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Excerpt

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THE HISTORY
OF THE
ROYAL MARINE FORCES.

CHAPTER I.

FROM OCTOBER 1805, TO FEBRUARY 1806.

WE left the Victory about a quarter before noon, just as she had conveyed to the fleet that inspiring sentiment of the noble chief, which echoed in every Briton's heart on this day of deadly strife; and with the signal hoisted to "engage closer," the Victory continued slowly advancing towards the enemy's line.

At twenty minutes past noon, and about ten minutes after the Royal Sovereign had passed under the stern of the Santa Aña, the Bucentaure fired a shot at the Victory, then, with studding sails on both sides, steering about east and going scarcely a knot and a half through the water, but the shot fell short: after a few minutes had elapsed, a second shot was fired, which fell alongside; a third almost immediately followed, and that went over the ship. One or two others did the same, until a shot went through her main top-gallant sail. This visible proof that she was within reach, was followed by a minute or two of awful silence; and then, as if by signal, six or seven ships ahead and stern of the french admiral opened their fire upon the Victory.

Seeing that the british admiral was about to follow the example of his second in command, the french and spanish ships closed for mutual support. This movement, together with the

stoppage in the head-way of the *Santa Aña*, and the bearing up of the two ships a-head of her, divided the combined line nearly in the centre; leaving fourteen ships in the van, and nineteen in the rear, with an interval between them of more than three quarters of a mile. When the *Victory* had reached within about 500 yards of the larboard beam of the *Bucentaure*, her mizen top-mast was carried away, and another shot knocked her wheel to pieces. In a few minutes, eight marines were killed and several wounded by a single shot, as they were drawn up on the poop, upon which the admiral directed captain Adair to disperse his men; and it is to be regretted that the precaution adopted by the *Belleisle* and some leading ships in the lee column had not been practised here,—that of ordering the men to lie down until they could return the enemy's fire. Presently a shot, which came through the hammocks near the larboard chess-tree, carried away the larboard-quarter of the launch on the booms, and striking the fore-bits on the quarter-deck, a splinter tore the buckle from captain Hardy's shoe, as he was walking the deck with lord Nelson. They both instantly stopped, and surveying each other with anxious looks, his lordship smiled and observed, "This is too warm work, Hardy, to last long."

As the *Bucentaure* forged a-head, a large french ship was seen upon her lee-quarter, and another ship astern of the former, ranging up as if intending to close the interval. Captain Hardy representing to lord Nelson the impracticability of passing through the line without running on board one of the ships, his lordship quickly replied, "It does not signify which we run on board of. Go on board of which you please,—take your choice."

It was about one o'clock when the sixty-eight pounder on the larboard-side of the *Victory's* fore-castle was discharged into the cabin-windows of the *Bucentaure*; and as the three-decker moved slowly a-head, the remaining fifty guns on that side, treble shotted, were deliberately discharged into the french ship as they came to bear: so close were the ships, that the

Victory's larboard main yard-arm, as she rolled, touched the vang's of the Bucentaure's gaff.

Although there were no visible effects of this destructive broadside, yet the havoc it made among the crew of the french ship was tremendous, and many of her guns were dismounted. As the Victory cleared the stern of the Bucentaure, she became exposed to a well-directed fire from the Neptune; but as she was advancing towards the beam of the french 80, the latter, apprehensive of an intention to run her on board, ran up her jib, and keeping away a little, ranged a-head. Captain Hardy having decided on closing with the ship on his starboard hand, the Victory, after discharging her starboard guns, put her helm a-port, and ran foul of the Redoutable, the sheet-anchor of the one striking the spare of the other, and in a few minutes the two ships dropped alongside. In this position they continued to engage; and as it is stated by our best naval chronicler that the Redoutable had lowered her ports, we presume that the only return made to the fire of the british three-decker was from the guns of the french ship's main and quarter-deck, aided by her musketry. About 1 h. 25 m. P.M., while lord Nelson turned round as he was walking on the quarter-deck with captain Hardy, he received a musket-ball on the left shoulder, which, passing through the fore-part of the epaulet, lodged in the spine.

