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THE NAVY IN THE WAR OF 1739–48

IN 3 VOLUMES

VOLUME I

ADMIRAL SIR JOHN NORRIS

THE NAVY IN THE WAR OF 1739–48

BY

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REAR-ADMIRAL

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PREFACE

THIS book was begun in 1907 as during the preceding two or three years I had tried in vain to understand the part played by the Navy in the wars between 1739 and 1748. I therefore began to study the original papers and the result of my researches gradually developed into this book. As opportunity was scanty and odd hours only could be given to the work I took some years to complete it. The book was finished in August 1914 and would have been published that autumn if it had not been for the outbreak of war. Although the story affords many analogies with, and abundant matter for comment on, the course of the War with Germany, it has been thought best to issue it as originally written, without any knowledge of the events which lay so close ahead.

I was the fortunate recipient of help from the late Sir John Laughton who was always ready to give to others the benefit of his own great store of knowledge; from Mr W. G. Perrin and Mr Carr Laughton who have procured papers and undertaken research for me when I was unable to do it for myself; from Lord Hawke and the late Lord Sandwich who allowed me to examine their family papers at Womersley and Hinchinbrooke; and finally from Sir Julian Corbett who has given me invaluable advice on many matters and to whom I owe more than I can express for his never-failing assistance and encouragement.

I am indebted to Mr Emery Walker for the use of his copyright photographs of the portraits, and to the authorities of the National Portrait Gallery for permission to reproduce that of Admiral Vernon.

To all of these my grateful thanks are due.

H. W. R.

H.M.S. 'CONQUEROR,'
March 1918.

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"The next great war has now passed almost entirely out of memory, not having brought to light any very great commander, nor achieved any definite result. But we have all heard speak of the fable of Jenkins' ears, and we have heard of the battles of Dettingen and Fontenoy, though perhaps few of us could give a rational account either of the reason for fighting them or of the result that came of them."

SEELEY, Expansion of England.

INTRODUCTION

THE war which lasted from 1739 to 1748 marks a definite phase in English naval history. The seventeenth century, which in an historical sense may be said to have lasted until the peace of Utrecht, had been a period in which the sea had played a supremely important part. It had been a century in which colonial expansion had held the foremost place in the external policy of England. As the sixteenth century had witnessed the discoveries of the Portuguese and Spaniards, and the acquisition by those powers of vast dominions and trading interests oversea, so the following hundred years had seen Holland, England and France stretching out their arms both in the East and in the West. England had become a truly maritime power on a new scale. She had taken her place as a factor to be reckoned with in the Mediterranean, as a colonial power in the West Indies and America and as a trading power in the Far East, where the first year of the century was marked by the establishment of the East India Company. The eighteenth century inherited the effects of this development, which shewed themselves in a struggle, lasting through a series of wars, to decide whether France or the United Kingdom should finally become the great colonial power. "The explanation of that second Hundred years' war between England and France which fills the eighteenth century is this, that they were rival candidates for the possession of the New World, and the triple war which fills the middle of the century is, as it were, the decisive campaign in that great world struggle[1]."

In considering therefore the strategy of this war the great struggles on the continent must not be allowed to obscure the fundamental contention between France and England; and the importance attached to colonies and trade was the direct outcome of the prevailing national sentiment. The significance of naval power was fully appreciated by the statesmen of the day, and naval strategy took the colour of the objects of national policy. With this object—the development of colonial power and trade—crystallised in their minds they saw clearly the means of reaching their ends. That a supreme navy was the

[1] *Expansion of England*, p. 34, Sir John Seeley. The "triple war" referred to is the series 1739–1748, 1755–1762, 1778–1783. Cf. also A. Sorel *Essais d'histoire et de critique*, for a parallel French view.

essential instrument formed an article of faith; but they had an equally unshakeable conviction as to the general principles governing the employment of that weapon. Whether it were the trade of the enemy to be attacked or our own to be protected, whether the kingdom were to be defended or military operations to be supported, it was an accepted formula that these ends could only be fully attained by the destruction of the sea forces of the enemy. If these were swept away or rendered impotent the enemy's trade, without protection, must collapse; the enemy's troops, undefended, could not risk themselves upon the water; and the troops and stores of ourselves or our allies could pass unmolested across the sea, or our small vessels could combine tactically with the troops on shore to the extent of the range of their guns because the sea forces of the enemy would be unable to interfere with them. Whatever the ends might be the means were governed by the one main principle—the necessity for destroying the enemy's sea forces.

