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CHAPTER I

THE EUROPEAN BACKGROUND

When the development of the stronghold and dockyard of Toulon enabled the French fleet to command the Mediterranean, British statesmen and seamen, during their frequent wars with France, sought for the means to thwart that domination. Accordingly, from the reign of William III onwards, the maintenance of the British fleet in that sea became one of the master aims of naval strategy. By the capture of Gibraltar in 1704 and of Minorca four years later, we were in a position effectively to counteract French efforts in that quarter, with the result that Anglo-French struggles, which had previously centred in home waters, extended to the great inland sea. This expansion of effort was due mainly to the following reasons. French statesmen found in the Toulon fleet a powerful weapon for coercing Spain and the Italian States; while, on the contrary, we sought to foil their efforts. Also, if no very pressing duties detained the Toulon fleet in the Mediterranean, French seamen sought as soon as possible to unite it with their Atlantic squadrons in order to overpower the British navy; while sound strategy impelled us to prevent such union. Hence, though war generally arose between the two Powers out of Netherlandish or colonial disputes, yet it tended to be fought out largely in the Mediterranean. The Revolutionary War formed no exception to this rule. Indeed, the transference of naval strife to that sea, especially in and after 1798, was destined to exert a curiously warping influence on the character of the war, assimilating it more and more to the age-long struggles for colonial supremacy or for the control of the Netherlands.

The latter motive was prominent among the causes that conduced to the declaration of war by the French Republic on Great Britain and Holland on February 1, 1793. But, so soon as the safety of Dutch territory was assured, British aims turned southwards. Action in the Mediterranean was commanded both by the general considerations above noted and by the requirements

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of our allies. French aggression brought us into line with a powerful coalition. Austria, Prussia and Sardinia, it is true, had in the autumn of 1792 suffered sharp reverses at the hands of the French Republicans, the Sardinians being driven from their County of Nice by a French army which had the support of the Toulon fleet; and further misfortunes threatened them on the Italian Riviera unless a British fleet came to their assistance[1]. Another reason for its arrival was the protection of the kingdom of Naples, whose Government late in 1792 had been coerced by the apparition of a powerful squadron from Toulon. But, besides the rescue of Sardinia and South Italy, wider motives were operative. The French Republic having in March 1793 declared war on Spain, hostilities soon began on the Pyrenean border; and the Spaniards desired the assistance of British warships for the projected invasion of Roussillon. In short the supremacy of the Union flag in the Mediterranean would serve to hearten the weaker States of the Coalition and bind them together for an offensive against the south of France.

The situation somewhat resembled that which prompted one of the grandest designs of Marlborough. The victor of Blenheim and Ramillies, not content with driving the French from the Rhineland and Flanders, sought to deal them a homethrust by the capture of Toulon. Relying on the alliance of the Emperor and the Duke of Savoy, he in 1707 planned an expedition which affords one of the first examples, on a great scale, of conjoint naval and military operations. Prince Eugène, crossing the Maritime Alps, was to advance quickly through the County of Nice towards Toulon and with the aid of a powerful British fleet capture that stronghold and destroy French naval power in the Mediterranean. For reasons that need not be stated here, the plan miscarried; but it came so near to success as to lead the French governor of Toulon to sink the fleet which was one of the chief objects of the Allies.

In the spring and summer of 1793 the omens seemed more propitious than in 1707. The six allies now in arms against France were stronger, and, to all appearance, she was weaker, than in the reign of Louis XIV. In the north the fortresses erected by

[1] Jomini, II, 198; Chevalier, p. 38.

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Vauban alone stayed their onset; in the west the Royalist peasants routed the Republicans; and large parts of the south and centre cast off the yoke of the Jacobins now supreme at Paris. The men of Marseilles and Toulon declared for a moderate Republic far different from that of the Terrorists. Therefore, as the summer advanced, another reason for British action in the Mediterranean became apparent, viz. co-operation with the moderates and Royalists of the south of France. This motive, as will duly appear, finds no place in the instructions issued to Lord Hood. His objective was Toulon and the French Mediterranean fleet, then consisting of sixteen sail-of-the-line.

On no side did the Jacobinical Republic betray signs of nervousness or apprehension. Its aggressiveness in adding Great Britain, Holland and Spain to the ranks of the Coalition harmonized with its strategy, which betokened confidence, even defiance. The Jacobins had good cause not to despair. France possessed the enormous advantage of the central position, which conferred the power of striking swiftly against the Allied forces thinly spread out over a wide circumference; and this advantage was utilized to the full by the geometrical genius of Carnot, "the organizer of victory." Moreover, her enemies were severed not merely by distance but by diversities of aim. The invaders all cherished plans of "indemnification" which tended to sunder them and to unite her in an increasingly solid resistance[1]. Their French sympathizers were also rent by incurable schisms. The French malcontents included "pure" Royalists, who sought to bring back *l'ancien régime*, constitutionalists who desired the limited monarchy of 1791, and moderate or more advanced Republicans. These parties cherished bitter animosities, so that Lord Mulgrave, commander of the Allied troops at Toulon, wrote thus to our envoy at Turin:

> You must not send us one *émigré* of any sort; they would be a nuisance; they are all so various and so violent, whether for despotism, constitution or Republic, that we should be distracted with their quarrels; and they are so assuming, forward, dictatorial and full of complaints, that no business could go on with them. Lord Hood is averse to receiving any of them[2].

