Mission Command in the Age of Sail

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Mission command is a command-and-control philosophy characterized by trust between senior and junior leaders and independent execution of orders based around a common understanding of purpose and intent - an extremely challenging and relevant challenge in an age of vulnerable, and increasingly relied on, communication networks. This paper proposes an analytical framework for both historians and modern practitioners to use when studying the age of sail in order to produce useful lessons for applying mission command in today's great power competition. It then uses that framework to analyze a case study from the Napoleonic wars.

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Mission command is a command-and-control philosophy characterized by trust between senior and junior leaders and independent execution of orders based around a common understanding of purpose and intent. While it has been part of the U.S. military's joint doctrine since the 1980s, it has recently received more attention from senior leaders.[1] In 2012, General Martin Dempsey, then the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, argued that the rapidly changing and increasingly complex security environment, especially when paired with an enduring period of constrained fiscal resources, requires the joint force be able to leverage any and all advantages presented by "smaller units enabled to conduct decentralized operations at the tactical level with operational/strategic implications."[2] In January 2021, Admiral Michael Gilday's CNO NAVPLAN also called for the navy to orient around commander's intent and learn to "foster initiative, flexibility, and trust" throughout the force.[3] Notably and appropriately to his central theme of providing commander's intent without specific direction, however, Gilday does not supply a method to achieve this goal.

Building a culture of mission command in the joint force requires a formal and continual education process. While practical exercises and training would be crucial to the program, much would be gained from a solid foundation on theory and study.[4] Fortunately, there exists

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[1] An in-depth discussion of the Prussian origins of mission command and how the various United States military services have incorporated it into their doctrine is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this paper. For an excellent summary see James Harvard, "Airmen and Mission Command," *Air & Space Power Journal* 27, no. 2 (March-April 2013): 131-145.

[2] Martin Dempsey, "Mission Command White Paper," Accessed September 7, 2020, https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/concepts/cjcs_wp_missioncommand.pdf?ver=2017-12-28-162056-713.

[3] Michael Gilday, "CNO NAVPLAN 2021," Accessed February 12, 2021, https://media.defense.gov/2021/Jan/11/2002562551/-1/-1/1/CNO%20NAVPLAN%202021%20-%20FINAL.PDF.

[4] Donald Vandergriff, *Adopting Mission Command: Developing Leaders for a Superior Command Culture* (Naval Institute Press, 2019), 259-264.

an extensively studied area of history which possesses as yet untapped potential to aid in building a mission command education program: the age of sail.

This is not a new idea. Despite the term "mission command" being an anachronism, several historians have already used the concept to examine the age of sail. However, the vast majority of them, as well as practitioners seeking to better apply the mission command framework, have done so primarily by examining Vice Admiral Horatio, Lord Nelson's tactical brilliance and specifically the idea of the "Nelson Touch."[5] That is a productive approach, and the "Nelson Touch" does anticipate many of the core aspects of contemporary mission command. But we should not limit ourselves to Nelson's tactics: the age of sail contains many useful examples of mission command, and it does so *at all levels of warfare*.[6] An analytical framework based on mission command can help discover, develop, and effectively present these lessons for the many modern practitioners seeking to apply mission command in the on-going great power competition.

This paper answers General Dempsey's and Admiral Gilday's calls by developing an analytical framework for mission command and by proposing the full age of sail as an area for current military officers to mine for case studies and lessons to learn. It further demonstrates the value of this novel approach by examining a case study from the age of sail through the lens

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[5] Ryan Mewett provides a comprehensive analysis of the existing historiography on the "Nelson Touch," as well as lessons for modern leaders in his 2017 article, "The Emergence of Horatio Nelson: Lessons for Leaders," *War on the Rocks*, February 14, 2017, https://warontherocks.com/2017/02/the-emergence-of-horatio-nelson-lessons-for-leaders/. John T. Kuehn also provides a thoughtful mission command analysis of Nelson's actions at the Battle of the Nile in "Nelson, Mission Command, and The Battle of Nile," in *16 Cases of Mission Command*, ed. Donald Wright (Fort Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2013): 31-40.

[6] J. Ross Dancy and Evan Wilson are the rare example of historians who have applied mission command above the tactical level of war. See J. Ross Dancy and Evan Wilson, "Sir John Orde and the Trafalgar Campaign - A Failure of Information Sharing," *Naval War College Review* 73, no. 2 (Spring 2020): 147-177.

of mission command. The resulting analysis exemplifies not only the value of studying the age of sail for practitioners, but also suggests some ways in which the current discourse on mission command could be extended productively.

A Mission Command Framework

At its heart, mission command is a relationship between a commander and a subordinate. The commander has a particular end state or a specific goal in mind and must rely on the subordinate to achieve that objective. Ideally, the commander can also count on the subordinate to exercise discretion on the scene to take advantage of local conditions or unforeseen changes in the operating environment. This is the primary benefit to mission command. The commander also has an idea of the boundaries or limits that the subordinate should operate in when executing orders. Another way to say this is that the commander has an idea of the appropriate decision space from which a subordinate can create and choose a particular course of action.

The subordinate relies on the commander to provide the overall goal, as well as the intent behind the objective and any limits or boundaries to the courses of action that the subordinate may choose to achieve the desired ends. This can be done through written or verbal orders, sometimes referred to as mission orders, depending on the specific situation. The subordinate then leverages the advantage of being *in situ*, as well as an understanding of the implicit and explicit limits conveyed by the commander's intent and orders to develop their own perception of the decision space from which they can choose a particular course of action. From this, the desired end state of correctly executed mission command is a subordinate who,

in an environment of imperfect or incomplete information, is able to confidently leverage any advantage deriving from their proximity to a task or issue by independently interpreting and executing orders without further guidance.[7] Of course, this is incredibly difficult to execute in the real world and requires significant effort on the part of the commander and the subordinate.

Understandably, the commander has the more difficult job with respect to mission command. He or she must clearly convey the objective or desired end state while also conveying sufficiently understandable and achievable boundaries for the subordinate to operate in. Additionally, these boundaries must not overly constrict the subordinate or the commander risks negating the ability of the subordinate to take advantage of local conditions or changes in the battlespace. Put another way, simply conveying a directive or objective, such as avoiding hostilities with another nation's naval forces, is insufficient because it can both overly constrain a subordinate and negate any advantage provided by that subordinate's ability to react to local conditions. On one hand, a subordinate may interpret such direction so narrowly as to prevent them from protecting allies from attack. On the other hand, it could prevent the subordinate from taking advantage of a rapidly developing or unforeseen situation. So, to fully leverage mission command, a commander must create and clearly communicate an acceptable and appropriate decision space for the subordinate to act within.

When creating the limits of such a decision space, the commander must consider three areas, all of which are interrelated. First, and most importantly, the commander must explain

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[7] Dempsey, "Mission Command White Paper"; Robert Rubel, "Mission Command in a Future Naval Combat Environment," *Naval War College Review* 72, no. 2 (Spring 2018): 109-115; Milan Vego, "Mission Command & Zero Error Tolerance Cannot Coexist," U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* (July 2018): 59-61.

the intent behind their orders to the subordinate. Understanding why the commander wants something done, and any other reasoning behind the orders, will help align the commander's and the subordinate's decision space, minimizing the potential that the subordinate will select a course of action that is unacceptable to the commander. It will also provide maximum opportunity for a subordinate to take advantage of opportunities *in situ*. Second, the commander must understand and incorporate the subordinate's mindset, personality, and personal history when both explaining intent and issuing orders. This will help the commander to shape the orders to the particular strengths and weaknesses of the subordinate. Finally, the commander must consider the specific language of the orders. Informed by an understanding of the subordinate to whom the orders will be issued, the commander must take care to use language that provides the subordinate sufficient maneuver room while not allowing too free a hand. Taken together, a careful analysis and consideration of these three areas will help a commander issue effective mission style orders and shape an appropriate decision space for the subordinate.

The subordinate's job is less complicated but still difficult. Upon receipt of orders, the subordinate must filter the language of those orders through his or her understanding of the commander's intent and the desired end state to create a perceived decision space from which to choose a particular course of action. Appropriately executed mission command ensures the two decision spaces overlap, even if not entirely so. If time and communications permit, the subordinate should seek clarification or further guidance as required. The subordinate should take advantage of any information or circumstances available on scene and select a course of action that stays within the bounds of their decision space.

Trust is the most significant prerequisite for successful execution of mission command. The commander issuing the orders and the subordinate executing them must both accept the risk of *all* possible outcomes of doing so.[8] In other words, mission command is not a panacea. It does not guarantee success. A subordinate with perfect understanding of commander's intent executing beautifully written orders may still choose an improper or ineffective course of action. They may fail to achieve an objective or do so in manner contradictory to that which the commander intended. So, both the commander and subordinate must trust each other. In mission command, the commander's trust of the subordinate should be considered as part of their previously discussed knowledge of the subordinate. An extra dimension exits for the subordinate, however. The subordinate must trust that the commander will understand and protect them from irrational or excessive punishment resulting from the subordinate exercising discretion or interpreting orders. If the subordinate does not have this trust in the commander, they will naturally be unwilling to take risk or exercise initiative, which effectively negates the prime benefit provided by mission command.

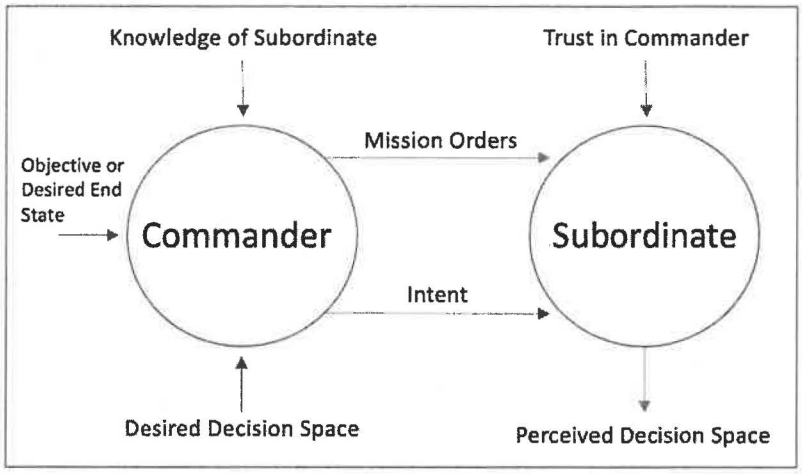

Figure 1 - The Mission Command Relationship

[8] Dempsey, "Mission Command White Paper"; Vego, "Mission Command & Zero Error Tolerance," 60.