There was however a link wanting in the chain of the factors necessary for success. However sound may be national policy, and however correct the tactical doctrines, the desired results cannot be reached unless the principles of the strategy are equally appreciated and acted upon. The overwhelming navy manned by expert tacticians and seamen must still fail fully to exercise its strength if the fleets and squadrons are not correctly disposed. This was the case in the early years of this war, and the country was, and had reason to be, dissatisfied with the results obtained by the navy. Commerce suffered heavy losses at the hands of the privateers of Spain alone and Spanish fleets sailed, effected junctions and escorted armies apparently as they pleased. A great oversea expedition, prepared in high hopes of conquests which should outshine those of any previous time came to a standstill before the walls of an inconsiderable city, whence it eventually retired reduced by sickness and battle to a fourth of its original strength. French squadrons sailed from their harbours and convoyed, unattacked, transports of troops and rich fleets of merchants across the Atlantic. There were, besides, inconclusive engagements between squadrons in more than one of which there were suggestions of misconduct; and to crown all, in the eyes of the British public, a British fleet engaged an approximately equal fleet of the enemy and parted without a victory.

The common habit of accounting for things by establishing generalisations or employing catchwords has led to the failures of this war being ascribed entirely to a want of professional ability on the part of the naval officer of the day. The degree of responsibility borne by the direction of operations and the state of naval thought, as influenced

by precedent, have not been sought for; yet in any study of war this should be one of the first points to be investigated. A navy, however well conducted, officered and manned, can do nothing in the shadow of inefficient strategical direction; the best manned fleet will be impotent if its tactical government embodies a wrong doctrine. Although these statements are platitudes and should seem to need no repetition, yet they continue to lie, in spite of experience, at the root of the cause of failure in war.

Infinite pains at different times have gone to the making of officers, as experts in seamanship and gunnery, but little towards instructing them in the design and conduct of operations. War, in its higher aspects, in what Kempenfelt called its "more sublime parts," has too often in the course of our history received only a Cinderella's share of attention.

This defect existed in that part of the eighteenth century to which this book refers both in the British and French navies. Indeed, in the French service the conditions were worse than in our own. At the Académie de Marine[1] sea military knowledge was in the background, while mathematics, hydrography, astronomy, navigation, construction of instruments, naval architecture, medicine, botany, agriculture, philosophy and even gynaecology found their places. Mineralogy and gun manufacture, "les productions d'ingénieur d'artillerie et non d'officier de marine cannonier," as M. Castex pertinently remarks—were included, but military studies only appear in an anecdotal historical form[2].

While the British navy did not err in the direction of a worship of mathematics, science and other matters unconnected with seamanship and sea fighting, there was a tendency to put purely nautical acquirements so high that sea military knowledge suffered in consequence. This was not peculiar to the fifth decade of the eighteenth century. It had existed earlier and continued to exist later. Yet, like Kempenfelt in 1779, there were men of the earlier period who had recognised the same defect in their time. Curtis Barnett and Vernon were both well aware that an officer must be something more than a seaman alone, and apparently Anson had had an idea of doing something to remedy

[1] Although the Académie de Marine at which the extraordinary education described was not instituted until 1752 the ideas which permeated the curriculum must have been long in existence or they could not have obtained a hold sufficient so completely to dominate the training. Castex, *Les idées militaires de la Marine du XVIIIième siècle*, chap. 5.

