

A brief review of horatio nelson history essay



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Horatio Nelson was born on September 29th, 1758, during the Seven Years' War (Lavery 10). He was the sixth child of Edmund and Catherine Nelson, out of eleven. His mother's maiden name was Suckling. She was the grand niece to Sir Robert Walpole. Walpole had previously been the British Prime Minister (Mahan 4). Although this connection to royalty was at best tenuous, it would play a role in Nelson's life (Coleman 9).

Nelson's attended the Royal Grammar School in Norwich. When he turned eleven he attended Sir John Paston's School. He was a very good student of English, becoming fairly knowledgeable in Shakespeare. In spite of the attempts of a French master, he was unable to become proficient in that language (Lavery 12-13).

Nothing in his upbringing to this point would have pushed him to go to sea. But in 1763 his uncle, Maurice Suckling, had returned from the sea as a Captain in the Royal Navy. Suckling had been the commanding officer of the HMS Dreadnought, a 60 gun ship-of-the-line, and had seen combat against the French in the West Indies. He had taken up residence forty miles from the Nelson residence (Lavery 13).

Peace was not to last. In 1770 Britain and Spain had a disagreement involving the Falkland Islands. As fate would have it, Suckling was offered a ship. Nelson, 12 years old, requested to go to sea with his uncle. Suckling agreed, and Nelson joined his ship in March of

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1771. The threat of war with Spain diminished, Nelson did not sail for the Falklands, and the ship he had been assigned to was taken out of commission (Lavery 17).

Suckling asked for and got the command of the 74 gun Triumph. He brought Nelson

with him as a Captain's servant. He was now on his way toward a career in the Royal Navy (Coleman 13). His uncle realized, though, that if Nelson was going to have a good chance at that career, he must have the chance to sail in the open water. In 1772 He transferred to a small merchant ship for a voyage to the West Indies (Coleman 13).

The Royal Navy in 1771 was in a state of flux. Lord Hawke, the political head of the Navy, and veteran of the Seven Years' War, resigned due to poor health. Lord Sandwich replaced him, serving in the post for the next twelve years (Knight 12). Captain Cook had finished his voyage and had moored Endeavor on the Thames. In 1771 the Royal Navy had 126 ships of various types in commission. England had just raised the taxes in the American colonies, and that was about to have great historical consequences. Prime Minister Lord North was imposing budgetary restraint. The Seven Years' war had been very expensive for the English government (Knight 13).

Nelson returned to England in 1773. After a trip to the Arctic, he returned and was put aboard the 20 gun Seahorse. He sailed east and stayed out for two years, and then contracted Malaria. He was sent home on another 20 gun ship. He returned to England in September of 1776 (Lavery 20).

Nelson received his commission to second lieutenant in 1777. He was assigned to the 32 gun frigate Lowestoffe. Nelson sailed to Jamaica, arriving there in May of 1777. While in the West Indies, he would harass American privateers, capturing one and sailing it back to Jamaica

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as a prize ship. When England declared war on France in early 1778, Nelson was transferred as a third lieutenant aboard the 50 gun Bristol (Lavery 25).

This was Nelson's first time as a junior officer aboard a large ship. He had lost some of the independence he had felt while on the Lowestoffe, but he also had a very real opportunity to advance his career. Since Bristol was the flag ship of Vice-Admiral Sir Peter Parker, Nelson might get noticed. If he did, Parker had the power to promote him up through Captain (Lavery 25).

By December he had been promoted to first Lieutenant and then commander. He was given command of the Badger, a small brig that had been an American vessel prior to it being taken as a prize (Lavery 26).

Nelson would serve along the Central American coast searching for American privateers. When he returned to Jamaica in 1779, the vice admiral gave him the highest award he could by promoting him to post-captain (Howarth 30).

Along with his promotion came the ex-French 28 gun vessel Hinchinbrook. The ship had not yet arrived when he received his commission. He spent part of the time in charge of some emplaced coastal batteries. When it did arrive, it was after the start of Hurricane season. This kept Nelson from sailing until October of 1779 (Lavery 28).

The situation for Britain was deteriorating in August of 1799. France and Spain had declared war on Britain, and the Dutch had signed a treaty with the American Rebels. The British were fighting the French from America all the way to India. A French fleet threatened the English Channel. In America, where Nelson was serving, the American colonies were not all that was threatened. Florida and Canada, along with the West Indies, were vulnerable. The French had captured St. Vincent and Grenada (Coleman p. 27-28).

