

Nelson: Leader, Manager, Mentor, Friend

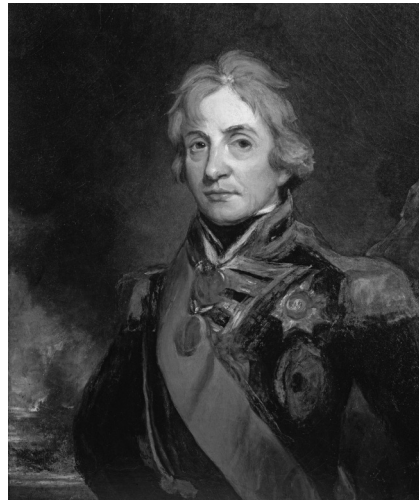
By Harold E 'Pete' Stark

Vice Admiral Horatio Lord Nelson remains to this day a premier figure in worldwide naval history. Born in 1758, he served in the Royal Navy from the age of twelve until his death on 21 October 1805 at the Battle of Trafalgar, having risen to, what many felt, the height of his abilities. However, Colin White, in his book *Nelson: The Admiral*, took issue with the long-held belief that Nelson died at the pinnacle of his capabilities 'with his work complete'. White disputed this:

The story of his career as an admiral ... is not one of genius who sprang ready-made into his role ... Rather, it is a gradual progression by a very gifted, but also flawed, man who made some mistakes early on, but who also learned from those mistakes and thus matured by degrees into a finely rounded leader – not just a great fighting admiral, but a diplomat, administrator and intelligence officer as well.

White believed that Nelson was on a continual upward path of professional maturity, and that he showed great promise for further growth; his death was a 'grievous loss to his country'.¹ White believed that had he lived, Nelson would have continued his climb, becoming an even greater individual in a variety of operational and managerial roles.

Nelson's management approach at its best might reflect the mastery of what the United States Navy's *Naval Doctrine Publication 1: Naval Warfare* calls 'operational art', the foundation of which 'encompasses broad vision; the ability to anticipate; and the skill to plan, prepare,



Lord Nelson by John Hoppner.
(National Museum of the Royal Navy)

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execute, and assess'.² *Publication 1* provides a definition of leadership that closely mirror Nelson's abilities: 'Leadership that engenders confidence, mutual trust, and expectations between leaders and subordinates – particularly in environments of chaos, uncertainty, constant change, and friction typical of naval warfare – leads to warfighting dominance of the enemy.'³ Nelson's penchant for decentralised command characterises his command philosophy in today's vocabulary as 'mission command'; that is, providing to his subordinates the broad objectives to be attained, and then relying on those subordinates to act on their own initiatives based upon current local situations.⁴

From 1803 to 1805 Nelson managed a far-ranging, powerful fleet of warships and other support vessels with activities spanning the entire Mediterranean, and, until late 1804, the Atlantic area between Cape St Vincent in Spain and the Straits of Gibraltar. Even with the latter area removed from his command and placed under the command of Sir John Orde, Nelson's responsibility remained vast and inordinately complicated – politically, strategically and operationally. Nelson was to keep the French fleet in Toulon under a careful watch, albeit a loose blockade, as was his practice to encourage the French to leave port and hopefully then to bring them to battle. He was to ensure the safe transit of merchantmen across the Mediterranean and support as much political stability as possible in critical areas, such as Naples and Sicily, including, if necessary, their defence. He also was responsible for meeting the immense logistical challenge of maintaining and provisioning his fleet, ensuring its battle readiness while remaining continually at sea for two years.



Composite Mediterranean, 1785 by William Faden, March 1785.
(David Rumsey Map Collection.)

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In 2005 Colin White published *Nelson: The New Letters*, in which 507 previously unpublished letters provide us with significant additional insight into Nelson's life and career. The letters included in 'Part 5 – Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean: 1803–1805' paint a vivid picture of the variety of activities for which Nelson was solely responsible and how he executed mission command. The purpose of this paper is to examine an example of Nelson's professional and managerial acumen prior to Trafalgar through a letter to one of his most trusted subordinates, Captain Frank Sotheron of *Excellent* (74).

