a week later, on the 29 September, he had a very busy letter writing day; to Spencer, he

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<sup>1</sup> Hughes to the Council of Bombay, 27 January 1784, quoted in Wadia, *The Bombay Dockyard*, pp. 47-8.

<sup>2</sup> N.M.M., RAI/ 4, Rainier to Moseley, 22 September 1794.

complained about the lack of naval stores,<sup>3</sup> he asked the Admiralty for information on when and how to use navy bills to pay invoices,<sup>4</sup> and he advised the Navy Board that he had to buy cordage and other naval stores.<sup>5</sup> His frustration at the poor communication is shown when he discovered that the Indiaman *Raymond*, which was part of the convoy he had escorted out to India, was actually carrying naval stores for him, and whilst he was buying these up locally, it was unloading them without his knowledge. Not only had the ship's captain not told him of his cargo, but also no-one from the Navy Board had told him.

He had also shown sensitivity to his neophyte position as a commanding officer: '...should there be any irregularity, for want of due form, you will have to have the goodness to overlook, and set me to rights for my future Government'.<sup>6</sup> The questions continued through the winter as he saw the full extent of the shortages. The cordage was of poor quality and had been stored too long; he would have to buy more. The last ship to arrive from London, which brought stores, was missing many items such as twine, sails for fourth and sixth rates, and spars. What should he do with all the stores he was condemning, including the 10,000 lbs. of bread destroyed by poor stowage on the voyage? There was no 'muster paper' for muster books and could he be sent some more?<sup>7</sup>

### **Secondary Concerns.**

The issues facing Rainier immediately, which are described above, could be tackled at once. But, in order to solve them in the long term, he realised that he would have to build up good relationships with the Company. Hughes' stormy relations with Company's officials during the American Revolution only exacerbated the problems. Probably because the East Indies squadron was a small one, the Admiralty was content to allow naval supplies and ordnance to be provided primarily by the Company – the unique organisation found on no other station. Whilst the Company could apparently meet all the demands made on it, there was the need to manage affairs in order to maintain the required standards. Rainier's many letters to them attest to his understanding of this vital part of his role. He would also need to build up, and maintain, good relationships with the navy's bureaucratic organisations at home.

His previous experience taught him that replacement sailors were not easily obtained. Therefore great care must be taken of their well-being. Provisions of the highest quality possible must be obtained and every effort must be made to protect their health. Fulfilling these requirements would need large sums of money and Rainier must quickly learn the navy's accounting processes and the limits of his authority.

Active service had a deleterious effect on the serviceability of warships and Rainier also knew that he must not only establish a means of providing naval supplies, but also ensure that

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<sup>3</sup> N.M.M., RAI/4, Rainier to Spencer, 29 September 1794.

<sup>4</sup> N.M.M., RAI/4, Rainier to Admiralty, 29 September 1794.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> T.N.A., ADM 106/1411, Rainier to Navy Board, 29 September 1794.

<sup>7</sup> N.M.M., RAI/4, Rainier to Navy Board, 26 February 1795.

the Company's dockyard facilities at Bombay were at his disposal when required. Again, this would demand good relationships with the Company as well as an adequate source of funds. These were his second group of priorities which would at least enable him to have well founded ships, adequate crews, well provisioned to operate anywhere throughout the station.

How Rainier addressed these issues will be studied under the five categories in the order they would have faced the admiral in terms of priority. A conclusion summarises the evidence;

1. Maintaining warship strength.
2. Ensuring their armament.
3. Provisioning the squadron.
4. Manning the squadron.
5. How all these activities were financed.
6. Conclusion.

### **1.Maintaining the Squadron's Warship Strength.**

The issues in this section will be covered under the following headings;

- a) The Number of Ships
- b) Organisation
- c) Naval Stores

#### **a)The Number of Ships.**

The year-end size of the squadron for the full period of Rainier's sojourn in the East Indies was as follows;<sup>8</sup>

	3 <sup>rd</sup> Rate	4 <sup>th</sup> Rate	5 <sup>th</sup> Rate	6 <sup>th</sup> Rate	Sloop/Bomb	Troopships	Total
1794	1	1	2		1	0	5
1795	1	1	4	0	1	0	7
1796	3	1	5	2	2	0	13
1797	5	1	5	2	3	0	16
1798	5	1	6	2	3	0	17
1799	5	3	6	3	3	0	20
1800*	6	4	5	1	3	0	19
1801*	7	3	8	1	2	1	22
1802*	4	3	9	1	2	2	21
1803	7	1	0	0	4	2	13
1804	7	2	8	0	4	1	22
1805	9	2	11	0	4	0	26
1806	8	1	15	0	6	1	31
1807	9	0	16	1	6	0	32

\* includes ships in Red Sea.

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<sup>8</sup> T.N.A., ADM 8.

These figures, sourced from ADM 8, do not include the vessels of the Bombay Marine or Indiamen that were attached to the Navy from time to time. They do include the small squadrons of Rear Admiral Blankett and Captain Sir Home Popham operating in the Red Sea. Apart from the predictable dramatic reduction in size at the Peace of Amiens,<sup>9</sup> the list demonstrates a steady increase in size. This was due, in 1796, to the threat of Rear Admiral Sercey's six frigate squadron based in Mauritius, then, in 1798, to Bonaparte's invasion of Egypt, and by the response to Rear Admiral Linois' arrival in Indian waters in 1803 following the outbreak of war.<sup>10</sup> But Rainier's squadron was still smaller than that of his successor, Pellew, who had, arguably, to deal with a less threatening situation. And even with his larger squadron, Pellew complained that he could not blockade Mauritius, let alone conquer it, without more ships.<sup>11</sup> It should also be noted that Richmond stated that the station strength recommended in 1810 was four capital ships, 16 frigates, and 9 lesser craft.<sup>12</sup> He probably obtained these numbers from a report of Pellew, written for the Admiralty in 1809 when he returned from the East Indies. In it Pellew states exactly these numbers.<sup>13</sup>

Given the time taken for ships to reach the East Indies, the Admiralty had to plan well ahead to send ships out. But they only sent out minimum numbers, responding more to news of French ships actually breaking the British naval blockade of French ports. As early as 1795, Elphinstone wrote to Spencer that 'so large a force may not be required in India'. He wanted permission to withdraw ships when he had solved the threat to the sub-continent.<sup>14</sup> Having withdrawn the vessels noted above in 1801, the Admiralty was slower to build up the squadron when war broke out again and well into 1804 Rainier was still overstretched, being unable to allocate ships to meet all the demands put on him. In fact the Battle of Pulo Aur would probably never have occurred if reinforcements had been received earlier.<sup>15</sup>

Rainier was not an admiral who made heavy demands on the Admiralty and his only request to them on the subject of ships was for more sloops and frigates rather than third rates. This was especially the case when he had to cover the Red Sea and watch for French ships using the Maratha harbours. This latter threat Rainier viewed as one which could be neutralised by the navy with shallow draught vessels.<sup>16</sup> The danger from the French was primarily from their privateers and National frigates so it could not be viewed as an unreasonable request. As this was a common demand, the East Indies was not favoured with the satisfaction of Rainier's wish. Naturally the majority of vessels that made up Rainier's command came out

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<sup>9</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Admiralty, 6 October 1802, ships recalled were *Intrepid*, *Victorious*, *Leopard*, *La Chiffonne*, *La Virginie*, *La Sybille*, *Orpheus*, *Eurydice*, *Romney*, *Daedalus*.

<sup>10</sup> Rear Admiral Marquis de Sercey, French C-in-C East Indies 1796-1799, by which time his entire squadron had been destroyed. Sailed to France, retired and then returned to Mauritius where he had been born. Rear-Admiral Linois, French C-in-C East Indies 1803-6, captured in the *Marengo* whilst returning to France. Was a prisoner of war until 1814.

<sup>11</sup> Durham University, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Grey Papers, Pellew to Grey, 30 September 1806.

<sup>12</sup> Richmond, *Statesmen and Sea Power* (Oxford, 1946), p. 226.

<sup>13</sup> Sir E. Pellew, quoted in 'Trade Defence in the Indian Seas', anon, *Naval Review*, vol. XVIII, No. I, February 1930, pp. 69-72.

<sup>14</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 75854, Elphinstone to Spencer, 13 November 1795.

<sup>15</sup> See Chapter 4.

<sup>16</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 75856, Rainier to Spencer, 19 December 1799.

from England. Any repair was effected in Bombay whither the squadron repaired during the months of the north east monsoon, from October to the following March. They moved back to the east coast when the winds changed to south westerly and Madras was no longer on a lee shore.

With the relatively uncharted waters of the station and its fierce weather patterns, Rainier was always vulnerable to ship losses due to natural causes. The *Resistance* (44), *Sheerness* (32) and *Orestes* (18) were all lost at sea to storms. The precious frigates *Forte* (44) and *Diomedé* (44) were both lost in harbour foundering on uncharted rocks – in Jeddah and Trincomalee respectively. Even if they were not totally destroyed, they could be put out of action as when the *Trident* struck a rock coming away from the Cape and had to go to Bombay for repairs.<sup>17</sup> Other ships were sent home due to their advanced age. Rainier's flagship, the *Suffolk*, launched in 1765, was sent home in 1803 to be broken up. The *Centurion*, launched in 1774, suffering from a white ant infestation which was destroying its masts and spars, was sent home in 1804.<sup>18</sup> The *Blenheim* (74), Troubridge's flagship, had been launched in 1761; it was lost with all hands in 1807. The sloop *Hobart* (18) was sold into private hands in 1803.<sup>19</sup> This French vessel, launched in 1794 and captured by the British in 1796, was not the best advertisement for French shipbuilding, lasting only nine years. Attempting to save the vessel illustrates Rainier's desire for due process and what is now called the 'audit trail'. He copied to the Navy Board a letter he had written to Captain Astle of the *Hobart* criticising him for using only his own carpenter to survey his ship. He could have used other carpenters as well as himself 'as perfectly competent to distinguish a rotten timber from a sound one'.<sup>20</sup> The *Carysfort* (28), launched in 1766, had to be sent home in 1800, requiring a substantial refit. It would appear that the Admiralty was comfortable with this process as it gave them a source of convoy escorts. In 1798 Rainier was advised that he was being sent out replacement ships from England and he was to send back those ships 'in most need of repair' as convoy escorts.<sup>21</sup>

A review of the thirty one naval vessels sent out to Rainier during his period of command, excluding those captured, acquired locally, and lent by the Company, shows that eight were less than ten years old, fourteen were between ten and nineteen years old when despatched to India, and nine were twenty years or older. Eleven of these vessels were retired from active service after their commissions in the East Indies.<sup>22</sup> One cannot necessarily conclude that it was Admiralty policy to send out to India only the oldest vessels. The third rates would expect to be involved in convoy escort, rather than fleet actions. The fifth rates would be primarily battling privateers rather than the latest French heavy frigates. Therefore it was natural that those warships sent out to India need not be the latest, heaviest, fastest in the navy.

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<sup>17</sup> N.M.M., RAI/5, Rainier to Hobart, 16 March 1797.

<sup>18</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Admiralty, 1 November 1804.

<sup>19</sup> R. Winfield, *British Warships in the Age of Sail 1793-1817* (London, 2005), p. 257.

<sup>20</sup> T.N.A., ADM 106/1412, Rainier to Navy Board, 1 July 1801.

<sup>21</sup> N.M.M., RAI/11, Admiralty to Rainier, 18 April 1798.

<sup>22</sup> Winfield, *British Warships in the Age of Sail*.



Rainier needed local sources to make up for all the losses he incurred. Because of the wear and tear on naval vessels and because there was always a shortage of sloops, brigs and frigates, the opportunity to buy new ships was treasured by remote commanding officers. Rainier clearly believed he had the authority, even less than a year after arriving on station: 'I have it in contemplation to purchase some ships to supply the loss of the *Diomede*'.<sup>23</sup> The drawback was that this was probably the most expensive item to be purchased and therefore much care had to be taken by the commander-in-chief to ensure that he had the appropriate authority. This was especially as: 'Captains and admirals were happy to spend public money, with a good chance of retrospective Admiralty approval'.<sup>24</sup> However, if this approval were not forthcoming, the bill would go to the admiral's personal account. The vagaries of communications between London and India gave an added degree of uncertainty to the approval process and Rainier certainly fell foul of the Navy Board, in spite of his naturally bureaucratic and careful personality. An added incentive for Rainier to want to acquire more ships was the presence of a fine shipbuilding industry based in Bombay. But Rainier did feel there was an unwritten limit to his authority, even eight years after he arrived on station. In 1802 he wrote to the Admiralty telling that he had sold the *Vulcan*, bomb, as it was not needed, and was in great need of expensive repairs. Yet he recommended the same action for a sloop and three brigs, thereby waiting for approval before acting, probably because this kind of vessel was always in great demand.<sup>25</sup>

Another source of additional ships was the French and Dutch navies, captures from which were often bought into the Royal Navy. Examples are the *Java* (32), *Forte* (44) and *La Chiffonne* (36), all much needed frigates. Rainier also persuaded the Admiralty to agree the purchase of the captured French sloop *La Gloire* which he renamed *Trincomalee*. However there was a strict protocol to be followed in purchasing ships for the Navy by the local flag officer. The Navy Board wrote to Rainier to say that it could not approve the purchase of the *Trincomalee* as there was no description of the vessel, no survey or details of its sale; these must be sent to London as soon as possible. In future, all these details must be sent to the Board for every ship to be purchased.<sup>26</sup> Finally the Board did agree, after three years, to take the *Trincomalee* into the Navy with a complement of 121 men and 16 guns.<sup>27</sup>

However, a month earlier Rainier had written to the Navy Board saying he had bought *La Forte* into the Navy:

which have duly communicated to Mr. Secretary Nepean for their Lordships' Information'. [Note the word 'information', not 'approval'], When I receive the

<sup>23</sup> N.M.M., RAI/4, Rainier to Hobart, 7 August 1795.

<sup>24</sup> Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, p. 303.

<sup>25</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Admiralty, 29 May 1802.

<sup>26</sup> T.N.A., ADM 106/2475, Navy Board to Rainier, 19 September 1799.

<sup>27</sup> T.N.A., ADM 106/2476, Navy Board to Rainier, 19 April 1802.

cost of her repairs [I] shall endeavour to estimate her real value to the King and draw for the same in order to distribute to the captors.<sup>28</sup>

Again, he appeared to take responsibility for deciding the value of the ship, not any local surveyors. The Board was very keen to ensure that the correct price had been paid for the ship and that no-one was making a profit. This gave Rainier the clear limits of what he could do without supporting paperwork.<sup>29</sup> *La Forte* caused Rainier more problems because Cooke, who had captured it, authorised repair to the severe damage it had incurred during its capture. Rainier told the Navy Board that the repairs were ‘utlerly (sic) without my knowledge’,<sup>30</sup> and unfortunately Cooke died of his wounds so there was no “audit trail”. Consequently the Navy Board put an imprest on Rainier and on Cooke’s first lieutenant for the total amount of the repairs, £20,059 19s. 2d.<sup>31</sup> After much indignation on the Admiral’s part the imprest was removed and all blame laid on the dead Cooke.<sup>32</sup>

A temporary solution to a shortage of ships could always be solved by borrowing one. Fortunately Rainier’s relations with his opposite number at the Cape, Curtis, were good when he requested a line of battle ship or frigate to protect the China Trade as all his own resources were tied up handling the threat from the Red Sea.<sup>33</sup> Curtis was clearly at ease with this because Rainier later wrote to him that he sent the *L’Imperieuse* and the *Braave* to Canton – both ships of the Cape squadron.<sup>34</sup>

The Bombay Marine was another source of vessels. Its frigates *Cornwallis* (44) and *Bombay* (32) were bought into the Navy in 1805 although the actual purchase was finalised by Rainier’s successor, Pellew. The *Sir Edward Hughes* (38) was bought from private Bombay merchants by Rainier in 1804 and transferred to the Royal Navy.<sup>35</sup> Rainier’s need for ships overcame his reluctance to make this purchase because their original officers were all put out of jobs as they were replaced by ‘royal’ equivalents.<sup>36</sup> Other Bombay Marine vessels were lent to the admiral from time to time as were actual trading Indiamen which were readily transformable into powerful frigates with an upgraded armament. Rainier wrote to the Admiralty that, because he was so short of ships:

I suggested to his Excellency the Governor General the expediency of arming some of the East India Company’s large ships ... as named in the margin [*Earl Howe, Princess Charlotte, Belvidere*] and are now assisting in cruising with me on Tippoo Sultan’s coast.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>28</sup> T.N.A., ADM 106/1412, Rainier to Navy Board, 9 August 1799.

<sup>29</sup> T.N.A., ADM 106/2476, Navy Board to Rainier, 5 March 1802.

<sup>30</sup> T.N.A., ADM 106/1412, Rainier to Navy Board, 24 January 1800.

<sup>31</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/173, Rainier to Admiralty, 22 February 1803.

<sup>32</sup> T.N.A., ADM 106/1412, Navy Board to Rainier, 12 December 1803.

<sup>33</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Curtis, 31 July 1799.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 October, 1799.

<sup>35</sup> Winfield, *British Warships in the Age of Sail*, pp. 122, 175, 213.

<sup>36</sup> N.M.M., RAI/4, Rainier to Shore, 13 September 1795.

<sup>37</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Admiralty 29 January 1799.

This letter also illustrated the trusting working relationship between Rainier and the Governor General.

In 1801 the Indiamen *Dover Castle* and *Asia* were armed and sent to China to cooperate with the Royal Navy.<sup>38</sup> This act shows how Wellesley was comfortable with Rainier's management of the Company's maritime resources. On a smaller scale, Duncan, President of the Bombay Council, sent five gunboats to the Red Sea in 1800, to be under Royal Navy control.<sup>39</sup> However, the direction of vessels was not always positive to Rainier. Showing that the Company still had overall control of its vessels, a letter from Duncan to Rainier asked for the return of two schooners that he had previously given to the Royal Navy.<sup>40</sup> The appearance of a very flexible arrangement is enhanced by another note from Duncan telling Rainier that he could keep the schooner *Antelope* in case he needed to send mail to China.<sup>41</sup>

Due to the far sightedness of the Company, the greatest assistance for keeping as many ships at sea as possible came from the dry dock at Bombay. This facility, to some extent, compensated for the length of time taken to send out reinforcements to the East Indies. It was of great benefit in 1799 when Rear Admiral Blankett's squadron was operating in the Red Sea. These waters were very poorly charted and Rainier wrote to the Admiralty: 'most of the ships under his [Blankett's] command I observe have been aground and suffered some damage'.<sup>42</sup> It can be imagined how much more difficult would have been Blankett's and Rainier's tasks if they had not had the use of the Bombay Dockyard. But it is not surprising that, in spite of the enormous benefits arising from the dockyard, Rainier was unhappy with the costs of repairing ships, which fact he advised the Admiralty in 1799.<sup>43</sup> Unhappiness with the cost of ship repair in India again raised its head when Rainier noted in a letter to the Admiralty that he had heard from Second Secretary to the Admiralty, Benjamin Tucker, that the Navy Board was very unhappy with the cost of repairing Captain Home Popham's ship, the *Romney*, at Calcutta, after its activities in the Red Sea in 1801.<sup>44</sup> As Rainier was not a supporter of the independently minded Popham, he was happy to stoke the fires which led to a parliamentary commission on the subject. Presumably Popham was ordered to Calcutta as it was the closest dockyard to Prince of Wales Island whence he was sent by Rainier. And a shipbuilding business had developed from the mid eighteenth century taking advantage of the good supply of Pegu teak from Burma which was lighter and more buoyant than the Malabar teak used in Bombay.<sup>45</sup> By 1781 it was building ships of 500 tons.<sup>46</sup>

The major drawback was that the Bombay dockyard did not belong to the Navy and sometimes there were competing claims on its resources. The yard was first built in 1754

<sup>38</sup> B.L., I.O.R., L/PS/5/24, Bengal Council to Secret Committee of the Court of Directors, 30 November 1801.

<sup>39</sup> B.L., I.O.R., Home Misc., H/474/2, Duncan to Rainier 16 December 1800.

<sup>40</sup> B.L., I.O.R., Home Misc., H/475/2, Duncan to Rainier, 13 March 1801.

<sup>41</sup> B.L., I.O.R., Home Misc., H/689, Duncan to Rainier, 20 October 1801.

<sup>42</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainer to Admiralty, 31 July 1799.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 9 August 1799.

<sup>44</sup> N.M.M., RAI/8, Rainier to Admiralty, 30 August 1804.

<sup>45</sup> See P.K. Crimmin (ed.), *The Supply of Timber for the Royal Navy c.1803-c.1830*, in S. Rose (ed.), *The Naval Miscellany*, vol. VII, p. 196, for a brief résumé, of the types of Indian timber available.

<sup>46</sup> Furber, *John Company at Work*, p. 188.

with the capability of taking a 74. The capacity was doubled in 1762 and trebled in 1773.<sup>47</sup> It meant that: ‘the outermost ship can warp out and another be admitted in her place every spring tide without any interruption of the work to the second and innermost ships’.<sup>48</sup> As the dockyard was owned by the Company, this meant that Rainier had sometimes to be a little more circumspect than he otherwise might have wanted. Admiral Hughes had also acknowledged the advantages that the dry docks gave him and the role of the Company in ensuring that they were available to his squadron. His understanding of the strategic benefits of the dockyard was clear:

...if the defence of the Company’s possessions in the East Indies depends in a very great degree if not entirely in time of war, on the superiority or exertions of His Majesty’s Squadron, ... then the safety of Bombay is of the utmost importance to the safety of the whole, for at no other port or place in our possession could the Ships of the Squadron be even properly refitted much less repaired.<sup>49</sup>

He continued to declaim that it would be impossible to keep his squadron at sea without it, especially with the need to repair battle damage. And, in this instance it appears that the Bombay Council understood where its self interest lay as he praised the speed with which his ships were repaired. However, although having the dockyard meant that both Hughes and Rainier did not have to deal with the Navy Board on this issue, they were merely replacing the frustrations of dealing with one bureaucracy with another.

Although Rainier often complained of its inefficiencies, his squadron was a heavy user of the yard. Indeed, support for the dockyard came from Sir Arthur Wellesley, who was very happy with the speed with which his troop transports were watered and provisioned in Bombay.<sup>50</sup> Rainier was keen to plan ahead so that the docks were empty in November, when he moved westwards to avoid the north east monsoon. That he viewed this to be a priority is shown in a letter to the Governor General asking him to keep the docks free so that his ships could be repaired as soon as possible.<sup>51</sup> He worried that his repairs were being delayed because the Bombay dockyard was being used to build new ships. But it was difficult to move incomplete vessels, which Rainier appreciated.<sup>52</sup> Unfortunately this concern was ongoing, he was still complaining to the Company the following year of delays to the docking of naval vessels.<sup>53</sup> Perhaps Rainier was hoping that, by complaining of delays, he might overturn the decision made in 1799 not to enlarge the docks as being too expensive a project.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>47</sup> R.A. Wadia, *The Bombay Dockyard and the Wadia Master Builders* (Bombay, 1983), pp. 39-43.

<sup>48</sup> W. Hamilton, *East India Gazetteer* (1815), quoted in A. Bulley, *The Bombay Country Ships*, p. 12.

<sup>49</sup> Hughes to the Council of Bombay, 27 January 1784, quoted in Wadia, *The Bombay Dockyard*, pp. 47-8.

<sup>50</sup> Bulley, *The Bombay Country Ships*, p. 21.

