

*Admiral Nelson's Correspondence in the Campaign of  
Trafalgar, with a Special Emphasis on the Information  
Connected to the Franco-Spanish Combined Fleet  
(October 1805)\**

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In 2005, the British Royal Navy celebrated the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Britain's greatest naval success and perhaps the most famous naval battle of all time. The best-known naval success of Britain, the battle of Trafalgar, is also the triumph of Admiral Horatio Nelson, who lost his life in the clash, which was the zenith of his life and career. The naval aspects of the Napoleonic wars and the deeds of Nelson are not widely known, however, in Hungary, where land warfare has always been in the focus of attention. A kind of indifference towards the naval aspects of that time is also reflected in the Hungarian book-making. Apart from translations of a few English popularizing<sup>1</sup> or out-of-date works, one can hardly find books available on the topic in Hungary. The situation is even worse when looking at the primary sources of naval history or other source-publications which, apart from a few remarks or citations, completely unfit for scientific investigation, were absolutely missing in Hungarian language until 2005.<sup>2</sup> Though the number of English language works on the topic is small in Hungary, fortunately, the University Library of Szeged holds several useful volumes.<sup>3</sup> The World Wide Web also alleviates the work of

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<sup>1</sup> To mention the most significant and useful works in Hungarian: SOUTHEY, Robert: *Nelson életrajza*. (Nelson's Biography) Published by the Hungarian Academy of Science, Budapest, 1902. Translated and annotated by: Antal Reményi; KEEGAN, John: *A tengeri hadviselés története*. (History of the Sea Warfare) Corvina, Budapest, 1998. Translated by: András Soproni; SWEETMAN, Jack: *Admirálisok. A történelem legkiválóbb tengernagyai, 1585–1945*. (Admirals. The Most Excellent Admirals of the History, 1585-1945) Zrínyi Kiadó, Budapest, 1999. Abridged edition, translated by: Pál Félix.

<sup>2</sup> To my knowledge, the first source-publication in this subject: ILLÉS András: *Dokumentumok a trafalgari hadjáratból*. (Documents from the Campaign of Trafalgar) Hadtörténelmi Közlemények (Quarterly of Military History), December 2005. pp. 962–982.

<sup>3</sup> In addition to the above-mentioned, useful for historical researches e.g. TUNSTALL, Brian: *Nelson*. Duckworth, London, 1933; TRACY, Nicholas: *Nelson's Battles. The Art of Victory in the Age of Sail*. Chatham Publishing, London, 1996.; LAVERY, Brian: *Nelson's Navy. The ships, men and organization 1793–1815*. Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, 2000.

the investigator, and is becoming an essential tool of historical researches. The Internet is resourceful – it provides useful literature and primary sources – but the researcher has to look at it with a critical eye.<sup>4</sup> So, basically, the Hungarian historian has to face a lot of difficulties when trying to deal with this topic. However, the *raison d'être* for such researches is reinforced by the fact, that Hungary (as part of the Austro–Hungarian Dual Monarchy between 1867 and 1918) possessed a navy, which – due to the efforts of navalism<sup>5</sup> – began to develop to considerable strength at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Based on this fact, I think, there is a need to create a notion in the Hungarian historiography – and in common knowledge – on the history of wartime sailing.

In this article, I try to give a survey of the Hungarian opportunities of the research work on the field of naval warfare. I will try to give an insight into Nelson's correspondence, which is considered to be one of the most important sources of naval history of that time. The correspondence covers the three weeks before the battle of Trafalgar. I will put a special emphasis on Nelson's information on the opposing Franco–Spanish combined fleet. What kind of information did he have about his enemies? Did he underestimate them? Did he anticipate their actions? If yes, how did he try to react? These are the main questions which this work tries to answer.

The research is based on the Nelson-papers, published in the seven volumes of *The Dispatches and Letters of Vice Admiral Lord Viscount Horatio Nelson*, edited by Sir Nicholas Harris Nicolas between 1844–1846.<sup>6</sup> In the following I will outline the situation

Moreover, the library holds the original edition of the above-mentioned book of John Keegan (KEEGAN, John: *The Price of Admiralty. The Evolution of Naval Warfare*. New York, Wiking, 1988.), and I used this, instead of the Hungarian translation. In the case of the work of Robert Southey, the Hungarian translation is taken into consideration, because of its annotations, where the translator (Antal Reményi) explains the statements of the author, and corrects his errors.

<sup>4</sup> The greatest and dynamically expanding database is the *Project Gutenberg Free eBook Library* (<http://www.gutenberg.org>), where the relevant works of authors – like William Beatty, Julian Corbett, James Harrison, Alfred Thayer Mahan, Theodore Roosevelt or Robert Southey, mentioned above – can be found on the history of sailing or on Nelson and the campaign of Trafalgar. Moreover, on the World Wide Web, it is easier than ever to access the digitalized materials of various magazines, archives etc. This list, fortunately, could be continued for a long time.

<sup>5</sup> Besides Károly Csonkaréti, Mihály Krámlí, who at present is perhaps the most significant Hungarian researcher of maritime history in the subject of Austria–Hungary's navy, describes navalism as it has been „*originated from the compound of patriotism, national pride, economic interest and self-interest, attraction to the sea power and military considerations*”. See KRÁMLI Mihály: *A császári és királyi haditengerészet és Magyarország. Magyarország szerepe a közös haditengerészet fejlesztésében*. (The Imperial and Royal Navy and Hungary. Hungary's Role in the Development of the Common Navy) Pro Pannonia Kiadói Alapítvány, Pécs, 2004. p. 219.

<sup>6</sup> The Trafalgar-letters of the seven-volumed work are quoted letter-perfect and with the original footnotes, without page numbers, in an on-line periodical, *The War Times Journal* (<http://www.wtj.com>), under the title *Letters and Dispatches of Horatio Nelson* (<http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/> – access: 10. June 2005.; hereafter: LDHN). Although the general editor of the journal, James Burback, does not mention his source, the title and the introduction to the letters suggest that it must be the Nicolas-collection.

of the British fleet (stationed at the Bay of Cadiz) and that of the Franco-Spanish combined fleet (anchored in Cadiz harbour) before the arrival of Nelson. After that – based on the Nelson-letters – I will try to give a picture of the combined fleet from Nelson's point of view.

