

By a French Seaman

An Account of the Action of the French Fleet Commanded  
by the Comptre de Grasse, with the British Fleet off  
Guadaloupe & Dominique on the 9<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup> April 1782;

Mons<sup>r</sup> De Grasse's intention was to have sent  
away the Convoy from Fort Royal by Night, -  
escorted by two Ships of the Line and Two  
frigates, that they might be advanced before us,  
as we were retarded by the St<sup>e</sup> Esprit which was  
not ready for sea - The Convoy went out on the  
night of the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> of April, in the hope that  
they would pass unnoticed by the Enemy,  
which however did not happen, as was imag-  
-ined, they having got sight of the English, were  
obliged to put back again the same day; - This  
determined the Admiral to sail without  
the St<sup>e</sup> Esprit, having learnt on the 8<sup>th</sup> Instant  
that the English Fleet had sailed from St<sup>e</sup>  
Lucia, at the same time observing four Ships  
and a frigate of theirs watching our motions;  
The whole Fleet got under weigh in the Evening  
from Fort Royal, consisting of thirty four Ships  
with our Convoy at 9 we got sight of the Enemy,  
at 10 all our Convoy being out we steerd for  
Guadaloupe where we were to take another  
Convoy - during the Night we steerd N & N<sup>e</sup>  
with a fresh breeze at East, at 5 in the morning

we

we perceived the English Fleet to Seeward of us in Line of Battle - at 25 minutes past 6 the Admiral made the signal to prepare for action, at 7 he made the signal for the Convoy to anchor under Guadaloupe - between 7 & 9 o'clock the French Fleet made several movements to form the Line of Battle, and also to favour the Convoy in getting to anchor at Guadaloupe before the action - at  $\frac{1}{2}$  past 9 the Admiral gave orders to the Whole Fleet to form with the Admiral on the same point of bearing, as best corresponded with the intended position - at 9:50 the signal was made for action to the ships the most advanced, and to make the attack on the Enemy's Van - at 10 the signal was made to Tack together - at 25<sup>th</sup> past 10 the signal was made for the Commanders of the 2<sup>d</sup> & 3<sup>d</sup> Divisions to charge themselves with manœuvring and conducting their own Squadrons, - at 37<sup>th</sup> past 10 the above signal was annulled - at 50 past - the signal to the Destier that she was not in her station & ordered him into it, - at 58<sup>th</sup> past 10 the firing ceased throughout, at 3 past 11 the signal to haul to the Wind & reserve the Fire - at 24<sup>th</sup> past 11 the signal to close the Line, at 41<sup>st</sup> past 11 the firing recommenced in the Rear - at 4<sup>th</sup> past 12 the signal for the Van to keep close to the Wind, at 15<sup>th</sup> past 12 the

Van

Van began to fire as did all the Line, and 4<sup>th</sup> 1/2<sup>th</sup> noon the action became general - & the Signal for a close Line - at 3/4<sup>th</sup> noon the Van & Center very close to the Enemy most vigorously engaged, at 1<sup>st</sup> 1/2<sup>th</sup> One the Pluton, shot away the Main topmast of the Enemy's Van ship, and her main yard came down upon Deck - at 1<sup>st</sup> 3/4<sup>th</sup> past 1 the Triumphant made the signal for the 2<sup>d</sup> Squadron to haul the Wind together, at which time the English ship that had lost her Topmast bore up before the Wind - at 4<sup>th</sup> past 2 the firing ceased, when part of the English Ships bore up, which made us think they had suffered much - maltraitée we then saw that they had 39 or 40 ships at least, 5 of which of three Decks, and we were all but 30 - The S<sup>t</sup> Esprit at Martinique 2 Ships with the Convoy - the Auguste with another whose name is not known were not in action - those that were distinguished themselves most gallantly - The Triumphant, and the Pluton signalized themselves the best, The Pluton engaged during two hours with a ship of 80 Guns whom he made bear up - The Marquis de Vandeville performed the most gallant manœuvres that could possibly be done - having bore up three times in the Fire, but finding himself so gall'd by his opponent and three others that attack'd him, that he would have been cut up, had he not Tacked, in doing which he

he was twice taken - but he afterwards repaid them well for it - While the Fleets were in Action the General sent a Tender to order the Convoy to get underway from Guadaloupe who immediately shaped their course for S<sup>t</sup> Domingo, and at 6 in the Evening the Sternmost of them were not in sight - We remained Cruizing off Guadaloupe from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup> the better to facilitate the Convoy getting on before us - well knowing that the English watched with attention our motions, in which they did not fail, we still continued plying to Windward the better to favour the Convoys escape, and considering our advantageous situation from having the Wind, and knowing the superiority of the Enemy - I believe it was not the Generals design to risk a second Action, knowing that if we were not successful we must fail in our Expedition -

