3522 Thoughts upon Naval Measures to be taken Sept: 14th 1779, with an account of the then state of the English fleet.

J.H

To suggest the proper modes of distressing the enemy is not very difficult, but to find the means of carrying those measures into execution is not easy; it is to little purpose to form plans, without at the same time pointing out the manner of securing their success; therefore it will be necessary to lay down not only what ought, but what can be done, and to shew the utmost force that can be collected for any Naval exertions.

The parts that call for our most immediate attention, are Gibraltar and Minorca, the Leeward

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Islands & Jamaica; & these, particularly the latter, must fall unless immediately succoured.

As to the first; something must without delay be attempted, at least to throw in a supply of stores & provisions; but to this the obstacles are very great if not unsurmountable, and these obstacles will multiply as soon as the campaign is over and the Spaniards are returned to Cadiz to refit; for then whatever ships are sent by us to Gibraltar, will not only be lost to our home defence, but if they remain in the Mediterranean will inevitably fall into the hands of the enemy who are between them & England with a superior force which we cannot contend with unless we give up all

all attention to the defence of this Island.
The only modes then that are left us, are either to endeavour to throw in supplies by single ships which must take the advantage of favourable winds & dark nights to push thro the straits,+ or if a proper opportunity offers to send them under Convoy of two or three Ships of the Line, which it is to be supposed would be superior to the Spanish Squadron now blocking the straits mouth: If it should appear that the whole Spanish fleet are in Brest or still remain joined to the French on this side Cape Finisterre, this is the favourable moment for executing either or perhaps both of these measures; and I should think that the Edgar, Alcide, & Ajax might be appropriated

+ Admiral Duff has pointed out the mode of performing this service in his instructions to the Captain of the Thetis, a copy which is hereto annexed, at the conclusion of this paper.

to this service: there are no other ships in such degree of forwardness; for I hold it as a fundamen=tal point that nothing is to be taken from Sir Charles Hardys fleet till his cruize is ended, which it is supposed will last at least two months from the time of his sailing.

This measure however is attended with much danger, first from the chance of their being intercepted in their way by a superior force, and afterwards, if they escape, by the difficulty how the Ships are to return home; for a very small detachment from Spain, will lock them up in the Mediterranean where they will be lost to the service, and must abide the fate of the Fortress they are sent to relieve, & fall with it

if it is taken: it therefore possibly might not be unadviseable for these Ships to leave Gibraltar with the first strong easterly wind that blows after their arrival and proceed directly to the West Indies to reinforce the Squadron in those Seas.

The three Ships above mentioned are particularly pointed out, because they will probably be ready by the time the supplies for Gibraltar are ready, that is to say in about a month from this date.

As to the Leeward Islands perhaps some measures may be taken to ensure & maintain a superiority there with Ships but not without much difficulty; if D'Estaing is come to Europe, the moment is favourable, so is the season; troops & line of battle ships

cannot be employed to any material purpose in the winter in america; might it not then be adviseable to dispatch orders instantly to the Admiral & General to send a sufficient force in ships & troops to act offensively, & to recover some of our Islands, if not conquer some of those originally in possession of the enemy? But the measure of all others that is most be wished would be the reduction of Martinico, if that could be effected the whole would fall with it, and the stroke would be so sensibly felt by France that it would probably put an end to the War.

The state of our fleet in the Leeward Islands is, it is to be feared very deplorable; there remain still under the command of admiral Parker 22 sail of the Line, but of these all that have

been deeply concerned in the late action, & some others, must return home before they can be considered as fit for every service. But if D'Estaing is returned to Europe (as some suppose him to be with 13 ships which I own I can scarcely believe) admiral Parker will still retain a superiority when the disabled ships are sailed for England; and we must at all events take care to have a rein==forcement of fresh ships there with as little delay as possible, but where they can be taken from till the campaign is over I profess I cannot point out; and even then the losing them from home service will be most severely felt in our principal & perhaps most vulnerable part. There is one circumstance concerning the Leeward Islands that deserves our most serious attention,

and without something is done in that the French will allways mantain their Fleets & Islands in good condition, and be from the innumerable distresses which we are subject to. from conversing with admiral Barrington & from what I knew before I am convinced that two thirds of the provisions that we carry out under Convoy from England and Ireland is, on its arrival in our Islands, immediately shipped off for St: Eustatia & from thence to Martinico, without which the French could not keep their fleet in a condition for sea. it is idle to talk of restraining such abuses by Laws; the rapacity of Merchants overbear all legal obstructions, and nothing but more forcible coercion can restrain from anything in which they find their immediate interest.

I come next to Jamaica upon which I can I speak with trembling, for I see the danger with which that Island is surrounded without being able to suggest any effectual means of giving it relief. Sir Peter Parker has with him only one ship of the Line, three or four of 50 & 40 guns & some frigates; the Vengeance that was sent to reinforce him is now at the Leeward Islands, and by the last letters seems to be detained there as part of that squadron.

The Spaniards either have or certainly will detach some force from Europe, and I believe they have several line of battle ships now at the Havanna; and as to land forces, what the French & they have at St. Domingo, will if it is to be feared be more than sufficient to take Jamaica, allmost without striking a blow: indeed

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indeed I am in constant apprehension of hearing that the blow is allready struck.

all these important services must be filled by ships at home & that will be soon ready for sea; let us see what those ships are, and consider what our stock is before we make draughts from which it may not be able to answer.

and here I cannot help laying it down as the foundation of the whole that the safety of these kingdoms requires that this stock should not be drawn so low, as to leave us unable to resist the united efforts of the house of Bourbon in these seas: fighting for our existence as a state with a force very inferior is a most lamentable consideration, but such will our situation be if we make our detachments without

having that object allways before our eyes.