Captain Hardy, turning also at that moment, saw the admiral in the act of falling: he was then on his knees, with his left hand touching the deck; and the arm giving way, his lordship fell upon the exact spot where his secretary, Mr. Scott, had breathed his last. On the captain's expressing a hope that he was not severely wounded, lord Nelson replied, "They have done for me at last, Hardy: my back-bone is shot through." From the direction of the fatal bullet, it must have been fired from the mizen-top of the Redoutable, but it is very doubtful if it was aimed at any individual; and had an officer been singled out, captain Hardy would probably have been the vic-

tim, for his commanding appearance was far more likely to have been the object of attention. Moreover, in the confusion which prevailed at that moment, with the deck enveloped in smoke, it would have been impossible to have used any discrimination beyond firing at the spot where many officers and men were busily engaged. Serjeant Secker and two marines, who had approached on seeing the admiral fall, bore their revered and much-lamented chief to the cockpit. The Redoutable's fire from her upper decks and musketry was so destructive, that several officers and about 40 men were killed or wounded on board the Victory, whose crew, abandoning the twelve-pounders, continued to fire her twenty-four and thirty-two pounders from the middle and lower decks into her opponent, who became exposed to a raking fire from the Neptune and succeeding ships, as they passed her a-head. The Redoutable had besides to contend with an unequal match in the *Téméraire* on her starboard side, who, in order to keep astern of the Victory as she had been directed, was under the necessity of cutting away her studding-sails; and upon taking her station close on the Victory's starboard quarter, was alike exposed to the heavy raking fire directed at her leader. In a few minutes after the Victory poured her larboard broadside into the stern of the *Bucentaure*, the *Téméraire* opened her fire at the Neptune and Redoutable; and when the Victory ran on board the latter, the *Téméraire* was compelled to haul to starboard, and passing along the broadside of the Redoutable, received a sharp fire, which carried away the head of her mizen top-mast. After standing on a short distance, the *Téméraire* hauled up as she passed through the enemy's line, to avoid being raked by the french Neptune, whose heavy fire brought down her fore-yard and main top-mast: at that moment, about 1 h. 40 m., the Redoutable, with the Victory on her larboard side, fell on board the *Téméraire*; the french ship's bowsprit passing over her gangway a little before the main rigging, where it was lashed by the british crew, who poured a raking broadside into

the bows of the Redoubtable. A short time before this second powerful opponent had placed herself alongside the french 74, the latter made a resolute attempt to board the Victory; and so formidable was the assault, that in repulsing the gallant enemy, captain Charles W. Adair, while standing upon the gangway encouraging his party of marines, and 18 men were killed; and lieutenant William Ram, mortally, George Augustus Westphal, midshipman, and 20 men wounded.

Notwithstanding the dreadful havoc among the boarders assembled on the forecastle and gangways of the Redoubtable by the heavy fire of the three-decker, the 74 continued nobly to defend herself after the *Téméraire* had dropped alongside; but at length overpowered, this heroically-fought ship was taken possession of at 1 h. 55 m. P. M. This happened just as the Victory was preparing to boom herself off from the Redoubtable; and at this moment a two-decker was observed close upon the *Téméraire's* starboard side, which ship was the *Fougueux*, who, it will be recollected, on quitting the *Belleisle* was engaged by the *Achille*. The french ship stood to the northward, steering directly for the beam of the three-decker, at that time much disabled; and as her gaff was down, she had no colours flying, except the jack on the fore-topmast stay. When the *Fougueux* got within 100 yards, she became exposed to the starboard guns of the *Téméraire*, which so crippled the french ship that she fell alongside, and was immediately lashed by her fore rigging to the *Téméraire's* spare anchor; and lieutenant Kennedy, with two midshipmen, 20 seamen, and 6 marines, then boarded the *Fougueux* in her larboard main-rigging. On the quarter-deck captain Baudouin (mortally wounded), and his officers, were encouraging their men to repel the boarders; but the second captain being severely wounded in the onset, the french crew were driven off the deck, and in ten minutes after lieutenant Kennedy and his twenty-eight followers got on board, the *Fougueux* was in possession of the British.

This occurrence took place at about 2 h. 10 m. P. M., and it

was within five minutes afterwards that the *Victory*, having by the aid of fire-booms, disengaged herself from the *Redoubtable*, gradually got her head to the northward, while the three fast-locked ships, from which she had just parted, swung out their heads to the southward. Shortly afterwards the main and mizen-masts of the *Redoubtable* came down: the main-mast falling on board the *Téméraire*, carried away the stump of the latter's mizen top-mast, and breaking down the poop rail, encumbered the whole after-part of the ship with the wreck. The main-mast of the french ship forming a bridge of easy descent, was soon available; and at 2 h. 20 m. P. M. lieutenant Wallace, heading a party of seamen and marines, stepped on board, and took quiet possession of the gallantly-defended *Redoubtable*.