11<sup>th</sup> The 11<sup>th</sup> at 4 in the morning we spoke the Triumphant, who directed us to inform the General that he had given orders to his Division to force sail, and to ask the General if it was his intention to weather the Saints - also to enquire if the Convoy was gone - the Generals answer to us was, that whatever signals Mons<sup>ie</sup>ur de Vandreville should make were well - That he intended to Pass to Windward of the Saints, and that the Convoy went away the day of Action, and that at  
five

five in the morning after, not one of them were  
to be seen - This is what made me conjecture that  
he had no Intention to seek another Battle, but  
rather to pursue the object of the Expedition,  
but the misfortune was that one of his Ships  
had lost her Fore mast, which rendered her  
unable to keep Company, and was on the point  
of being carried off by the Enemy - This obliged  
the General to bear up with his Fleet, to follow  
and protect the disabled Ship, who was under the  
necessity to bear away before the Wind, and engag-  
ed us in a second Action, which proved the  
hottest and the most Vigorous that has happened  
for a century past - Having bore up the whole  
night we found ourselves brought down - to fight  
with the English; who at 5 in the morning were  
ready to receive us - at 6 the General made the  
signal to prepare for action, at 7 past 7 he gave  
orders for the Fleet to pay attention - at the same  
hour he made the signal de Retiment to form  
the order of Battle reversed on the Starboard Tack,  
at 10 past 7 the signal for the whole to bear up  
together on the bearing specified SSW, at 8 a Quick  
Cannonade commenced - at 10 past 8 the signal  
to close the Line - at 8<sup>th</sup> past 8 the signal to haul to  
the Wind together; which was not well executed,  
by reason of the advantage of Situation given up  
to the Enemy - They then fought on Contrary Tacks,  
the General had reason to hope for much success -  
the fire being as Brilliant from one as from the  
other

13 April -

other - we were cutting up the Rear of the English  
while their Van had pass'd, and had not woe to  
give them aid, The Action continued Violent and  
at the Instant we recover'd ourselves master of the  
Field of Battle, we perceived the Glorieux, had  
lost her Main & Mizzen Masts - at  $\frac{1}{4}$  past 9 the  
Ville de Paris and all our Van were close to the  
Rear of the Enemy keeping up a Quick fire;  
La Ville de Paris had her Main top sail but in two  
when she immediately began to bind another  
and went to the assistance of the Glorieux, who  
kept up an incessant fire; Two ships of three  
Decks at 37<sup>th</sup> p<sup>t</sup> of carried away his Foremast and  
Mainsprit - at 10 we saw an English ship that  
had lost her Foremast - another her Topmast -  
at 15<sup>th</sup> past 10 the Van of the Enemy were, at the  
same time the General gave directions to make  
an attack upon the Rear of the Enemy - at 15<sup>th</sup>  
Past 10 an English ship lost her Main Topmast,  
and two others their Jib Booms, at noon the  
Richmond bore up in the Fire to take the  
Glorieux in tow, but was forced <sup>to</sup> quit her, several  
of our ships - attempted to Succour her, but they were  
obliged to bear up likewise; by the number of the  
Enemy that fell upon them; they being but three  
against Twenty Three, which was the cause of  
abandoning the Glorieux; who was protected  
and

and throughout, shewed every mark of disting-  
-uished Bravery to the very last moment -

From this time the two Fleets kept a quick fire  
without ceasing till half past 4 in the Evening

At 9 we saw a large Fire bearing S 66° at 115<sup>m</sup> ft  
9 we saw the Explosion of a ship but did not  
know whether she was English or French -  
we have apprehension for the Sovereign - we are  
however told that the French Fleet had made,  
towards St Domingo, and the English were seen  
trying to fetch St Lucia or Antigua to repair  
their damages, who have been very tough handled,

Herewith annexed is an Account  
of their state as seen from the Island of  
Guadaloupe - Here follows a List of 19 British  
ships that had suffered in the Action, the  
loss of Masts & Yards; Forty Two sail were  
then counted tho they were once forty nine  
in number, it is not known what is become of  
the others - of our own no positive accounts  
have been heard -

I thought to have given you pleasure  
by this Account, for which reason I am in a  
hurry to send it, as to morrow we set sail  
for St Domingo; Inclosed is the number of our  
ships

Ships that did not come into Action —

The first crippled ship described has  
no yard Rigged but the Spritsail Topsail Yards  
her maintopmast Unrigged her Top Gallant  
mast down and no Sails Bent; —