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A study of the influence of the internal politics of the Royal Navy on the conduct of the war against the French Republic

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POLITICS IN THE ROYAL NAVY, 1793-1801

A study of the Influence of the Internal Politics of
the Royal Navy on the Conduct of the War Against the French
Republic.

by

Kevin Charles Smith

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	
Introduction	
Abstract	p. 1
Chapter I:	
The State of the Navy, 1783-1793.	p. 3
Chapter II:	
The First Four Years of War, 1793-1796	p. 17
Chapter III:	
The Great Mutinies: 1796.	p. 46
Chapter IV:	
The Last Years of War, 1798-1801.	p. 64
Conclusion	p. 79
Bibliography	p. 86
Vita	p. 90

INTRODUCTION

Contrary to the myth of invincibility which frequently enshrouds the history of the Royal Navy, there was no particular reason to cause an observer to predict a British victory in the War against the French Republic. At the outbreak of the war, England had a smaller navy than France. In addition, France had won the most recent war between the two countries. Finally, France was obviously a larger, stronger, more populous country than England.

Yet England won all the naval battles. This is due in part to the weaknesses of the French navy caused by the French Revolution. But more important, it is due to the officers of the British navy.

Because these British officers were human, they had both personal strengths and weaknesses. Yet because of their positions of high responsibility, their personal friendships and feuds often had a profound effect on the course of the war. This thesis studies how their interpersonal relationships influenced the conduct of the War against the French Republic, sometimes for the better, and sometimes for the worse.

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This thesis begins with the advent of William Pitt as Prime Minister in 1783 and sketches his rebuilding of the Royal Navy during the following ten years. The professional and political administration of the navy is examined as well as the organization of the Admiralty. The first chapter concludes that the navy was in a favorable position on the eve of war.

The second chapter begins with the outbreak of the war, mobilization of the navy, and appointment of fleet commanders. This chapter also records the appointment of Lord Spencer as First Lord of the Admiralty and his subsequent problems with Admirals Howe, Middleton, Hood, Hotham, Cornwallis, Laforey, and Christian, and how Lord Spencer resolved each of these problems.

The third chapter tells of Spencer's appointments of Duncan and St. Vincent as commanders of the fleets, and the role of these two Admirals in the battles of St. Vincent and Campedown. In addition, the great mutinies of 1797 are examined with particular attention to their causes, Spencer's role in ending them, and an analysis of the measures taken to reform the navy at this time.

The fourth chapter studies the appointment of Admiral Nelson to command a squadron, and the significance of this decision by Lord Spencer. In addition, the battle of the Nile and Spencer's appointment of St. Vincent to the command of the Channel fleet is also examined, as well as the formation of the League of Armed Neutrality which led to the last battle of this war, Nelson's victory at Copenhagen.

This thesis concludes that the personal relationships between such men as Howe and Bridport, Spencer and Nelson, Spencer and Middleton, Middleton and Laforey, Chatham and Pitt and many others had a profound effect on the conduct of this war, sometimes for the better, as in the case of Nelson and Spencer, and sometimes for the worse, as in the case of Spencer and Middleton. Finally, this thesis concludes that the persons who led the Navy in this war had trained the men who would lead England to victory in the next.

CHAPTER I: THE STATE OF THE NAVY, 1783-1792

When William Pitt became Prime Minister of Great Britain in 1783, he discovered that one of his first tasks would have to be the rebuilding of the Royal Navy. The recent loss of the war against the American colonies had demonstrated serious deficiencies within the Navy, and Pitt immediately began a personal supervision of the fleet that was to last for eighteen years. Discovering, as Admiral Byam Martin had noted, that there was "not a sound ship in the fleet",¹ Pitt sought and closely followed the advice of Sir Charles Middleton, the able comptroller of the Navy.

Pitt first initiated a Parliamentary inquiry into the state of the dockyards. This inquiry prompted reforms which left the dockyards so enlarged and expanded that they were prepared to cope with any reasonable requirement.² During Pitt's first five years in office, he spent over £7,000,000 on improving the Navy, and within his first seven years in office, he ordered twenty-four new ships of the line constructed.³ For a peace Minister to spend so much time and

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1. J. Holland Rose, et al, eds., The Growth of the New Empire. Vol. II of The Cambridge History of the British Empire. (Cambridge University Press, 1940) p. 39.
 2. Geoffrey Callender and F. H. Hinsley, The Naval Side of British History: 1485-1945. (London: Christophers, 1952) p. 184.
 3. J. Holland Rose, William Pitt and National Revival. (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1911) p. 405

money on the Navy indicated the Navy's state of disrepair. Later in his Ministry, Pitt further strengthened the Navy when war threatened in 1790 over the Nootka Sound incident with Spain and again in the anxious days of 1791 when war appeared likely with Russia over Ochakov.

Pitt's selection of a First Lord of the Admiralty was perhaps his only naval mistake during these years of peace. Yet it was a serious error. On July 16, 1788, Pitt invited his elder brother John, Second Earl of Chatham⁴, to take charge of the Admiralty. Chatham was only thirty-two years old and except for a few years in the Army, he had had neither administrative nor military experience. Chatham's strong points included rendering helpful advice on non-naval matters and the personal friendship of King George III, but he was entirely unsuited for his new post. For example, he had great difficulty getting up in the morning, and, since much of the Admiralty's business was completed before noon, this weakness kept senior naval officers waiting for his attention and earned him the soubriquet of the late Lord Chatham.⁵ Indeed, Chatham was a man of brains who "found

4. John Pitt, second Earl of Chatham (1756-1835). Entered the army, 1774. First Lord of the Admiralty, 1788-1793. Promoted to Colonel, 1793; to Major General, 1795; died as General and Governor of Gibraltar, 1835. D.N.B.

5. J. Holland Rose, et al, eds., Growth of the New Empire, 40.

6. Arthur Bryant, Years of Endurance. (London: Collins, 1946) p. 84.

it restful not to use them."⁶

With such a weak leader at the Admiralty, it is not surprising that naval policy was formulated by the Cabinet, although none of its members had any special talent for naval affairs. Three members of the Cabinet took upon themselves the responsibility for naval strategy. The first was the industrious Foreign Secretary, William Grenville.⁷ Although Grenville was a career diplomat and extremely attentive to detail, he had no military training whatsoever, and attempted to substitute common sense for experience. The second member was Henry Dundas⁸, whose personality was invariably jovial but whose ideas of naval affairs were all too often impractical. The third member of this group was Pitt himself, who also shared the total lack of military experience.

Thus Britain's primary defense was in the hands of men who had no formal training in military matters. But this very serious defect was largely invisible. Britain was at peace

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6. Arthur Bryant, Years of Endurance. (London: Collins, 1946) p. 84.
 7. William Windham Grenville, Baron Grenville (1759-1821). Statesman and diplomat; became Foreign Secretary in 1791 and retained this office until 1801. D.N.B.
 8. Henry Dundas, first Viscount Melville (1742-1811). A professional politician, Dundas held a wide variety of offices, including Secretary of War and Treasurer of the Navy. Although of great aid to Pitt in Parliament, he made several serious errors while in charge of the Army. D.N.B.

and had little need for the Navy save to subdue an occasional pirate. There were no major naval decisions to be made, and the routine administration was left to the career officers at the Admiralty.

While political control of the Navy might be in weak hands, the internal administration of the Navy was in the very capable hands of the Board of Admiralty. This Board was composed of five men, the First Lord of the Admiralty, who might be a naval officer or a civilian, as well as four Sea Lords, who were usually Admirals. The First Lord was appointed by the Prime Minister and was a member of the Cabinet. The First Lord also had the responsibility of selecting the Sea Lords. He was free to retain those of the previous administration or to select his own men. Thus, when Chatham left the Admiralty in 1793, his successor, Lord Spencer, retained all of Chatham's Sea Lords.⁹

The Admiralty Board was responsible for the internal administration of the Navy. Its duties included everything from assigning destinations for each ship through ordering examinations for promotion for junior officers to recommending senior officers for high commands. One advantage of this system was that the four Sea Lords generally knew the senior

9. Julian S. Corbett, ed., Private Papers of George, Second Earl Spencer, First Lord of the Admiralty, 1794-1801, II. (n.p. Navy Records Society, 1914) xiv.

officers personally, and were able to recommend one man over another for a particular assignment requiring particular talents. The First Lord generally accepted their advice.

The Sea Lords retained their offices at the discretion of the First Lord. At any time, he could dismiss all or any of them, but they usually changed only when a new administration took office, when they retired, or when one had a serious disagreement with the other Lords over a matter of policy.

This system seems weaker than it was, for while the First Lord could overrule the other members of the Board and make some grievous error, he rarely did so. The First Lord had the power to ignore his advisors, but seldom did so because the Sea Lords could always resign en masse, which invariably produced a Parliamentary inquiry. Parliament generally presumed the four naval officers collectively could better judge naval affairs than the First Lord alone, especially if the First Lord was a civilian. Thus, the Sea Lords could often sway the First Lord to their point of view by hinting at resignation.

Another check on the theoretically dominant power of the First Lord was provided by the Prime Minister. At any time, a Prime Minister who was unhappy with his First Lord could ask him to resign, as Pitt did in 1793. This method of changing a First Lord was only applied if he was clearly inadequate for his post.

The organization of the Admiralty had other and less obvious faults. Numerous clerks dealt with the enormous paper work of the Admiralty, and these clerkships were often lucrative rewards for political favors. As Sir Charles Middleton noted, clerkships were often sold to the highest bidder, and the poor supervision of Admiralty funds made it rather easy for clerks to divert large sums to their own pockets. Middleton also complained that the lines of organization and responsibility within the Admiralty were, at best, hazy.¹⁰ Furthermore, while the Admiralty had overall responsibility for the Navy, some important duties were in the hands of an independent institution, the Navy Board. This Board had control of food supply, transportation, and care of the sick and wounded.¹¹

On the other hand the Admiralty had sole responsibility for recruiting, training and promoting naval officers. A man became a naval officer either by promotion from the ranks or by "interest". Since promotion from the ranks was generally a reward for conspicuous bravery in battle and since, by 1792

10. Sir Charles Middleton (Lord Barham) to Chatham, December, 1790. John Knox Laughton, ed., Letters and Papers of Charles, Lord Barham, Admiral of the Red Squadron, 1758-1813, II (n.p., Navy Records Society, 1910), 343-44.

11. C. W. Crawley, ed., War and Peace in an Age of Upheaval: 1793-1830. IX of The New Cambridge Modern History. (Cambridge University Press, 1965), p. 80.

Britain had been at peace for ten years, nearly all officers became such by "interest". Each large warship carried a number of teenage officer apprentices called midshipmen. These youths owed their appointments to favorable recommendations by a Captain, an Admiral, friend in the Admiralty, Royal Patron, or Parliamentary sponsor. In a word, they owed their appointments to interest.

To advance from Midshipman to Lieutenant, an oral examination was required. But a word in the right ear generally guaranteed promotion, as the career of Admiral Byam Martin indicates:

On arriving at Spithead, I had the happiness to learn by a letter from my father, who then held the office of comptroller of the navy, that an arrangement was under consideration for promoting me to the rank of commander, not on account of (our) capture of the Enterpris¹², or on any other account than the good name, interest and services of my father.¹³

But interest was indiscriminate. Another British officer, James Gardner, gave exactly the opposite answer to a question put to him by his examiners. Even so, Gardner's interest was sufficient to obtain his commission and to

12. Throughout this paper, the names of all ships are underlined, even when, as in this case, it is not underlined in the original.

13. Diary of Sir Thomas Byam Martin, February, 1793. Richard Hamilton, ed., Letters and Papers of Admiral of the Fleet Sir Thomas Byam Martin, I (n.p.: Navy Records Society, 1901), 173.

prove that interest could overcome incompetence.¹⁴

On the other hand, interest could work against a man, especially if his patron was out of favor at the Admiralty. For example, Lord Hood replied to a letter requesting a recommendation:

But to be candid with you, I can be of no use to anyone; for Lord Spencer (the First Lord of the Admiralty) is not content with marking me with indifference and inattention, but carries it to all who have any connexion with me.¹⁵

Interest did have its limits, however. It could not carry an officer beyond the rank of Post Captain. Further advancement depended solely upon seniority. If, for example, promotion, retirement and death created ten vacancies in the ranks of Rear-Admirals, the ten most senior Captains were automatically promoted to fill their places.

