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 Edited by James Stanier Clarke and John McArthur
 Excerpt
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BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIR
 OF
 CAPTAIN WILLIAM LAYMAN,
 OF THE ROYAL NAVY.

His genius, ever for the event prepared,
 Rose with the storm, and all its dangers shared ;
 And though full oft, to future perils blind,
 With skill superior glow'd his daring mind,
 Through snares of death, the reeling bark to guide,
 When midnight shades involve the raging tide.

FALCONER.

(Continued from Vol. xxxvii. page 458.)

WE shall now resume the *naval* biography of Captain Layman. On the recommencement of hostilities, Lord Nelson nominated Mr. Layman to be lieutenant of the *Victory*, in which ship he sailed with his Lordship for the Mediterranean in May, 1804. In the way out, the *Victory* retook the *Ambuscade* frigate, of which Mr. Layman was sent in charge ; and on the passage to Gibraltar, captured a French ship and Dutch vessel. Soon after, rejoining Lord Nelson off Toulon, he was appointed, in October, by his Lordship, to the command of the *Weazle* ; in which vessel Captain Layman was immediately despatched to watch the enemy's cruisers, and protect the trade of the Straits, as well as keep open the conveyance of provisions from the coast of Barbary for the supply of the garrison of Gibraltar. In February, 1805, Lord Nelson wrote to Captain Layman, signifying his high approbation of the manner in which the service of the *Gut* had been executed, and hoping soon to be able to give him a better ship ; but this commendation Captain Layman did not receive till after the *Weazle* had been unfortunately wrecked. On which occasion the merchants and inhabitants of Gibraltar presented the following address to the lieutenant-governor :—

Nav. Chron. Vol. XXXVIII.

B

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

To his Excellency Sir THOMAS TRIGGE, K.B. General of his Majesty's Forces, Colonel of the 68th Regiment of Foot, Lieutenant-Governor and Commander-in-Chief of the Town and Garrison of Gibraltar.

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EXCELLENCY,

We the undersigned Merchants and Traders residing in Gibraltar, with sincere concern, conceive that the late loss of his Majesty's ship *Weazle*, commanded by Captain Layman, will materially affect the security of our trade, unless early removed. And having witnessed and felt the benefit from the extraordinary and unremitting exertions of Captain Layman to fulfil his duty, in keeping the Straits free from the piratical French privateers, that had so long been destructive to the trade of this port, as well as the Mediterranean; and as few or none of these cruisers have of late dared to venture in the Gut, it is beyond comparison a proof how fully the *Weazle* performed the service on which she was employed.

We therefore sincerely lament that the late boisterous and thick foggy weather has for the present deprived us of Captain Layman's exertions and skill, by the loss of the said brig on the rocks off Cabaretta point.

On which occasion, and being persuaded that no man is more capable of supporting and protecting the Trade passing the Straits, and convoying the supplies to this place, from his constant study and knowledge of the different bays and inlets, as well on the neighbouring coasts of Spain as Barbary, we will be exceedingly obliged, if your Excellency would do us the favor to strongly recommend to the Right Honorable Lord Nelson, that Captain Layman, his officers, and crew, may be appointed to a vessel of force suitable to support and protect us in the way they have so ably performed before, not only to our satisfaction, but to the benefit of the public in general.

And we shall feel highly gratified, if this our request meets your Excellency's approbation, that you will second our wishes by a statement to Lord Nelson of the advantages we have experienced during the time of Captain Layman's being on this station, as well as the necessity of having a suitable vessel stationed in the Gut; and begging that, if necessary, his Lordship will have the goodness to represent this our petition to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty.

Gibraltar, 6th March, 1804.

Signed { By all the principal Merchants
and Inhabitants.

This address, with a suitable testimony from the lieutenant-governor and the garrison, being forwarded to Lord Nelson, and Captain Layman having presented a sketch of the description of vessels best suited for cruisers in the Straits, stating the necessity that all such should in particular be armed with flank guns in the stern and bow, and fitted with Chinese sculls, as well as pivot sweeps (which, although imperfectly fitted in the *Weazle*, Captain the Hon. George Elliott declared to Rear-admiral Otway, then

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

CAPTAIN, WILLIAM LAYMAN.

§

commissioner at Gibraltar, enabled the Weazle, in a calm, to beat the Maidstone's jolly-boat). Lord Nelson instantly, on reading the paper, wrote at the bottom :—" I perfectly agree in the propriety of having vessels of the above description stationed in the Straits, and I know no person so fit to command one of them as Captain Layman."—Which testimonials, with his own recommendation, he enclosed to the Admiralty, and sent Captain Layman to England with his despatches."