### *The Background of the Trafalgar campaign*

Taking the general strategical scheme of the naval conflicts between the English and French Navy during the 18<sup>th</sup> century into consideration, we can make the following summary: both the strategical and tactical advantages were on the side of the British fleet, so it blockaded the harbours of France and its allies. While the British fleet tried to force its opponents into a decisive battle, the squadrons of the French fleet made attempts to break out, and tried to harrass the British merchant shipping.<sup>7</sup> In 1804 a war had broken out between Britain and Spain and it has resulted that the Spanish fleet was also at Napoleon's disposal by 1805. This increase in naval power gave the theoretical opportunity to Napoleon to invade Great Britain.<sup>8</sup> The preparations for such an action have begun as early as 1803, but the Empereur was not able to set up a fleet, strong enough to dominate the English Channel as a *sine qua non* of the invasion by spring and summer 1805. Finally, in August 1805, the combined fleet, commanded by Admiral Pierre de Villeneuve sailed into the port of Cadiz, Spain, and remained there until the third week of October.<sup>9</sup>

After two years of consecutive duty and less than a short month's leave Nelson, on board of *Victory*, 100, joined to the British fleet in the Bay of Cadiz on the 28<sup>th</sup> of September.<sup>10</sup> The next day, on his 47<sup>th</sup> birthday,<sup>11</sup> he took over the fleet's command from his

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*Nota bene:* this collection does not contain every letter of Admiral Nelson, but the most significant ones are included.

<sup>7</sup> For such consolidation of the British and French naval warfare, see SWEETMAN pp. 73–76.

<sup>8</sup> TRACY pp. 157–158.

<sup>9</sup> Vice Admiral Pierre Charles Jean-Baptiste Silvestre de Villeneuve was the commander-in-chief of the French fleet, and the Franco-Spanish combined fleet, anchored at the harbour of Cadiz, his flagship was the *Bucentaure*, 80. According to Napoleon's invasion directives, the ships of the line, anchored in various French and Spanish ports (Brest, Lorient, Rochefort, Toulon, and Ferrol, Cadiz, Cartagena), were to force their way through the British blockade and to unite in the West-Indies. The next step for the Franco-Spanish fleet would have been to sail into the English Channel, and in order to clear the way for the invasion forces, to acquire the naval superiority there. Apart from Villeneuve's Toulon squadron, however, only a few ships managed to put to sea, and after waiting for a short time they started marauding off Martinique, then headed back to the French waters. (Meanwhile Nelson worked hard to intercept them with a fleet of similar size.) As his forces were not strong enough to secure the English Channel, Villeneuve headed towards Ferrol, but on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July at Cape Finisterre he encountered Sir Robert Calder's squadron. Due to bad weather conditions, after the battle, the two fleets, stared at each other, then Villeneuve left heading towards Vigo. Finally, on the 19<sup>th</sup> of August, he arrived at Cadiz. For Napoleon's invasion directives, Villeneuve's escape and the chase by Nelson, particularly see KEEGAN pp. 24–28.

<sup>10</sup> The harbour of Toulon was under the blockade of Nelson since June 1803, see CALLO, Joseph F.: *Nelson Speaks. Admiral Lord Nelson in his own Words*. Chatham Publishing, London, 2001.

childhood friend, Vice Admiral Cuthbert Collingwood.<sup>12</sup> 29 ships of the line of the British fleet anchored about 90–100 km away from Cadiz, where 36 sails of the line of the combined fleet were under blockade.<sup>13</sup> The port was under the surveillance of a frigate squadron, commanded by Captain Henry Blackwood, who observed the enemy from a distance of 35–40 km.<sup>14</sup> There were two good reasons for this: on the one hand, the British fleet was out of the sight of the combined fleet, and the lack of information about the strength of the enemy made the French hesitant.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand the British “*must guard against being caught with a Westerly wind near Cadiz, as a Fleet of Ships with so many Three-deckers would inevitably be forced into the Straits [of Gibraltar], and then Cadiz would be perfectly free for the Enemy to come out*”<sup>16</sup> – as Nelson wrote to Lord Barham, the First Lord of the Admiralty.

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xxxii. (*Chronology*). After the escape and chasing of Villeneuve, Nelson disembarked at Spithead on the 18<sup>th</sup> of August in 1805, see TRACY p. 166. He spent only three weeks in his Merton estate (he owned it since the October of 1801), then on the 14<sup>th</sup> of September, at Portsmouth he stepped on the board of the *Victory*, as he wrote in his private diary, published by BEATTY, William: *Authentic Narrative of the Death of Lord Nelson*. T. Cadell and W. Davies, London, 1807. (*Appendix: Memorandum Book*) (<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/15233/15233-h/15233-h.htm> – access: 13. September 2005.)

<sup>11</sup> Nelson was born at Burnham Thorpe, Norfolk, on the 29<sup>th</sup> of September 1758.

<sup>12</sup> Vice Admiral Cuthbert Collingwood was Nelson’s second-in-command at Trafalgar and after the death of Nelson he became the commander-in-chief of the Mediterranean Fleet, his flagship was the *Royal Sovereign*, 100. Nelson and Collingwood both were lieutenants in the West Indies during the American War of Independence. As Collingwood wrote to one of his friends on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November 1805: „*Since the year '73 we have been in the terms of the greatest intimacy*”, cites TRACY p. 169. They both were protégés of Admiral Sir Peter Parker. Although Collingwood was the senior of the two, Nelson got the promotions in the first place, and Collingwood only followed him later. About their service in the West-Indies and their advancements at this time, see MAHAN, Alfred Thayer: *The Life of Lord Nelson. The Embodiment of the Sea Power of Great Britain. Vol. I*. Sampson Law, Marston & Company Limited, London, 1897. pp. 17–21. (<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/16914/16914-h/16914-h.htm> – access: 30. November 2005.)

<sup>13</sup> TRACY p. 166.; CALLO, Joseph F: *Lasting Lessons of Trafalgar*. Naval History Magazine, October 2005. (<http://www.usni.org/naavalhistory/articles05/NHCalloOct-2.htm> – access: 10. October 2005.); Nelson to Marsden [2], 2. October 1805., see LDHN [http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805\\_10a.htm](http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805_10a.htm).

<sup>14</sup> Captain Henry Blackwood was the commander of the frigate *Euryalus*, 36. Early in September, Blackwood visited Nelson at Merton and informed him, that the combined fleet was anchored in Cadiz, see SOUTHEY p. 303.

<sup>15</sup> SOUTHEY pp. 393–394. endnote 15.

<sup>16</sup> Nelson to Barham, 5. October 1805., see LDHN [http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805\\_10b.htm](http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805_10b.htm).

