

posing it were better sailers than those of the centre and rear divisions, which lay still becalmed, and it might reasonably be supposed that the action would be over before they could close. Accordingly the Comte de Grasse having allowed Hood's division to approach as near as he thought advisable, bore up at 9.30 a.m. on the 9th of April for the purpose of cutting it off. Seeing this manœuvre the British Admiral, whose squadron was on the starboard tack with the wind at east-south-east, hove to in line of battle for the purpose of allowing the centre and rear to close, while the French, by keeping under sail, were able to manœuvre as they pleased. Under these circumstances a furious action commenced at 10 o'clock, a.m., during which eight British ships bore the fire of fifteen French ships of the line for more than an hour, when the breeze having reached the centre and rear divisions, the French Admiral tacked and stood in shore, the superior sailing powers of his ships, enabling him to decline a close action. The British ships engaged were much cut up and two of the French vessels were obliged to take shelter in Guadaloupe.

The British fleet lay to at night to repair damages, and next morning made sail in pursuit of the enemy, but with so little effect that by the morning of the 11th the French fleet had got so far to the windward that some of the ships were scarcely visible.

The rear division of the British fleet had become the van; it was commanded by Admiral Drake. About noon one of the enemy's ships was seen to the windward in tow of a frigate, having lost her foremast and bowsprit, a general chase was ordered with the intention of taking her, and before evening the leading ships had approached so near that she would have been compelled to surrender had not the Comte de Grasse bore down with his fleet so close together that nothing but the near approach of night prevented a general engagement. As it was evident this much desired event must come off in the morning if both fleets retained their relative positions during the night, Sir George Rodney formed his line on the starboard tack, and at daylight it was evident that it was not in the power of the Comte de Grasse to avoid an action if he would. His fleet consisted of one ship of 110 guns, five of 84, nineteen of 74, six of 64, and three of 50, mounting in all 2560 guns of heavier metal than their opponents. The British fleet consisted of five of 90 guns, twenty of 74, ten of 64, and one 70-gun ship, mounting altogether 2640 guns, throwing a lighter broadside than the French.

The Comte de Grasse formed his fleet on the larboard tack, just far enough distant to windward to cross the bows of the British. A few minutes after 8 o'clock, a.m., on the 12th of April, 1772, the leading ship of Sir George Rodney's fleet opened fire on the centre and rear division of the French, and in a few minutes it became general. Hood's division, being the rear, and a great part of

the centre were nearly becalmed, but the leading ships had the breeze; the same variations of the wind were soon afterwards experienced by the French. As the ships got more to the southward the breeze had had also veered in that direction so that their van ships could not lie higher than south-west, while the centre and rear, having the sea breeze at about east, were lying up to the south. Although this southerly sea breeze completely broke the French line it did not disarrange the British, and at 11 o'clock a.m. Sir George Rodney, at the head of the centre division, having passed the *Ville de Paris*, Comte de Grasse's flag ship, and her second, so close as to be almost in contact, delivering a tremendous fire from his flag ship, the *Formidable*, arrived abreast of the opening in the line described as caused by the variation of the breeze and keeping a close luff, passed through it between the second and third ship astern of the *Ville de Paris*, followed by the *Duke*, *Namur* and *Canada*, immediately wore round, and the signal being made for the van to attack the British fleet thus gained the wind and stood upon the same tack as their opponents. Meantime Hood's division became heavily engaged with the French centre, and it having fallen a calm the ships of both fleets became so enshrouded in smoke that a cessation of firing became necessary, and when the smoke cleared away the French fleet had bore away and were to the leeward retreating in disorder. A general chase ensued, and the *Glorieux* (74), the *César*, the *Lector*, the *Ardent*, and finally the *Ville de Paris* of 110 guns, were captured; the latter after fighting through the long summer's day surrendered at sunset to the *Barfleur*, Sir S. Hood, at which time only three men, of whom the Comte de Grasse was one, were left alive on her upper deck. The *Diadem*, a 74-gun ship had been sunk by a single broadside from the *Formidable*.

This decisive victory settled the question respecting naval supremacy, frustrated the designs of the confederates, and relieved the rebellious Colonies of an incubus far more formidable than the stamp duty.

On board the *Ville de Paris* the military chest for the pay of the French troops was captured. The whole train of artillery with battering cannon and stores meant for the attack on Jamaica were also captured. The *Ville de Paris* was the largest man of war afloat; she had been presented to Louis XV. by the City of Paris, and cost £175,000 sterling, an enormous sum for those days. She had 400 men killed in the action of the 12th of April, and the loss of the French fleet is said to have been over 3000 men killed and nearly 7000 wounded, while those vessels that escaped were so damaged as to be nearly useless. The loss of the British amounted to 253 killed and 816 wounded. None of the prizes taken in this action reached England; the *César* took fire and blew up during the night with 400 of her own crew and 50 British seamen on board. The res

were all lost at sea in one of the most fearful hurricanes which have ever devastated the tropics.

In this action the manœuvre of breaking the line was practiced for the first time on record. It is a controverted question as to whether it was a part of a deliberate tactical plan of Sir George Rodney's, as it afterwards became of Nelson's, or whether it was accidental. The fact of having kept a close luff would seem to imply that it was a deliberate design, although it is possible that the idea may not have occurred till the *Formidable* arrived opposite the break in the line, which was caused by accident. Hitherto and afterwards it was not the rule to force a passage till Nelson's time, and it formed the chief object in all his tactics—at all events on this occasion it secured a victory, and Rodney has the credit of giving the manœuvre practical effect.

The French ships which escaped bore away to the leeward the night after the action. Four of them ran down to the Dutch Island of Curacao, but the greater part, under Bougainville and Vaudrioul, the second and third in command, kept together and stood for Cape Francois.

The next morning Sir G. Rodney attempted to pursue, but was becalmed for three days under Guadaloupe, and having ascertained that the enemy were gone to leeward he dispatched Sir S. Hood to the west of Hispaniola, while he himself followed to join him off Cape Tiburon. In the Mona passage between Hispaniola and Guadaloupe Hood gave chase to and captured two 64-gun French ships and two large frigates, a third frigate escaping, the French fleet thus losing eight ships of the line and two frigates. Sir Geo. Rodney now proceeded to Jamaica, leaving Sir Samuel Hood with twenty-five sail of the line to watch the enemy. Both these Admirals were elevated to the Peerage for this victory; Rear Admiral Drake and Commodore Affleck were created Baronets.

The last action worth noticing in the West Indies was the capture of the Bahama Islands with a garrison of 170 invalids on the 6th of May, by an expedition fitted out at Havannah, consisting of three frigates and sixty sail of transports, having on board 2500 troops.

A recent number of the *Army and Navy Gazette* intimates that, at last, three regiments will be retained, under the new arrangements, in Canada, but that they will be severally reduced to a service establishment of 500 men. One of the regiments at Halifax will be relieved in the course of the summer by the 1st Battalion of the 60th Rifles now quartered in Ottawa. The Rifle Brigade and the Artillery stationed at Montreal, are also under orders for home, and the force stationed in the country will then consist of the 69th at Quebec, and the 78th and 1st Battalion of the 60th at Halifax. The reliefs will probably be delayed until the fall, as the head quarters are not to be transferred from Montreal to Quebec until October or September.