

# THE GLORIOUS FIRST OF JUNE

## Captain William Hope, HMS BELLEROPHON

Wednesday, 28 May 1794

AM—Moderate and fine weather. Hauled to starboard and steered SE per signal. Sent the frigates to look out. At 6, the PHAËTON spoke a strange sail in the SE and made signal for a strange fleet SSW. At 9, saw 33 sail to windward, 23 appeared to be of the line. Went to reconnoitre by signal. At noon the enemy's fleet SW to WSW 3 or 4 leagues, standing on the larboard tack under easy sail. At 9, the Admiral made our signal to shorten sail. The enemy's fleet in a line ahead; our fleet 3 or 4 miles to leeward in the order of sailing under a press of sail.

PM—Fresh gales and squally, with showers and a heavy swell from the westward. Repeated the general signal for chase and battle. About 3, the RUSSELL, being about a mile or two to windward of us, began to fire on the enemy's rear as they were hauling on the starboard tack; the RUSSELL, THUNDERER and frigates stood on to get into their wake. We tacked before the rear ship got on [our] beam, which enabled us to bring them to action a considerable time before the other ships could get up to our assistance. The Admiral, seeing us engaging a three-decked ship, made the RUSSELL's and MARLBOROUGH's signals to come to our assistance, they being astern and on the weather quarter. A little before dark more of the fleet had got up with us; the LEVIATHAN and THUNDERER in particular passed to windward of us, and each of them poured a well-directed broadside into the ship we was engaging. By this time, having received sundry shot in different places, the main cap disabled and the mast likely to fall over the side, made the signal of inability, got down the topgallant yard, mast, &c., and secured the cap, and bore up in the Admiral's wake by signal about. The rear of the enemy lost her mizen mast and bore up, as we supposed, with intention to strike to us, but was intercepted by one of our ships, who soon after silenced her fire and run down to leeward after her.

Thursday, 29 May 1794

AM—Fresh breezes and hazy; the enemy in a line ahead 4 or 5 miles distant, the fleet being in an irregular position. The Admiral made signals to take stations as convenient; we bore up next to the QUEEN CHARLOTTE astern. About 8, our fleet tacked in succession with a view to cut off the enemy's rear; but they wore in succession, run down to leeward of their line, supported their rear, and edged down on our van, and at 10, they began to fire on our van at a great distance. Hazy weather with a great swell from the westward.

PM—Fresh breezes and hazy; the enemy's line inclining towards ours, and every appearance of a general action. The signal was repeated for the van to tack; they made the signal of inability. At last they got round. The signal was made to cut through the enemy's line. The Admiral, finding that our leading ships was passing to leeward of their line, tacked in the midst of a very heavy fire or cannonade and cut through between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> ships in their rear; we followed and passed between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> ships, all the others passed to leeward of their line. In passing we brought down a ship's topmast, and in the heat of the action it was difficult to know who was French or who was English, we was all firing through one another. Their rear ship received many broadsides even from our three-deckers, but still kept her colours flying. Lord Howe made the signal to tack and for a general chase, but few of the van ships were able to follow him; upon which the French rallied, tacked and supported their disabled ships, and even attempted to cut off our QUEEN, who came out of the action a mere wreck. The Admiral seeing their intention bore down with several of the heavy ships that had not been engaged, and forced the enemy to leeward of our disabled ships. In passing the line we had our sails and rigging cut to pieces. Brought to, rove new rigging, bent a new fore topsail, &c. and about ½ after 5 bore down and joined the Admiral, who soon after wore and formed the line in two divisions and stood to westward under easy sail, the enemy to leeward in a line ahead. About sunset saw two large ships pass to windward. Employed splicing, knotting, and repairing sails, &c. At night thick foggy weather.

Friday, 30 May 1794

AM—At 8, saw the enemy to NNW. At noon foggy. Saw the enemy to leeward 4 or 5 miles.

Saturday, 31 May 1794

PM—Moderate and foggy weather. About two, it began to clear up a little, saw the enemy to leeward 8 or 9 miles. Made the signal for seeing them, and soon after the fleet bore up towards them by signal. They edged away from the wind and several of their ships changed stations in the line. About 7, the van of our fleet being within 3 miles of the enemy's centre, and the heavy ships in the rear a considerable way astern, the Admiral, finding it impossible to bring on a general action before dark, made signal for the fleet to haul their wind on the larboard tack. At sunset the enemy in a line ahead steering about two points from the wind, their van NW by W, their rear NE by E, their centre distant from us about 4 miles. About 11, the PHAËTON came along the line, hailed the different ships, and told them that it was Lord Howe's intention to carry his fore-sail, single-reefed topsails, jib and main topmast staysail all night.

Sunday, 1 June 1794

AM—At daylight fresh breezes and cloudy, none of the enemy in sight, and our rear ships a long way astern. After making the signal several times for the fleet to close to the van, when the line became nearly connected the signal was made to alter course to starboard and steer NW. About 6, saw the enemy to northward, bore up towards them. About 8, being nearly within shot, and their van brought to and waited for their rear to close. About ½ past 8, ran down on the enemy in nearly a line abreast, with the signal for close action, and each ship engage his opponent in the line. Ran down and lay upon our opponents' quarter within musket shot, in going down we received a very heavy fire from 3 or 4 of the enemy's van. At 50 minutes past 10, the Admiral unfortunately lost his leg, before which time we had once or twice made the CÆSAR's signal for close action, she lying frequently to windward of us. A little before noon the van of the enemy began to bear up, having silenced their fire; our topmasts being both gone, and most of our lower shrouds shot away, we were unable to follow. Made the LATONA's signal to come to our assistance. When we got out of action and the smoke cleared away saw 11 ships to windward of the fleet without a mast standing, two of them proved to be the MARLBOROUGH and DEFENCE. Saw several of their wrecks firing at some of our ships though without a mast standing. Cleared away the wreck of the fore and main topmasts, cut away the remains of the mainsail, which was shot and tore to pieces. Employed knotting, splicing, and securing the lower masts, particularly the main mast which had most of the shrouds shot away, and otherwise dangerously wounded in several places; fortunately no accident happened amongst the people. We had only four killed and about thirty wounded. But masts, sails, and rigging were cut to pieces; even the boats and spars on the booms were all destroyed with shot.

PM—Saw the rear of our fleet standing towards us, firing both sides; bore up towards them. Saw the MONTAGNE, the French Admiral's ship, to windward with only her fore mast standing, by herself, keeping up an incessant fire on our ships as they passed. She then wore round, set her foresail and joined the remainder of her fleet. By this time the French ships that were not disabled formed a kind of line to leeward, stood to the eastward and fired on our ships as they passed, particularly the QUEEN who had only her fore mast standing. About 9 o'clock, the firing ceased and by some means or other the enemy towed off 4 or 5 ships, which had hardly a mast left. The French Admiral shifted his flag to another ship. The BRUNSWICK, being to leeward of the enemy with her mizenmast gone, was obliged to make sail to the northward. About 6 o'clock, saw one of the enemy's ships, said to be the JACOBIN, sink, but two of our ships near picked up many of her people. People employed repairing our defects and getting up jury masts.

Monday, 2 June 1794

AM—Signal was made for 9 sail of the enemy on the NNE. The people employed as before.

T. Sturges Jackson, *Logs of the Great Sea Fights, 1794–1805*. (London:1899), I:72–77.