

PREFACE

The inaccessibility of the official Fighting Instructions from time to time issued to the fleet has long been a recognised stumbling-block to students of naval history. Only a few copies of them were generally known to exist; fewer still could readily be consulted by the public, and of these the best known had been wrongly dated. The discovery therefore of a number of seventeenth century Instructions amongst the Earl of Dartmouth's papers, which he had generously placed at the disposal of the Society, seemed to encourage an attempt to make something like a complete collection. The result, such as it is, is now offered to the Society. It is by no means exhaustive. Some sets of Instructions seem to be lost beyond recall; but, on the other hand, a good deal of hitherto barren ground has been filled, and it is hoped that the collection may be of some assistance for a fresh study of the principles which underlie the development of naval tactics.

It is of course as documents in the history of tactics that the Fighting Instructions have the greatest practical value, and with this aspect of them in view I have done my best to illustrate their genesis, intention, and significance by extracts from contemporary authorities. Without such illustration the Instructions would be but barren food, neither nutritive nor easily digested. The embodiment of this illustrative matter has to some extent involved a departure from the ordinary form of the Society's publications. Instead of a general introduction, a series of introductory notes to each group of Instructions has been adopted, which it is feared will appear to bear an excessive proportion to the Instructions themselves. There seemed, however, no other means of dealing with the illustrative matter in a consecutive way. The extracts from admirals' despatches and contemporary treatises, and the remarks of officers and officials concerned with the preparation or the execution of the Instructions, were for the most part too fragmentary to be treated as separate documents, or too long or otherwise unsuitable for foot-notes. The

only adequate way therefore was to embody them in Introductory Notes, and this it is hoped will be found to justify their bulk.

A special apology is, however, due for the Introductory Note on Nelson's memoranda. For this I can only plead their great importance, and the amount of illustrative matter that exists from the pens of Nelson's officers and opponents. For no other naval battle have we so much invaluable comment from men of the highest capacity who were present. The living interest of it all is unsurpassed, and I have therefore been tempted to include all that came to hand, encouraged by the belief that the fullest material for the study of Nelson's tactics at the battle of Trafalgar could not be out of place in a volume issued by the Society in the centenary year.

As to the general results, perhaps the most striking feature which the collection brings out is that sailing tactics was a purely English art. The idea that we borrowed originally from the Dutch is no longer tenable. The Dutch themselves do not even claim the invention of the line. Indeed in no foreign authority, either Dutch, French or Spanish, have I been able to discover a claim to the invention of any device in sailing tactics that had permanent value. Even the famous tactical school which was established in France at the close of the Seven Years' War, and by which the French service so brilliantly profited in the War of American Independence, was worked on the old lines of Hoste's treatise. Morogues' *Tactique Navale* was its text-book, and his own teaching was but a scientific and intelligent elaboration of a system from which the British service under the impulse of Anson, Hawke, and Boscawen was already shaking itself free.

Much of the old learning which the volume contains is of course of little more than antiquarian interest, but the bulk of it in the opinion of those best able to judge should be found of living value. All systems of tactics must rest ultimately on the dominant weapon in use, and throughout the sailing period the dominant weapon was, as now, the gun. In face of so fundamental a resemblance no tactician can afford to ignore the sailing system merely because the method of propulsion and the nature of the material have changed. It is not the principles of tactics that such changes affect, but merely the method of applying them.

Of even higher present value is the process of thought, the line of argument by which the old tacticians arrived at their conclusions good and bad. In studying the long series of Instructions we are able to detach certain attitudes of mind which led to the atrophy of principles essentially good, and others which pushed the system forward on healthy lines and flung off obsolete restraints. In an art so shifting and amorphous as naval tactics, the difference between health and disease must always lie in a certain vitality of mind with which it must be approached and practised. It is only in the history of tactics, under all conditions of weapons, movement and material, that the conditions of that vitality can be studied.

For a civilian to approach the elucidation of such points without professional assistance would be the height of temerity, and my thanks therefore are particularly due for advice and encouragement to Admiral Sir Cyprian Bridge, Vice-Admiral Sir Reginald Custance, Rear-Admiral H.S.H. Prince Louis of Battenberg, and to Captain Slade, Captain of the Royal Naval College. To Sir Reginald Custance and Professor Laughton I am under a special obligation, for not only have they been kind enough to read the proofs of the work, but they have been indefatigable in offering suggestions, the one from his high professional knowledge and the other from his unrivalled learning in naval history. Any value indeed the work may be found to possess must in a large measure be attributed to them. Nor can I omit to mention the valuable assistance which I have received from Mr. Ferdinand Brand and Captain Garbett, R.N., in unearthing forgotten material in the Libraries of the Admiralty and the United Service Institution.

I have also the pleasure of expressing my obligations to the Earl of Dartmouth, the Earl of St. Germans, and Vice-Admiral Sir Charles Knowles, Bart., for the use of the documents in their possession, as well as to many others whose benefits to the Society will be found duly noted in the body of the work.