[2] Out of 274 units of instruction, two only were accorded to strategy and tactics, "a particularly edifying percentage. It is equal to that of agriculture." Castex, *Les idées etc.*, chap. 5. The causes of the successes of the British navy in the eighteenth century are largely to be found in this book, and in particular, in this chapter.

matters before 1739. In a letter from Barnett to Anson, written in 1745 on hearing of the latter's appointment to the Admiralty, the following sentence occurs:

> I expect a great deal from you. I am stupid enough to think that we are worse officers though better seamen than our neighbours; our young men get wrong notions early, and are led to imagine that he is the greatest officer who has the least blocks in his rigging. I hope you will give a new turn to our affairs and form a society for the propagation of sea-military knowledge. I think you had formerly such a scheme[1].

Barnett and Anson moreover were not solitary in their views even at this time. A senior officer, writing in 1747, says

> It is certainly necessary that a sea officer should have some natural courage: but it is equally just that he should have a good share of sense, be perfect master of his business, and have some taste for honour; which last is usually the result of *a happy education, moderate reading, and good company, rarely found in men raised on the mere credit of being seamen.*

And, continuing, he complains that "the art of offensive and defensive sea fighting" and fitness to govern others are not so much as thought about in the examination for lieutenant.

> The general notion about sea officers is that they should have the courage of brutes, without any regard to the fine qualities of men, which is an error themselves too often fall into. This levels the officer with the common seaman, gives us a stark wrong idea of the nature design and end of the employment, and makes no distinction between the judgement skill and address of a Blake, and a mere fighting blockhead without ten grains of common sense[2].

While the business of sea-fighting belongs to the seaman, the direction of a war concerns also and in a greater measure, the statesman, who in time of war becomes a member of Committees or Council, Inner Cabinets, War Councils or whatever name or form suits best the taste of the day. If therefore some study of strategy is incumbent on the seaman it is none the less incumbent on the statesman, lest when war breaks out there should be no definite doctrine as to how the national resources—navy, army and finance—can most effectively be employed in bringing about a victory which shall give a satisfactory and lasting peace. If this has not been determined, and the resultant course of action decided upon, there can be no national strategy, no clear plan of operations. Internal dissensions which hamper the full development of our strength, such as those caused by the Jacobites or the Chartists or their modern counterparts will not have been provided for and guarded against. In such cases the consequence must be indecision, vacillation and controversy in the execution of such immature plans as are eventually made. The war of 1739 to 1748 was no exception to this, and furnishes indeed an excellent example of the working of a system in

[1] Anson correspondence Add. MS. 15955.
[2] An article, probably by Vernon in *The Fool*, Feb. 25, 1747. B.M., 12530, c. 30.

which preparation for war finds too small a place in the activities of government.

Until the general European war began in the end of 1740 Great Britain's main strategy presented no very controversial points. Since Spain for want of an adequate naval force could not invade England nor England for want of a military force invade Spain on any large scale, the problem of the utilisation of the army of each kingdom was fairly restricted. Each country had in its power to attack the outlying possessions of the other, or to make feints against the home country. But in case of an invasion of foreign territory it is not sufficient merely to carry the troops thither in safety; the command of the sea must be sufficient to maintain the army and to prevent the enemy from sending out a counter expedition to recapture it. The only places in which England was seriously vulnerable abroad were Jamaica, Barbados, Antigua and some lesser West Indian islands of no great importance, Minorca and Gibraltar. Jamaica, great in area and equipped with a numerous local militia of white and black servants, would have required an expedition greater both to convoy and maintain than Spain could hope successfully to send across the Atlantic. The Leeward Islands and the Bahamas might have been taken with smaller forces, but would have been difficult to hold. Gibraltar and Malta remain. The former had proved its power of resistance in 1727: its capture would not involve the sending of a force by water, but it could not be invested unless reliefs could be intercepted by sea. Minorca might however be attacked swiftly by a considerable force despatched from the neighbouring ports of Carthagena and Barcelona, and its subsequent supply would not have been impossible owing to the large number of local Catalan small craft whose interception would be difficult. But provided that England retained the command of those seas its eventual recapture would depend only upon whether England could send a sufficient military force to reduce it by siege and blockade.

In consequence of these difficulties, inherent to her weakness at sea, Spain chose commerce attack as her principal strategical measure and used her army to assist this by threatening to attack the most important British points—the United Kingdom, Gibraltar and Minorca—in the hope that by preoccupying the British fleet with their defence, the high seas would be left open for the operations of her cruisers and privateers against trade.