This system contained some weaknesses. It automatically promoted the incompetent, as well as awarding high office to elderly men whose ideas had become fixed in their earlier days and who were incapable of adjusting the habits of a lifetime to changing circumstances. However, **these weaknesses**

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14. Richard Hamilton and John Knox Laughton, eds., Recollections of James Anthony Gardner, Commander R.N. (n.p., 1906), p. 174.
 15. Lord Hood to William Wolseley, August 2, 1797. John Knox Laughton, ed., The Naval Miscellany (n.p. Navy Records Society, 1918) p.78.

were overcome by the distinction made between promotion and appointment. While an officer was guaranteed promotion, he was not assured of active duty. The Admiralty always managed to have more Admirals than it needed, and thus could choose one or two for particular assignments while leaving the others on half-pay and without appointments. In this way the Admiralty preserved a freedom of choice as well as a reserve of officers. Thus, for example, Lord St. Vincent once recommended that the Admiralty promote the fifteen most senior captains in order that St. Vincent might entrust part of his fleet to the fifteenth Captain on the list, the only Captain whose professional qualities St. Vincent respected.¹⁶

On balance, the system worked very well. In fact, by 1793 it could be said that:

As a general rule the British officers were men of high character and great capacity, animated with a spirit of zeal for the service, trained in the American war, and professionally unmatched in any navy which ever existed.¹⁷

From 1783 to 1792, these excellent officers led the reformation of the Navy. For example, Middleton ordered complete provisioning of all ships in the reserve fleet. Thus, in an

16. Julian S. Corbett, ed., Spencer Papers. II, 9.

17. A. W. Ward et al, eds., The French Revolution. VIII of The Cambridge Modern History. (London: Macmillan Co., 1904). 454.

emergency, these ships could sail as soon as crews came on board rather than waiting for supplies from strained and perhaps distant warehouses. In 1790 Admiral Richard Lord Howe initiated a new flag system for signalling between ships, especially during battles, which restored mobility to fleet tactics.¹⁸

Another reform carried out in these years of peace applied to ordinary seamen. Their problems included indefinite enlistment, poor wages, poor food, harsh discipline, and other complaints which will be examined later. The one reform carried out at this time was a Parliamentary Bill aimed at paying the seamen more promptly.¹⁹ While not of major importance, the act demonstrates Admiralty awareness of seamen's conditions and concern to improve them.

Towards the end of these years of peace, Prime Minister Pitt began to reduce the Navy's size. In 1790, the Navy had 39,526 seamen; Pitt cut this to 34,097 in 1791²⁰ and in 1792 he reduced the naval budget by 200,000 and cut the seamen to 16,000.²¹ By 1792, only twelve ships of the line²² re-

18. Michael Lewis, History of the British Navy (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1957), 155.

19. Parliamentary History, XXIX, 549-551.

20. A. W. Ward, ed., The French Revolution, 452.

21. William Hunt, The History of England from the Accession of George III to the Close of Pitt's First Administration (1760-1801). X of The Political History of England (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1905), 333.

22. A ship of the line was the largest size warship, roughly corresponding to the modern battleship.

mained in commission, none of them in either the Mediterranean or the West Indies.²³

Pitt believed he had excellent reasons for reducing the size of the Navy, as he told Parliament early in 1792:

... unquestionably there was never a time in the history of this country where from the situation of Europe we might more reasonably expect fifteen years of peace, than we may at the present moment.²⁴

While one of the "world's worst prophecies",²⁵ it was not unreasonable at the time Pitt pronounced it. As a student of history, Pitt argued that revolutions usually weaken a nation's military power. Then, too, so long as the French finances remained critical and French harvests continued bad, France appeared incapable of waging war. Pitt failed to understand that France was no longer an old-style power, but that it would emerge with modern energies provided by an entire nation at war.

Not was Pitt alone in his mistake. Grenville agreed with him and added still another motive for naval retrenchment. He believed that the only danger from France was that the English common people would be infected with French discontent. Grenville reasoned that if the Navy was reduced,

23. Arthur Bryant, Years of Endurance, p. 81.

24. Parliamentary History, XXIX. 971.

25. G. M. Trevelyan, Autobiography and Other Essays (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1949), p. 84.

taxes could be lowered, living standards would rise, and thus the danger of rebellion would pass. Then, too, he believed that since the reserve fleet was in good repair and adequately provisioned, the navy could be readied quickly to face any emergency.²⁶

But this faith in speedy mobilization was not warranted. While ships and officers were available, crewmen were not. The Admiralty obtained its crews by impressment, using an officer and a few men to impress (or legally kidnap) any available seamen or healthy men. But as Middleton noted:

The impress service in its best state has never furnished more than 22 or 23,000 men, including every other means, in the first year of a war, and which, circumstanced as we are at present, will not man one half of the line-of-battle ships that are fit for service...²⁷

Nor was this the only unsolved naval problem at the end of 1792. Britain owned 115 ships of the line and 400 smaller vessels, but had only twelve ships of the line in commission. France, Britain's traditional rival, owned 76 ships of the line and 246 smaller vessels, but had 27 ships of the line in commission.²⁸ Thus, proper deployment of the French Navy at the outbreak of war could make Britain's speed of mobilization

26. Lord Grenville to Lord Auchland, August 23, 1791. Dropmore Papers (n.p. Historical Manuscripts Commission, 1894), II, 177.

27. Middleton to Chatham, Aug. 27, 1788. Barham Papers, II, 313.

28. C. W. Crawley, ed., War and Peace in an Age of Upheaval, p. 83.

critical to her safety.

Mere size of the French Navy was not the Admiralty's only worry: the French ships were, class for class, superior to the British in gun power, tonnage and speed. Then, too at least ten French ships mounted between 100 and 120 guns each while the largest British ships mounted only 100 guns.²⁹ However, the British had some advantages. Their rate of fire, two rounds in three minutes, was superior to the French,³⁰ and the use of carronades,³¹ introduced in 1779, gave the British a tactical advantage.³²

On the other hand, the Revolution had severely crippled the French Navy which suffered from a lack of trained officers and seamen. Many officers had fled. At the trial of Louis XVI, for example, his prosecutor charged "You destroyed our navy; a vast number of that body emigrated; scarcely sufficient were left to do port duty...".³³ Then, too, early decrees of the Convention dissolved the corps of trained gunners because they

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29. J. Holland Rose, et al, eds., Growth of the New Empire, p.40
 30. C. W. Crawley, ed., War & Peace in an Age of Upheaval, p. 83.
 31. Carronades were a particular type of cannon designed to kill or wound an enemy crew rather than harm the sails or rigging.
 32. Tactics refers to the individual means and methods of commanders in battles; strategy refers to the higher problem of having the right ship in the right place at the right time. Thus, battles can show both good strategy and poor tactics or vice versa.
 33. Annual Register, 1793, p. 95.

seemed to be "privileged", and also replaced Captains with men elected by the crews. The consequent disappearance of discipline was inevitable, and on the first cruise of the war, Admiral Morard de Gaulle could not persuade "more than fifty men to be on deck at one time".³⁴ The boast of naval minister Jean Bon St. Andre that France had "the most powerful navy in the world" was partly right, for its sheer size was indeed formidable. With its minor responsibilities, it appeared even more formidable. But whether the reforms of the Convention had replaced the Navy with a collection of ships remained to be seen.

The problems of France notwithstanding, Pitt's administration had in its early years substantially rebuilt the material strength of the Royal Navy. In addition, England possessed a large group of talented officers. Although Pitt reduced the strength of the Navy as the years of peace drew to a close, his earlier reforms left the Royal Navy in a comparatively favorable position.

34. This represented about one twelfth of his crew. C. W. Crawley, ed., War and Peace in an Age of Upheaval, p. 62.

CHAPTER II: THE EARLY YEARS OF WAR, 1793-1796

Great Britain and France went to war in February of 1793. The immediate cause was Britain's objection to the French invasion of the Scheldt River basin in The Netherlands. With France in control of Holland, Antwerp became a "pistol" aimed at England.¹ Pitt's first problem was to devise a strategy to defeat the French.

Almost every prominent British citizen had his own pet project for defeating the enemy. The Duke of Richmond, for example, urged an invasion of French naval bases such as Brest and Toulon, while Edmund Burke insisted that aid to the Royalists in the Vendée was the best method.² Lord Auckland favored a prompt conquest of Paris because this would allow the British to capture the French West Indian colonies.³ Both Dundas and Pitt favored capturing the French colonies, as the revenue thus gained could subsidize Continental allies.⁴ Then, too, there was the question of allies, whether the British should employ their army alongside their

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1. Michael Lewis, History of the Royal Navy. (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1957), p. 153.
 2. Herbert Richmond, Statesmen and Sea Power. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), p. 179.
 3. J. Holland Rose, et al., eds., The Growth of the New Empire. Vol. II of The Cambridge History of the British Empire. (Cambridge: University Press, 1940), p. 48.
 4. Herbert Richmond, Statesmen and Sea Power, p. 175.

allies or in independent campaigns. Clearly, British strategy could no longer be simple and direct as in previous wars, for now Britain had to shield an ever-expanding Empire from Bengal to Canada to Jamaica, as well as protect England and attack France and her colonies.

Since William Pitt was primarily a peace minister, not a military commander, it is not surprising that he had problems drafting British strategy:

The plans of the British government were of the vaguest. Should we concentrate for invasion on the French front? Or make sudden attacks on the coast of France, where a counter-revolution might be encouraged? Or turn our attention to the French Islands in the West Indies?⁵

Only Pitt could answer these questions, and in reaching his decisions he had very little help. Pitt's early administration of the war was a chaotic affair. No one professional decided war policy; three amateurs attempted to do so. For example, the Secretary of State at War was only responsible for equipment and supplies, nothing else, while another officer, the Secretary of State for War, theoretically had responsibility for war plans. This second office was held by Dundas and illustrates that the entire Cabinet contained not

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5. Edward Lascelles, The Life of Charles James Fox. (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), p. 253.
 6. J. Seton-Watson, The Reign of George III: 1760-1815. (London: Clarendon Press, 1960), p. 365.

one man in whom there was a "flicker of war genius."⁷ Although Pitt and Chatham were both sons of Britain's great minister, the First Lord Chatham, neither had inherited their father's talent for waging war.

Consequently, Pitt entrusted the direction of war policy to Dundas, though he had no particular reason either to trust or doubt Dundas' judgment in this area. Since Dundas had never failed him before, Pitt believed that the conduct of the war was in the best possible hands. With the exception of occasional sound advice from the King, such as the comment that "the misfortune of our situation is that we have too many objects to attend to, and our forces must consequently be too weak at each place," Dundas toiled alone at plans and schemes.⁸ Not surprisingly, Dundas failed Pitt by producing only impulsive and diffuse plans.

Pitt's failure to see the disadvantages of employing amateurs to perform professional tasks is easily explained. Many authorities, including Admiral Byam Martin,⁹ expected a short war. Middleton, in a rare error, wrote to the First Lord six months later that the war "does not seem to call much for a continuance of employing the flower of our ships."

7. J. Holland Rose et al., eds., Growth of the New Empire, p. 39

8. Ibid., p. 47.

9. Diary of Admiral Martin, June, 1793. Richard Vesey Hamilton, ed., Letters and Papers of Admiral of the Fleet Thomas Byam Martin, I (n.p.; Navy Records Society, 1903) 181.

Indeed, Middleton went on later in the month to advise Chatham on how to demobilize the Navy.¹⁰ Pitt realized that the French Army was disorganized, that France was almost bankrupt and, at the moment, lacked leaders.¹¹ It was no wonder, then, that he anticipated a short war, so short, in fact, that at first he made no provision for increasing taxes.¹²

While the Prime Minister decided how to use the fleet, the Admiralty hastened to bring it up to wartime strength. The first problem was obtaining seamen. Parliament voted to expand the Navy to 45,000 seamen,¹³ but no Parliamentary decree could produce these men. Seamen, neglected in peacetime, could not now be found in wartime. Most were already at sea on the vast merchant fleets which were often away from England for years at a time. Unquestionably, the most critical problem was to find men for the waiting warships. Although press warrants were issued in the second half of February 1793, the complements of the Channel, Mediterranean and North Sea fleets were filled so slowly that not until July 14, fully five months

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10. Middleton to Chatham, October, 1793. John Knox Laughton, Letters and Papers of Charles, Lord Barham, Admiral of the Red Squadron 1758-1813, II (n.p.; Navy Records Society, 1910) 353, 362.
 11. Herbert Richmond, Statesmen and Sea Power, p. 175.
 12. William Hunt, The History of England from the Accession of George III to the Close of Pitt's First Administration (1760-1801). Vol. X of The Political History of England. (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1905), p. 347.
 13. Parliamentary History, XXX, 561.

after war was declared, was the Channel fleet ready for sea. As late as September, the Admiralty anxiously awaited the East and West Indian convoys which would provide good hauls for the press gang.¹⁴ Collingwood's ship was a typical case. He reported in May 1793, that: "The Prince has been eight weeks in commission and there are not eight good seamen before the mast belonging to her".¹⁵ Such poor results demonstrated that the press gang was not prepared to cope with any extensive war requiring large numbers of seamen.