*The Campaign of Trafalgar in Nelson's Correspondence*

The dispatches, letters, orders and notes of Admiral Nelson at Trafalgar are very wide-ranging. The number of papers in discussion is 97, without numbering: 89 letters, 6 diary entries<sup>17</sup> and 2 double-page enclosures to a letter to William Marsden, Secretary of the Admiralty, published separately.<sup>18</sup> Less than 50 % of the letters contains information about the complement of the British fleet, about 40 % deals with the provisions, and some 25–25 % of them is about the personnel and the tactics and the enemy.<sup>19</sup> Therewith only a smaller part of the letters are about the weather conditions or contain private matters.<sup>20</sup> Although the present article basically attempts to reconstruct Nelson's information and thinking about his enemies at Trafalgar on the basis of his papers, we need to make some remarks about other themes, too, since they make significant part of the correspondence.

The letters provide information about the arrivals and departures of the sails of the line and the special needs of the fleet.<sup>21</sup> The needs usually were referred to the absence of the frigates. The orders and reports from between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> of October, mention at least a dozen times that the "eyes of the fleet"<sup>22</sup> were missing.<sup>23</sup> In this respect, the most critical

<sup>17</sup> Three diary entry between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> of October are published in one item, see *LDHN* [http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805\\_10e.htm](http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805_10e.htm).

<sup>18</sup> William Marden was a famous orientalist and the Secretary of the Admiralty between 1804–1807. *King's College London Archives Services. Summary Guide: Marsden, William (1754–1836)* (<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/iss/archives/collect/10ma65-1.html>) – access: 11. August 2005.)

<sup>19</sup> Letters, of course, usually contain various types of information in various topics, so they are difficult to categorize. That is the reason, why proportions are used instead of concrete numbers.

<sup>20</sup> These letters will only be mentioned in case, they are connected to the main subjects of this paper.

<sup>21</sup> These letters: Nelson to Marsden [1], 1. October 1805.; Nelson to Collingwood [1], 3. October 1805.; Nelson to Blackwood, 4. October 1805.; Nelson to Marsden [2, 4], 4. October 1805.; Nelson to Barham, 5. October 1805.; Nelson to Collingwood [2], 5. October 1805.; Nelson to Rose, 6. October 1805.; Nelson to Collingwood, 6. October 1805.; Nelson to Gambier, 7. October 1805.; Nelson to Marsden, 7. October 1805.; Nelson to Blackwood, 8. October 1805.; Nelson to Collingwood [3], 8. October 1805.; Nelson to Gambier, 8. October 1805.; Nelson to Collingwood [3], 9. October 1805.; Nelson to Blackwood, 9. October 1805.; Nelson to Collingwood, 10. October 1805.; Nelson to Marsden [4], 10. October 1805.; Nelson to Marsden [5], 10. October 1805.; Nelson to Ball [1], 11. October 1805.; Nelson to Marsden, 11. October 1805.; Nelson to Collingwood [1], 12. October 1805.; Nelson to Collingwood, 13. October 1805.; Nelson to Marsden [1, 2, 4], 13. October 1805.; Nelson to Blackwood, 14. October 1805.; Private Diary, 14. October 1805.; Nelson to Hamond [1], 15. October 1805.; Nelson to Collingwood, 18. October 1805. See *LDHN* [http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805\\_10a.htm](http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805_10a.htm), ...1805\_10b.htm, ...1805\_10c.htm, ...1805\_10d.htm, ...1805\_10e.htm.

By the arrival of Nelson, the British fleet consisted of 29 ships of the line. From that time on the number of the ships continuously increased to 35, until the 10<sup>th</sup> of October, see TRACY p. 177. However, this number is only nominal, in practice the number of the ships varied all the time, this was mainly because the convoys heading towards Gibraltar, see below and footnote 28. The day of the battle Nelson commanded 27 ships of the line.

<sup>22</sup> This is a common name to frigates. Their speed and manoeuvrability made these ships capable of doing reconnaissance missions.



period was between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> of October. In his letter of the 4<sup>th</sup> of October, Nelson complains to William Marsden that there were only three frigates at Captain Blackwood's disposal, although at least eight would have been needed to keep Cadiz under surveillance. On the 5<sup>th</sup> of October, Nelson wrote to Lord Castlereagh (the Secretary for War Department) that only two frigates were at his command to observe the combined fleet.<sup>24</sup> Later, as the letters suggests, the problem was solved: after the 10<sup>th</sup> of October the complaining tone disappears.<sup>25</sup> The reports between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> about the tasks of the ships also reinforce the idea that the frigate-problem was solved after the 10<sup>th</sup> of October.

The letters concerning provisions and water are also of great importance, as the combat readiness of an army greatly depends on the appropriate supply.<sup>26</sup> In this particular case, the army meant 20–25 000 officers and crew. As the British fleet at Cadiz did not have transport ships and spare frigates to provide an escort, ships of the line were used.<sup>27</sup> To solve the problem of the supply of the fleet, Nelson assigned Rear Admiral Thomas Louis (he was third-in-command with his flagship *Canopus*, 80) to lead convoys to Gi-

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<sup>23</sup> These letters: Nelson to Blackwood, 4. October 1805.; Nelson to Marsden [3], 4. October 1805.; Nelson to Barham, 5. October 1805.; Nelson to Castlereagh, 5. October 1805.; Nelson to Marsden [1], 5. October 1805.; Nelson to Collingwood [1], 5. October 1805.; Nelson to Rose, 6. October 1805.; Nelson to Collingwood, 6. October 1805.; Nelson to Marsden, 7. October 1805.; Nelson to Blackwood, 8. October 1805.; Nelson to Blackwood, 9. October 1805. See *LDHN* [http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805\\_10a.htm](http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805_10a.htm), ... [1805\\_10b.htm](http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805_10b.htm), ... [1805\\_10c.htm](http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805_10c.htm)

<sup>24</sup> „*I have only two Frigates to watch them, and not one with the Fleet. I am most exceedingly anxious for more eyes, and hope the Admiralty are hastening them to me. The last Fleet was lost to me for want of Frigates; God forbid this should.*” Nelson to Castlereagh, 5. October 1805., see *LDHN* [http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805\\_10b.htm](http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805_10b.htm).

<sup>25</sup> These letters: Nelson to Marsden, 11. October 1805.; Nelson to Collingwood [1], 12. October 1805.; Private Diary, 14. October 1805. See *LDHN* [http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805\\_10d.htm](http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805_10d.htm).

