

County Record Office Huntingdon: Sismey Papers – item ref 3658/E4(e): duplicate of letter: William Darley, Captain of Marines to ‘Lt Col Desborough’, 14 August 1798 [slim paper volume, paper watermarked 1795, with grey sugar paper cover]

The correspondents

William Darley seems to have been born in June 1761 and baptised at St Stephen's Coleman Street London. He was commissioned as 2nd Lieutenant in the Marines 29 October 1779, joining the Portsmouth Division. He was promoted 1st Lieutenant, 18 July 1793, at the beginning of the Revolutionary War with France, and Captain, 2 December 1796. He transferred to *Zealous* in March 1797. After the Battle of the Nile, Darley remained with the Mediterranean squadron until its recall in 1799. He himself remained in Naples, apparently attached to the Neapolitan government, then recovering its mainland territory. In 1803, he was authorised to receive a Sicilian honour as Knight of the Sicilian Order of Constantine St George 'which distinction with many other marks of approbation his Sicilian Majesty conferred upon him as a reward for his service and spirited conduct against the French in Italy...' and to use the rank and style Sir William Darley. He remained on full pay as a Marine until 1803. In 1804 he married at Ashford Justia Frances, youngest daughter of the late Thomas Hallett Hodge of Hempstead, Kent. Notice of the marriage in the *Gentleman's Magazine* describes him as a Captain in the Cambridgeshire Militia, then stationed at Hythe, Kent on coast defence duties. He died in December 1809 at Hempstead, and a posthumous son was born on 1st February 1810.

Laurence Desborough was born in Huntingdon and christened at all Saints and St John's in 1758. He was commissioned as 2nd Lieutenant in the Marines 13 November 1775, and promoted 1st Lieutenant 4 February 1777. He was Quartermaster to Portsmouth Division August 1779, and was promoted Captain, January 1782. Placed on half pay in 1784, he was recalled to the active list in 1793. In accordance with then practice, he was placed on the Army List of Majors, 1794, wearing that rank and using that style of address. He and Darley were shipmates in *Cumberland* and *Prince of Wales* November 1794 – April 1795. Desborough embarked in *Princess Royal* in August 1797, and joined Admiral Jervis' fleet off Cadiz, where Darley was already serving. He achieved the Army rank of Lt Colonel early in 1798, and the same rank in the Royal Marines December 1803, shortly after conferment upon the Marines in June 1802 of the style Royal. He was a Colonel on the Army list in April 1808 and in February was promoted Colonel 2nd Commandant at Chatham Division, a post he continued to hold beyond June 1811, when he achieved the rank and style of Major General on the Army list. He was retired on full pay at the end of the war, and is not on the Royal Marines payroll after 1819. He was promoted to Lt General on the Army list in 1821, and died at Canterbury in August 1825, aged 66.

The 'duplicate'

It was customary for correspondents from overseas to insure against loss of letters by misadventure or enemy attack by making and transmitting duplicates by another route. The present letter appears to have been transmitted to Desborough, and through his Huntingdonshire connections to have come into the hands of the Sismey family.

Sources of information

I am indebted to Lt Colonel Brian Edwards RM, Chairman of Council, the Royal Marines Historical Society, for his willingness at short notice to undertake research to identify the marine officers and much of the context for this letter. Other information comes from *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (N A M Rodger's article on Nelson), on-line version (September 2005); and from Edgar Vincent, *Nelson, Love and Fame*, Yale, paperback edition, 2004.

Transcript, with explanatory annotations

(orthography and punctuation have been retained. Lines of dots ... represent similar lines of varied length in Darley's text)

Zealous¹ in the Anchorage of Aboukar²
Off the Nile Egypt 14th Augt 1798

My Dear Desborough

Though I know not, that any thing of consequence remains to be added to the Letter I have already sent you by the *Leander*³, yet in accord with my promise to write more at Large than Situation and fatigue would then permit me to do, I now once more commence my narrative with the departure of the Squadron under Capt Troubridge⁴ from before Cadiz on the 24th of May last, for the names of which I refer you to the enclos'd Papers etc⁵..... We made the best of our way through the Streights of Gibraltar, and on the 27th were join'd by the *Audacious*, *Leander* & *Mutine* Brig. On the same day we met with the *Caroline* Frigate with a prize *Corvette*, from whom was learn'd that Adml Nelson in the *Vanguard* with the *Orion* & *Alexander*, were to be found in the Vicinity of Toulon⁶, and that the French fleet with upwards of 300 Sail of Transports had put to Sea, on the 10th of May (six days before our leaving