Meanwhile, commanders were appointed for the two main fleets. The Admiralty had an extraordinarily talented and experienced list of available senior commanders. Foremost among them was Admiral Richard Lord Howe. He had entered the Navy in 1739 at the age of 13 and had never left it. Although he enjoyed powerful interest, he also had a distinguished early career. In addition to serving in Parliament for twenty-five years, he had been a Sea Lord at the Admiralty, the commander in chief in North America during the American war, and had served as First Lord of the Admiralty from 1783 to 1788. When the Nootka Sound crisis broke out in 1790, he was appointed to command the Channel fleet. He declined active duty from 1790

14. J. Holland Rose et al., eds., Growth of the New Empire, p. 39.

15. Collingwood to the Admiralty, May 5, 1793. Edward Hughes, ed., The Correspondence of Admiral Lord Collingwood. (n.p.; Navy Records Society, 1957), p. 37.

until the war broke out in 1793.¹⁶ Yet it is entirely proper to conclude that Howe was, in 1793, "the first officer in the world".¹⁷

The Admiralty also enjoyed the services of the Hood brothers. Samuel Viscount Hood's career closely paralleled that of Lord Howe. Hood joined the navy while still a boy, saw service in America, was a member of Parliament, and of the Board of Admiralty. Hood was conscious of his rank and its dignity, religious, conscientious and industrious. His somewhat cool manner held his officers in awe of him. By 1793, he was a member of the Admiralty Board and a Vice-Admiral.¹⁸

Hood's younger brother was Alexander Hood, later Viscount Bridport. Having gone to sea at the age of 13 in 1740, he also took part in many naval engagements. He was promoted to Rear-Admiral in 1780 and served under Lord Howe. Bridport

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16. Richard, Earl Howe (1726-1799). Member of Parliament, 1757-1782; promoted Rear-Admiral, 1770; Vice-Admiral and Commander-in-Chief, North America, 1775; promoted Admiral and Commander-in-Chief, Channel Fleet, 1782; First Lord 1783-88, Commander-in-Chief, Channel Fleet, 1790. D.N.B.
 17. Arthur Bryant, Years of Endurance, p. 107.
 18. Samuel Viscount Hood (1725-1816). Member of Parliament 1784; promoted to Vice-Admiral and Commander-in-Chief Portsmouth, 1788; member of Board of Admiralty 1788-1793. D.N.B.

was more cautious and reserved than his older brother, and Bridport also enjoyed a large private income while Hood had to live on his officer's salary. By 1793, Bridport was a Vice-Admiral but without a current appointment.¹⁹

The last of the experienced senior officers available to the Admiralty was Sir John Jervis (later Lord St. Vincent). He probably knew the Royal Navy better than any other officer, for he had entered it as an ordinary sailor at the age of 13. He spent his early career in West Indian and North American waters. He departed on a tour of Europe in 1772 which lasted intermittently for three years, during which time he taught himself to speak French, studied the Russian Navy while a visitor in St. Petersburg, and paused to study the Swedish and Danish navies on his way home. By 1784, he was elected to Parliament where he generally favored the Whig position. After another appointment to the West Indies, he was promoted to Vice-Admiral on the eve of war in 1793.²⁰

Thus the Admiralty had a list of outstanding officers from which to choose its fleet commanders. Under the system used in 1793, the Admiralty Board recommended the Commanders to the First Lord, who then cleared them with the Cabinet. The

19. Alexander Hood, Viscount Bridport (1727-1814). Promoted to Rear-Admiral, 1780; Vice-Admiral, 1787. D.N.B.

20. John Jervis, Earl of St. Vincent (1735-1823). Promoted to Rear-Admiral, 1787; to Vice-Admiral, 1793. D.N.B.

final step was to submit the nominations to the King, who then formally appointed commanders. Since the premier post was Commander in Chief of the Channel Fleet, and since Lord Howe had commanded it when it was last mobilized in 1791, his nomination for this post was automatic. Lord Bridport who had previously worked harmoniously with Lord Howe was appointed as his second in command. The fact that Lord Bridport's brother was a member of the Admiralty Board helped prompt his selection.

Lord Hood was appointed to command the Mediterranean fleet, in part because of his personal merits, but in part because he sat on the Admiralty Board. Before sailing for the Mediterranean, however, Hood resigned from the Board in order to devote his considerable talents to his new post.

Thus the British fleet was placed in experienced hands at the beginning of the war. But the hands were none too steady. Howe was 67, Hood was 68, and Bridport was 66. Only Jervis was under 60, and only he was healthy. For the others, sea duty meant an exchange of the comforts of their estates for the patriotic rigours of sea. But none complained, and all accepted the offered appointments.

By the time the Admiralty finally provided enough men to sail the ships, orders had been drafted for each fleet. Lord Howe was to protect England from French attacks as well as to harass French shipping. As a consequence of Pitt's alliance

with Austria, the British sent a fleet under Lord Hood into the Mediterranean to disrupt the French.²¹

In Lord Howe's first year in the Channel he disrupted French shipping, but could not provoke a major battle. At first, Howe only watched the French ports. But when his strenght roughly equalled the French, a point reached by mid-summer, an engagement was possible. Yet Howe found the French reluctant to leave their ports and, therefore, he had only one course open to him -- blockade.

However, Howe failed to blockade France for three reasons. First, rather than tie down his ships, he cruised the Channel to protect trade against possible French raiders. This was a prudent decision on his part, for French war strategy had traditionally been guerre de course, a war against trade.²² Second, Howe, simply did not have enough ships to blockade effectively, principally because there were not enough men to fill all the ships assigned to his fleet.²³ Third, and most important, Howe did not believe in blockade. Rather, he was "obsessed with the supreme importance of safeguarding his ships"

21. J. Holland Rose, William Pitt and the Great War. (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1914), p. 143.

22. Michael Lewis, History of the British Navy, p. 153.

23. "In short, there are a great many ships commissioned, and no prospect I see of manning any of them". Collingwood to Dr. Alexander Carlyle, September 1, 1794. Edward Hughes, ed., Correspondence of Collingwood, p. 157.

and not surprisingly, the Treasury strongly supported his views.²⁴

Since the French harvests of 1791, 1792 and 1793 had been poor, a blockade of imported grain by Howe would have seriously crippled France.²⁵ But Howe's decision to cruise rather than blockade was probably correct. To maintain a force of twelve ships in a blockading position at least twenty ships were required to permit provisioning, watering, and repairs.²⁶ Howe simply did not have this force.

Howe spent the winter of 1793-94 in port, not wishing to risk his ships in the rough weather. But when spring came, he resumed his Channel cruising. By mid-May, his fleet comprised 32 sail of the line while Admiral Villaret-Joyeuse commanded 26 sail of the line in Brest.

As recent harvests had been poor, France had purchased over one hundred shiploads of grain from Virginia, and these were due to arrive in France at the end of May or in early June. Realizing the critical nature of the cargo, Villaret resolved to meet the grain fleet at sea and convoy it past the roving Howe. Howe had been waiting for precisely this, and Villaret's decision led to the Battle of the Glorious First of June.

24. Arthur Bryant, Years of Endurance, p. 107.

25. A. W. Ward, ed., The French Revolution, pp. 455-56.

26. Herbert Richmond, Statesmen and Sea Power, p. 172.

Howe spotted Villaret almost as soon as he put to sea and chased after him immediately. Howe detached his fastest ships to attack the slowest of the enemy fleet, thus forcing Villaret to turn his lead ships back to rescue his stragglers. If Villaret was forced to retrace his steps often enough in this manner, the main British fleet could catch up to him. Hood knew this as well as Villaret, but only Villaret knew that he was leading both fleets well out of the path of the crucial grain ships.

Howe spent the last three days of May, 1794, attacking Villaret's tail, and finally offered battle on June 1. With both fleets in single files on opposite courses, the classic line of battle, Hood ordered each of his ships to suddenly turn and pass between the French ships, so that each English ship would pass just behind the stern and just in front of the bow of the next French ship. Hood crashed through from the windward to the leeward in order to prevent the French from retiring without his permission.²⁷ These were excellent tactics, and Hood thus engineered a real battle, not a mere skirmish.

The battle raged fiercely at close quarters, and the British triumphed. Yet victory was costly. As Collingwood recalled:

27. Michael Lewis, History of the British Navy, p. 156.

"Our condition did not admit of a further pursuit; indeed, to take possession of what we had got required exertion."²⁸ The victory was a great moral boost, the first naval victory of the war. The six captured ships became instant tourist attractions at the naval base of Spithead, for they were an unprecedented number of prizes.²⁹

But the Glorious First of June was at best only a moral victory. The French fleet was still intact. British tactics had been good, true, but their strategy was poor, for the important grain fleet landed intact in France on June 6.³⁰

Meanwhile Hood in the Mediterranean also had an active time. Just as the French Atlantic fleet had taken refuge in Brest, the French Mediterranean fleet had fled into Toulon. But shortly after Hood brought his 21 sail of the line to anchor off Toulon, that city surrendered to him. The Toulonese feared famine, approaching Revolutionary armies, and the English disruption of their trade and sea-borne food supplies. Hood accepted the surrender and agreed to hold the city in trust for Louis XVII. Hood asked Pitt for troops to hold the town.

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28. Collingwood to Sir Edward Blackett, July 17, 1794. Edward Hughes, ed., Correspondence of Collingwood, p. 23.
29. Michael Lewis, ed., A Narrative of My Professional Adventures: Sir William Henry Dillon, Vice-Admiral of the Red, I (London: Naval Records Society, 1953), 147.
30. A. W. Ward, ed., The French Revolution, p. 470.

This request put Pitt in a quandary. He did not want to repeat the Flanders fiasco of putting in troops, getting no support from his allies, and ingloriously having to withdraw them later. Then, too, he had sent a number of troops and a small escort fleet to the West Indies, further reducing his already inadequate army. Even if Pitt had wanted to commit troops, he simply did not have them.

None of these considerations made Hood's position more comfortable. Hood was obliged to supply food for both Toulon and his own force, as well as to resist the advancing Revolutionary armies attempting to retake the town. In addition, he had quarrels with his Spanish, Neapolitan and Sardinian allies. Hood also had to endure indecision from London. When advancing French armies assured Toulon's imminent fall in December 1793, Hood ordered the town evacuated.

His last orders included burning the French warships. Spanish Admiral Langara demanded, as a point of honor, that his men share in this destruction. This task they bungled miserably. Of the French fleet of 31 sail of the line, fully 17 survived, largely due to Spanish incompetence.

Now unable to use Toulon for supplies and repairs, Hood ordered a subordinate captain, Horatio Nelson, to take a small detachment and conquer a new base on Corsica.³¹

31. A. W. Ward, ed., The French Revolution, pp. 457-59.

The loss of Toulon posed a serious problem for Prime Minister Pitt. Lack of resounding naval success had helped increase the price of grain in England. In addition, the high cost of war forced Pitt to increase taxes drastically. To strengthen his government by enlisting more widespread support, Pitt invited the Portland Whigs to join his Ministry. He entrusted the Home Office to the Duke of Portland and the Secretary of State for War to William Windham.³²

Had the war been more successful, Pitt would have had fewer, or at least more pleasant problems. But in May 1794, the Dutch surrendered themselves and their fleet to France. In April, Prussia surrendered, and in July, Spain made peace. Indeed, from the Glorious First of June in 1794 until February of 1797, almost three whole years, the Royal Navy delivered not a single victory.

Pitt moved to increase the effectiveness of the Navy. He sacked his brother John as First Lord of the Admiralty, but only because the adverse tide of the war necessitated a drastic change at the Admiralty in order to "infuse method and punctuality into the dispatch of business,"³³ two qualities which had never been strong points in Chatham's character. As Collingwood complained:

32. J. Holland Rose, William Pitt and the Great War, pp. 270-71.

33. J. Holland Rose, et al., eds., Growth of the New Em-
Ibid, p. 54.

... when we see a great fleet equipped, superior in number, and possessed of more skill than the enemy, and at the same time find your trade almost demolished, and the ports of the Enemy filled with your ships, it is very fair to conclude that the best possible use is not made of that great fleet....³⁴

Pitt appointed Lord Spencer to succeed Chatham. Spencer had already had ministerial experience, having served as Lord Lieutenant for Ireland and as ambassador extraordinary to Austria. Although once a Whig, he joined Pitt upon the execution of the French king and remained his warm supporter.³⁵

With his new position as First Lord, Spencer inherited a wide variety of serious problems. The first of these was the volatile Sea Lord, Sir Charles Middleton. Henry Dundas, who enjoyed a cordial relationship with Middleton, felt obliged to warn Spencer that:

(Middleton) has very great official merits and talent but he is a little difficult to act with from an anxiety, I had almost said an irritability of temper, and he requires to have a great deal of his own way of doing business in order to do it well.³⁶

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34. Collingwood to Dr. Alexander Carlyle, October 18, 1794. Edward Hughes, ed., Correspondence of Collingwood, p. 59.
 35. George John Spencer, second Earl Spencer (1758-1834). Appointed to the Privy Council, June 1794; appointed First Lord, December 1794;

Spencer therefore invited Middleton to bring to his attention any problems he might have. This simple invitation unleashed a torrent of incredibly detailed memoranda from Middleton to Spencer. These covered every point from past reforms already enacted to proposals for future reforms.³⁷ Middleton seemingly assumed that Spencer, although well intentioned and industrious, was a typical civilian First Lord and ignorant of naval matters. While this may have been true, Middleton woefully underestimated the First Lord, as he would soon learn.