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PART 1

EARLY TUDOR PERIOD

I. ALONSO DE CHAVES, *circa* 1530

II. SIR THOMAS AUDLEY, 1530

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ALONSO DE CHAVES ON SAILING TACTICS

INTRODUCTORY

The following extract from the *Espejo de Navegantes*, or *Seamen's Glass*, of Alonso de Chaves serves to show the development which naval tactics had reached at the dawn of the sailing epoch. The treatise was apparently never published. It was discovered by Captain Fernandez Duro, the well-known historian of the Spanish navy, amongst the manuscripts in the library of the Academy of History at Madrid. The exact date of its production is not known; but Alonso de Chaves was one of a group of naval writers and experts who flourished at the court of the Emperor Charles V in the first half of the sixteenth century.[1] He was known to Hakluyt, who mentions him in connection with his own cherished idea of getting a lectureship in navigation established in London. 'And that it may appear,' he writes in dedicating the second edition of his *Voyages* to the lord admiral, 'that this is no vain fancy nor device of mine it may please your lordship to understand that the late Emperor Charles the Fifth ... established not only a Pilot-Major for the examination of such as sought to take charge of ships in that voyage' (*i.e.* to the Indies), 'but also founded a notable lecture of the Art of Navi-

gation which is read to this day in the Contractation House at Seville. The Readers of the Lecture have not only carefully taught and instructed the Spanish mariners by word of mouth, but also have published sundry exact and worthy treatises concerning marine causes for the direction and encouragement of posterity. The learned works of three of which Readers, namely of Alonso de Chaves, of Hieronymus de Chaves, and of Roderigo Zamorano, came long ago very happily to my hands, together with the straight and severe examining of all such Masters as desire to take charge for the West Indies.' Since therefore De Chaves was an official lecturer to the Contractation House, the Admiralty of the Indies, we may take it that he speaks with full authority of the current naval thought of the time. That he represented a somewhat advanced school seems clear from the pains he takes in his treatise to defend his opinions against the old idea which still prevailed, that only galleys and oared craft could be marshalled in regular order. 'Some may say,' he writes, 'that at sea it is not possible to order ships and tactics in this way, nor to arrange beforehand so nicely for coming to the attack or bringing succour just when wanted, and that therefore there is no need to labour an order of battle since order cannot be kept. To such I answer that the same objection binds the enemy, and that with equal arms he who has taken up the best formation and order will be victor, because it is not possible so to break up an order with wind and sea as that he who is more without order shall not be worse broken up and the sooner defeated. For ships at sea are as war-horses on land, since admitting they are not very nimble at turning at any pace, nevertheless a regular formation increases their power. Moreover, at sea, so long as there be no storm, there will be nothing to hinder the using of any of the orders with which we have dealt, and if there be a storm the same terror will strike the one side as the other; for the storm is enough for all to war with, and in fighting it they will have peace with one another.'

At first sight it would seem that De Chaves in this argument takes no account of superiority of seamanship—the factor which was destined to turn the scale against Spain upon the sea. But the following passage with which he concludes shows that he regarded seamanship as the controlling factor in every case. 'And if,' he argues, 'they say that the enemy will take the same thought and care

as I, I answer that when both be equal in numbers and arms, then in such case he who shall be more dexterous and have more spirit and fortitude he will conquer, the which he will not do, although he have more and better arms and as much spirit as he will, if he be wanting in good order and counsel. Just as happens in fencing, that the weaker man if he be more dexterous gives more and better hits than the other who does not understand the beats nor knows them, although he be the stronger. And the same holds good with any army whatsoever on land, and it has been seen that the smaller by their good order have defeated the stronger.'

From the work in question Captain Fernandez Duro gives four sections or chapters in Appendix 12 to the first volume of his history,[2] namely, 1. 'Of war or battle at sea,' relating to single ship actions. 2. 'The form of a battle and the method of fighting,' relating to armament, fire discipline, boarding and the like. 3. 'Of a battle of one fleet against another.' 4. 'Battle.' In the last two sections is contained the earliest known attempt to formulate a definite fighting formation and tactical system for sailing fleets, and it is from these that the following extracts have been translated.

It will be noted that in the root-idea of coming as quickly as possible to close quarters, and in relying mainly on end-on fire, the proposed system is still quite mediæval and founded mainly upon galley tactics. But a new and advanced note is struck in the author's insistence on the captain-general's keeping out of action as long as possible, instead of leading the attack in the time-honoured way. We should also remark the differentiation of types, for all of which a duty was provided in action. This was also a survival of galley warfare, and rapidly disappeared with the advance of the sailing man-of-war, never to be revived, unless perhaps it be returning in the immediate future, and we are to see torpedo craft of the latest devising taking the place and function of the *barcas*, with their axes and augers, and armoured cruisers those of the *naos de socorro*.

ESPEJO DE NAVEGANTES, circa 1530.