¹ 74-gun ship of the line, commander Captain Samuel Hood

² Abu Quir, Egypt

³ Nelson had sent his dispatches with Captain Berry in *Leander* (50 guns) on 6th August, when she was fit to sail. Only when his frigates arrived on 14th August was Nelson able to send on his duplicates, with Captain Thomas Capel in *Mutine*, to travel overland. The coincidence of dates suggests that the original of the present letter also travelled in *Mutine*. The letters sent in *Leander* probably fell into the hands of the French when she was captured by *Genereux*. Capel arrived in England on 2nd October. (Edgar Vincent, *Nelson and Fame*, pp 266, 267, 281)

⁴ Afterwards Rear-Admiral Sir Thomas Troubridge

⁵ presumably the list of the lines at page 15. Other papers, including the transcripts of captured documents mentioned at page 12 and the sketch plan of the battle at page 16 were apparently not copied

⁶ France's major Mediterranean sea-port, where the French forces were know to be amassing. Toulon fell briefly into Royalist hands in 1794, until retaken by Napoleon, then a young officer

your Fleet.) supposed gone for Naples or Sicily..... Every diligence was instantly used by us to join him, and on the 7th of June the Land off Toulon being in sight, we had the pleasure to succeed in this intent, making our force combin'd, Thirteen Sail of the Line, one Fifty, and a Brig. The Fleet immediately pursued the enemy round Cape Corzi, the Northern part of Corsica [page 2] and arrived in the Bay of Naples on the 17th where we learn'd that the French force was then actually employ'd in an attack on Malta: continuing our pursuit (for we did not anchor at Naples) we passed the Faro Messina on the 20th where a variety of information or rather reports offer'd for our choice Let it be remarked, that the Frigates intended to accompany our Squadron by what fatality I know not never join'd us⁷; in consequence of which, we were ever at a loss for information of the enemy's movements, it being totally inadmissible, knowing their superiority to risk the separation of a Line of Battle Ship, merely to go in search of information however requisite or necessary – we being in momentary expectation of meeting, or overtaking them, and determined to attack them, *coute qui coute*⁸.....If any thing could give additional Spirit to an already determined People, it would have been the reception we met with in passing the Faro; - the Scenery itself was grand beyond description, and would alone, demand the pen of very different abilities from mine, to give even the faintest idea of it; but when we add to this, the towering pride of Britain, I mean, our Fleet in full canvass, a sight altogether novel in these Seas – the lofty Hills of Calabria with the Scylla on one hand – the Charybdes and the beautiful City of Messina with the green capp'd hills of Sicily and the Etna in the back ground on the other, [page 3] the inhabitants of all ranks & sexes, rowing round our Ships, blessing & praying for our success, expecting themselves to be the next object to be swallow'd up, in the never to be satiated Gulf of French ambition, pillage, and Depravity⁹ – I say combining all these objects, with the great, the momentous one we were in pursuit of the chord of feeling was stretch'd to its utmost, and tears only could give to Nature that relief, which she required in such an instant as I am attempting to describe. On the 22nd of June being off Cape Passaro steering a course for Malta, the Adm'l learn'd from the Mutine who had boarded a vessel in the night, that the french after having possess'd themselves of Malta without opposition, had sail'd on the 15th Ultimo after having left a garrison in the place their destination unknown¹⁰: (here again you

⁷ The frigates *Flora*, *Terpsichore*, *Caroline* and *Emerald* and the sloop *Bonne Citoyenne* set out with Nelson as the 'eyes' of his fleet. Accidental non-delivery of orders and perhaps poor positioning (Vincent, p244) resulted in their failing to espy Napoleon's fleet leaving Toulon on 19th May, when Nelson was only 75 miles to the south-west. In the gale of 20th –21st May Nelson's flag ship *Vanguard* was nearly lost off the coast of Sardinia. As a result of heroic repair efforts, Nelson reached his fleet's fixed rendezvous at Cape San Sebastian only a few days late, but to discover no frigates. Only when *Mutine* arrived with fresh orders did he learn that Capt Hood had taken them off the rendezvous, assuming that the damage to *Vanguard* would necessitate Nelson's return to Gibraltar. (Vincent, pp 244-249). They met up again only on 14th August, at Aboukir Bay. Nelson wrote to Lord Spencer on 9 August 1798 'Was I to die this moment, Want of Frigates would be found stamped on my heart' (quoted Vincent, p 281).