<sup>26</sup> These letters: Nelson to Castlereagh, 1. October 1805.; Nelson to Marsden [1], 2. October 1805.; Nelson to Ford, 2. October 1805.; Nelson to Strangford, 3. October 1805.; Nelson to Barham, 5. October 1805.; Nelson to Collingwood [1, 2, 3, 4], 5. October 1805.; Nelson to the Dey of Algiers, about 5. October 1805.; Nelson to Collingwood, 6. October 1805.; Nelson to Gambier, 7. October 1805.; Nelson to Collingwood, 7. October 1805.; Nelson to Collingwood [1, 2], 8. October 1805.; Nelson to Blackwood, 8. October 1805.; Nelson to Collingwood [1, 2], 9. October 1805.; Nelson to Blackwood, 9. October 1805.; Nelson to Collingwood [1, 2, 3], 10. October 1805.; Nelson to the respective captains [3, 5, 6, 9, 10], 10. October 1805.; Nelson to Marsden, 11. October 1805.; Nelson to Collingwood [2], 12. October 1805.; Nelson to Blackwood, 14. October 1805.; Nelson to the boatswains of H. M. Ships *Victory*, *Ajax*, and *Neptune*, 15. October 1805.; Nelson to Collingwood [1, 2], 18. October 1805. See *LDHN* [http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805\\_10a.htm](http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805_10a.htm), ... [1805\\_10b.htm](http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805_10b.htm), ... [1805\\_10c.htm](http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805_10c.htm), ... [1805\\_10d.htm](http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805_10d.htm), ... [1805\\_10e.htm](http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805_10e.htm).

<sup>27</sup> „[...] *it is said hunger will break through stone walls – ours is only a wall of wood*” – wrote Nelson rather desperately to Lord Castlereagh in his letter on the 1<sup>st</sup> of October, referring to the problem of insufficient supplies. He also emphasized the fact, that the combined fleet was free to resupply itself from the city of Cadiz or through neutral ships. Nelson to Castlereagh, 1. October 1805., see *LDHN* [http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805\\_10a.htm](http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805_10a.htm).

braltar and Tetuan in order to acquire supplies.<sup>28</sup> In this manner the logistic problems of the fleet were settled.

The documents dealing with the personnel are not to be neglected either.<sup>29</sup> These papers give information about the disciplinary procedures, the changes in command, and the medical services. Six letters which are concerned with the case of Vice Admiral Robert Calder deserve particular attention.<sup>30</sup>

The tactical-strategical aspects of the Nelson-papers are in close connection with his private opinion on his enemies.<sup>31</sup> These papers usually deal with the positions of the Brit-

<sup>28</sup> During the following weeks Louis was leading the rotation of convoys of 5-6 ships to Gibraltar. Finally, Louis was not able to participate in the battle, so his post was temporarily occupied by Rear Admiral William Carnegie, the 7<sup>th</sup> Earl of Northesk for the time of the battle, his flagship was the *Britannia*, 100. See TRACY p. 169. Due to the small number of frigates, Nelson was constrained to use Louis' convoys to observe the port, as it is written in his two letters to Collingwood (Nelson to Collingwood [1], 5. October 1805.; Nelson to Collingwood, 6. October 1805.), see *LDHN* [http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805\\_10b.htm](http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805_10b.htm).

<sup>29</sup> These letters: Nelson to Collingwood [1, 2], 3. October 1805.; Nelson to Marsden [4], 4. October 1805.; Nelson to Marsden, 5. October 1805.; Nelson to Gambier, 7. October 1805.; Nelson to Collingwood [2], 8. October 1805.; Nelson to Collingwood [2], 9. October 1805.; Nelson to Marsden [1, 4], 10. October 1805.; Nelson to the respective captains [4, 10, 12,], 10. October 1805.; Nelson to Collingwood [2], 10. October 1805.; Nelson to Marsden, 12. October 1805.; Nelson to Collingwood [1, 2], 12. October 1805.; Nelson to Marsden [4], 13. October 1805.; Nelson to the boatswains of H. M. Ships *Victory*, *Ajax*, and *Neptune*, 15. October 1805.; Nelson to Marsden, 18. October 1805. See *LDHN* [http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805\\_10a.htm](http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805_10a.htm), ...1805\_10b.htm, ...1805\_10c.htm, ...1805\_10d.htm, ...1805\_10e.htm.

<sup>30</sup> On his arrival Nelson handed an order to Calder, he was to appear before the Court Martial. The Admiralty accused Calder of not doing everything in order to achieve victory in his action of the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July, although he captured two ships of the line. Nelson held him back, speculating that Calder's participation in the battle would buy the Admiralty's indulgence. Calder, however, requested Nelson to let him back to home as soon as possible, and to order some captains, who were his subordination in the action on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July, to participate on his trial. (Calder's four letters to Nelson, see *LDHN* <http://www.wtj.com/arcdocs/f/nel1005b.htm>.) Nelson was reluctant, however, he gave permission to leave to captains who volunteered. Finally Calder, on board of his flagship, the *Prince of Wales*, 98, left for Britain on the evening of the 13<sup>th</sup> of October. Although, he was acquitted of the charges, he was often criticised later, and soon he was forced to retirement. The Admiralty, in the end, promoted him to be the commander-in-chief of Portsmouth in 1810. See TRACY p. 169.

Nelson's letters connect to Calder's case: Nelson to Marsden [2], 2. October 1805.; Nelson to Collingwood [3], 10. October 1805.; Nelson to Collingwood [1], 12. October 1805.; Nelson to Marsden [4], 13. October 1805.; Nelson to Collingwood, 14. October 1805.; Nelson to Hamond [2], 15. October 1805. *LDHN* [http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805\\_10a.htm](http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805_10a.htm), ...1805\_10d.htm, ...1805\_10e.htm.

<sup>31</sup> These letters: Nelson to Castlereagh, 1. October 1805.; Nelson to Collingwood [2], 3. October 1805.; Nelson to Duff, 4. October 1805.; Nelson to Blackwood, 4. October 1805.; Nelson to Barham, 5. October 1805.; Nelson to Blackwood, 5. October 1805.; Nelson to Collingwood [2, 3, 4], 5. October 1805.; Memorandum, 9. October 1805.; Nelson to the respective captains [8, 13], 10. October 1805.; Nelson to Collingwood [3], 10. October 1805.; Nelson to Blackwood, 10. October 1805.; Nelson to Ball [1, 2], 11. October 1805.; Nelson to Collingwood [2], 12. October 1805.; Nelson to

ish fleet and the location of the frigates observing the port of Cadiz. A small part of the letters give a view of Nelson's strategical thinking (redirecting ships to the Mediterranean) and provide information about tactical instructions (signals, the Cadiz memorandum). The letters also include theoretical plans to force the enemy out of the port (using Congreve rockets or fireships<sup>32</sup>).