[1] For the war in Flanders see Fortescue, IV, Pt. I, chs. 4, 5.
[2] F.O. Sardinia, 13, Mulgrave to Trevor, Oct. 19.

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On the other hand, up to the end of 1793, the Jacobins were of one mind; they controlled the machinery of government, and had on their side the instinct of obedience to the central authority instilled by ages of centralized rule, and now quickened by enthusiasm for democracy and hatred of the monarchical invaders. Resistance to the Jacobins spelt treason to the Republic and treason to *la patrie*. Above all, the Parisian Government acted with immense energy. The Committee of Public Safety acquired new vigour by the entry of Robespierre on July 26 and of Carnot on August 10. On August 23 it obtained from the now subservient National Convention a decree enforcing conscription in all but name, by subjecting every adult Frenchman to some form of national service. A *levée en masse* was decreed, and its effects were to be seen in the hordes of eager though ill-disciplined troops which in the autumn of 1793 crushed internal revolts and beat back the Allies on the frontiers.

While France was girding herself with new and hitherto undreamt of strength, the Allies waged the campaign in a manner which revealed the inner divergence of their aims. Austria and Prussia were on very bad terms owing to the Second Partition of Poland recently carried out by Russia and Prussia to the exclusion of the Habsburg Power. By way of compensation Austria proposed to revive her old scheme of annexing Bavaria, indemnifying the Elector by assigning to him either her Belgic lands, or (when Great Britain objected to this) certain provinces conquered from France—either the north of France down to the River Somme, or Alsace-Lorraine. When news of this scheme leaked out, Prussia, gorged with the spoils of Poland, showed little desire for continuing the war against France. The Habsburgs, furious at being duped in the Polish affair, sought to hold their unwilling Prussian allies to the compact of February 7, 1792, whereby they promised to work together in the settlement of French affairs. But the Coalition was in danger of collapse, and probably would have fallen asunder but for the diplomatic, financial and naval succours forthcoming from Great Britain. Yet, as she had recently been on bad terms with Spain, Prussia and Austria, she was ill fitted to be, what she soon became, the leader of the Coalition. Her compacts of 1788 with Prussia and

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the Dutch Republic still subsisted, but intrigues at Berlin and timidity at the Hague atrophied that union. In truth, she was on cordial terms only with Sardinia and Naples, who urgently needed her naval protection.

At sea she was strong. Parsimonious to the army, Pitt had granted money liberally and wisely to the navy; and, assisted by that able comptroller, Sir Charles Middleton (afterwards Lord Barham), he raised the grand total of sail-of-the-line to 115, there being also 135 smaller vessels available. It is probable that the French Revolutionists, puffed up with their military triumphs in 1792, reckoned on winning the war on land before this mighty array could be adequately equipped. This notion was not altogether chimerical; for owing to the wholesale discharges of seamen in 1783, nothing but the relentless work of the press gang would avail to man so great a fleet. At first, the opinion prevailed that the strain on the navy would not be severe; for Great Britain figured merely as an auxiliary to a mighty coalition. French commerce also having been ruined during the Revolution, there was little prospect of the copious prize money which in former wars had quickened the recruiting for the fleet; and the high bounties now offered for the army diverted men to the junior service. Such were the later statements of the second Earl of Chatham, First Lord of the Admiralty; but he claimed that, despite these disadvantages, the navy secured the unexampled increase of 56,337 men in the first year of war[1]. Nevertheless in the first months the scarcity of men was severely felt. Even in September 1793 the Marquis of Buckingham congratulated Lord Grenville on the arrival of the East and West India convoys, which would yield at least 2000 pressed men; "and God knows your fleet wants them[2]."

The urgent need of naval assistance to Sardinia and Naples explains the readiness with which those States made treaties with the Court of St James's. Austria and Spain also pressed for the dispatch of Hood's fleet; for though a Spanish fleet, under Don Borja, put to sea and captured a French frigate and 1225 troops left by the French on the St Pierre Isles off the Isle of Sardinia,

[1] Undated Mem. for the King in Chatham MSS.
[2] *Dropmore P.*, II, 443; *Letters of Sir T. Byam Martin* (N.R.S.), III, 380–2.

