

Narrative of the Circumstances that led to the late  
important Victory at Sea April 12<sup>th</sup> 1762

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The Count de Grasse had been promised by his Court a Reinforcement of twelve Sail of the Line, to be with him in November. They actually sail'd in December; but the bold manœuvres of Kempenfelt in attacking a Convoy in sight, and within command of a superior Fleet, with the subsequent stormy weather, for that time frustrated their views, only one or two of the Ships having been able to pursue their voyage. The next reinforcement intended for him sail'd the 11<sup>th</sup> of February. As soon as the intelligence of this reinforcement arrived at St Lucia, measure were taken for intercepting it; but it would appear that the French Ships had made Descada to the northward, & hauled in to leeward of our Cruisers, getting in by the Pearl, or Dominica Channel, into Martinico. They anchored March the 21<sup>st</sup>, whilst our Fleet was all to windward; & we had intelligence of their having got in on March 28<sup>th</sup>. Our Squadrons & Cruisers were then called in, & every possible expedition was used to equip & store the Fleet, to be ready to attend de Grasse in his voyage to leeward. Admiral Drake's Squadron, being kept longest out cruising, had met with considerable damage in a sudden squall; but so well provided was our Fleet with stores

& so much alertness was used in refitting, that the whole in a few days was completely fitted & stored ready for service. Our force at St Lucia was 36 sail of the line, fit for sea, besides several others leaky, & not in a condition for service.

De Grasse had only 33 sail of the line that he could take to sea with him, & many of these in a very poor condition to go into service. It may therefore be asked, how he could think of sailing incumbered with transports, on an expedition in face of a superior force, & had he been so successful as to have got off safe, it would have appeared to every one a most unaccountable transaction. Officers that have long acted against each other can give a shrewd guess at what their Antagonists will do in every possible emergency. He had been successful last year in completing the conquest of Tobago, in sight of our fleet; & had observed that it was the constant view of our commanders to act with their whole force, & how difficult it was for one large fleet to bring another to action, that wished to decline it. With this view he resolved to keep close under the islands, instead of pushing, as his course was directed to leeward. By having a few hours start of our ships, & being able to keep more close in with their own Islands than we

could venture, & keeping his Convoy between him & the Shore,  
he was in hopes to throw his pursuers to leeward, & effect his  
purpose: & had he not indiscreetly begun the action on the 9<sup>th</sup>,  
when he thought he had an advantage over our van, which ended  
in disabling two of his ships, & was the cause of the decisive  
action of the 12<sup>th</sup>, he certainly might have got off. For as it  
was, he <sup>had</sup> got so far to windward of our fleet as to be only discer-  
nible with the body of his fleet from our mast heads; & it  
had become matter of deliberation on our side, whether to  
continue an ineffectual chase, or push to leeward, & wait for  
them at their rendezvous. De Grasse was also pinched in point  
of time, the seasons for expeditions in the West Indies being well  
advanced; & the cannon with which he had used his master's fleet,  
had given him with his officers, the character of Poltroon & coward;  
so that he was in terms with very few under his command, &  
was therefore probably stimulated to venture more than he otherwise  
should <sup>in prudence</sup> have done.

On Monday April 16, signal was made  
from our cruisers off Fort Royal, that the French were then under  
way in great force, attended with a fleet of transports. Our fleet  
instantly veig'd, & stood to the northward under main-sails, after  
them, & soon got sight of part of their men of war. The pursuit

was continued during night, under every possible sail, & was directed by the enemy's night signals; the wind a fresh gale at N. E. by E. At two in the morning the Valiant being to windward of the Formidable, discovered the enemy under the north end of Dominica, & soon after their ships were visible from the Formidable. At three the fleet brought to by signal, the enemy then bearing North.

Tuesday half past five in the morning a signal was thrown out to prepare for battle, & a line to be formed at two cables length asunder, & the fleet to fill, & stand on. At this time one of the enemy's ships had got so far to leeward detached from their line, that she must have immediately fallen, had not the wind failed us, while it served her to regain her station. The French kept working to windward in the channel between Dominica & Guadaloupe, where they had a steady breeze. At length our van got the breeze, & fetched up with the enemy's centre about nine o'clock, & were soon fired on. For the space of an hour they sustained the attack of the whole enemy's forces; our centre & rear lying then becalmed under Dominica. The Alfred lost her commander, Capt. Bayne; the Royal Oak was disabled & several other ships suffered damage. The Barfleur had at

one time seven ships, generally three, firing on her, which killed eight & wounded 22 men. About noon part of our centre got the breeze, & joined the van; the action was then renewed, but the Duke, the Formidable's second was the last ship engaged, the 16<sup>th</sup> astern of her, not being able to get up. The French having the command of the wind, & being connected, kept at a cautious as if meaning only to disable. This firing continued an hour & three quarters, till our rear received the breeze, & began to close the line, & only served <sup>to show</sup> the enemy's want of enterprise in not daring to seize the opportunity that the partial breeze afforded them to close with our van thus separated from the rear. The enemy had not received much visible damage; but one of them soon after lost her foremast, & we found that two had received so much hurt, that they were obliged to bear away to Brest or Guadalupe, to refit, so that they were not in it, & they appear to have been the ships captured by Sir Samuel Hood.