[+Fernandez Duro, Armada Española i. App. 12+.]

Chapter III. — Of a Battle between One Fleet and Another.

[*Extract.*]

... When the time for battle is at hand the captain-general should order the whole fleet to come together that he may set them in order, since a regular order is no less necessary in a fleet of ships for giving battle to another fleet than it is in an army of soldiers for giving battle to another army.

Thus, as in an army, the men-at-arms form by themselves in one quarter to make and meet charges, and the light horse in another quarter to support, pursue, and harass[3] so in a fleet, the captain-general ought to order the strongest and largest ships to form in one quarter to attack, grapple, board and break-up the enemy, and the lesser and weaker ships in another quarter apart, with their artillery and munitions to harass, pursue, and give chase to the enemy if he flies, and to come to the rescue wherever there is most need.

The captain-general should form a detachment of his smaller and lighter vessels, to the extent of one-fourth part of his whole fleet, and order them to take station on either side of the main body. I mean that they should always keep as a separate body on the flanks of the main body, so that they can see what happens on one side and on the other.

He should admonish and direct every one of the ships that she shall endeavour to grapple with the enemy in such a way that she shall not get between two of them so as to be boarded and engaged on both sides at once.[4]

* * * * *

Having directed and set in order all the aforesaid matters, the captain-general should then marshal the other three-quarters of the fleet that remain in the following manner.

He should consider his position and the direction of the wind, and how to get the advantage of it with his fleet.

Then he should consider the order in which the enemy is formed, whether they come in a close body or in line ahead,[5] and whether

they are disposed in square bodies or in a single line,[6] and whether the great ships are in the centre or on the flanks, and in what station is the flagship; and all the other considerations which are essential to the case he should take in hand.

By all means he should do his best that his fleet shall have the weather-gage; for if there was no other advantage he will always keep free from being blinded by the smoke of the guns, so as to be able to see one to another; and for the enemy it will be the contrary, because the smoke and fire of our fleet and of their own will keep driving upon them, and blinding them in such a manner that they will not be able to see one another, and they will fight among themselves from not being able to recognise each other.

Everything being now ready, if the enemy have made squadrons of their fleet we should act in the same manner in ours, placing always the greater ships in one body as a vanguard to grapple first and receive the first shock; and the captain-general should be stationed in the centre squadron, so that he may see those which go before and those which follow.

Each of the squadrons ought to sail in line abreast,[7] so that all can see the enemy and use their guns without getting in each other's way, and they must not sail in file one behind the other, because thence would come great trouble, as only the leading ships could fight. In any case a ship is not so nimble as a man to be able to face about and do what is best.[8]

The rearguard should be the ships that I have called the supports, which are to be the fourth part of the fleet, and the lightest and best sailers; but they must not move in rear of the fleet, because they would not see well what is passing so as to give timely succour, and therefore they ought always to keep an offing on that side or flank of the fleet where the flagship is, or on both sides if they are many; and if they are in one body they should work to station themselves to windward for the reasons aforesaid.

And if the fleet of the enemy shall come on in one body in line abreast,[9] ours should do the same, placing the largest and strongest ships in the centre and the lightest on the flanks of the battle, seeing that those which are in the centre always receive greater injury because necessarily they have to fight on both sides.

And if the enemy bring their fleet into the form of a lance-head or triangle, then ours ought to form in two lines [*alas*], keeping the advanced extremities furthest apart and closing in the rear, so as to take the enemy between them and engage them on both fronts, placing the largest ships in the rear and the lightest at the advanced points, seeing that they can most quickly tack in upon the enemy opposed to them.

And if the enemy approach formed in two lines [*alas*], ours ought to do the same, placing always the greatest ships over against the greatest of the enemy, and being always on the look-out to take the enemy between them; and on no account must ours penetrate into the midst of the enemy's formation [*batalla*], because arms and smoke will envelope them on every side and there will be no way of relieving them.

The captain-general having now arrayed his whole fleet in one of the aforesaid orders according as it seems best to him for giving battle, and everything being ready for battle, all shall bear in mind the signals he shall have appointed with flag or shot or topsail, that all may know at what time to attack or board or come to rescue or retreat, or give chase. The which signals all must understand and remember what they are to do when such signals are made, and likewise the armed boats shall take the same care and remember what they ought to do, and perform their duty.[10]

Chapter IV. – Battle

Then the flagship shall bid a trumpet sound, and at that signal all shall move in their aforesaid order; and as they come into range they shall commence to play their most powerful artillery, taking care that the first shots do not miss, for, as I have said, when the first shots hit, inasmuch as they are the largest, they strike great dread and terror into the enemy; for seeing how great hurt they suffer, they think how much greater it will be at close range and so mayhap they will not want to fight, but strike and surrender or fly, so as not to come to close quarters.

Having so begun firing, they shall always first play the largest guns, which are on the side or board towards the enemy, and likewise they shall move over from the other side those guns which have wheeled carriages to run on the upper part of the deck and