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yet the outbreak of pestilence on board soon compelled it to return to Carthagena in a deplorable state[1]; and, when Hood was delayed by causes soon to be explained, certain Francophils at Madrid angrily exclaimed that England purposely postponed his departure in order to expose the Spanish marine to destruction. Lord St Helens, our ambassador at Madrid, thus described the situation in a "private" letter to Lord Grenville, written on May 29, four days after the signature of the Anglo-Spanish treaty of alliance at Aranjuez:

> ...The truth is that it is hardly possible to obtain anything from these people but through the medium of their fears, so that they are infinitely more untractable and difficult to deal with as friends than as enemies. Our chief antagonist is the Minister of Marine, M. Valdès, who, in common with but too many other persons, has persuaded himself that the secret aim of Great Britain in the present war is to engage the French and Spaniards to batter each other's ships to pieces and so secure to herself in future an uncontested superiority over both; for which reason, added to an ill-judged demency, he is sure to oppose every plan which he thinks may lead the Spanish Navy into any service of danger.

He added that the chief minister Godoy, Duke of Alcudia, would through ignorance be probably misled by Valdès, and that British officers, when they arrived, must be extremely careful not to offend the Spaniards[2]. The dispute concerning Nootka Sound in what was soon to be called Vancouver Island was designedly kept open by the Spanish Government, which also displayed extreme jealousy as to the extension of British trade and influence in the Mediterranean.

It follows, then, that our union was cordial only with the hard-pressed kingdoms of Sardinia and Naples. The treaty which, on April 25, our Foreign Secretary, Lord Grenville, signed with Sardinia bound her to maintain in the field an army of 50,000 men, she receiving in return an annual subsidy of £200,000 and support from a British fleet. The two States mutually guaranteed their territories—a clause which, for us, implied an engagement to recover Savoy and Nice for King Victor Amadeus (a promise

[1] Duro, *Armada española*, VIII, 32. Lord St Helens on July 19 (F.O. Spain, 27) reported 3500 sick landed at Carthagena. The Venetian ambassador reported over 300 dead and 3332 sick (Venetian Archives, *Spain*, vol. 189).

[2] F.O. Spain, 27.

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not fulfilled until 1814). By the Anglo-Spanish treaty of May 25 the two Powers promised to oppose France, and to seek to prevent neutrals from helping her trade; also each agreed to convoy the merchantmen of its ally. The convention with Naples, signed there on July 12 by Sir William Hamilton and General Acton, bound that Court to make common cause against France, to assist the British forces in the Mediterranean with a body of 6000 troops, four sail-of-the-line and eight smaller craft, provided that Great Britain would maintain in that sea *une flotte respectable*, establish naval supremacy, pay for the transport and upkeep of the said contingent, and protect Neapolitan commerce at sea.

Finally, the British treaty of July 14 with Prussia, and that of August 30 with the Emperor, implied little more than a loose union against France. At that time, too, Austro-Prussian rivalry was so acute that all the efforts of Great Britain to secure vigorous action in the common cause proved fruitless. Not until September 24 did Francis consent to detach from the troops in his Milanese province 5000 men for service at Toulon. The sequel will show how that promise was kept[1].

Meanwhile the Jacobins were mustering forces with a view to an offensive in Flanders, the Rhineland, the Maritime Alps and the Pyrenees. Nay! They were preparing to strike blows in the Mediterranean. On June 22 and 24 the French Convention passed decrees which augured vigorous action; they placed an embargo on all merchantmen in order speedily to man the Toulon fleet and reinforced it by eight sail-of-the-line from Brest and Rochefort[2]. Thenceforth the need for the assertion of British supremacy in that sea became urgent, all the more so as the chief food supplies for the French armies about to invade North Italy came by sea from Genoa and Leghorn[3].

[1] F.O. Austria, 34, Eden to Grenville, Aug. 31, Sept. 25.

[2] Lévy-Schneider, *Jean Bon St André*, p. 415.

[3] The despatches of Trevor at Turin, of Lord Hervey, the British envoy at Florence, and of Brame, our consul at Genoa, teem with complaints as to the flagrant manner in which the corn ships of Genoa and Leghorn supplied the French armies. On April 10 Trevor stated that Genoa had sold corn so lavishly to France as to produce a scarcity at that city; and on the 20th he reported the sailing of eleven or twelve corn ships for Toulon or Marseilles. French frigates had recently attacked Oneglia because from that Sardinian port privateers set out to intercept that trade, which the presence of Hood alone could terminate. Even on August 27, *i.e.* five weeks