Spencer's problems were not confined to the Admiralty. Lord Hood had protested ever since the loss of Toulon that his fleet was too weak to control the Mediterranean, and that the Admiralty sent him only token reinforcements while greatly strengthening the Channel fleet. When Spencer sent him a new list of proposed reinforcements, Hood declared them insufficient and announced that with such puny forces he could not promise victory.³⁸

As a fleet commander, Hood was correct in frankly stating his position to the First Lord. But he went too far. Not only did his protests cast doubts on Spencer's competence as First Lord, but some of his protests became public. From Spencer's point of view, the issue was simple: either the

37. See Ibid pp. 7-14, and passim.

38. Dorothy Hood, Admirals Hood. (London: Hutchinson, n.d.), p. 153.

First Lord or a fleet commander ran the Navy. Spencer's decision was also simple: he promptly cashiered Lord Hood. But in view of the Admiral's past record of service, Spencer announced that Hood was recalled due to poor health. The First Lord's confidential report to the King was more explicit: he was

... fully persuaded that the discipline and subordination so necessary to be maintained between the Board of Admiralty and the officers entrusted by that Board with the conduct of your Majesty's naval forces would be entirely at an end, if public and official representations of this kind were allowed to pass unnoticed.³⁹

Following the recall of Lord Hood, the command of the Mediterranean fleet fell to Vice-Admiral William Hotham,⁴⁰ Hood's second in command. In allowing Hotham to take command, Spencer committed one of the "gravest blunders of the war".⁴¹ Hotham was an adequate subordinate, but he lacked the decisiveness, force of character and energy required of a commander in chief. As one of his colleagues described him:

Admiral Hotham is a gentlemanly like man, and would ... do his duty in a day of battle. But he is past the time of life for action; his soul has got down to his belly (sic) and never mounts higher now, and in

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39. Spencer to the King, May 3, 1794. Julian S. Corbett, ed., Spencer Papers, I, 31.
40. William Hotham, Baron Hotham of South Dalton (1732-1813). He had served during the American war, as had many of the flag officers. Promoted to Rear-Admiral 1787; Vice-Admiral 1790; Admiral 1795. D.N.B.
41. A.W. Ward, ed., French Revolution, p. 459.

all business he is a piece of perfectly inert formality.⁴²

Hotham's record as commander in chief demonstrates his inadequacy. When the French sailed against Corsica in March 1795, Hotham immediately engaged their fleet. But after taking only two prizes, Hotham ordered his fleet to retire, and the French returned to Toulon. When Nelson protested Hotham's failure to continue the battle, Hotham replied: "We must be content; we have done very well".⁴³ Thus Hotham threw away one of the war's greatest opportunities of destroying the French fleet. Hotham's blunder was obvious even to the ordinary seamen such as James Gardner:

The Yankee historian⁴⁴ gives a very incorrect account of this (battle); ... which appears strange, as this calumnator always felt happy in finding fault with naval officers and here missed a good opportunity.⁴⁵

To make matters worse, Hotham did not learn from his error; rather, he repeated it on July 13. To such hands had Spencer entrusted the Mediterranean fleet.

Meanwhile, Spencer was also having difficulties with Lord

42. Sir Gilbert Elliot to William Windham, April 2, 1795. Lord Rosebery, ed., The Windham Papers: The Life and Correspondence of the Tr. Hon. William Windham: 1750-1810, I (Boston: Small, Maynard & Co., 1913) 294-5.

43. A. W. Ward, ed., French Revolution, p. 459.

44. William James, a contemporary naval historian.

45. Richard Vesey Hamilton and John Knox Laughton, eds., Recollections of James Anthony Gardner, Commander, R.N. (n.p.; Navy Records Society, 1906), p. 147.

Howe, commander of the Channel fleet. Howe spent the winter of 1794-95 ashore because of his poor health. During this time, Lord Bridport commanded the Channel fleet under Howe's nominal supervision. When Lord Howe failed to inform the Admiralty of whether he would return in the Spring of 1795, and when, at the same time, Bridport requested that Howe either retire altogether or return to the fleet immediately, Spencer faced a serious problem. While Spencer had some sympathy for Bridport's position, he valued Howe too highly to press him to a decision. Spencer and the King urged Howe to retain nominal command until such time as he could return to sea. Wishing to resign entirely, Howe yielded to the King's request and continued in nominal command for two more years.⁴⁶ Meanwhile, Bridport ran the fleet in his own fashion, which created ill-will between Bridport and Howe, an ill-will which would have serious consequences in 1797.

In addition to the Channel and Mediterranean fleets, Spencer also had to deal with problems stemming from the West Indian expedition. From the earliest days of the war, British colonial interests, which enjoyed considerably support from Pitt and Dundas, urged that the French West Indian colonies be conquered. By November of 1793, most of these colonies had passed under British control, but within a year, powerful French reinforcements as well as native uprisings had almost

46. George III to Spencer, April 17, 1795; Spencer to George III, May 3, 1795. Julian S. Corbett, ed., Spencer Papers, pp. 30-32.

completely pushed out the British. By the time Spencer took office, it was obvious that the British commander, Admiral John Laforey,⁴⁷ would need strong reinforcements.

Accordingly, a powerful expedition to relieve Laforey was formed under the command of Admiral Hugh Christian.⁴⁸ Spencer had selected Christian for this appointment because of his experience in the prompt organization of diffuse forces.⁴⁹ Since speed was essential to save the West Indies, Christian appeared an excellent choice.

But he was not. In assigning Christian to relieve Laforey, Spencer opened a Pandora's box. Christian had been promoted to Rear-Admiral only four months before while, at the same time, Laforey had been promoted to the rank of Admiral. Since Laforey's error had been his failure to succeed against greatly superior forces, tradition denied Spencer the right to replace a full Admiral in an important position with a very junior Rear-Admiral.

Further problems connected with Christian's appointment were quickly pointed out to Spencer. If Christian were killed or wounded, would command of the fleet revert to Laforey?⁵⁰

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47. Sir John Laforey (1729? - 1796). Promoted to Rear-Admiral, 1789; Vice-Admiral, 1793; Admiral, June 1795) D.N.B.
48. Sir Hugh Cloberry Christian (1747-1798). Christian had seen some service in West Indian and American waters and had served with Lord Howe.
49. Spencer to Dundas, Oct. 12. 1795. Julian S. Corbett, ed., Spencer Papers, I, 167.
50. Abercrombie (the commander of the troops assigned to Christian) to Dundas, October 16, 1795. Ibid., p. 171.

Indeed, would Laforey remain in the West Indies, fully aware that he was to exercise only nominal command while Christian actually gave the orders? To further complicate matters, Sir Ralph Abercrombie, who had been offered the command of Christian's troops, declined to accept until the naval command was clarified.⁵¹

Spencer's reply to all these objections was to urge personal cooperation between Laforey and Christian. Laforey was urged to accept the fact that Christian was fully versed in the new plans as developed in London, while at the same time Christian was urged to treat Laforey with all due deference and respect. Yet in his letter to Dundas outlining this solution, Spencer also introduced a constitutional question, for he wrote:

You now have my sentiments on this subject, and as it now stands it must be decided by the Cabinet, to whom on their first meeting I shall take the liberty of stating the subject of this letter.⁵²

Dundas replied very swiftly, and informed Spencer that he believed the First Lord had three choices: to leave matters as outlined in his letter, to appoint Laforey to full command, or to send out a third admiral who would outrank both Laforey and Christian. Dundas also promised that whatever Spencer chose to do, Dundas would insist upon Sir Ralph

51. Sir Ralph Abercrombie to Dundas, October 20, 1795.
Ibid., 179

52. Ibid., 175-76

Abercrombie's remaining in command of the troops for if Abercrombie declined, Dundas would simply "send him His Majesty's Orders to proceed on the Service."⁵³ In the same letter, however, Dundas also took up the constitutional question:

Your lordship talks of (the command in the West Indies) being a matter for the Cabinet to decide upon. Surely upon reconsideration you will not adhere to that idea. It is a subject upon which you cannot expect that any Cabinet Minister will give an opinion. The responsibility rests with you, and you must act upon it.

Dundas went on to say that he had discussed the matter with Pitt and that the Prime Minister had agreed that the decision was Spencer's alone, but that Pitt would defend that decision whenever required to do so.

Spencer realized the implications of Dundas' letter. Either the First Lord had sole and final responsibility for the Navy, or he shared it with either the Cabinet or the Board of Admiralty. To assign responsibility to the Board of Admiralty was to make the Navy independent of civilian control. Spencer's sacking of Lord Hood had shown that naval officers, regardless of their ranks, appointment, or personal prestige, were not the ultimate naval authority. Nor could the Cabinet as a whole be responsible for the Navy. No Minister could be expected to run his own department well if he also had to supervise another. Further, proper management of the Navy demanded that one voice be final. The Navy could not tolerate

divided command.

Spencer realized all of this as he followed Dundas' suggestion to reconsider his statement. After first insisting that he did not wish to "shift the smallest part of responsibility from myself" for the appointment of Christian, he continued:

I know I am responsible for the measure and appointments ordered by the Board of Admiralty, and if it were ever to happen that the majority of the Cabinet should differ with me in opinion on any important point relating to such measures or appointments without at the same time convincing me that their opinion was the right one, I know that there would be but one line for me to take.⁵⁴

Having thus settled the constitutional question, Spencer returned to the problem of Admiral Christian. The First Lord decided the easiest solution would be to recall Laforey. But, as so often when dealing with people, the simple solution is not always best.

Spencer's new difficulty came from Sir Charles Middleton. As a Sea Lord Middleton's signature was customarily appended to orders to an officer of Laforey's rank. But Middleton was a personal friend of Laforey and held him in high regard. Middleton informed Spencer that the only reason he could see for the recall of Laforey was that he was getting older, and Middleton hinted that since the other fleets were

54. Spencer to Dundas, October 22, 1795. Julian S. Corbett, ed., Spencer's Papers, I, 179.

commanded by even older officers, this was entirely unjust.⁵⁵ Consequently, Middleton declined to sign the orders to Laforey but added that he would direct his assistant to prepare the orders.⁵⁶

Spencer, who by this point must have been laboring under severe strain, took great umbrage at Middleton's letter. The very officer who had been writing Spencer intemperate memoranda for over a year was now joining the ranks of the subordinate Admirals. Spencer, who had been reminded only six days earlier that he was in sole command of the Navy, replied by a thinly veiled warning to Middleton to sign the orders or be fired. Middleton's reply was characteristic:

My Lord, -- No consideration will induce me to concur in what I think an unjust measure, however recommended, because I know myself amenable to a much higher tribunal than any on earth.

As your lordship seems to insinuate a removal from office, I can only say that my seat is at your lordship's service.⁵⁷

Spencer replied on the same day by requesting that Middleton turn over all his official papers to Admiral

55. Middleton to Spencer, October 23, 1795. Ibid., 182

56. Middleton to Spencer, October 24, 1795. John Knox Laughton, ed., Letters and Papers of Charles, Lord Barham, Admiral of the Red Squadron: 1758-1813, II (London: Navy Records Society, 1910), 421.

57. Middleton to Spencer, Oct. 26, 1795. Julian S. Corbett ed., Spencer Papers, I, 183. The sources for this dispute are remarkably complete. See also John Knox Laughton, Barham Papers, II, 423 ff. and passim; III, p. 6-9.

Gambier. Profoundly shocked and deeply wounded by this shoddy treatment, Middleton wrote a full account of all that had transpired and left the Admiralty, a misused and bitter man. Meanwhile, Admiral Laforey resigned his post, thus clearing the way for Admiral Christian.