One letter, however, deserves particular attention. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of October Nelson, in order to resolve the problem of the inadequate number of frigates, instructed Captain George Duff, commander of *Mars*, 74, to "keep, with the *Mars*, *Defence*, and *Colossus*, from three to four leagues<sup>33</sup> between the Fleet and Cadiz, in order that [Nelson] may get the information from the Frigates stationed off that Port, as expeditiously as possible".<sup>34</sup> With this measure, Nelson not only put more frigates under Captain Blackwood's command but reinforced the cordon of communication<sup>35</sup> with stronger warships. Besides repeating the signals of the "watching eyes", as Nelson called the frigates sometimes, these ships of the line were able to provide strong support in case of an accidental attack.<sup>36</sup>

Another document has also to be mentioned, which is presumably the most important document of the British Royal Navy. It is known as the so-called Cadiz memorandum, which was written originally for Collingwood. The memorandum includes Nelson's tactical guiding principles for the upcoming battle. Eventually, the memorandum was distributed among all captains of the fleet. Two things have to be mentioned about the memorandum: the plan itself, and Nelson's flexible leadership. In connection with the plan Nelson wrote: "I have [...] made up my mind to keep the Fleet in that position of sailing [...] that the Order of Sailing is to be the Order of Battle, placing the Fleet in two Lines of sixteen Ships each".<sup>37</sup> This measure aimed at breaking through the enemy line; after the

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Blackwood, 14. October 1805.; Private Diary, 14. October 1805.; Nelson to Hope, 15. October 1805.; Nelson to Ball, 15. October 1805.; Nelson to Hamond [1], 15. October 1805.; Nelson to Collingwood [2], 18. October 1805.; Private Diary, 19. October 1805.; Memorandum, 20. October 1805.; Private Diary, 20. October 1805. See LDHN [http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805\\_10a.htm](http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805_10a.htm), ...1805\_10b.htm, ...1805\_10c.htm, ...1805\_10d.htm, ...1805\_10e.htm.

<sup>32</sup> In his letter to Castlereagh on the 1<sup>st</sup> of October, Nelson suggests to put the Congreve rockets into action: „Even should no Ships be burnt, yet it would make Cadiz so very disagreeable, that they [the combined fleet] would rather risk an Action than remain in Port." Nelson to Castlereagh, 1. October 1805., see LDHN [http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805\\_10a.htm](http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805_10a.htm). That would have been the first naval deployment of this early tactical missile. On the 14<sup>th</sup> of October he wrote to Blackwood, that he expects „three stout Fire-Ships" from Britain, and he also mentioned the possible deployment of Congreve rockets. Nelson to Blackwood, 14. October 1805., see LDHN [http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805\\_10d.htm](http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805_10d.htm).

<sup>33</sup> 1 league = 3 nautical miles, so the distance of 3–4 leagues means cca. 17–23 km.

<sup>34</sup> Nelson to Duff, 4. October 1805., see LDHN [http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805\\_10a.htm](http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805_10a.htm).

<sup>35</sup> Robert Southey wrote the terms „repeating ships", see SOUTHEY p. 312.

<sup>36</sup> This intention is also supported by the written order of the 15<sup>th</sup> of October, to Captain George Hope, commander of the *Defence*, 74. See below and footnote 60.

<sup>37</sup> Memorandum, 9. October 1805., see LDHN

breakthrough Nelson's ships, raking the vessels stuck between the British lines, were to overpower the Franco-Spanish fleet. This was different from the everyday practice, what meant an artillery duel fought in a distance of about 200 meters, and this method was a culmination point of the evolution of the naval tactics in the age of sail.<sup>38</sup> Nelson's flexible leadership is lucidly demonstrated by the well-cited phrase in the Anglo-Saxon military historiography: the memorandum contains *guiding principles* only, and not exact orders. With the help of these guiding principles he sketched the outlines of the battle, leaving the tactical decisions to his subordinates.

A perfect example for this is, when he writes: "*the Second in Command [Collingwood] will in all possible things direct the movements of his Line*", practically giving Collingwood the freedom to decide in the following battle, or when he put down the following: "*no Captain can do very wrong if he places his Ship alongside that of an Enemy*".<sup>39</sup>

#### *The Franco-Spanish combined fleet in Nelson's Trafalgar papers*

As I have mentioned before, about 25 % of the Nelson-papers of Trafalgar contains information about the combined fleet. The data can be categorized into four main groups: the question of prize law, the possible plans of the Franco-Spanish fleet, the actions of the French squadron which broke out from the harbour of Rochefort, and the sailing of the combined fleet. The last three groups are closely connected to each other, so these are going to be the subjects of my investigations. The question of prize law will be mentioned only partially.

Only three Nelson-letters deal with the interception of neutral ships. In his letter to Castlereagh on the 1<sup>st</sup> of October, and in the report to Marsden on the 10<sup>th</sup> of October, he complains that laws restraining the prizing of neutral ships are jeopardizing the authority of the Admiralty, moreover, have a negative moral effect on the captains of the navy. In this way, the restrictions, directly and indirectly, support the enemy. One of the letters to

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[http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805\\_10c.htm](http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805_10c.htm). Nelson continues the above mentioned: „*with an Advanced Squadron of eight of the fastest sailing Two-decked Ships*”. Nelson's aim was – as it turned out from the Cadiz memorandum – to separate Villeneuve from his van, and to trap him between his line and the mentioned advanced squadron. This part of Nelson's conception was impossible to carry out, because there were not enough ships of the line at his disposal.

<sup>38</sup> The failure of the line tactics laid in several factors of the rigid naval tactics (formalism), the inappropriate signal system and the traditional positioning of the ships in the line. (Usually the attacker occupied the windward side and got the initiative, while the defender stayed on the leeward, and had the possible of wearing and retreating.) For the origin and the fail of the line tactics particularly see TRACY pp. 52–76.

<sup>39</sup> Memorandum, 9. October 1805., see LDHN

[http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805\\_10c.htm](http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805_10c.htm). The most recent work on Nelson's tactics at Trafalgar, see CZISNIK, Marianne: *Admiral Nelson's Tactics at the Battle of Trafalgar*. History, October 2004. pp. 549–559.