On Captain Layman's arrival, and waiting on the late Lord Melville, then at the head of the Admiralty, his Lordship immediately acquiesced with Lord Nelson in the propriety of having vessels of the before-mentioned description for the service of the Straits, and asked Captain Layman if it required to have one built, as " Lord Nelson seemed very desirous to have him out again as soon as possible." Captain Layman observed, that although all ships of war were extremely formidable from a broadside battery, they were very vulnerable, indeed almost defenceless at the extremities, from which many vessels of force had been taken in a calm by gun-boats, and amongst others the *Alexander*, 74, when commanded by Sir Alexander Ball, was in danger of capture : it were desirable that all ships should be so armed as to fight guns in every direction, it was more particularly indispensable for a cruiser in the Straits ; but as building a vessel would be a loss of time, Captain Layman would, if it met his Lordship's approbation, convert one of the 18-gun brigs for that service, by fixing flank guns, and fitting Chinese sculls, so as to place the broadside in any direction. These propositions being immediately approved by his Lordship, orders were given for Captain Layman to be appointed to the first vessel of this description that was launched, which was the *Despatch*, built by contract, at Falmouth ; but as on survey at Plymouth that vessel proved so defective as to require to be taken into dock, Sir William Rule, then surveyor of the navy, proposed one of the fir brigs building in the Thames, and Captain Layman was appointed to the *Raven*. On the equipment of which vessel, the following description was given in a work published when he was abroad :—

" The *Raven*, upon being fitted for sea, at Woolwich, under the direction of her very ingenious and active commander, Captain William Layman, had, agreeable to his recommendation, among other alterations, the two

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

4

NAVAL BIOGRAPHY.

foremost ports closed up, and the guns taken away. In lieu of which was fitted amid-ships, immediately before the foremast, a 68-pound carronade,* upon a traverse carriage, so as to fire in almost every direction clear of the gunwale; and in lieu of the two stern chasers, a carronade of the same power abaft. The wonderful accession of force derived from these alterations, and the great advantages to be derived from them in chase, in clearing an enemy's coast, &c. are too obvious to need a comment."—*Extract from the Elements and Practice of Naval Architecture*, p. 180.

To this description may be added, that the guns were completely fitted, not only with object and side sights, but with tangent screws: the workmanship of the sliding traversing flank guns, done at the Warren, was admirable; but Captain Layman's intention of getting the Chinese sculls improved upon at the dock-yard, by fixing them to traverse on a bull's eye, he could not accomplish, although the facility with which they would thereby work is evident.

The Raven having been detained to carry out to Lord Nelson the declaration of war with Spain, was not despatched till January 1805. On getting into the Bay of Biscay, on the very first night, although the sea was not particularly heavy, and the wind was upon the quarter, the vessel opened much, particularly under the fore channel; during part of the first and middle watch, under the 2d lieutenant and master, † from neglecting the order to sound the pump, the vessel had made so much water as to have reached the magazine before Captain Layman was acquainted with the circumstance, after the relieve of the morning watch; and which was only a prelude to a more serious misfortune, as shewn in the following letter:—

MY LORD,

Prison at St. Mary's, January 30, 1805.

It is my painful duty to narrate to your Lordship an event as grievous as unexpected; for having quitted England on the 21st inst. in command of his Majesty's sloop Raven, charged with despatches for Vice-admiral Sir John Orde, the senior officer at Gibraltar, and your Lordship; with directions from the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty to put myself under your Lordship's orders. I arrived at the rendezvous of the squadron under Sir John Orde, from 2 to 10 leagues off Cadiz, on the 28th instant, with a

* An 18-pounder gun was intended to be fitted, but there was not sufficient space.

† It appears the second lieutenant has been since tried by a court martial, and dismissed the service, for incapacity; and such was the effect of fear on the master, that he died in C—— Temple soon after the vessel struck.

Cambridge University Press

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

CAPTAIN WILLIAM LAYMAN.

5

fresh breeze from the westward, and not seeing any thing of the squadron, I reduced the sail from whole to treble-reefed topsail, and hove-to at 9 o'clock P.M.; a few minutes before 10 o'clock, I went upon deck to look round, and desired the lead to be hove; and on the officer of the watch reporting there was not any soundings at 80 fathoms, I delivered the following order in writing:—

Memorandum.—January 29th, 1805.