The *Victory's* masts were all badly wounded, and her rigging and sails cut to pieces. Among the killed was captain Charles W. Adair and 18 marines; and among the wounded, lieutenants Lewis Buckle Reeves and J. G. Peake, and 9 privates. On board the *Téméraire*, captain Simeon Busigny, lieutenant John Kingston, and 8 marines were killed; lieutenant Samuel J. Payne and 12 marines wounded.

The *Redoubtable's* loss was unusually severe: out of a crew of 643 men, she had 300 killed and 222 wounded, including nearly the whole of her officers. The *Fougueux's* loss was comparatively very small, being only 40 in killed and wounded.

As the *Leviathan* was advancing in her station astern of the *Conqueror*, captain Blackwood communicated to captain Bayntun that lord Nelson desired the latter to place his ship between the *Téméraire* and the *Victory*, and it was intended that these two ships were to precede the commander-in-chief; but the lead of the column had then advanced too near the enemy to render the change practicable. The *Leviathan* made every effort to reach the enviable post assigned her; but as it was now 11 h. 30 m. A.M., she did not get further a-head than just abreast of the *Conqueror* before the enemy's shot were beginning to pass over the *Victory*.

The Neptune, having shortened sail to facilitate the endeavours of the Leviathan to pass a-head to her newly allotted station, and the almost calm state of the weather, made it 1 h. 45 m. P.M. before she became closely engaged. At this time, after her fruitless efforts to go a-head, the Leviathan had resumed her station in the line, close astern of the Neptune and a short distance a-head of the Conqueror. Passing close under the stern of the Bucentaure, the Neptune poured in a well-directed broadside, which shot away the french admiral's main and mizen-masts nearly by the board, and doubtless killed and wounded a great many of her crew. The Leviathan, when within thirty yards of the french ship's stern, also poured in a destructive fire, and the Conqueror soon after raked her in the same manner.

The Conqueror, then hauling up on the lee-quarter of the Bucentaure, soon knocked away her fore-mast, and after a few minutes, an officer on board the latter waved in token of surrender. Captain James Atcherly of the marines, with three of his men and two seamen, were sent in the Conqueror's jolly-boat to take possession: on that officer's stepping on the Bucentaure's quarter-deck, vice-admiral Villeneuve and his two captains presented their swords; but conceiving that it more properly belonged to captain Pellew to disarm officers of their rank, captain Atcherly declined the honour of receiving them, and accompanied by the french admiral and his two captains, pushed off with his three remaining hands, and at length boarded the Mars; for the Conqueror had proceeded in chase.

The Neptune, hauling up soon after she raked the Bucentaure, soon found herself in a similar position astern of the Santissima Trinidad, whose main and mizen-masts came down with a tremendous crash, just as the Leviathan was in the act of seconding the fire of her leader. The Neptune then luffed up alongside of the Santissima to leeward, while the Conqueror kept up a distant fire upon the four-decker with her starboard guns to windward. At 2 h. 30 m. P.M., the fore-mast of the

Santissima fell over her bows, and she lay an unmanageable wreck upon the water. At this moment the movement in the combined van called the attention of the Neptune; and some of those ships on bearing up raked her, and caused the principal part of the damage and loss she sustained in the action.

Leaving the Santissima Trinidada to the care of the english Neptune, the Leviathan stood on towards the french Neptune, then in the position we have related on the lee-bow of the Téméraire; but before the Leviathan had opened her fire, the french Neptune wore round and stood away in the direction of the Belleisle. Captain Bayntun then hauled up on the larboard tack, and soon afterwards stood on towards the van-ships of the enemy, who were observed to be tacking or wearing, as if intending to double upon the headmost ships of the british weather column.