But the problems of the West Indian expedition were by no means over. In late October 1795, the Duke of York as commander in chief of the army issued orders that henceforth, soldiers serving on board ship or being transported by ship were no longer subject to naval discipline, but would at all times be subject only to army officer's orders.⁵⁸ These new regulations set off a storm of protest within the Navy. Lord Howe wrote to Spencer citing the exact laws which granted naval officers jurisdiction over soldiers while on board ships.⁵⁹

Indeed, one Admiral, William Cornwallis, wrote to Spencer that until the order was revoked, he would decline to accept any appointments.⁶⁰ This created a fresh problem for Spencer, because the First Lord had decided to send Cornwallis

58. Although no copy of the original order still exists, its contents are clear from the various Admirals' letters of protest. See Julian S. Corbett, ed., Spencer Papers, I, 191-219.

59. Howe to Spencer, November 1, 1795. Ibid., p. 195.

60. Cornwallis to the Admiralty, November 5, 1795. Ibid., p. 202

to supersede Christian. As Cornwallis outranked Christian Spencer thought this would solve his original problem. But again, Spencer underestimated the personalities involved.

Spencer informed Cornwallis that although Sir Ralph Abercrombie had a copy of the Duke of York's orders, he did not intend to promulgate them. Spencer privately assured Cornwallis that he would exercise all the traditional powers of the commander-in-chief. Cornwallis replied that in the event of the death of Abercrombie, his successor might promulgate the new and offensive regulations. Spencer answered, in effect, that Cornwallis ought to forget the whole matter and prepare to sail as soon as possible.

Reluctantly, Cornwallis acquiesced. He sailed in his flagship on February 29, 1796, but returned a few days later when his flagship was damaged in a storm. Thus an exasperated Spencer found Cornwallis was still in England weeks after he had been ordered to proceed with haste to the West Indies. Spencer immediately sent Cornwallis orders to sail at once in the only available ship, a mere frigate. In ordering an Admiral to take a frigate as his flagship, Spencer violated naval etiquette. Flag officers -- those holding the rank of Rear-Admiral or above -- almost invariably had a large ship of the line as their flagship. Cornwallis took his orders to sail on a frigate as both a personal insult and an affront to his dignity as a Vice-Admiral. He refused to sail.

The man who had fired Hood, Middleton, and Laforey would not tolerate such conduct. Spencer ordered Cornwallis court-martialled. The number of officers assembled to try Cornwallis, more Admirals than had ever before sat on a single English court-martial, unanimously acquitted Cornwallis.⁶¹

Spencer was not disappointed by the acquittal. While he held Cornwallis and his family in high regard, he felt his position as First Lord had to be maintained. Since Cornwallis' refusal had been public, he felt it his duty to order the court-martial.⁶² In any event, Cornwallis resigned soon afterward, and held no further command until after Spencer left the Admiralty.

Even while dealing with all the West Indian problems, Spencer still had to worry about the Channel and Mediterranean fleets. By September 1795, Spencer decided to accept Hotham's resignation for ill health from the Mediterranean fleet. The problem was to select his successor from the two good candidates. The first was Sir John Jervis, who had taken command in the West Indies when war broke out, but who had returned to England in poor health in 1794. By the winter of 1795, he was again able to accept an appointment. The other candidate was Adam Duncan.⁶³ For once, Spencer had no

61. Ibid., pp. 220-228

62. Spencer to Lord Cornwallis, not dated. Ibid., p. 229

63. Adam Duncan, Viscount Duncan (1731-1804). A talented and experienced Scot. Promoted Rear-Admiral, 1787; Vice-Admiral, 1793.

problems with rank: both had been promoted to Admiral in the summer of 1795, Duncan in June and Jervis in July.

Spencer's choice between the two admirals was somewhat eased by the fact that Duncan was already serving as commander in chief of the North Sea fleet. Since Russia was at this point allied with Britain and the Russian fleet was working in close harmony with Duncan, Spencer decided that Duncan should retain the command. Accordingly, Jervis was appointed to command the Mediterranean fleet.⁶⁴

Jervis was a talented officer, "at once fighter, strategist, leader and administrator",⁶⁵ but he could not work miracles. Too many opportunities had already been missed. With France's conquest of Italy, with a hostile Spain on his only supply route, and without any base east of Gibraltar, Jervis evacuated the Mediterranean in December 1796. For the following eighteen months, not one British ship sailed on that sea. This was thoroughly defective strategy, for Britain's 160 ships of the line easily outnumbered the combined forces of all her enemies.⁶⁶

Nor was the Channel fleet accomplishing much. Indeed, only heavy seas prevented a French invasion of Ireland. In

64. Spencer to the King, September 23, 1795. Julian S. Corbett, ed., Spencer Papers, I, 54-55.

65. Michael Lewis, History of the British Navy, p. 158.

66. A. W. Ward, ed., The French Revolution, pp. 460-61.

December 1796, the French sailed from Brest but were spotted by Pellew's frigates. Bridport, wintering at Spithead, had left a supporting force for Pellew under Admiral Colpoys, but Pellew could not find him. Very intelligently, Pellew sent word of the French sailing to Bridport instead. But even as Bridport received the news, so did the Admiralty, where a clerk failed to transmit sailing orders to Bridport. When the orders finally arrived, Bridport's fleet stumbled to sea; the Sanspariel fouled the Prince, the Formidable fouled the Ville de Paris and the Atlas ran aground; these accidents delayed Bridport's sailing until January 3, 1797. Meanwhile a series of similar accidents as well as rough seas prevented the French landings, although they sat off Bantry Bay unmolested from December 20 until January 6. They finally returned to France, and Bridport even failed to catch them on their way back.⁶⁷

This surprisingly poor showing by Bridport's fleet led to a lengthy debate in Parliament. The Earl of Albemarle demanded to know why no fleet was permanently stationed off Ireland, since Ireland was such a likely target. Then, too, he demanded to know why Bridport's fleet was so weak that the loss of just five ships prevented him from getting to sea. Spencer replied that some of Bridport's ships which had just returned from sea required reprovisioning. Further, although

67. Dorothy Hood, The Admirals Hood, p. 173.

Pellew had reported the French had sailed, he did not know where they had gone. Therefore, the Admiralty kept Bridport from sailing until they knew just where to find the French.

These explanations failed to satisfy many members of Parliament. Spencer then threatened to resign if Parliament ordered an inquiry into the state of the Navy. The debate concluded when the House supported Spencer by 74 to 14 votes.⁶⁸

In conclusion, much had been learned in these first four years of war. While the Navy had won only one important victory, it had nonetheless protected England. Perhaps most important, Spencer had taken firm control of the Navy. He had learned that too loose an adherence to tradition sometimes provoked serious dissent in the Navy, such as the Collingwood affair. He would not repeat that mistake. He had learned that the Navy could not conquer the whole world at once, as the evacuation of the Mediterranean demonstrated. He would not repeat that mistake. With interest, hope, and not a little anxiety, England looked ahead to the new year.

68. Parliamentary History. XXXIII, 111 ff.

CHAPTER III

THE BATTLE OF ST. VINCENT, THE GREAT MUTINIES, AND THE BATTLE
OF CAMPERDOWN

The new year opened with the loud and prolonged Battle of St. Vincent.¹ England faced the most serious challenge of the war in 1797, with a hostile Dutch navy to the north, a hostile French navy to the east, and a hostile Spanish navy to the south. The Spanish wing advanced first.

Admiral John Jervis cruised off the Atlantic coast of Spain after his forced evacuation of the Mediterranean two months earlier. On February 13, his fleet of 15 ships of the line spotted the Spanish battle fleet of 25 ships of the line. Undaunted by his numerical inferiority, commanding captains of the high caliber of Collingwood and Troubridge, Jervis ordered his fleet to clear for action and form a battle line of two parallel columns.

By the next morning, Jervis was prepared for battle, but not his opponent, Admiral Don Jose de Cordova. The Spanish fleet was in two groups, one of 19 and one of 6 ships. Jervis ordered his fleet to pass through the gap in the Spanish formation. As soon as the lead British ship passed through, her Captain was ordered to turn toward the larger Spanish group. Troubridge obeyed this order so

1. So named for the nearest prominent point of land, Cape St. Vincent.

promptly that it was obvious he had anticipated it, a sign of the professional excellence of Jervis' fleet.

The H.M.S. Captain, commanded by Horatio Nelson,² was one of the last ships to sail through the gap. Nelson realized that as soon as he passed, the Spanish could close their ranks. To prevent this, he ceased to follow the British ships but instead turned directly into the path of the Spanish flagship. This bold maneuver forced the Spaniard to stand and fight rather than rescue his tardy detachment. Collingwood and Troubridge quickly came to Nelson's aid, and the ensuing confusion unsettled the Spanish fleet until Jervis took his four prizes and retired.

The Battle of St. Vincent was decisive only because of the actions of the Captain of the Captain. Since breaking away from his own line without orders was a court-martial offense, Nelson reported to Jervis on board the H.M.S. Victory not knowing whether he was to be congratulated or cashiered. Jervis, however, was delighted with the initiative and good judgement exercised by Nelson, values he had been attempting to inculcate in all his subordinates.³

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2. Horatio Viscount Nelson (1758-1805). Although a young officer, Nelson had seen service in a North Pole expedition and American waters before 1793. He was promoted to Rear-Admiral in 1797, fourteen days before news of the Battle of St. Vincent reached England. D.N.B.
 3. A. W. Ward, ed., The French Revolution. VIII of The Cambridge Modern History, (London: Macmillan Co., 1904) 453.

The battle ended the Spanish menace. Moreover Jervis had shown the English could win even when greatly outnumbered, which provided moral encouragement at home. Jervis was created Earl St. Vincent, and Nelson was given the Order of the Bath.

While the victory of St. Vincent ended the problem posed by the Spanish fleet, it had no effect on the newest of Spencer's problems. Less than two months after this victory, the seamen of the Royal Navy staged the first great sit-down strike in history, a massive and crippling mutiny.

The long-suffering seamen had valid grievances, not the least of which was their virtual imprisonment. Over half of a warship's crew was composed of impressed men.⁴ Men would not volunteer because the Royal Navy provided poor food, poor living conditions, harsh discipline, a liberal helping of disease, indefinite enlistment, low wages and a real danger of death. The only compensation was patriotic glory, but few considered it an adequate counterbalance to the deprivations, especially when skilled seamen could enjoy much better conditions on a merchant ship.

Since seamen would not volunteer and press gangs could not bring in enough men, the shortage of seamen became a

4. Michael Lewis, The History of the British Navy, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1957), p. 167.

critical problem. As Collingwood noted, "Ships we have, plenty of good ones, but there is not one of us who does not feel weak for want of men."⁵ Indeed, at one point, the Mediterranean fleet was shy 1400 men.⁶ In order to solve the manpower problem the Admiralty persuaded Parliament to pass the Quota Act.

The first Quota Act, passed in 1795, ordered each county to produce a certain number of men for the Navy; the second act extended the system to the towns. Thus London was to produce 5,704 men, Dartmouth 394 men, Cambridgeshire 126 men, and so on until a total of 30,000 was secured.

Enforcement of these acts was left to local Justices of the Peace. Hard pressed to meet their quota, the Justices viewed the acts as a great opportunity to empty their jails. These forgerers, counterfeiters, smugglers and poachers were sent to the Navy but brought with them intelligence, education and powers of organization which had never before existed in such quantity in a Royal Navy crew.⁸ Fully 12 per cent of the Royal Navy's crews was composed of Quota men by 1797, while another 50 per cent were forced there by a press gang.⁹ Obviously, a majority of the Navy was serving

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5. Collingwood to Caryle, March 20, 1795. Edward Hughes, ed., The Correspondences of Admiral Lord Collingwood (n.p.; Navy Records Society, 1957), p. 66.
 6. A. W. Ward, ed., The French Revolution, p. 459.
 7. Parliamentary History, XXXII, 414 ff.
 8. Michael Lewis, History of the Royal Navy, p. 164.
 9. Ibid., p. 166.

against its will.

Nor were these the only grievances. A seaman could be sentenced to 48 lashes without appeal. A court-martial could impose 500 lashes which was a sentence of death by torture. A man maimed in the King's service was discharged without pay to beg his living, while married men rarely saw their families. In addition, bread was so infested by worms and insects that one consumer noted "You have to watch very narrowly the bread you eat, or the inhabitant animalcules will walk away, house and all on their backs."¹⁰

The seamen's greatest grievance also stemmed from Stuart times, as their last pay raise had been passed under Charles I in 1649. For the following one hundred and forty-eight years, seamen's pay remained fixed at 26 S bd. a month¹¹ and even that was based on a month of 28 days.¹² Yet during that period, the cost of living had risen by 30 per cent, and army pay had been raised proportionally. Then, too, seamen were paid so infrequently that by the end of 1796 they were

10. James Dugan, The Great Mutiny. (New York: New American Library, 1967), p. 59.

11. Geoffrey Callendar and F. H. Hinsley, The Naval Side of British History: 1485-1945. (London: Christopher's, 1952), p. 187.