<sup>51</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/169, Rainier to Wellesley, 17 September 1798.

<sup>52</sup> B.L., I.O.R., Bombay Political Letters, F/4/68, 29 January 1799.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 September 1800.

<sup>54</sup> B.L. I.O.R., General Correspondence, E/4/457, Bombay Presidency to Court of Directors, 9 July 1799.

The situation must also have been difficult for the Navy Board: ‘Much of the Navy Board’s work continued to be the supervision of the dockyards’.<sup>55</sup> But it had no direct role in shipbuilding and repair in India although this was a major part of its *raison d’etre*. Consequently it also was learning how to manage remotely through a secondary organisation and trying to keep control of a process for which it was held accountable by the Admiralty. As Rainier’s squadron grew in size and suffered the ravages of active service, there were more demands on the Board to supply not only consumables, but also replacement parts for his ships. It should be remembered that in every other station ships had to be sent home for serious repair. Only in India could Bombay, with its triple dry dock, compare with the resources the Navy had in England. Therefore the Board can be excused for some of the criticism loaded on it by Rainier from not sending out all of the items needed for almost rebuilding some of his ships.<sup>56</sup>

The Company’s other far sighted move had been to persuade the Parsee shipbuilders to relocate from Surat to Bombay in 1736. Of these Lowjee Nusserwanjee became the master shipbuilder in 1764 and no English shipbuilders were thereafter employed in the yards until the retirement of his great grandson, Nowrojee Jamsetjee in 1844.<sup>57</sup> These Parsees built excellent ships, usually of teak, which did not deteriorate in the manner of oak. They built ships primarily for the Country Trade, mainly between India and China, and they were not allowed to build East Indiamen for the home trade because Company regulation said they could only be built in certain shipyards in England. Naturally there was no question of them being allowed to build ships for the Royal Navy, although they did build vessels up to size of frigates for the Bombay Marine and the Sultan of Oman.

Rainier grew to appreciate the quality of Bombay built ships and began a crusade to persuade the Admiralty and Navy Board that they should build for the Navy. In this act he was pushing at an open door as there was already support for this in the form of Secretary of State Dundas and First Lord St. Vincent. In fact Dundas saw Bombay as the proper base from which to monitor Tippoo Sultan in Mysore and had rejected advice from Governor General Cornwallis in 1787 to abolish it as a presidency.<sup>58</sup> Rainier wrote to the Admiralty praising how well the Parsee shipbuilders had repaired the *Tremendous* and *Trident* and asked if they could be paid extra salary.<sup>59</sup> He also praised their work to Governor Duncan of Bombay for their ‘indefatigable zeal, activity and perseverance’, and asked if they could be given some land as a reward.<sup>60</sup> Not forgetting to work on the Navy Board he also wrote praising the native shipbuilders and, following the first warship construction order from the Admiralty to the Bombay Yard, he told them that work on the 36 gun frigate had begun but not yet on the 74, due to a shortage of timber. He also criticised British dockyard workers by pointing out that the Bombay yard had discovered iron nails in the copper sheathing of the *Indefatigable*

<sup>55</sup> Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, p. 297.

<sup>56</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/174, Rainier to Admiralty, 10 March 1804.

<sup>57</sup> Bulley, *The Bombay Country Ships*, p. 12, and Wadia, R.A., *The Bombay Dockyard*, p. 294.

<sup>58</sup> A. Lambert, *Empire and Seapower: Shipbuilding by the East India Company at Bombay for the Royal Navy 1805-1850*, in P. Haudrere (ed.), *Les Flottes des Compagnies des Indes* (Vincennes, 1996), pp. 151-3.

<sup>59</sup> N.M.M., RAI/8, Rainier to Admiralty, 10 December 1803.

<sup>60</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/175, Rainier to Duncan, 12 February 1804.

which, in effect negated the use of the copper as resulting electrolysis would corrode the iron out of existence.<sup>61</sup> Seven months later Rainier was able to give a positive report on the progress of building the frigate and asked what should be its name.<sup>62</sup> In fact the success of the navy's building programme in Bombay has encouraged the historian of India, C.A. Bayly to write: 'In a sense the Navy represents the first true multinational manufacturing corporation', as it took timber from around the region, brought in naval supplies from Europe, and built the ships in Bombay.<sup>63</sup>

The Admiralty *Report on Ships Building at Bombay and Cochin*, covering all communication on this subject between 12 May 1802 and 18 January 1821, noted the agreement that the Company would build annually at Bombay a 74 gun third rate and a 36 gun frigate. Both ships would be built of teak, which Rainier had been encouraging as it did not rot. It was agreed that the costs would be 306,900 rupees [£38,142 10s] for the 74, and 170,700 [£21,377 10s.] for the 36.<sup>64</sup> All the: 'copper bolts, copper sheathing and other such materials' would be sent from England as soon as possible in Company ships.<sup>65</sup> However, there were delays in commencing the building because of the shortage of sufficiently large timbers and the Resident at Anjenjo was instructed to 'exert himself'.<sup>66</sup> Although Rainier had requested several times that the Admiralty raise the wages of the master shipbuilders it took a letter from Pellew before their wages were increased from 6s3d to half a guinea [10s.6d.] per diem.<sup>67</sup> The Admiralty was clearly warming to the idea of Indian-built ships because just before Rainier left India, he acknowledged his orders to buy six ships from the Company to act as frigates. He had advised Pellew to buy them in Bombay as that was the best shipbuilding centre in India.<sup>68</sup>

The ship building activity continued throughout and even after the end of the Napoleonic War with the 74's *Minden* (1810), *Cornwallis* (1814), *Wellesley* (1815), *Melville* and *Carnatic* (1817), and *Malabar* (1818). The frigates were called *Salsette* (1807), *Amphritite* (1816), *Trincomalee* (1817), and *Seringapatam* (1818). These ships were surveyed in England and, in the case of the *Minden*, found to be: 'a credit to those Gentlemen under whose instructions she has been built'.<sup>69</sup> There was a hiatus in the process in 1811 due to the difficulties of obtaining sufficient timber but this was overcome and the building recommenced. In 1810 a cost comparison was made between the three potential sources of new frigates. The *Salsette* had cost £20,667, excluding the copper and iron supplies sent from England. The cost of

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., Rainier to Navy Board, 12 December 1803.

<sup>62</sup> N.M.M., RAI/8, Rainier to Admiralty, 7 July 1804.

<sup>63</sup> Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: the British Empire and the World, 1780-1930*, p. 130.

<sup>64</sup> T.N.A., ADM 106/3123, *Report on Ships Building at Bombay and Cochin*, 12 May 1802, p. 3.

<sup>65</sup> *Report on Ships Building*, p. 1. [The first Bombay 74 launched was the *Minden* and its final cost in 1810 was £48,260, c/f the same class *Invincible*, built at Woolwich and launched in 1808, built at a cost of £65,044. But extreme care must be taken in making comparisons due to the uncertainty of what items included; for example iron fittings, standing rigging, cost of shipping items out to India, the fact that teak ships did not need copper sheathing, which was not initially realised].

<sup>66</sup> *Report on Ships Building*, p. 5.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>68</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Marsden, 9 March 1805.

<sup>69</sup> *Report on Ships Building*, p. 17.

building in a private yard in England was estimated at £17,729 and for one built in the royal yard at Chatham £16,187.<sup>70</sup> Thus it can be seen that building in Bombay was not a cheap option but it was admitted that the quality was very high and the teak would mean far less maintenance during the ship's life. It would also not deplete the precious stocks of timber in England. Rainier had been correct to push for warships to be built under contract in India, but his vision only came to fruition after he had left.

The relationship between Rainier and Indian ships and shipbuilding did not end when he returned to England. He wrote to the Navy Board praising the Parsees, saying that they built excellent ships, they did not overcharge for materials, and when repairing naval ships they did not need watching over, as was necessary in England. He also commented that they were paid very little, suggesting that they might be granted a further parcel of land in Bombay.<sup>71</sup>

#### b) Organisation

Rainier had the use of a Naval Officer in each of the three presidencies of Calcutta, Madras and Bombay. These men were not naval officers but were the Navy Board's representatives in each city. They received no pay but a commission of 5% on all their purchases.<sup>72</sup> There was an interesting three way relationship between the Navy Board, Naval Officer and Commander-in-Chief. It was important that there was a reasonable working relationship between the local Naval Officer and Admiral as the former had the authority, in the absence of a real senior naval officer, to open his mail and decide what actions to take therefrom.<sup>73</sup> This appears to be quite reasonable when one knows that Rainier also viewed the Naval Officer's role as one of intelligence gathering. He wrote to Philip Dundas, Naval Officer at Bombay: 'You will not omit to forward Intelligence from the Red Sea, or any other [item] of importance, with the utmost expedition'.<sup>74</sup>

These administrators were officially appointed by the Navy Board, although Rainier believed he had the authority to hire and fire if the service required it.<sup>75</sup> He made the local decision to appoint John Brouncker, who happened to have been his secretary, as Naval Officer in Madras in early 1800, after the incumbent, Sewell, died.<sup>76</sup> Sewell's death caused a minor panic when it was realised that he had spent on personal items the money authorised by the Admiral to be spent on naval supplies. It is noteworthy that it was Rainier who had to write to Nepean asking him to obtain the money from Sewell's estate via the Court of Directors,

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>71</sup> N.M.M., RAI/ 8, Rainier to Navy Board, 10 January 1806.

<sup>72</sup> Evidence of Matthew Louis to Court of Inquiry into Cost of Repair to HMS *Romney*, 26 July 1804.

<sup>73</sup> C.N. Parkinson, *Trade in the Eastern Seas 1803-10*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, p. 121 (University of London, 1935).

<sup>74</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Philip Dundas, 25 April 1799.

<sup>75</sup> The duties of the Naval Officer are described in C.N. Parkinson, *War in the Eastern Seas*, p. 338.

'The duty of the naval officer was to take charge of the specie sent out from England in dollars for the use of the squadron, to check all expenditure and keep accounts of all supplies purchased. As storekeeper, it was often the case, there was no money to carry on the business, he had to dispose of bills on the Navy Board, signed by the commander-in-chief. When these could not be sold at any reasonable discount, he had to borrow money from the Company's treasury'.

<sup>76</sup> Lloyds Marine List 26 May 1801 stated that Rainier had appointed John Brouncker as Naval Officer Madras.

rather than the Navy Board.<sup>77</sup> But the Board refused to accept Brouncker's appointment and appointed Chinnery to the post. He was unacceptable to Rainier because he had not obtained the documentation to support Rainier's signature for 58,000 star pagodas [approximately £23,000] of purchases for which the Navy Board duly issued an imprest against the Admiral.<sup>78</sup> In fact Rainier wrote directly to Chinnery telling him he would not accept his warrant as Naval Officer because Brouncker was doing the job well.<sup>79</sup> The compromise candidate was Hoseason who the admiral appointed on a temporary basis. Unsurprisingly, Hoseason had been the purser of Rainier's flagship, the *Suffolk*. In September 1801 Matthew Louis wrote to the Navy Board saying that he had been appointed as Naval Officer at Calcutta by Rainier, could the Board approve?<sup>80</sup> Six months later the Board wrote to Rainier that it could not accept his appointment and could he dismiss Louis immediately?<sup>81</sup> Rainier reacted by finding fault with Louis' performance:

I need no other proof of your inattention to these important Objects than the exorbitant charge made in your late disbursements for the Articles on account of His Majesty's Ships under my Command.<sup>82</sup>

Yet strangely the tone of Rainier's letter to Louis four months later was more friendly. He thanked Louis for his offer to ship home any items the admiral might want to send prior to his expected recall after the Peace of Amiens.<sup>83</sup> There must have been some nervousness in London because, in his short stay, Louis had spent a total of £80,833 5s.4d. on naval stores.<sup>84</sup> Rainier was not alone because, in 1800, Blankett's appointment of his purser, Howden, as Naval Officer at Mocha, was refused by the Board.<sup>85</sup> But Blankett did not show the kind of adherence to form filling as did Rainier, who had to write to Wellesley about his subordinate's cavalier approach to administration:

I have to make Your Excellency my acknowledgements on behalf of His Majesty's Service under my Charge, for giving directions for the due Acceptance of the Bills in question.<sup>86</sup>

Chinnery came back to haunt both the Navy Board and the Admiralty during the command of his successor, when Rainier's view of the man seemed to be upheld. Pellew wrote:

I beg [to inform you] the embarrassment which has occurred to me from the Board's recent order of January last directing W. Chinnery to be instated as Naval Officer at Madras, an appointment to which he had been long since nominated.

<sup>77</sup> B.L., I.O.R., Company General Correspondence, E/1/109, Nepean to Court of Directors, 17 February 1802.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., E/1/106, Rainier to Nepean, 9 June 1801.

<sup>79</sup> N.M.M., RAI/9, Rainier to Chinnery. 6 June 1801.

<sup>80</sup> T.N.A., ADM 106/ 2008, Louis to Navy Board, 14 September 1801.

<sup>81</sup> T.N.A., ADM 106/ 2476, Navy Board to Rainier, 19 April 1802.

<sup>82</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/172, Rainier to Louis, 8 June 1802.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., Rainier to Louis, 23 October 1803.

<sup>84</sup> T.N.A., ADM 106/2476, Navy Board to Rainier, 19 February 1802.

<sup>85</sup> T.N.A., ADM 106/2475, Navy Board to Blankett, 13 August 1800.

<sup>86</sup> B.L. Add. Mss. 13759, Rainier to Wellesley, 20 December 1799.



Your Lordship will observe my public letter that I have taken upon me to suspend its effects from consideration of public Security, having reason to believe that his Circumstances [were] not fully known when that order was enforced. ... These Objections were materially strengthened by the present Situation of his Affairs, which are in a State of absolute Bankruptcy ... which have exposed him to every general Obloquy at Madras.<sup>87</sup>

It seems that matters worsened because, the following year, Pellew wrote again that Chinnery was 'driven from Society for immoral offences'.<sup>88</sup>

Often the Admiral appointed his secretary to the post on the assumption that it would be confirmed by the Navy Board, as was the case with Thomas Hoseason in 1801 to the Madras vacancy. In a letter the admiral gave him his warrant, told him that his compensation would now consist of salary and expenses and noted that he would receive: '3d. in the pound on the amount of all your disbursements whether in cash, stores or otherwise'.<sup>89</sup>

Rainier was quite willing to criticise these administrators, whether or not he had appointed them. 'The Naval Officers, particularly the one in Madras, have not been brought up in habits of being conversant in the business required of them'.<sup>90</sup> He continued to tell the Board that the Naval Storekeeper at Woolwich was more skilled at estimating what stores he would need than the Naval Officers in India. Clearly Rainier had been put under pressure for spending too much money – an accusation which did not go down well. He told the Board that it was not sending him enough sails and he therefore had to buy them locally. So the Board should stop complaining about his expenditure. Seven years after his arrival on station, Rainier was now sufficiently confident in his authority that he had no qualms about challenging the Board.

Naval Officers were responsible for ordering the naval supplies required by the squadron, storing them, usually in locations decided by Rainier, and obtaining the money which was required to pay all the bills incurred by the Navy. The supplies were sourced from England via the Navy Board and then shipped out in Company ships, or they were bought on the local market, which was usually more expensive, especially if there were competition with the Company's own vessels. In Bombay, the items directly used for repairing warships came under the control of the Company's Dockyard Storekeeper. That the Naval Officer was also responsible for transporting the stores is illustrated in a letter from Rainier to Captain Osborne, then the "real" Senior Naval Officer at Bombay. In it he told Osborne that all stores must be sent under the same conveyance so he would 'write to the Naval Officer to provide Freight accordingly'. This was at a time when Rainier was assisting Blankett in the Red Sea with all the supplies he might need. Rainier continued to take responsibility for supplying naval forces in the Red Sea through 1801 as illustrated by a letter from the Bombay Council to Popham. This stated that the transports *Phoenix* and *Commerce* were being sent with

<sup>87</sup> Durham University, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Grey Papers, Pellew to Grey, 30 September 1806.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., Pellew to Grey, 12 July 1807.

<sup>89</sup> T.N.A., ADM 106/2008, Rainier to Hoseason, 10 June 1801.

<sup>90</sup> T.N.A., ADM 106/1412, Rainier to Navy Board, 24 January 1800.

victuals and stores by Rainier from Madras.<sup>91</sup> Further evidence of Rainier's organisation of naval supplies for the Red Sea can be seen in his arrangement for the transport *Eliza*, sent to manage the distribution of stores to naval vessels in the area. Rainier's task was not helped by the fact that *La Forte*, carrying supplies for Blankett, struck a rock and sank in Jeddah harbour, a total loss.<sup>92</sup> However, the strain of managing a process from such a distance was telling. Blankett wrote to Rainier telling of his dependence on the Arabs of Mocha and Jeddah for local supplies and that it was easier to deal with the former.<sup>93</sup> And to the Bombay Council he wrote:

The want of provisions has been an invincible Check to all the operations I could have proposed to myself, and to be obliged now to seek them at Mocha, is a Circumstance of a most unpleasant nature.<sup>94</sup>

The added level of complexity for Rainier came from the fact that he had to rely on officials of the Company to provide most of the administration and storage of supplies for his squadron. Apart from complaining, he was powerless. In 1795 he told the Navy Board that the Company Marine Storekeeper was incompetent and it would be beneficial to appoint a full time navy storekeeper.<sup>95</sup> His suggestion was not taken up.

The absence of an administrative staff continued to be an irritant. In 1804 Hoseason, the Naval Officer at Madras worried that the orders he received were not always easy to meet:

... some Orders as are given to Officers on other Foreign or Distant Stations who have a regular Establishment of other Officers to consult with and to assist him in the execution of these arduous duties [are more difficult to carry out in India].<sup>96</sup>

He emphasised that he did not have the knowledgeable staff to keep detailed control of what ships used and they came and went, seemingly out of control. He reminded the Board that repairs carried out at Madras had to be completed in an open road as there was no dock at all.

### c) Naval Stores.

The majority of letters between the Boards of the Admiralty and Rainier were on this subject. They included such items as masts, spars, sails, cordage, copper, iron nails, and barrels. Because of the tropical weather and the distance from the source of supply Rainier appears at times almost paranoid about the subject. He could probably remember the serious impact their absence had on Hughes which had constrained the opportunities his predecessor had for attacking Suffren. He did not want lack of supplies to be a deciding factor in his own deployment of ships.

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<sup>91</sup> Exeter University, Bombay Diary 108/1801, Bombay Council to Popham, 27 May 1801.

<sup>92</sup> Exeter University, Bombay Diary 107/1801, Blankett to Rainier, 20 February 1801.

<sup>93</sup> B.L., I.O.R., Add. 13755, Blankett to Rainier, 8 October 1800.

<sup>94</sup> Exeter University, Bombay Diary 110/1801, Blankett to Bombay Council, 5 July 1801.

<sup>95</sup> N.M.M., RAI/4, Rainier to Navy Board, 26 February 1795.

<sup>96</sup> T.N.A., ADM 106/2008, Hoseason to Navy Board, 20 March 1804.

As a captain, Rainier was required to account for all naval stores consumed by his ship before he could be paid, but now he had to control many vessels, consuming and paying for stores across his entire station. Rainier had held no posts in the navy at fleet level, or at the Admiralty, which might have given him a deep insight into the demands of naval administration he now had to meet. But, in some ways, he had experience of ship administration because he had been a merchant ship's master for several years. In this role he had to husband the ship's resources or there would be no profit, and he had to pay directly for what stores he needed – there were no navy bills on which to rely in the merchant service.<sup>97</sup> This history gave him an understanding of, and ease with, the attention to detail needed in his new post.

In "Primary Concerns" above, it was noted how Rainier was not informed when Indiamen were carrying naval stores. Four years later this was still the case. He also noted that Admiral Pringle was taking out those stores which he wanted at the Cape, without concern for the needs of the East Indies Station. But it was somewhat harsh of him to hold the Board to task for sending a fifth of the stores to Bombay and the remainder to Madras. This was not what he wanted, but how was the Board to know?<sup>98</sup> Frustrations with the Navy Board continued. He wrote in 1800 that stores which had been sent to him in Country Ships had not arrived and he feared they had been taken by privateers. He explained that stores should not be sent in such ships unless as part of a convoy because they had so few European sailors to defend them. [A docket to this letter advises that there was no space on any Indiamen and that was why the stores were put into Country Ships]. An early letter from the Admiralty to the Company had requested that naval stores should not be sent to India in vessels sailing individually but should only go in protected convoys, indicating that this was an ongoing problem.<sup>99</sup> Due to the absence of the stores the Naval Officer had had to purchase poor quality and expensive replacements locally. But Rainier had managed to persuade some Indiamen commanders to sell him spars and masts. He also thought India could supply good quality hemp to England. Rainier continued to push Malabar hemp for rope making, even into 1804. But now he was being exploited by the Company which was selling him spars at enormous cost. And the cost of all supplies was greater to the east of India as that was where most of the action now took place.<sup>100</sup> Ever convinced of the benefits of Trincomalee, he also recommended building go-downs [store houses] at that harbour so that repairs to his ships could continue during the south west monsoon, thereby giving the Navy all year round repair facilities.<sup>101</sup> Further evidence of Rainier's drive for economy is found in his letter to the Navy Board explaining that he had found a local substitute for top-mast timber which was nearly as light as fir.<sup>102</sup> That the Navy Board was also enthusiastic about experimentation is shown

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<sup>97</sup> Navy Bills were promises to pay the face amount, with interest, at a later date on presentation in London. They were sold on the local Indian financial markets at varying discounts depending on the perceived creditworthiness of the British government and the availability of specie locally.

<sup>98</sup> T.N.A., ADM 106/1412, Rainier to Navy Board, 23 February 1798.

<sup>99</sup> T.N.A., ADM 2/611, Admiralty to East India House, 25 September 1795.

<sup>100</sup> T.N.A., ADM 106/1412, Rainier to Navy Board, 20 October 1804.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 1 October 1800.

<sup>102</sup> T.N.A., ADM 106/ 1412, Rainier to Navy Board, 24 January 1800.

when it advised Rainier that it had sent out a new kind of cable for use on his ships and it wanted to know how well they worked.<sup>103</sup>

His continuing crusade on behalf of forms was not a short lived issue: 'We are so short of Stationery I fear it will not be in my power to furnish you with a complete set of Duplicates'.<sup>104</sup> More reference to forms comes in a letter to Captain Rowe of the *Trincomalee* (16). He told the newly promoted Rowe how to purchase goods for his ship, reminding him that he must provide vouchers in triplicate.<sup>105</sup> But Rowe was slow to understand the importance of due process. Rainier wrote to the Navy Board that Rowe had not sent vouchers for all that he had bought 'tho' strictly enjoined to do so by my Orders'. He was reprimanded.<sup>106</sup> It is clear that, from their frequent mention, the shortage of forms was of grave concern to Rainier. In 1795 he needed more removal and discharge tickets: 'printing them is not very practicable here and will be very expensive'.<sup>107</sup> However, he gave in to temptation and ordered some discharge forms to be printed, informing the Sick & Hurt Board of the fact.<sup>108</sup> And, in 1798 he was still reminding their Lordships: 'I must beg leave to repeat the great inconvenience experienced by the Captains of His Majesty's Ships on this Station for want of Muster Paper and printed forms of every kind'.<sup>109</sup>

These last two points illustrate two particular aspects of Rainier's character; with his well developed and necessary skills as an administrator, which he seemed to enjoy, he realised that the logistics issues were going to be a vital part of his task in keeping his squadron at sea, and that this fact was not fully understood in London. And perhaps not so necessary was the extent of the minutiae of detail in which he wallowed.