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Jamaica was being threatened by Vice-Admiral Comte d'Estaing with 25, 000 men and 20 ships of the line. Barbados was no longer under British rule. Britain was either losing or believing it was going to lose its colonies in the New World (Coleman 27-28). The invasion of Jamaica was expected. Nelson, in a pessimistic letter home, spoke of learning French, apparently as a French prisoner. The threatened invasion never materialized. Instead of invading Jamaica, D'Estaing had his fleet turn north and assisted the Americans (Coleman 28).

Nelson's next command was the 44 gun Janus. But he had taken ill and resigned the command to sail home in the fall to recuperate. He arrived in Portsmouth in December of 1780 in the midst of the anti-Catholic riots. He then traveled to Bath to recover (Coleman 29).

Nelson had missed opportunities for fleet action before, and fate would have the same in store yet again. After his recovery, he was given command of the frigate Albemarle. But just before he took command, the Dutch and British fleets had engaged in a fierce battle at Fogger Bank. Later, in 1872, <https://assignbuster.com/a-brief-review-of-horatio-nelson-history-essay/>

the ship was damaged by another vessel that had broken its moorings during a Gale (Lavery 32).

With the defeat at Yorktown in 1781, the British had lost almost all hope of retain the American colonies. But they had captured Dutch possessions in both India and the West Indies, so the focus of the war shifted there.

Nelson's ship was repaired and he was ordered to escort a convoy to Quebec. He arrived in North America and was sent out to harass enemy shipping. He captured or destroyed several, but was unable to get any back safely to a port (Lavery 36). .

Nelson had served with distinction during this time period, though most of it was on the outskirts of the empire, away form the main fleet. When the war ended in 1783, he continued to serve and protect British interests in the Caribbean. He was unemployed and on half pay by 1788 (Lavery 41-43).

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The second half of 1792 was overshadowed by the continued decline of order in France. The royal power was suspended, and the decrees of November 19, and December 15 all served to alarm Europe in general and Great Britain in particular. There concern went from academic to fear as the Revolution gained support among the general populations of the nations of Europe (Mahan 93).

In January of 1793, King Louis XVI was beheaded and war with France was imminent. Nelson was reemployed by the Admiralty in 1793 and given command of the Agamemnon, a 64 gun ship-of-the-line on January 30th. Two

days after Nelson received his command, France declared war on Great Britain and Holland (Mahan 95). The Agamemnon was deployed with the Channel fleet several times before receiving orders for the Mediterranean. The emphasis of the deployment was to protect British interests, contain the French in Toulon, and make contacts with potential allies (Lavery 46-48).

The attempt to contain the French failed. The allied troops could not or would not work as a unit. Napoleon Bonaparte, then a young artillery officer, led the forces for the revolutionaries. The allied forces withdrew, attempting to burn the French ships that were in the harbor. The effort was not effective (Lavery 48).

Nelson continued his service in the Mediterranean, participating in two sieges at Corsica, and his first taste of true battle. In March of 1795, the Mediterranean fleet met the French fleet off Corsica. Nelson captured two 74 gun ships. Admiral Hotham, then in command of the fleet, ended the pursuit, much to Nelson's chagrin. Great Britain was satisfied with this victory, as it helped to raise the moral of the forces. Hotham was thanked by the House of Lords and the House of Commons. Nelson, for his part, still seethed over the missed opportunity (Lavery 53).

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The war in Europe had not gone well for the British. Belgium, Holland, and Luxemburg fell to the French. Spain and Prussia capitulated. Austria was holding the French to a stalemate in Northern Italy, and Nelson was assigned the task of supporting them. He rescued retreating Austrians at Genoa in December. The state of Agamemnon was now of great concern, and Nelson

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did not think she would last another winter without a major refit. Reluctantly, he took command of the HMS Captain, his first of several 74 gun ships (Lavery 54).

The war took an even worse turn in 1796. Austria was defeated by Napoleon in Northern Italy and was out of the war. Spain and France signed a treaty that would lead to Spain going to war against Britain. In September, the orders came to evacuate Corsica. Nelson was given the task of evacuating the Capital, and as they did the loyalty of the Corsicans turned as the British left and the French were advancing. The last task of the failed Mediterranean campaign was the evacuation of a British outpost on the island of Elba (Lavery 56).

