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**Introduction.**

Nelson Horatio Nelson, Viscount Duca (duke) Di Bronte, also called (1797 - 1798) sir Horatio Nelson, or (1798 - 1801) baron Nelson of the Nile and Burnham-Thorpe (b. September 29, 1758, Burnham Thorpe, Nor-folk, Eng. - d. October 21, 1805, at sea, off Cap Trafalgar, Spain), British naval commander in the wars with Revolutionary and Napoleonie France, who won crucial victories in such battles as those of the Nail (1798) of Trafalgar (1805), where he was killed by enemy fire on the HMS "Victory". In private life he was known for his extended love affair with Emma, Lady Hamilton, while both were married.

**Early years.**

Horatio Nelson was the sixth of 11 children of the village rector, Edmund Nelson, and his wife, Catherine. The Nelson were genteel, scholarly, and poor. The family's most important connection from which Nelson could expect preferment was that with a distant relation, Lord Walpole, the descendant of sir Robert Walpole, who had been prime minister earlier in the century. Decisive for Nelson's life, however, was his mother's brother, Capt. Maurice Suckling, who was to become comptroller of the British Navy. When Horatio's mother died, Captain Suckling agreed to take the boy to sea.

Nelson's first years in the navy were a mixture of routine experience and high adventure. The former was gained particularly in the Thames estuary, the latter in voyage to the West Indies by merchant ship and a dangerous and unsuccessful scientific expedition to the Arctic in 1773. Nelson had his first taste of action in the Indian Ocean. Soon after, struck down by fever - probably malaria - he was invalided home, and, while recovering from the consequent depression, Nelson experienced a dramatic surge of optimism. From that moment, Nelson's ambition, fired by patriotism tempered by the Christian compassion instilled by his father, urged him to prove himself at least the equal of his eminent kinsmen.

In 1777 Nelson passed the examination for lieutenant and sailed for the West Indies, the most active theater in the war against the American colonies. Promoted to captain in 1779, at the early age of the 20, he was given command of frigate and took part in operations against Spanish settlements in Nicaragua, which became targets once Spain joined France in alliance with the American Revolutionaries. The attack on San Juan was militarily successful but ultimately disastrous when the British force was almost wiped out by yellow fever; Nelson himself was lucky to survive.

In 1783, after the end of the American Revolution, Nelson returned to England by way of France. On his return to London he was cheered by the appointment, in 1784, to mand a frigate bound for the West Indies. But this was not to be a happy commission. By rigidly enforcing the navigation Act against American ships, which were still trading with the British privileges they had officially lost, he made enemies not only among merchants shipowners but also among the resident British authorities who, in their own interest, had failed to enforce the law. Under the strain of his difficulties and of the loneliness of command. Nelson was at his most vulnerable when he visited the island of Nevis in March 1785. There he met Frances Nisbet, a widow, and her five-year-old son, Josiah. Nelson conducted his courtship with formality charm, and in March 1787 the couple was married at Nevis.

Returning with his bride to Burnham Trope, Nelson found himself without another appointment and on half pay. He remained unemployed for five years, aware of "a prejudice at the Admiralty evidently against me, which I can neither guess at, nor in the least account for" - but which may well have been connected with his enforcement of the Navigation Act Within a few days of the execution of King Louis XVI of France in January 1793. However, he was given command of the 64-gun Agamemnon.

**Service in the Mediterranean.**

From this moment, Nelson the enthusiastic professional was gradually replaced by Nelson the commander of genius. The coming months were probably his most tranquil emotionally. At home waited a living wife, whose son he had taken to sea with him. His ship, fast and maneuverable, and his crew, superbly trained, pleased him. His task was to fight the Revolutionary French and support British allies in the Mediterranean. Assigned to the forlorn defense of the port of Toulon against the revolutionaries - among them a 24-year-old officer of artillery, Napoleon Bonaparte - Nelson was dispatched to Naples to collect reinforcements. He later gratefully recognized that he owed the success of his mission largely to the British minister - the adroit and scholarly Sir William Hamilton, who was had lived at Naples for 30 years and whose vivacious young wife, Emma was in the queen's confidence.

When Toulon fell, Lord Hood, Nelson's commander, moved his base to Corsica, where Nelson and his ship's company went ashore to assist in the capture of Bastia and Calvi, where a French shot flung debris into Nelson's face juring his right eye and leaving it almost ughtless. At the end of 1794, Hood was replaced by the uninspiring Admiral William Hotham, who was subsequently replaced by Sir John Jervis, an officer more to Nelson's liking. At the age of 60, Jervis was an immensely experienced seaman who quickly recognized Nelson's qualities and who regarded Nelson "more as an associate than a subordinate officer". The arrival of Jervis coincided with an upsurge of French success by the so that the British were forced too abandon their Mediterranean bases and retreat upon Gibraltar and the Tagus.