The Letter

By March 1805, Nelson had been Commander-in-Chief of the British Mediterranean Fleet for almost two years, during which time he had not left his flagship *Victory* (102). Daily from her great cabin, his administrative hub, he directed the movements of different elements of his fleet, which at the beginning of 1805 included eleven ships of the line, including two three-deckers and one 80-gun ship, the rest being 74s. In addition, he had a shifting number of frigates and smaller vessels – never enough – that were vital to reconnaissance, intelligence gathering and general fleet support activities.



Admiral's Great Cabin, HMS *Victory*, Royal Navy, 2016.
(Royal Navy Museum, Portsmouth)

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Nelson had entrusted Captain Frank Sotheron with the defence of the Bay of Naples.⁵ Vessels continually passed in and out of Sotheron's command, as he was senior Royal Navy officer on that station. Among those vessels was the fifth-rate frigate *Seahorse* (32), commanded by the Honorable Courtenay Boyle, who was well known to Nelson and to whom he entrusted convoy duty as well as the important surveillance of the French at Toulon. Boyle's arrival at Nelson's rendezvous bearing dispatches from Naples was the catalyst for the following letter:

370. ALS: To Captain Frank Sotheron, 28 March 1805⁶

Victory Palma March 28*: 1805

My Dear Sir

By the *Renown* on the 13th I received your letter of Janry 19th: and on my arrival here the 26th: your several letters of March 1st: for all which I feel very much obliged. Your last dispatch a duplicate of Mr Elliots of March 1st: arrived yesterday in the *Seahorse* which I was much surprized to find was not at Malta.

The distress for her there must have been extreme, the only sloop of war at that Island being the *Camelion* who was sent to Trieste with Mr Elliotts dispatches.

The outward bound Levant ships have been laying at Malta waiting her arrival, and she was directed to bring down the homeward bound Ships, the Convoy being appointed to sail for England on April 1st. Therefore the consequences of her detention at Naples has been of infinite detriment to our Commerce and our Merchants will call loudly against me.

And I must earnestly beg that you will not detain any ship at Naples in future beyond a reasonable time for Mr Elliots waiting his letters, for every day decreases my small craft (the *Camelion* going home this convoy). Mr Elliot does not consider that nothing comes out, and every Convoy takes from me, therefore my means are decreased as my wants increase. I am truly sensible that you ever act in the most correct manner and that information was of the very greatest importance to Me, therefore although that is most desirable for Me, yet I have only mentioned my situation to you to prove to you the impossibility of any of the small ships being allowed to remain in Port longer than is absolutely necessary.

With respect to your removal of Mr Elliot and his family you will of course comply with his desire, but I can hardly think it will be proposed to you. It is a most serious thing and on which I cannot give an opinion. I

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think I see that if he is removed that our exclusion from Naples & Sicily will soon follow and possibly very important events may result from such a step. Not but that I see the possibility of such a step being necessary, but when that is necessary who can say to what length the French will next force Naples. I remember the fable of the Wolves the Sheep & the Dogs.

Ever My Dear Sir Yours Most Faithfully

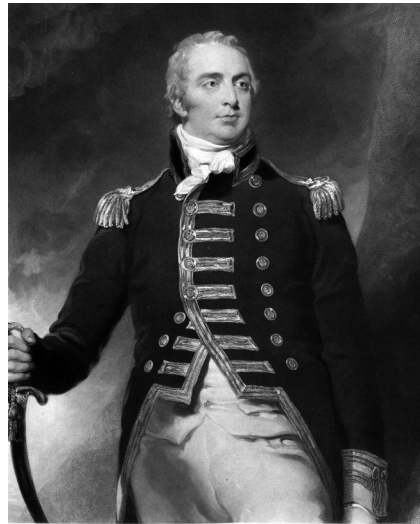
Nelson & Bronte

Capt. Sotheron (Captain HMS Excellent, Senior Royal Navy Officer on Site, Naples)

Before discussing the details of this letter, it is helpful to look more closely at Captains Sotheron and Boyle as examples of two highly capable naval officers commanding in an extremely sensitive and politically charged atmosphere.