To illustrate that he did not fear to complain directly to the Navy Board he raised the issue of the lack of naval stores.<sup>110</sup> A whole year later he was writing a six page letter to the Board listing all his problems with naval stores, highlighting the fact that some storeships were delivering goods without bills of lading – something that would have been anathema to an ex merchant navy master. He also had to explain to them that one Indian coin, the pagoda, was worth 7s.6d in order that the London based clerks could interpret local invoices.<sup>111</sup>

A year after his arrival, Rainier wrote to the Company's Marine Storekeeper in Bombay:

In your Account of the remains of the Stores made out in the month of April there is an omission of many articles which afterwards were shipped in the *Ewer*, and you put me to the expense of making a Jibb (sic) for the *Suffolk* when you had two

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<sup>103</sup> T.N.A., ADM 106/2477, Navy Board to Rainier, 28 April 1804.

<sup>104</sup> N.M.M., RAI/5, Rainier to Elphinstone, 6 June 1796.

<sup>105</sup> N.M.M., RAI/6, Rainier to Rowe, 21 May 1799.

<sup>106</sup> T.N.A., ADM 106/1412, Rainier to Navy Board, 24 January 1800.

<sup>107</sup> T.N.A., ADM 106/1411, Rainier to Navy Board, 14 August 1795.

<sup>108</sup> N.M.M., RAI/4, Rainier to Sick & Hurt Board, 19 April 1795.

<sup>109</sup> T.N.A., ADM 106/1412, Rainier to Navy Board, 23 February 1798.

<sup>110</sup> N.M.M., RAI/4, Rainier to Navy Board, 12 October 1794.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 10 October 1795.

in store ... [I must] report ... the irregularities that I have so much occasion to complain of respecting the administration of His Majesty's Stores in Bombay.<sup>112</sup>

Having a local Navy Board presence would also solve Rainier's belief that it did not understand his issues:

Your Board can but have noticed how very widely the Service in this Country differs from that in almost every other Quarter of the Globe and therefore several of your regulations in the hands of Naval Officers at Madras and Bombay must at times be inapplicable.<sup>113</sup>

Clearly he was setting out his stall to tell all relevant bodies that there were insufficient resources in India and he would have to spend more money to keep his squadron operable. It is possible that the Navy Board officials did not place much operational emphasis on supplying the East Indies station as they knew that supplies could be obtained locally although they were ignorant of local prices. Rainier pointed out that he was short of anchors, bower cables and large spars for masts and that, although they were readily available locally, they were very expensive and purchasing in India used up much scarce silver. It would therefore be much better if they could be sent out from England in East Indiamen.<sup>114</sup> Criticism of Rainier by the Board continued to the last days of his command to which he replied that, if the Board sent him insufficient supplies he had no alternative but to buy locally at higher prices.<sup>115</sup> He implied, but did not say so, that this process would keep all the financial transactions in England and thus avoid not only the use of scarce currency, but also take much administrative burden from him. This letter also noted that ships from the Cape station were now being repaired in the Bombay dockyard in addition to his own ships and that this was at high cost. Another example of the lack of control when Rainier had to buy locally is illustrated when he told the Navy Board that the Company had started selling copper on the open market rather than directly to the Navy, thus forcing up the price he had to pay.<sup>116</sup>

Rainier tried wherever possible to save money and in 1804 he told Hoseason to buy scarce naval stores although they were not immediately required, because their cost was increasing rapidly.<sup>117</sup> The benefits far outweighed the cost and, as late as 1804, Rainier was able to tell the new Secretary to the Admiralty, Marsden, that all his squadron's ships had been repaired at Bombay, apart from those newly out from England which did not need repair.<sup>118</sup> It is clear that the admiral kept a keen eye on prices as when he told Popham that he had heard available naval supplies in Bombay and Madras were scarce but were cheap in Calcutta. He should

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<sup>112</sup> N.M.M., RAI/4, Rainier to Alexander Adamson, 29 September 1795.

<sup>113</sup> T.N.A., ADM 106/1412, Rainier to Navy Board, 20 October 1804.

<sup>114</sup> N.M.M., RAI/6, Rainier to Navy Board, 9 May 1799.

<sup>115</sup> T.N.A., ADM 106/1412, Rainier to Navy Board, 20 October 1804.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 24 January 1800.

<sup>117</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/175, Rainier to Hoseason, 19 February 1804.

<sup>118</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Marsden, 7 July 1804. It is interesting that in other communication Rainier argued that ships just arrived from England required heavy maintenance after a long voyage.

therefore get his stores in Calcutta.<sup>119</sup> Perhaps to keep Popham busy, Rainier then wrote the following year telling him to get his repairs done in Bombay as Calcutta was too expensive.<sup>120</sup>

That there was divergence of understanding between the admiral and the Navy Board from the start is illustrated by another letter to Spencer in March 1795 when Rainier complained that insufficient stores were still being sent from England even though the Company had publicly stated that the Navy Board was sending 300 tons of naval stores to India.<sup>121</sup> Rainier fully appreciated that he needed to provide detailed evidence of all he was doing regarding naval stores and in August he wrote to the Navy Board again that he was sending home John Brouncker, currently the purser of the *Diomedea*, with all the details of the losses in stores. Brouncker had been Rainier's purser in the *Astraea* in the 1780s and he was a very good officer.<sup>122</sup> Ever mindful that the Navy might forget to pay its officers Rainier requested that Brouncker be paid for his efforts. An example of the far sightedness of Rainier is illustrated by his comment in the same letter that Trincomalee was an excellent location to keep naval stores.<sup>123</sup> His other concern was that, even if the stores were of high quality, they were kept in inadequate conditions. The storehouses were very badly built and therefore there was a need to construct more substantial, and therefore expensive, go-downs.<sup>124</sup> But stores sent to Trincomalee were also damaged by rain, having been carelessly left out after unloading instead of being placed under cover.<sup>125</sup> Rainier's lobbying was effective because, the next year he wrote to Halliday, the Naval Officer in Bombay, to re-tender for smaller storehouses at Trincomalee as the best quote he had of R.15,600 for two large go-downs, was too high.<sup>126</sup>

Rainier did not let up his lobbying during Elphinstone's brief period of command. His keenness for communication also ensured that the former knew of the stores' deficiencies. And concerning his frustration with the subcontracting of administration to the Company, he wrote to Adamson, the Company's Marine Storekeeper at Bombay:

As Rear Admiral the Hon. Sir George Elphinstone is soon expected I shall make no new arrangements but report to him the irregularities that I have had so much occasion to complain of respecting the administration of the King's Stores at Bombay.<sup>127</sup>

Clearly his words had an impact on his short lived superior who warned the new Commander-in-Chief at the Cape, Rear Admiral Pringle, that: 'Great Inconvenience has been

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<sup>119</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 13757, Rainier to Popham, 9 August 1801.

<sup>120</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 13757, Rainier to Popham, 14 July 1802.

<sup>121</sup> N.M.M., RAI/4, Rainier to Spencer, 20 March 1795.

<sup>122</sup> See Page 11, Brouncker had also been Rainier's Secretary in India.

<sup>123</sup> N.M.M., RAI/4, Rainier to Navy Board, 14 August 1795.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., Rainier to Spencer, 12 October 1794.

<sup>125</sup> T.N.A., ADM 106/1412, Rainier to Navy Board, 15 March 1803.

<sup>126</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/175, Rainier to Halliday, 8 February 1804.

<sup>127</sup> N.M.M., RAI/4, Rainier to Adamson, 29 September 1795.

experienced in the Navy Victualling and the Ships have at all times been detained from want of Provisions'.<sup>128</sup>

Yet with all this activity to keep his squadron in good repair he had the sense to realise how his complaints and criticisms might be viewed in London. On the 11 May after he had arrived Rainier wrote to Sir Andrew Hamond, the Comptroller of the Navy, ensuring that Sir Andrew understood why he was spending so much money on stores. He explained the difficulty of keeping naval stores in the three major bases of Calcutta, Madras and Bombay and of the need to have better go-downs in which to maintain the quality of the newly purchased stores. He realised that he might appear somewhat pedantic:

I am afraid, my dear Sir Andrew, my letter will rather appear long and tiresome, my intent is to remove any impressions in your mind of any extravagancy in my conduct in the administration of Stores, wherein you may be assured no shadow of emolument has accrued to me or anyone I have employed.<sup>129</sup>

Clearly Rainier understood the tenet of “no surprises” for his superiors. He was also aware that his criticisms of the state of naval stores in India could be seen as a criticism of Navy Board officials in London and they might be stirred into questioning his motives behind his back. Therefore a letter to the Comptroller to “put him in the picture” was a very wise move.

Another example of Rainier’s strategic thinking can be seen in his letter to the Admiralty noting the effect of the change of activity more to the eastwards of India. He noted that Malacca was more expensive than he expected and it would be helpful if Indiamen bound for China could stop off with supplies there.<sup>130</sup>

To be fair to the Navy Board, it was also in as difficult position over stores as it was over ship building. It clearly had little or no knowledge of the local Indian market, both for price and availability, and it suffered from the perennial problem of time delay when communicating with the ultimate users of its stores. This it pointed out in a letter to Sewell, the Naval Officer in Madras, when it told him that the Board would try and act on his complaints of damaged goods but they found it difficult as Sewell has not told them what was the problem – could he do so in future?<sup>131</sup> Even before stores were damaged or used, the Board needed to know what stores to send out. That there was no automatic process to tell them is shown by the letter from the Navy Board to Mr. Secretary Nepean asking him for how many men and for how long they should send out supplies to the East Indies.<sup>132</sup> The Board’s frustration also comes through in another letter to Nepean. They had planned to send stores to Trincomalee but Elphinstone told them not to as there were no storehouses there, and it was pointless to send them to Bombay as ‘the King’s Ships seldom rendezvous there’. [Bombay being the winter

<sup>128</sup> N.M.M., KEI/L/136, Elphinstone to Pringle, 5 October 1796.

<sup>129</sup> N.M.M., RAI/4. Rainier to Sir Andrew Hammond, 11 May 1795.

<sup>130</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/169, Rainier to Admiralty, 27 September 1798.

<sup>131</sup> T.N.A., ADM 106/2475, Navy Board to Sewell, 18 April 1799.

<sup>132</sup> T.N.A., ADM 101.41, Navy Board to Nepean, 6 January 1796.

rest and repair centre rather than a centre of naval activity]. He had suggested Madras and the Board wanted to know what was the opinion of the Admiralty.<sup>133</sup> This subject continued to fester as a letter from the Navy Board four years later demonstrates. It told Rainier the Naval Officer at Madras had been told not to reject damaged goods but accept them and then send the details to the Navy Board as soon as possible.<sup>134</sup> A year later it wrote:

We are perfectly aware of the uncertainty which prevails with regard to the demands which may be made on you for Stores for which the proper allowance will be made, but we must look to you to demand such as are likely to be wanted.

The Board then suggested Rainier might give his views.<sup>135</sup>

So it can be seen that the Board was not the obdurate body it was sometimes made out to be.

The result of this difficulty in obtaining the correct naval stores created a large demand for “outsourcing”, as it would be called today, from the Company. It must have been a difficult balance for Rainier between complaining in order to improve matters, and complaining so much that he lost all cooperation from the Company’s officers. And on remote stations, where there was not the critical mass to have any Royal Naval organisation, his squadron was completely reliant on the officers of the Company. It was a major reason for his request for a Navy Board organisation to be established in India in order to take from him the heavy administrative burden.

## **2. Ensuring the Squadron’s Armaments.**

The Ordnance Board, which provided guns and ammunition for the army and navy, was an independent organisation with its own representative in the Cabinet. It was not controlled by the Admiralty in any way. But in the East Indies, again differing from other stations, all the Navy’s guns and ammunition came from Company stores. Therefore Rainier had virtually nothing to do with the Ordnance Board officials in England. The only exception was prior to departure from England when guns and powder were prepared for overseas. For example, Rainier’s flagship had to have all its gun carriages replaced before it could leave for India as they were worn out.<sup>136</sup>

There were over 212,000 royal and Company troops, plus artillery, with many forts to defend, in addition to the Bombay Marine. Naturally they required large amounts of powder. So it had already built up its own large organisation which provided weapons and ammunition for its own needs. From this source came almost all Rainier’s requirements. In fact, any purchasing independence his captains thought they might have was closed by the order received from the Admiralty in 1796 referring to an Ordnance Board order telling all HM

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<sup>133</sup> T.N.A., ADM 110/42, Navy Board to Nepean, 16 January 1797.

<sup>134</sup> T.N.A., ADM 106/2476, Navy Board to Rainier, 2 April 1803.

<sup>135</sup> T.N.A., ADM 106/2475, Navy Board to Sewell, 11 August 1800.

<sup>136</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/2396, Rainier to Admiralty, 19 November 1793.



vessels in the East Indies not to buy powder privately but only to take it from the Company magazines.<sup>137</sup> And any unserviceable ordnance stores should only be returned to the 'Commissary of Military Stores' of the Company at Madras, Bombay or Calcutta.<sup>138</sup> Central billing from India House would keep the cost in Britain, thus avoiding the expenditure of rare specie locally.

The relationship between the Company and Navy in India had been settled by the decision of the Ordnance Board not to appoint an Ordnance Storekeeper in India as it had planned. This led Rainier to:

presume that your Hon'ble Court had consented that the Military Boards at the different Presidencies should transact the whole business of the Department in this Country [India] so far as regards his Majesty's Ships both with respect to supplies and Returns.

The letter went on to say that he expected that the Gunners of his ships would be given receipts for powder they returned to the Company and that it would then be sold 'to the highest bidder'. The Military Board stated that it had told Rainier it would only supply 'Ordnance Stores for the use of His Majesty's Ships' but would not accept 'Old unserviceable Stores in part payment of the supplies'. No longer would naval officers be allowed just to deposit bulky amounts of old gunpowder at the Company's arsenals as they caused 'great inconvenience'. Rainier accepted that any stores left by his ships should be sold so as not to cause any trouble to the Board.<sup>139</sup> The Company was keen to ensure that it was paid for the gunpowder:

In consequence of a request from the Master General ... we direct that orders be given to our Storekeeper to make such supplies of Ordnance Stores as may from time to time be required by the Admiral ... and you must be careful to furnish us with the necessary Vouchers in order that the amount of the value ... be accounted for to the Company by the Board of Ordnance.<sup>140</sup>

Almost from the beginning of Rainier's command he had problems with the quality of his powder and he had to ask the Governor General if he could replace that which was damaged by being incorrectly stored.<sup>141</sup> Two years later he wrote to Hobart, asking if he could borrow some good powder from the Company whilst his own was being restored. He was nervous of being without powder if the French were suddenly to appear.<sup>142</sup> It was clearly not common for the ships to require more powder because in 1804 Rainier had to explain this fact to

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<sup>137</sup> T.N.A., ADM 2/131, Admiralty to Rainier, 28 October 1796.

<sup>138</sup> Blair Adam Papers, Box D, Misc. Papers, Rainier's General Orders, 29 January 1801.

<sup>139</sup> Kohli, *Fort William-India House Correspondence (Military Series)*, XXI, Military Department to India House, Letter from Governor General in Council to Court of Directors, 29 August 1799, p. 390.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, Court of Directors to Governor General (Delhi, 1969), Court of Directors to Governor General, 20 January 1797, pp. 2-3.

<sup>141</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/168, Rainier to Shore, 14 February 1795.

<sup>142</sup> N.M.M., RAI/5, Rainier to Hobart, 21 February 1797.

Hoseason, the Naval Officer at Madras, who was authorised to make purchases from the Company.<sup>143</sup> Naturally Rainier was one of those allowed to do so because as late as September 1804 he asked the Governor of Madras, Lord Bentinck, if he could have more powder.<sup>144</sup>

Although the Navy was billed back in England for the ordnance it obtained in the East Indies, this did not stop Rainier from trying to avoid having to pay. He told the President of Madras that, at home, new ships were paid for by the Navy and the guns supplied by the Ordnance Board. So could he have Company guns from the Madras Ordnance store?<sup>145</sup> Using the same argument, he wrote to Clive, the Governor of Madras, to explain that normally the Board of Ordnance paid for all the ordnance stores, as they were in India did he think it would be possible for the Company Military Board to pay for these stores for the new ship?<sup>146</sup>

Occasionally guns were taken out of ships to enable them to carry large numbers of troops and equipment as travelling by sea was much easier than by land. These *en flute* vessels stored their guns with the Company until they were required again. The same process occurred during the Peace of Amiens for those few ships remaining on station.

It is worth noting that over 90% of Britain's saltpetre came from India and it was of exceptionally high quality. Efforts were naturally made to stop it falling into the wrong hands. Rainier wanted to know who was trading in it from the Dutch colonies and what was its destination.<sup>147</sup> Yet, two years later, the Company allowed 500 tons of it to be shipped to the US.<sup>148</sup>

Thus we can again see that Rainier was almost entirely reliant on the Company for ensuring that his squadron's firepower was always effective. Its organisational capabilities were so recognised by the Ordnance Board itself that it did not even attempt to replicate its own structure in India. It would appear that Rainier was content with this arrangement.

### **3. Victualling the Squadron.**

Due to the distance from England, most victuals were sourced locally, so Rainier had more dealings with the local victualling agents of the Navy and Company than with the Victualling Board. Apart from initial food and drink supplied to ships in England before departure, most replacements came through the agency of the Hon. Basil Cochrane, under a contract obtained by his brother John, in negotiation with Rainier's predecessor, Cornwallis. Rainier's relationship with Basil, a very difficult character, was crucial to the smooth supply of victuals. Cochrane was not an easy man with whom to work and it is to Rainier's great credit

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<sup>143</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/175, Rainier to Hoseason, 26 March 1804.

<sup>144</sup> N.M.M., RAI/10, Rainier to Bentinck, 7 September 1804.

<sup>145</sup> N.M.M., RAI/4, Rainier to Hobart, 13 September 1795.

<sup>146</sup> N.M.M., RAI/9, Rainier to Clive, 17 June 1801.

<sup>147</sup> N.M.M., RAI/4, Rainier to Captain Smith [*Diomedé*], 26 February 1795.

<sup>148</sup> B.L., I.O.R., L/PS/2/1, Secret Minutes of the Commissioners for the Affairs of India, 23 August 1797.

that they developed a close working relationship. He had warehouses in the three presidencies and either bought or hired ships to transport supplies to wherever the Navy needed them. It meant that Rainier had little direct contact with the Victualling Board over day to day victualling issues. In fact, in March 1804 he was able to tell Cochrane that he had not heard from it for fourteen months.<sup>149</sup> Nevertheless, having encountered severe victual shortages under Hughes, which had limited not only his possible course of action, but also the time he could spend at sea, Rainier knew that an efficient victualling system was vital.

Those of Rainier's concerns over victualling sent from England, primarily beef, were covered in his communications with the Navy Board, which paid for the food and drink and which was also responsible for ensuring that the supplies reached the consumers. But there is a great deal of correspondence indicating how much Rainier was concerned with the well being of his crews. In 1796 he halved the salt beef allowance 'as injurious to the health of seamen' and replaced it with extra flour and raisins.<sup>150</sup> In 1799 he wrote to some of his ships to check the quality of flour and beef.<sup>151</sup> And this enthusiasm still continued after he had retired when he wrote to the Victualling Board supporting the experiments with new methods of salting beef.<sup>152</sup>

He realized that only continued diligence would enable him to keep his squadron at maximum strength. As he explained to Nepean:

The constant employment of His Majesty's Ships at Sea, or in open Roads on this Station, the nature of the Climate, the general poverty of the vegetables and the scarcity of Fruits [on] this Coast, and particularly this Port [Madras] affords, that victualled upon Fresh Beef frequently and upon every opportunity, exposes their Crews to scorbutic and other disorders disabling them from service in this Country, which now wears a serious aspect.<sup>153</sup>

Shortages of fresh food caused problems during the entire period of Rainier's command. In 1795 he wrote to Governor General Shore telling him that scurvy was an issue.<sup>154</sup> Although he had experience of the benefits of lemon juice he still had an incomplete understanding of the illness; his letter to the Sick and Hurt Board four months later noted that scurvy had returned even though they had fresh beef. He noted that fresh fruit and vegetables were hard to find.<sup>155</sup> And the search for fresh food spread wider the following year when he captured the Spice Islands. Showing originality, he sent some of the captured spices to Canton to trade

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<sup>149</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/175, Rainier to Basil Cochrane, 7 March 1804.

<sup>150</sup> The Hon. B. Cochrane, *An Exposé of the Conduct of the Victualling Board* (London, 1824), p. 102.

<sup>151</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/170, Rainier to Masters of H.M. Ships, *Suffolk, Victorious, La Forte*, 4 and 15 December 1799.

<sup>152</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Victualling Board, 11 November 1805.

<sup>153</sup> N.M.M., RAI/5, Rainier to Nepean, 11 October 1795.

<sup>154</sup> N.M.M., RAI/4, Rainier to Shore, 15 June 1795.

<sup>155</sup> N.M.M., RAI/4, Rainier to Sick & Hurt Board, 10 October 1795.

for victuals,<sup>156</sup> writing the same day to the Governor of Manila requesting stores from the Philippines.<sup>157</sup> In 1799 Rainier ordered the *Victorious* to remain off Goa to obtain fresh food as its crew were so badly affected by scurvy.<sup>158</sup> His continued ability to plan ahead to ensure that lack of victuals would not hinder his dispositions is illustrated by a letter to Wellesley in which he told the Governor General that he had been ordered to send warships to Canton and must therefore go to Madras to arrange for additional stores in order that they could remain at sea for a longer period of time.<sup>159</sup> He also expected his captains to take as much care of the victuals for their crews as he did. Captain Surridge of the *Trident* received a letter from Rainier demanding an answer, in writing, as to why the *Trident* had run out of tea.<sup>160</sup>

The provision of water appears not to have been an issue apart from during the campaign in the Red Sea. The main issues were the quality of the casks in which the water was carried, its availability and cost. He noted the quality problem and shortage of casks to Kemp, the agent to Cochrane, also telling him to give cash to John Sprat Rainier so he could buy water and victuals in the Red Sea.<sup>161</sup> Knowing water was a serious problem he also told Osborn that he would have all the casks belonging to the King, but held by the Company's agent, coopered and sent onto Blankett.<sup>162</sup> Three months earlier he had written to Captain Losack of the *Jupiter* (50) at the Cape of Good Hope. He told Losack to obtain better casks as the last ones he had sent from Madagascar had been too leaky.<sup>163</sup> This illustrates how far Rainier had to go to obtain his water.

#### The Role of Basil Cochrane.

The focal relationship on which the adequate supply of provisions to the squadron depended, was that between Rainier and Cochrane. The latter had previously been the Military Paymaster of Fort St. George but had to relinquish this post when the Madras Government decided that there was a potential conflict of interest for one person to be both a contractor and a government official. Cochrane chose to maintain his ties with the Navy, and he appears to have maintained this policy because, as he wrote to Lord Clive, the President of the Madras Council, he had no other contracts but his naval one and that there was no complaint about his attention to the navy contract on record.<sup>164</sup> The Cochrane family, under the title of the earls of Dundonald, was not one of Scotland's wealthiest, and its children were always searching for ways to improve their fortunes. John, and later Basil, clearly hoped that their victualling contract would make theirs.