By understanding the roles and requirements for the both the commander and subordinate in mission command, four potential scenarios can be developed for use in analyzing events in the age of sail. Each scenario presents a unique framework to question, understand, and present lessons. Questions specified below should not be taken as applying to only the scenario in which they are presented. In many cases they will apply to multiple scenarios. Nor should the questions presented below be interpreted as a complete representation of those possible. They are merely presented to show the outline of a possible framework for historical analysis.

The first scenario represents the best execution of mission command. In this scenario, the subordinate's derived decision space overlaps the intended decision space provided by the commander through mission orders and explanation of intent. The subordinate then chooses a course of action from this shared decision space that leads to the commander's desired outcome. There are several questions historians and practitioners should ask of scenarios like this. What factors led to the two decision spaces overlapping so well? Was it in the way the commander understood his subordinate's limitations? Was it because the subordinate trusted the commander to

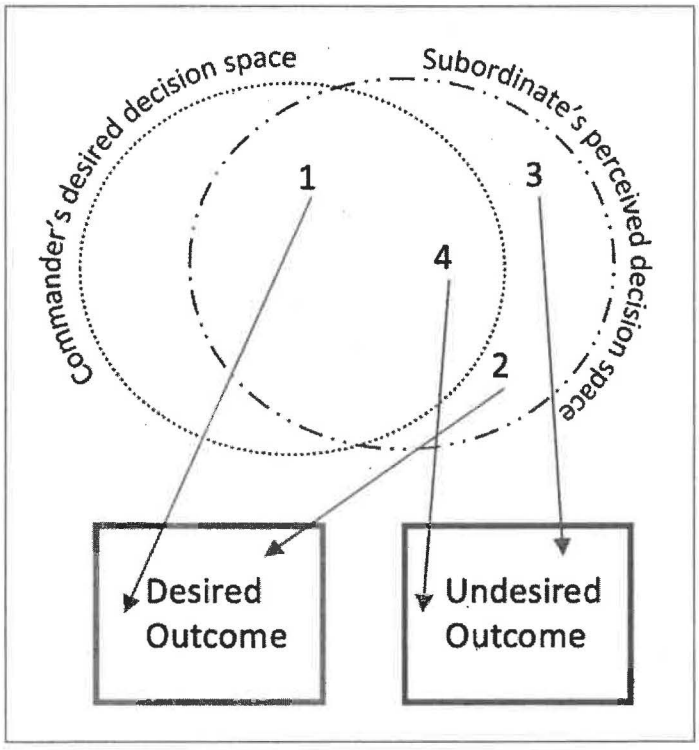

Figure 2 - Four Mission Command Scenarios

protect him from unintended consequences? Did the overlap of the decision spaces lead to the successful outcome or was it some other factor?

The second scenario is best described as an adequate exercise of mission command. In this scenario, the subordinate chooses a course of action from his decision space that leads to the commander's desired outcome. However, the chosen outcome lies outside the decision space the commander intended the subordinate to choose from. In other words, the subordinate got the job done, but did so in a manner that the commander did not intend. This scenario should not be confused with the best execution of mission command simply because the subordinate achieved the desired outcome. Because mission command is a relationship, it is at its best when the chosen course of action comes from a shared decision space. Instead, historians and practitioners should ask of these scenarios why the two decision spaces did not overlap to include the ultimately chosen successful course of action. Did the commander poorly convey intent or did the words of the orders overly constrain the subordinate from exercising initiative? Was there a viable course of action that lay in the shared decision space? Why did the subordinate choose the course of action that lay outside the decision space provided by the commander?

The third scenario is similar to the second in that the subordinate chooses a course of action inside his own decision space, but outside that intended by the commander. However, in this case, the subordinate fails to achieve the commander's desired outcome. This is best described as a failure of mission command. In addition to the questions presented for scenario two, here practitioners and historians should focus on whether or not mission command related issues contributed to the failure to achieve the desired outcome. Would the desired

outcome have been achieved if the subordinate had chosen a particular course of action within the commander's intended decision space? Was the failure unrelated to a mission command issue?

The fourth possible scenario likely does not relate to mission command at all. Here, the subordinate chooses a course of action from a decision space that overlaps the commander's intended decision space, but still fails to achieve the desired outcome. In other words, the final scenario describes issues that even mission command could not have solved such as those caused by chance or the fog of war. Here practitioners and historians should attempt to identify the factors that caused the chosen course of action to fail. Was it simply that, in war, sometimes bad things happen? Did the shared decision space contain a course of action that might have led to the desired outcome? If so, why was it not chosen? Taken together, these four scenarios create the basis for a useful framework with which to analyze events from the age of sail.

As will be demonstrated below, the age of sail is a particularly useful era to mine for mission command related lessons because of the challenges inherent in the communication methods of the age. The communications related challenges at the tactical level are well known and have been explored.[9] However, the same challenges existed at the operational and strategic levels of war as well. Because of delays in communication and the global nature of the war, officers on station in the age of sail, the subordinates, were frequently required to use their initiative and make decisions at the operational and strategic levels of war in an environment characterized by incomplete or imperfect information. Likewise, ministers at

[9] Kuehn, "Nelson, Mission Command, and The Battle of Nile," 31-40.

home, the commanders, had to try to shape those officers' behavior through orders that could take months to arrive, if they did at all, and which could be irrelevant when they did. There are clear parallels from this information environment to modern militaries' concerns with disruption of today's communication and coordination capabilities at all levels of war.[10] This means there are lessons to be learned from the successes and failures of the era.

Less clear, but no less important, are the parallels from the age of sail to today's information rich environment. The same constant communication capabilities militaries worry about losing in the opening days of modern combat are likely degrading subordinates' abilities to exercise initiative. John Nelsen neatly demonstrated this in his 1987 article "Auftragstaktik – A Case for Decentralized Battle." His concern, which has come to pass today, was that newly developed communications technology both allows and incentivizes commanders to micromanage subordinates to the detriment of the subordinate's ability and willingness to take advantage of initiative.[11] Because commanders in the age of sail did not have the option of constant communications, they naturally developed methods to communicate in, and to develop subordinates to deal with, a sparce information environment. Modern commanders seeking to prepare their subordinates for a severely degraded communication and information environment in a future conflict can learn from their predecessors in the age of sail. It is time, then, to apply the framework to a specific case study and demonstrate how this can be done.

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[10] Rubel, "Mission Command in a Future Naval Combat Environment," 109.
[11] John Nelsen, "*Auftragstaktik*: A Case for Decentralized Battle," *Parameters* 17, no. 3 (September 1987): 31-33.

The Case Study

Between June 30 and July 11, 1815 Rear Admiral Sir Philip Durham and Lieutenant General Sir James Leith, respectively the British naval and land force commanders-in-chief of the Leeward Islands, engaged in a remarkable dispute regarding the island of Guadeloupe, whose governor had declared allegiance to the recently returned Napoleon Bonaparte. The dispute was carried out via a series of lengthy and legalistic letters between the two officers and centered on whether the British forces should, or were even permitted to, intervene militarily to re-take Guadeloupe in the name of the restored Bourbon king, Louis XVIII.[12]

The correspondence between the commanders makes clear each was attempting to interpret imprecisely worded orders to fit a novel situation and that this effort was significantly complicated by their inability to communicate quickly with ministers in Britain. The fundamental problem was that the two commanders reported to different ministers in London, and the two ministers issued them different orders. Leith's orders came from the Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, Earl Bathurst, while Durham reported to the First Lord of the Admiralty, Viscount Melville. Bathurst effectively communicated the end state he envisioned to Leith—support the Bourbon forces in the West Indies—while Melville constrained Durham and forced him to wait for a positive order to engage in any hostilities. In other words, the two commanders were operating in two different mission command scenarios.

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[12] Hilary Rubinstein, ed., *The Durham Papers* (London: Routledge, 2019), 404; Philip Durham to William Croker, July 10, 1815, ADM 1/336, Letters from Commanders-in-Chief, Leeward Islands, The National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom [hereafter TNA].

As will become clear, though, the episode is not as simple as a case of two commanders with two different orders. A close reading of the correspondence between Durham and Leith demonstrates that Durham did not understand Melville's desired end state and that Melville did not understand the pressures that were weighing on Durham. Herein lies the value of mission command as an analytical tool: it encourages historians to delve into the mindsets of the commanders on the spot as well as those higher in the chain of command. When we do so in this case, we not only till fruitful ground for mission command related lessons, but we also revise our historical understanding of the particulars of this case.

Events in the West Indies during and after Napoleon's escape from Elba have received very little attention. Recent accounts of the naval history in the West Indies during this period either focus on American commerce raiding during the end of the War of 1812 or do not touch on events in the West Indies at all.[13] Nor is the nineteenth-century historiography much better.[14] In both cases, the lack of interest in the region is understandable given the enormity of the shadow cast by Napoleon's return, his defeat at Waterloo, and his exile to St. Helena.

The few accounts we have of the dispute between Durham and Leith flow entirely from Durham's personal opinion of the events. James Ralfe's biography of Durham in 1828, very likely sourced from the Admiral himself, blames the dispute on Leith and concludes that the root cause was "an excess of zeal on one part [Leith's], and the exercise of sound discretion on

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[13] N.A.M. Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain, 1649-1815* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), 563-574; James Davey, *In Nelson's Wake: The Navy and the Napoleonic Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 304-311.