⁸ [French]: 'whatever the cost'

⁹ The Kingdom of the Two Sicilies (Sicily and Naples), a protégé of Britain, was threatened by the French land conquests in Italy, as well as being a potential main objective of the French fleet

¹⁰ N A M Rodger, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, gives 16th June as the date obtained from a neutral merchantman, south of Sicily, on 22 June. The French had not in fact sailed until 19th June, and the two flagships were at this juncture less than 60 miles apart (Rodger).

will observe our want of Frigates) without entering into the motives upon which Sir Horatio acted, it will be sufficient to say, that our Fleet immediately shap'd a course for Alexandria in Egypt¹¹, and on the 28th we arrived off that City without meeting with or receiving there, any species of information which could give us reason to believe their route could be, what it had been supposed by us; on the contrary, we [page 4] had every inducement to believe we had been deceived, & that Sicily was the second object of the enemy's intent; in accord with which, we once more turn'd our faces to the Westward, and Anchor'd in the Harbor of Syracuse¹² on the 19th of July, a Voyage almost unparallel'd in these Seas for its celerity, at this Season the winds being invariable from the Westward..... You will hardly expect me (while things of greater moment are to be related) to offer any description of this place, however interesting by reason of its ancient History, or present remains of Antiquity & former grandeur, let it suffice to say, that during the five days of our stay watering the Fleet, I visited all these, from the Ear of Dyonisius¹³ the Tyrant of Fam'd Memory, to the now pudling Fountain of Arethusa¹⁴, that being neither troubled with jaundice, spleen, cholic, or any other Malady, I did not (like Mr Brydone who has publish'd what he calls a tour in this island, pretty, light, airy reading, by the by) find Syracuse to be so shocking a place, as not to possess even a house or room in which I could sit down – on the contrary, the City is well built though old, possessing not only many good Houses, but also some on which the title of Palace is deservedly bestow'd. The inhabitants of Family, of which there are many, were polite and civil beyond expectation, particularly [page 5] those of the Barons di Boschi and Gargali, the latter in particular, whose Horses & Carriages etc I had for my different excursions – some of these attentions I might perhaps owe to my speaking their language, a thing unusual & almost singular in our Squadron¹⁵ – as Mrs D¹⁶ will most probably see this, I must not neglect to say something of the Ladies. I visited what is termed their conversazione, which is nothing more than a suite of rooms calculated for different amusements, viz: Billiards, Cards, dancing, and literally conversation, you are serv'd with refreshments of Tees, wines etc this institution is supported by the Gentlemen subscribers alone; and both Sexes of a certain condition or rank go there indiscriminately. It being Sunday, their Gala night it was unusually crowded, among them were many interesting figures and countenances, and some who even in England where the Sex are not to be surpass'd would be term'd beautiful – mostly Brunette but my taste has rather inclin'd that way – The Evening of our departure, I was honor'd by a visit from the young Baroness of Gargali with her Family: (no small favor I assure you) she is quite

¹¹ Nelson assessed that Napoleon intended to capture Egypt and the Near East in order to threaten British interests in India

¹² in Sicily, where they were able to reprovision

¹³ The Ear of Dionisius is the name given (reputedly by the artist Caravaggio in 1586) to the tall cave said to have been used by the tyrant Dionisius as a prison. The name refers to the shape of the cave entrance, but may also reflect its acoustic, which permits conversation in the cave to be heard on land above. (*Italy, the Rough Guide*, 1999)

¹⁴ The freshwater spring, famous in antiquity both for its water and its romantic site, was clearly already failing in 1798. It is now dry. (*Italy, the Rough Guide*, 1999)

¹⁵ Darley displays a good cultural education, of which he is clearly proud

¹⁶ We do not yet know who and when Desborough had married. Darley's playful reference suggests that he had met Desborough's wife.