Whilst later Rainier came to rely much on Cochrane, initially this was not the case. Such was their poor relationship that Rainier was himself buying beef in every port where Cochrane's

<sup>156</sup> N.M.M., RAI/5, Rainier to Henry Brown, President of Select Committee of the E.I.C. in Canton, 5 May 1796.

<sup>157</sup> N.M.M., RAI/5, Rainier to Governor of Manila, 5 May 1796.

<sup>158</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Admiralty, 29 January 1799.

<sup>159</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 13769, Rainier to Wellesley, 20 December 1801.

<sup>160</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/175, Rainier to Surridge, 4 June 1804.

<sup>161</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Kemp, 12 November 1798.

<sup>162</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Osborn, 5 October 1799.

<sup>163</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Losack, 14 July 1799.

<sup>164</sup> B.L., I.O.R., Company General Correspondence, E/1/108, Basil Cochrane to Lord Clive, 28 March 1800.

contract did not apply as he thought he could obtain it more cheaply.<sup>165</sup> He admonished Cochrane at the attack on Trincomalee:

I am farther to add that I am much dissatisfied with the Bread aboard the *Suffolk* it being very ill baked and flinty nor can I conceive otherwise than that there is some improper mixture in the preparing [of] it.<sup>166</sup>

Two months later, having evidently been researching the subject, he wrote to the Victualling Board: ‘I have offered the Hon. Basil Cochrane of two English Biscuit Bakers, that article is now so well made as to give general satisfaction’.<sup>167</sup> Indeed, he had already written to Captain Newcombe of the *Orpheus* asking him what was the price of beef and was it better to buy it locally or in Qatar?<sup>168</sup> It indicates the length to which Rainier would go for the lowest price as, at this time, the *Orpheus* was cruising off the south east coast of India. Both these examples illustrate the early issues and the level of detail to which Rainier went in ensuring the best supplies for his crews.

Rainier’s concerns continued and he wrote to Nepean that he had discovered: ‘a very extraordinary and corrupt’ agreement between Cochrane and Arnott, who had been the purser of the *Suffolk*. This stated that the profits of the sale of supplies to naval ships would be shared between the two men.<sup>169</sup>

He immediately dismissed Arnott, who was the Agent Victualler, but only threatened Cochrane with losing his contract. If Rainier was such a guardian of propriety one needs to ask why did he not dismiss Cochrane. It can be argued that Arnott was easily replaceable if Rainier wanted to do so, however Cochrane was not – as the later contract re-tendering showed. Rainier was still relatively new to the station. He knew the importance of good logistics and how difficult they were to provide. With all the other aspects of his job, he could not afford the time to build a new supply organisation and, if he could ensure Cochrane’s future honesty by threatening him, it was surely in the best interests of the station for Rainier to concentrate on the naval elements of his role. He also understood that it was not in the interests of the navy to reduce its suppliers to penury. Perhaps he knew certain items could be bought more cheaply somewhere on the station but, with such a small administrative organisation, he had more important tasks to which he should attend.

A key aspect of the victualling structure was the role of the Agent Victualler. This person was responsible for organising the victualling of the entire fleet on a station. He stood between the admiral and the contractors to ensure that supplies were provided at the correct quality, quantity and price. He reported to both the admiral and Victualling Board but, due to proximity, his first duty was to the admiral, and he was often appointed from the role of

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<sup>165</sup> N.M.M., RAI/5, Rainier to Elphinstone, 14 October 1795.

<sup>166</sup> N.M.M., RAI/4, Rainier to Cochrane, 7 August 1795.

<sup>167</sup> N.M.M., RAI/4, Rainier to Victualling Board, 11 October 1795.

<sup>168</sup> N.M.M., RAI/4, Rainier to Captain Newcombe, 14 April 1795.

<sup>169</sup> T.N.A., ADM 110/41, Rainier to Nepean, 18 January 1796.

admiral's secretary or the flagship's purser. In the normal process of events the contractor, in this case Cochrane, would obtain approval for his purchases from the Agent Victualler who would also provide the necessary finance. Rainier did not think it was helpful to have such a position so he terminated it.<sup>170</sup> Thus he made the chain of approval only Cochrane and himself. For most items this was not a problem as there were invoices to back up the expenditure, although the pricing could still be suspect. However, there was a category called 'contingent expenses' whereby the contractor asked for money in advance, and therefore without invoices, for those products which would be needed frequently and urgently, often on remote sectors of the station, such as some items of food.<sup>171</sup> This was a common practice. But Rainier's decision not to replace Arnott meant there was now a very short audit trail. And it was easy for approved money not always to meet up with future invoices, given the delays and the distances between the various centres of naval supply. Yet he knew he was not corrupt, and he could monitor Cochrane in an auditing manner, by terminating the role of agent victualler. In his mind he was probably merely ensuring there could be no misdemeanours within the victualling chain. Therefore it is not surprising that the two Boards were suspicious of such a weak audit trail. This would have gone some way towards explaining the pressure they put on Rainier when he returned to England to account for these often large amounts of money. In 1796, when Rainier made this change, he was still a very inexperienced flag officer. Perhaps he would not have done it if he had known the trouble it would cause him on his return. Yet the Victualling Board had agreed to it and it continued to be the arrangement under Rainier's successors.

Four years later there was still some animosity between the two men. Rainier was wise enough to realise that his wide range of responsibilities and the vast geography of his command meant he could not manage the day to day activities in the Red Sea to counter Bonaparte. He also knew that obtaining supplies there was difficult and expensive and he wanted to ensure that Blankett could concentrate on opposing the French, rather than worrying about naval stores and victuals. To this end Rainier did his utmost to ensure that Blankett received regular deliveries of supplies. He wrote to Mr. Grimes, Agent to the transport *Eliza*, that he was ordering him to the Red Sea to manage the distribution of naval stores in that area and to check that they were being properly stored. If there were any losses the cost would be deducted from his fee. He was also enjoined to ensure that he obtained receipts in triplicate: 'from the proper officers to whom they are delivered'.<sup>172</sup> When he arrived in Bombay, the nearest base to the Red Sea, he discovered that there was no arrack, and that the provisions he had previously ordered to be sent to Blankett had not been obtained, yet he knew that these stores were readily available in Bombay. He told Cochrane that: 'I ... require you will assign your reason for this manifest breach of contract ... to supply His Majesty's Squadron in this Country with Provisions'. He told him that there would have been no problems if Cochrane had done as Rainier had previously asked him to do. As an aside which was a good reflection of Rainier's attention to detail and his desire to

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<sup>170</sup> N.M.M., RAI/4, Rainier to Victualling Board, 19 April 1795.

<sup>171</sup> T.N.A., ADM 7/40, *A Narrative of the Transactions of the Hon. Basil Cochrane with the Hon. Victualling Board*, p.76.

<sup>172</sup> N.M.M., RAI/6, Rainier to Grimes, 5 September 1799.

see that his sailors were not exploited, he also mentioned that the biscuits were of poor quality.<sup>173</sup>

The process continued in the same manner until 1803 when Rainier was ordered by the Admiralty to terminate the victualling contract with Cochrane and put out to tender for a new supplier.<sup>174</sup> Presumably the original one was now thought to be too generous given the much greater scale of naval activity since it was first agreed in peacetime in 1790. The threat to the Cochrane clan initiated protest from a new source. Captain, later Admiral, Alexander Cochrane wrote to the Company that:

...my late brother, the Hon. John Cochrane, did about the year 1790 take at a Public Sale, a Contract for victualling His Majesty's Ships and Vessels in India, which Contract at the particular request of Commodore, now Admiral Cornwallis, was subjected to the review and received the approbation of the Governor General and Council of Bengal, after several of the Articles had been modified and altered as to render the whole a fair and equitable Contract between the Government and the Contractor. ... the Contract was assigned over to the Hon. Basil Cochrane at Madras, who received a renewal of the same, first from Admiral Rainier. And afterwards from Sir George Keith Elphinstone ... which Contract has been ever since executed to the entire satisfaction of the Squadron serving in India and also of the Hon. Commissioners in London victualling His Majesty's Navy.<sup>175</sup>

This letter would indicate that Basil Cochrane's contract was not obtained through any nefarious means although there may be some question as to how satisfactory was his execution of the contract.

There were only two tenders and the cheaper one was from Cochrane. It is easy to understand why anyone would be reluctant to tender for such a contract. The organisation to provide victuals across the entire station was expensive to run and required large numbers of premises; bakeries, breweries, warehouses and ships. Cochrane even built an eponymously named canal, in Madras, to facilitate the movement of supplies around the region.<sup>176</sup> When one adds to these costs the fact that the contractor was only paid, in most cases, after incurring the expense of providing this service, it is easy to see how wealthy one had to be to stay in this business.

Rainier wrote to Cochrane agreeing to his tender and, even though he was in a poor negotiating position, he insisted on a reduction of one shilling a gallon on the price of vinegar and one penny reduction in the price of a pound of bread. He noted that he still had not had

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<sup>173</sup> N.M.M., RAI/6, Rainier to Cochrane, 9 March 1799.

<sup>174</sup> T.N.A., ADM 2/144, Admiralty to Rainier, 6 January 1803.

<sup>175</sup> B.L., I.O.R., Company General Correspondence, E/1/108, Captain Alexander Cochrane, R.N., M.P., to Court of Directors, 8 March 1803.

<sup>176</sup> [www.20twentytwo.blogspot.com/2008/12/chennai-buckingham-canal-to-be-made.html](http://www.20twentytwo.blogspot.com/2008/12/chennai-buckingham-canal-to-be-made.html), accessed 27 April 2009.

the approval of the Victualling Board to his decision but he had waited too long already; he needed to put a new contract in place. However, things might change once he did hear.<sup>177</sup> This shows that Rainier knew the limits of his authority but realised that he had to act in order to keep the navy effective. He also protected himself by writing to the Admiralty that he had signed a new contract with Cochrane although no instructions had arrived from the Victualling Board, because he needed to keep the squadron fed. He wanted to ensure that no corruption was suspected as he did ‘...hope their Lordships will approve ... no fee or reward whatever was admitted’.<sup>178</sup>

But the relationships gradually evolved until it became one of friendship, as can be inferred by the fact that Cochrane owned one of the two known portraits of the admiral: the one painted in 1805 by Arthur William Devis.<sup>179</sup>

The poor accounting systems of the British government during this period ‘almost invited corruption when allied to the vast increase in expenditure’.<sup>180</sup> As a huge user of government cash, naval administration had been subjected to investigation against corruption since St. Vincent was the First Lord. When even the navy’s paymaster, Alexander Trotter, was discovered to have been illegally using his own account at Coutts to carry public balances, it was not surprising that the Navy Board clerks would delve into Rainier’s eleven year long administration. But as the Admiralty itself was not equipped for competent auditing purposes, neither was Rainier. Added to this was the fact that John Cochrane’s successor was his brother, Basil Cochrane, and there were many who believed he had made a fortune at the expense of the navy. The admiral had initially been suspicious of Basil’s subsidiary contracts with suppliers and once, with a naval officer. But he had later come to be a friend and had supported him when the contract had been renewed. But there was no evidence of any corruption or collusion in the awarding of contracts. Yet there is still a question left by such comments, written by Rainier to Basil’s brother, Rear Admiral Alexander Cochrane: ‘what help your brother showed to me was more than I had favours in my power to show him during my Command in India’; he continued by telling Alexander that he had advised Basil to return to England immediately to agree his accounts with the Victualling Board.<sup>181</sup> Much can be inferred by Cochrane’s decision to return to England when he heard that Rainier was departing. No longer would Cochrane be able to hide any nefarious dealings from the new C-in-C. The Board’s concern was probably focused by the fact that Cochrane’s cash account, which needed to be passed, stood at a staggering £1,247,666 0s.2d.<sup>182</sup> The Navy Board records show a steady flow of letters to the Admiralty from 1795, saying that they had received bills from Cochrane for various amounts. Although Rainier had approved them, there were no vouchers. Should they pay? The sums were large, £27,000, £30,000, £42,000,

<sup>177</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/175, Rainier to Cochrane, 14 January 1804.

<sup>178</sup> N.M.M., RAI/8, Rainier to Admiralty, 30 August 1804.

<sup>179</sup> E.P. Brenton, *A Naval History of Great Britain*, quoted in [www.college-optometrists.org](http://www.college-optometrists.org), accessed 14 August 2006.

<sup>180</sup> P. Harling, *The Waning of Old Corruption* (Oxford, 1996), p. 78.

<sup>181</sup> N.L.S., Cochrane Family Papers, f71, Rainier to Alexander Cochrane, 6 May 1806.

<sup>182</sup> T.N.A., ADM 110/54, Navy Board to Marsden, 22 August 1806.



£53,000.<sup>183</sup> The worries carried over into Pellew's command. When Cochrane heard that the Board was reviewing his accounts going back to 1794, and had asked for copies of all his documentation going back to that period, he decided it was time to return to England. Claiming ill health, he asked for, and was given, permission to do so. The negotiation to settle his accounts took until 1820 before they were agreed, resulting in Cochrane receiving £1000 from the Navy Board. But one must believe that he was cleared of any wrongdoing as he was then presented to the King by Lord Keith in 1821.

Parallel to this activity, imprests were placed on Rainier and many were the letters flowing between the Admiralty Board, the Navy Board and the Admiral. Finally there is a plaintive letter from the Navy Board to Admiralty Board saying that it had investigated the matter as far as it could and it was really a question of whether or not the Admiralty believed what Rainier said.<sup>184</sup> It finally came down on Rainier's side and the imprests were lifted.

The East Indies was not the only station to experience rapid expansion, this was felt literally around the world and the Navy Board had also struggled to keep up with the administration of such a large organisation as the navy now was. It admitted that some paperwork had: 'been mislaid in passing them thro' the different Departments of this Office'.<sup>185</sup> 'Our naval boards are in such a weak state, that they cannot be relied upon for either advice or execution' was a further admission that not all the fault lay with serving naval officers.<sup>186</sup> And the errors even spread to the Admiralty Board; Lord Keith wrote to Marsden, its secretary: '[I] enclose a minute of the Board which has been accidentally sent [to me]'.<sup>187</sup>

Whilst Cochrane appeared to organise the supply of victuals to the squadron in an increasingly acceptable manner, he was by no means a "fire and forget" figure. He clearly took up a great deal of Rainier's time and attention which might have been better employed in managing the disposition of his squadron. But the result was a highly effective system which provided good service. As Knight and Wilcox say of Cochrane: '...a system took shape which was less costly, more reliable and more transparent than that which had gone before it'.<sup>188</sup> It even, on occasion, tempered the shortcomings of the army's own system by providing victuals to its soldiers.<sup>189</sup> Clearly this could not have happened without Rainier's active involvement.

Until the very end of his command he was fighting victualling incompetence, even if it would cause embarrassment. Pellew, Rainier's successor, had been requested by the Admiralty to show favour to Edmund Anderson, a purser. Pellew replied somewhat dryly that Rainier had

<sup>183</sup> T.N.A., ADM 110/43, 110/52, 110/53, 110.54.

<sup>184</sup> T.N.A., ADM 106/2239, Navy Board to Admiralty, 9 September 1806.

<sup>185</sup> T.N.A., ADM 110/55, Navy Board to Marsden, 12 September 1806.

<sup>186</sup> Barham to Pitt, 22 May 1805, quoted in J.K. Laughton (ed.), *Letters and Papers of Charles, Lord Barham*, III, N.R.S. XXXIX (London, 1911), quoted in R. Knight, 'Victualling the Navy 1793-1815', *M.M.*, 94, May 2008, p.139.

<sup>187</sup> N.M.M., KEI/76, Keith to Marsden. 6 March 1806.

<sup>188</sup> Knight and Wilcox, *Sustaining the Fleet*, p. 176.

<sup>189</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/168, Newcombe to Rainier, 25 August 1795.

already dismissed him by court martial therefore: ‘their Lordships’ directions in his favour ... are rendered fruitless’.<sup>190</sup> It is also evident that Cochrane played the useful role of a private banker to Rainier’s captains. Charles Adam wrote to his father that the £3000 he would earn from the capture of *La Chiffonne* would enable him to pay back what he owed to Cochrane.<sup>191</sup>

#### **4. Manning the Squadron.**

Throughout the period of this study the Navy struggled to find an efficient method of manning its ships.<sup>192</sup> And the issues it had were magnified in the Far East due to the distance from the main source of trained seamen - the merchant service. The East India Company’s monopoly of trade in the east not only kept out any competition but also meant that its ships were the only ones from which the Royal Navy could obtain skilled seamen in time of war, and they were officially exempt from the Press. There was no equivalent to the Baltic, the Newcastle Coal, the Deep Sea Fisheries, or the West Indies/ North America trades. In the absence of British merchant seamen the Navy had to take the local equivalents, usually Indian lascars or Chinese, who were not very effective in the harsh discipline of a British warship in the tumult of fierce storms and desperate battles.<sup>193</sup>

As the captain of a warship Rainier already had experience of the difficulties of manning. For example, out in India, under Hughes, he had been assigned Company troops as marines.<sup>194</sup> During the Russian Armament of 1790-1, he wrote to the Admiralty that he had pressed men from the *Worcester* Indiaman, and other vessels.<sup>195</sup> Not surprisingly, the following year he was writing that he was being sued for false impressments and was therefore sending all the legal papers to the Admiralty.<sup>196</sup> Of course Rainier’s solicitous attitude to his crew members could be argued to be another method of obtaining and keeping rare skilled sailors. During the Spanish Armament of 1790, Rainier, then commanding the *Monarch*, asked for the return of a sailor who had been ashore on an errand and had been pressed. He was not a very intelligent man and could not explain what he was doing.<sup>197</sup> In 1793 Rainier asked that a court martial on a deserter be annulled as he had been in irons for three months which Rainier thought was sufficient punishment.<sup>198</sup> In 1794 the Admiralty agreed to his request that an old deserter who had rejoined the Navy under an assumed name could be released as long as he paid back his bounty.<sup>199</sup> Whilst illustrating compassion, all these actions reduced the perennial problem of manning a warship in war. But his protection of individual old seamen showed that he had an altruistic side. He wrote to Nepean asking that one of his men, a John

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<sup>190</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/175, Pellew to Admiralty, 22 July 1805.

<sup>191</sup> Blair Adam Papers, Kinross, Box H, No. 142, Charles Adam to William Adam, 7 September 1801.

<sup>192</sup> **For changes in manpower by year, see Appendix 5.**

<sup>193</sup> Parkinson, *War in the Eastern Seas*, p. 343.

<sup>194</sup> T.N.A., ADM 7/733, Hughes Order Book, 3 September 1781.

<sup>195</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/239, Rainier to Admiralty, 6 May 1790.

<sup>196</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/2395, Rainier to Admiralty, 4 September 1791.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, 24 June 1790.

<sup>198</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/2396, Rainier to Admiralty, 26 June 1793.

<sup>199</sup> T.N.A., ADM 2/771, Admiralty to Rainier, 12 February 1794.

Collins, had been invalided out of the Navy and could he find him a place at Greenwich?<sup>200</sup> Yet there was also a retribution side. When a British deserter was found amongst the captured crew of the French frigate *La Prudente*, he did not have to wait long for his court martial and execution.<sup>201</sup>

So when Rainier arrived at Madras in 1794 he already knew that there was little hope of major crew replacements from naval sources, that there were relatively few British merchant seamen, and that disease and climate would take a heavy toll of his men. It was therefore important that he look after his precious resource of experienced fighting sailors.

### Minimising Losses

With it being so difficult to replace seamen, the obvious first step was to try and keep effective those he already had. Even as he was being nominated for the command he was writing to the Admiralty who agreed to his request for the release into the *Suffolk* of a French baker who had been captured on a French privateer.<sup>202</sup>

Gardner had been keen to protect his crews from the threat of scurvy and had requested additional lemons for his aborted journey to take Mauritius, prior to taking over the East Indies Command.<sup>203</sup> With the cancellation of the expedition and Rainier's appointment to the now much reduced station, only his ships were provided with the extra lemons. Before he set sail he was advised by the Admiralty that he would receive the extra lemon juice and medicines he had requested.<sup>204</sup> Evidently he was as convinced as his mentor of its anti-scorbutic value although he still believed that there were other cures, such as fresh beef, noted above. But his subsequent successful voyage to India probably played a large part in persuading the Admiralty of the efficacy of lemon juice in the control of this debilitating disease.<sup>205</sup> The Sick and Hurt Board had been pleased to hear that Rainier's journey out to India had resulted in only fifteen men sick aboard the flagship after a nineteen week voyage.<sup>206</sup> Signs of scurvy in individual sailors were eradicated by increasing the dosage of lemon juice. He also pointed out that some lemon juice had been adulterated with vinegar.<sup>207</sup> This achievement can be measured by comparing it with the fate of the ten Dutch East Indiamen that left the Netherlands in 1782. By the time they had reached the Cape, 43% [1,095], of their crews had died.<sup>208</sup>

Yet six months later he was writing to Lord Spencer that, even though his squadron had fifty seven men sick, [evidently believed to be a large number, out of less than 2000] he had not

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<sup>200</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Admiralty, 13 January 1800.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 25 January 1800.

<sup>202</sup> T.N.A., ADM 3/122, Admiralty Board Minutes, 24 February 1794.

<sup>203</sup> N.M.M., ADM FP/36, Gardner to Sick and Hurt Board, 4 December 1793, quoted in B. Vale, 'The Conquest of Scurvy 1793-1800', *MM*, 94, May 2008, pp. 169-171.

<sup>204</sup> T.N.A., ADM 2/792, Admiralty to Rainier, 15 March 1794.

<sup>205</sup> Vale, 'The Conquest of Scurvy 1793-1800', *M.M.*, 94, May 2008, pp. 169-171.

<sup>206</sup> Sir G. Blane, *Observations on the Diseases of Seamen*, p. 490 (London, 1799).

<sup>207</sup> N.M.M., RAI/4, Rainier to Sick & Hurt Board, 29 September 1794.

<sup>208</sup> C.R. Boxer, 'The Dutch East Indiamen: Their Sailors, their Navigators and Life on Board, 1602-1795', *M.M.*, 49, 1963, No.2, p.86.

pressed a single man from the Company.<sup>209</sup> And in January 1798 the eleven mutineers at Bombay who had been sentenced to death, were pardoned when news was received of Duncan's victory at Camperdown. Indeed the rather minor mutiny had been defused by Captain Osborne reminding the crew of the *Suffolk* that their admiral had obtained for them high quality provisions, including a tea allowance and had established a naval hospital at Madras, illustrating his care for them. Rainier thought that the desire to mutiny had come from seamen pressed from an East Indiaman bringing out news of the Nore and Spithead mutinies from England.<sup>210</sup>

As a flag officer, Rainier's concern for the health of his men is clearly visible – witness his emphasis on lemon juice. From bitter experience he knew how easily crews were reduced in the Far East and he seemed keen to ensure this drain would be effectively blocked. Later in the year his attention to detail must have astounded the Navy Board when Rainier told them that, despite the fact that cocoa was twice as expensive in Manila as in the West Indies, he had still bought some for the sick of the squadron.<sup>211</sup> This attitude was further shown by his standing order that all captains and their surgeons should visit their men in hospital every Monday when in port.<sup>212</sup>

An issue that was important to Rainier for over twenty years was the treatment of Indian crew members and dockyard workers. The earliest example of this concern is the paying off of the *Burford* in England when he requested that five Indian crew members be given passage back to India.<sup>213</sup> All seamen, including Indians and Chinese, needed to go to England in order to receive their wages. Unfortunately they then had to wait until they could find a ship that would take them back to their homes. Not until 1804 was he finally given permission by the Admiralty to pay off these seamen in their home country.<sup>214</sup> In 1797 he wrote to Sir John Shore, the Governor General, that he wanted the commander of the East Indiaman *Amboina* punished for his 'inhumanity to the native part of his crew'.<sup>215</sup> Even after he had retired to England he was still defending the Indians. Sir Roger Curtis had been appointed to the 'Commission for revising the civil affairs of His Majesty's Navy'. He asked Rainier's advice on the establishment of a Navy Board organisation in India. Considering all he had suffered from the administrative side of his job it was not surprising that he agreed. Additionally he thought there should a European senior clerk: 'to converse with the warrant officers of the Squadron and check their overbearing and often insulting carriage towards the Native Clerks and Porters'.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> N.M.M., RAI/4, Rainier to Spencer, 20 March 1795.