[14] William James, *The Naval History of Great Britain, Volume 6* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1902), 229; William O'Byrne, *A Naval Biographical Dictionary* (London: J. Murray, 1849), s.v. Philip Charles Calderwood Henderson Durham; John Marshall, *Royal Naval Biography* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1823), s.v. Sir Philip Charles Durham.

the other."[15] Durham's memoirs, published posthumously in 1846, come to a similar conclusion although they do not directly attack Leith.[16] The only modern analysis of the dispute relies heavily on both these sources, as well as three letters from Durham to Leith. It concludes that it was "Leith's belief that his letter from Bathurst clearly obligated him to restore by force of arms the usurped royal authority on [Guadeloupe], and Durham's insistence that his instructions dated 26 March prevented him from co-operating" that caused the dispute.[17] In fact, a closer examination of the events in question suggests a different conclusion, as this paper will demonstrate. In addition to developing a mission command framework, it also relies on additional correspondence from Durham and other previously unconsidered perspectives of the events on Guadeloupe and Martinique during Napoleon's return.[18]

One new perspective on the dispute between Durham and Leith is that of the French General Eugène Édouard de Boyer de Peyreleau, who was the principal deputy to the governor of Guadeloupe, the Count of Linois. In a pamphlet published in 1849 General Boyer provided commentary on the internal deliberation and a detailed view of the events leading up to the government of Guadeloupe declaring allegiance for the restored Bonapartist government on June 18 - the event that was the chief cause for Durham and Leith's dispute, and coincidentally the same day as the Battle of Waterloo. When considering his account, however, it is important

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[15] James Ralfe, *The Naval Biography of Great Britain, Vol. 3* (London: Whitmore & Fenn, 1828), 38-46.
[16] Alexander Murray, *Memoirs of the Naval Life and Services of Admiral Sir Philip C.H.C. Durham* (London: John Murray, 1846), 96.
[17] Hilary Rubinstein, *Trafalgar Captain: Durham of the Defiance* (Cheltenham: Tempus Publishing, 2005), 242-245.
[18] Leith does not appear to have ever publicly commented on his disagreement with Durham as neither his report to Bathurst nor his memoirs refer to anything other than the successful re-capture of Guadeloupe. For a copy of Leith's report to Bathurst see the *Caledonian Mercury*, September 21, 1815. For Leith's memoirs see *The Annual Biography and Obituary, For the Year 1819, Vol. III* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1819), 488-491.

to consider that while both he and Linois were sent home to face trial after Napoleon's final defeat, he was the only one to face any blame. He was sentenced to death for his role, although this was quickly commuted to a lifetime prison sentence of which he only actually served 3 years.[19] As he makes indirectly clear in the introduction to the pamphlet, it is primarily written to reclaim his reputation and set the "public record" straight after the death of Linois. Therefore, aside from things like dates, places, and names of participants, his account should be treated skeptically. Nevertheless, it provides a helpful French perspective on the dispute which, after all, hinged on the behavior of the French in the West Indies.

In addition to ignoring the French perspective, the existing studies of the dispute have also failed to examine how the backgrounds of the British and French commanders-in-chief shaped their actions in the summer of 1815. When he was appointed to command Royal Navy forces in the Leeward Islands in November 1813 Rear-Admiral Durham's career was approaching its apex. In the 37 years since joining the navy he had survived the disastrous sinking of the *Royal George*, successfully commanded several ships and a squadron, fought and been wounded at Trafalgar, and amassed considerable fame and fortune.[20] He had made an excellent first impression in the Leeward Islands by capturing two French frigates en route to his new command. American privateers were preying on shipping throughout the station, so Durham immediately set about employing his squadron to capture them. His efforts earned lavish praise from the British merchants in the Caribbean, but Durham was eager to return to

[19] Eugène-Édouard Boyer Peyreleau, *Événements de La Guadeloupe en 1814 et pendant les Cent-Jours* (Alais, 1849), xxxiii.

[20] Durham's full career reads like a combination of Horatio Hornblower's and Jack Aubrey's. For a comprehensive account see Hilary Rubinstein's *Trafalgar Captain.*

England to commence his post-war career. As such, shortly after the Treaty of Paris was signed in 1814 Durham applied for relief. While waiting for the identified officer to arrive and relieve him, and through the winter and early spring of 1814-1815, Durham's time and squadron were occupied by several tasks. These included continuing protection of merchant ships as the Treaty of Ghent awaited ratification and implementation, as well as removing British troops and colonists from the West Indian islands being returned to Denmark and to France, and sending several ships of his squadron home to England as part of a general drawdown of the Royal Navy.[21]

As Governor-in-Chief and commander of the British land forces in the Leeward Islands, Leith found himself in a similar position to Durham. Having served with distinction in the Peninsula Campaign at Busaco, Badajoz, and Salamanca he received his appointment to the Leeward Islands February 15, 1814. Arriving later that spring, Leith's primary concern was handing administration and control of the captured islands to the newly arriving Danish and French authorities - not a simple task. The handover of Guadeloupe, which was completed in early December 1814, proved particularly challenging for all involved and apparently required Leith's personal intervention to overcome disagreements between the outgoing British governor and incoming French administration. Adding to Leith's difficulties in carrying out his duties was that fact that he had no legal authority over his naval counterpart or the troop ships

[21] Rubinstein, *Trafalgar Captain,* 240-242; Admiralty to Durham, September 6, 1814, ADM 2/166, Lords' Letters: Orders and Instructions, TNA; Durham to Croker, March 30, 1815, April 7, 1815, and May 1,1815, ADM 1/336, TNA.

in the region and therefore could not move troops around the station unless Durham agreed to supply ships.[22]

On the French side, the governors of Martinique and Guadeloupe appointed by the newly restored government of Louis XVIII were reliant on a pre-revolution ordnance for the organization of the colonies. The two governors were in charge of military matters while the administration and finances were left to an Intendant and a Superior Counsel. The first French ships of the expedition to reclaim the West Indies for the Bourbons left France on September 1, 1814, and the governors set sail in late October.[23]

The new governor of Guadeloupe, Charles-Alexandre Léon Durand, the Count of Linois, served in the Bourbon, Revolutionary, and Imperial French navies, seeing notable service in the Mediterranean and the Indian oceans as part of the latter two. Linois' active service ended when he was injured in a battle with Admiral Sir John Borlase Warren during his return to France in March of 1806 and taken prisoner to England. He spent the remainder of the war there until Napoleon's abdication in 1814. While captive in England he was created Baron of the Empire and awarded a pension of 4,000 livres per year. Linois arrived on Guadeloupe and assumed his post as governor on December 14, 1814.[24]

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[22] *The London Gazette*, February 5, 1814, 367; *The Annual Biography*, 488-491; Admiralty to Durham, September 6, 1814, ADM 2/166, TNA; *The Calcutta Gazette*, May 25, 1815; Boyer, *Événements de La Guadeloupe*, 9-20; Durham to Croker, June 17, 1815, ADM 1/336, TNA.

[23] Papiers de Pierre René Marie de Vaugiraud, gouverneur de la Martinique puis gouverneur des Iles du Vent [hereafter Vaugiraud Papers], Les Archives de la Vendée [hereafter AV], accessed September 6, 2020, http://recherche-archives.vendee.fr/archive/fonds/FRAD085_40J/view:191434; Boyer, *Événements de La Guadeloupe*, 5; *The Evening Star*, November 10, 1814.

[24] Georges Six, *Dictionnaire biographique des généraux et amiraux français de la Révolution et de l'Empire: 1792-1814. Tome 2* (Paris: 1934), 126-127; William James, *The Naval History of Great Britain, Volume 4* (London: Harding, Lepard, and Co, 1826), 319; Boyer, *Événements de La Guadeloupe*, 14-27.

Unlike Linois, Pierre René Charles Marie de Vaugiraud, the Count of Vaugiraud, was a staunch royalist. He was appointed as a Vice-Admiral and governor of Martinique in June of 1814 after having spent the previous 24 years in exile in London. Vaugiraud is also notable for, while serving as the pilot on Durham's *Anson* off Nourmoutier in 1795, running the ship aground resulting in a threat from Durham to hang him. Vaugiraud received his appointment as governor of Martinique in June of 1814 and arrived on the island in early December. His first several months on the island appear to have been fairly routine and concerned with the mechanics of the restoration of Bourbon rule and the re-establishment of commerce to and from the island. However, Vaugiraud's knowledge of Linois' background likely played a part in his decision to order the captain of the Royalist ship *L'Hermione* on December 15, 1814 to bring him an account of the situation on Guadeloupe, Linois' attitude, and of any Bonapartist activities there.[25] Clearly, during the winter and early spring of 1815 a tension existed between the two French governors.

It is next important to understand the relative economic and strategic unimportance of the islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique compared to other islands in the West Indies. It is true that sugar, and the ability to produce it inexpensively using enslaved labor, made West Indian colonies very valuable possessions in the long eighteenth century. Furthermore, strategically, the West Indies provided a convenient peripheral theater for a nation to distract its opponent or to force a dilution of forces away from another theater. In fact, in every war

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[25] Vaugiraud Papers, AV; Murray, *Memoirs of the Naval Life*, 41; Rubinstein, *Trafalgar Captain*, 65; *Caledonian Mercury*, December 10, 1814; Etat des dépêches de M. le gouverneur de la Martinique parvenues au ministère de la marine depuis le 1er janvier 1815 jusqu'au 31 juillet 1817, 40 J 16, Fonds du Fériet (1581-1867) [hereafter FF], AV; Raport au Roi sur le système colonial et la prospérité du commerce, Octobre 1814, 40 J 25, FF, AV; Instructions secretes données par Vaugiruad, gouverneur general des Iles du Vent (sic), à M. de Bussy, capitaine de vaisseau, commandant "l'Hermione," 15 Décembre 1814, 40 J 46, FF, AV.

between 1748 and 1815 the British conducted major operations there to disrupt French and Spanish trade. From the British perspective, the importance of Guadeloupe and Martinique lay in bolstering the domestic sugar market by denying the French the ability to profit from them by destroying their capacity to produce sugar rather than bringing their cane land under British rule. Once this was done, the islands could be used as diplomatic bargaining chips in peace negotiations. At the end of the Seven Years War Britain effectively traded both islands, along with a number of other West Indian possessions, back to the French in exchange for Canada, and in 1802, they gave back Martinique for no directly related concessions in the Treaty of Amiens.[26]

A similar line of thinking seems to have influenced Viscount Castlereagh's decision to return the islands to Louis XVIII in the 1814 Treaty of Paris. Castlereagh appears to have returned Martinique and Guadeloupe solely as a salve for France's national pride as that country's borders on the continent were being driven back to the *status quo ante bellum*—British sugar production on Jamaica, Trinidad, Demerara, and St. Lucia was not threatened by the resumption of French production on Guadeloupe and Martinique.[27] As a result of the treaty, in the winter and spring of 1815, Leith and Durham busied themselves redistributing the colonists, naval forces, and land forces to restore French control over the islands.[28]

The French merchant interest, on the other hand, assigned more economic and strategic importance to returning islands to their control, maintaining peace, and re-starting trade. The

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[26] J.R. Ward, "The British West Indies in the Age of Abolition, 1748-1815," and Michael Duffy, "World-Wide War and British Expansion, 1793-1815," in *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume II: The Eighteenth Century*, ed. P.J. Marshall and Alaine Low (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 186-206 and 415-430.
[27] John Bew, *Castlereagh: A Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 360; Ward, "The British West Indies," 429.
[28] Admiralty to Durham, September 6, 1814, ADM 2/166, TNA.