12. William Hunt, The History of England from the Accession of George III to the Close of Pitt's First Administration (1760-1801). Vol. X of The Political History of England (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1905), p. 391.

owed the fantastic sum of £ 1,408,720 in back wages.¹³ Unquestionably the seamen had valid grievances.

The seamen first attempted to obtain redress of their grievances by lawful actions. A group of them addressed an anonymous petition to Lord Howe in March of 1797, a petition which asked only for an increase in pay. Hardly able to reply to an anonymous letter, Howe passed it on to Lord Spencer. But Howe did not inform Lord Bridport of the petition, yet it allegedly came from Bridport's fleet.¹⁴ While this failure was probably due to the ill-will between Bridport and Howe, it nonetheless deprived Bridport of the opportunity to head off the coming mutiny. Meanwhile, Spencer ignored the petition.¹⁵ Thus, the chance to appease the sailors had passed.

In any event, Bridport brought his fleet into Spithead on the last day of March. Each of his ships received a smuggled copy of the petition prepared by a seaman named Valentine Joyce, a crewman of H.M.S. Royal George.¹⁶ This petition, also confined to the issue of wages, was circulated with such silent success throughout Bridport's fleet that it remained undetected by the officers until Maundy Thursday.

13. James Dugan, Great Mutiny, p. 35.

14. Parliamentary History, XXXIII, 476.

15. Annual Register, 1797. p. 220.

16. James Dugan, The Great Mutiny, p. 65.

By Holy Saturday, Bridport informed the Admiralty that he did not believe his ships would return to sea until the petition was answered.

Never one to take suggestions easily, and alarmed by reports of imminent Dutch attack, Spencer resolved to put his main fleet between the Texel and the Thames. On Easter Sunday, he ordered Bridport to sail. Reluctantly and fearfully, Bridport passed the order to his ships. Not a sail was set, not an anchor lifted. No longer a legal petition, this was mutiny -- willful and massive disobedience to King's officers.

Informed by return post of the refusal to sail and thoroughly alarmed by further reports of an imminent Dutch attack, Spencer repeated his order to sail with exactly the same results.¹⁷ Spencer had become the chief of a navy that would not sail, of a fleet that removed itself from the line of defense just as the enemy was believed approaching.

Doubtless haunted by a vision of an enemy conquest of England, Spencer sought advice. But London was deserted for the holidays. Pitt was in the country lamenting his just-broken engagement with Eleanor Eden as well as attempting

17. Annual Register, 1797. p. 221.

to recover his health.¹⁸ Parliament was in recess, and even the King was off hunting in Windsor Park. Deprived of both counsel and criticism, but armed with the hard-won knowledge that he alone was responsible for the Navy, Spencer resolved to go in person to Portsmouth to settle the matter.

Spencer collected two of his Admiralty colleagues, Richard Pepper Arden and Rear-Admiral William Young and hurried down to Portsmouth at noon on Easter Tuesday. The First Lord immediately summoned Admiral Peter Parker, the base commander, and Admiral Bridport, the fleet commander. By this time, a new and enlarged petition had been submitted demanding better wages, fresh vegetables in the diet, better treatment of the sick, wage provision of the wounded, and more.¹⁹

Spencer agreed to recommend a pay raise if the seamen would immediately return to duty. But as the seamen had already broken 21 of the 36 Articles of War, over half of which provided the punishment of death, Joyce induced the mutineers to submit only when they had received a royal pardon, signed

18. Pitt had been ill since January and took little part in this whole problem save to approve of Spencer's measures. J. Holland Rose, William Pitt and the Great War. (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1914), p. 320.

19. Petition to the Admiralty, April 18, 1797. Annual Register, 1797. pp. 380-81

by the King.²⁰ At this point, Admiral Sir Alan Gardner went on board the H.M.S. Queen Charlotte, where the mutineer leaders were meeting, and announced his personal solution: "I'll hang every fifth man in the fleet."²¹ This intemperate outburst made the seamen adamant in their insistence on a royal pardon as a sine qua non of their sailing. The fleet sent a note announcing this to Spencer who had returned to Whitehall.

Spencer sent this latest note to the Prime Minister who hurriedly summoned the Cabinet. Chatham, Dundas, Grenville, Spencer and Pitt all recommended that King George issue the demanded pardon.²² The King agreed, signed and promulgated the pardon. But by the last week of April, the Privy Council had still failed to send the pay raise bill to Parliament, largely because the Admiralty had not yet drafted it.²³

Meanwhile, part of Bridport's fleet moved down river to St. Helen's where it expected news of the pay raise bill -- news that did not come. But the first day of May did bring

20. James Dugan, The Great Mutiny, p. 109.

21. Ibid. p. 110.

22. Cabinet Minute, April 22, 1797. A. Aspenall, ed., The Later Correspondence of George III. II (Cambridge: University Press, 1963), 564.

23. Parliamentary History, XXXIII, 493 ff.

fresh orders from the Admiralty ordering all officers to insure proper obedience. These new orders coupled with intemperate speeches in Parliament²⁴ made the seamen believe that the Admiralty was about to renege on its promises, and the mutiny broke out again on May 7 when the fleet refused Bridport's order to put to sea.

At this point Pitt asked Lord Howe to go down to the fleet and show them the royal pardon.²⁵ The seamen had always held Howe in high esteem and trusted him fully. Indeed, their first petition had been sent to him. Howe arrived in Spithead and rowed alongside each warship, waving the original pardon over his head, allowing the ribbon and wax seals on it to be visible to the decks of the ships. The word of Lord Howe coupled with a ribbon blowing in the wind from the certificate was enough for the seamen and Bridport's fleet accordingly obeyed orders to sail on May 17.²⁶

Meanwhile an even more serious mutiny broke out in Admiral Duncan's fleet anchored at the Nore. On May 2, four of his ships sent their officers ashore and began a semi-blockade of London.²⁷ This fleet elected delegates to a

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24. J. Holland Rose, William Pitt and The Great War, p. 312.
 25. Earl Spencer to the King, May 9, 1797. A. Aspenall, ed., Correspondence of George III, II, 370.
 26. James Dugan, The Great Mutiny, p. 161.
 27. A. Ward, The French Revolution, p. 479.

"Parliament" which elected Richard Parker as President²⁸ and proceeded to draft extreme demands, including a revision of the Articles of War and regular leave for seamen.

The Admiralty could resist this mutiny more effectively since the Channel fleet had returned to obedience. Spencer refused to accept these demands, but declared he would pardon the Nore mutineers if they would return to obedience immediately. The seamen refused his offer and opened fire on the fort at Sherness, moored their 26 ships across the river and blockaded London. When the Admiralty replied by cutting off all their supplies, they captured ships heading upriver and confiscated their cargoes.

The Admiralty Board travelled to Sherness to negotiate but found the demands excessive. Conciliation failing, they turned to repression. Parliament passed a bill forbidding all communication with the fleet; 15,000 troops were collected on the river banks. In addition, the fort at Tilbery fired on the rebellious ships, and the beacons and buoys were removed from the river mouth. Finally, measures were taken to obstruct the passage upriver.²⁹

28. A Captain Dixon offered to assassinate Parker if Spencer felt this would help end the Mutiny. Spencer declined the offer. See Julian S. Corbett, ed., Spencer Papers, II, 150-51.

29. Pitt to Spencer, June 7, 1797. Ibid., 149.

Thus the mutineers were virtually under seige. They could not move downriver without pilots which the new law denied them; they could obtain no supplies, for all shipping had been halted, and if they landed on shore, the troops would arrest them. As a final measure, the Admiralty moved artillery into place to bombard the fleet.³⁰

The spirited resistance by the government caused the mutiny to collapse on June 14 when Parker was arrested. Parker and a number of others were court-martialled and hanged, while another group was flogged round the fleet, and nearly 200 men were imprisoned until pardoned later by the King.

These mutinies raise a number of questions. Why did the mutiny break out at this point rather than earlier or later? One important reason was that majorities in each crew were composed of imprisoned men with a sprinkling of educated leaders. The Act designed to end the manpower shortage had inadvertently brought on board men capable of both sailing and rebelling.

Then, too, the mutineers were moderate. They did not demand an end of flogging,³¹ but accepted harsh discipline as a necessary aspect of life at sea. Further, the seamen almost invariably treated the officers with great respect -- even when ordering them off their own ships. One officer

30. Annual Register, 1797, p. 226.

31. Ibid., pp. 379-95.

asked:

'How do you spare me? Did I not get you flogged the other day?' His answer was -- 'You did, Sir, but I deserved it You never punished men but when they were at fault, and you did it as an officer ought to do.' 32

Indeed, the mutineers even fired salutes on the anniversary of the restoration of Charles II on May 24 and again on the King's birthday, June 4.³³

Another interesting question was who was to blame for the mutiny? Some naval officers found fault with Lord Howe:

It is impossible that Lord Howe can justify his not having taken proper notice of the memorials and petitions of the seamen which were sent to him, and which neglect was the sole cause of the great national calamity....³⁴

Collingwood was too harsh on Lord Howe; his "neglect" of petitions which he reasoned might have all been written ✓ by one "malixious individual who meant to insinuate the prevalence of a general discontent in the fleet" was hardly the "sole cause" of the Mutiny.³⁵ Quite to the contrary, Collingwood more accurately noted:

32. Peter Cullen's Journal, May 12, 1797. H. G. Thursfield, ed., Five Naval Journals: 1789-1817. (London: Navy Records Society, 1951), p. 85.

33. J. Holland Rose, William Pitt and the Great War, p. 314.

34. Collingwood to his sister, Aug. 7, 1747. Edward Hughes, ed., Correspondence of Collingwood, p. 85.

35. Parliamentary History, XXXIII, 476.

How unwise in the officers, or how impolite in the administration, that did not attend to, and redress the first complaints of grievance...³⁶

The blame more properly belonged to all the naval officers and Admiralty officials who had allowed such abominable conditions to exist.³⁷

Yet in the face of such a massive demonstration of the horrible conditions of seamen, it is amazing how few reforms the Admiralty did enact. For example, not until 1806 was the seaman's pay increased by a shilling a week; not until 1825 did Parliament require a prompt payment of seamen; not until 1860 were the Articles of War rendered less harsh.³⁸

Another good example is the case of H.M.S. Swinger. The crew of this ship informed the Admiralty that they would not accept their newly appointed commander because his inability

37. There was nothing new about these poor conditions. Samuel Johnson had written 38 years earlier that 'No man will be a sailor who has contrivance enough to get hiiself into a jail; for being in a ship is being in a jail, with the chance of being drowned.... A man in jail has more room, better food, and commonly better company.' In view of the Quota Acts, this observation is particularly appropriate. Boswell's Life of Johnson, March 16, 1759. Oxford Dictionary of Quotations, 2nd Edition (Oxford: University Press, 1955), p. 271.

38. James Dugan, The Great Mutiny, p. 430.

to read or write might put them in danger. Instead of acknowledging this legitimate concern, the Admiralty replied that Swinger would accept the new Captain simply because the Admiralty so ordered.³⁹

Indeed, the Admiralty enacted so few reforms that in the months following the mutinies, the seamen struck H.M.S. Sovereign, Saturn, Bedford, Ardent, Grampus, Phoenix, and Calypso; half of these were rebelling for the second time. The Admiralty ended these with savage repression.⁴⁰

On the other hand, the Admiralty had good reason for postponing some reforms. With the high cost of war, a great shortage of specie, and very heavy taxes, England simply could not afford to spend more on the Navy. Yet other reforms, such as regular leave or more moderate discipline would have cost nothing. The Admiralty elected to do nothing.⁴¹

In any event, with the fleets once again obeying orders,

39. Admiral Keith to Lieutenant Pamp; June 21, 1797. Christopher Lloyd, ed., The Keith Papers, II. (London: Naval Records Society, 1950), 24.