<sup>210</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/169, Rainier to Admiralty, 25 January 1798.

<sup>211</sup> N.M.M., RAI/4, Rainier to Navy Board, 14 August 1795.

<sup>212</sup> Blair Adam Papers, Sir Charles Adam, Misc. Papers, Box D, Bundle 4/1589. H3, Rainier's General Orders to his captains, 15 February 1797.

<sup>213</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/2394, Rainier to Admiralty, 16 August 1784.

<sup>214</sup> T.N.A., ADM 2/147, Admiralty to Rainier, 16 February 1804.

<sup>215</sup> N.M.M., RAI/5, Rainier to Sir John Shore, 29 January 1797.

<sup>216</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Sir Roger Curtis, 31 July 1806.

Although it had already been suggested by the Sick and Hurt Board in January 1794 that a hospital should be established in India,<sup>217</sup> it had not received approval from the Admiralty Board before Rainier took the initiative and created one in Madras. And when he took the Spice Islands he established temporary hospitals at Penang and Malacca to ease the recovery of sailors brought down by illness.<sup>218</sup> The admiral was anxious because, ever careful with expense, he believed that the Company charged too much for providing medical care to naval seamen.<sup>219</sup> Finance was at the base of another frustration for Rainier when he asked the Admiralty if it could settle the conflict caused by the Navy Board not accepting bills drawn for supplies for the Madras hospital. He had had to pay for the supplies himself.<sup>220</sup> His correspondence with the Navy and Victualling Boards illustrates his desire to provide decent food for his men, including cocoa.<sup>221</sup> In another letter, fresh fruit and vegetables for those suffering from scurvy were sent to the agent of the Victualling Board Commissioners at Bombay, although he must not pay more than one shilling a day for ten days.<sup>222</sup> Mindful of the conditions in the Red Sea he ordered Captain Osborne of the *Arrogant* to take sugar out to Blankett and charge it to the Sick and Hurt Board.<sup>223</sup> He also wanted the sick to go to sea on cruises to improve their health away from the diseases of the Indian sub continent.<sup>224</sup> One of his more optimistic attempts to save money was to ask the Governor General if sick sailors could be treated with free medicines from the Company.<sup>225</sup> The normal practice was 'to supply the Medicines on indents being furnished by the Proper Officers, Charging the price of the Medicines to the Account of the Crown'.<sup>226</sup> Unsurprisingly he received a negative response with the argument that, if the Company did this for the navy then it would upset the army.<sup>227</sup>

When Rainier's men did not recover, but did not die, he had to arrange for their repatriation to England. In 1798 he wrote to Christian at the Cape that he was sending home 129 invalids and Christian was welcome to take any that might have recovered by the time they reached the Cape. At the same time he requested the names of all those seamen that Christian had taken out of Indiamen on their way to India as Rainier never received the replacements he was promised.<sup>228</sup> He also required the help of the Company in caring for his sick men, occasionally needing its help to return to England those seamen invalidated out of the Navy, with, on one instance, a request for eighty sailors to be returned home on Indiamen.<sup>229</sup> Yet all

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<sup>217</sup> T.N.A., ADM 98/17, Sick and Hurt Board to Admiralty, 16 March 1795.

<sup>218</sup> B.L., I.O.R., H/441, Capt. Lennon, *Journal of Rainier's Expedition to Molucca Islands*, p. 23, and K.C. Tregonning, *The British in Malaya: The First Forty Years* (Tuscon, AZ., 1965), p. 133.

<sup>219</sup> N.M.M., RAI/4, Rainier to Admiralty, 20 March 1795.

<sup>220</sup> N.M.M., RAI/8 Rainier to Admiralty, 14 October 1801.

<sup>221</sup> N.M.M., RAI/4, Rainier to Navy Board, 14 August 1795.

<sup>222</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/175, Rainier to Halliday, 23 January 1804.

<sup>223</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Osborne, 5 October 1799.

<sup>224</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/175, Memorandum of Capt. Surrudge, 29 December 1803.

<sup>225</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 13758, Rainier to Wellesley, 24 January 1799.

<sup>226</sup> Kohli, *Fort William-India House Correspondence*, XXI, Governor General to Court of Directors, 28 August 1797, p. 248.

<sup>227</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 13751, Wellesley to Rainier, 9 March 1799.

<sup>228</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Christian, 27 September 1798.

<sup>229</sup> B.L., Mss. Add. 13758, Rainier to Wellesley, 24 January 1799.

his efforts could not stop his ships being infected by the diseases common in Java and, in 1801, he had to call off his blockade of Batavia because of sickness on his vessels.<sup>230</sup>

A review of the muster books of a cross section of Rainier's vessels illustrates only that phenomenon common to all stations; the rate of sickness was lower with smaller crews.<sup>231</sup> This was primarily because smaller vessels were at sea more often, away from land-based diseases. The *Orpheus*, which seems to have suffered an epidemic with seventy two sick out of a crew of 220 when it returned to Bombay for serious repair in 1800, was an exception.<sup>232</sup> But apart from this, there were only slight increases in sickness when ships were stationed around Java and Amboina and in the Red Sea.

#### Help from the Admiralty

Conscious of Rainier's manning problems, the Admiralty's idea was to send out replacement seamen taking passage on Indiamen. Unfortunately, practice did not align with theory. As early as 1795 he informed Hobart that only eight out of thirty replacements sent to him were fit for service.<sup>233</sup> Two years later, it was learned that Rainier's replacements were being taken by the Cape command.<sup>234</sup> The next year the admiral was driven to complain directly to the Admiralty that he had received not one replacement, contrary to what he had been told to expect.<sup>235</sup> This countered directly Nepean's assurance to Rainier that able bodied landsmen were being sent out to him on Indiamen so he would have no need to press men from the Company's ships.<sup>236</sup> The illusion under which the Admiralty was working is also illustrated by its letter to the Company saying that it had sent out enough men so there was no further need to send more out to India.<sup>237</sup> Yet two months earlier Rainier had written to the Admiralty explaining what was the exact situation:

The arrangement proposed by the Secret Committee ... has been wholly omitted on their part, as not one of the ships mentioned brought out any men on that account, and on their arrival here universally complained of their inability to supply any men for the Squadron, owing to the numbers taken out of them at the Cape.<sup>238</sup>

But still the system was not working as the following year Rainier complained that the Company ships were not sending enough men: '[they] have no regard to the proposal of the Committee to their Lordships'.<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Admiralty, 27 January 1801.

<sup>231</sup> T.N.A., ADM 36, various.

<sup>232</sup> T.N.A., ADM 36/14766, Muster Book of HMS *Orpheus*, December 1800.

<sup>233</sup> N.M.M., RAI/5, Rainier to Hobart, 10 October 1795.

<sup>234</sup> N.M.M., RAI/5, Rainier to Speake, 27 February 1797.

<sup>235</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Admiralty, 27 September 1798.

<sup>236</sup> N.M.M., RAI/11, Admiralty to Rainier, 17 March 1798.

<sup>237</sup> T.N.A., ADM 2/1353, Admiralty to East India Company, 7 November 1798.

<sup>238</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Admiralty, 27 September 1798.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 January 1799.

The admiral needed to look for other means of recruitment. He wrote to the Admiralty acknowledging that the award of bounties had been prohibited but could he use them in the East Indies due to his special needs?<sup>240</sup>

### The Press

The major source of replacement seamen was through the press and this was a constant source of friction throughout the period of Rainier's command, and indeed, afterwards, as illustrated by a letter Pellew received from the Admiralty condemning the behaviour of one of his captains after taking men from an Indiaman.<sup>241</sup> Dundas stated that the Company employed 7,000 seamen,<sup>242</sup> which concurs with Cotton's account of 50,000 tons of shipping at an average of approximately 14 men per 100 tons.<sup>243</sup> Rainier was conscious of the problems and spent much time writing to the Company and Admiralty defending his actions. He did try not to upset the Company but felt that, on occasions such as the renewal of war in 1803, he had to break the rules. The Admiralty's insistence on cutting back the squadron at the Peace of Amiens placed Rainier in a difficult situation when war was again imminent. He needed men quickly. He told the Admiralty that he had taken men out of Indiamen because his ships had only peacetime crews and the replacements sent out from England were of 'indifferent quality'.<sup>244</sup> And he was prepared to defend his captains from complaints, telling Captain Lucas of the *Arrogant* that:

The Commander of the *Thetis* has represented to me that You have taken eleven men out of his Ship ... You are the best Judge whether that Ship's Company will bear the draught for His Majesty's Service.<sup>245</sup>

But apparently the evidence against Captain Bingham of the *San Fiorenzo* was too great as Rainier wrote to Governor Duncan that he would reprimand the captain for his 'uncivil conduct'.<sup>246</sup> This was the kind of naval attitude amongst naval officers which gave it such a bad reputation with the Company officers. And, later that year, whilst criticising the Canton supercargoes for not telling him when the China Fleet was sailing, he apologised in turn for pressing more men out of the Indiamen.<sup>247</sup>

Deserters from the army were also a source of recruitment, especially as marines, but the practice had clearly got out of hand when Rainier told Hobart that he had ordered his captains not to take any more deserters from either the royal or Company armies into his squadron.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> Ibid., 10 March 1804.

<sup>241</sup> B.L., I.O.R., L/MAR/1/23, Admiralty to Pellew, 28 November 1805.

<sup>242</sup> Dundas, *Substance of the Speech*, p. 6.

<sup>243</sup> Cotton, *A review of the shipping system*, p. 23, Parkinson, *Trade in the Eastern Seas*, p. 212.

<sup>244</sup> N.M.M., RAI/8, Rainier to Admiralty, 3 September 1803.

<sup>245</sup> N.M.M., RAI/5, Rainier to Lucas, 14 March 1797.

<sup>246</sup> N.M.M., RAI/10, Rainier to Duncan, 14 July 1804.

<sup>247</sup> N.M.M., RAI/10, Rainier to Canton Supercargoes, 14 August 1804.

<sup>248</sup> N.M.M., RAI/5, Rainier to Hobart, 16 March 1797.

But official exchanges were still encouraged as when Rainier asked General Stuart if he could have some troops to act as marines on the newly captured *La Chiffonne*.<sup>249</sup>

The men of the Bombay Marine were a tempting source of prime fighting seamen although officially the Navy was not allowed to take men from it.<sup>250</sup> And Rainier was not exactly fulsome in his praise of the Marine, primarily because they had so few British crewmen and he thought its management was poor.<sup>251</sup> But, as already seen, the rules were not always respected far from England. Rainier's letter to Duncan, the President of Bombay, stated his agreement to hand back all the men pressed from the Marine and he promised not to take any more.<sup>252</sup>

He also had to explain some of the unique issues he faced. His letter to Duncan told how Captain Vashon was trying to take back deserters from Mecca who had become Muslims.<sup>253</sup> This was an issue Home Popham also had in 1801.<sup>254</sup> The rewards of service with the Company meant that the movement of seamen was not one way. Rainier's information to the Admiralty caused it to write to the Company noting that naval deserters had been found in Company ships and could the practice be stopped?<sup>255</sup> A further letter asked the Company to stop enticing naval men to desert to Company ships.<sup>256</sup> More locally, Captain Hills of the *Orpheus* wrote to the Governor General telling of two naval seamen seized by the Company.<sup>257</sup>

That he also had lawyers to deal with, besides the Company, is illustrated by his letter to Tullock, Cannell and Brodie of Madras explaining that only six volunteers had been taken from the merchant ship *Bridgewater* 'whose crew will well bear that reduction'.<sup>258</sup>

## **5. Financing the Squadron.**

Whilst there are many similarities between the financial management issues in the East Indies compared with other stations, its sheer size and variety, the scarcity of specie, and the involvement of the Company made the whole process of obtaining the money necessary to keep the squadron at sea a complex and stressful one and took a great deal of the admiral's time. There have already been a number of examples of how the matter of finance impacted the manner in which Rainier managed his squadron. The subject can be reviewed under the

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<sup>249</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Lt. Gen. Stuart, 7 October 1801.

<sup>250</sup> B.L., I.O.R. 354.54, P. Auber, *An Analysis of the East India Company Constitution – A Supplement* (London, 1828).

<sup>251</sup> N.M.M., RAI/5, Rainier to Admiralty, 12 November 1795.

<sup>252</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/175, Rainier to Duncan, 14 June 1804.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, 31 August 1804.

<sup>254</sup> B.L., I.O.R., Company General Correspondence, E/4/457, Bombay Council to Select Committee, 19 October 1801.

<sup>255</sup> T.N.A., ADM 2/612, Admiralty to East India Company, 11 November 1795.

<sup>256</sup> T.N.A., ADM 2/613, Admiralty to East India Company 9 January 1798.

<sup>257</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/169, Hills to Shore, 29 November 1797.

<sup>258</sup> N.M.M., RAI/9, Rainier to Tullock, Cannell and Brodie, 24 June 1801.



general headings of how Rainier was supplied with the means of purchase, and how he actually made his purchases.

The Source of Purchasing Power.

Regular and large items of expenditure were paid directly in Britain from invoices raised in India and authorised by Rainier and the appropriate naval officer. This would apply, for example, in the purchase of gunpowder and naval stores bought in India from the Company. Due largely to the trade imbalance between Britain and both India and China and the land wars waged by the Governor General, there was always a shortage of specie on the station. This approach had the benefit of keeping the cash for these transactions at home, between the Admiralty and India House.

When invoices were paid locally, money would be obtained from navy bills sent out from England, which could then be used to pay for goods and services directly. These bills would then be redeemable in England at a later date, payable with interest. Cash could also be obtained locally from wealthy individuals and trading companies, using these bills, and they saw this process as one by which they could transfer securely their wealth back to Britain. There were also many rich Indian merchants and they saw this as just one more legitimate means of making money if the discount was attractive. If there was insufficient cash in circulation, as sometimes happened when the land wars were not progressing well,<sup>259</sup> Rainier was reduced to borrowing money directly from the Company. And there were many opportunities for the wealthy to lend their money, including to the Nawab of Arcot, who borrowed tens of thousands of pounds at high interest rates – unfortunately he never repaid anything he owed, much to the chagrin of his creditors, including one Admiral Rainier.<sup>260</sup>

The discounts on navy bills could be very high – up to 30-40%. Occasionally the market was so wary that they could not be sold at all. Rainier wrote to Philip Dundas at Bombay: ‘as you inform me ... that there has been no Tenders offered to your later advertisements in the public Papers for Cash for Bills on the Navy Board, for which you assign as a reason the very great scarcity of specie ... [I] recommend the Board sending out a supply of silver’.<sup>261</sup> A £20,000 tender by Hoseason in 1804 elicited not one reply and the Madras Council would not help him. But he managed to off load £5,000 to a friend. The Sick and Hurt Board was in debt to him personally and he had to buy stores daily.<sup>262</sup> Rainier’s response was to write to Bentinck and ask if he could borrow £20,000 from the Company.<sup>263</sup> This followed a long tradition because, in 1795, he had written to Hobart telling him he hoped Hobart agreed with him making ‘use of the Credit of Your Lordship’s government or even that of Calcutta if necessary’.<sup>264</sup> He also noted to Bentinck that, when his reinforcing ships arrive from England, they need so much money spending on them to prepare them for battle conditions that it

<sup>259</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Admiralty, 27 September 1798.

<sup>260</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/169, Rainier to Admiralty, 27 September 1798.

<sup>261</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Philip Dundas, 29 April 1799.

<sup>262</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/175, Hoseason to Rainier, 31 January 1804.

<sup>263</sup> N.M.M., RAI/4, Rainier to Bentinck, 2 April 1804.

<sup>264</sup> N.M.M., RAI/5, Rainier to Hobart, 13 October 1795.

drained his resources even more.<sup>265</sup> The Company would also provide financial support indirectly. In 1802 the Canton Supercargoes wrote to Wellesley that they had provided Basil Cochrane's victualling agents with Spanish \$25,000 to purchase food for the Navy.<sup>266</sup> Rainier regularly asked for money to be sent rather than bills, as ultimately it would be cheaper.<sup>267</sup> Unfortunately there was not the specie to be had, even after the Navy Board passed on Rainier's requests to the Treasury.<sup>268</sup> But cognisant of his problems the Board also told him on one occasion that it had arranged for him to draw £150,000 over six months from bankers Messrs. Boyd Benfield.<sup>269</sup> This banking house thereby would be repaid in London for assets it held in India without having to use the Company to transfer them. Unfortunately such transactions were unable to halt the bank's collapse the following year. Even as late as 1804, he wrote to Bentinck, the President of Madras, asking for Company money as he had almost run out of cash to pay for all the stores that his enlarged squadron required.<sup>270</sup> But the Navy Board was still sending out cash whenever possible. In July 1805, it asked Secretary Marsden in which ships it should send £20,000 to Madras and £28,000 to Bombay.<sup>271</sup>

Even when there was good news the cup was dashed from Rainier's lips as when a public subscription raised thousands of pounds in India for the Navy. Rainier's clear need for cash was rebuffed when he asked for it to be handed over as the Governor General told him that the subscribers wished the money to be sent to England where, naturally, it would receive more good press.<sup>272</sup>

#### Making Payments.

For final authorisation to pay, all the correct vouchers, signatures, and valuations had to be presented to the Navy Board. If not, the invoice would be paid and an imprest placed on the individual that the Board felt had not followed the correct procedure. This happened to Rainier himself during his command, especially with ship purchases and repairs – the most expensive items. The various Naval Officers also bore the brunt of this crude weapon. Rainier was still arguing with the Navy Board two years after he had returned to England – a mere blink of the eye compared with Cochrane who finally settled his accounts in 1820 – fourteen years after his return from India. But Rainier did not let bureaucracy stand in the way of being fair to his seamen. He authorised the payment of £5,000 prize money to the crew of HMS *La Sybille* for the capture of *La Forte* even though it had not yet been approved for purchase by the Navy Board. He wanted the men to have some money before their long journey home to England.

The major problem was marrying the amount of money obtained from the bills with vouchers for the goods purchased by that money. And the Navy Board realised that it could not always

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<sup>265</sup> N.M.M., RAI/9, Rainier to Bentinck, 2 April 1804.

<sup>266</sup> B.L. I.O.R., G/12/142, Canton Supercargoes to Wellesley, 14 November 1802.

<sup>267</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Admiralty, 27 September 1798.

<sup>268</sup> T.N.A., ADM 106/2474, Navy Board to Rainier, 11 January 1798.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid., 18 July 1798.

<sup>270</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/175, Rainier to Bentinck, 7 January 1804.

<sup>271</sup> T.N.A., ADM 106/2237, Navy Board to Marsden, 8 July 1805.

<sup>272</sup> B.L., Add. Mss. 13751, Wellesley to Rainier, 29 August 1798.

do this. For example in 1798 it had a shortfall of £42,000 unaccounted for expenditure – it asked the Admiralty if it could write it off.<sup>273</sup> It is not surprising that forms got lost, especially as the Navy Board admitted that it lost papers: ‘... have been mislaid in passing them thro’ the different Departments of this Office’.<sup>274</sup>

To be fair to Rainier, he had no staff or accounting department to monitor the financial transactions of this large organisation covering thirty million square miles and in multi currencies. He even had to watch exchange rates, for example, writing to Cochrane telling him to buy forward star pagodas as he expected the rate to move to ten shillings to the pagoda.<sup>275</sup>

The more common currencies with which Rainier had to deal were;

Spanish dollar	0.25p
Batavia Rix dollar	0.21p
Madras Star pagoda	0.40p
Madras rupee	0.11p
Bengal rupee	0.10p
Bengal sicca rupee	0.12p
Bombay rupee	0.11p
Chinese tael	0.33p

Because of the size of the station there were not always established bases where supplies could be purchased and captains often had to be given large sums of cash in advance of their expenditure. For example, Rainier wrote to Francis Kemp, Cochrane’s agent:

You are to consider on the readiest means of furnishing Captain John Spratt Rainier with a credit to purchase water and fresh provisions at Muscat, or otherwise advance the Purser a sum of Money for that Purpose.<sup>276</sup>

This also caused Rainier some problems if his captains were not as conscientious in their form filling as he was, because ultimately he would be held responsible, having signed off the voucher to give the money out but then not having receipts for what it had purchased. This issue even went up to Rear Admiral Blankett:

... you are to furnish the Bombay Government with like Bills for the Cash you took up of the Company’s Servants in the Red Sea, for their purposes; but you are to settle with the Victualling Contractors for the Cash I transmitted to you.<sup>277</sup>

<sup>273</sup> T.N.A., ADM 110/43, Navy Board to Nepean, 19 February 1798.

<sup>274</sup> T.N.A., ADM 110/55, Navy Board to Marsden, 12 September 1806.

<sup>275</sup> N.M.M., RAI/6, Rainier to Cochrane, 28 September 1798.

<sup>276</sup> N.M.M., RAI/7, Rainier to Kemp, 12 November 1798.

<sup>277</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/179, Rainier to Blankett, 25 December 1799.

Given the size of the station and the less than sophisticated financial regimes with which the Navy operated in some areas, it is not surprising that control of a proper accounting procedure was difficult to ensure. And the problem would be made more difficult on those occasions when barter was employed such as when Rainier traded spices directly for naval supplies in Canton.

One change that Rainier made to the purchasing process as described above, might, with hindsight, seem to have been a mistake and perhaps made both the Victualling and Navy Boards suspicious. There was now a very short audit trail and it was easy for approved money not always to meet up with future invoices, given the delays and the distances between the various centres of naval supply. This would have gone some way towards explaining the pressure they put on Rainier when he returned to England to account for these often large amounts of money.

There appeared to be some nervousness in London concerning how defensible was the accounting process for victualling in the East Indies. Information that Cochrane was also the agent for the Board to receive stores sent out from England and to provide and distribute water, wine and tea was given to the Admiralty, on its request, in 1806. It was also told that cash accounts were generally returned in six months and stores accounts within eighteen to twenty four months. Their Lordships' minds were probably focused by the fact that Cochrane's cash account, which needed to be passed, stood at a staggering £1,247,666 0s.2d.<sup>278</sup>

### **Conclusion.**

It is clear that, whilst Rainier had a more difficult manning situation than other station commanders, he had no original ideas as to how to solve the problem. The charitable donations he made, which were noted in various editions of *The Times*, such as five guineas to French refugees, five guineas on three occasions to the Society for the Discharge and Relief of Persons imprisoned for small debts and two guineas to the Marine Society,<sup>279</sup> together with the letter he wrote to his nephew on the duties of a captain,<sup>280</sup> would indicate that he was a man who cared naturally for those less fortunate than himself. This attitude, allied to his demand for the best available supplies for his men, ensured that the ravages of ill health that beset Hughes during the American Revolution were minimised. He therefore never suffered from the extreme shortages of manpower that limited Hughes' possibilities for action. Shortage of manpower, as opposed to shortage of ships, never stopped him carrying out his plans, even if he had to beg, borrow, and occasionally steal, the necessary men.