Marsden on the 10<sup>th</sup> of October, concretely mentions a captain in this subject, named William Hoste, who was a protégé of Nelson.<sup>40</sup>

Nelson's first remark about the intentions of the combined Franco-Spanish fleet can be found in his letter to Marsden, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October. Based on a gossip, that there was a food shortage in Cadiz, he speculated, that the combined fleet was sure to leave the port of Cadiz.<sup>41</sup> On the 5<sup>th</sup> of October, his report to Lord Barham reflects a much firmer conviction, namely he thought that the ships of the sail of the enemy "*mean to sail the first fresh Levant wind; and as the Carthagena Ships are ready [to put out to sea], [...] it looks like a[n intended] junction*".<sup>42</sup>

The background of this thought was provided by Blackwood, whose report informed Nelson on the 4<sup>th</sup> of October that the ships of the line of the combined fleet had been filled with troops, and have been ready to set sail.<sup>43</sup> What Nelson meant by "junction" is still unclear. Although, around the 8<sup>th</sup> of October he mentions to Major-General Stewart that "*Some day or other, that Buonaparte, if he lives, will attempt the invasion and conquest of Great Britain*",<sup>44</sup> but Nelson does not seem to be afraid of a possible invasion. Beside this, he must have known that Napoleon disassembled his camp at Boulogne (where the *Grand Armée* stood waiting for the invasion) and started marching towards the inland.<sup>45</sup> Considering that he mentioned the squadron of Cartagena, it is likely, that under the term "junction" he meant a military action aiming at the Mediterranean Sea and at Naples. For France, the Kingdom of Naples was a bridgehead to expand its interests to the Near East.<sup>46</sup> The following three letters also provide evidence for this. He writes to Blackwood, on the 9<sup>th</sup> of October: "*Agamemnon, Belleisle, and very probably London, are at this moment on their passage; therefore, if Mr. Decrès<sup>47</sup> means to come forth (if he would take my advice, which I dare say he won't), he had better come out directly; [...] and that if the Enemy are bound into the Mediterranean they would come out at night, which they have always done,*

<sup>40</sup> These letters: Nelson to Castlereagh, 1. October 1805.; Nelson to Marsden [1, 2], 10. October 1805. See *LDHN* [http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805\\_10a.htm](http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805_10a.htm), ... [1805\\_10c.htm](http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805_10c.htm).

<sup>41</sup> Nelson to Marsden, 2. October 1805., see *LDHN* [http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805\\_10a.htm](http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805_10a.htm).

<sup>42</sup> Nelson to Barham, 5. October 1805., see *LDHN* [http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805\\_10b.htm](http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805_10b.htm).

<sup>43</sup> BEATTY <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/15233/15233-h/15233-h.htm>. According to Beatty's opinion, the aim of this manoeuvre was to lure Nelson closer to the port, by this means finding out the number of the British ships. As it is mentioned above, however, there is no sign of speculation in Nelson's letter to Lord Barham on the following day. Finally, the combined fleet withdrew to the inner harbour, fearing the development of the Congreve rockets. See TRACY p. 171.

<sup>44</sup> Nelson to Stewart, about 8. October 1805., see *LDHN* [http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805\\_10c.htm](http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805_10c.htm).

<sup>45</sup> KEEGAN p. 52. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of August, Napoleon told Talleyrand, that he gave up his invading plans for a time, see TRACY p. 165.

<sup>46</sup> TRACY p. 159. Dominating the Mediterranean meant not only the advantage of controlling the naval flank of the ground operations – and in this way the opportunity of surrounding the enemy through seaborne operations – but also controlling the land route to India, which was the key of the British positions and interests in the Far East.

<sup>47</sup> Admiral Denise Decrès was the French Minister of the Marine and the Colonies.

[...] run to the Southward, and catch the sea-breezes at the Mouth of the Gut, and push through [the Strait of Gibraltar] whilst we might have little wind in the offing."<sup>48</sup> On the next day he writes to Collingwood: "The Enemy's Fleet are all but out of the harbour – perhaps, this night, with the Northerly wind, they may come forth, and with the Westerly sea-breeze to-morrow go into the Mediterranean".<sup>49</sup> In his next letter to Collingwood on the same day Nelson writes: "and should it [the weather] turn bad, we may be forced into the Mediterranean, and thus leave them [the combined fleet] at liberty to go to the Westward, although at present I am sure Mediterranean is their destination".<sup>50</sup> All these letters imply that Nelson took every movement of the enemy into account and was capable of taking all circumstances into consideration. It is a good evidence for the fact, that Nelson did not underestimate his enemies: he treated them mentally equal. The feeling of anxiety is easily noticeable in the letters: Nelson feared that the combined fleet might slip into the Mediterranean Sea.

The above-mentioned facts show, that before the 10<sup>th</sup> of October the number of remarks about the enemies is relatively small in Nelson's letters. The reason for that is the distribution of provisions and water supplies, which required a great amount of organizing activity. By the 10<sup>th</sup> of October the question of the provisions was solved and the problem of the combined fleet became the dominant topic of the letters.

The most intense correspondence was triggered undoubtedly by the marauding Rochefort squadron.<sup>51</sup> It was on the 13<sup>th</sup> of October, when Nelson first learned about their appearance, as the following letter to Collingwood clearly demonstrates: "The Rochefort Squadron has been seen in Latitude 41° 43' near Oporto, with several Prizes with them. If they cannot get to Vigo I should not be [surprised] if they push for the Mediterranean, or try to get into Cadiz, unless they go into Lisbon. Upon looking at the chart I see they can get into Vigo. The Oporto Convoy is, I fear, taken, and Agamemnon and L' Aimable had a narrow chance".<sup>52</sup> On the same day the two ships met the British fleet in the Bay of Cadiz

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<sup>48</sup> Nelson to Blackwood, 9. October 1805., see LDHN  
[http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805\\_10c.htm](http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805_10c.htm).

<sup>49</sup> Nelson to Collingwood [1], 10. October 1805., see LDHN  
[http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805\\_10c.htm](http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805_10c.htm).

<sup>50</sup> Nelson to Collingwood [3], 10. October 1805., see LDHN  
[http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805\\_10d.htm](http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805_10d.htm).

<sup>51</sup> The Rochefort squadron set sail on the 16<sup>th</sup> of July under the command of Captain Zacharie Jean-Théodore Allemand. After failing to meet Villeneuve's fleet, returning from the Caribbean Sea, he entered the port of Vigo. The squadron (five ships of the line and three frigates) put to sea once again on the 18<sup>th</sup> of August, hoping to unite its forces with those of Villeneuve's in the entrance of the English Channel. After the captain realized, that due to the blockade of Cadiz, such mission is impossible, Allemand started to marauding in the eastern waters of the Atlantic. The Rochefort squadron returned to its starting point on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of December 1805. By that time, it spent 161 days marauding, captured three warships, several hundred prisoners and destroyed numerous merchant ships. See JAMES, William: *Naval History of Great-Britain. Vol. IV*. Richard Bentley, London, 1837. pp. 148., 150.