40. James Dugan, The Great Mutiny, p. 426.

41. Michael Lewis holds the opinion that the mutiny 'taught authority a badly-needed lesson -- that the humble sailorman has his rights like anyone else, and that, if pushed to far, he also has his remedies.' (A History of the British Navy, p. 85). I disagree. The continuing mutinies as well as the lack of reform indicate the Admiralty learned little if anything.

the second of the three enemy wings could be challenged. Accordingly, reinforcements were sent to Admiral Duncan off the Dutch coast. For some time, he had commanded only two ships while blockading 16 sail of the line and 20 frigates. He had concealed his weakness by constantly making flag signals. The Dutch assumed his signals were to a large supporting fleet just over the horizon, and never realized he was signaling an entirely imaginary fleet.⁴² Duncan's reinforced fleet suffered from the wear and tear of four uninterrupted years of war. Duncan complained to Spencer:

The Venerable cannot hold out a winter's cruise, I am sure, for when it rains, even in my cabin I am not dry, as is the case with everybody in the ship. Indeed when she has much motion she cracks as if she would go to pieces. Little has been done to her for near four years....⁴³

The Dutch sailed on October 9, and Duncan's 16 sail of the line met Admiral de Winter's equal force two days later. Duncan approached the single Dutch line in column abreast, intending to attack all ships simultaneously. But Duncan's second order was more important. He ordered his fleet to form between the Dutch and shore, thus insuring a decisive battle by cutting off the Dutch line of retreat and forcing them to stand and fight.⁴⁴ In addition, this well chosen

42. Michael Lewis, A History of the British Navy, p. 160.

43. Duncan to Spencer, August 7, 1797. Julian S. Corbett, ed., Spencer Papers, II, 189.

44. Oliver Warner, Captains and Kings. (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1947), p. 110.

maneuver gave the British a tactical advantage, for the rough seas gave the windward line difficulty in opening their lower gun ports, and Duncan had forced the Dutch to the windward. On the other hand, Duncan risked losing his disabled ships on the shore, especially in the strong wind.

The British concentrated at first on the rear of the Dutch line. After victory there, the British moved up to the center where Duncan's own ship was engaged. Indeed, Venerable was so heavily hit that her pumps could barely contain the incoming water. But the arrival of British ships from the rear inclined the battle for the center to Duncan. By the end of the Battle of Camperdown, Duncan's excellent tactics had resulted in the capture or defeat of 9 Dutch ships while only 7, and those badly damaged, escaped.

By his excellent leadership, Duncan had earned a real and much needed victory. The Dutch threat of invasion was ended, and a great morale boost was obtained. Clearly, Spencer's appointment of Duncan was one of Spencer's finest choices.

Thus passed 1797, the year that had begun with the three-pronged threat of invasion. Spencer's appointments had defeated two of these prongs. Further, Spencer had resolutely put down the greatest mutiny in British history. Finally, his own appointments were now in command of every fleet, and he

was in full and undisputed control of the entire Navy. Spencer was now free to concentrate on what ought to have been his first problem and was now his only remaining problem -- defeat of the French.

CHAPTER IV

THE BATTLES OF THE NILE AND COPENHAGEN AND THE PEACE OF AMIENS

In the spring of 1798, Pitt offered to subsidize Austria against France. But Austria made the new alliance conditional on the reentry of the British fleet into the Mediterranean because they hoped it would be able to harass the French in Italy.¹ Pitt asked Spencer if he could assemble a fleet for this purpose. The First Lord replied that although he could spare the ships, such a fleet would require at least 6,000 more seamen "of which there is not the least prospect" of obtaining.²

By the end of April, Spencer was alarmed by the reports of a powerful French force gathering at Toulon. The only British fleet that could possibly be moved to mask this force was St. Vincent's which was then blockading Cadiz. Spencer ordered him either to detach part of his force to enter the Mediterranean or to move his entire fleet there. Spencer added:

If you determine to send a detachment into the Mediterranean, I should think it unnecessary to urge to you the propriety of putting it under the command of Sir H. Nelson, whose acquaintance

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1. Herbert Richmond, *Statesmen and Sea Power* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), p. 195.
 2. Spencer to Pitt, April 6, 1798. Julian S. Corbett, ed., *Private Papers of George, second Earl Spencer: First Lord of the Admiralty, 1794-1801*. II (n.p.; Navy Records Society, 1913) 435-36.

with that part of the world, as well as his activity and disposition, seem to qualify him in a peculiar manner for that service.³

Yet the order to create this new fleet reflected a bold initiative by the First Lord since it weakened the fleet blockading Cadiz. Thus Spencer took the risk that the Spanish fleet might be able to attack St. Vincent, and move on to attack England. On the other hand, the new fleet would bring Austria into the war and might inflict an important defeat on the French. Thus to transfer British power in this manner was a calculated but bold step.

Giving command of this new fleet to Nelson was also an important step. Clearly, Nelson was St. Vincent's most qualified subordinate, but not his highest ranking subordinate. To appoint Nelson, Spencer passed over more senior Admirals such as William Parker and John Orde. While Spencer had the authority to appoint any officer he chose to command the fleet, a right he had firmly demonstrated by appointing Christian to the West Indian command, Spencer was nonetheless aware that he was risking another round of protests from the admirals.

The protest followed swiftly. Indeed, Orde and Parker⁴ protested so loudly to St. Vincent that he ordered them to

3. Spencer to St. Vincent, April 29, 1798. Ibid., p. 439.

4. Parker to Spencer, May 28, 1798. H. W. Richmond, ed., Private Papers of George, second Earl Spencer: First Lord of the Admiralty, 1794-1801, III (n.p.; Navy Records Society, 1924), 27 ff.

return to England. The sudden and unexplained arrival of the two admirals in England was a shock to Spencer, for St. Vincent had no authority to countermand an Admiralty appointment. As one officer observed:

The Admiralty, I find, have intensely disapproved of his sending Sir Jno. Orde home; it seemed to everybody an unwarrantable stretch of power and I think the Admiralty cannot consider it other than a hardy stroke at their authority in sending the officers of their appointment home to them without even the slightest charge of misdemeanour.⁵

However, a little quiet questioning by Spencer discovered that Orde had not been sent home because of jealousy over Nelson's appointment; rather, the real reason was a fundamental disagreement with St. Vincent over discipline. The mutinous spirit of Spithead and the Nore had spread into St. Vincent's fleet, where he quashed it with inflexible severity. For example, visits between ships were prohibited and overt acts were immediately punished by court-martial and subsequent hanging. Indeed, mutineers convicted on Saturday night were hung on Sunday morning much against naval tradition.⁶ It was against St. Vincent's firm hand that Orde was really protesting.

But whatever the reason, Orde's arrival in England posed

5. Collingwood to Sir Edward Blackett, December 3, 1798. Edward Hugues, ed., The Correspondence of Admiral Lord Collingwood (n.p.; Navy Records Society, 1957), pp. 89-90.

6. St. Vincent to Spencer, July 9, 1797. Julian S. Corbett, ed., Spencer Papers, II, 410.

a new problem for Spencer. Clearly, Orde was insubordinate to St. Vincent, but so was St. Vincent in sending him to Spencer. Since St. Vincent was suppressing what might have become a mutiny under a milder officer, and since he was conducting the blockade of Cadiz with great success, Spencer resolved merely to send him a letter of reprimand. The First Lord had learned to balance an officer's offense against the value of his service, a vital lesson. Accordingly, the most successful Admiral thus far in the war retained his command of the Mediterranean fleet.⁷

While Spencer dealt with the consequences of Nelson's appointment, Nelson himself organized his new squadron. St. Vincent generously gave him the best ships in the Mediterranean fleet. With these 13 ships of the line, Nelson spent the months of June and July searching the entire Mediterranean for the Revolutionary Fleet. At the same time, the French had landed Napoleon's army in Egypt and then anchored in Aboukir Bay, a mouth of the Nile River. However, the French fleet was in deplorable condition.

To begin with, the ships themselves were in need of

7. Although St. Vincent's fleet had long since left the Mediterranean ocean and not now in the Atlantic off Cadiz, it was still referred to as the 'Mediterranean fleet'.

repair. Cables, anchors, spars, and sails were worn out or of poor quality. Complicating this problem was Admiral Brueys' extreme shortage of trained seamen; not only were his ships woefully undermanned, but his crews were so poorly trained that they were unable to repair their defective equipment. To make matters worse, Napoleon took a number of seamen with him to man the boats operating in support of the army on the Nile River.

Brueys resolved to fight at anchor rather than at sea. This decision was prompted by the simple consideration that the French did not have enough men to manage the sails and the guns at the same time. Thus, he gambled on sacrificing mobility to gain firepower. Brueys' strategy was to anchor his ships in a single line almost two miles long hugging the shoreline of Aboukir Bay. He ordered his ships to anchor so close to the shore that if an enemy ship tried to pass between his ships and the shore, they would run aground. Contrary to his orders, the French ships were far enough from the shore to allow the British to attack them on both sides. Brueys noted this, but failed to correct it. Thus positioned, Brueys noted the approaching British fleet on the afternoon of August 1.⁸

8. Annual Register, 1798. pp. 76-79

Nelson hurried to attack immediately, before the French could recover from the surprise of his arrival. But to do so, Nelson was obliged to assume certain risks. For example, the French controlled the forts protecting the Bay. Properly managed, they alone might be able to destroy the British fleet. Then, too, the anchored fleet was presumed to be familiar with the local geography, to know where the hidden reefs, shoal waters, and dangerous currents were located. Finally, the French could concentrate on firing the guns and not have to devote a portion of their manpower to working the sails.

Yet Nelson was willing to accept all of these hazards because of an important personal characteristic. He possessed a tremendous faith in the quality of the British seaman. He seems to have believed that the British Navy was invincible, that sheer courage and determination could overcome all obstacles.

Armed with this semi-mystical belief, Nelson risked much to gain much. With only a rough pencil sketch of the waters of the Bay, he ordered his fleet to attack.⁹ As the first British ship approached, her commander, Captain Foley, saw that he would have enough space to pass between the single

9. W. M. James, Influence of Sea Power on the History of the British People. (Cambridge: University Press, 1948) p. 20

line of French ships and the beach. Since the French vessels probably expected him to attack on the other side, Foley decided to surprise them by attacking on the landward side. The British ships behind Foley formed two outside lines of ships with the anchored French forming the third and center line.

Taken completely by surprise in this crossfire, the French hastened to correct their greivous error. They had been so confident of attack on only one side they had not bothered to load and run out the guns on the other side. But the French were not cowards; recovering from their initial surprise, they offered the most spirited resistance of any battle in this war. Although Nelson was wounded early in the battle, almost at the same time that Brueys was killed, the fight raged all afternoon, off and on throughout the night, and well beyond dawn of the next day. By the end of the carnage, only two French ships survived, a remarkable British victory.¹⁰

The destruction of the French at the Nile was due to the singular ability of Admiral Horatio Nelson. This young commander had refused to be bound by the naval tradition against attacking a superior force anchored in a faovrable position. Then, too, his orders to his fleet had been broad

10. Parliamentary History, XXXIII, 1559.

enough to permit Foley to take advantage of his opportunity to attack from the side. Unquestionably, the appointment of Nelson was one of Spencer's finest decisions.

The results of the Battle of the Nile were a great boon for Great Britain. British power was restored in the Mediterranean, Turkey entered the war against France, Russia declared war on France, and a Turko-Russian fleet harassed the French near Corfu.¹¹

Then, too, the British were able to use their naval power to further cripple the plans of Bonapart in Egypt. With no navy to evacuate his army, Bonapart began to march overland through Palestine on his way to Turkey. However, he would have to reduce the fort of Acre blocking his path. He sent a seige train ahead by sea to bombard Acre but sending it by sea was his mistake. A British cruiser captured the train, escorted it to Acre, and with supreme irony, installed those very guns on the walls of Acre, thus using French guns to hold back the French army. With the help of his ships, H.M.S. Theseus and Tiger, Smith was able to keep the army marooned.¹²

On the other hand, the Channel fleet was having less

11. Herbert Richmond, Statesmen and Sea Power, p. 198.

12. Annual Register, 1798. 151, ff.

success. In August 1798, the French invaded Ireland with an army of 1100 men. Although Bridport's fleet should have captured the French, with his usual bad luck, Bridport completely missed them. The French were only stopped by the army at Ballinamuch in Ireland. A second French attempt to land was prevented by a detachment of Bridport's fleet off Tory Island.¹³ Since Bridport boasted "The French might come as they would; I can only say they cannot come by water,"¹⁴ and since this was the third time the French had landed, doubts were finally aroused about Bridport's fitness for command. But for the time being, no action was taken to remove him.

The French spent the winter of 1798-1799 repairing their fleet at Brest, planning to use it to rescue the army still in Egypt. In April 1799, Admiral Bruix sailed from Brest with 24 sail of the line. Only Bridport's fleet was strong enough to stop him, but as usual, Bridport was elsewhere. This time he had fallen back so as to be better able to protect Ireland from invasion. Bridport never realized that the best defense for all British territories was a close blockade of the French ports.

Bruix took his fleet into the Mediterranean, forcing the small British units there to run before him. But aware

13. Ibid. 150

14. Dorothy Hood, The Admirals Hood, (London: Hutchinson, n.d.) p. 189.

of his own ill-trained crews, defective ships and poor supplies, and also aware that a powerful British force was bound to pursue him, Bruix sailed into Toulon. After a brief stay there, he returned to the Atlantic, joined company with a Spanish fleet of 18 sail of the line, and retired into Brest again.¹⁵ His brief sojourn had done nothing except thoroughly frighten the British Admiralty.