Reviewing Rainier's experiences with the various naval boards highlights a number of discrepancies when judging his success as an operational admiral. There is sufficient evidence to show that, by the standards of the day, he was a meticulous, careful and honest

<sup>278</sup> T.N.A., ADM 110/54, Navy Board to Marsden, 22 August 1806.

<sup>279</sup> *The Times*, 3 October 1792, 18 April 1796, 25 April 1797.

<sup>280</sup> N.M.M., RAI/201/ 8. Admiral Rainier to Captain Peter Rainier, 2 April 1805.

officer. He loved his forms and they had to be completed correctly. He expected due process to be followed and he was quick to admonish if it were not. He was keen to reprove publicly any transgression of rules which could be deemed to be corrupt.

Yet his own relationship with Matthew Louis seemed suddenly to improve only months after he had been severely critical of him. And his relationship with Basil Cochrane, which lasted the full eleven years of Rainier's sojourn in the East Indies, is more puzzling. He clearly did not trust Cochrane in his initial phase, either through competence or dishonesty it is difficult to say. But he did understand that he needed Cochrane's skills to ensure the efficient victualling of his squadron. He must have been able to see how much money Cochrane was making by supplying his squadron yet he did nothing to reduce it, even though he was so meticulous in other areas to keep costs down "for the good of His Majesty's Service". And he terminated the role of the Agent Victualler in April 1795, saying that there was no need for such a post. Yet Cochrane had agents all over the station. Any agent victualler would not have such an infrastructure and would therefore need sub-agents. These would incur fees and thus would increase the cost of victualling the squadron.<sup>281</sup> It is also worth noting that, when Elphinstone arrived at Madras in January 1796, he and his secretary and agent victualler, John Jackson, found the arrangement sufficiently satisfactory that Elphinstone agreed a new contract, on the same terms, with Cochrane, two months later.<sup>282</sup> It is highly unlikely that a man of Elphinstone's character would have allowed this arrangement if there had been any suspicion of foul play. The fact that no comments were received from the Victualling Board also implies that Rainier's plan was acceptable.

That Cochrane decided to come back to England around the same time as Rainier also gave some concern, although he did not actually sail until October the following year; perhaps he felt that he would never get the same opportunities to increase his wealth under any other commander-in-chief. It does leave a disconcerting feeling in the mind of anyone studying his correspondence today. In Cochrane's defence, his year with Rainier's successor, Rear Admiral Pellew, allowed him to build up a relationship from which Pellew acknowledged Cochrane's reliability, competence and honesty.<sup>283</sup> And, given fourteen years to investigate him, the Navy Board was unable to uncover any evidence of corruption on Cochrane's part. The notice of his death in the *Glasgow Herald* stated that he came back from India: 'with a large fortune which has always been applied in acts of charity and benevolence'.<sup>284</sup> Clearly his reputation was by then unblemished.

One should also view the evidence of Rear Admiral Drury, Pellew's successor, who was noted for a considerable reduction in costs on the station. But Drury had several advantages over his predecessors; he had almost a year as "apprentice" to Pellew before assuming actual command, French power on the station was no longer a serious threat, he had sufficient ships

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<sup>281</sup> The Hon. B. Cochrane, *An Expose of the Conduct of the Victualling Board to the Hon. Basil Cochrane*, p. 61.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>283</sup> T.N.A., ADM 7/40, *Narrative of the Transactions of the Hon. Basil Cochrane with the Hon. Victualling Board*, p. 79.

<sup>284</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 21 August 1826.

to counter any possible danger and indeed enough to attack Mauritius, and he had a well established and efficient logistics organisation. However, he did address a number of issues regarding the provision of naval supplies as well as victuals and he did reduce their prices. He, like Rainier before him, also realised the danger of driving prices so low that the victuallers went out of business, and he refused offers to undercut items in the current contracts as that would destroy the relationship between the victuallers and the navy.<sup>285</sup> But if he were able to reduce costs, one must also question why Pellew was unable to do the same during his command.<sup>286</sup>

Given Rainier's efforts to keep his squadron at sea, his love of administrative process was not always in evidence. His failure occasionally to meet his own high standards caused several harsh imposts to be placed on him, mostly after he retired. He can be excused for not knowing of Captain Cooke's cavalier use of his own authority in repairing *La Forte*. But the enormous sums used in cash accounts and naval supplies were so large that surely, even if he would normally just sign without reading, occasionally he might have asked to see the vouchers that went with a particular bill. And the impost for the purchase of two Dutch ships captured in 1799 was instigated because of a lack of paperwork of which the admiral must have known. He had seen the way such matters were handled many times by 1799. His argument was that, at the time, he had told the Admiralty and he had not heard any admonition, so it must have been acceptable. But previous actions might have agreed on the assumption that the paperwork would follow and when it did not then it was the Admiralty that caused the impost to be invoked.

Yet, to put these suspicions into perspective, when Rainier first arrived in India in 1794, there were literally no naval ships at all and no real infrastructure. He had to fulfil the role of the Navy, Victualling, and Sick and Hurt Boards with only the most rudimentary support. All the time he had another organisation, the Company, at his shoulder. This body continually impacted his decisions, sometimes for good and sometimes for bad. He had to put into place a financial system to ensure the Navy had sufficient funds to pay its way. He had to ensure adequate clothing, food and drink were obtained, including substitutes when traditional fare could not be obtained, and he had to ensure his ships were properly seaworthy and supplied with all the equipment, weapons and stores they needed. All this time he had to communicate with the Boards, primarily the Navy Board, to ensure that his needs were acted upon and that the Board understood how different were the circumstances in the East Indies.

Assuming this to be the case, it can be seen that Rainier ran his squadron with a high degree of effectiveness. He obtained its finance from a variety of sources using whatever means were available to him even though, in the case of navy bills, they were not the most efficient. In the previous war, under Hughes, he had seen the impotence of a fleet without naval supplies and victuals. He ensured that his own operations were largely uninhibited by these considerations, apart from the repair of damaged and worn out ships at the Bombay dockyard.

<sup>285</sup> T.N.A., ADM 1/182, Drury to Admiralty, 15 July 1809, Messrs Balfour & Baker [Victuallers], 25 July 1810.

<sup>286</sup> See Appendix 6 for relative costs of victualling in East Indies, West Indies and Mediterranean, which illustrate how much more expensive was victualling in the East Indies.

His own personality appears to have relished the challenges he encountered in the vast administrative task of keeping his vessels at sea across his enormous station as he built up, almost from scratch, an administrative system to cope with its demands, far from the support of the Admiralty Boards that were officially responsible for such activities. It is not surprising that, after eleven years on station, there were some gaps in the audit trail, and that some prices paid could have been bettered if there had been a department of clerks devoted to the task. The communication between the Navy Board and Rainier through 1806 and 1807 also contains requests from the former for his advice on how the Navy should be administered in the East Indies, what people should be paid, and where stores should be kept. He was also quoted by the Navy Board in its evidence to the Parliamentary Commission. It is difficult to believe that his advice would have been held in such esteem if there had really been any suspicion that he had been a user of corrupt practices. Surely an admiral who claimed to the Navy Board that he did not have enough blank forms could not be in a corrupt relationship with a naval contractor.

## CHAPTER 8.

### CONCLUSION: 'REMOVING THE CLOUD'

In 1799 a correspondent to the *Oracle and Daily Advertiser* complained that all the honours and rewards of the present war were being bestowed on the victors of naval battles – Howe, St. Vincent, Duncan and Nelson – while Rainier's conquests were being forgotten. Comparing the recent celebration of Nelson with the plight of Rainier, he protested that 'the former is surrounded in a blaze of glory, the latter seems enveloped in a cloud'.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this thesis has been to remove that cloud.

It was no accident that the *Oracle's* correspondent signed himself 'an E.I. Proprietor' and pointed to the 'immense territories' and 'countless treasures' secured to the East India Company [and hence to Great Britain] by the commander of the East Indies Station. 'The name of Vice Admiral Rainier' he asserted, 'will always appear with distinction amongst those officers who have effectually served their country, and signalised themselves in the present war'.

Rainier abundantly demonstrated that he possessed the right qualities for his task. To command effectively the most distant station in the navy, where it could take a year between sending a message and receiving an answer, required patience, great self confidence and independent spirit. Commanding the widest, as well as the most distant, station also necessitated foresight and organisation. The main task was to protect the trade and possessions of the most politically and economically powerful British trading company on which depended the nation's financial capacity to sustain the biggest war effort yet attempted, this required courage and commercial understanding. And at this particular time the Crown's principal representative in India was a megalomaniac who wilfully ignored government and Company instructions to refrain from an expansionist policy and who wished to use the navy to pursue imperial expansion. Working with him required tact, self reliance and strength of will.

As his eleven years in command attest, the Admiralty clearly believed that Rainier had these abilities. He had the most prior experience of serving on the station of anyone available and understood its needs well. He had time to grow into the job before its difficulties grew; when the Dutch switched sides, when the French sent warships, Richard Wellesley arrived, and when there was a major French invasion of Egypt. His own experience as a merchant ship master and trader enabled him to appreciate the needs of commerce, certainly better than his predecessors and successors in the East Indies. Having been severely wounded capturing a larger American privateer and facing the brilliance of Suffren in five fleet actions, he was not going to submit tamely to the blandishments of the Governor General. But he also had the political acumen not to tackle him head on, but to attain his ends more indirectly. Those ends

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<sup>1</sup> *The Oracle and Daily Advertiser*, 21 September 1799.



were always those directed by the Admiralty. He constantly kept in mind who were his real superiors and was sure to justify himself to them. And they responded by backing him once they found in him the sure and safe pair of hands on which they relied to run so complex a station.

It must also be remembered that no East Indies flag officer after Rainier arrived with no operational warships and no organisation structure on station with which to operate. And, in contrast to his successors, he was never sent sufficient ships to complete all his tasks – he always had to make compromises. Surely Java and Mauritius would have fallen to him if he had been better resourced. As the volumes of trade grew and the centre of gravity moved permanently eastwards, so the station became more complex. Rainier matured in parallel with this growth and never allowed the complexities to overwhelm him. However, one measure was constant; the unequalled volume and value of trade. When Rainier sailed in 1794, he took the largest ever convoy from Britain to India. When he returned in 1805, he brought back the most valuable convoy ever to leave Indian waters. So important was this convoy that the Channel Fleet was diverted from its blockade of the French coast in order to cover its journey through the Western Approaches.

The vital importance of the revenue generated by trade, both between Europe and the Far East, and within the region, was vital to the British government's execution of the war.<sup>2</sup> The growth of this trade was stimulated directly by Rainier's capture of Malacca and the Moluccas, with the resultant presence in the area of British warships. Indirectly it was stimulated by the indigenous growth of an economic/ commercial structure of banks, trading houses, a modern legal system, merchant houses and ship building that became self financing. Thus it could generate its own wealth and, indeed, transfer large sums back to Britain.<sup>3</sup> Without the rule of law and protection provided by the navy, this dynamic expansion could not have happened.

The navy also played a key role in the defence of British India. This had been acknowledged in the previous war by Vice Admiral Hughes:

...the defence of the Company's possessions in the East Indies depends in a very large degree if not entirely in time of war, on the superiority or exertions of His Majesty's Squadron.<sup>4</sup>

Although Rainier was almost certainly unaware of the impact of his successes, nevertheless his support of Wellesley's territorial expansion meant that British domination of India was not threatened for another 140 years. His stimulation and protection of the Country Trade built up a self sustaining economic zone which paved the way for British ascendancy over South East Asia and the establishment of Singapore and Hong Kong.

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix 4.

<sup>3</sup> Cuenca-Esteban, J., 'The British balance of payments, 1772-1820: India transfers and war finance', *Economic History Review*, vol. 54, No. 1 (2001), p. 67.

<sup>4</sup> Hughes to the Bombay Council, 27 January 1784, quoted in Wadia, *The Bombay Dockyard*, p. 47-8.

Overall Rainier can surely bask in the reflected glory of Pannikar's comment that:

the mastery of the sea over Indian history was complete but unobtrusive. The question of sea power did not arise as the Indian Ocean was a British lake.<sup>5</sup>

As the first objective given to Rainier in his initial orders, the requirement for trade protection was clearly understood by all parties. Rainier's skill as a navigator, and vast experience of the region, gave him an understanding of the optimum use of his resources with which to protect that trade. Convoys were made available, warships patrolled vulnerable trading routes and Trincomalee was captured as it not only guarded India but also covered a focal rendez-vous point for shipping between the Indies and Europe. His low ego, experience of as merchant ship master, and calm and patient character enabled him to minimise the inherent conflict in the relationship between the navy and merchant class. There certainly were complaints, primarily over the unwillingness of merchants to submit to the discipline of the convoy system, and the habit of naval vessels to press merchant sailors. But these rarely reached an official level. As already noted, Indiaman losses were greater after Rainier which precipitated the final seizure of Mauritius.

The conquest of the Dutch colonies, primarily to protect and enhance trade, together with the planned, but not executed, attacks on Batavia and Manila, demonstrated Rainier's recognised ability as a combined operations leader. His organisational skills and his ability to work harmoniously with army commanders were crucial in ensuring their success; a factor accepted even by the despotic Wellesley. Indeed the support given by Rainier to the land operations against Tippoo and the Marathas received much praise from the Governor General. That the Admiral was so well appreciated indicates not only great personal and political skill and low ego, but also the strength of will not to be diverted from his primary objective, which would have been threatened by Wellesley's proposed attack on Mauritius. Rainier's strategic acuity could discern that, whilst the French island was a severe annoyance, it was not a fundamental threat to British rule. This ability to see the "bigger picture" is also illustrated by his speedy and measured response to Bonaparte's attack on Egypt. Without waiting for orders he sent two warships to blockade the Red Sea and to demonstrate Britain's naval power to the local Arab rulers. And he expended considerable amounts of time and diplomatic skill working with the Bombay Presidency keeping its members calm and focussed.

Rainier was truly a man of the eighteenth century. He was born in 1741 and fought in three wars against the French. He was a conservative, Christian monarchist brought up in the Huguenot tradition. Yet many elements in his personality seem to have more in common with a twentieth century person. He understood how organisations worked, skilfully managing people both upwards and downwards through his use of networks. The manner in which he communicated with his superiors at the Admiralty, managing the information flow, resulted

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<sup>5</sup> K.M. Pannikar, *India and the Indian Ocean* (London, 1952), p. 8.

in not one admonition in his 11 years in command. Given the distances and time involved in communication with London, this in itself was a considerable achievement. Managing down the organisation, Rainier nurtured and supported his captains who might be operating alone, thousands of miles from his guidance. This required a different expertise than that of a flag officer of a squadron sailing together within sight of signalling flags. His care of the health and wellbeing of his ships' crews, his lack of racism, his desire to minimise punishments, his understanding of the need to motivate, praise and communicate in order to get the best out of people, all indicate a leader of exceptional managerial ability, even by the standards of today.

These same talents were also employed by Rainier when he was working with the Company. It was equally necessary, but more difficult, to manage its officials and employees, over whom he had no control. Thus did he receive, *inter alia*, the assistance of additional Company warships when needed, all his ordnance supplies, and the efficient use of the Bombay Dockyard to repair and maintain his own naval vessels.

It is rare that a person who is a sensitive and capable "man manager" is also an accomplished administrator of systems, but Rainier had this ability too. When he first arrived in India in 1794, there were literally no naval vessels at all and virtually no supporting infrastructure. Yet management was a vital aspect of Rainier's function. He had to fulfil the role of the Navy, Victualling, and Sick & Hurt Boards with only the most rudimentary support. He had to ensure adequate clothing, food and drink were obtained, including substitutes, when traditional fare could not be obtained, and he had to ensure his ships were properly seaworthy and supplied with the equipment, weapons and stores they needed. All this time he had to communicate with the Boards, primarily the Navy Board, to ensure that his needs were acted upon and that the Board understood how different were the circumstances in the East Indies. The attention to detail, knowing when to micro-manage and when to manage at arms' length, when to cajole and when to praise, all contributed to the success of Rainier's management.

Victualling was certain to be a major issue on such a large station. Rainier worked with Basil Cochrane to build an effective system which, whilst it may not have been the cheapest, it never hindered operations as had occurred during the American Revolution. Markedly, the structure was able to expand as the squadron grew under his successors. This is a true sign of a well designed enterprise. As Wilcox said:

...despite the unprecedented range and scale of operations, no major operation was seriously disrupted by a lack of provision ... it [victualling] made a crucial contribution to the eventual British victory.<sup>6</sup>

Rainier also had to manage the finances of his squadron on a station where specie was always in short supply. This required negotiating discounts on navy bonds, borrowing money from the Company and from local bankers, trading houses and merchants in India, who were provided liquidity for the burgeoning Country Trade. This money was used to buy anything

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<sup>6</sup> M. Wilcox, 'This Great Complex Concern', forthcoming article for the *Mariner's Mirror*.

from ships to cocoa on invoices to be redeemed by the Navy Board in London. He was also using at least ten major currencies in advanced cultures often with disparate traditions far older than his own, which had to be given the respect due to them.

Today, with a clearer understanding of the importance of non-heroic trade protection and organisational abilities that would have been required to manage a sailing era squadron on such a large station, and with a greater understanding of the vital importance of the contribution of the commercial wealth of the East Indies to sustaining the British war effort throughout the long and unprecedentedly expensive wars against the French Revolution and Empire, it would appear that Rainier's achievements are worthy of far greater recognition than he received in his lifetime.

## **Appendix 1.**

### **Terminology**

Throughout the thesis the full description of the Honorable (sic) East India Company has been abbreviated to “the Company” as there was only one such important and powerful organisation. In the literature, Richard Wellesley, the Governor General, is occasionally named using his noble title, Lord Mornington. This thesis uses his family name throughout. The spelling of geographic names on the station proved to be a more difficult challenge as their phonetic translation into English tended to depend on the individual writing the letter. The most common spelling filtered from reading the many documents of the period has been used as no single example can be deemed the correct one. Many of the place names have changed in the late twentieth century. For example, Bombay is now Mumbai and Canton is now Guangdong. As the thesis covers a period two hundred years ago the names common in European parlance at the time have been retained. As Rainier’s period of command runs from the French Revolutionary War into the Napoleonic War, in the interests of brevity, the phrase “French Wars” has been used.

In the Middle East modern Bushehr on the coast of Iran, is called Bushire. The main entry port at the north end of the Persian Gulf, in what is now Iraq, had two names at the time, Basra and Bussora. The latter, older name has been used at all times, unless in a quotation.

Amboina is occasionally spelled Amboyna; the former spelling has been used. Aceh, on the northern coast of Sumatra, has been preferred to other spellings such as Acheen, Acheh, and Ache.

One Indian ruler plays a large role during the period described. His name is variously spelled Tippoo or Tipu Sultan. The former spelling has been used throughout this thesis.

The title used at the time to describe the chief naval administrative officer in each of the presidencies has been given capital letters as in “Naval Officer” to distinguish him from any real “naval officer” that may be mentioned.

## Appendix 2.

### CHRONOLOGY

#### 1794

- |           |                                                                                                                                                                            |
|-----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| February  | Rainier ordered to East Indies as Commodore.                                                                                                                               |
| April     | Rear Admiral Cornwallis enters Spithead from India.                                                                                                                        |
| May       | Rainier sails for East Indies.                                                                                                                                             |
| September | Rainier reaches Madras.                                                                                                                                                    |
| October   | Goes to Penang to escort Country Trade from China. <i>Centurion</i> and <i>Diomedé</i> in inconclusive battle off Mauritius. British withdraw from blockade of the island. |

#### 1795

- |           |                                                                                                                                        |
|-----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| February  | Merchants say do not want convoys, just RN ships patrolling danger areas. Rainier has insufficient ships to blockade Mauritius.        |
| July      | French capture Netherlands. With Lord Hobart, Rainier plans attacks on Dutch territories.                                              |
| August    | Rainier takes Trincomalee, Captain Newcombe takes Malacca. Elphinstone takes Cape and assumes overall command of Cape and East Indies. |
| September | Bombay Marine blockade Columbo. Rainier plans attack on Spice Islands.                                                                 |
| November  | Elphinstone sails for Madras. Rainier arrives at Malacca.                                                                              |

#### 1796

- |          |                                                                           |
|----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| January  | Elphinstone arrives at Madras.                                            |
| February | Columbo taken by Captain Hyde Gardner. Rainier takes Amboina.             |
| March    | Elphinstone returns to Cape because of Dutch threat. Rainier takes Banda. |
| August   | Dutch surrender to Elphinstone.                                           |

September Rainier again C-in-C East Indies. Sercey has inconclusive engagement with *Arrogant* and *Victorious*.

October Elphinstone replaced by Pringle at the Cape.

### 1797

January Sercey retires from attacking China Fleet, thinking them warships.

April Wellesley becomes Governor General of India.

### 1798

January Agents of Tippoo Sultan land on Mauritius.

April French volunteers land in India to help Tippoo.

July Bonaparte lands in Egypt.

December Rainier sends *Centurion* and *Albatross* to Red Sea.

### 1799

April Blankett reaches Red Sea.

May Tippoo Sultan killed at Battle of Seringapatam, ending Fourth Anglo-Mysore War.

June Perim captured.

### 1800

March Perim evacuated.

May Rainier and Wellesley receive orders to capture Batavia.

September Rainier offers resignation to Spencer.

October French victories in Europe lead to blockade of Batavia being called off. Rainier refuses to help Wellesley in attack on Mauritius.

### 1801

January Home Popham replaces Blankett in Red Sea.

October Preliminary Peace Treaty signed.

### 1802

Period of Peace

1803

- May War declared.
- June *Belle Poule* arrives to occupy Pondicherry with French troops.
- July Linois and Rainier arrive at Pondicherry. Linois escapes with his squadron.
- September Rainier hears of declaration of War with France. General Arthur Wellesley defeats Marathas at Assaye.
- October Linois raids British settlement of Bencoolen.
- November General Lake defeats Marathas at Laswari.

1804

- February Battle of Pulo Aur.
- September Linois escapes Rainier's trap in Straits of Malacca.
- November Linois returns to Mauritius.

1805

- January Rainier meets his successor, Pellew, at Penang.
- March Rainier relinquishes command to Pellew and leaves Madras en route for England.
- September Rainier reaches England.

1807

- June Rainier elected as an independent M.P. for Sandwich.

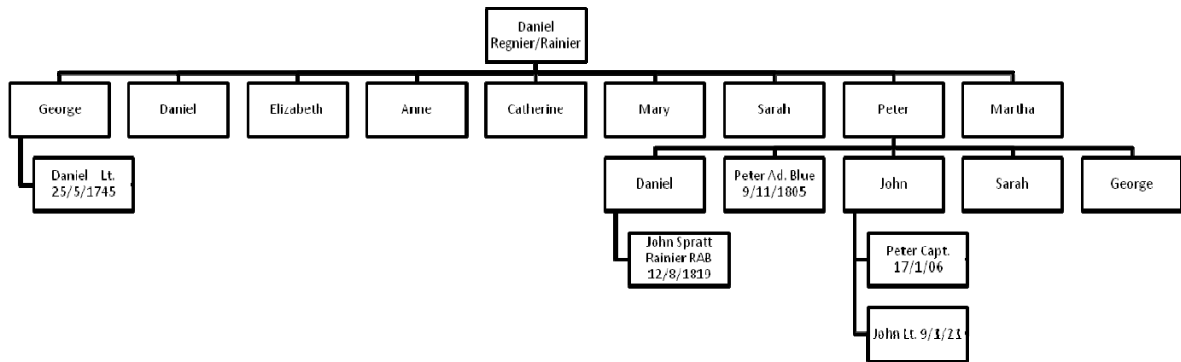
1808

- April Rainier dies in London.