England, with her larger fleet was able to undertake larger military operations against the distant and valuable possessions of the enemy. Attacks upon the principal naval ports of Spain lay also within her compass, for with the slowness of communication on land reinforce-

ments took so long to reach a threatened point that a well prepared and informed expedition, carried out by surprise, had great promise of success even against places on the mainland. Rebuffs at Cadiz on earlier occasions had however been experienced and there was no great desire to incur them again, though an expedition was suggested. There was also a school of military thought—and the experienced Duke of Argyll was amongst its exponents—which advocated the employment of combined raiding expeditions on the lines of that carried out by Lord Cobham in 1719 against Vigo and Pasages, the object of such expeditions being the destruction of enemy privateers, their bases and the shipping. For warfare of this kind a comparatively small military force which could be carried in the fleet together with a few transports was sufficient. One definite proposal was made to use the army to assist the navy in obtaining command of the sea by the capture of Ferrol, but this was rejected in favour of the colonial attack. The ruling opinion however was that it was preferable to use the army in a more comprehensive way in capturing places on which Spanish prosperity depended. Such part of the army therefore as was available when the defence of the kingdom against internal rebellion on the part of the Jacobites had been allowed for, as well as external attack from a dubiously neutral France, was to be used in large bodies against the oversea possessions whence Spain drew the wealth on which her capacity for continuing the war depended. The innumerable discussions however which were heard before any decision was arrived at as to how and where war should be made against Spain, and the lamentable result of the constant procrastinations, provide examples for all time of the need of thinking out the employment of the national forces before war begins.

When the continental war broke out English main strategy received a new orientation. The great problem of whether British policy were to be mainly naval or mainly military divided the opinions of the day into two separate camps. There was on the one hand a body of opinion which would have conducted the war entirely at sea and in the colonies, sending no troops to the continent; and on the other a school which urged our taking a considerable share in the continental war and making that our principal effort. Both recognised the necessity of furnishing subsidies to our allies. The numerous debates in Parliament both on the question of sending troops to take part in the war on the continent, and on the subject of a standing army furnish interesting and important evidence of the way in which this question was regarded by the statesmen of the day. In the aims of the two schools there was no real difference. Both had the same objects in view—the security of the

kingdom and the trade, the development of the colonies and the maintenance of the liberties of Europe, though the last of these was less considered by some supporters of the maritime and mercantile doctrine than by their opponents.

Those who advocated the strategy of a purely maritime and colonial war, leaving the continental battle fields severely alone, relied largely on arguments of a financial kind. As Britain was primarily a trading nation it was against her most important interests to hamper herself by the heavy expenses of an army. Continental struggles, they argued, did not concern this island nation; and if war were necessary it should only be such a war, waged in such a manner, as would advance our true interests, which were commercial. We should sweep the enemy's commerce from the sea, destroy his naval power and capture his colonies, the sources of his wealth; for by the monopolistic colonial system then in vogue we should thus become sole masters of the commerce, both export and import, of those colonies.

If we should take part in a land war the extra expense would involve extra taxation, which would cramp imports, hinder the re-exportation business, thus enhancing the prices of commodities sold to foreign countries, reducing trade and leading to borrowing and unsound finance[1].

A further argument, though of a different nature, was that if this country refused to afford military assistance on the continent it would not affect the war since the continental powers would then exert themselves more on their own account, as they could very well do, and would not look to the United Kingdom to repair their own sins of omission. It was argued that we should always be expected to bear the whole of the expense of the sea war to which there would be added the chief expense of the land war[2]. Moreover, if our army were used on the continent to defend Europe against France, the interested powers would leave to England the defence of those of their possessions as affected her—such as the Netherlands—and would themselves embark upon offensive operations for the increase of their own dominions. So, it was pointed out, had the Emperor behaved in King William's wars. When he saw that the Dutch and ourselves were ready to defend Flanders for him because of the great importance we attached to its not falling into the hands of France, he left us to fight these battles for him, and himself carried on a war of conquest against the Turks[3]. Indeed, an example