The 10<sup>th</sup> was spent in refitting, & keeping the wind, and transposing the van & rear divisions, as the van had suffered in the action of the 9<sup>th</sup>. On the 11<sup>th</sup> in the morning one of the enemy's disabled ships was discovered at Brest, & the second was seen steering for it. She was chased, but got in.

Two other ships were discovered far to windward, the one getting up a fore-yard, the other a main-top mast. On this a general chase was ordered. In the afternoon the *Agamemnon*, & some others got near these two ships, which in consequence made signals for assistance; at this time, only three or four of the body of the French Fleet were visible from the *Formidable's* mast head. *De Grasse* bore down to protect his disabled ships which our headmost ships continued to threaten, till the van of the French fleet got near up. They then bore down into their stations, & our line was formed in close order.

In the West Indies, the wind generally keeps to the northward, towards evening; to make the most of this circumstance, our fleet stood to the southward till two next morning, & then tacked with their heads to the northward. In the morning of the 12<sup>th</sup> the enemy was discovered broad on the lee-bow, & one of their ships directly to leeward, with her ~~top~~ <sup>main</sup>mast gone, & foremast across her fore-castle, tow'd by a frigate, the wind ESE. The *Veliant* & *Monarch* were order'd down to engage her; this oblig'd *De Grasse* to edge down to protect her. Admiral *Doake* led with the starboard tack, making

the most of the wind to secure the weather-gage. When it was judged that De Grasse had got far enough to leeward to put it in our power to make the action decisive, the Valiant & Monarch were ordered to resume their stations. The French were now forming their line on the opposite tack, & the wind coming about to the eastward, they had hopes of regaining their usual fighting distance, as their van pointed to windward of ours. Our fleet disposed in a line a-head, at one cable's distance, continued standing on, led by Admiral Drake. A little before eight o'clock the Marlborough was fired on, having fetched the seventh ship of the enemy's line. The signal for close action was thrown out, & our ships ranged slowly & closely along the enemy's line under their lee, giving & receiving a most tremendous fire. The Formidable gave her first fire to the enemy's 50<sup>th</sup> ship, & kept edging in on their line with a full sail. The impression made by Admiral Drake's Division, the unremitting fire of the Duke, & her own unsupportable, quick & well-directed fire enabled the Formidable, after passing the Ville de Paris & her seconds almost in contact to cut the enemy's line between the second & third ship astern of the Ville de Paris. This bold manœuvre of the Formidable, gave the decisive turn to this important day; it brought the four enemy's ships next

astera into one group, which the Formidable, Ramus, & Duke played on, as if a single object, so that a shot could not possibly miss. The Formidable then wore round on her heel, & a signal was made for our van to tack, which brought our fleet to windward of the enemy on the same tack.

It was half past nine before Sir Samuel Hood's division, now the rear, got into action. The breeze was so small, that the Barfleur took an hour & a half to pass the enemy's line, only so far as the opening made by the Formidable, giving a most tremendous well-directed fire. From the calmness of the day, the monarch fell on board her, but the ships separated with damage. After passing the French ships, the Barfleur was tow'd round by her boats, & a breeze springing up about a quarter after two made sail to cut off the disabled ships. At this time the French fleet appeared disabled, routed & in disorder. The Centaur, in the rear, first came up with the Cesar, which she attacked in a masterly manner but she would not yield till cut up by three different ships. her Captain fought nobly, & fell in the action. At a quarter after three, she struck, & soon after her foremast fell over her side; nor had she a foot of canvas without a shot hole.