But the fright set off an important round of Admiralty promotions and transfers. Spencer finally chose to acknowledge Bridport's incessant complaints of ill health and in April of 1800 replaced him with St. Vincent. The new commander's first move was to order a close blockade of Brest and the other Atlantic bases. Indeed, St. Vincent instituted the first effective blockade of Brest.¹⁶ Thus, the main effect of Bruix's raid was to put one of the best British commanders in command of the most important fleet. Yet this important change did not take place until the seventh year of the war.

After the appointment of St. Vincent, another full year passed before the last naval battle of the war. The engagement was a direct result of the formation of the League of Armed

15. A. W. Ward, et al, eds., The French Revolution, Vol. VIII of The Cambridge Modern History. (London: Macmillan Co., 1904), p. 630.

16. Michael Lewis, History of the British Navy. (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1957), p. 168.

Neutrality. As both France and England were in need of naval stores such as tar, rope, canvass and masts, the Scandinavian countries who controlled the bulk of the world supply were in an attractive business position. By selling to both sides, they could raise prices and make huge profits. Late in 1800, Prussia, Russia, Denmark and Sweden announced that since they were neutral in the war, they could sell to either side. They announced belief in the principle of "Free ships, free goods,"¹⁷ and formed the League of Armed Neutrality to defend this principle.

This League created a critical problem for the Royal Navy. The Admiralty advised the Ministry that any interference in the supply of these stores would have the gravest consequences. On the other hand, the combined navies of these powers totaled 123 ships of the line and hundreds of smaller vessels. But these vessels were scattered all over northern Europe, and were not likely to fight effectively together. The Admiralty estimated that an energetically led force of 15 British warships could defeat the Northern powers. Grenville realized that the British would have to fight, even against such seemingly large odds:

If we give way to (the Northern Powers)
we may as well disarm ourselves at once,
and determine to cede without further
contest all that we have taken as a

17. Herbert Richmond, Statesmen and Sea Power, p. 209.

counterbalance to the continental acquisitions of France, for such you may rely upon it will be the tendency of their plan of peace.¹⁸

Britain had not been fighting for seven years to meekly acquiesce. The Ministry ordered a fleet to the Baltic under Admiral Sir Hyde Parker with Nelson as his second in command.

Nelson was ordered to lead a detachment of the British fleet into Copenhagen on April 1, 1801. The Danish fleet was anchored and unrigged; it could not sail out to fight. Nor did it have to, for the Danes had taken many of the ships' guns and lined them along the beach so that Nelson's ships would have to run a gauntlet of intense fire. This arrangement of cannon plus the twisting and unmarked channel through the shallow water made Copenhagen seem impregnable.

At least one man was convinced Copenhagen could be conquered -- Horatio Nelson. Undaunted by the powerful defensive preparations, he sailed boldly into the bay. His fleet was so badly battered at first that Parker hoisted the flag signal ordering Nelson to withdraw. When informed of the signal, Nelson put his telescope to his blind eye and announced to his officers that he could not see it.¹⁹

18. Lord Grenville to the Earl of Carysfort, December 2, 1800. Report on the Manuscripts of J. B. Fortesque, Esq., Preserved at Dropmore. IV (London: Machie and Co., Ltd., 1905).

19. Carola Oman, Nelson. (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1946), p. 446.

Nelson's willingness to attack Copenhagen and his spirited fire on the enemy ships convinced the Danes that he would be content to lose his entire fleet, but that he would destroy the Danes in the process. They surrendered. Once again, Nelson's refusal to believe that the odds were too heavy, his faith that the British would always win, had paid off handsomely.

The victory left Nelson free to move against the other Powers. But the advent of a pro-English government in Russia removed both their threat to naval stores and Nelson's threat to them. Aware of their now untenable position, the Swedes and Prussians also backed down.²⁰ Thus the last naval challenge to Great Britain was ended.

Yet the victory of Copenhagen only served to emphasize England's great problem. Although she won all the great battles -- the Glorious First of June, St. Vincent, Campel-down, and the Nile -- she was not winning the war. The British had known when war began that they might earn and maintain control of the sea, but they alone could not defeat France. Because England was an island that depended on imports for her food, her commerce, indeed, her very existence, she had to retain control of the sea to survive.

20. Annual Register, 1801. 101-102

France was an entirely different case. Even if every French ship was sunk, France would be crippled but not killed. Not only was France far closer to economic self-sufficiency, but she maintained overland trade with all of Europe. Thus, a victory over France required a large army, an army England simply did not have.

Consequently, England was forced to rely on the armies of other nations. These armies, such as the Austrian or Prussian troops, required large English subsidies. Then, too, since they were organized as relatively small, professional armies, they were seldom able to defeat the massive and enthusiastic French citizen-soldiers.

As a result, England found herself constantly renting losing armies. The modest gains made in war, such as the new revenue from French colonies, were more than lost on the scattered battlefields of Europe. These unsuccessful campaigns were enormously expensive. Pitt was obliged to increase taxes drastically, to introduce the income tax, and to borrow heavily. All of these measures produced great hardships in England. While taxes continued to rise, so did the price of staples such as wheat. Pitt then had to contend with widespread popular unrest and discontent.

And yet for what were the hardships endured? Although Britain won all the naval battles, she remained equidistant from total victory or peace. Thus, victories seemed to earn

only the right to continue to fight.

After eight years of this depressing conflict, Pitt resigned. Whether he quit over the Irish question or to make way for a Ministry committed to peace is uncertain.²¹

In any event, Henry Addington succeeded him in February 1801.

Addington took over an office burdened with many problems. Bread riots, war, famine, heavy taxes, financial crises -- all were Addington's inheritance. As France could not win at sea and England could not win on land, as neither Addington nor Napoleon had any reason to continue such an indecisive war, and as both had excellent reasons for ending it, the peace of Amiens was signed in March of 1802.

For the first time in nine years, the French and English had stopped shooting at each other.

21. For a discussion of the Irish question, see J. Stephen Watson, Reign of George III: 1760-1815. Vol. X of The Oxford History of England. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960) p. 387 ff. For his domestic problems, see William Hunt, The History of England from the Accession of George III to the Close of Pitt's First Administration (1760-1801) Vol. X of The Political History of England. (London: Longman, Green and Co., 1905). p. 434 ff.

CONCLUSIONS

The interaction of personalities had a profound effect on the course of this war. The lack of leadership by Lord Chatham in the earliest days allowed Dundas too much voice in naval affairs, and the earliest opportunities of hurting the French were missed.

The advent of Lord Spencer as First Lord marked the beginning of a strong rule by the Admiralty. Spencer clashed with Lord Hood, and fired him. The First Lord then gave the Mediterranean fleet to Admiral Hotham, who promptly misused it. Thus, the personal clash between Spencer and Hood partly caused the British loss of control in the Mediterranean.

Spencer also clashed with Middleton over the appointment of Christian to the West Indies. This dispute cost Britain the services of one of her most talented although most vexing Admirals. In addition Spencer was obliged to order the court-martial of Admiral Cornwallis, although that court-martial, composed of more Admirals than had ever before formed a single court, unanimously upheld Cornwallis.

Then, too, Lord Howe hurt the Navy when he failed to inform his old antagonist, Lord Bridport, that a mutiny was brewing in Bridport's fleet. This act alone might have cost Britain the war, for if the French had attacked while the fleet was in mutiny, England might have been beaten. In any event,

Howe's animosity toward Bridport cost the fleet commander any opportunity of heading off the mutiny.

On the other hand, there were many instances when personal relationships aided the war effort. It was Spencer's friendship with Nelson that produced Nelson's command in the Mediterranean and so led to the victory of the Nile. Then, too, it was Spencer's decisions which put Duncan and Jervis in command in time for the battles of Campeldown and St. Vincent.

Indeed, the Navy had done all that could be expected of it. It captured nearly all the French colonies. It protected British trade so successfully that trade rose from £44,500,00 in 1792 to £73,750,00 in 1801.¹ Finally, the Navy prevented any serious invasion of Great Britain.

On the other hand, the Navy had made mistakes. Howe's victory of the Glorious First of June did not prevent the French fleet from landing the vital imported grain. Further, while Howe captured six French ships, he nonetheless left the main French battle fleet intact.

Then, too, there were serious errors of naval strategy.

1. William Hunt, The History of England from the Accession of George III to the Close of Pitt's First Administration (1760-1801). Vol. X of The Political History of England. (London: Longman's Green & Co., 1905), p. 443.

Failure to initiate a close blockade of France until 1800 allowed the French to sail at will. Twice the army alone defeated an invasion of Great Britain. The ships carrying the invasion forces should never have been able to leave their ports, for by the time these attempts were made, Bridport had ample power to seal them in their harbours.

Another serious error was the failure to initiate seamen's reforms. Because so few reforms were enacted after the mutinies of Spithead and the Nore, sporadic mutinies occurred throughout the fleet for the duration of the war. While Pitt's government could not afford to pay the seamen higher wages because of the critical lack of cash, it could have begun the non-financial reforms far sooner.

While these errors are easily detected by hindsight, most of them appeared to the participants as distinct advantages. For example, Howe did not believe he had the strength to blockade. Then, too, for Hotham or Howe to win great victories, they would have had to risk great defeat. Each felt that maintaining the strength of his fleet was more important than one victory, for only their fleets kept the French out of Britain. A naval defeat for France, a land power, would be an inconvenience; a naval defeat for Great Britain could have been a catastrophe. Then, too, regarding Admiralty reforms, the Sea Lords were too concerned with manning and maneuvering great fleets to worry about the conditions of individual seamen on individual ships.

On the other hand, the Navy learned some valuable lessons in the war. For the first time since Henry VIII had mounted the broadside of a warship, the Navy learned how to use this weapon effectively.² Instead of forming the classic line of battle in single fleet to flee over the horizon, Admirals such as Duncan and Nelson introduced new procedures. ✓ Duncan cut the Dutch line of retreat which forced them to fight the battle of Campldown, and Nelson attacked his enemies even when they were protected in fortified harbours such as at the Nile and at Copenhagen. The achievement of Duncan and Nelson was not merely to win but to annihilate, and one of Spencer's achievements was to appoint men such as these ✓ to command the fleets. The

The British Navy began the war in a strong position, yet took ten years to achieve only a stalemate. There are good reasons for this. First, France was basically a much stronger nation, outnumbering the English by nearly three to one, and France was also economically relatively self-contained. While the loss of her sea-trade could hurt her, it could not kill ✓ her, for given good weather, France could feed herself. Then, too, her adequate resources were augmented by those of the numerous nations she conquered.

2. Michael Lewis, The History of the British Navy. (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1957), p. 155.

The basic difference in strength might have been overcome by close cooperation among Britain's allies. But the Prussians failed the English in Flanders, and the Spanish failed them at Toulon. This lack of effective cooperation continued throughout the war. For example, if the Austrians had informed the British that the battle of Marengo was imminent, the British Navy might have been able to interfere with Napoleon's supply lines in Italy and thus possibly reverse the outcome of that battle.³

Perhaps one of the most important reasons why France did not do better against its smaller opponent was because the decrees of the Convention had disbanded both the trained officers corps and the trained seamen. Then, too, as the war dragged on, the French concentrated their resources on the army while neglecting the navy. Naval supplies were not purchased and ships were permitted to fall into disrepair. This neglect came from the failure of the French authorities to understand the principles of seapower.

This ignorance of naval affairs was fortunate for the British. For example, the situation of the British in 1797 could not have been worse. The French, Dutch and Spanish fleets all opposed the English. The Royal Navy was engaged in a

3. Herbert Richmond, Statesmen and Sea Power, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), p. 206.

massive mutiny. Duncan was blockading the entire Dutch war fleet with only two ships. England was virtually undefended. This was a time, a short but real time, when a properly handled French fleet would probably have had difficulty in losing. France did not take advantage of this opportunity because she had poor leadership.

England survived this war because France could not use her enormous land power on water. France survived this war because England could not use her naval power on land. If the French had used their far greater resources to build up their navy, it is difficult to see how Britain would have survived. The stalemate was reached because British naval power was strong and French naval power weak. Neither power could beat the other, and both were exhausted spiritually and financially from trying.

Perhaps the least satisfying fact about this war is that it resolved no issues. England, at enormous cost in lives, money, ships, lost trade, heavy taxes, a much higher cost of living and much personal hardship, obtained none of her war aims. But such a conclusion overlooks one crucial fact. The men who were trained in this war were to be the leaders of the next. The Nelson who would win at Trafalgar mastered the art of war in the school provided by the war against the French Republic. In this way, the personalities that dominated this war, such as Spencer and St. Vincent, had

insured that England would have the personalities she would need in the future.

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