[1] *Parliamentary History*, vol. XIII, p. 176.
[2] Alderman Beckford's speech, *Parl. Hist.* vol. XIII. At a later date, see also Lord Strange and Beckford, *Parl. Hist.* vol. XIV, "Debate on the subsidy to the Elector of Hanover."
[3] Velters Cornewall's speech, *Parl. Hist.* vol. XIII, p. 159.

corroborating in no small measure this view arose later in this very war of the Austrian Succession. In 1745 Austria under the guidance of Kaunitz endeavoured to leave the defence of her territory in Lombardy to the King of Sardinia and the British fleet, while her own forces were used to conduct a campaign of conquest on Naples.

Finally, the supporters of the maritime policy urged that no success of France on land could affect us so long as we preserved our superiority at sea. No ignominious peace could be imposed upon us. By devoting our whole resources to the navy and to expeditions against the sources of wealth of the enemy we could ensure both the free flow and increase of our commerce, the destruction of that of the enemy, and the capture of the colonies of France and Spain; so that in the end the exhaustion of those powers would be brought about and a satisfactory peace obtained. As to the military operations on the continent our fleet alone, without the help of a single soldier landed in Europe, would render the most important service in the Mediterranean by commanding the sea communications, transporting where necessary the armies of our allies, and preventing the enemy from moving troops by sea from France or Spain into Italy, or from carrying supplies for his army by water. If on the other hand we should take upon us the burden of a continental war, we must abandon operations in America and the West Indies, and thus deny ourselves the only really profitable offensive in our own interests, for we could not conduct a strong war in two important theatres at the same time. Alderman Beckford summed up the views of this school.

"The most effectual way," he said, "to assist our allies will always be to prosecute the war by sea and in America... We may conquer from our enemies, they can conquer nothing from us, and our trade will improve by a total extinction of theirs[1]."

Admiral Sir Peter Warren was a no less pronounced advocate of the purely maritime policy. While not believing that we could bring France to a peace solely by the operation of our squadrons at sea, he was strongly averse from our taking any part in a continental war.

"We are not the weaker party," he said, "we have nothing to do with the continent; we do not stand in need of assistance from any state on the continent; let us confine ourselves to our own element, the ocean. There we may still ride triumphant, in defiance of the whole house of Bourbon[2]."

Warren considered it possible to keep a navy that could defy whatever force Europe brought against it, though he deplored the tendency he observed to neglect the navy, a tendency which would lead to our being "beat out of the ocean, and then we must contend not for any part of the continent of Europe, but for our own island."

[1] *Parliamentary History*, vol. XIII, p. 119.
[2] *Parliamentary History*, vol. XIV, p. 470.

The two postulates on which the maritime policy rested were that the continental powers alone should be able to withstand France without our help; and that we should be able, whatever the result of the continental campaign, to maintain our supremacy at sea in the face of such maritime confederations as might be arranged against us in succeeding years under the guidance of a Franco-Spanish alliance.

These views were disputed and their conclusions denied by the protagonists of the continental school. It was pointed out that in any case we were already engaged by treaty to furnish troops for the defence of Holland, and to uphold the rights of the Habsburg dynasty in the Netherlands. These countries could only be defended against French attack by an army on land, and our allies, in the dispositions of their forces, had counted upon our promised help. Whether this agreement were a right or a wrong one was now beside the case. We had entered into it and must act upon it.

Apart however from the question that honour dictated an abiding by our agreements, there was the fact that if Holland and the Austrian Netherlands were conquered owing to lack of cooperation on our part the ports of both and the maritime force of the latter would be at the disposal of France. The material assets of sea power of that country would thus be increased. But another, and possibly more important consideration would be that our allies, incensed at our desertion of their cause, would willingly turn to our enemies and execute vengeance upon the nation that had deserted them[1].

