

THE GLORIOUS FIRST OF JUNE

Captain A.P. Molloy, HMS CAESAR

28 May 1794

On the 28th when the signal was made for a general chase and to attack the rear of the enemy, we were not able to fetch up far enough to windward to come to action with them, though several of their shot passed over us, some of which cut the foresail and main topsail. At 6, we saw the BELLEROPHON closely engaged with the rear ship of the enemy, keeping up a brisk fire and behaving most nobly; but having lost the main topsail yard she edged down towards the fleet, and the Leviathan then got up alongside of the rear ship of the enemy and began a close and heavy fire, and continued engaged with her a considerable time. The RUSSELL, THUNDERER, and several other ships also fired on the rear of the enemy. A little after 8, the rear ship of the enemy bore up out of the line, and I concluded that she had struck; at half past 8, she appeared to me to be on fire in one of her tops.

29 May 1794

At dawn of day saw the enemy's fleet, consisting of 26 sail of the line, on our weather beam. At ½ past 4, the signal No. 55 being made to form the line as most convenient, made sail and took our station ahead, as leading ship, the QUEEN being next to us on the line. At half-past 6, tacked ship per signal in succession and formed on the larboard tack. At 7, the four rear ships of the enemy in crossing on different tacks opened their fire upon the QUEEN and us; finding their shot going over us and through our sails, we returned their fire, as did the QUEEN. The enemy's fleet having wore in succession and formed on the same tack with us, stood along our line and edged down. At ½ past 8, our signal being made to make more sail, let the third reef out of the main topsail; in doing which the sail split all the way down, from the earing to the clew, owing to its having been shot the night before. Unbent the sail immediately and got a new sail to the yard, before the van ship of the enemy came abreast of us. At 10, the van and centre of the enemy began to engage. ½ past 10, the van ship of the enemy being abreast of us, and keeping up a heavy fire on us, we began to engage, and by the quickness of our fire, slackened hers considerably. At 11, our signal was made to tack; and whilst we were preparing so to do, the signal was annulled. At 12 o'clock, the van ship of the enemy our opponent appeared to be silenced, as she did not fire a single shot at us for ¼ of an hour, but hauled her main tack on board and kept a close wind, in doing of which we shot away her main tack and weather fore topsail sheet, which caused her to drop nearer to us, and we continued a heavy fire upon her. At this time our signal was again made to tack, but as our fore yard was nearly shot through, the main stay shot away and the QUEEN little more than a cable's length astern of us, and a heavy head sea sunning, I thought it dangerous to attempt tacking. I therefore made the signal of inability to tack, but wore ship immediately and then hauled to the wind on the starboard tack, under the stern of the 5th ship in our van. In the act or wearing the van ship of the enemy fired several raking shot at us. At this time, I observed the signal No. 34 out, but as our fore yard was nearly gone in two and our weather bumpkin block and fore tack being shot away, the sail blowing up on the yard and 8 sail of the enemy's ships closing each other and edging down towards us, I found it impracticable to pass through their line. I therefore kept on to leeward of it, firing at and receiving the fire of every ship of their line as we passed, but observing many of our own ships to leeward (not being able to see us for the smoke) kept firing at us, and having cut away our lee main tack and sheet and hulled us twice, I ceased firing that they might see my colours, and made the people lie down to prevent their being exposed to the enemy's fire; and did not again fire till I was too far to windward for the shot of our ships to reach us. Having then spliced the fore tack and got a block at the bumpkin end and hauled to the wind, we fetched close up to the three rear ships of the enemy's line, on which we kept a brisk fire till they passed us. After our firing ceased, I observed the QUEEN, INVINCIBLE, and BELLEROPHON had also run to leeward of the enemy's line as we had, and that the QUEEN CHARLOTTE alone had cut through the enemy's line and was closely engaged then with several of them. After she had passed them all, she tacked and made a general signal to chase, upon which we wore and came to the wind on the larboard tack; but, from our rigging being very much cut, our main and mizen stays shot away, and expecting every minute our fore yard to come down, the larboard yard-arm having been shot quite through, we could make but little sail. All we could set was set. In this action we had three men killed and nineteen wounded, and three guns disabled, two of which (24 pounders) we threw overboard; and the ship made so much water, it was with difficulty we could keep her free, for until we had stopped some of the principal shot holes, the leaks gained upon the pumps.

1 June 1794

The 1st of June at ¼ past 8 bore up per signal to attack our opponent in the enemy's line. At 12 minutes past 9, the three van ships of the enemy's line began firing upon us, the 4th and 5th firing at the BELLEROPHON, who appeared to me to be close alongside the fourth ship but standing on towards their van. At 25 minutes past 9, backed the main topsail and opened our fire on the van ship of the enemy's line, upon which their second ship closed to the first and

both ships kept a heavy fire upon us, which we returned as quick as possible. A short time after, not seeing our opponent for the smoke, I ceased firing; and as it cleared away I observed that they had edged own from us and increased their distance. I therefore ordered the mizen topsail to be backed and the helm to be put hard to port, and told the master (who was at the conn) to steer close down on the weather bow of the van ship. The men at the wheel at that moment called out that the rudder was chocked and that they could not move it either way. We then squared our fore yard, and lay with our three topsails to the mast. Our signal was at that instant made by the BELLEROPHON to come to close action; our mizen yard was shot in two and the mizen mast quite through and through, and we expected every moment it would fall. In this extreme awkward situation we lay for more than thirty minutes with our signal flying to come to closer action.

I want words to express the pain an anxiety of mind I laboured under all the time. I ordered the fore topsail to be filled and the fore topmast staysail hoisted to run down close to the enemy; but the master very properly said, 'If we get before the wind, and the rudder continues fixed as it now is, we cannot again bring her to, as we can set no after sail;' and we therefore continued with the three topsails aback, engaged with the two van ships, but at a greater distance than I wished. The carpenter, master, and three lieutenants went to examine the cause of the obstruction of the rudder, and the carpenter reported to me that two shot had struck the rudder, one of which was lodged between the sternpost and the rudder, but that that did not appear to him to obstruct the movement of it. Soon after we discovered that a shot had driven a splinter and a part of one of the lower deck port ropes into the starboard quarter block of the tiller rope, which had jammed the rope in the sheave. As soon as it was cleared, we filled the fore topsail and bore round upon the van ship of the enemy and got close alongside and kept a heavy fire on her, till she bore away before the wind. The ship's company seeing it, in the eagerness of their joy, which I could not restrain, ran upon deck on the booms and starboard gangway, and gave three cheers; during which time the second ship of the van fired at us and wounded several men. I ordered the people to return to their quarters and we backed close down on the second ship, but we had scarce fired on her, when she also bore away, with as much sail as she could set. The third ship, with which the BELLEROPHON was then engaged, fired a few shots at us, which we returned; and soon after all her masts went away together. On looking round after this, I saw several ships dismasted, and the ROYAL SOVEREIGN about ½ mile to leeward of us, with the signal flying for ships to close round him. I then bore down to him and shortly after the signal was made to come to the wind on the starboard tack. The only observations I made during the action were of the very spirited and noble conduct of Rear-Admiral Pasley and Lord Hugh Conway, the BELLEROPHON and LEVIATHAN being the only ships I took notice of during the whole of the action.

T. Sturges Jackson, *Logs of the Great Sea Fights, 1794–1805*. (London:1899), 1:79–84.