

THE GLORIOUS FIRST OF JUNE

Midshipman T. Consett, HMS DEFENCE

28 May 1794

PM—Fresh gales and hazy weather. At half past one, the enemy's centre bearing NE and steering SSW, standing close upon a wind. The admiral made the signal for a general chase. At 2, the signal 35 ships to windward keep sight of the enemy and denote their motions. No. 40 to engage as arriving up. Beat to quarters. At half past three, wore ship. Admiral Pasley with the ships to windward hoisted English colours and engaged the enemy. The admiral's signal No. 83 to tack in succession. At a quarter past four, the signal to carry a light by night. Cloudy weather with heavy squalls. Split the jib and bent a new one. At 5, carried away the bolt-rope of the fore topmast staysail. Bent a new staysail. Split the mizen topsail and bent another. At a quarter past six, the admiral's signal 34 to attack the enemy's rear separately. At seven, ships to windward in close action with the enemy. At half past seven, the signal No. 17 to assist ships engaged or going into action. At a quarter before eight, the signal No. 60 to form the line without regard to the given form. At eight, the admiral's signal No. 55 for the line of battle ahead in open order. At half past eight, dark squally weather. Hoisted three lights in a triangular form. Admiral Pasley's squadron to windward engaging the enemy.

29 May 1794

AM—At four, the signal to form the line; the enemy at this time about three miles to windward. At seven, the signal 83 to tack in succession. At a quarter past seven, the signal No. 33 to fire on the enemy in passing. On the smoke clearing away in the van to windward, observed the CÆSAR, the leading ship, had not kept her wind, but was ranging along with the ships astern of her to leeward of the enemy's line. The QUEEN CHARLOTTE at this time tacking kept her wind and, with the BELLEROPHON and LEVIATHAN astern of her, passed between the fifth and sixth ships from the enemy's rear. The British ships astern passing to leeward of the enemy's line. At a quarter past eight, split the main topsail. At nine, up main and foresail and backed the mizen topsail. Wore ship to keep clear of the BARFLEUR who had missed stays.

PM—The admiral's signal for a general chase and to tack, but was annulled. Five of the enemy's ships having been separated from their rear, the enemy wore in succession to succour their disabled ships, and steering large in compact order opened a brisk cannonade on the nearest British ships. Having succeeded in this manœuvre, they wore round again in order of battle on the larboard tack. The British fleet having gained the wind followed them on the same tack. At a quarter before four, the signal No. 101 to close round the admiral or divisional commander. At 10 minutes past four, the signal No. 60 to form the line without regard to the given form. At 20 minutes after four, the signal No. 83 tack in succession. Missed stays; and in wearing, from the Gibraltar being astern, got to leeward of the line; the enemy still continuing a distant fire. Had part of our main top shot away with the slings of the main yard, and one man killed and three wounded. A quarter past five, wore ship to the westward. At six, the signal No. 88 to haul the wind in succession on the larboard tack. The body of the enemy's fleet NW by W distant six miles, on the larboard tack. At six, the admiral's signal 54 to form the line of battle on the larboard line of bearing.

30 May 1794

AM—Fresh breezes, thick foggy weather. At 8, the admiral's signal No. 1 for the enemy in sight. At 40 minutes past 9, the signal 15 to prepare for battle. At 5 minutes after 10, the signal No. 73 for the ships astern to make more sail. At 10.15 the signal No. 2 for the order of sailing in two divisions. At 10.35, No. 91 to keep in the admiral's wake. At 11, No. 66 to keep in close order. The centre of the enemy's fleet bearing NW by W distant 3 leagues.

PM—Moderate breezes. The fog so thick, lost sight of every ship in the fleet. Made the usual fog signals to keep in company. At 5, heard a gun, supposed from the admiral.

31 May 1794

AM—The fog at intervals cleared away. At 7.30, the admiral's signal for the ships to windward to keep in his wake. Set topgallant sails and studdingsails. At 10, foggy weather. At 10.30, the PEGASUS frigate passed close to us with the compass signal flying that the QUEEN CHARLOTTE bore W by S. Made and shortened sail. Continued fog signals.

PM—Moderate breezes and fair weather. At 1.30, the BELLEROPHON made the signal No. 1 for the enemy in sight. The admiral's signal to alter course and compass signal NW by N. The signal No. 73 to make more sail. At 5, beat to quarters; steering down towards the enemy, then bearing NW by W on different tacks, distant 7 miles. At 8, hauled the wind in succession on the larboard tack. The enemy at this time forming in good order to leeward distant about five miles on the larboard tack. Centre of their line N by W. The enemy's frigates and ours sailing between the lines.