“With the wind westerly lye-to with head to the southward till 4 A.M. and then to the northward; keeping the lead going every half hour, and acquaint me if there is soundings, or any alterations.

W. LAYMAN.”

I then retired to my cot, and about 12 o'clock was called by the officer of the watch, and acquainted that he saw the lights of the squadron; but before I could get on my things, the officer came down the ladder, and said they were the lights at Cadiz; at this time he appeared to me flurried. I instantly went on deck, veered ship, and hove the lead; had 10 fathom the first cast, but only 5 fathom before the vessel was round, and we veered on each tack as the water shoaled; for the night being dark, with heavy rain, and the alarm frequently given of rocks and shoals, it was impossible to anchor, or see our way out till daylight; when I must beg of your Lordship to judge of my feelings, in finding we were within the enemy's ships of war at anchor off Cadiz on one side, as well as the batteries and Fort St. Catherine on the other, with the wind then blowing strong from the westward, with a very heavy swell; but I was determined the Raven should not be tamely surrendered, and by a press of sail not only cleared the enemy's fort and batteries, but the ships and gun-boats; but by carrying the vessel gunwale under, *I beat her over the shoals*, notwithstanding the fears and cries of many of the crew, amongst whom was the boatswain; and by 10 o'clock was to-windward of St. Sebastine, and laying up W.S.W. WHEN THE MAIN YARD BROKE IN THE SLINGS. From this serious accident, the vessel driving fast to-leeward, obliged us to anchor on the Rota side, clear of the guns at Cadiz. At this time some gun-boats attempted to annoy us, but in defiance of all we rigged the main-boom for a main-yard, and were ready to make sail, for which we anxiously waited an opportunity; the wind having increased to a very heavy gale, with a tremendous sea, dark night, and heavy rain. As the vessel at first drifted with one anchor and cable down, we were now riding by two anchors and two cables an end upon each; but it was impossible for them to long withstand the violence of the wind and sea, and *with one tremendous surge she parted from both*. Sail was instantly set, and a last attempt made to work out, but shortly after she struck, when the despatches, signals, and all other papers of consequence, were thrown overboard by me, with two 32lb. shot, and 11 lb. lead, to sink them, as it appeared now impossible to save the vessel, which was completely at the mercy of the wind, and heavy rolling ground-swell sea; as, however, the flood-tide and indraught was setting strong, the close-reeved fore-top-sail was set on the cap; she was kept athwart the tide and swell, until a-breast a bite near Port St. Cathalna, by

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

which the lives of all the people were saved except two, and even those would not have been drowned, had they not quitted the vessel contrary to my positive orders: for the gale being at its greatest height at the top of high water, when the vessel went on shore, and bilged in three places; she laid comparatively quiet as the tide receded; and as the wind had lulled considerably by low water, when the inner and heeling side was left dry, the people were enabled to land on a sandy beach.

After getting on shore, I conceived it necessary, from the circumstance of being prisoners, that inquiry should be made, whether the orders I gave had been complied with; and it appears, from the declaration of the quarter-master at the cunn, man at the wheel, boatswain's mate of the watch, &c. that the lead had not been hove from the time I quitted the deck, and that when the lights were seen, the officer of the watch was below, and not then sober. Should the evidence of these people at the court martial correspond with their deposition so recently after, when the events are so fresh in their memory, I shall have to lament that an officer whom on former service I have had occasion to commend for his vigilance, should, from neglect, have been the cause of so fine a vessel being wrecked.

Of my own conduct on this trying occasion, it would be presumptuous in me, my Lord, to speak; but in this afflictive event, it is the greatest consolation, from the praise you have been pleased to give me, that on this occasion, when the eyes of all Cadiz were spectators, I have received the most honorable testimony from the very people that I was employed against, as will appear by the accompanying letter from the Captain-general the Marquis de la Solano; and which is the more gratifying, as I was unacquainted with such intention until the letter was very handsomely conveyed to me by our late Consul-general, Mr. Duff.*

* "SIR,

" Cadiz, 14th February, 1805.

" I have much satisfaction in not only acquainting you, that his Excellency Marquis de la Solano has readily forwarded your packet to Lord Nelson, containing an account of the unfortunate loss of his Majesty's sloop Raven; but in enclosing to you the Marquis's testimony (a) of your skill and exertions to extricate the brig; and I must again repeat, that they were very great, and deservedly admired by the whole city, and deserving of success.