Nelson had slipped out of the Mediterranean on February 13th and rejoined Admiral Jervis. He had been pursued by Spanish force of at least two ships-of-the-line. Admiral Jervis ordered the fleet to attack, and advanced toward the Spanish on February 14th, off of the cape of St. Vincent. Nelson, coming up from the end of the line, cut off two Spanish ships, one a 130 gun. In the end, Nelson had himself boarded and captured two Spanish ships. He had already been promoted to Rear Admiral, but had not yet been notified. Nelson was also knighted. The victory was a much needed moral boost in England, and Nelson became a national hero for the first time (Lavery 58-67).

Admiral Jervis was made a peer, and took the title of the Earl of St. Vincent. The British position in Europe continued to decline. The only ally they had left was Portugal. The British

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had no way of engaging the French. There was a rumor of treasure ships at Santa Cruz on Tenerife, and Nelson planned to have those (Lavery 62).

Nelson received orders to capture the town of Santa Cruz. He was unsuccessful in his first attempt. In a subsequent attempt Nelson was badly wounded in his right elbow, requiring amputation (Mahan 304). Nelson was sure his career was over and returned to England to recuperate (Mahan 306).

After his recuperation, Nelson was again assigned to the Mediterranean, in command of the 74 gun ship HMS Vanguard. The British Admiralty had been informed that the French were gathering in Toulon, and that Bonaparte was going to lead them. Nelson was given the task of finding out what the French were up to.

In the ensuing campaign of the Nile, Nelson's ships would be battered by a gale, sustaining significant damage. The French would take Malta, and then through some miscalculation on Nelson's part, would end up with Alexandria. Nelson was finally able to locate the French fleet after the Turks informed him that Alexandria had fallen (Lavery 68-76).

Nelson discovered the fleet during the night. Not wanting to wait for daylight, as conventional wisdom would dictate, he formed his line and attacked the French at anchor. He discovered that the French were anchored too far from shore, leaving a gap so that his ships could pass between the shore and the French. This allowed Nelson's fleet to attack the French on their unprepared side. When the battle was over, Nelson had scored a magnificent victory. His

fleet had destroyed thirteen out of fifteen Ships-of-the-line, along with several frigates. Napoleon's 35, 000 troops in Africa were stranded (Lavery 77-79).

Nelson returned to London, participated in a campaign against Denmark, and was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean. His main duty was to watch over Toulon.

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The Admiralty did not want Napoleon to break out into the Atlantic for the Mediterranean. Nelson was given command of the Victory, a 100 gun ship. He sailed from Portsmouth for his post, arriving off of Toulon in July of 1803. (Lavery 114).

The duty was monotonous. Nelson and his fleet show no action until January of 1805, when the French fleet left Toulon while Nelson was away getting water. When the news reached him, he immediately set sail for Alexandria, but found only three Turkish frigates there. He was distraught over not finding the French, and they continued to attempt escape during his absences from the post. On April 4th, the Phoebe brought news that the French had left Toulon and were heading south. Nelson began the chase (Lavery 110-120).

Nelson chased the French across the Atlantic to the West Indies. He had hoped to cut them off before they reached Barbados. He had some faulty intelligence, and turned south toward Trinidad when indeed the French had turned north and were on their way back. Nelson crossed the Atlantic again,

and anchored at Gibraltar. He was given orders to turn over his fleet and sail to Portsmouth in the Victory (Lavery 121-124).

On September 5th, 1805 Nelson was informed that the French and Spanish fleets had joined into one massive fleet that encompassed 30 ships-of-the-line. He set out for Portsmouth, boarded Victory, and took his fleet back to the Mediterranean. His fleet was stationed forty miles from Cadiz, and waited for news. That news came on October 9th. The combined fleet was coming out of the harbor (Lavery 127).

Nelson's fleet moved to engage the enemy. The enemy turned and attempted to flee back to Cadiz. Nelson's fleet was gaining on the enemy by three or four knots. At about noon, the Royal Sovereign, the first ship in line, engaged the French. The Victory entered the Battle of Trafalgar about ten minutes later. At 1: 15 in the afternoon, Nelson was struck in the left

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shoulder by a musket ball that passed through his lung and shattered his spine. Two and three quarter's hours later Nelson died (Lavery 126).

His death had no bearing on the outcome of the battle. The British had won the day yet again, capturing twenty ships. There are some French writers who state that Nelson's death cancelled out this victory. But in reality, there were no other fleet battles in this war. No nation was willing to challenge the British dominance at sea. Nelson was transported back to London in a cask of brandy. He was buried in St. Paul's Cathedral on January 10th, 1806 (Lavery 128).

Nelson had brought self esteem back to England. He was a tremendous Admiral, whose exploits saved his country. He was made larger than life by the Royal Navy, but stands as one of the very few remembered from the age of sail.