1 June 1794

AM—Moderate breezes, fine clear weather. At daylight found the enemy had fallen a good deal to leeward in the night. Could only see them from the main topmast head bearing North. At 20 minutes past four, the admiral's signal to close to the centre; at half past four, to close to the van. Admiral Graves made the signal 15 with the divisional flag, for the van to prepare for battle. Beat to quarters. Made and shortened sail to keep our station. At 5, the admiral's signal No. 23 to alter course together to starboard, steering about NW. At 40 minutes past six, the signal No. 23 to alter course to starboard, steering North. At 7, the signal to close to the van. At half past 7, the admiral's signal No. 89 to haul the wind together on the larboard tack. The enemy at this time in a compact line of battle to leeward bearing N by W distant six miles. At three quarters past seven, formed the line on the starboard line of bearing. At ten minutes before eight, the admiral's signal No. 45 with the divisional flag for the van to engage the enemy's van; No. 44 with the divisional flag for the centre to engage the enemy's centre; and No. 46 for the rear to engage the enemy's rear. At eight, backed the main topsail, the van of the enemy NW by W distant four miles. At 5 minutes past 8, the admiral's signal to close to the van. At twenty minutes past eight, the admiral's signal No. 58 for the ROYAL SOVEREIGN and MARLBOROUGH to interchange places in the line. At thirty minutes past eight, the admiral's signal No. 78 to make sail after lying by. At 45 minutes past 8, the admiral's signal for each ship to pass through the enemy's line. At 9, the admiral's signal to bear up, No. 19. At 5 minutes past 9, the signal No., 41, engage each ship her opponent. At half past 9, on the preparative being hauled down, each ship put up her helm to bear down on the enemy, making and shortening sail to keep a compact line. At this time the enemy had begun their fire from van to rear; but it was not returned till our line arrived within musket shot. The seventh ship in the enemy's line being our opponent, steered for her, and succeeded in passing between the seventh and eighth ship, notwithstanding they had nearly closed to oppose us. Luffed close under her stern and commenced the action to leeward of her. The enemy's ship astern bore up and went ahead under our lee, engaging us in passing. Enemy's second ship astern also bore up and went ahead. Continued attacking our opponent who was keeping away to follow the admiral in the *MONTAGNE*. Enemy's third ship astern following under our lee, divided the men at their quarters to fight both sides of the ship; from the commencement of the action having had four different ships of the enemy successively upon us. At half past ten, our mizen mast was shot away, and our running rigging and sails rendered nearly useless. One of the enemy's ships about this time crossing our bows did considerable injury by her grape shot. We lost, among others killed, our master, boatswain, and captain of the forecabin; and nearly the whole of the party of the Queen's 2nd Regiment stationed forward, wounded and disabled. At half past eleven our main mast fell over the starboard quarter, and at twelve the fore mast over the larboard bow. The ship being now unmanageable, lashed the helm a lee and sent the men from the wheel to assist at the lower deck guns. During the time we lay dismasted several of the enemy's ships, in bearing up, came close under our stern, raking us in passing. The ship being reported on fire forward, firemen were called; and by their exertions and the officers of the main deck was soon got under. It was found to be owing to the foresail, which had been cut away from the yard to prevent the ship driving to leeward; it fell on the fore part of the ship foul of the starboard bow port, by which the foremost guns had set it on fire.

PM—At a quarter past twelve, a French three-decker with only her fore mast standing lay on our starboard quarter keeping up a brisk fire, about two cables length from us. Having but few guns to bear on her, lashed two oars on the stump of the mizen mast and made the signal for assistance. As the smoke cleared away saw part of the enemy's fleet bearing away. Soon after the ROYAL SOVEREIGN bore down to our assistance, but remained to windward firing into us, mistaking the colours. At half past twelve, the body of our fleet hove in sight, going before the wind in chase of the remainder of the French fleet. At a quarter before one, Admiral Bowyer made the signal to open secret instructions. At one, the admiral sent the PHAËTON frigate to take us in tow. At twenty minutes past one, the admiral's signal 101 close round the admiral. At 35 minutes past one, the admiral's signal No. 86 to haul to the wind together on the starboard tack, the enemy having left in our possession seven of their dismasted ships. Employed clearing the wreck and getting ready for jury masts. Hove the remainder of a cutter overboard, nearly shot to pieces. At three, the admiral's signal No. 72 to make sail and form the line as most convenient. At a quarter past seven, the admiral's signal No. 20 to bring to. At eight, the PHAËTON cast us off and the CÆSAR took us in tow. At ten, committed to the deep the bodies of Mr. Wm. Webster, master, and Mr. John Fitzpatrick, boatswain.

2 June 1794

AM—At nine, mustered the ship's company; found there had been killed during the action the following men: Peter Wilson, John Jackson, John Bruce, James Haynes, Charles Parker, James Clark, Angel Swordmaker, John Chidzey, Robert Rowden, John Polly, John Steward, David Scott, and Benjamin Moat, seamen. John North, John Collier, John Hamilton and Richard Roberts, privates of the 2nd Queen's Regiment of Foot, acting as marines; with 56 men wounded, amongst them Mr. Boycot, ensign in the Queen's, and Mr. Thomas Elliot, master's mate.

Six captured ships in company, one having sunk after being taken possession of.

NB—The Admirals during the action hoisted distinguishing flags instead of their own, and red ensigns were universally hoisted.

The ships which particularly distinguished themselves in the action: QUEEN, BELLEROPHON, LEVIATHAN, DEFENCE, BRUNSWICK, RUSSELL, and INVINCIBLE.

On the 1st of June Lord Howe had twenty-five sail of the line opposed to twenty-eight. The AUDACIOUS 74, Captain Parker, having parted company with the *RÉVOLUTIONNAIRE* 120 on the 28th of May at night. Admiral Villaret was joined on the 30th by Contre-Admiral Nielly in *LE SANS-PAREIL* 80, with *LE TRAJAN* 74, *LE TÉMÉRAIRE* 74, and three frigates. Nielly afterwards shifted his flag to *LE RÉPUBLICAIN* 112. This reinforcement enabled Admiral Villaret to send away on the 31st at night three of his most disabled ships; one of which, *LE MONTAGNARD* 74, foundered on her passage home. *LE TYRANNICIDE* 74 was with difficulty retained, being taken in tow, and was necessitated on the 1st of June to remain to leeward of the line. *L'AUDACIEUX* sank in action on the 1st, supposed to have been *LE JACOBIN*; and *LE MONT-BLANC* sank on her passage home with the fleet.

T. Sturges Jackson, *Logs of the Great Sea Fights, 1794–1805*. (London: 1899), I:107–114.