1814 Treaty of Paris also gave the French government the right to attempt to reconquer Saint-Domingue (Haiti) from the slave revolt that had held control of the island since the early days of the French Revolution. This gave the traders and merchants who had suffered since the onset of the French revolution, both in France and in the colonies, hope of restoring their former glory and prosperity.[29] They were eager to be rid of their overbearing former British overlords and to resume a hopefully more profitable life under the rule of Louis XVIII's newly installed government.[30]

Napoleon's unanticipated return from Elba, and the response of the French armed forces to his return, had global implications. While the allies in Vienna were quick to declare Napoleon an outlaw and to ratify the seventh coalition on March 13, one week after learning of his escape from Elba, Napoleon's return caused significant angst and debate within the British government. The debate did not center on whether Britain should oppose Napoleon's resumption of his throne. In fact, before Napoleon even arrived in Paris, Wellington was able to inform Castlereagh on March 18 of the allies' decision to renew the Treaty of Chaumont which bound each signatory to supply 150,000 troops for a common defense against Napoleon's expected aggression. The military provisions of the treaty were "instantly accepted" by the British government after it was signed on March 25, with an immediate commitment of £2 million in subsidies to be paid to continental powers for the raising of 100,000 troops to help Britain meets its quota.[31]

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[29] Vivian de Sola Pinto, "Traditions and Changes in French Atlantic Trade Between 1780 and 1830," *Renaissance and Modern Studies* 30, no. 1 (1986): 136-145.
[30] Boyer, *Événements de La Guadeloupe*, 7-13.
[31] R. J. B. Knight, *Britain Against Napoleon: The Organization of Victory, 1793-1815* (London: Penguin Books, 2013), 455; Charles Webster, *The Foreign Policy of Castlereagh, 1812-1815: Britain and the Reconstruction of Europe* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1931), 441-444; Bew, *Castlereagh*, 390-1.

The debate instead focused on what ends the British government could publicly commit itself to achieving through the use of military force against Bonaparte. It was particularly concerned with whether the Bourbon monarchy was worth restoring. Louis XVIII's abrupt flight from Paris to Lille and then to Belgium within a span of 19 days did not help his supporters in Britain.[32] Neither, however, did his flight soften the British government's intent to fight Napoleon, as Castlereagh wrote to Wellington after hearing news of Louis' departure: Britain's involvement must be of "'the largest scale. ... [Y]ou must inundate France with force in all directions.'"[33] The final results of this debate, and the fate of Napoleon himself, have been extensively studied and do not need to be addressed further here. However, the fact that this debate occurred from the moment the British government and its ministers learned of Napoleon's return on March 10 until the end of May serves as an important backdrop to the orders sent by those ministers to their respective commanders in the West Indies during this time period.[34]

The first letter that Melville wrote to Durham after Napoleon's escape was a cancellation of his relief as naval commander-in-chief of the Leeward Island station. Writing shortly after news of Napoleon's return reached London on March 10, Melville told him about Napoleon's escape, praised his conduct, and specifically mentioned that he had given "such great satisfaction" to the merchants on his station. He concluded, "Should, however, peace not be disturbed, I will take care to send out an officer to relieve you."[35] Having disappointed

[32] Webster, *Foreign Policy of Castlereagh*, 439-440.
[33] Bew, *Castlereagh*, 444.
[34] Webster, *Foreign Policy of Castlereagh*, 452; Bew, *Castlereagh*, 390.
[35] Murray, *Memoirs of the Naval Life*, 95.

Durham's hopes of a return to England, Melville then wrote the order that would drive and guide Durham's conduct for the next four months. Because a subordinate's understanding of the intent behind a commander's orders, and how the commander conveys that intent in his orders is so important, Melville's orders are worth quoting in their entirety here.

> March 26, 1815
>
> The vessel that conveys this letter and other despatches for you, carries out orders from Louis XVIII to the Governments of Martinique and Guadaloupe [sic], to hold those islands in his name.
>
> I hope they will obey this requisition, but if they should not, and if on the contrary they declare for Bonaparte, it will nevertheless be your duty (indeed it is scarcely necessary for me to remind you of it) to abstain from any hostile acts against his flag, unless the vessels which carry it should commit any act of aggression against British ships, or until you learn hostilities between France and this country have actually commenced. If Martinique and Guadeloupe continue faithful to Louis XVIII., and their vessels carry his flag, they must of course be treated as friends."[36]

On the face of it, Melville's orders seem to differ significantly from the attitude of the rest of the British government. He wrote them two weeks after the allies in Vienna had declared Napoleon an outlaw and a week after Wellington informed Castlereagh of the allies' intent to renew the Treaty of Chaumont and commit 150,000 troops to Napoleon's defeat. However, his orders still fit within the trend of the overall response of the government. During this period Melville, like the rest of the British government, was dealing with the shock of Napoleon's return, and specifically for the navy, with the on-going post-war reduction in the strength of

[36] No copy of these orders survives today. A request to the British archives for all correspondence from the Admiralty to Durham during 1815 did not produce a copy and Rubinstein's edition of Durham's papers does not contain them either. They are originally quoted in Durham's memoir as an excerpt from a longer letter: Murray, *Memoirs of the Naval Life,* 95-96.

squadrons around the world and in the Leeward Islands. He was also facing the growing potential of renewing a worldwide war where the Royal Navy would again likely play a part in protecting the British homeland and its possessions overseas.

Looked at this way with the benefit of hindsight and the knowledge of how the greater conflict concluded, Melville's desired end state seems clear.[37] He did not want to provoke unnecessary conflict in the West Indies. His guidelines for acceptable action by Durham are less clear, serving to obscure his true intent. Durham is not to act aggressively nor allow his actions to start an unprovoked conflict with any French ship regardless of whether it flies the white Bourbon flag or the Imperial tri-color. Crucially, what was less clear is what Durham should, or was even permitted to, do if events in the West Indies exceeded the scope of Melville's orders before new ones could be sent across the Atlantic. In the end, Melville's language is extremely rigid and is that of a commander too severely restricting the options available to a subordinate in the field. "[T]o abstain from any hostile acts" gave Durham very little room to maneuver as circumstances changed, and the focus on "hostilities between France and this country" only confused matters. After all, the allies claimed to be taking up arms against French forces *as allies of France*—they were merely seeking to capture the outlaw Napoleon Bonaparte. Whether France and Britain were actually at war seems a simple question on its face, but in the context of Napoleon's return, Melville severely limited Durham's available courses of action and confused his understanding of the evolving events in Europe.

[37] There is significant potential for further research in this area. Because of COVID-19 restrictions, I was unable to access any of Melville's personal papers.

On April 10, in the midst of efforts to supply and prepare the Duke of Wellington's army on the continent after Britain's official commitment to the renewed Treaty of Chaumont on March 25, Bathurst wrote his orders to Leith. For the same reasons as with Melville's orders to Durham they are worth quoting in their entirety here.

> The events which have recently taken place in France give too much reason to believe that some endeavors may be made by the party attached to Bonaparte to gain possession of the islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique and there is ground for apprehension that the governors of those islands may not be able without assistance to maintain the authority of His Most Christian Majesty.
>
> Under these circumstances I am commanded to signify to you the pleasure of His Royal Highness the Prince Regent that in the event of any requisition being made to you for assistance for such a purpose from the officers in command in those islands you should without delay afford from the force under your command such assistance as the means placed at your disposal may be able to furnish.[38]

Unlike Melville's orders, these clearly communicate Bathurst's desired end state to Leith: retention of the islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique under the control of Louis XVIII. In further contrast to Melville's orders, Bathurst's are those of a commander setting a goal for the on-scene subordinate while leaving significant room for that subordinate to choose how to best accomplish that goal. His full intention is clear. The islands must be retained for the King of France without removing Leith's ability to do his job and protect the British colonies under his charge. By using open and permissive language, Bathurst gave Leith significant room to maneuver and match his actions to the situation. This will become important later.

As evidenced by the first sentence of Melville's orders of March 26 to Durham, the French ministers also felt the need to send proscriptive orders to Vaugiraud and Linois in the

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[38] *Durham Papers*, 455-456.

immediate aftermath of Napoleon's return. The Bourbon Minister of the Navy and the Colonies wrote to Vaugiraud on March 12 sending him copies of papers announcing the return of "l'usurpateur." Louis' ambassador in London wrote to both governors on March 24 urging them to hold their islands in the name of Louis XVIII, but, likely understanding the different backgrounds of the two governors, gave additional instructions that neither should permit any new forces to enter Guadeloupe nor should they hand over the administration of the colony without a personal order from the King countersigned by Count Blacas D'Aulps, the minister of the King's household. Another potential reason for the firm tone of the ambassador's order is that the King was apparently considering permanent retirement to Guadeloupe and Martinique if Bonaparte was ultimately successful in his return.[39] Much like Melville's, these orders served to rigidly box in the French commanders on station.

As the Bourbon's situation in France worsened, however, even those proscriptive orders did not provide sufficient confidence to Louis' government. On April 18, Blacas wrote to Vaugiraud and Linois, as well as the Intendant of Guadeloupe, to inform them that the King had appointed Vaugiraud as Governor General of both Martinique and Guadeloupe. Explicitly, he gave Louis' reasoning for this change as a result of the events and circumstances that have come to pass in France. Implicit, however, is the concern that as Louis' government continued to witness military and government leaders declare for Napoleon, so they were anxious to consolidate power in the West Indies in the French commander they trusted.[40]

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[39] Murray, *Memoir of the Naval Life,* 95; Etat chronologique des déspêches du minister de la marine et des colonies adressées au comte de Vaugiraud, soit individuellement, soit en nom collectif avec l'intendant Dubuc, depuis le 17 juin 1814 jusqu'au 30 avril 1817, 40 J 15, FF, AV; Boyer, *Événements de La Guadeloupe*, xxx-36; Léon Muel, *Gouvrenements, ministéres et constitutions de la France depuis cent ans* (Paris: Marchal et Billard, 1891), 92.
[40] Three letters from Blacas to Vaugiraud, Linois, and Guilhermy, April 18, 1815, 40 J 18, FF, AV.

By the third week of April, then, both the British and French Ministers in Europe had cast their die from a mission command perspective. On both sides intent was imbued, intentionally or otherwise, into orders. On the French side Louis XVIII's government decided it did not have the right military commander on Guadeloupe for the unfolding situation. The orders and commands were then sent on the long journey to the West Indies to be interpreted and carried out by a disparate group of commanders-in-chief.