It was denied that our allies could stand against France unaided by us: in that case, they would be beaten; Europe would be at the feet of France. The conquests of the Netherlands by her, and of Lombardy by Spain would place the Bourbon Powers in so strong a military position that they would no longer have anything to fear on land. It would not be necessary for them to devote so large a proportion of their revenues to their armies and their attention would be devoted to developing their navies and that of Holland, who would fall under the Bourbon yoke. Then, with Portugal and the Italian states under the military thumb of the alliance and ordered to close their ports to us, with the Flemish and Dutch ports as bases of operation and trade, our navy though we should strengthen it to the utmost could not protect efficiently our kingdom, our colonies and our commerce. Tariffs and treaties would be arranged against us at the bidding of France for the destruction of our trade in peace, and, when the allied powers should feel themselves strong enough to engage us in war, first the trade and finally the kingdom would succumb to the superior forces they would bring out

[1] H. Fox, *Parliamentary History*, vol. XIII, p. 169.

upon the seas. Anticipating the policy of the Napoleonic decrees by sixty years, Mr James West, a member of Parliament, said:

> They might perhaps by threats or money get all the ports of the Baltic, except the Russian, shut against us; and in this case I should be glad to know how we could carry on even a naval war against the House of Bourbon, assisted by the Dutch. We might it is true fit out a most powerful navy, because all our merchant ships except those engaged in the East and West India trade would of course be laid up in our harbours. But as neither the French nor Spaniards would then have occasion to be at the expense of keeping up numerous land armies they might in a year or two be able with the assistance of the Dutch to provide a navy at least equal if not superior to ours.

As to possible conquests in America and at sea whose effect was so strongly represented by the maritime school, they would avail us nothing if the continental campaign were favourable to the Bourbons. The colonies would be reconquered in Europe, and their temporary loss by the enemy would not affect the final result. "I fear," said Hardwicke in a letter of August 17th, 1741 to the Duke of Newcastle, "that now America must be fought for in Europe, whatever success we may have in the former, I doubt it will always *finally* follow the fate of the latter[1]."

It was further argued that if we should abstain from sending troops, the Dutch would not move in defence of the Austrian Netherlands. Our abstention would thus have a double effect, and only a weak Austrian contingent would be left to defend that vital area. Austria without the aid of ourselves and the Dutch could not protect her Flemish and Italian provinces. First the former and then the latter would be over-run and reduced. Lord Perceval in a debate which took place three years after the continental war had been in progress gave a practical example of the value of the British contingent in the Dettingen campaign, the troops which took part in it being those British, Hessian and Hanoverian troops voted in 1743. It was owing to the presence of this pragmatic army that 60,000 French troops had been detained on the Maine and defeated at Dettingen. If these had been able to join the French armies in Bohemia and Bavaria, was it probable, asked the speaker, that the Queen of Hungary could have stood her own in Germany? or could the King of Sardinia have resisted France, Spain and Naples unless this diversion had been made?

The opinion of the Duke of Newcastle was that a military force upon the continent was necessary.

> "Naval force," said he, "tho' carried never so high unsupported with even the *appearance* of a force upon the continent, will be of little value....France will outdo us at sea when they have nothing to fear by land....I have always maintained that our marine should protect our alliances upon the continent; and they, by diverting the expense of France, enable us to maintain our superiority at sea[2]."

[1] *Life of Lord Hardwicke*, Yorke, vol. I, p. 263.
[2] Duke of Newcastle to Lord Hardwicke, Sept. 2, 1749. *Life of Lord Hardwicke*, Yorke, vol. II, p. 23.

Students of the later wars between this period and 1815 can consider whether the views of Newcastle or of Warren were borne out by the experience of those struggles.

The advocates of the continental policy were in the majority. Hence, from 1742 to 1748 we maintained an army in Europe which took part in the victory at Dettingen and shared the defeats at Fontenoy, Roucoux and Laffeldt; it was unable to prevent the Austrian Netherlands from falling into the hands of France, or the surrender of the great Dutch fortress of Bergen-op-zoom. The wished for attack upon Canada could not be carried out and was postponed until the second war of the trilogy. Whether the policy adopted were the one most in accordance with the national interests of the time will possibly be as much a matter of difference of opinion to-day as it was in 1740.