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The diversion of a powerful fleet to the Mediterranean early in the war has been criticized as involving an unwarrantable dispersion of force. But the reasons in its favour have now been shown to be unanswerably cogent. Within six weeks of Hood's arrival fortune conferred on the Allies an almost fantastic boon. In truth their admission into Toulon at the end of August 1793 ought to have dealt a mortal blow to the French Republic. No event of the war (so wrote Drake to Grenville on September 12) has so much tended to bring about a safe and honourable peace[1]. Such was the belief at the Allied capitals; and that excess of confidence was part reason for the discreditable failure. The story of Toulon in 1793 is concerned with an expedition suddenly confronted with an immense but unforeseen opportunity; it describes efforts courageously extemporized on the spot but never adequately supported from home; it deals with Allies who were skilful in promoting friction and in shirking or postponing disagreeable duties until the occasion had vanished. It tells also of a raw Administration gathering strength from despair, enforcing national unity even in the midst of schism, and developing efficiency out of apparently hopeless turmoil.

after Hood's arrival, Francis Drake, British minister at Genoa, reported that British cruisers had not wholly stopped the trade, and that of the 30,000 quarters of corn still in Genoa most had been bought by the French, and the leading families of Genoa profited so much by the sales of corn that the authorities would try to get it through. F.O. Sardinia, 11; F.O. Genoa, 6.

[1] F.O. Genoa, 6.

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CHAPTER II

THE OCCUPATION OF TOULON

VICE-ADMIRAL, first Viscount Hood, who commanded the British fleet destined for the Mediterranean, was sixty-nine years of age; but in the opinion of the most illustrious of his captains, Horatio Nelson, he still possessed the spirit and energy of a man of forty. Descended from a good family, he had had varied experiences. Serving as able seaman in the years 1741–3, and afterwards making his way from midshipman to the rank of vice-admiral (1787), he knew thoroughly all details of the service. Fortune had pressed hard on him, compelling him to serve under the unfortunate Graves at the Battle of Cape Henry in 1781, and under Rodney at the Battle of the Saints (April 12, 1782). On both occasions his daring and independent mind resented the conduct of the commander-in-chief, and he passed the following very severe criticism on the latter action:

> Surely there never was an instance before of a great fleet so completely beaten and routed, and *not pursued*....Had it been my lot to have commanded H.M.'s fleet on the 12th and have passed by so very clear and favourable an opportunity of raising the glory of my country, as I am grieved to say *was done*, I should have thought my head would have been justly required for such a glaring and shameful neglect.

Later on, he criticized Admiral Pigot for loitering along, and never exercising the fleet during a voyage of six weeks. Indeed he once admitted that he was "too open and honest-hearted to live in these times, and my mind often tells me I express my thoughts too freely; but I cannot help it[1]." On the one great occasion before 1793 when Hood was in command of a fleet, he displayed brilliant originality, viz. at Frigate Bay in St Christopher's (St Kitt's) when he challenged and tempted the French fleet out of its very advantageous berth and neatly slipped in to one that dominated it (January 1782). This brilliant nautical joke endeared

[1] *Letters of Sir S. Hood*, ed. by D. Hannay (N.R.S.), pp. 136, 145, 148.

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Hood to every sailor; and in the judgment of his most famous successor he was the greatest seaman of that generation[1].

Hood had the defects of his qualities. He was apt to be censorious, and his impulsiveness often led him into exaggeration; but his warmheartedness and cheeriness won him the devotion of subordinates, and carried him through difficulties insuperable to mediocre or desponding natures. He was a great admiral because he was a keen, resolute and high-souled man. With any one of his former chiefs in command at Toulon, the place would have been very soon lost. On the other hand, his opinionated ways and dogmatic tone increased the difficulty of working with those impracticable allies, the Spaniards and French Royalists; while his full-blooded optimism led him, early in the defence, somewhat to understate the difficulties of that enterprise.

Hood's ardent spirit chafed at the long delays which deferred his departure from Spithead; but they were inevitable. Firstly, the supplies for the navy passed by Parliament on December 20, 1792, were for only 20,000 seamen and 5000 marines. On February 11, 1793, it granted supplies for 20,000 extra men, inclusive of 4000 marines; but of course these men were not forthcoming, still less efficient, during several months. Consequently (as has already appeared) the task of manning the fleets needed for the observation of Brest and Toulon was very great. The calls on the service were manifold. Besides guarding the coasts against armed bands of Jacobins, who, it was expected, would seek to stir up rebellion among our numerous malcontents, the navy had to convoy to Holland the forces supporting our Dutch allies, to watch the French ports, cope with privateers, and prepare to satisfy the demands of our Mediterranean Allies. Further, in February one of the French squadrons succeeded in getting away to the West Indies; and the imperious need of safeguarding our most valuable group of colonies led the British Cabinet at once to despatch a squadron in pursuit. This decision caused the first delay in the sailing of Hood's fleet. In an undated letter to Lord Grenville Pitt gave his judgment in favour of the colonial expedition, even though it should "retard sending twenty sail to the Mediterranean probably for about a fortnight beyond the time

[1] Nicolas, I, 378, 487.

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