

## NELSON and his Napoleonic War Subordinate Admirals

**Note:** I will follow the normal French custom of integrated both the 'French Revolutionary Wars' with the 'Napoleonic Wars', whereas we tend to separate them into time windows which can get confusing.

Throughout my naval career [indeed anybody's naval career] all I had to do was to look, listen and observe the many naval icons, establishment names, ship names, pub names, whatever without even picking up a reference book, to know the names of all our famous admirals, and for the most part, why they were famous, or even infamous: Admiral John Byng comes to mind as did Bligh, although Bligh's bad-patch came upon him and history when he was a mere lieutenant commanding an equally mere cutter! He achieved the rank of vice admiral but by that time he was famed for his membership as a Fellow of the Royal Society as he was his naval rank/career I don't have to elaborate further!

Substantive rank never really mattered as long as their rank title contained the word admiral. Rear, vice, admiral, of the fleet, and we all know that Lord Nelson as a young man of 47, died whilst still a relatively junior admiral, as a Vice Admiral of the White Fleet. Admiral Lord [Samuel] Hood was a dear friend of Nelson's, was his long time mentor and one of the chief mourners at Nelson's funeral in January 1806. He was 81 at that time, dying ten years later. Roughly half the age of Hood, had Nelson lived to that grand old age, what might he have achieved?

The admirals collectively mentioned by association in the opening paragraph were made famous by the navy for outstanding deeds, valour, leadership, but there was a greater power whose blessing upon a named officer carried more weight than all the navy put together, and that was the King's blessing conveyed at court as a national and personal thank you. After that, and coming before the navy [the Admiralty] was the thanks of the State expressed through Parliament, and usually both Houses, And yet, history seems to have picked out some royal blessings and some Westminster blessings whilst ignoring others! There's obviously an ulterior motive?

For the purposes of my story, I am going to isolate monarchs and isolate famous battles, choosing the most famous monarch and the most famous battle to make my point, they being respectively, George III and Trafalgar.

George III lived not only a long life but in a most troubled Europe ever: yes, even transcending the worries Frau Merkel has brought upon herself in 2015/16. His reign covered the period 1760 until 1820. In that time he was preoccupied by warring factions in Europe, Asia, Africa and North America, seeing out the Seven Year War with France, the American War of Independence and the long war again with France from 1793 until 1815, the Napoleonic battles *inter alia*. Sadly for all, for after two 'foreign Hanoverian monarchs' George I and II who were disliked, followed by his son equally disliked, George III, also a Hanoverian monarch [but born and bred in Britain, never once having put a foot on German soil] was a good and well like monarch, he finally became too ill to reign and in 1810 and was replaced at Court by his son George acting as the Prince Regent: in 1820 he became George IV who was greatly disliked. George III therefore never officially saw Napoleon's defeat and surrender in 1815. That health sadness apart,

George III is credited as being the monarch [when it most mattered] at the time of France's complete and utter defeat. He was totally distraught upon hearing of the death of Nelson.

After Nelson's funeral in January 1806 the need to make the nations case of thanks to Lord Nelson and his officers and men for the victory at Trafalgar loomed large. Lord Castlereagh, was an eminent British statesman, the [Foreign Secretary](#) in Lord Liverpool's government, and the leader of the House of Commons, took the lead in submitting to the King a suitable draft recommendation which all Britons would recognise and acclaim *nem con*. He also needed an agreed decree to be issued by Parliament. Lord Castlereagh was the lead figure in the management of the [coalition](#) that defeated [Napoleon](#) and was the principal British diplomat at the [Congress of Vienna](#).

Lord Castlereagh declared that he had a list of eight things he wanted the MP's to agree to, and where relevant and fitting, subsequently for the King to endorse and make so under the general heading of "The Nations Vote of Thanks to the Navy" and these were [all text sic]:-

1. "That an humble address be presented to his majesty, that his majesty will be graciously pleased to give directions, that a monument be erected in the cathedral church of St. Paul, London, to the memory of the late ever-to-be-lamented lord viscount Nelson, who fell gloriously in the moment of the most brilliant and decisive victory, obtained by his skill and enterprise over the combined fleet of France and Spain, off Cape Trafalgar, on the 21st of October last; and to assure his majesty that this house will make good the expense attending the same."
2. "That the thanks of this house be given to vice-admiral lord Collingwood, for his able and gallant conduct in the most glorious and decisive victory obtained by the late vice-admiral lord viscount Nelson, over the combined fleet of France and Spain, off Cape Trafalgar, on the 21st of October last."
3. "That the thanks of this house be given to rear-admiral the earl of Northesk, and the several captains and officers in the fleet under the command of the late lord viscount Nelson, who, by their bravery and good conduct, contributed to that most glorious and decisive victory; and that vice-admiral lord Collingwood do signify the same to rear-admiral the earl of Northesk, and the several captains and officers."
4. "That this house doth highly approve of, and acknowledge, the services of the seamen and marines on board the ships under the command of the late lord viscount Nelson, in the most glorious and decisive victory over the combined fleet of France and Spain off Cape Trafalgar, on the 21st of October last; and that the officers commanding the several ships do signify the same to their respective crews, and do thank them for their good behaviour."
5. "That an humble address be presented to his majesty, that his majesty will be graciously pleased to give directions, that monuments be erected in the cathedral church of St. Paul, London, to the memory of capt. George Duff, and capt. John Cooke, who fell gloriously in that signal victory; and to assure his majesty, that this house will make good the expence attending the same."
6. "That the thanks of this house be given to rear-admiral sir R. Strachan,