About 3 P. M. the San Augustin, steering to the south-east, when within 100 yards, attempted to rake the Leviathan; but the latter, porting her helm at the same moment, and having fresher way than the spanish ship, not only defeated the intended manœuvre of her antagonist, but was enabled to pour her broadside so effectually into the starboard quarter of the San Augustin, that it brought down her mizen-mast, and with it the spanish colours. The Leviathan then ran on board the San Augustin in such manner, that the latter's jib-boom became entangled in the british ship's main rigging. In this position, the marines on board the Leviathan's poop soon drove the Spaniards below; and lieutenant Eyles Mounsheer, at the head of a party of seamen and marines, boarded the San Augustin, and carried her without further opposition. Soon after the Leviathan had lashed herself to her prize, the Intrépide, another fresh ship from the combined van, was seen advancing, and after raking the Leviathan a-head, she ranged along her starboard side; but on the Africa approaching, the french ship merely exchanged a passing fire. The british 64 gallantly brought the Intrépide to close action at about 3 h. 20 m. P. M.,

and notwithstanding her great inferiority of force, the Africa continued the contest for nearly three-quarters of an hour, at which time the Orion came up and opened a fire upon the Intrépide's starboard quarter. The Orion then wore round the french ship's stern, and bringing to on the latter's lee-bow, between her and the Africa, maintained so heavy and well-directed a fire, that in less than a quarter of an hour the main and mizen-masts of the french ship fell over her side, and the approach of the Conqueror left the Intrépide no alternative but to strike her colours. At about 5 P. M. she was taken possession of, having sustained a loss of 200 killed and wounded.

In reference to the Africa we must observe, that from having lost sight of the fleet during the night, she was broad upon the Victory's larboard-beam when the firing commenced, and nearly abreast of the van-ship of the combined line. Seeing her danger, lord Nelson made the Africa signal to make more sail; but captain Digby, not comprehending his lordship's motive, used every means to hasten his ship into the thick of the fight, instead of withdrawing from it. Passing along, and exchanging broadsides in succession with the enemy's ships, the Africa bore down a-head of the Santissima Trinidada, and meeting no return to her fire, nor seeing any colours hoisted, the british captain concluded she had surrendered, and consequently sent lieutenant John Smith in a boat to take possession; but on reaching the quarter-deck, a spanish officer explained that they had not surrendered, at the same time pointing to the four french and one spanish ship of the line then passing to windward: strange to say, lieutenant Smith and his boat's crew were permitted to return to their ship, and the Trinidada remained without a prize-crew until 5 h. 30 m. P. M., when the Prince, by signal, boarded, and took the dismasted four-decker in tow. The Africa had her main top-sail yard shot away, and her lower masts and bowsprit were so badly wounded, that they all fell after the action. She had 6 marines killed, captain James Fynmore and 7 wounded; and her total loss, out of 493 men and boys, was 18 killed and

37 wounded. On board the Conqueror, lieutenant Thomas Wearing was among the wounded.

It was about 2 h. 30 m. P. M. that the whole of the ships of the combined van a-head of the Santissima Trinidad, who lay dismasted abreast and to leeward of the Bucentaure, (equally a wreck,) began to tack or wear, in obedience to a signal made by the commander-in-chief at 1 h. 50 m. P. M. to the following purport:—"Ships not engaged, are to take such a position as will bring them the most quickly into action;" and it appears that five minutes previous to this communication, rear-admiral Dumanoir had signalled the commander-in-chief that the van had no enemy to contend with. At all events, no immediate attempt was made by the generality of the ships to comply with the signal, and those who were most prompt in obeying it were so baffled by the calm state of the weather, that the Formidable and one or two other ships had to employ their boats to tow themselves round. When the ten ships did at length get on the starboard tack, four french and one spanish, under rear-admiral Dumanoir, hauled their wind; and the remaining five kept away as if to join admiral Gravina, then to leeward of the rear, in the act of making off towards Cadiz.

It was at this period of confusion in the combined van, that the Britannia, Agamemnon, Orion, and Ajax got intermingled among the enemy's ships that had wore and edged away in the manner related. The Britannia was engaged for a short time with the Francisco d'Asis, and subsequently with the Rayo. The Agamemnon and Ajax also exchanged a few broadsides with some of the ships that had bore up; and the Orion, as already stated, was the first, after the Africa, that became engaged with the Intrépide: the latter, and the San Augustin, were the only ships of the five that seemed to have any other object in view than a retreat.

The five ships that hauled to the wind, were the Formidable, bearing the flag of rear-admiral Dumanoir, Dugnay Trouin, Mont Blanc, Scipion, and Neptune. The British that lay near-