the Ton, and a diamond of the very first water, the favor was preced'd by more solid marks of the Friendship of her Family: Handsome present of Wines, Liqueurs, etc etc, so you see short as my stay was, I contrived to have Fashion, & the Head of the Church on my side, pretty well this for a Heretic like me. [page 6] Once more I resume the thread of more interesting narrative commencing with the Fleet leaving Syracuse on the night of the 24th of July, steering a course for the Morea in search of intelligence, no knowledge whatsoever of the Enemys motions being to be obtain'd in Sicily. On the 28th being close in with the Island of Sapienza in Greece, we had information of their being at Alexandria by a small Vessel, taken out of Caron by the Culloden detached for that purpose¹⁷. Immediately the Fleet steer'd for that place, and on the Ever Memorable 1st of August about Middy, we were abreast of the City, where perceiving nothing but a crowd of transports within the Mole, we stood along the Coast to the Eastward, and at 2 O'Clock the Zealous¹⁸ made the signal for discovering the enemy's Fleet at Anchor in Line of Battle in the Anchorage of Aboukar. Being near the Adml he hailed us, and asked Capt Hood, his idea of the attack, to which he ['answere'd' deleted] replied, that he was entirely ignorant of the place, but if permitted the Zealous should have the Honor to lead the Fleet into Action, to which he assented, by wishing him a good Voyage, and immediately we press'd sail for the Van of the Enemy Line: at a quarter after five in the Evening we commenced the Action, by Anchoring a long side the Gurrier¹⁹ of 74 guns within pistol Shot on a bow & quarter position; the rest of our Ships took their stations at pleasure & agreable to signal as [page 7] most convenient, all except the Culloden who in rounding the Shoal too near, in the hope of sooner reaching in action, run aground and was useless during it. - But one observation arises on this last circumstance, viz that the accident happening to Capt Troubridge was perhaps one of the most fortunate Events to the whole Squadron, as it would have been difficult to have found among them, one whose character stood so far beyond the possibility of impeachment, nay whose Naval career has stood so mark'd in the Annals of his Country for professional knowledge Gallantry & conduct, as to bid defiance to even suspicion²⁰. The remarks which can be made at a moment such as I am describing, can be but few, and seldom extend beyond personal situation and position. Sticking to that point, our superiority over our opponent was early discernable, our fire of three round shot from each Gun was beyond discription dreadfully unremitting and effectual in ten minutes every Mast was by the board, and that before our fourth ship was in action The Wreck tumbling over the side next us, prevented their opening their fire to any considerable effect, and their efforts to disingage themselves from it was ineffectual, from the heavy fire of Musquetry and increasing Showers of Grapes and canister from the

¹⁷ Capture of vessels became the best method of gaining information, for lack of frigates

¹⁸ Note Darley's pride that his ownship's lookout was first to discern the masts of the French fleet at anchor

¹⁹ *Le Guerrier*, stationed at the head of the French line. *Goliath* commanded by Captain Tom Foley was, despite Darley's description, apparently the first ship to head round the enemy, but her anchor held only when she was opposite the second-in-line, *Le Conquerent*. *Zealous* followed, and anchored on *Guerrier*'s port bow.

²⁰ A convoluted defence of the unfortunate Captain Troubridge, who being unable to get his ship off, missed the action, increasing the initial numerical odds against Nelson's squadron