bart, for his able and gallant conduct in the defeat and capture of a French squadron, on the 4th day of Nov. last."

7. "That the thanks of this house be given to the captains and officers in the squadron under the command of sir R. Strachan, bart. who by their bravery and good conduct contributed to the success of that day; and that rear-admiral sir R. Strachan, bart. do signify the same to the several captains and officers." The above resolutions were put, and carried.

8. "That this house doth highly approve of, and acknowledge, the services of the seamen and marines on board the ships under the command of rear-admiral sir R. Strachan, bart. in the victory obtained over the squadron of the enemy on the 4th day of Nov. last; and that the officers commanding the several ships do signify the same to their respective crews, and do thank them for their good behaviour."

By and large the lower House agreed in principle, but that there were obvious needs to amendments, additions, and part re-writes to the stated resolutions.

In Resolution 2, one of the chief worries for some, was that Collingwood's bravery had been under stated, and that "able and gallant conduct," without that distinct enumeration to which, they were indubitably entitled, was inadequate.

" Lord Castlereagh stated that on advice , to prevent the establishment of a precedent which might create confusion in some future case where differences of opinion might exist, to conform the resolution to the words usually adopted on similar occasions. I read that as saying in the future, there might be other second in command who does even better things than did Collingwood, so better to stick with the 'able and gallant' to leave room for precedents set in the future. As far as I can see nobody has ever out-performed Collingwood, nor has there ever been a battle of the enormity of Trafalgar.

Many wanted to know why the normal rules of reporting on large convoluted battle dispositions had not been adhered to. Nelson and Collingwood were or became instant household names with Collingwood granted a peerage before he left the carnage which was Trafalgar. The third in command was always mentioned in Court circles and certainly in Parliament and in the relevant department , war office or admiralty. The third in command was a very brave, courageous and able admiral called William Carnegie, at the time of the battle, the 7th Earl of Northesk. He acquitted himself at his task as well as Collingwood did at his, and yet in Resolution 3, he had been grouped together with other officers suggesting that they had all out performed expectations. On the final draft of the Resolutions, Northesk became an officer on a par with Collingwood when being presented at Court. Northesk, once resolution 3 had been amended [creating a new resolution 4 et sq to incorporate Northesk's officers] resulting in an extra resolution was immediately elevated to become a Knight of the Bath. REMEMBER that name Northesk for later on.

Again members were perplexed as to why Admiral Sir Richard [Dicky] Stachan had not been better rewarded - REMEMBER his name too for later on.

Stachan, like Northesk was a Scottish nobleman, but unlike the lordly refined Northesk, Stachan was everything one expects a Scotsman to be? He was red-headed, foul mouthed and foul tempered and liked a glass of pop. But he was one of the best seamen ever, a fine leader of the bullying type but nevertheless one hundred per cent effective, and woe betide the enemy once he

had their scent. Now Stachan wasn't at Trafalgar but he was given orders to take his small squadron down to Biscay areas and keep a look out for French land forces geeing-up the defeated fleets [French and Spanish] - although those units still there, those not dead, licking their wounds, and the spirit of revival nowhere to be seen ever again; the defeat was total and lasting. However, unbeknown to many of whatever side, four magnificent French ships of the line had done a runner from the scene, deserting their admiral and shamefully their country in its hour of need. Unaware of MAD DICKY's [a name given to him for his crude and pugilistic mannerisms] presence, these cowards were heading north enroute for La Rochelle and a safe haven in France. MAD DICKY was heading south when he espied these men of war and gave chase. This was approximately two weeks after the Battle day [21st October]. At first they responded as naval men should do, but it wasn't long before Stachan had overhauled them and captured the ships crew and stores intact. Thus it is correct to say that the battle started on the 21st October and finished on the 4th November when all the enemy ships were accounted for either destroyed or captured. That Stachan was even considered a postscript to Trafalgar is rubbish when we considered that Collingwood himself thanked Stachan for his services off the Iberlant coast, choosing to consider Stachan's miraculous feat as being as creditable as any phase of Trafalgar itself bringing to heel first hand a mighty foe, and for all intents and purposes an integral part of the main battle fleet.