I am, &c. &c. &c.

Captain Layman, late of H.M.S. Raven,

James Duff.

(a) Translation.

" SIR,

" Cadiz, February 13, 1805.

" By the next post I shall forward to the Captain-general of Catalonia, the letter you sent me in your's of the 8th instant, for Vice-admiral Lord Nelson, since it only contains the loss of the English brig of war Raven, whose captain, in honor to truth, I must acknowledge, from what I saw myself, and what I heard from the most intelligent men employed upon the naval service of the King my master, used all efforts imaginable that depended upon great exertion and good seamanship, to save the vessel, and manœuvred with the greatest skill and judgment;

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

CAPTAIN WILLIAM LAYMAN.

7

I am informed by the agent for prisoners of war, that an exchange will soon take place; after which I shall take the earliest opportunity of bringing the officers and people to your Lordship; and in the interim beg leave to assure you, that misfortune will not make me lose sight of my duty; and that in a great national object, which I know your Lordship to have in view, I hope to make myself useful.

I have the honor to be, my Lord, &c. &c.

*Vice-admiral Viscount Nelson, &c. &c. &c.
Commander-in-chief of his Majesty's
Ships in the Mediterranean.*

W. Layman.

The exchange of prisoners being effected, Mr. Duff engaged a passage for Captain Layman, the officers, and crew, in an American ship bound to Malta, which ship falling in with the British squadron off Sardinia, Captain Layman was most cordially received by Lord Nelson, to whom he delivered the preceding letters; and as his Lordship wanted to send Captain Layman immediately on service, he ordered the court martial to be assembled the next morning. On the previous evening, about 10 o'clock, when the usual glass of weak punch was finished in the stern gallery, after all had retired for the night, Lord Nelson sent privately for Captain Layman, saying as he entered, "If this narrative is laid before the Court, they will hang the officer of the watch."—Captain Layman replied, "I should not have stated it, my Lord, but for my own justification, to shew, that if the orders I gave had been complied with, the vessel would not have been in the situation I found her, which was in consequence of the neglect of the officer of the watch, who went below to drink grog, instead of staying upon deck to look out and have the lead hove."—"That is very true; but as *you* will not be censured, it will give an opportunity for ill-natured people to say you had no occasion to make this official statement, and as it is the business of the *President* to find out all these things, it will come out better then,

but the weather becoming very bad, and having carried away his main yard when most in want of it, he was obliged to anchor, though in a place distant from the batteries, and they could not annoy them; until it being impossible for her to resist any longer the high sea and still greater wind, she went on shore on the coast of St. Catalina Castle, off Port St. Mary's.

El Marques de la Solano."

"To James Duff, Esq. H. M.'s late
Consul at Cadix."

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

and I wish you would omit the paragraph ; I think it would be better to leave the Court to find out all the circumstances, in preference to their coming immediately from you ; and therefore, as an act of humanity, I would not say any thing about the officer of the watch, the boatswain, and the people that behaved so ill, or the second lieutenant and master, who set the magazine a-float ; it will all come out, depend upon it."

In consequence of this representation from Lord Nelson, which originated from humane motives, Captain Layman, by his Lordship's desire, re-wrote the letter between 11 and 12 o'clock at night, *omitting the paragraph*, and parts marked in italics, and breakfasted with his Lordship at half-past six in the morning ; soon after which the Court was signaled on board the Royal Sovereign, so anxious, as his Lordship said, was he to have it over.

During the sitting of the Court, no inquiry was made whether the officer of the watch was sober, or upon deck, or particularly into his compliance with the orders he received ; yet, as the Court did not indicate any feelings of censure toward Captain Layman, or, if they meant it, he naturally supposed he should be asked, as is done to the vilest criminal, what he had to say in his defence before the Court was closed ; Captain Layman was therefore astounded to hear the Acting Judge-Advocate read, after the preamble—

"The Court is of opinion, that there appears to have been a great want of necessary caution in Captain Layman, in approaching the land.

"The Court doth therefore adjudge the said Captain Layman to be severely reprimanded, and put at the bottom of the list of commanders."

