

12th May 1853

LETTER TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

The Victory at Trafalgar

My attention has been incidentally called to Rear Admiral Pasco's letter headed "*The Redoubtable* and the *Victory*" wherein the gallant Admiral appeals to Rear Admiral Sir George Westphal, Commanders Carslake and Lancaster, and Lieutenants Rivern and Pollard, in living evidence in corroboration of his own of what ought to be an unquestioned historical fact, that not even a single foe set his foot on the deck on the *Victory* in the Battle of Trafalgar.

I believe there is now scarcely a person living who can testify to this incontrovertible fact better than I can do, as I was quartered on the forecastle of the *Victory*; and having been, by the merciful interposition of an overruling Providence, singularly fortunate in not having received even a scratch, I was of course at my post during the whole action – latterly with few left beside me in that particular part of ship. Lieutenant Bligh, who commanded on the forecastle, was desperately wounded in the early action and carried off deck to the cockpit where he was receiving medical attention during Nelson's final moments; he is now dead in 1834, and so is the boatswain whose name I now forget, who was also wounded but not severely. Had a Frenchman succeeded in gaining a footing on any part of the *Victory* it would have been on her forecastle as being that part of ship the *Redoubtable* first came into contact with.

I verily believe that it was the premeditated intention of the *Redoubtable* to board the *Victory*; and that the historical fact, as detailed in the *Moniteur* of that day, of the favourable reception graciously conceded by Napoleon to M. Lucas the gallant captain of the *Redoubtable*, is so far correct wherein it is stated that he [Lucas] perceiving it was the intention of the *Victory* to break through their line, filled his main topsail [which was previously shivering] and shot ahead with the view of stopping her progress and ordering his men into the lower rigging for the purpose of dropping onto *Victory's* deck the moment the collision took place – which collision, however, was no sooner effected than the idea of boarding was soon abandoned. M. Lucas further detailed that when *Victory* first opened her fire, he could compare the dropping of his men from the rigging to nothing else, save the autumnal fall of the leaf. So, circumstances, he further goes on to detail in this interview, that he ordered the remaining part of his crew to the great guns; but having, when the order was given for boarding previously directed [by way of caution] his lower deck guns to be run in and the ports lowered, no use could be made of them for the close contact of the ships, now broadside to broadside, and this may account for what I believe was the fact that not a single great gun was fired by the *Redoubtable* after coming in actual collision with the *Victory*, the *Redoubtable* ultimately being in close collision with our ship the *Temeraire* on the other side, and which ship was grappled in like manner with the French ship *Le Foujeux*, the four ships forming at one period of the action a compact solid mass, the *Temeraire* being in close contact with an enemy on each side, But that a Frenchman ever appeared above the hammock nettings of the *Victory* is purely a baseless assertion.

What the more confirms me in an opinion of the truth of that part of M. Lucas' narrative that he made preparations for boarding is, that when the *Victory* was in the act of breaking through the enemy's irregular kind of double [I may say dovetailed] line, and we were assiduously, on the port side of the forecastle pouring into the stern of *La Bucentaure* and the *La Santissima Trinidad*, as we slowly advanced the contents of our 68 pounder charged with besides a round shot also a keg of firmly packed grape and musket balls, Captain Adair ahead of his marines rushed from the poop to the forecastle, and applying his mouth to my ear, bawled into it "are they going to board us?" I replied "Who are going to board us?" "Why, this ship in contact with us on the starboard bow" – at the same time as elevating his hand and pointing to the foreyard of the *Redoubtable*, dimly seen through clouds of smoke right across our forecastle, and perceiving at the same time an officer in white uniform in the forerigging of that ship, who instantly disappeared, whether shot or not, I cannot say. We of course put our starboard 68 pounder into immediate recognition and I believe most effectively, but so incessant was the small arms fire of the enemy that most of the marines that came on the forecastle, as also their gallant captain, fell like corn before the sickle; the blue-jackets sharing a similar fate.

It is a singular fact, and further corroborative of the *Redoubtable* not having fired any of its great guns after falling on the *Victory*, that only two men were hurt on the latter's lower deck, and they suffered from musketry only – this chief carnage taking place on the poop, forecastle and quarterdecks.

Thinking that the above may not be unacceptable to your readers, I submit it for insertion, should you think it proper.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant

JAMES ROBERTSON WALKER Captain R.N.

Gillgaran. Whitehaven May 6.