When the sea strategy of the war is examined an impressive evidence of continuity of tradition comes into view, a continuity broken only during the unhappy early years in which the advice given by the experienced seaman Norris, a veteran of Queen Anne's wars steeped in the doctrine of that time, was disregarded by those in whose hands the direction of the war rested. The Committee of Council frequently made their decisions in direct contradiction to the opinion of the Commander-in-Chief, and on many occasions made them without consultation with any of the sea-officers of the Admiralty. At one time, when Lord Winchelsea was first commissioner, the orders issued were such that the two Admirals then on the Board refused to put their names to them, that being the only way that lay in their power of expressing their disapproval. We have it on Vernon's authority that the basic principle of defence of the kingdom and of trade was a strong squadron operating in the Channel approaches from which detachments could be made as necessary. Norris continually urged this course in the early years of the war with Spain but without result; and Vernon revived it on his taking up a command in home waters after his return from the West Indies. Finally it fell to Anson to re-establish the squadron in the closing years of the war. The letters of the Duke of Bedford and Lord Sandwich in 1746[1] are important landmarks in this connexion, while Anson's later views on the western squadron as the corner-stone of our naval strategy in a war against France are well known.

The instructions to the Commanders in the Mediterranean at various periods of the war, which in many cases are reprinted at length in order fully to illustrate their form and the ideas which they express, shew how well accepted was the idea that in the event of a French squadron breaking out of the Mediterranean it should be followed to the West

[1] *Vide* vol. III.

Indies, as Nelson followed Villeneuve. The value of the West Indies was so great that they were considered to form the natural objective of a French naval force. Nelson, so far from creating a precedent, was in fact carrying out, perhaps instinctively, a practice the tradition of which extended over at least three generations.

While British strategy was comparatively consistent in its main lines, if not in its execution, French strategy was undecided. The operations of the French navy were not coordinated with those of its ally. The fleets of the two powers, except upon two occasions[1], worked separately, each pursuing its own policy. To criticise however is easy: but when the intense provincialism of the Spaniards themselves is remembered, and the difficulty of obtaining cohesion between the thirteen kingdoms, it is not hard to appreciate that full cooperation with a foreign power should be unattainable. This lack of cooperation gave England the greatest possible advantage throughout the war, combined as it was with a want of practical experience on the part of the enemy. Vernon's operations in the West Indies in 1741 were watched by France with grave and unconcealed anxiety in consequence of the loss to French trade, and the gain to English strength which would follow from an English capture of the more valuable Spanish possessions. To oppose such conquests France sent a fleet to Hispaniola, but, though it was expected by the Spaniards, cooperation was not provided; and lack of sea experience caused such illness in the fleet that it returned to Europe without having effected anything. When war broke out France began hostilities with two surprise attacks, one upon the British fleet in the Mediterranean, the other upon the United Kingdom itself, failing in both: in the former because it was not made clear that the destruction of the British fleet was the overwhelmingly important object, in the latter through a variety of causes which are not reducible to a generalisation. Immediately abandoning direct attack upon the British fleets, although the combined Franco-Spanish naval forces in European waters were superior to those of England, the French attempted a form of guerilla warfare upon the lines of communication of the Mediterranean fleet. It failed. A further attempt to invade England, and an endeavour to recover Louisbourg were made. The former again relied upon evasion, and upon the assistance of the Jacobites. The latter was conducted as though there was no enemy fleet to be considered nor communications to be maintained. Beyond these the strategy was concerned almost entirely with the protection of trade by convoy, that is by direct

[1] Viz., the scheme for the invasion of Italy in the last months of 1741, and the battle of Toulon in Feb. 1744. In the second case cooperation ceased after the battle.

tactical defence and not by attack upon the enemy's force which threatened it. Attack upon British trade was relegated to privateers, which, though they caused heavy losses were unable to bring about any serious dislocation of British commerce, and therefore no decisive effect upon the war. The French naval strategy of protection of trade by convoy alone, and of offence by sporadic attack failed.

When the strength of the British navy and the individual efficiency of its seamen are considered in relation to the divided forces, wrong ideas and inefficiency with which it was opposed, it is impossible not to regret that such great advantages should so largely have been thrown away by those who had to make use of our formidable weapon. What actually brought us through the war with some measure of success, was that the enemy made more mistakes than we did.