**Battles of Cape St. Vincent and the Nile.**

Making for a rendezvous with Jervis in the Atlantic off Cape St. Vincent, Nelson found himself sailing in mist through a Spanish fleet of 27 ships. The Spaniards were sailing in two divisions and Jervis planned to cut between the two and destroy one before the other could come to its assistance. But he had miscalculated, and it became clear that the British ships would not be able to turn quickly enough to get into action before the Spanish squadrons closed up. Without orders from Jervis. Nelson hauled out of line and attacked the head of the second Spanish division. While the rest of Jervis' fleet slowly turned and came up in support. Nelson held the two Spanish squadrons apart, at one time fighting seven enemy ships. The efficiency of British gunnery was decisive and he not only boarded and captured one enemy man-of-war but, from her deck, boarded and took a second.

The Battle of Cape St. Vincent won for Jervis the earldom of St. Vincent and for Nelson a knighthood, which coincided with his promotion by seniority to rear admiral. His first action in command of major independent force, however was disastrous. In the cours4e of an assault on Tenerife, a grapeshot shattered his right elbow, and back in his flagship the arm was amputated. In the spring of 1798 Nelson was fit enough to rejoin the Earl of St. Vincent, who assigned him to watch a French fleet waiting to embark an expeditionary force.

Cruising off the port in his flagship, the Vanguard, Nelson was struck by a violent northwesterly gale that blew his squadron off station and carried the French well on their way to their destination, Egypt. The British set out in pursuit, Nelson believing that the French were going either to Sicily or Egypt. After a somewhat confused chase the British caught up with the French squadron in the harbour at Alexandria near the mouth of the Nail. There the British saw the harbour crowded with empty French transports and, to the east, an escorting French squadron of 13 ships anchored in a defensive line across Abu Qir Bay near the months of the Nile. Once the signal to engage had been hoisted in the Vahguard, Nelson's ships attacked the French. With the French ships immobilized, the attacking British ships could anchor and concentrate their fire on each enemy before moving on to demolish their next target. Its outcome never in doubt from its beginning at sunset, the battle raged all night. By dawn the French squadron had been all annihilated. The strategic consequences of the Battle of the Nile were immense, and Nelson took immediate steps to broadcast the news throughout the Mediterranean as well as hastening it to London.

At Naples, the most convenient port for repairs, he was given a hero's welcome stagemanaged by Lady Hamilton. A prolonged British naval presence in Naples was useful in supporting the shaky of King Ferdinand, the one major ruler in Italy to be resisting the southward march of the French, who had already taken Rome and deposed the pope.

The love affair that developed between Nelson and Emma Hamilton came at a time of crisis. With Nelson's encouragement, King Ferdinand had indulged his own fantasies of glory and, openly joining the alliance of Great Britain, Russia and Austria against the French, led his own insignificant army to recapture Rome. Not only was this a disastrous failure but the French counteroffensive drove him back to Naples, which itself then fell. Nelson had to evacuate the Neapolitan royal family to Sicily, and at Palermo it became obvious to all that his infatuation with Emma Hamilton was complete. She had proved herself indispensable company to him.

**Blockade of Naples and battle of Copenhagen.**

In the summer of 1799, Nelson's squadron supported Ferdinand's successful attempt to recapture Naples, but word of his dalliance with Emma had reached the Admiralty, and his superiors began to lose patience. Bonaparte had escaped from Egypt to France, and the French still held Malta when Lord Keith, who had replaced ST. Vincent as commander in chief, decided that the enemy's next objective would be Minorca. Nelson was ordered to that island with all available ships but refused on the grounds that he expected the threat to be toward Naples. Events justified him, but to disobey orders so blatantly was unforgivable. The Admiralty, also angered by his acceptance of the dukedom of Bronte in Sicily from King Ferdinand, sent him an icy return home.

In 1800 he returned, but across the continent in company with the Hamilton. When the curious little party in England, it was at once clear that he was the nation's hero, and his progress to London was triumphal. Emma was pregnant by Nelson when he was appointed second in commanded to the elderly admiral Sir Hyde Parker, who was to command an expedition to the Baltic, Shortly before sailing, Nelson heard that Emma had borne him a daughter named Horatia.

Parker's fleet sailed the first objective, Copenhagen, early in 1801. At first Nelson's advice was not sought; then, as Danish resistance became increasingly likely, he could record, "Now we are sure of Fighting, I am sent for." By the stratagem of talking the fleet's ships of shallower draught through a difficult channel, Nelson bypassed the shore batteries covering the city's northern approaches. The next morning, April 2, he led his squadron into action. There was to be no room for tactical brilliance; only superior gunnery would tell. The Danes resisted bravely, and Parker, fearing that Nelson was suffering unacceptable losses, hoisted the signal to disengage. Nelson disregarded it, and, an hour later, victory was his; the Danish ships lay shattered and silent, their losses amounting to some 6,000 dead and wounded, six times than those of the British.