**Appendix 3.**

**Rainier Family Tree**



date = date of final promotion and rank

## Appendix 4.

### TRADE STATISTICS AND THEIR INTERPRETATION.

It is exceedingly dangerous to make too many conclusions from the data as figures vary depending on their source. For example, in Appendix 4a one can see that the UK export data varies between five and ten per cent between Esteban and the figures presented to Parliament. Numbers from the Company itself also show great disparity with both those previously stated. Care has to be taken as to whether or not the value of bullion is included in export figures. Silver was a major export to China to pay for tea until it was steadily replaced by opium, which came from India and is not therefore accounted for, and by the revenue generated in India by the Country Trade. The fluctuations between successive years also make dangerous comparisons over a period of time. For example, using Appendix 4d, export shipping tonnage rose by eight per cent between 1793 and 1805, but if one compares 1794 to 1804, the growth is 92%. Where there is sufficient data moving averages can be used, as in Appendix 4c. Care must also be taken to specify whether or not the data is for the UK [including Ireland], or Great Britain [England, Scotland and Wales].

Perhaps the most reliable data comes from Mitchell and Deane.<sup>7</sup> They note the difference between statistics at “Official Trade Values” and those that are “computed”. The former, as seen in Appendix 4b, are based on Customs and Excise fixed rates and the latter are an attempt to reflect the real life values of trade. The computed figures indicate a steady growth in imports as against a slight decrease in the official ones. A similar, less emphatic relationship, is noted in the export data.

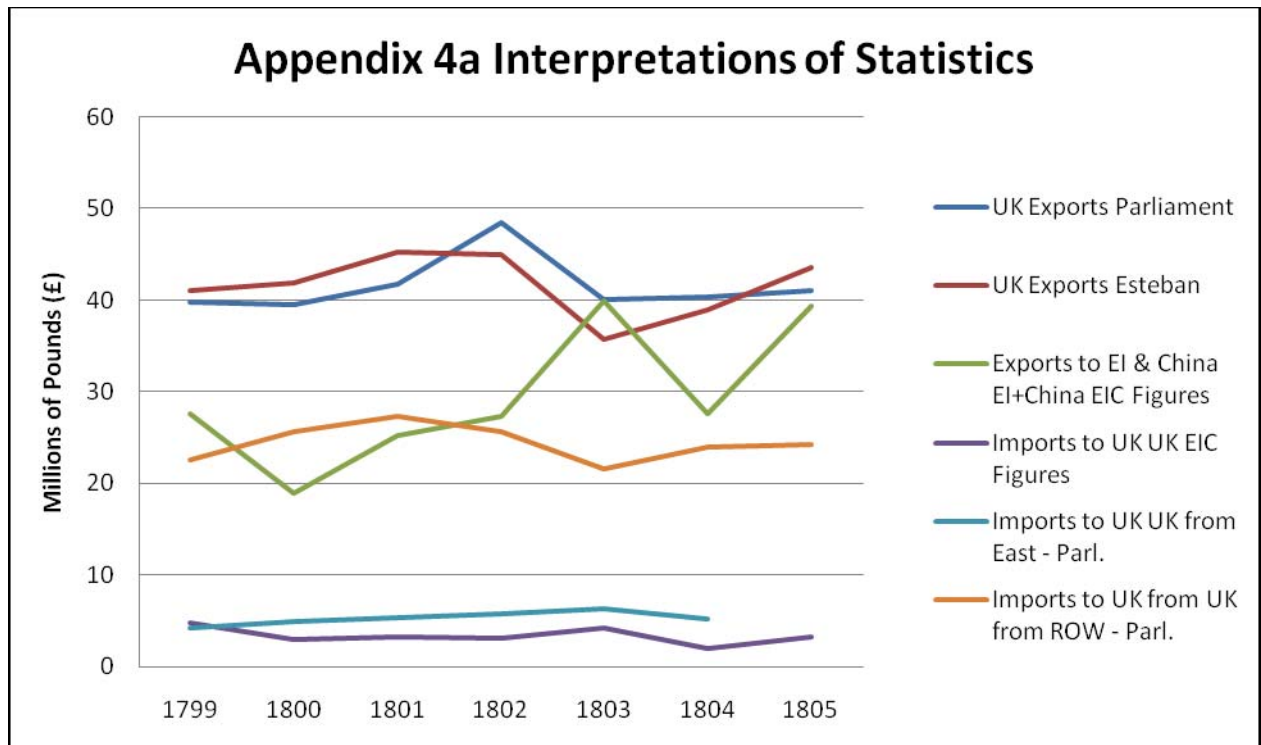
Appendix 4c clarifies the actual movements behind this data. Exports to the West Indies and United States grow rapidly whilst those to Asia decline, probably due to the replacement by Indian opium of British silver and by the growth of the Country Trade. Imports from Asia expand less quickly than those from both other locations although there is considerable percentage growth in all three. Appendix 4d, showing the growth in shipping tonnage to Asia supports the data indicating the growth of trade between Britain and India/ China.

In addition to protecting the trade between Europe and Asia, Rainier also had to protect the Country Trade, within his station. As an example, Appendix 4e illustrates the enormous expansion of regional exports from China. The steady level of imports demonstrates the unattractiveness to the Chinese market of most British products and, as the trade was illegal, opium imports are not reflected. Appendix 4f also points towards the expansion of regional trade. Clearly Canton is an “end user” market, but the Maldives and Penang, without vast domestic markets, are benefitting from their entrepôt status. Although the data in Appendix

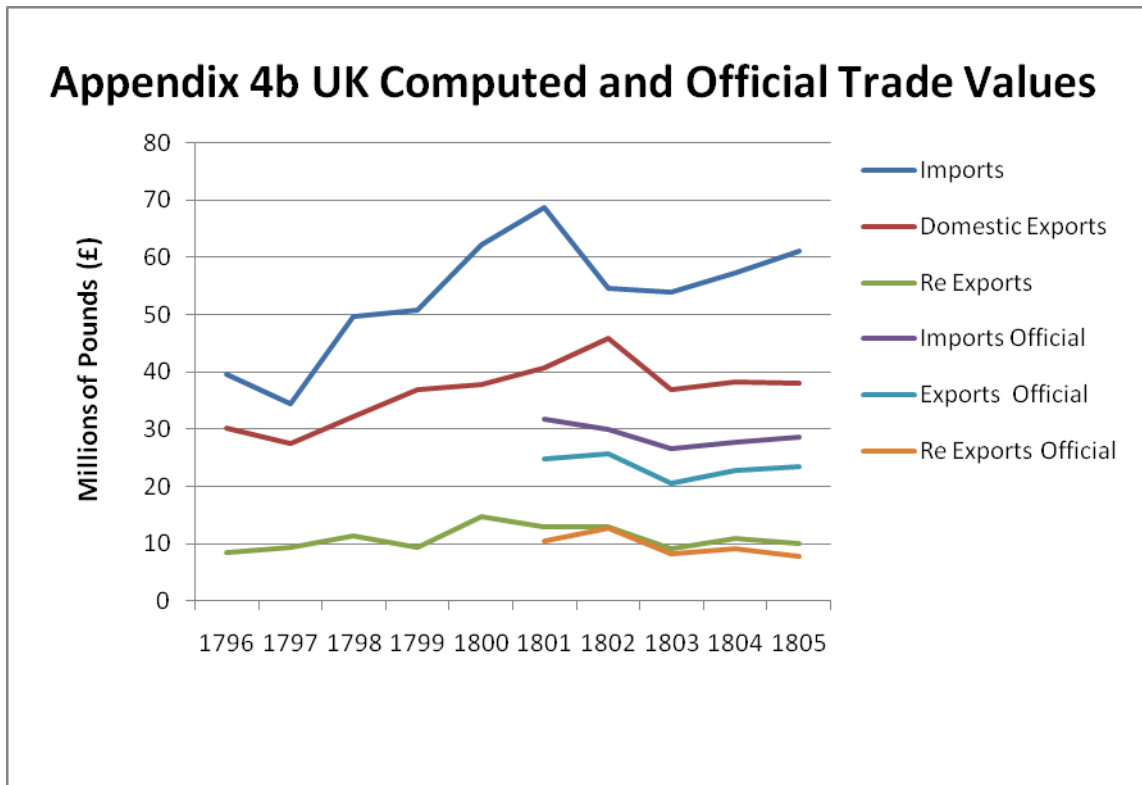
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<sup>7</sup> B.R. Mitchell and P. Deane, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge, 1971).

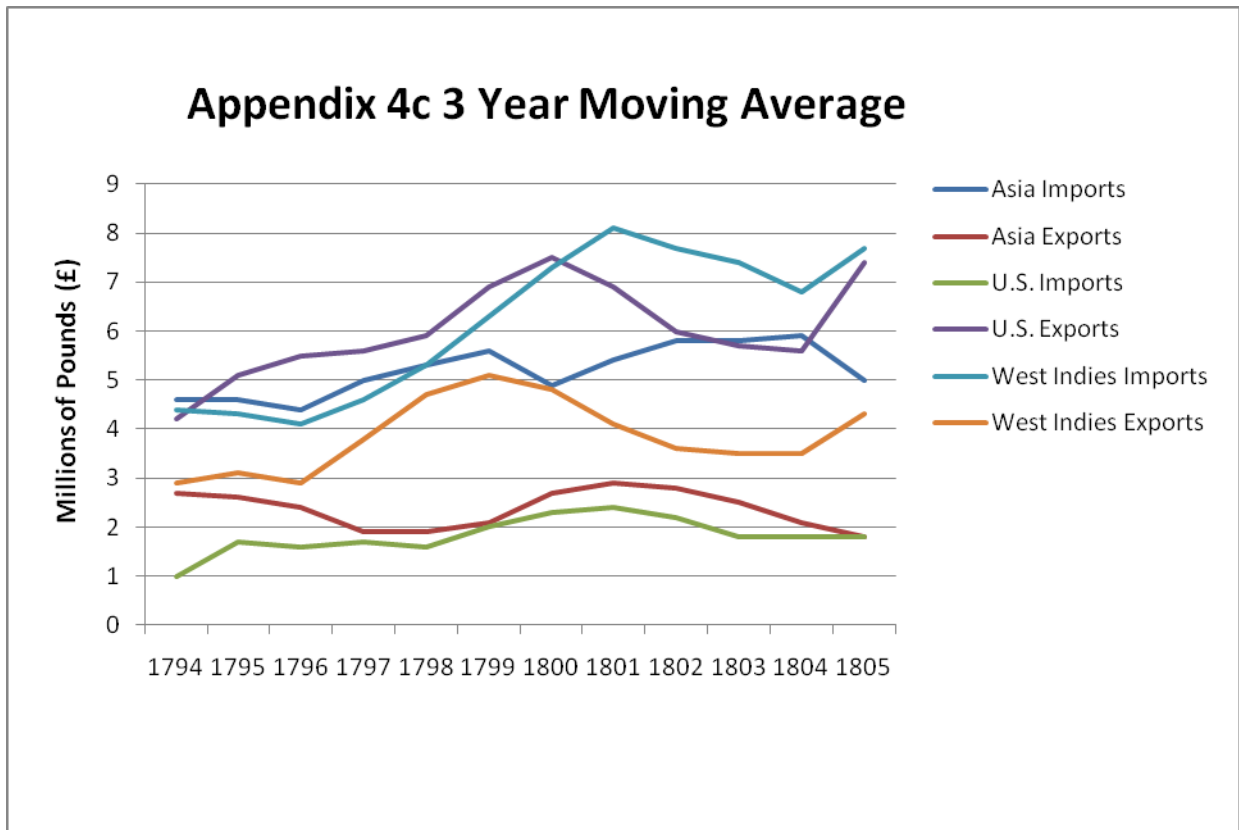
4g primarily covers the years around the Peace of Amiens, it nevertheless illustrates a confidence amongst merchants and ship owners that investment in trade was worthwhile and that any losses to enemy action or piracy would be exceeded by the rewards made from successful voyages under the umbrella of Royal Naval protection.



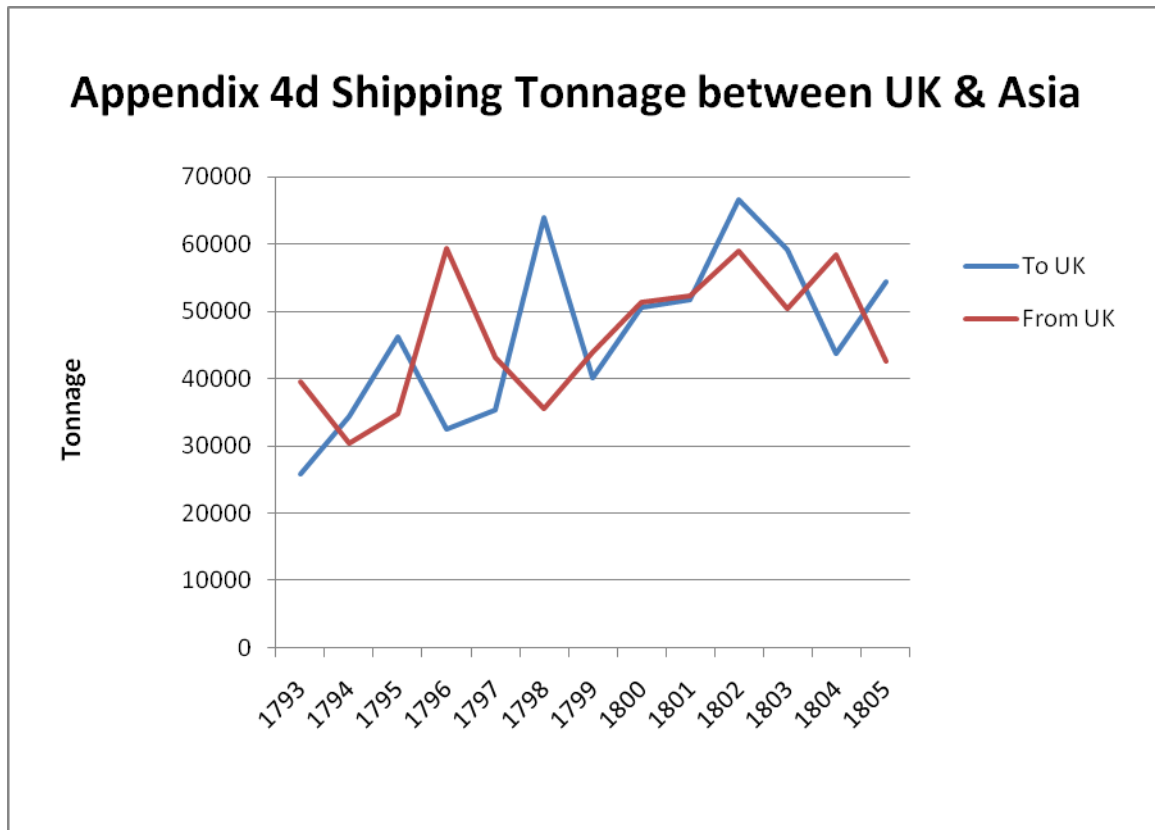
Sources: House of Commons Papers, 1806, J.C. Esteban, 'The Rising Share of British Industrial Output 1700-1851', *The Journal of Economic History*, vol. 57, No.4 (December 1997), p. 901, H.V. Bowen, *The East India Company Trade and Domestic Financial Statistics*.



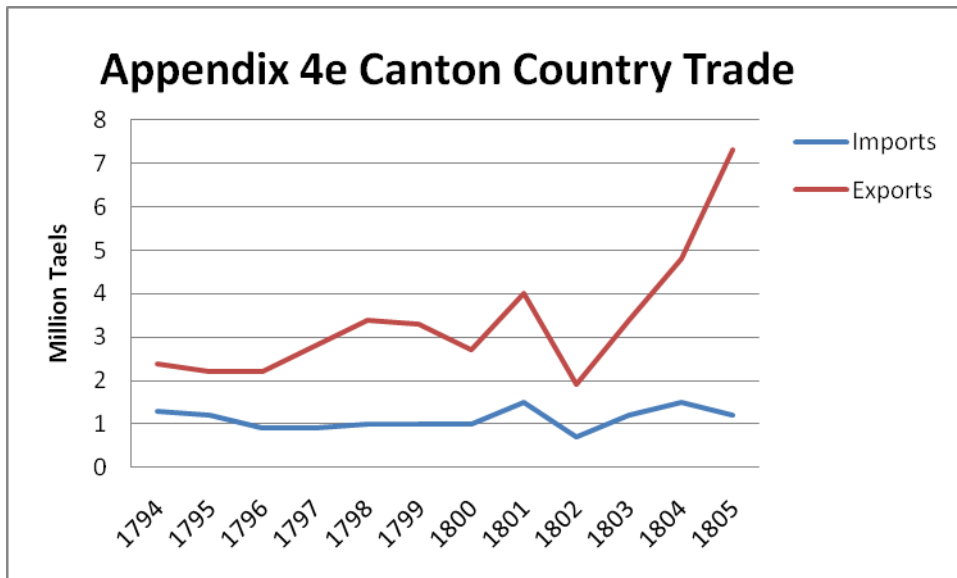
B.R. Mitchell and P. Deane, Abstract of British Historical Statistics, (Cambridge, 1971).



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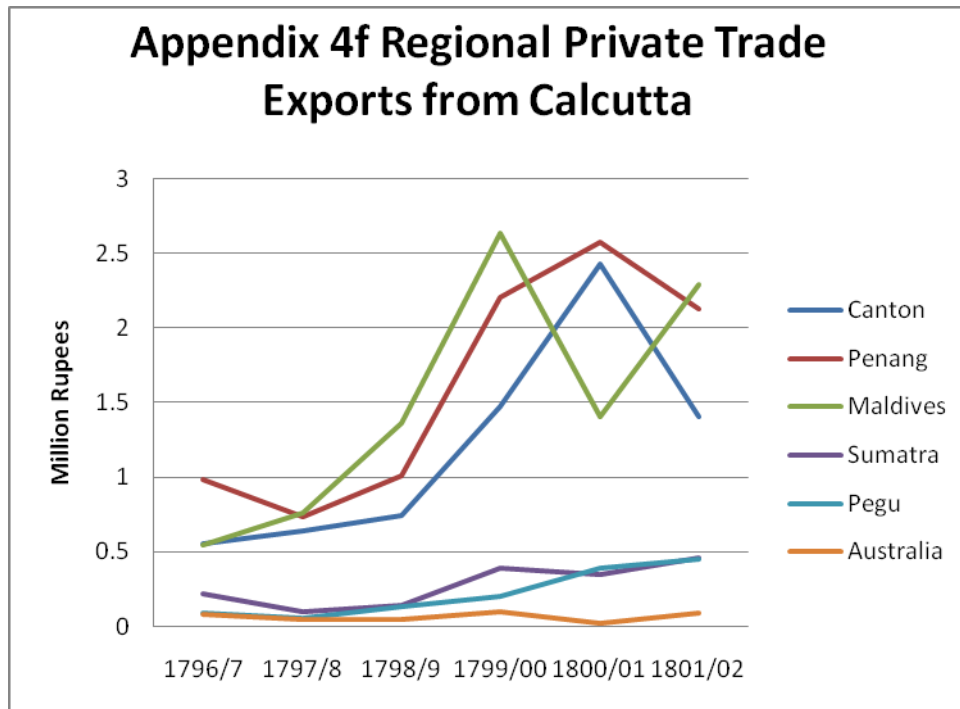


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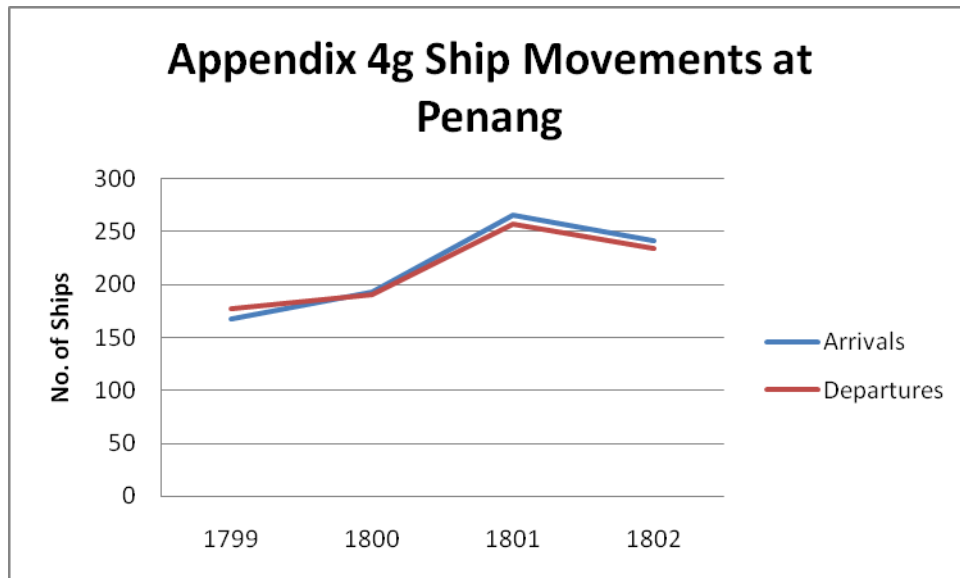
£1= approx 3 taels

E.H. Pritchard, 'The Struggle for the Control of the China Trade in the Eighteenth Century',  
Pacific Historical Review, vol. 3, No. 3, (Sept. 1934),



B.L., I.O.R., P/174/13, Bengal Commercial Reports 1795-1802.





B.L. Mandal, *India's Trade Relations with Malaya and Indonesia (1793-1833)*, (Allahabad, 1984)

## **Appendix 4h.**

### **TRADE STATISTICS FROM *HISTORICAL VIEWS OF PLANS FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF BRITISH INDIA AND THE REGULATION OF TRADE TO THE EAST INDIES* (John Bruce, 1793).**

#### **CHINESE TRADE.**

Average Cost of goods imported from China to Britain:

1762-65      £321,707

1765-79      £501,137

1779-85      £571,761

Average sales of Chinese goods:

1762-67      £1,046,816

1767-77      £1,305,444

1777-84      £1,309,545

Average sales of British manufactures to China:

1789-92      £496,713

Estimated 1793 £626,100

#### **INDIAN TRADE.**

British Exports to India:

1762-67      £386,319

1767-77      £371,840

1777-84      £364,746

1784-90      £357,764

1790-92      £415,264

Imports to Britain from India:

1761-66	£549,712
1772-79	£1,243,178
1782-88	£1,222,832
1789-91	£1,170,225

### **Appendix 5.**

#### **East Indies Naval Manpower Strength 1793-1812**

1793	1062
1794	297
1795	Combined with Cape Squadron
1796	5353
1797	7508
1798	4001
1799	5415
1800	5698
1801	5918
1802	6108
1803	5016
1804	6188
1805	7731
1806	8779
1807	8779
1808	9103
1809	7703
1810	6962
1811	8089

1812	6465
------	------

Source: Wilcox, M., 'The Great Complex Concern', draft article for the *Mariner's Mirror*, May 2011, ADM 8, Admiralty List Books 1793-1813.