cannonades on the poop, all of which was [page 8] under my command²¹ – in Short after sustaining our fire from half past five in the Evening until ten at night the Ship surrender'd – the scene she presented on boarding her, which I did a few minutes after by desire of Capt H²² in search of signals, Charts etc was beyond description horrid. Death, despair, rage etc shone forth with ten thousand additional circumstances of distress which I was glad to escape from to our own ship, who from the well judged position in which she had been plac'd, the masterly manner in which she had been handled had obtained so cheap a Victory, as to be almost in a perfect readiness for further service, as the first moment of the Action²³. At this period the Battle was raging with uncommon violence from Van to Rear: in the centre a ship was perceiv'd on fire, and all of a sudden blew up with a crash which it is impossible to give an adequate idea of, it proved to be L'Orient²⁴ of 120 Guns & one Thousand men, having several loaded shells on board her, the alternate bursting of which while driven up to an immense height in the air by the violence of the explosion, added not a little to the horrid Grandeur & Beauty (if I may be allow'd the combination) of the Scene. For about ten minutes after this event, all was darkness, and the most profound silence, reign'd throughout the Lines, - it seemed as if suffering nature had resum'd her empire in the breast of Man, who sickening at the sight of so much [page 9] death and horror, for a moment allow'd the feelings of Humanity to prevail over the rage of contending Battle, and enthusiastic emulation. However sentiments such as these could not long have place, again the thunder of cannon announced the recommencement of the Battle which continued until three, then ceasing until 5 in the Morning was renew'd again with equal violence as ever, and continued until two o'Clock after midday when it ceas'd entirely, leaving to our Fleet decisive victory – that is to say nine sail of the Line in possession L'Orient blown up in action, & the Timoleon by her people; also two Frigates, the Artemise burn'd, & the Serieuse (both of 36 guns) sunk by our fire – the Fleet of the Enemy consisted at the moment of the attack of 13 Sail of the Line Four Frigates, three bomb Ketches and two brigs; I have already accounted for 10 Sail of the Line & two frigates, as to the other two Ships viz the Guillaume Tell of 80 guns, & the Genereuse of 74 with the Diana, & Justice frigates of 42 Guns these made their escape, though not without opposition: The Zealous being under way attack'd them formed in Line within pistol shot for twenty minutes but the state of our Fleet not permitting any assistance to be sent us, oblig'd us unwillingly to relinquish our hopes of additional Victory. Thus ended an Action, which for the object it had in view, its uncommon success, the nature of the attack, (it being the first instance of one Fleet, anchoring alongside of another already prepar'd in Line [page 10] for their reception) is the most extraordinary that the Annals of any Country can produce: jaded and disappoint'd, nay absolutely despairing of ever

²¹ Following normal practice, Darley with a significant part of his detachment was stationed on the poop, where he also had charge of the carronades (smaller cannon, firing anti-personnel 'grape' shot). (Information from Lt Co Edwards.) *Le Guerrier* had already been fired on by *Goliath*, *Theseus* and *Audacious*

²² Captain Samuel Hood

²³ *Zealous* suffered only one killed and seven wounded, the lightest casualties of any ship (Information from Lt Col Edwards)

²⁴ usually reckoned the largest warship in the world

coming up with them, and expecting if we did to find them shelter'd by Batteries²⁵, where it would be impracticable to reach them but at certain loss and ruin; how great must our joy and exultation be thus to have fulfill'd the most sanguine expectations that our friends, or Country could look for at our hands. Such is the light we poor Egyptians²⁶ see their affair in, as to how you gentry of the western World will regard it I know not, but surely England had nevermore reason to be thankful both to God & her Sons, than she has in the most unparalleled instance of Favor and protection. May her gratitude to both equal the event and may she not in the hour of her prosperity, forget that the surviving actors in this scene of Glory of all ranks, will look for some ostensible mark of the approbation of their Sovereign & Country, as well as the relicts of the dead. Perhaps you will think my language in this instance overstrain'd, and that I give a degree of colouring to this Event beyond its merits & deserts, it may be so, but when I consider the object the enemy had in view [() viz the menac'd destruction of our power in the East) now totally annihilated, I do suppose you will in some measure coincide with my ideas, and in Order to give [page 11] you a certainty that the intentions of the enemy were such as I have ventur'd to assert, take the following Extract translated by me from the french, contain'd in an intercepted letter from Grand Cairo, the authors name Boyes, of the Etat Major of that place bearing date 6th Thermidor²⁷ or 22nd of July the authority unquestionable. 'France by the different events of the War and the revolution beholds by the loss of her Colonies & Mercantile Houses, the infallible destruction of her commerce; many things which are view'd by government with the Eye of Feasibility, are deem'd by others as impracticable. Thus if the regaining of our Colonies be considered (whether from the abolition of the Slave Trade, or the destruction and Horrors committed in them[]) as a lesser or impracticable object, at least we are bound to seek elsewhere for similar advantages to those we drew from them, and by so doing avoid the evil of seeing a Nation so industrious as ours obliged to negotiate through the medium of second Hands, the articles and objects most essential to her Commercial interests & prosperity. Fraught with these ideas, and to indemnify herself for a loss, which seems almost real – the Government have turned their eyes towards Egypt and Syria: countries which by their climate, goodness and fertility of soil may become the Granaries of the French Commerce, her magazine of abundance, and by the course of time [page 12] the depository of the riches of India: it is almost indubitable that when possessed of & regularly organized in these countries we may throw our views still farther, & in the end destroy the English Commerce in the Indies, turn it to our own profit, & render our selves the Sovereigns also of that, of Africa, & Asia. All these considerations united, have induced our Government to attempt the expedition to Egypt. That part of the Roman power has been governed for many ages, by a species of Men call'd Mamalouks, who have Beys at the head of each District: these deny the Authority of the Grand Seigneur, governing themselves despotically and tyrannically. A People, & Country, which in the hands of a polished Nation would become a source of wealth & profit.' Such my dear Friend are the