In this period, instructions from ministers in Europe took between one to two months to reach their intended recipients in the West Indies. For the British the primary mail route to the West Indies originated, like all other wartime mail service, from Falmouth in the south west of the country. The service followed a relatively consistent path from Britain to the West Indies designed to take advantage of prevailing winds and geography. The first stop for the ships after their departure from Britain was occasionally Lisbon—three of the twelve packets called there in 1815. Next, the ships would sail to the north east coast of South America before proceeding into the Leeward Islands where they would typically stop at the various colonies in the region. Barbados, followed by Dominica and Antigua, were the colonies most often visited in 1815. Finally, from the West Indies the packets would take about a month to return by a more northerly route to Falmouth, where they would start the cycle again.[41]

Between the fall of 1814 and the end of 1815, the route to the West Indies was serviced by approximately a dozen packets which departed on a roughly monthly schedule. The primarily determinant of the scheduling seems to have been, on all the routes maintained by

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[41] Howard Robinson, *Carrying British Mails Overseas* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1964), 75-79; John Olenkiewicz, "British Packet Sailings Falmouth <> Surinam 1810-1816," last modified July 8, 2013, https://www.rfrajola.com/mercury/1810%201816%20British%20Packet%20Surinam%20Sailing.pdf.

the packet service, availability of the packets themselves. However, if important mail needed to be sent, and no packets were available, mail could also be sent by any available Royal Navy vessels.[42]

On the French side, Louis XVIII's flight to Ghent meant that his government would not be able to rely on the French postal service to relay instructions to their commanders in the West Indies. Instead, they would have to rely on the British postal system for assistance. As the opening line of Melville's March 26 orders to Durham point out, the packet carrying his orders also carried orders to the governors of Guadeloupe and Martinique. This is also likely why Blacas, while notifying Vaugiraud of his appointment as Governor-General in the West Indies, directed him to relay all reports on the colonies through Louis XVIII's ambassador in London. Likewise, Bonaparte's newly restored Imperial Minister of the Navy and the Colonies sent his first letter to Vaugiraud and Linois via a French armed schooner.[43]

Also inherent to this timeline is the assumption that the packet ship, warship, or merchant entrusted with the mail safely made it to its destination. There were many risks to packets in the early nineteenth century including falling victim to a competing nation's warship, privateers, or simply to the elements. This was especially true for transatlantic packets during the War of 1812 which saw the average loss of mail-carrying ships at sea jump from two a year to seven after June of 1812. Luckily for Leith and Durham, however, the last packets lost to any source in the West Indies in 1815 occurred in February when the *Lady Mary Pelham* was taken by an American privateer on her return trip to Falmouth and when the *Duke of Montrose*

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[42] Olenkiewicz, "British Packet Sailings"; Robinson, *Carrying British Mails*, 79-95.
[43] Letter from Blacas to Vaugiraud, April 18, 1815, 40 J 18, FF, AV; Boyer, *Événements de La Guadeloupe*, 36; Durham to Croker, June 13, 1815, ADM 1/336, TNA.

foundered on rocks off Barbados in April while still managing to save the mail bags. Correspondence successfully and regularly arrived in the West Indies throughout the entirety of the Hundred Days.[44] Of course, neither Bathurst or Melville, nor Leith or Durham, could have known this during the spring and summer of 1815. Instead, they would have been used to the opposite where the timely arrival of guidance could not be counted on.

From a mission command perspective, the slow and semi-reliable system responsible for conveying orders and guidance from ministers and commanders at home to subordinates in the West Indies created a dangerous information environment in the spring and summer of 1815. Despite the reliability and stable, periodic timing of mail from Britain, the potential for the loss of orders, combined with the significant travel time, meant that the British and French commanders-in-chief were operating in an environment characterized by incomplete and imperfect information—or at least the fear of flawed and late information. This, in turn, placed even greater emphasis on the latitude provided those commanders in the orders that were about to begin arriving.

The communications and orders arrived in quick succession. Newspapers carrying the first reports of Napoleon's escape from Elba and the upheaval in France reached Barbados on April 28 in the mail bags saved by the crew of the sinking *Duke of Montrose* packet.[45] The news reached Guadeloupe on April 29. A few days later on May 2, after stopping at Martinique, HMS *Badger* arrived on Guadeloupe with the March 24 orders from Louis XVIII's ambassador in

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[44] Robinson, *Carrying British Mails,* 103; Olenkiewicz, "British Packet Sailings."

[45] There is a small disagreement on the day *Duke of Montrose* arrived. Robert Schomburgk gives the day as April 28 while Lloyd's Maritime list gives it as April 29. See Robert Schomburgk, *The History of Barbados* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longman, 1848), 391; *Lloyd's Maritime List*, June 9, 1815, no. 4978.

London before proceeding on to Barbados. Melville's orders to Durham of March 26 also arrived in *Badger*, reaching Barbados May 8, but Durham did not actually receive them until a few days later after a reconnoiter of the initial situation on Guadeloupe. It is not known exactly when Leith received his April 10 orders from Bathurst, or by what means he received them. However, Durham, in a letter to the Admiralty dated May 28, informed them that Leith had received instructions to help Linois and Vaugiraud maintain their islands loyal to Louis XVIII. Based on recorded packet sailing and arrival dates during this period these instructions could only have been delivered by warship or private vessel and likely arrived shortly after Durham's orders from Melville.[46]

On Martinique and Guadeloupe, as in France, news of Napoleon's return created immediate difficulties for the Bourbon governments. In early May both governors, fearful of their respective populations' increasingly pro-Napoleon sentiments, reached out to Leith to ask for assistance. Vaugiraud, facing imminent mutiny from two-thirds of the 1,300-man garrison on Martinique, swiftly communicated with Leith and concluded a signed agreement with the British governor on May 20 to allow British troops to garrison forts on Martinique as auxiliary forces for the preservation of Louis XVIII's authority.[47]

On Guadeloupe, Linois, concerned with rumors of the return of the hated "Anglais" spreading across the island and with his government's inability to keep news of Napoleon's increasing success in France from its inhabitants, wrote to Leith on May 3 asking for a British

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[46] Schomburgk, *The History of Barbados*, 391; Boyer, *Événements de La Guadeloupe*, 34-36; Durham to Croker, May 11, 20, and 28, 1815, ADM 1/336, TNA.

[47] Leith to Vaugiraud, May 27, 1815, 40 J 28, FF, AV; *Royal Gazette of Jamaica*, July 29, 1815; *London Courier and Evening Gazette*, July 26, 1815.

man-of-war to patrol off both Martinique and Guadeloupe.[48] His request for this patrol was that it "intercept any vessels with the tri-coloured flag," and Durham, not yet having received the March 26 orders from Melville, immediately complied with the request.[49] Durham and Leith then both immediately sailed to Guadeloupe, arriving May 13, to inform Linois that the requested patrol would be established, to offer him assistance, and to request an in-person interview. Likely fearing the effect of his being seen interviewing with British commanders-in-chief, subsequent to rumors amongst the general population of an imminent reinvasion of the island by the hated British, Linois refused an in-person interview but continued to communicate with Leith by letter for the remainder of May, culminating with Leith's offer on May 26 to send an auxiliary force to garrison the forts of Guadeloupe. Linois declined the offer, citing his orders from Louis XVIII's ambassador in London to allow no new forces to enter the colony without express permission. Upon hearing of his refusal Vaugiraud wrote to Linois on June 6 counseling him that the Ambassador's orders were solely intended to exclude new French troops from Europe and that he should admit British help to maintain the colony loyal to the French King. Linois refused again.[50]

Durham and Leith, both newly in receipt of guidance from their respective ministers in England, swiftly made preparations to assist Vaugiraud. By May 27 Leith had assembled 2,000 troops, including artillery, stores, and provisions, at Saint Lucia. Having no authority over the troop ships or Durham himself, Leith requested assistance to ferry the British troops from St.

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[48] Boyer, *Événements de La Guadeloupe*, 36-41.
[49] Durham to Croker, May 11, 1815, ADM 1/336, TNA.
[50] Boyer, *Événements de La Guadeloupe*, 41; M. A. Fabre, "La Guadeloupe Pendant Les Cent-Jours," *Revue Historique de L'armee* 13, no. 1 (1957): 79.

Lucia to Martinique as soon as Vaugiraud was ready to receive them.[51] Durham readily, and without any apparent argument, agreed, arriving at St. Lucia with the required transports on May 31.[52]

While making preparations to deliver the British troops to Vaugiraud on May 31 Durham reported Linois' refusal of Leith's similar offer off an auxiliary force to the Admiralty. In it, Durham first defended Linois' loyalty and reported on the deteriorating situation on Guadeloupe. He believed Linois' refusal to be based on his inability "to permit an English Soldier to land as almost every Man on that Island 'is attached to Buonaparte,' to 'Privateering', and 'Plunder' and are the most disorderly set in the West Indies." He also noted, with the concern of a man whose reputation in the West Indies to this point had been built on his success in defending the merchant trade from attack, that he had received reports of a force of up to 20 privateers waiting in the harbor at Point-a-Pitre (the main anchorage of Guadeloupe). He believed they were only waiting for the "moment the tri-colored flag is hoisted or that they hear of Hostilities having commenced" to begin wreaking havoc on British trade in the region. Durham then went on to assure the Admiralty that he would do everything in his power to avoid being the first aggressor in the region. He also reported to the Admiralty asking for and receiving Linois' promise that he would not endorse any expedition to occupy two valuable

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[51] *The Royal Gazette of Jamaica*, July 29, 1815; Durham to Croker, May 28 and 31, 1815, ADM 1/336, TNA; Leith to Vaugiraud, May 27, 1815, 40 J 28, FF, AV.