[http://www.pbeyon.plus.com/Naval\\_History/Vol\\_IV/Vol\\_IV\\_P\\_148.htm](http://www.pbeyon.plus.com/Naval_History/Vol_IV/Vol_IV_P_148.htm), .../Vol\_IV\_P\_150.htm.

<sup>52</sup> Nelson to Collingwood, 13. October 1805., see LDHN  
[http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805\\_10d.htm](http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805_10d.htm).

unharm d. Nelson received a three day old report of Sir Edward Berry, captain of the *Agamemnon*, 64, about his encounter with the Rochefort squadron.<sup>53</sup> On the same day he sent this report to Marsden.<sup>54</sup> The day after, in a letter to Collingwood he mentions, that “Africa did not see the Rochefort Squadron, but heard of them”.<sup>55</sup>

At this point, the question of the marauding Rochefort squadron and the problem of the combined fleet seem to be interwoven in Nelson correspondence for a short time. After this more and more emphasis is put on the movement of the combined fleet, right till the morning of the battle of Trafalgar. These were the last reports of Nelson.

The news of the break-out of the Rochefort squadron made Nelson to speculate about the intentions of the combined fleet. He presumed that if the combined fleet will not put out to sea soon “I shall then rather incline to think they will detach Squadrons”, trying to force their way out of Cadiz that way.<sup>56</sup> To avoid this, in the same letter, he planned the deployment of Congreve rockets and fireships to force the combined fleet out of the port.<sup>57</sup> Moreover he expressed his expectations: “we may (I hope) flatter ourselves that some of them will cruise on our side”.<sup>58</sup>

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of October Nelson informed the Governor of Malta: “the combined Fleets are all at the Harbour’s Mouth, and must either move up again, or move off”. The letter implies Nelson’s intentions to get round to the battle as soon as possible, and to send to the Mediterranean Sea “ten Sail of the Line, two Frigates, and two Sloops, off Toulon, Genoa, and [the] Coast [of Malta], to cover our Army and to prevent [the French shipping] along shore, and to save Sardinia”.<sup>59</sup> On the same day Nelson became aware of the position of the combined fleet, and he ordered Captain George Hope, on board of *Defence* (this sail was one of the repeating ships), to sail closer to Cadiz, as according to Captain Blackwood “it seems [...] that a [French or a Spanish] Ship or two may attempt to drive the Frigates off”,<sup>60</sup> and in this case he could support them instantly.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of October Nelson, referring to the problem of the Rochefort squadron, writes to Collingwood: “Sir Richard Strachan will either spoil their cruise or lock them up

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<sup>53</sup> In his report, Berry gives detailed information about the chase, that was not infrequent at the speed of 17 knots. For the text of the report, see *LDHN*  
<http://www.wtj.com/arcdocs/f/nel1005b.htm>, footnote 14.

<sup>54</sup> Nelson to Marsden [3], 13. October 1805., see *LDHN*  
[http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805\\_10d.htm](http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805_10d.htm).

<sup>55</sup> Nelson to Collingwood, 14. October 1805., see *LDHN*  
[http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805\\_10d.htm](http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805_10d.htm). *Africa*, 64, at the time was *en route* to the British forces, anchored in the Bay of Cadiz.

<sup>56</sup> Nelson to Blackwood, 14. October 1805., see *LDHN*  
[http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805\\_10d.htm](http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805_10d.htm).

<sup>57</sup> See above, footnote 32.

<sup>58</sup> Nelson to Blackwood, 14. October 1805., see *LDHN*  
[http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805\\_10d.htm](http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805_10d.htm).

<sup>59</sup> Nelson to Ball, 15. October 1805., see *LDHN*  
[http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805\\_10e.htm](http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805_10e.htm).

<sup>60</sup> Nelson to Hope, 15. October 1805., see *LDHN*  
[http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805\\_10e.htm](http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805_10e.htm).

in Vigo".<sup>61</sup> On the next day he writes to Collingwood "it was the Rochefort Squadron that took the *Calcutta*",<sup>62</sup> then, referring to a captured French officer he claims that the enemy really attempted to intercept the *Agamemnon*, "but they fancied the Oporto and Lisbon Convoy were Ships of War. Four West Indiamen, some Whalers, and the *Calcutta*, with very few [ships] of the Lisbon Convoy, is the fruit of their cruise."<sup>63</sup> These are Nelson's last reports about the Rochefort squadron.

As it later turned out, Nelson's (and in fact Blackwood's) prediction was correct. The Franco-Spanish fleet stood out to sea, partly because of an attacking manoeuvre that was directed at the observer frigates. On the 17<sup>th</sup> of October Villeneuve learned that Admiral François Rosily arrived at Madrid five days before, so Napoleon intended to relieve him of his post, because of not leaving the port of Cadiz. As a response, he ordered Rear Admiral Charles René Magon to take a squadron of ships (seven ships of the line and a frigate) and intercept the enemy look-out ships on anchor in front of the harbour. The same day Villeneuve was informed that some time earlier a squadron of sails had left Nelson's fleet – the ships of the line of Rear Admiral Louis, escorting a convoy to Malta.<sup>64</sup> He considered the opportunity a fine one to leave the port. Finally, the whole combined fleet was put to sea the next day, on the 19<sup>th</sup> of October.<sup>65</sup>

The first signal was given by the frigate *Sirius* on the 19<sup>th</sup> of October, 7 o'clock in the morning. Through the system of repeating ships, the news of the combined fleet's movement reached Nelson in two and a half hours. As he puts in his diary: "at half-past nine, the *Mars* [...], repeated the Signal, »that the Enemy was coming out of Port«".<sup>66</sup> In fact, only Magon's squadron managed to be put to sea, but the wind calmed and the whole fleet got stuck in the mouth of the harbour. It was only on the next day when the combined fleet could leave the harbour.<sup>67</sup>

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of October, in his last letter to Lady Emma Hamilton, Nelson wrote: "In the morning, we were close to the Mouth of the Straits [of Gibraltar], but the wind had not come far enough to the Westward to allow the Combined Fleets to weather the Shoals off Trafalgar; [...] a group of them was seen off the Lighthouse of Cadiz this morning, [...] that I rather believe they will go into the Harbour before night."<sup>68</sup> This remark refers to the

<sup>61</sup> Nelson to Collingwood, 18. October 1805., see *LDHN*

[http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805\\_10d.htm](http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805_10d.htm).

