

THE GLORIOUS FIRST OF JUNE

Lieutenant J. Smith, Queen's Regiment, on Board the ROYAL GEORGE

3 June 1794

I will now give you a more distinct account of our victory than I did in my scrawl of yesterday. After a cruise of a fortnight the fleet again returned to look into Brest, when intelligence was gained that the French fleet had sailed to protect their convoy. This news was brought to us on the 17th May. Lord Howe immediately followed them, steering directly out for America, the course they had taken. A few days afterwards several ships were retaken by us which had been captured by them, an evident proof that we were not far from them. In this situation Lord Howe very prudently burnt the recaptured ships to the amount of fourteen, and a French armed brig sloop and cutter. He seems to have had very accurate intelligence, for when we were despairing of seeing them, a strange fleet was seen on the morning of the 28th, which proved to be the French. In the evening a partial action ensued between our windward ships (for they were to windward of us) and their rear, in which our ships had the good fortune to cut off and take a first rate, *LE RÉVOLUTIONNAIRE*, formerly the *BRETAGNE*. It began about 8 in the evening and ceased about 10. In this the ROYAL GEORGE had no share, being in the rear and our van only engaged. On the morning of the 29th the French were still to windward. The signal was made to form the line as most convenient, and the ROYAL GEORGE was in the van. They edged down towards us, and were led with great gallantry by a beautiful 80-gun ship. At 10 the firing began, when we were amply repaid for our inactivity on the preceding night. The brunt of the action lay upon us and the QUEEN and INVINCIBLE, who supported us most nobly. At one time we had the fire of five ships upon us, and I may venture to say we were much distinguished. Lord Howe made the signal at one o'clock to tack and break the enemy's line, which was complied with by the QUEEN, ROYAL GEORGE, RUSSELL, and INVINCIBLE, the QUEEN leading. But not being able from our damaged state, having run the gauntlet of their whole line, we ran astern of it and so weathered them. The QUEEN CHARLOTTE then broke it herself in a most gallant manner, and the enemy were thrown to leeward in confusion; but they formed afresh, and, from the disabled state of the QUEEN, ROYAL GEORGE, and other leading ships, it was not held prudent to renew the action. On Friday and until Saturday evening we were in so thick a fog that we could scarce distinguish each other, but the fog clearing up then the enemy were seen to leeward, when Lord Howe formed the line, but very prudently deferred the engagement till next morning as it was then near sunset. On Sunday morning the 1st June the signal was made to break the enemy's line and engage them close. The ROYAL GEORGE, seeing that a French three-decker would fall to the lot of one of our seventy-fours as the line was then formed, changed stations with her, and the whole fleet bore down, the enemy lying to receive us in very good order. The ROYAL GEORGE led the rear, and first broke through the line by throwing a very heavy fire into the bows of an eighty-gun ship on her starboard (right) quarter, and then completely raked the *TERRIBLE* (the three-decker) on her larboard or left quarter. She then ran close up to the *TERRIBLE* and engaged her for some time; but the Frenchman did not choose to stand it, and, being less damaged in her rigging, made off. The line was soon most completely broken. The QUEEN CHARLOTTE dismasted an eighty-gun ship, and so completely raked her in three broadsides that she lost 350 men killed or wounded. In short, after a most severe action, six French ships are taken totally dismasted, four sunk, and six towed away by their fleet totally dismasted. In two hours after the action began I counted seven Frenchmen with not a stick standing above their decks. Of our ships, the MARLBOROUGH and the DEFENCE are totally dismasted; the ROYAL GEORGE nearly so, but we are now in tolerable order again; the QUEEN very much damaged and behaved most gallantly. The French fought with desperate bravery and great rascality. In the first action I was quartered on the poop, in the second on the main deck, and escaped untouched. Admirals Pasley and Bowyer have lost a leg each, Admiral Graves an arm. One Frenchman fired into another who had struck; another struck, having been fired into by their own ships for striking; a third was sunk by the ROYAL SOVEREIGN; and a fourth sank after she was in our possession. One fired into us in a rascally manner. Another fired into the PHAËTON in an equally rascally manner, and killed five men; and another would have been blown up by her captain after surrendering if the crew had permitted it. This villainous behaviour disgraces the gallant and desperate spirit with which they fought. 180 prisoners are on board us from the *JUSTE*, which was so raked by the QUEEN CHARLOTTE; they say they lost 350 killed and wounded. It could not be otherwise; their eighty-gun ships had 1,000, and their first rates 1,500 men, and we were so close to them they must have fallen by hundreds. Our loss is trifling in comparison—20 killed and 76 wounded. I am happy to say that the ROYAL GEORGE had a distinguished share in the business. I hope to return in a few days, &c. &c., &c.

T. Sturges Jackson, *Logs of the Great Sea Fights, 1794–1805*. (London:1899), I:55–58.