[52] Durham's memoirs and Rubinstein's *Trafalgar Captain* both make a reference to Durham sending an officer to Martinique *incognito* to ensure that Vaugiraud was actually still in command of the island. Heavily implied in both these descriptions is that if Vaugiraud had already been overthrown then Durham would not have supported landing troops on Martinique in order to stay within the bound of the March 26 orders from Melville. This does not make sense given Durham's demonstrated propensity for communicating his intentions to the Admiralty. Also, he makes no mention of his intention to verify Vaugiraud's hold on power in either of the letters he wrote to the Admiralty prior to embarking Leith's troops. See Murray, *Memoirs of the Naval Life*, 97; Rubinstein, *Trafalgar Captain,* 243; Durham to Croker, May 28 and 31, 1815, ADM 1/336, TNA.

islands to the south of Guadeloupe, the Saintes. Finally, in a post-script Durham warned that the *Duchess d'Angouleme*, a French frigate, had departed for France leaving only one French warship in the area. It is clear that at this point Durham understood the fragile situation on and around Guadeloupe, especially the weakness of its government, and the potential consequences of that island declaring for Napoleon. Despite having received Melville's direction to engage in no hostile act against a ship carrying the tri-color flag, Durham left four brigs, the maximum amount of force he could spare, to watch for both any indication that privateers had begun to attack shipping and for the arrival of any ships from the French mainland.[53]

Both Durham and Leith expected Vaugiraud to take immediate advantage of the agreement, but were surprised when, after being notified of Durham's readiness to land troops, he balked. Durham's report to the Admiralty describes his hesitation as a fear of the reaction of the inhabitants to the arrival of the British. However, in two letters to Durham, on May 29 and June 1, Vaugiraud asked Durham to postpone the arrival of the troops until he could make proper arrangements to receive them, including concerns with sending some of the more recalcitrant Bonapartist soldiers back to France first. Durham and Leith, both concerned about the health of the British troops packed together in ships, were understandably upset and leaned heavily on Vaugiraud to accept the troops. It is also notable that while Durham and Leith were exchanging letters with Vaugiraud, Durham began to dictate a summary of his career-long exploits and the several plaudits he had received for his service to King and country. As Rubinstein hypothesizes in *Trafalgar Captain*, it appears that in the midst of preparations for occupation of French territory and the potential beginning of another world war, Durham was

[53] Durham to Croker, May 31, 1815, ADM 1/336, TNA.

focused on memorializing himself. Ultimately, on June 5 the British auxiliary force landed safely, the forts were garrisoned in the name of Louis the XVIII with appropriate pomp and circumstance, and the colony of Martinique remained loyal to the French King. Finally, recognizing that the inhabitants of Martinique might be wary of the return of British troops to their island, Leith and Vaugiraud took care to publish widely the terms of their agreement. They also tried to assuage the fears of the French colonists by making the first two conditions about the retention of Bourbon authority over the colony. Specifically, Leith guaranteed that the sovereignty of Martinique would remain under Vaugiraud entirely and that the British troops would, as auxiliaries, report to Vaugiraud for use as he saw fit to maintain Louis' authority.[54]

The news of the British troops' arrival on Martinique reached Guadeloupe the next day on June 6 and the terms of the agreement between Leith and Vaugiraud were published there on June 10. According to Linois' deputy, Boyer, the former caused a significant uproar while the latter did nothing to calm the population. In fact, according to Boyer, it was only his heroic efforts that prevented the island's inhabitants from immediately declaring for Bonaparte.[55] Writing to the Admiralty on the same day as the terms of the agreement were published, Durham offered a different perspective. Because of Melville's orders of March 26 Durham had found it necessary to resist requests from Leith, Vaugiraud, and Linois to "act in any way hostile to the tri-colored flag." Clearly, Leith, Linois, and Vaugiraud had grown uncomfortable with the situation on Guadeloupe, realized that the arrival of orders from Napoleon's government would set the island on fire, and that the Royal Navy was the only means of preventing this from

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[54] *London Courier and Evening Gazette*, July 26, 1815; Durham to Croker, May 28, May 31, and June 10, 1815, ADM 1/336, TNA; Leith to Vaugiraud, May 27 and June 2, 1815, 40 J 28, FF, AV; Rubinstein, *Trafalgar Captain*, 243.
[55] Boyer, *Événements de La Guadeloupe*, 42-44.

happening. Durham did not disagree with this conclusion, expressing his relief later in the same letter that he was "happy to say [that no ship carrying Napoleon's flag] had...appeared yet in these seas." He, however, appeared concerned that he may soon be forced to act outside the restrictive bounds of Melville's orders.[56] So, by the second week of June the situation on Guadeloupe had reached a tipping point. So had Admiral Durham.

Dispatched by Napoleon's government from France on May 9 with a mission to "rallier la Martinique et la Guadeloupe à la metropole," the French schooner *L'Agile* made its first landfall on the north side of Guadeloupe at St. Francois on June 12 with two letters for the governor.[57] HMS *Barrosa*, one of the brigs cruising around Guadeloupe at Linois' request to prevent exactly this from happening, came upon *L'Agile* shortly after it left St. Francois on the northern side of Guadeloupe. *Barrosa*, ignorant of *L'Agile's* success in already landing letters, determined the schooner was acting suspiciously and brought it to Durham, whose flagship was anchored at the Saintes. Durham's interrogation of *L'Agile's* commander revealed that the ship carried both the tri-colored flag and the white flag of the Bourbons and that the captain had instructions to fly the Bourbon flag when away from the coast in order to fool any patrolling British ships. Most importantly, Durham learned that *L'Agile* carried instructions and exhortations from Napoleon's newly installed Minister of the Marine and the Colonies for the governors of Martinique and Guadeloupe, and all the French warships thought to still be in the West Indies, to return themselves to Imperial rule. Likely remembering the rigid words of Melville's orders, Durham forwarded the dispatches to Linois on Guadeloupe and asked what

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[56] Durham to Croker, June 10, 1815, ADM 1/336, TNA.
[57] Boyer, *Événements de La Guadeloupe*, 46.

he would like done with them. Linois' reply, and the increasing stress of his position, were unambiguous. He asked Durham to send the dispatches to Vaugiraud, who had recently learned of his appointment by Louis XVIII's government in exile as Governor General of all the French West Indian colonies, to ask for his advice and instruction. Tellingly, he also implored Durham, taking care to refer to him as a friend, to have *L'Agile* forcibly escorted out of the West Indies to ensure continued tranquility.[58]

At this point Durham was faced with what, on its face, appeared to be an easy decision: to confiscate the dispatches carried onboard *L'Agile* and possibly the ship itself, or release it to deliver the instructions. No act of aggression had actually yet occurred. *L'Agile* had been encountered by *Barrosa* flying the Bourbon flag and appears to have peacefully come to the Saintes where, again, the captain surrendered the dispatches without any recorded violence. In other words, Durham had stayed within the letter of his instructions and could easily justify confiscating the Imperial dispatches, if not *L'Agile* also. This is especially true given the explicit request to do exactly that from the Bourbon governor of Guadeloupe, which was in line with Bathurst's orders to Leith. Even if the confiscation of the Imperial dispatches generated a protest from a yet to be established Napoleonic government in the far distant future it was extremely unlikely that Durham would face censure from a government that had declared Napoleon an outlaw two weeks before Melville sent Durham his orders and that had directed another commander-in-chief on the same station to give the French governors any assistance they requested.

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[58] Durham to Croker, June 13, 1815, ADM 1/336, TNA; Two letters from Decrès to commanders of French warships and to Vaugiraud and Guilhermy, April 16, 1815, 40 J 19, FF, AV.

It is also possible to argue that it was in Durham's best interest as the naval commander-in-chief to confiscate the dispatches. Left unchecked, *L'Agile* had instructions to provide the incendiary dispatches to any French warship it could contact. While Durham knew that only one such warship remained, even that single ship could have resulted in a significant threat to Durham's diminished squadron and the merchant shipping in the area. Additionally, as he had previously reported to the Admiralty, Durham was concerned that the 20 or so privateers in Point-a-Pitre harbor in Guadeloupe were only waiting for a return of Napoleon's government to begin ravaging trade in the region. Finally, regardless of what happened to Napoleon in Europe, in no way would Britain's interests in the West Indies be bettered by a Bourbon government secured by British power on Martinique and a Bonapartist government on Guadeloupe. Again, it is extremely unlikely that a British commander-in-chief would face any discipline or displeasure for taking measures to prevent depredation of British trade in the West Indies. Instead, as Durham wrote to the Admiralty on June 13, he didn't believe the "nature of his instructions" permitted him to do anything other than return the dispatches and allow *L'Agile* to go wherever it chose.[59]

Unsurprisingly, the captain of *L'Agile* chose to proceed directly to Guadeloupe, arriving at Basse-Terre on June 15. The crew distributed copies of the *Moniteur* and other newspapers immediately upon landing and gave dispatches to the commander of the harbor. The captain, proudly displaying a tri-colored cockade on his hat, proceeded through town to the governor

[59] Durham to Croker, June 13, 1815, and Linois to Durham June 12, 1815, ADM 1/336, TNA. If Boyer is to be believed, Durham initially agreed with Linois' request and sent *L'Agile* under tow to Martinique, but then, out of a fervent desire to ravage Guadeloupe in the name of George III, he immediately regretted the decision and chased down both ships to release *L'Agile*. See Boyer, *Événements de La Guadeloupe,* 47.

drawing an increasingly large and boisterous crowd as he went. Over the next three days events proceeded exactly as Linois had feared when he asked Durham to send the dispatches to Vaugiraud and to banish *L'Agile* from the West Indies. The enthusiasm of the general population for Napoleon's return followed an identical path to that of the people in France and, likely out of a sense of self-preservation rather than any overwhelming sense of attachment to Napoleon's cause, culminated in Linois allowing the tri-colored flag to be raised over the island on June 18 and his formal declaration of loyalty to Napoleon's government on June 19. This proved too much for the island's intendant, Jean François César de Guilhermy, a staunch royalist. He, and several other leading citizens of the colony fled Guadeloupe for the Saintes on the night of June 20. Two days later Linois sent an armed detachment to the island to deliver a letter to Guilhermy. In accordance with Durham's orders, HMS *Barbadoes*, stationed at the Saintes to monitor Guadeloupe, did not interfere with landing of the armed party or their stay on the island. Linois' letter to Guilhermy asserted that he had no other choice but to attach his own destiny to that of France. He also requested that Guilhermy return to Guadeloupe to resume his post. At the same time, according to Guilhermy's personal papers published in 1886, Linois threatened Guilhermy's wife, who was still in her house on Guadeloupe, that he would keep her and her children hostage until Guilhermy agreed to return. The threat did not persuade Guilhermy or the others on the Saintes, who escaped onboard HMS *Barbadoes*, leaving the Saintes in possession of the armed party from Guadeloupe. Guilhermy arrived on Martinique on June 26, one day after his family who had apparently not been held captive. Three days later, after receiving a report of the events on Guadeloupe, Vaugiraud issued a

proclamation, in his capacity as Governor General of the French West Indies, dismissing Linois as governor of Guadeloupe.[60]

Meanwhile, Durham had returned to Guadeloupe on the morning of June 18 to discover the tri-colored flag flying above all the fortifications as he had apparently "long been in expectation of [it] taking place." In his report of this news to the Admiralty, Durham did not give an explicit reason for his return to Guadeloupe but his concern that he may be found at fault for releasing *L'Agile* and its dispatches was heavily implied by a post-script to the report. In it, Durham informed the Admiralty that he had just learned that *L'Agile* delivered more dispatches at the north end of Guadeloupe before *Barrosa* came into contact with it - he was clearly trying to demonstrate that his release of *L'Agile* was not the sole cause of the island declaring for Napoleon. Durham then informed them that he sent an officer ashore to confer with Linois whose reply convinced him that the colony's leadership was now fully dedicated to Napoleon's cause. Finally, wholly in line with Melville's orders of March 26, Durham informed the Admiralty that once he heard of hostilities actually beginning, he would immediately place the island in a state of blockade.[61]

Having completed his report on the revolt of Guadeloupe, Durham's next action baffled Leith. Shortly after June 18 Durham wrote to Linois and informed him that, having received no orders to commence hostilities, he would not interfere with any ship flying Napoleon's flag regardless of the mission on which it was engaged. It did not matter if the ship was actively

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[60] The events that took place on Guadeloupe between June 15 and 18 present a significant opportunity for further research that does not fit into this essay. See Boyer, *Événements de La Guadeloupe,* 47-60; Fabre, "La Guadeloupe Pendant Les Cent-Jours;" Jean François César Baron de Guilhermy, *Papiers D'un Émigré, 1789-1829*, ed. Colonel Guilhermy (Paris: E. Plon, Nourrit et Cie, 1886), 390-5.