I have to smile when I am told that the EU was formed by European countries to stop them warring with one another - the belligerent Germany and the coward France. It's funny that one by one European countries have had a go at Britain but each has failed, and a couple of times too, and none ever succeeded or tried a third time.

Richard Stachan was married and had three daughters but no son. He was the Chief of the Clan Stachan, but when he died, the clan died with him. No doubt I too would fear him, but I have a feeling that I would have like him and I would certainly have felt safe under his command.

Under Lord Castlereagh's stewardship [he was the foreign secretary], several gifts were made to the Nelson family to keep for life: it mainly passed to the male line of Nelson blood family. Whilst his lover Emma Hamilton got nothing from the public purse and died near destitute in Calais just as the Battle of Waterloo was about to start, the State ensured that his wife Fanny was well rewarded by granting her a £2000 [£300,000 in todays money] lifetime gratuity. This was an enormous amount of money and would have provided Fanny with a good monthly income to address all her needs but after Nelson's death she had a sad life.. On the other hand Emma Hamilton was a quintessential spendthrift and created an enormous and unsustainable debt for herself. Had she lived within her means all would have been well for her and Horatia. She was helped by many admirers but wasted their money too, eventually spending a small fortune on alcoholic beverages which hastened her death. To the nation, the government granted a gift of £200,000 to buy land and do no noble things to perpetuate Nelson's memory. Many towns and streets were named after him, and much else. Two nights before Nelson died, he willed his daughter Horatia £200 per year, but strangely no proper and lasting provision was made for his darling daughter. Nelson would have been absolutely shocked to know that his egotistic, idle and money-grabbing brother had taken his name, his wealth, his titles and in many cases his fame. Horatia married young, a clergyman, and the marriage [in Norfolk] was happy and fruitful having ten issues, seven boys and three girls. One of the sons [of grandpa Nelson] joined the navy as a surgeon but his name was Marmaduke Phillip Smyth Ward [his mothers married name] which would not have alerted the Nelson buffs of that time. Horatia's husband died in office [in the vicarage] when he was just 66 and so the family lost their home. Horitia went to live in north London in Pinner where she died aged 80. Like most Georgian/Regency folks, life was often cruel and death was never far away. The deaths in the family were less frequent than for many poor souls though. As I said, she died at 80 and her husband when 66. Of her seven sons the deaths

occurred at 66, 61, 2, 89, 48, 6 months and 34, and daughters 66, 57 and 23. Forty five years after Nelson's death, a group of friends persuaded the Prime Minister to set up a fund to help Horatia out but after four years it raised less than £1500 so Horatia drew on it and shared the money between three sons who were away in for forces. Thereafter Queen Victoria, disgusted at Horatia's plight pledged public funds of £100 per annum for each of her three daughters. It is sickening that Nelson's brother became a rich man on Nelson's fame and that his blood daughter got nothing. Such is life - sadly! At that time William Pitt the Younger was the Prime Minister and a good friend of Nelson. He would have made sure that Nelson's loved ones were well rewarded, but he too died very soon after Nelson [at the end of Nelson's burial month January 1806] and the bond was broken and the promises forgotten.

Nelson, had three Scottish admirals with whom he was familiar and certainly with one, a friend. That was Lord Thomas Cochrane and his name is well known pan-navy and wider afield by academics and possibly Scots. His son was the first captain of the iron-clad HMS Warrior [1860]. His name HMS Cochrane is revered at Rosyth, Fifeshire Scotland, where the one and only Scottish Naval Barracks was built. This discounts the ultra modern HMS Neptune over on the Clyde side - a different thing altogether.

But what of friends Stachan and Northesk ? Ever heard of them? Nor me. I have heard of the footballer Gordon Stachan but not of Admiral Stachan. Acknowledged as a hero of our most famous naval battle ever, and yet no HMS Stachan anywhere in the world. Royalty knew it but we don't. Lord Cochrane was known to be a jack me lad character, unpredictable, unruly but a good rough and tough fighter when it mattered. He was also a jail-bird after leaving the navy - his face fitted - why not MAD DICKY's ?

And what about Northesk another Trafalgar hero and this time squeaky clean in table-manners terms. He has a very famous Scottish name, namely Carnegie and I am sure that Andrew Carnegie would have been a willingly pal of his - I sure would have been. No HMS Northesk or even a HMS Carnegie - shame really. Northesk was more famous than any of the Battle of Jutland commanders could ever be given the outcome of the battle, and that goes for the overall commanders, his number two and number three.

Why is this I wonder? Surely can't be just a foul mouth or foul tempter - I have served with officers like that, and being offended is not part of the scenario.

I am not necessarily pro-Scot, but I am definitely pro-good officer and I believe that these men have been cheated possibly by royal navy officers who think their efforts and sacrifices were not noteworthy. The national records [royal and government] have their names enshrined in our history, but we don't - how come?

Moreover, their mention on the internet is very brief and untelling, and you wouldn't easily find them had I not mentioned them here - SAD