²⁵ shore gun emplacements

²⁶ The name given to themselves by those who fought at the Nile. The captains of his squadron were immortalised by Nelson, after the battle, as his 'Band of Brothers'

²⁷ the calendar devised by the revolutionary French

sentiments of our Enemies, & such have been their intentions, what is next to happen is as yet in the bosom of futurity: but without reinforcements it is now according to opinion here impossible to go on, & these they cannot have without a Fleet: if England does her duty & keeps one here: at present their distress is great and hourly increasing: may Plague, Pestilence and Famine be their portion in this World, whatever it may please God to do with them in the next. You will perceive by the enclosed papers sent for your amusement or information, that I have been obliged to beg assistance in the writing way: they are copies from rough translations of mine, taken by one of my Soldiers; therefore you must excuse Orthography etc etc etc²⁸. The one is a Proclamation of Buonaparte on landing; the other a letter to a Friend at Paris from the Comptroller Genl of the Army: by which last you will observe the opinions of the lookers on during the Battle & compare them with mine, & by the first you have [page 13] additional instance of French depravity & bare faced apostacy, it needs no comment – I hate a Frenchman, cordially hate them; they are all one from the Prince to the beggar, fawning, cringing, and dastardly when in adversity, & insolent, impertinent & overbearing when possessed of power, or authority to exercises; even their Emigrants are not exempted from this general review, nursed & foster'd in your bosom, they behold askance, & like the Devil in Milton the Paradise that surrounds you: every event of Politics or of battle which is to your advantage fills them with rage, as its contrary does with inbred satisfaction, & ill concealed pleasure shewn in affected condolence & half assumed pity.²⁹ I know them all well my Dear Desborough, or I should not be so severe, both Emigrants, & Prisoners, as well as their Nation at large. I had some conversation with some of them the other day, who had the presumption to make a boast of the favors conferr'd on them by our Women: I knew the scoundrels lied, & I told them so – but this is the return made for the marks of Hospitality bestowed on them: so much for the freedom of ingress, egress, address and all the ss in the Alphabet allowed them. I wish Billy Pitt³⁰ would get rid of the whole. What a volume of paper I have spoiled! Will you not wish either my complaisance in writing to the Devil, or that I were possessed of more powers to amuse & inform. You may thank yourself and the injunctions you laid me under for being thus tormented. I have this instant received your letter giving me an account of the business in your Ship. I was no way surprised, on the contrary, it was what I long expected from several observations made upon her general discipline etc: not by me, but by others. I congratulate you on your escape however, & have only to add [page 14] my best wishes for your speedy return to England³¹. You will of course let me hear from you by every opportunity.

²⁸ Darley was clearly busying at least one of his soldiers with copying out for transmission his initial drafts translated by him from the French

²⁹ Refugees from the Revolution had fled to England. Darley's anti-French sentiments, shared by many of his countrymen, extended to all French and not only the Revolutionaries

³⁰ William Pitt ('Pitt the Younger', 1759 – 1806), prime minister

³¹ There had been serious unrest and mutiny in the fleet during 1797, the result of the poor treatment of ordinary seamen by some commanders (Nelson was much loved for his care of all his men), and of the failure to increase their pay, although pay to the army had been increased (there were some regular army regiments aboard ship, as well as marines). This disaffection spread to the ships off Cadiz later in 1797 but was swiftly put down by Admiral St Vincent. It would appear from this reference that there were renewed difficulties the following year.

We understand the business in Ireland is over, is this true.³² Our Squadron now reduced to six Sail of the Line, will I fancy cruise in this neighbourhood until water & provision force us elsewhere: to Naples I suppose³³. Our other ships are gone as convoy to our Prizes, which are also reduced from Nine to six, having been so torn to pieces by the firing as to be render'd incapable of being navigated.