[61] Durham to Croker, June 18, 1815, ADM 1/336, TNA.

engaged in hostility towards Louis XVIII's authority or bringing troops, weapons, and supplies to fortify Guadeloupe against a Bourbon reinvasion: Durham would not permit his squadron to intervene unless his ships were attacked, or he learned that war had commenced between Britain and Napoleon's France. This news circulated rapidly throughout British, Bourbon, and Bonapartist circles appropriately encouraging or enraging each audience as late as July 22. At the time, Leith could not comprehend why Durham's ship had allowed the rebels to seize the Saintes without opposition. Leith was especially troubled with Durham's decision to tell Linois that he had an effectively free hand to undermine Bourbon authority in the West Indies, and as a direct consequence to put Leith's troops on Martinique, and anywhere else they were assisting Bourbon forces, in danger.[62] The rationale behind Durham's decision becomes clearer when viewed through the lens of mission command.

As previously discussed, Melville's orders of March 26 overly constrained Durham's available options. They too severely limited the decision space available to Durham to deal with a unique and rapidly evolving environment in which he could not hope to get clarification on a useful timescale. Undiscussed to this point, however, is that Melville's orders also failed to account for the personality and mindset of the person receiving them. It is clear that by the end of June 1815 Durham wanted to go home to England. He had applied for a relief and been granted one, only to find that hope snatched away at the last moment by Napoleon's escape from Elba.[63] Sensing the possibility of another destructive world war, Durham was acutely aware of the degraded material state and decreasing numbers of the squadron he had to

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[62] *Durham Papers*, 452-455; Rubinstein, *Trafalgar Captain*, 243; *Royal Gazette of Jamaica*, July 22, 1815.
[63] Durham concluded an already despondent letter to Vice Admiral Cochrane, written June 28, with the sentence "No hopes of peace." *Durham Papers*, 452.

protect the vital commerce in his theater. This in turn could threaten the reputation he had built through his entire career and affect his prospects at home. In fact, he was concerned enough about this reputation to begin memorializing it while preparing to land troops on Martinique. As with the *L'Agile* incident, Durham could have stayed well within the bounds of his orders by simply ordering his ships not to interfere with French ships flying the tri-colored flag. He didn't need to explicitly tell Napoleon's sympathizers on Guadeloupe that they had a free hand to do as they pleased. Durham's broadcasting of his intention to not interfere with, or intercept any of, Napoleon's ships only likely served to ensure that none of those ships would act aggressively in the first place, forcing Durham to start a conflict he did not want. When looked at in light of all these stresses, it is clear that the restrictive nature of Melville's orders, as well as explicitly tying Durham's prospects of a relief to the maintenance of peace, provided Durham an excuse to do nothing and hope for the best. Put another away, Melville's orders did not take into account the mindset of the commander for whom they were intended. Instead, they took away any incentive to boldness or initiative and provided room for the Admiral to prevaricate.

Leith, of course, did not know any of this when he wrote the first of what turned out to be a seven-letter back-and-forth. He was simply trying to accomplish his mission as he understood it and Durham was doing things that both did not make sense and that could significantly hinder Leith's ability to carry out his orders. On June 30, Leith wrote two letters to Durham. The first expressed Leith's general frustration at Durham's decisions to allow *L'Agile* to put into Guadeloupe, at Durham's public insistence that he would not interfere even with ships bringing re-enforcements to Guadeloupe that Leith's troops might eventually have to fight, and

with Durham's complete unwillingness to take a risk for the greater good. Leith concluded the first letter by informing Durham that he had ordered a force to retake the Saintes, by force if necessary. Likely anticipating significant pushback from Durham, Leith asked only for Durham's ships to provide protection from aggression and to prevent the garrison on the Saintes from communicating with Guadeloupe. The second letter was an extension of the first. Leith informed Durham that based on a communication from Vaugiraud of the events on Guadeloupe, Leith felt compelled to greatly accelerate his preparations to make his army ready for offensive operations against any French island that might declare for Napoleon. He again implored Durham to change his policy of allowing French re-enforcements to enter Guadeloupe in order not to make the island's inevitable recapture prohibitively costly in blood and treasure.[64]

Durham's reply on July 1 was extremely narrow in its scope and almost as acerbic in its tone, going well beyond the intent behind Melville's orders. Durham, in an overtly defensive and offended tone, stated plainly that he would not, and cannot, permit any ship under his command to be the first aggressor against any force coming from Guadeloupe. Most surprisingly, Durham informed Leith that *only because the forces occupying the Saintes had withdrawn to Guadeloupe*, would he permit his ships to intervene and protect Leith's troops from attack. He then went further limiting that protection to only "warn[ing] off any force that may be sent from Guadeloupe." In other words, Durham implied that if a French force had still occupied the Saintes, he would have required his ships to stand off and watch an attack on

[64] *Durham Papers*, 452-456; Leith received additional orders from Bathurst, dated May 20, on June 21, directing him to prepare his forces to attack any French colony in the West Indies in the event of war with France. See Leith to Durham, June 22, 1815, ADM 1/336, TNA.

British troops and even if he did allow his ships to intervene, he would have allowed the French to attack first.[65] His narrow interpretation of Melville's orders was clearly excessive. In no way did Melville intend for his commander-in-chief in the West Indies to stand by and watch British soldiers die, but that is how Durham, intentionally or not, had construed his orders. The British successfully landed a force on the evacuated Saintes on July 4 and 5 but continued to exchange more letters as Vaugiraud and Leith had decided to forcibly repossess Guadeloupe itself.[66]

The two commanders exchanged another four letters over the next six days that contained similar arguments and identical reasoning to the previous three. On July 2, Leith attempted to reason with Durham, and most importantly, to demonstrate that the two commanders could find a path to cooperation that would satisfy Durham's narrow interpretation of his orders. Leith's line of argument laid out that he was acting in accordance with the spirit and intent of the orders of the Prince Regent, not just his department head Bathurst, to support Louis XVIII's government by employing force short of declaring war. Leith also argued that he considered anyone attempting armed rebellion against Louis' authority, regardless of what flag they did it under, to have committed the first act of aggression against British and French troops. He ended by pointedly asking Durham whether he would permit his ships to protect the British troops on the Saintes from being attacked by troops and weapons that Durham's ships had allowed the French to deliver to Guadeloupe.[67]

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[65] Durham to Leith, July 1, 1815, ADM 1/336, TNA.

[66] Ironically, Durham may have been in receipt of bad intelligence here. According to both Boyer and Guilhermy's memoirs the British imprisoned the small garrisons found on the Saintes. Even more damning for the British intelligence is Guilhermy's statement that the attacking force took unspecified measures to minimize the resistance of the troops on the island prior to landing and were extremely surprised to find the Bourbon flag already flying over the islands on their arrival. See Boyer, *Événements de La Guadeloupe*, 68 and Guilhermy, *Papiers D'un Émigré*, 390-395.

[67] *Durham Papers*, 457-459.

Leith's arguments only partially convinced Durham. The admiral, on July 4 hastened to inform the general that he had already sent orders to his ships to "prevent [any] renewed attempt at the repossession of that post, and when the British have garrisoned it to keep all French ships of war under whatever flag at a respectful distance." That is as conciliatory as Durham got, however. The rest of his letter was dedicated to legalistic arguments about how he could not possibly allow his forces to become the aggressors. First, he argued that if only the governor of Guadeloupe had requested assistance, as Vaugiraud had done at Martinique, he would feel satisfied that the British were acting defensively. Then he concluded that, because he had received "several communications from the Admiralty subsequent [to Leith's receipt of his April 10 orders from Bathurst], all of which recommend to [him] a cautious line of conduct with respect to any act of aggression against the French nation under whatever flag," that his naval forces could not participate in an operation against Guadeloupe until he received orders from Britain, which he expected to arrive at any moment.[68]

Leith shifted tactics in his reply on July 6, primarily attacking Durham's legalistic arguments. He reminded Durham that Vaugiraud had been appointed Governor General of all the French West Indies and had in fact requested British assistance, making Linois a rebel instead of a governor refusing assistance. He also informed Durham that he received another

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[68] *Durham Papers*, 460-461. Based on Durham's established reputation as a man who loved to spin a good yarn, especially when it enhanced his personal reputation, and based on his clearly defensive response to Leith's repeated questioning of his narrow interpretation of his orders, it is possible that Durham is lying about, or exaggerating, the existence of these other orders. The only proof that they existed are Durham's letter to Leith and James Ralfe's biographical entry about Durham which was very likely sourced from Durham himself. An examination of the lists of correspondence received by Durham from the Admiralty between January and July 11, 1815, showed that Durham received 53 letters in this time period, none of which appear to be the mentioned orders. However, Durham's acknowledgement and receipt letters only give a brief summary of the contents of the letters, so it is possible, but unlikely, that the guidance he mentioned was contained in letters with different subject lines. See Rubinstein, *Trafalgar Captain*, 22; Ralfe, *Naval Biography, Vol. 3*, 44; Durham to Croker, May 22, 1815, and three reports to the Admiralty of received letters, June 2, June 17, and July 13, 1815, ADM 1/336, TNA.

dispatch from Bathurst, dated two days later than the last instruction previously referenced by Durham, again instructing him to support and maintain Louis' authority. Not willing to base his argument entirely on technicalities, Leith concluded the letter with a remarkable paragraph, writing:

> The responsibility of every commander ought naturally to oblige him to regulate the extent of his cooperation, in absence of direct orders, by his zeal for public service, and by his professional judgment founded on all the circumstances of the case, while the principle of action is established by facts, for that purpose, require the exercise of discretion.[69]

Durham was, unsurprisingly, not swayed and, in the final letter of their disagreement on July 7, simply responded by restating the same argument that he had made since June 30: he could not and would not act offensively until the Admiralty gave him permission.[70] Clearly, nothing Leith said was going to change Durham's mind. He would do nothing until directly ordered to do so.