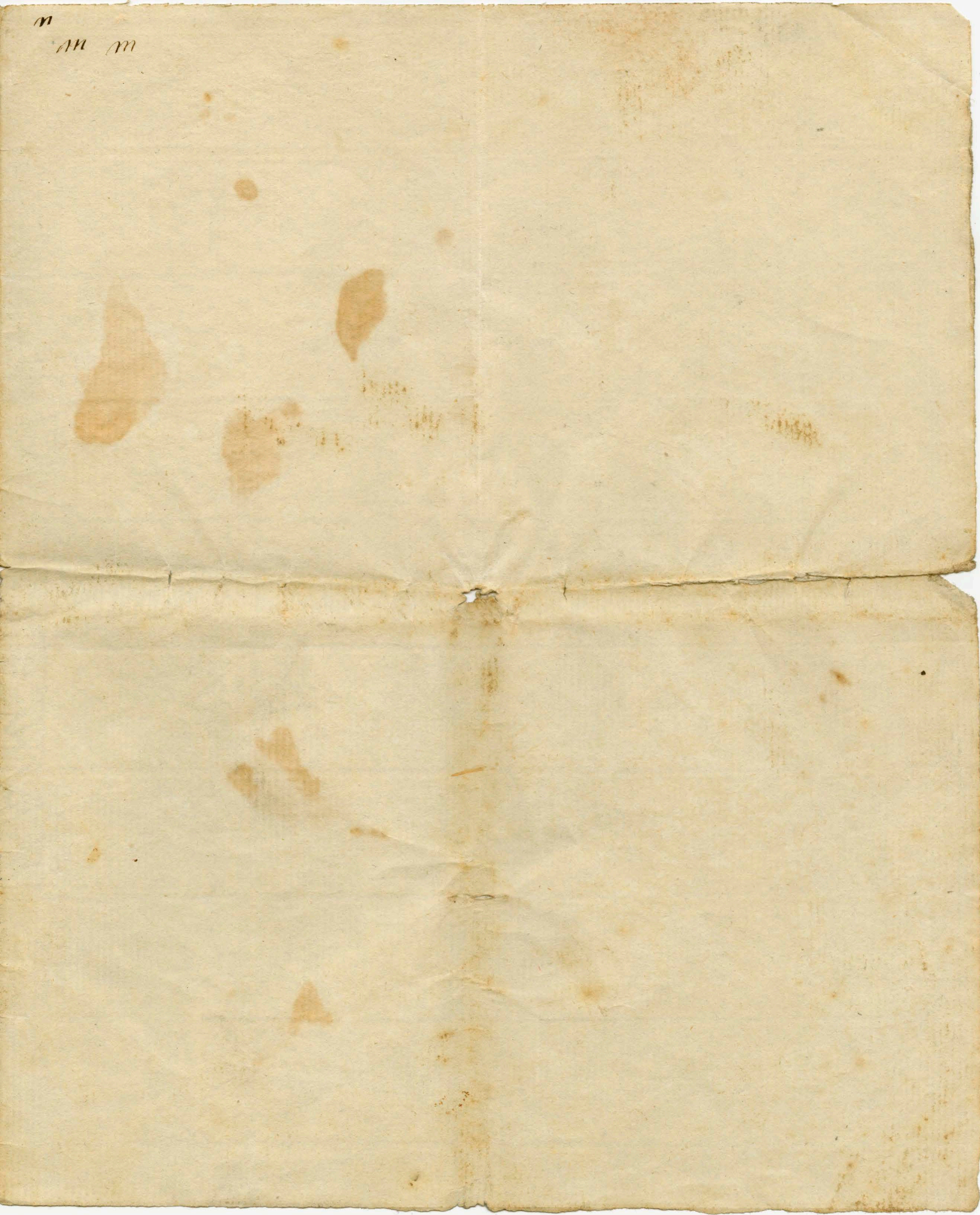
The Hector struck to the Canada, which did not stop to take possession of her, but pushed on to the Ville de Paris. About a quarter before six, the Ardent struck to the Belliqueux. The Barflueur then stood on to the Ville de Paris, then engaged by the Canada. Count de Grasse seemed only to wait to have the honour of yielding to a flagship; & after receiving a most tremendous close cannonade of about ten minutes, struck his flag, & was conducted on board the Barflueur. The Glorieux after losing every mast, her bowsprit, & ensign staff, did not yield till surrounded by our ships. It fell dark as the Ville de Paris struck, & to keep the fleet collected, & secure the prizes it was thought proper to bring to. The enemy made off, & were out of sight to leeward before morning. The French troops on board consisted of five regiments of 5400 men. The Caser caught fire, by drawing off some spirits. A Lieutenant, & ten of the Centaur's people were blown up in her, & about 200 Frenchmen. The Ville de Paris had 22000 sterling sterling on board.

This action, besides its immediate political consequences, has decided a point a new, that never was doubted of till the present war. Every honest Englishman believed firmly, that Frenchmen never could stand a firm close fire; but all our men of sentiment,

& all who affected to know more than others, as firmly maintain  
that we had no advantage either in ships, seamanship, or courage,  
& that nothing but numbers would ever decide the question, &  
they were not in our power. Now it appears, that single  
ships in the French line, lost as many men as our whole 36  
ships; that the Marlborough which sustained the first fire of  
of 23 French ships, had only three men killed, & 16 wounded.  
And as by the care of the Admiralty, our ships now have the  
advantage in point of sailing, & it appears, that the way to  
receive least damage from the enemy, is to engage near; it  
is to be hoped that every Officer will take advantage of the  
native intrepidity of the seamen to save the men & ships,  
& get possession of their enemy's; & that we shall have no more  
such cold-hearted opinions circulated among our people, that  
can answer no purpose, but to shelter the unmanly coward,  
or the man who, to please a faction would sacrifice his country.  
In actions with single ships, our brave Captains always have  
used this advantage. It would be right to reduce general actions  
as much as possible to single actions, by every ships seizing hold  
of the enemy opposed to her, & engaging till she yields.

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