<sup>62</sup> The *Calcutta*, 54, was captured by the French ship of the line *Magnanime*, 74, near Scilly, on the 26<sup>th</sup> of September, see *LDHN* <http://www.wtj.com/arcdocs/f/nel1005c.htm>, footnote 3. Particularly see JAMES pp. 147–150.

[http://www.pbenyon.plus.com/Naval\\_History/Vol\\_IV/Vol\\_IV\\_P\\_147.htm](http://www.pbenyon.plus.com/Naval_History/Vol_IV/Vol_IV_P_147.htm) – .../Vol\_IV\_P\_150.htm.

<sup>63</sup> Nelson to Collingwood, 19. October 1805., see *LDHN*

[http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805\\_10d.htm](http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805_10d.htm).

<sup>64</sup> KEEGAN p. 53.

<sup>65</sup> TRACY pp. 171–172.

<sup>66</sup> Private Diary, 19. October 1805., see *LDHN*

[http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805\\_10e.htm](http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805_10e.htm). For the time of the signal of frigate *Sirius*, see KEEGAN p. 53.

<sup>67</sup> TRACY p. 172.

<sup>68</sup> Nelson to Emma Hamilton, 20. October 1805., see *LDHN*

miscarried attempt of the enemy fleet to put to sea, by which it made itself very vulnerable against the British fleet. Nelson's manoeuvre, what directed his squadron to the mouth of the strait, aimed at preventing the combined fleet from reaching the Mediterranean Sea. His private diary is the evidence, that his manoeuvre was successful: "In the afternoon Captain Blackwood telegraphed that the Enemy seemed determined to go to the Westward; and that they shall not do if in the power of Nelson & Brontë to prevent them. [...] At six o'clock Naiad made the signal for 31 Sail [sic!] of the Enemy N.N.E."<sup>69</sup> Nelson here – as he did it in his letter to Emma Hamilton – mentions the Franco-Spanish fleet, as if it were torn into two groups. This was the result of its miscarried attempt to leave the harbour: Magon's squadron and the main force of Villeneuve were not able to unite their powers on the open sea. Though the latter diary entry suggests to some extent that the combined fleet turned back towards Cadiz, it did not, as it can be learned from Nelson's last diary entry on the morning of the battle: "At daylight saw the Enemy's Combined Fleet from East to E.S.E.; bore away; made the signal for »Order of Sailing«, and to »Prepare for Battle«; the Enemy with their heads to the Southward; at seven the Enemy wearing in succession."<sup>70</sup> The last remark, however, gives information about Villeneuve's unexpected manoeuvre of trying to turn his fleet back to Cadiz.<sup>71</sup> Villeneuve, however, did not manage to reach the harbour, and the battle of the 21<sup>th</sup> of October 1805 resulted in a deciding victory of the British fleet, when 27 British ships defeated the combined fleet of 33 ships.<sup>72</sup>

### Conclusion

The above-quoted letter passages demonstrate Nelson's self-confidence in treating the intelligence about the enemy; it can be learned from most of his letters of the time of the Trafalgar campaign. He recognized the intentions of his enemy and positioned his ships in

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[http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805\\_10e.htm](http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805_10e.htm). Lady Emma Hamilton was the wife of Lord William Hamilton, the British Ambassador accredited to the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. Nelson met the Ambassador and his wife for the first time in Naples, in the September of 1793. The beginning of Nelson and Lady Hamilton's love affair can be dated to the autumn of 1798. On the 21<sup>st</sup> of December 1798 Nelson, in order to save them from the French onslaught, moved Ferdinand IV and the royal family from Naples to Palermo, alongside the British diplomatic corps. For this deed, Ferdinand rewarded Nelson with the title of Duke of Brontë in August 1799. Nelson and the Hamiltons returned to Britain in July 1800, and they lived at Merton, Nelson's estate, purchased in October of 1801. See CALLO xxix–xxxii. (*Chronology*); TUNSTALL pp. 32., 70–73., 102–105.

<sup>69</sup> Private Diary, 20. October 1805., see *LDHN*

[http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805\\_10e.htm](http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805_10e.htm).

<sup>70</sup> Private Diary, 21. October 1805., see *LDHN*

[http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805\\_10e.htm](http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805_10e.htm).

<sup>71</sup> TRACY p. 181.

<sup>72</sup> For the most recent work in Hungarian about the battle of Trafalgar, see KRÁMLI Mihály: *A trafalgarai csata, 1805. október 21.* (The Battle of Trafalgar, 21. October 1805.) *Hadtörténelmi Közlemények* (Quarterly of Military History), December 2004. pp. 911–961.

a way, which enabled him not only to remain unseen, but also to make more extended manoeuvres. Keeping a greater distance brought him the opportunity to react to the moves of the enemy quickly, either towards the Strait of Gibraltar (and the Mediterranean Sea) or towards the Atlantic Ocean.

Nelson's determined leadership is also verified by his attitude to the reports on the Rochefort squadron. As in the case of the efforts of the combined fleet to get to the Mediterranean, there is a sense of anxiety in Nelson's letters in connection with the problem of the Rochefort squadron. The five French ships of the line posed no real threat to Nelson's fleet at Cadiz, but threatened the ships that were under way to rendezvous with the British fleet (or back from there to Britain), as the relevant letters mention. Besides, the Rochefort squadron was a distracting factor in Nelson's manoeuvres.

The reports on the movement of Vice Admiral Villeneuve's fleet are testifying the effectiveness of Nelson's system of observing ships. The "look-out ships" were able to keep the sailed-out Franco-Spanish fleet under surveillance, even in those critical hours. Even Nelson himself comments with exaltation: "*The Frigates and look-out Ships kept sight of the Enemy most admirably all night, and told me by [night] signals which tack they were upon.*"<sup>73</sup> As an experienced mariner and commander, he understood the problems of the enemy and took them into account when planning operations against them. His letter to Emma Hamilton, in which he foresaw that the combined fleet will turn back to the harbour, also testifies this, although this manoeuvre took place later.

One can see that Admiral Horatio Nelson possessed up-to-date information about his enemies in the campaign of Trafalgar and used the information wisely when leading the forces under his command. All these factors played an important role in his complete victory over the combined Franco-Spanish fleet at Trafalgar on the 21<sup>st</sup> of October 1805 – and in shattering Napoleon's endeavors to invade Britain.

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<sup>73</sup> Private Diary, 20. October 1805., see *LDHN*  
[http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805\\_10e.htm](http://www.wtj.com/archives/nelson/1805_10e.htm).