That order came quickly. On July 10, having had enough of Leith questioning his decision, Durham prepared to forward the correspondence between himself and Leith and began a letter to the Admiralty complaining that Leith was "insisting [he] commence offensive operations." He also took special care to call attention to "the many extraordinary Arguments and Accusations that [Leith] has brought forward," in an attempt to "goad me into compliance." If Durham had more to say about the pressure Leith was putting him under, he never got a chance. On July 11, halfway through the letter, Durham received Admiralty orders directing him

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[69] *Durham Papers*, 461-463.
[70] *Durham Papers*, 464-465.

to cooperate with Leith.[71] To his credit, Durham quickly informed Leith that he was ready to cooperate. Perhaps fearing criticism from the Admiralty, however, he was also quick to inform the Admiralty that he had been preparing for the expedition "without intermission."[72] Given his strident opposition to Leith's entreaties, this was likely, at best, a bending of the truth, but one which would not affect the overall operation.

Finally released from his narrow interpretation of Melville's March 26 orders, Durham lost no time and cooperated fully with Leith to prepare to retake Guadeloupe. Compared to the effort to launch the expedition, and contrary to Leith's fears, the assault of Guadeloupe was relatively non-eventful. The attack began on August 8 and despite spirited resistance Linois and Boyer surrendered the island on August 10 with little loss of life. However, according to Leith's report to Bathurst the attack had come just in time to prevent the return of the terrors of the French revolution as several Royalists were apparently due to be executed only five days later to mark Napoleon's birthday. Somewhat surprisingly, also in Leith's report was fulsome praise for Durham's efforts. Likewise, Durham heaped nothing but praise on Leith in his dispatch to the Admiralty.[73]

In the end, the events in the West Indies caused by Napoleon's escape from Elba concluded with no major consequences. Napoleon was defeated and exiled again. British trade

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[71] Rubinstein incorrectly identifies the day of Durham's change of heart as July 27 and the cause as receiving word of the battle of Waterloo. See Rubinstein, *Trafalgar Captain*, 244.

[72] Durham to Croker, July 10/11, 1815, ADM 1/336, TNA. Durham actually received two separate orders from the Admiralty on July 11. The first, to which he refers in his 10/11 July letter was dated June 8. The second, dated May 22, directed him to "detain and bring into Port all French National armed vessels," and provides a useful example of the variability in delivery time for instructions. Bathurst had written to Leith on May 20 and Leith received the orders June 21. Melville's orders, written two days later, took another three weeks to arrive. See Durham to Croker, July 13, 1815, ADM 1/336.

[73] *Royal Gazette of Jamaica*, September 23 and 30, 1815; *Caledonian Mercury*, September 30, 1815.

to and from the West Indies was not interrupted. Leith was able to execute his orders and shore up Louis XVIII's authority in the West Indies. Melville kept his promise and Rear Admiral John Harvey was named as Durham's relief. Durham could finally go home. He was even able to bolster his reputation further when, in the closing hours of the assault on Guadeloupe, a fort close to Basse-Terre hauled down its flag on August 10 in response to bombardment from Durham's flagship, HMS *Venerable*. Based on this, Durham claimed for the remainder of his life that he had been present at, and responsible for, the surrender of the first and last tri-color flags of the war.[74] Even Linois was honorably acquitted at a court-martial in France, promoted in retirement to Vice Admiral, and created a Grand Officer of the Legion of Honor.[75] Looked at only through the lack of significant consequences for the people involved and the minimal effect on the larger war, it is easy to see why these events have largely evaded analysis. But, when looked at through the lens of mission command, their importance stands out.

Conclusion

As demonstrated above, mission command is a powerful tool which can provide a nuanced and more compelling explanation of events from the age of sail at all levels of warfare. In the case of the events in the spring and summer of 1815 in the West Indies, and especially in the case of the conflict between Durham and Leith, using mission command as an analytical framework

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[74] *Royal Gazette of Jamaica*, September 2, 1815; Rubinstein, *Trafalgar Captain*, 246. It is more accurate to say that Durham was responsible for the surrender of the first and last tri-colored flags of the war to British naval forces. The final surrender of a tri-colored flag of the Napoleonic Wars likely occurred when the fortifications at Charlemont and Givet surrendered to Blucher's army, which may have had a contingent of British siege artillery with it, on November 30, 1815. However, there is no indication Durham or any of his biographers were aware of this. See Gareth Glover, *Waterloo: Myth and Reality* (Havertown: Pen & Sword Books, 2014), 226.
[75] Six, *Dictionnaire biographique*, 126-127.

provides a much better explanation than the previously accepted narrative. It also provides important lessons for modern commanders at the operational and strategic levels of war.

This essay's mission command framework demonstrates clearly that the cause of the dispute between Leith and Durham goes much deeper than a difference in interpretation of orders or Durham's alleged desire to avoid plunging his "nation into a rash, and perhaps unnecessary, war."[76] Clearly, Melville and Durham's relationship, as evidenced by the orders and communications between the two, fits into a failure of mission command scenario—the third of the frameworks presented in the introduction. Not only did Durham fail to achieve the desired end state by allowing Guadeloupe to fall into Bonapartist hands when minimal and non-aggressive action could have prevented it from doing so, but their respective decision spaces barely aligned, if they did so at all. This failure was primarily Melville's fault. His orders were overly restrictive and prevented Durham from adapting to a fast-changing situation or of taking advantage of his position on scene. Melville also failed to take Durham's mindset into account when writing his orders. He knew that Durham had requested relief and wanted to return home but does not appear to have anticipated how this might have affected Durham's actions on station. Taken together these failures created such a narrow potential decision space for Durham that the orders both forced and allowed Durham to take actions that made no strategic sense and could have greatly complicated Britain's position in the West Indies if Napoleon had fared differently in Europe.

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[76] Ralfe, *Naval Biography, Vol. 3*, 45. This quote is taken from what is effectively a rebuttal by Durham, through Ralfe's biography of him, to Leith's striking, and mission-command-sounding, quote in Leith's last letter to Durham. That Durham still felt the need to rebut Leith over a decade after Leith's death, and that he did so publicly, speaks to both power the events in the West Indies held over Durham and to how Durham felt about the legitimacy of his actions.

On the other hand, at the operational level of war, the interaction between Leith and Bathurst exemplifies the best execution of mission command scenario. Leith, operating with orders that specified an end state and that used permissive language, made the most of his initiative by quickly securing Martinique and preventing an imminent uprising there. Bathurst's orders to Leith were also clearly well-tailored to Leith's mindset and the trust between the two. This is demonstrated by the fact that Leith did not feel the need to ask for clarification or further orders. He understood what was required of him and trusted that his actions would find the support of Bathurst, despite whatever consequences Durham's actions might have brought about. It is even more powerfully demonstrated by the above quoted extract from Leith's last letter to Durham. While Leith obviously had no familiarity with the term mission command, he clearly understood, and strove to apply, its core concepts.[77]

Modern commanders can draw two lessons from Melville's failure of mission command and from Bathurst's best application of the same. The first is the difficulty in crafting adequate mission orders. Put simply, word choice matters. Overly restrictive language, as Melville found out, can restrict the subordinate's perceived decision space to the point where it brings about unintended consequences, even at the strategic level of war. Permissive language, on the other hand, allows a subordinate freedom to maneuver and adapt as Leith did. Commanders must consider whether their orders are defining an appropriate decision space for their subordinate or simply removing potential courses of action that should have been available to the

[77] COVID-19 restrictions prevented a closer study of the relationship between Bathurst and Leith, but one is warranted. Particularly, there are likely more mission command related lessons to be drawn from their correspondence about why the two trusted each other so implicitly and why Bathurst did not feel the need to be more proscriptive with Leith.

subordinate. Implicit in this is an understanding of the subordinate for whom the orders are intended. A subordinate who is energetic and willing to take risks, whether physical or to a personal reputation, might be trusted with more latitude in orders. A subordinate who is too reckless or aggressive may need to be more restrained. Alternately, a subordinate who is too timid may need to be forced into action. So, when crafting mission orders, modern commanders should take care to use language that shapes and appropriately restrains the subordinate's decision space. As demonstrated above, permissive language will usually provide better results than constrictive wording.

The second lesson commanders can draw is of the importance of intent. Even precise wording of orders can still prove insufficient if a subordinate does not understand why the commander wants an objective to be achieved. If Melville had written even a few lines to Durham in the March 26 orders explaining why he was to avoid hostilities, Durham would likely have been in a much better position to adapt his restrictive orders to a changing situation. Bathurst's orders to Leith further demonstrate the power of intent. Simply by telling Leith that the Prince Regent desired the French West Indian islands to remain faithful to Louis XVIII, Bathurst gave Leith the confidence to adapt to the situation. This lesson is applicable to all three levels of war. Explanation of the intent behind orders, then, is the most powerful tool a modern commander has when applying mission command.

Mission command has never been more important than in the current era of great power competition because it is one of the strongest methods to leverage the advantages

inherent in decentralized command in today's rapidly evolving battlespace.[78] This is especially true with the emergence of the cyber and space domains of warfare. However, mission command is neither simple nor easy to effectively use. To reap the full benefits made available by mission commander, practitioners must both practice it in day-to-day operations and study the past for lessons already learned.

The age of sail is a goldmine for those lessons - at all levels of warfare. As previously mentioned, historians have already successfully drawn mission command related lessons from the age of sail at the tactical and operational levels of war. However, this paper's framework provides a standardized and more rigorous analytical method for future study than that applied previously. And there are many other examples from the age of sail, from Graves at the Battle of the Capes to Calder in the Trafalgar campaign to Berkeley in the Peninsular campaign, that should be mined for mission command lessons. Most importantly, this proposed framework also allows the mission command concept to be extended to the strategic level of war, which has not been done previously. For example, applying this framework to Collingwood's time in the Mediterranean or Saumarez's in the Baltic would likely provide invaluable lessons for senior Admirals and Generals. Finally, this proposed framework is intended as a starting point, not as an immutable law. It will produce immediate benefit and should be used and adapted by practitioners and historians alike to mine mission command lessons and to frame them in language and ideas that are relevant to today's operating environment.

Word Count: 15,768

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[78] Vego, "Mission Command & Zero Error Tolerance," 61; Dempsey, "Mission Command White Paper"; Gilday, "CNO NAVPLAN."

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