On Captain Layman's returning to the Victory, Lord Nelson was on the quarter-deck, and with a countenance of concern never to be forgotten, beckoned Captain Layman to the ladder leading to his cabin, and on reaching the stern gallery, said, with great feeling, "I did not expect this ! but it is all my fault ; however, never mind, *I'll get you over it.*" On Captain Layman's observing, he had never before been so convinced of a commander-in-chief's ship being a floating court where those favored with his good opinion were sure to draw upon them the envy of others ; and that he attributed the origin of the sentence to that cause. Lord Nelson replied, "Ah ! there are two kinds of justice—

Cambridge University Press

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Edited by James Stanier Clarke and John McArthur

Excerpt

[More information](#)

CAPTAIN WILLIAM LAYMAN.

9

justice tempered with mercy, and justice carried to severity; and you have been treated with severity to the extreme; but as twelve people were upon their oath, I cannot say any thing publicly, although, said his Lordship, significantly, “I have my own opinion.” The day after the court martial, on Lord Nelson shewing to Captain Layman the paper on which the Court had grounded the censure, more particularly one said to be copied from the log-slate when in Fort Catalina, Captain Layman instantly said, he would forfeit his head if that was fact. “You will, my Lord,” said he, “I hope, excuse the warmth with which I express my feelings before you.”—“To be sure I do; for it is very natural you should feel warmly on such an occasion, or you would not be good for much; and I hope you will be able to substantiate sufficient proof to justify my ordering a farther investigation, as justice is due to every one.” On inquiry, it came out that during the time the Court was sitting, and when this paper was produced, the surgeon having some doubts as to its validity, went on deck, and asked the clerk respecting its being copied from the log-slate in the fort; and was then made acquainted, that the clerk had seen the log-slate broken and obliterated on the deck, before quitting the vessel. Lord Nelson, when informed of this circumstance, on which rested the opinion of the Court, that Captain Layman had shewn a great want of necessary caution in approaching the land, wrote to the surgeon, purser, and clerk; and having by their answers substantiated the fact, gave directions that the Court should re-assemble and re-examine the evidence. Things were in this state, when Captain Layman, on entering the stern gallery in the evening, to take, as usual, a glass of light punch, observed Lord Nelson very much agitated; and on finding himself the innocent cause, a principal officer having started obstacles to the purposed re-examination, he withdrew.

When all the others had retired, Captain Layman sent in a message, requesting to speak with Lord Nelson *then*. This request was instantly complied with; and Captain Layman, on entering the stern gallery, said, “I feel most grateful to your Lordship for your very kind endeavours to get me out of the pit into which I have been *jostled*; but, my Lord, I should ill deserve your favorable opinion, if on this occasion I permitted any circumstance, however momentous *to myself*, to produce a schism between

Nav. Chron. Vol. XXXVIII. c

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-01877-7 - The Naval Chronicle, Volume 38

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

you and those who fill the principal situations in the squadron. You well know, my Lord, that human nature is formed of such materials, that it requires the strongest mind, and best disposition, to acknowledge error. What then, my Lord, is to be expected from those of different descriptions, who are tenacious of the consequence of rank, and habituated to consider their own opinion as infallible? And although, my Lord, I would willingly trust my life, or what is of far more importance, my character as a sea officer, to the *unbiassed* decision of the greater part of the Members; yet there are others who would be gratified by any censure passed on me. These, my Lord, will do all they can to prevent the evidence, on which the sentence was founded, from being falsified, as then the revocation of the sentence must follow; which might be against the majority who had been induced to sign, that after '*the strictest investigation into the cause of the loss, and having MATURELY weighed and considered the whole and every part of the evidence, the Court do adjudge the said Captain Layman to be severely reprimanded, &c.*' Besides, my Lord, it may be objected by the supporters of quarter-deck authority, that to revise the evidence, is to doubt the ability with which the Court had been conducted; and that to revoke the sentence, would be in opposition to the policy—that a court martial, like the King, can do no wrong. At all events, my Lord, it is evident, that to obtain me justice, would produce ill-blood between you and some of those under your command, which could not but be attended with great prejudice to the public service; it therefore appears to me better, my Lord, that to prevent such evil consequences, for an humble individual like myself to submit to the injustice at present; and, indeed, if I am sacrificed, it will always be a greater satisfaction to me in having thus acted, than if I had triumphed over my persecutors; one of whom, notwithstanding his oath, has openly avowed he would have broke me if he could: but I shall ever treat with contempt such littleness of mind, and malevolence of heart."

Lord Nelson's eye expressed the greatest satisfaction during the address of Captain Layman, who had scarcely finished, before his Lordship, taking him by the hand, said most cordially—" *I thank you—I thank you very much—You are right*; but it shall not be the worse for you in the end."—Captain Layman replied, he left it to