Remember me kindly to my good friend Mrs Desborough whom you say is at Chiswick I congratulate mutually both parties on the acquisition to the Society, and remain

Your Affectionate Friend Wm Darley

Page 15

| List of the French Line as at Anchor at Aboukar | Guns | List of the English Line | Guns | Name of the Captains |
|---|------|---|------|----------------------|
| Le Guerrier | 74x | 1 Zealous | 74 | Hood |
| Le Conquerant | 74 | Audacious | 74 | Gould |
| Le Spartiate | 74 | 2 Goliath ³⁴ | 74 | Foley |
| L'Aguilon | 74 | Theseus | 74 | Millar |
| Le Peuple Souverain | 74 | Orion | 74 | Sir Jas Saumarez |
| Le Franklin | 80 | 3 Vanguard | 74 | Sir H Nelson & Berry |
| L'Orient | 120x | Defence | 74 | Peyton |
| Le Tonnant | 80 | Majestic | 74 | Westcott |
| L'Hereux | 74x | Bellerophon | 74 | Darby |
| Le Mercure | 74x | Minotaur | 74 | Lewis |
| Le Guillaume Tell | 80* | 4 Swiftsure | 74 | Holwell |
| Le Genereux | 74* | 5 Alexandria | 74 | Ball |
| Le Timoleon | 74x | 6 Culloden | 74 | Troubridge |
| La Diane | 42* | Leander | 50 | Thompson |
| La Justice | 42* | Mutine Brig | | Hardy |
| La Serieuse | 36x | | | |
| L'Artemise | 36x | | | |
| Two Brigs escaped in the night | | NB Those numbered of our Fleet are the Ships which form our present squadron. | | |
| Three Bombs x sunk | | The other seven conduct the Prizes | | |

NB Those marked thus x are burned, or sunk – the others are the Prizes sent to Gibraltar under Convoy of seven sail of the Line

* *annotated in the text* 'escaped'

³² Irish anti-English feeling made sections of the population ready allies of the French. An attempted French landing in Bantry Bay had failed narrowly in late 1796, and in May 1798 there was renewed rebellion, initially in Wexford but spreading to other parts of the east and midlands

³³ *Zealous* remained in the Mediterranean until the end of 1799. Darley then appears to have received an attachment to the Neapolitan government, then recovering its mainland territory, where presumably his linguistic skills were put to good use

³⁴ sic – recte *Goliath*

[page 16]

I have looked over this letter I find many things omitted which your Naval Acquaintances will be desirous of knowing. And first as to Signals. There were only four made from the moment of seeing the Enemy until the conclusion of the business 1st to prepare to Engage at Anchor, with a Sheet Anchor & Cable astern. The 2nd to form the Line as most convenient. The 3rd that it was the Admirals intention to press upon the Van & Center of the Enemys Line. And the 4th to engage as close as possible. Thus you have the whole of our Manoeuvres & perhaps to the celerity of our motions it is we owe the extent of our Victory for you will remark that from the first instant of seeing them until the commencement of the Action was only three hours & half a period of time barely sufficient under a press of canvas to carry us along side our respective Antagonists. Some of the ships you will perceive have suffer'd more than others particularly the Bellerophon & Majestic both of which having their Cables shot away while engaging the L'Orient swung round with their heads or sterns to the Enemys fire and were thus cut almost to pieces 59 killed and wounded in the one & 193 in the other³⁵. The Alexander suffer'd from the L'Orient blowing up, not being able to get far enough from her until the explosions took place. As to the general List of Kill'd & wounded in the Fleet, I am not as yet acquainted with it, nor have I indeed been anxious to see it. There are three Lieutenants killed (poor Capt Hopkins of Marines by this time dead) on board the Bellerophon On board the Majestic Capt Westcott. The Alexander one Lieutenant. The Vanguard Capt Toddy of Marines & the Minotaur one lieutenant of Marines. These are all the Officers killed, who have as yet come to my knowledge. I am this instant made acquainted with several Orders relative to our Corps, which have lately taken place with you at Cadiz....you already know my ideas & therefore I forbear to comment. I wish to God you was at home. I understand that the Zealous, Goliah Swiftsure with some Frigates are to form our Eastern Squadron: & that the remaining three join your Fleet. This cannot be for a long continuance Oh! how I long for England

Adieu W Darley

I have added a rough sketch of the Action, the two Northernmost ones in the line engaged are the Zealous & Guerrier

As I have had a strict attention to fact without any Embellishments of plain Narrative, you may rely on the contents and communicate accordingly.

Lieut: Colonel Desborough

Elizabeth Stazicker, October 2005

³⁵ These numbers proved to be underestimates