Let us then consider what our Naval force really is, what it will be, and at what periods it is to be hoped any additions may be made to it; but here I must allways desire to be understood that I do not speak with precision as to the time of the reading of any ship; I can only tell my opinion as to what now appears probable, for delays in building and equipment often occur so unexpectedly from being obliged to take men off for more pressing services &c from other causes, that it would be the utmost indiscretion to speak with any degree of certainty upon that subject.

Sir Charles Hardy has now under his command only 40 good & serviceable ships of the line, for two of 42 namely the

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Blenheim & Arrogant are only fit to go out in the Summer upon such an emergency as the late one when the enemy was at our door; and they cannot now venture beyond Plymouth or the Lizard without manifest risque to the lives of their crews: these ships however it is to be hoped may be so repaired in the course of the winter, as to become effective & fit for Summer service in the channel.

None of these 40 ships as I have allready said can be had till the campaign is over; those that are now in commission and in any forwardness are the

Guns
90 Sandwich
90 Ocean
74 Edgar
74 Alcide
74 Ajax
74 Montague

Those that will be ready (that is to say out of the

Shipwrights hands) before the beginning of April next, follow, with the probable times marked for their being in that state of readiness: after which there must be allowed them one with another at least two months before they can be manned, stored & fit for Sea; and if men are not to be had no time can be fixed for their being ready: and it is to be observed that unless the Ordnance Cooperates strongly in dispatching their part of this business, a great deal of the equipment cannot be depended on.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 74 | Dublin | November |
| 74 | Torbay | November |
| 90 | Barfleur | December |
| 64 | Inflexible | January |
| 74 | Bellona | middle of March |
| 74 | Hero | March |
| 74 | Kent | March |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 84 | Royal William — | end of March |
| 90 | Blenheim ——— | end of March |
| 74 | Arrogant ——— | end of March |

To these may be added the crippled ships that will return from the West Indies, none of which it is to be supposed will want any repair that will employ a length of time; so that I imagine I may venture to say that they will all be ready for service in the Spring: for the sake of accuracy I will suppose these ships to be about eight in number.

Our whole force then that we have, and posibly may have at home fit for sea between this and the beginning of April 1780.

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| Sir Charles Hardys fleet — | 40 |
| nearly ready for sea ——— | 6 |
| coming from the W: Indies ——— | 8 |
| will be out of the Strip with hands by the end of the year ——— | 4 |
| | 58 |

six more will be in service in the middle of the summer, but cannot be depended on sooner.

Upon this force all our Naval operations depend; we have no other source to draw from and no possibility of augmenting our strength; on the contrary all accidents are against us, and our numbers may be delayed or diminished but cannot be encreased.

But it will be asked, why when we have as great if not a greater force than ever we had the enemy are superior to us? to this it is to be answered that England till this time was never engaged in a sea war with the House of Bourbon thoroughly united, their naval force unbroken, and having no other war or object to draw off their attention & resources:

we unfortunately have an additional war upon our hands, which essentially drains our finances, & employs a very considerable part of our Navy & army. We have no one friend or ally to assist us, on the contrary all those who ought to be our allies, except Portugal, act against us in supplying our enemies with the means of equipping their fleets; but still had we been early enough in our preparations, and had not suffered them to go on arming & building without keeping pace with them, their superiority would certainly have not been so decided. I think it is very easy to demonstrate that our Naval force is at this time greater than ever it was at any other period, we now have

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| Ships in actual service | |
| at home & abroad — | 79 |
| Guardships — | 3 |
| nearly ready — | 6 |
| | 88 |
| of these there are | |
| with Sir Charles Hardy — | 42 |
| in the Mediterranean — | 1 |
| Leeward Islands — | 22 |
| Jamaica — | 1 |
| East Indies — | 8 |
| America — | 5 |
| at home fitting — | 6 |
| Guardships — | 3 |
| will be ready in the Spring | 4 |
| to these add | |
| Taken by the enemy | 1 |
| Ship wrecked — | 2 |
| total equipment since the beginning of the war | 95 |

But these ships are exceedingly superior in size & number of guns to those employed in the last war; for of those that were in commission in the year 1759 which was the greatest effort ever made till now, when the

whole number of line of battle amounted to 97, there were to be reckoned 29 of 60 guns & 5 guardships; (and it is to be observed that this exertion could not be carried to this extent till the fourth year of the equipment) whereas in our number of 88 are to be included only 5 of 60 guns & 3 guardships.

By this state it will appear that before April we shall, nearly in number, but greatly in strength have exceeded every former exertion.

But, under all our difficulties, if, as I have allready said, our equipments had began sooner; or had an effectual blow been struck against the French fleet before they were joined by Spain, we should probably still have been triumphant

every where; but I am not yet inclined to despair, if we manage the force we have with prudence our case does not appear to me yet to be desperate; but as we have a deep stake to play for, we ought in my opinion to husband our strength & to employ it only on those services which are of the most importance, and have a probability of being attended with success.

Extract of Admiral Duffs order to Captain Gell of the Thetis, dated Gibraltar July 26th 1779

You are hereby required & directed to proceed to Lisbon and about the end of September or in the month of October to take on board as much bread & flour and other provisions

as you can stow so as to keep your Ships in sailing trim, but particularly of the two former articles Bread & Flour which will be most wanted here; and therewith you are to make the best of your way hither, using all manner of caution in your passage, and not on any account to enter the Straits but with a strong Westerly wind & in the Night time, so as to fetch this place before daylight in the morning, which may ensure your safety

Signed Rob: Duff.