### **Appendix 6.**

#### **Cost of Victualling (£ Sterling) in the East Indies, West Indies & Mediterranean 1804-9**

	<b>East Indies</b>	<b>West Indies</b>	<b>Mediterranean</b>
1804	140,000	110,000	61,000
1805	201,000	64,000	93,000
1806	268,000	82,000	67,000
1807	300,000	104,000	177,000
1808	166,000	130,000	167,000
1809	210,000	155,000	148,000

T.N.A., ADM 106/61

**Appendix 7.****Commanders in Chief/ Senior Naval Officers of East Indies Station 1754-1814.**

Name	Rank on leaving station	Years C-in-C/ SNO	Honours given/ Date	Honours given/ Date
Charles Watson	Vice Admiral	1754-57 (d)		
Edward Pocock	Vice Admiral	1757-59	Kt. 1761	
Charles Steevens	Rear Admiral	1759-61 (d)		
Samuel Cornish	Vice Admiral	1761-63	Bart. 1766	
John Tinker	Commodore	1763-65		
Hon. John Byron	Captain	1765-66		
Philip Affleck	Captain	1766-67		
John Lindsay	Commodore	1769-1771	Kt. 1771	
Robert Harland	Rear Admiral	1771-75	Bart. 1771	
Edward Hughes	Commodore	1774-77	Kt. 1778	

Edward Vernon	Commodore	1777-79	Kt. 1773	
Edward Hughes	Vice Admiral	1779-84	Kt. 1778	
Andrew Mitchell	Commodore	1784-86	Kt. 1800	
William Cornwallis	Rear Admiral	1788-93	Kt. 1815	
Peter Rainier	Vice Admiral	1794-1805		
Edward Pellew	Vice Admiral	1805-09	Kt. 1793	Baron 1814/ Viscount 1816
Thomas Troubridge	Rear Admiral	1805-07 (d)	Bart. 1799	
William O'Brien Drury	Vice Admiral	1809-11 (d)		
Samuel Hood	Vice Admiral	1811-14 (d)	Kt. 1808	Bart. 1809

## Appendix 8.

### National Ships taken/ destroyed by Admiral Rainier's Squadron<sup>8</sup>

Date	Name	Captured By
Oct 1794	Revenge (18)	Resistance (44)
Jan 1796	Harlingen (10)	Suffolk (74)
Aug 1796	Alert (16)	Carysfort (28)
March 1797	Modeste (20)	Fox (32)
Sept. 1797	Reunion (6)	Oiseau (36)
Oct. 1797	Yonge Frans (10)	Resistance (44)
“	Yonge Lansier (10)	“
“	Wakker (10)	“
“	Limbi (8)	“
“	Resource (6)	“
“	Ternate (4)	“
“	Juno (4)	“
Feb. 1799	Forte (44)	Sybille (38)
April 1799	Helena (12)	Virginie (38)
“	Brak (12)	“
“	Helena Prau (8)	“
May 1799	?	Arrogant (74) and Orpheus (32)

<sup>8</sup> W. L. Clowes, *The Royal Navy, A History from the Earliest Times to 1900*, vols. IV and V.

Oct. 1799	Iphgenie (24)*	Trincomalee (16)
Dec. 1799	Preneuse (36)	Boats of Tremendous (74) and Adamant (50)
July 1800	Cerbere (7)	Viper (12)
Aug. 1801	Chiffonne (36)	Sybille (38)
Sept. 1801	Fleche (18)	Victor (18)
Aug. 1803	Haasje (6)	Caroline (36)
Jan. 1804	Passe Partout (2)	Boats of San Fiorenzo (36)
Fe. 1805	Psyche (32)	San Fiorenzo (36)

- Both vessels destroyed when Trincomalee blew up.



## APPENDIX 9.

### CAPTAIN RAINIER'S ORDERS ON SAILING TO THE EAST INDIES IN 1794<sup>9</sup>

‘Having detached the *Sampson* and *Argo* to St. Helena ... you are to pursue your voyage with the *Suffolk* and *Swift* Sloop and the East India Company Ships under your Convoy, making the best of your way to the Cape of Good Hope where you may expect to find His Majesty’s Ships named in the margin<sup>10</sup> which have been sent to cruise off that Cape under Orders from Rear Admiral Gardner ... and upon joining those Ships, or any of them, ... you are to take them under your Command (their Captains being hereby directed to follow your Orders) and to prosecute your Voyage to the East Indies, proceeding to Madras and using your best endeavours to see the East India Company’s Ships thither, or as far as your way and theirs may lie together; and having delivered to the Honble Rear-Admiral Cornwallis, Commander-in-Chief of His Majesty’s Ships in the East Indies, or forwarded to him wherever he may be on that Station, ... put yourself and the ships and sloop which may be with you, under his Command, follow his Orders for your further Proceedings.

‘But if on your arrival in the East Indies you shall not find the above-mentioned Rear-Admiral, or any other officer of His Majesty’s Ships senior to yourself on that Station, you are in that case to employ the Force under your Command and such others of His Majesty’s Ships and Vessels as you may find there, or as may join you afterwards, in such manner as, upon consultation with His Excellency the Governor-General, or the Governor and Council of Madras, shall be judged best for the Protection of the Trade and Settlements of His Majesty’s Subjects and His Allies in the East Indies, until you receive further orders.

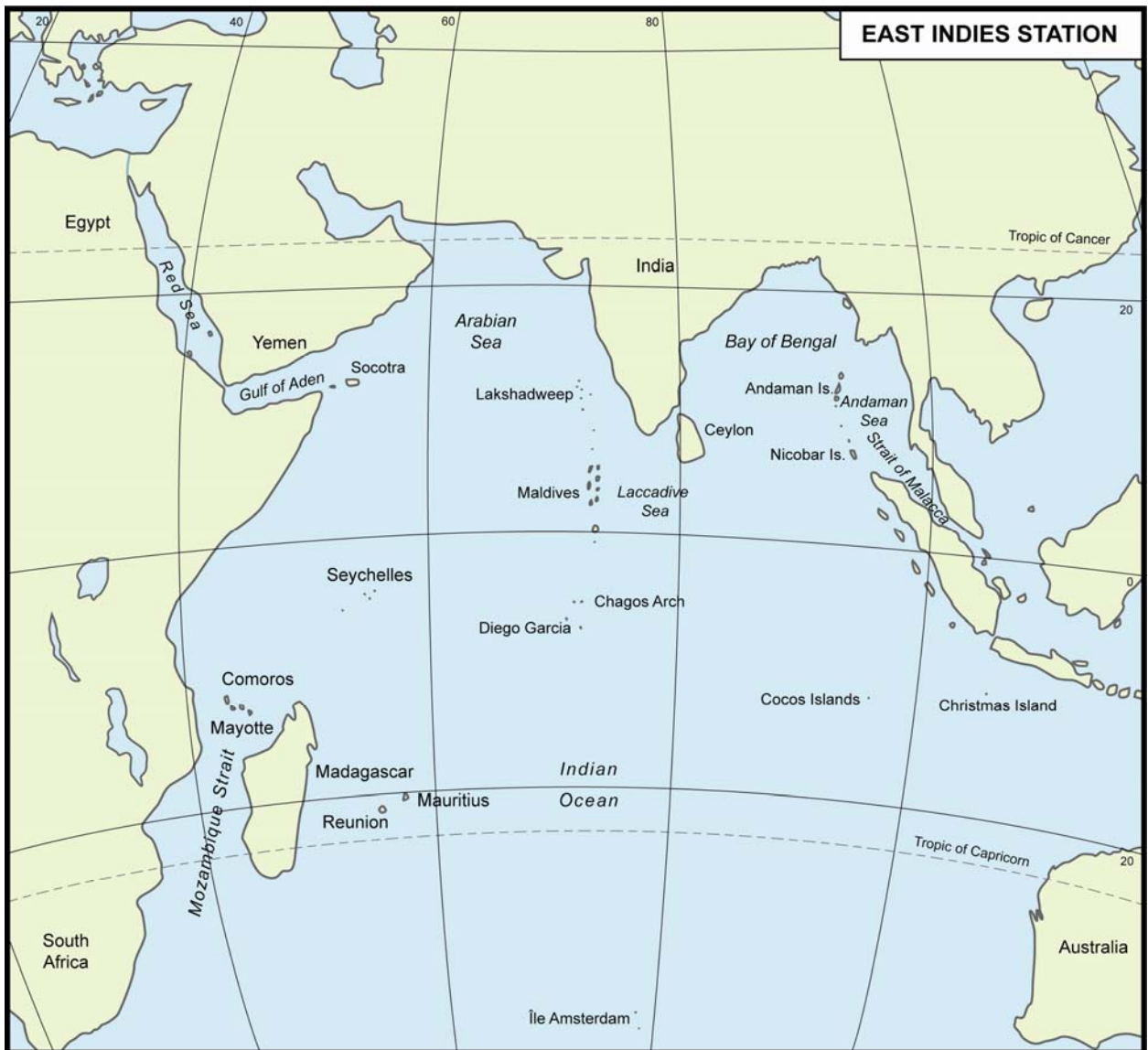
In case you should not fall in with the *Centurion*, *Orpheus* and *Resistance* off the Cape of Good Hope when you arrive there, you are not to make any delay in looking out for them, but to leave in the Hands of the English East India Company’s Agent resident in the Cape Town, Orders for the Commanding Officers of those ships to follow you to Madras with all possible expedition’.

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<sup>9</sup> T.N.A., ADM 2/1347, Admiralty to Rainier, 25 February 1794.

<sup>10</sup> *Centurion*, *Orpheus*, *Resistance*

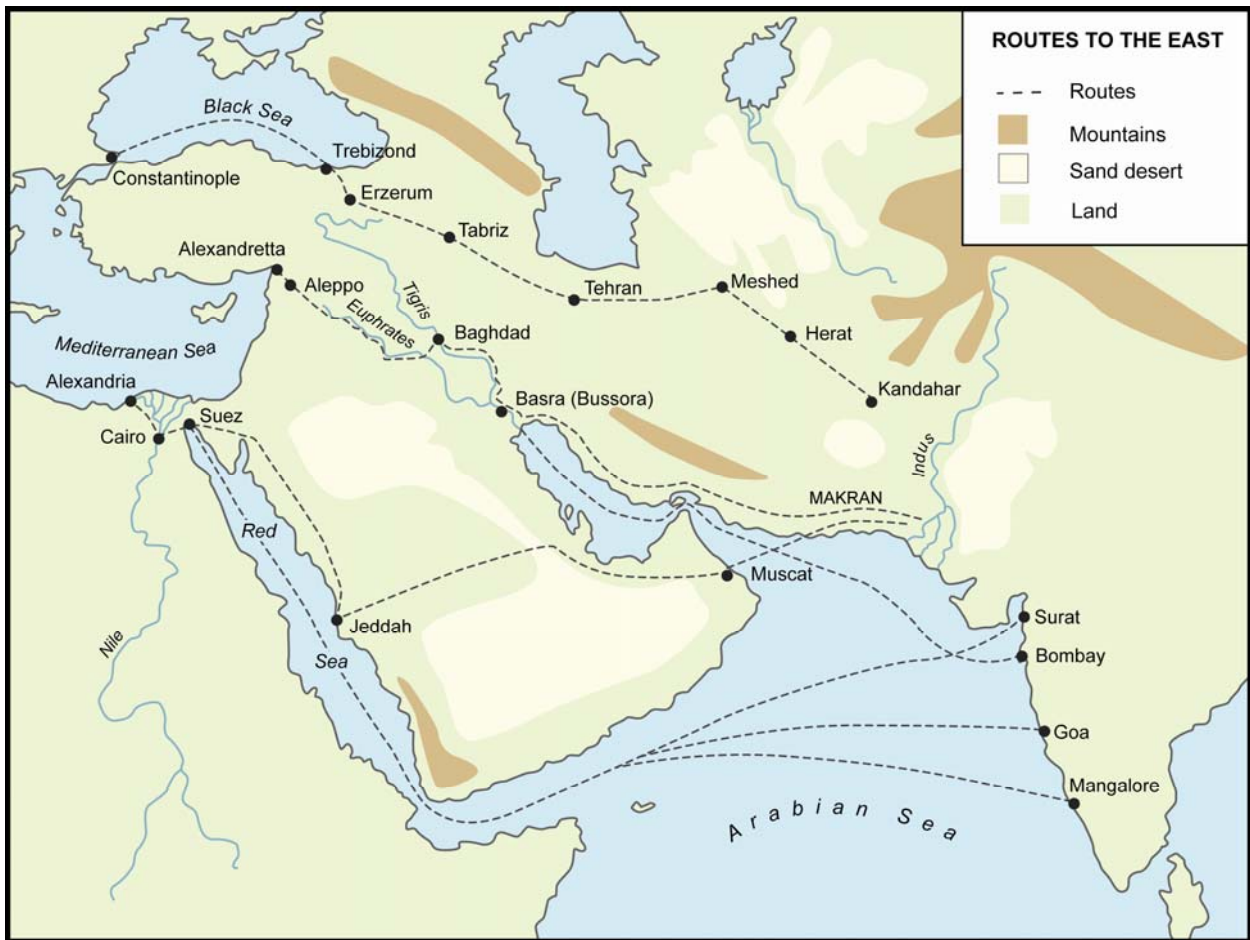
**APPENDIX 10A EAST INDIES STATION**



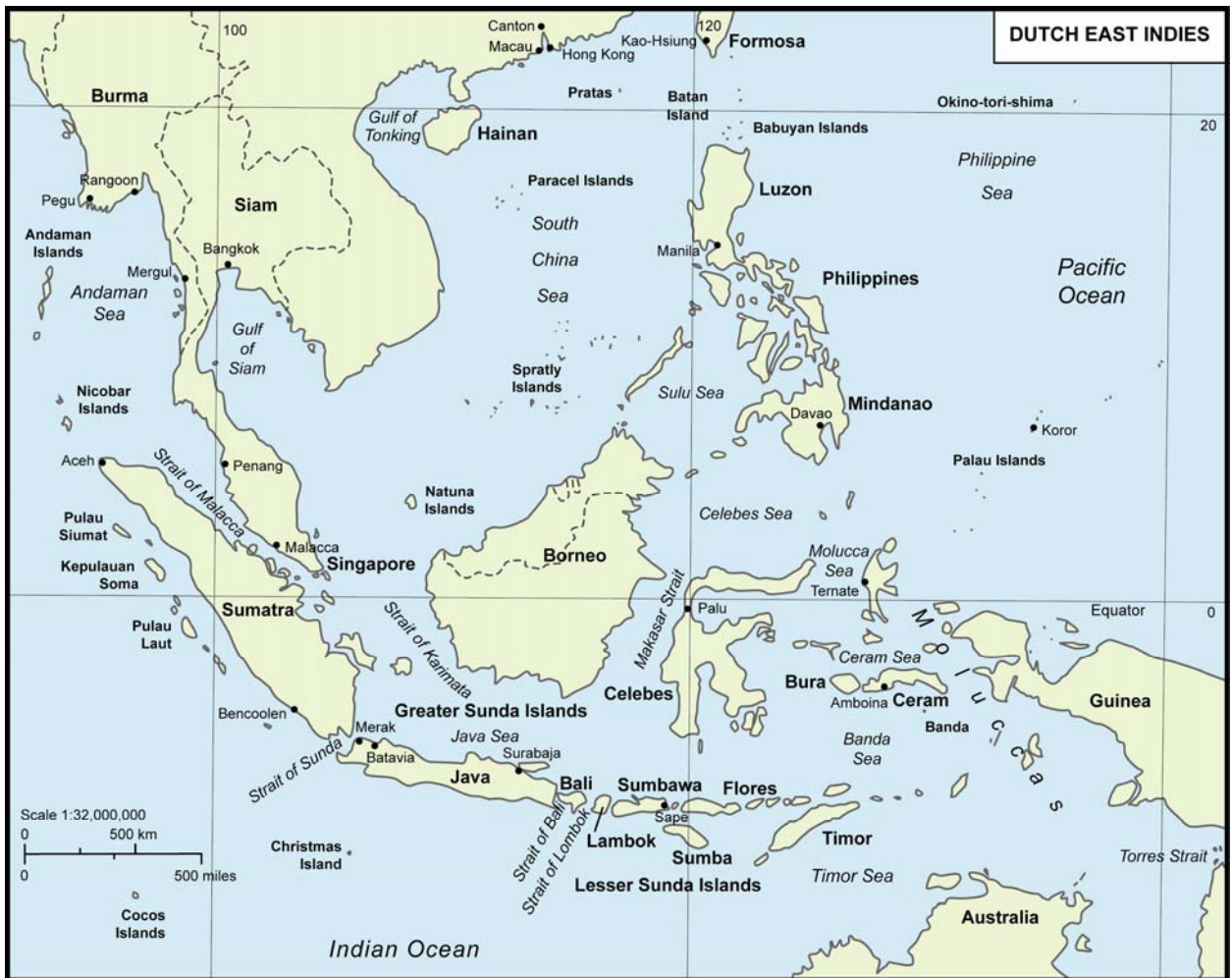
APPENDIX 10B INDIAN COASTLINE



**APPENDIX 10C – ROUTES TO THE EAST**



APPENDIX 10D – DUTCH EAST INDIES

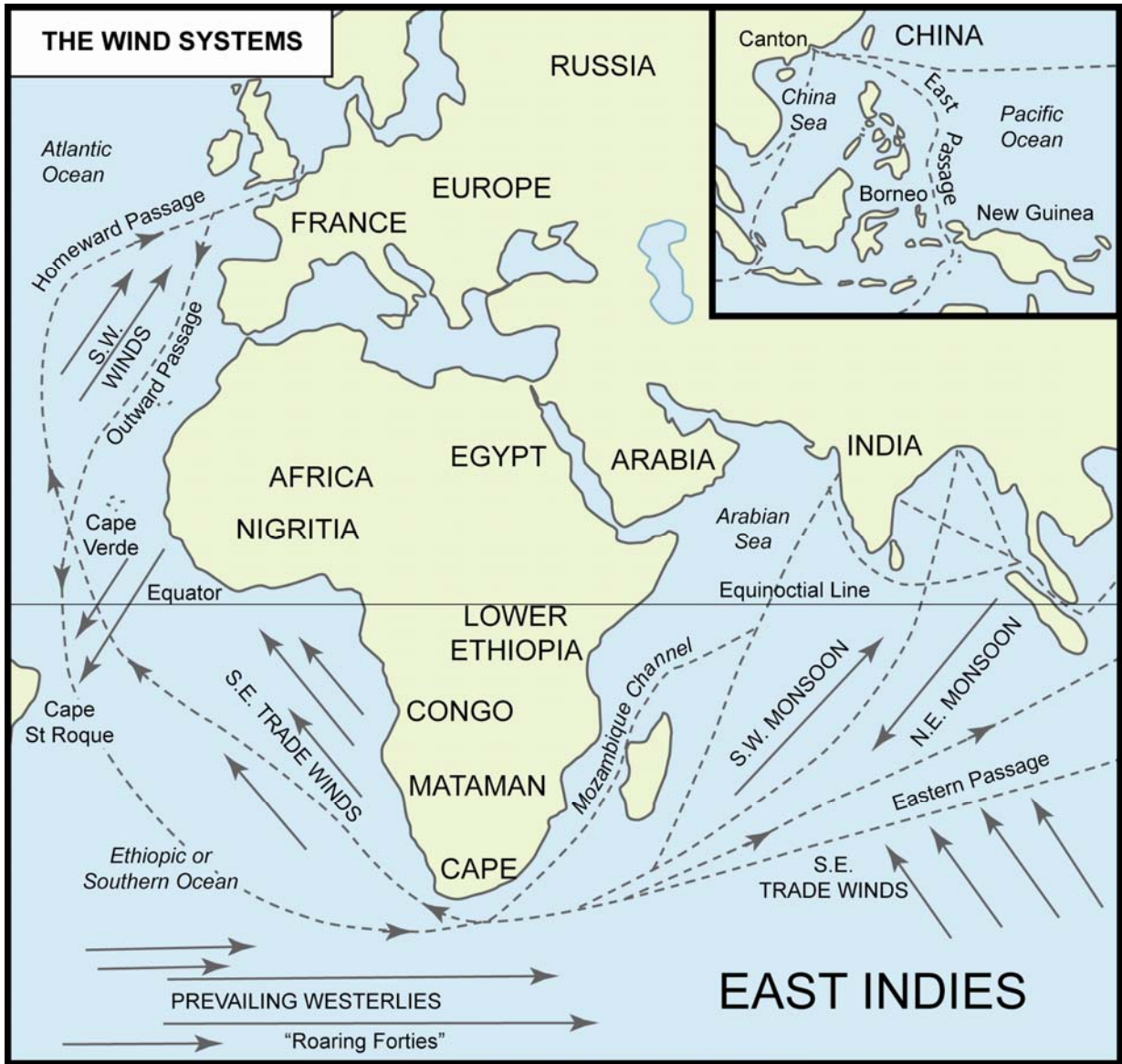


**APPENDIX 10E - RED SEA**



APPENDIX 10F – WIND SYSTEMS







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 ADM 1/55-9 Admiralty In-Letters Cape 1796-1808

##### *Commander in Chief Portsmouth to Admiralty*

- ADM 1/1006 Parker to Admiralty 1794

##### *Letters from Captains, Surname R*

- ADM 1/2375-97 Captains' Letters 1784-94

##### *Letters from Secretaries of State*

- ADM 1/4176

##### *Correspondence between Admiral Rainier & Governor General Wellesley*

- ADM 1/5121/5 Admiral Rainier & Wellesley 1801-8

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- ADM 1/5310 Court Martial of Lieutenant Hibbs 1778  
 ADM 1/5344 Court Martial of Capt Broughton and Lieutenant Vashon 1798

##### *Admiralty Correspondence*

- ADM 2/124-150 Lords' Letters: Orders & Instructions 1793-1806  
 ADM 2/270-309 Lords' Personal Letters 1793-1806  
 ADM 2/603-45 Secretary's Letters: Public Officers & Flag Officers 1793-1806  
 ADM 2/771-840 Secretary's Letters: Common Letters 1793-1806  
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- ADM 3/129 Admiralty Board Rough Minutes November 1793  
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 ADM 5/46 Ceylon 1801

*Seniority Lists*

ADM 6/17 Lt. Daniel Rainier 1747  
 ADM 6/20 Rainier's Commission 1768

*Narrative of the Transactions of the Hon. Basil Cochrane with the Hon. Victualling Board*

ADM 7/40 1818

*Admiral Sir Edward Hughes*

ADM 7/733-5 Order Book 1781-4  
 ADM 7/736 Secret Order Book 1783  
 ADM 7/738-9 Journals 1781-3  
 ADM 7/748 General Correspondence 1780-3

*List Books*

ADM 8/ 69-89 East Indies Squadron 1793-1805

*Muster Books*

ADM 36/4529-3 HM Sloop *Weazle* 1747-49  
 ADM 36/6288-89 HMS *Oxford* 1756  
 ADM 36/6817 HMS *Tyger* 1758  
 ADM 36/7081 HMS *Yarmouth* 1758  
 ADM 36/6173 HMS *Norfolk* 1760  
 ADM 36/8247 HMS *Maidstone* 1774  
 ADM 36/7554 HMS *Antelope* 1777  
 ADM 36/15009-11 HM Sloop *Hobart* 1795-1802  
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 ADM 51/874 HMS *Suffolk*, 1793-4

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*High Court of Admiralty*

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