Before this success could be followed by similar attacks on the other potential enemies, Tsar Paul of Russia died and the threat faded. Parker was succeeded by Nelson, who at last became a commander in chief. The Admiralty, well aware of his popular appeal now made maximum use of it by giving him a home command. At once he planned an ambitious attack on the naval base of Boulogne in order to foil a possible French invasion. He did not take part himself, and the operation was a glory failure. A second attempt was abandoned because of peace negotiations with France, and in March 1802 the Treaty of Amiens was signed.

At last there was time to enjoy the fruits of his victories. Emma had , on Nelson's instructions, bought an elegant country house, Merton Place, near London, and transformed it into an expensive mirror for their vanities. At last her husband rebelled, but it was too late for change, and he appeared reconciled to his lot when, early in 1803, he died with his wife and her lover at his side.

**Victory at Trafalgar.**

Bonoparte was known to be preparing for renewed war, and, two days before it broke out, Nelson, in May 1803, was given command in the Mediterranean, hoisting his flag in the Victory. Once again he was to blockade Toulon, now with the object of preventing a rendezvous between the French ships there with those at Brest in the Atlantic and, after Spain declared war on Britain, with Spanish ships from Cartagena and Cadiz. A combined force of that size could well enable Bonaparte to invade England; and early 1805, Napoleon, who the previous year had crowned himself emperor, ordered the fleets to converge for this purpose. In March, Admiral Pierre Villeneuve, who was to be in overall command, broke out of Toulon under cover of bad weather and disappeared. Nelson set off in pursuit. Villeneuve cut short his marauding, but his fleet was intercepted and damaged by a British squadron, Failing to win control of the English Channel, he ran south to Cadiz.

Nelson put into Gibraltar, made dispositions for the blockade of Cadiz, and returned to England. During his 25 days at home, he planned the strategy for the confrontation with the Franco-Spanish fleets that seemed inevitable; 34 enemy ships were blockaded in Cadiz by smaller numbers under Admiral Cuthbert Collingwood. Although Napoleon, abandoning the plan of a cross-Channel invasion, began to redeploy the Grand Army, in Britain the danger of invasion seemed as pressing as ever, and Nelson appeared the country's hope.

When his orders came, Nelson on September 15 sailed in the Victory. He was now at the height of his professional powers. Worshiped by his officers and sailors alike, he was confident that his captains understood his tactical thinking so well that the minimum of consultation would be required. On his 47th birthday he dined 15 captains in his flagship and outlined his plans to bring on a "pell-mell battle" in which British gunnery and offensive spirit would be decisive. He planned to advance on the Franco-Spanish fleets in two divisions to break their line and destroy them piecemeal. This was the final abandonment of the traditionally rigid tactics of fighting in line of battle.

After receiving Napoleon's orders that he must break the blockade, Villeneuve, on October 20, sailed out of Cadiz. At dawn next day, the Franco-Spanish fleets were silhouetted against the sunrise off cape Trafalgar, and the British began to form the two divisions in which they were to fight, one by Nelson, the other by Collingwood. As the opposing fleets closed, Nelson made signal. "England expects that every will man do his duty". The Battle of Trafalgar raged at its fiercest around the victory. A French sniper from the mast of the Redoutable, shot Nelson through the shoulder and chest. He was carried below to the surgeon, and it was soon clear that he was dying. When told that 15 enemy ships had been taken, he replied, "That is well, but I had bargained for 20". Thomas Hardy, his flag captain, kissed his forehead in farewell and Nelson spoke his last words, "Now I am satisfied. Thank God, I have done my duty".

Although the victory of Trafalgar finally made Britain safe from invasion, it was, at the time, overshadowed by the news of Nelson's death. A country racked with grief gave him a majestic funeral in St. Paul's Cathedral, and his popularity in countless monuments, streets, and inns named after him and, eventually, in the preservation at Portsmouth of the Victory. Emma Hamilton and his daughter, however, were ignored. Emma died, almost destitute, in Calais nine years later. Horatia, showing her father's resilience, married a clergyman in Norfolk and became the mother of large and sturdy family.

**Assessment.**

Nelson had finally broken the unimaginative strategical and tactical doctrines of the previous century and taught individual officers to think for themselves. His flair and forcefulness as a commander in battle were decisive factors in his two major victories- the battles of the Nile and Trafalgar. In the former, he had destroyed the French fleet upon which Napoleon Bonaparte had based his hopes of Eastern conquest, and in the latter he had destroyed the combined French and Spanish fleets, thus ensuring the safety of the British Isles from invasion and the supremacy of British sea power for more than a century. Spectacular success in battle, combined with his humanity as a commander and his scandalous private life, raised Nelson to godlike status in his lifetime, and after his death at Trafalgar in 1805, he was enshrined in popular myth and iconography. He is still generally accepted as the most appealing of Britain’s national heroes.

**Bibliography.**