Captain Frank Sotheron

Frank Sotheron reflected a calm, steady command competence based upon successful naval experience. Born in 1765, he entered the navy in 1776 as midshipman aboard the third-rate *Bienfaisant* (64), commanded by Admiral John MacBride, under whom he served multiple times. Present in the fifth-rate frigate *Arethusa* (38) on 17 June 1778, he participated in the furious battle with the French frigate *la Belle Poule*, *Arethusa* breaking off the action when she lost her mainmast. He moved in 1780 with MacBride into another fifth-rate frigate, *Artois* (38) and was present at the engagement off Dogger Bank between Sir Hyde Parker and Dutch Admiral Johan Arnold Zoutmann. Sotheron remained in *Artois* for the remainder of the American War for Independence and was promoted lieutenant in 1783. He was posted captain on 11 December



Admiral Frank Sotheron, 1765–1839, by Charles Turner; 1839, after Sir Thomas Lawrence. (Scottish National Portrait Gallery)

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1793. During the French Revolutionary War, Sotheron commanded several ships including the third-rate *Monarch* (74), the fourth-rate *Romney* (50) and the fifth-rate *Latona* (36).⁷

Sotheron served in the Baltic in command of *Latona*. Under the direction of William Drummond, British envoy to Denmark, and prior to the arrival of Sir Hyde Parker and Lord Nelson, Sotheron pursued the French privateers *Marengo*, *Chasseur* and *Volitguer*, all three of which were capturing British prizes and sending them into Danish ports.⁸ *Latona* remained in the Baltic supporting the British presence into 1801 and fell under Nelson's command when he took over from Admiral Parker following the Battle of Copenhagen.⁹ Nelson, in the second-rate *St George* (98), sent Sotheron a short letter on 22 May, 1801, directing that: 'Should the Russian Fleet make any movements indicating an intention of putting to sea, you are immediately to make it known to Lord St Helens, in order that I may be apprised of their so doing.'¹⁰

In 1803, Sotheron was appointed to the third-rate *Excellent* (74), which had been commanded by Cuthbert Collingwood at the Battle of Cape St Vincent in 1797. The *Monthly Register* for Portsmouth, 7 August to 14 September 1803, stated: 'The Excellent, of 74 guns, Captain Sotheron, is ordered to victual for foreign service, supposed for the Mediterranean.'¹¹ Nelson acknowledged his arrival under his command in his letter of 24 November 1803 to Sir John Acton, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Naples, and placed Sotheron in command of the defence of that city. That kingdom was being hard pressed by the French and was in very real danger of being captured. In the same letter to Acton, Nelson states his understanding of the need to support the King of Naples: 'I shall only assure your Excellency that the defence of their Majesties and their Kingdom is always nearest my heart.'¹²

By January 1805, the Neapolitan situation had deteriorated to such an extent that Nelson sent the following letter to Sotheron, dated 14 January 1805; it indicates his trust in Sotheron's ability to carry out an extremely sensitive operation:

Most secret and confidential. You are hereby required and directed, on this order being delivered to you, to receive, or to convey them, if they embark on board their own Ships, the King, Queen, and Royal Family of Naples, to Palermo, or such other place as the King may choose to proceed to; and you will afford every protection and assistance to all those who may wish to follow their Majesties, and that they approve of; and you will also receive his Majesty's Minister and suite, and afford such other protection as in your power to all British Subjects, and their property, as the urgency of the case may require. Nelson and Bronte.¹³

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Sotheron accompanied Nelson on his pursuit of the French fleet to the West Indies in April 1805,¹⁴ afterwards returning to his station at Naples.

Nelson valued Sotheron's reputation for good judgement and discretion, asking him at one point to handle an especially sensitive and personal issue. Captain Charles Tyler, a long-time friend of Nelson and commanding the third-rate *Tonnant* (80) at Trafalgar, had a son who, as a lieutenant in the fifth-rate frigate *Hydra* (38), deserted his ship and ran off with an opera dancer from Malta, and from there, going to Naples. On 30 September 1805 Nelson wrote to Captain Sotheron asking him to intervene with Neapolitan authorities on behalf of the younger Tyler, whom he feared was in prison for debt. Per Nelson, Tyler's father would pay his bills (£200 to £300); Nelson himself would make up any difference. 'All we want is to save him from perdition. If you will, my dear Sotheron, undertake this task of inquiry, it will save me the no small trouble of writing two letters.' In writing to Sotheron, Nelson avoided having to write a similar letter to the British envoy Elliott, as he trusted that Sotheron would do all the necessary co-ordination. Nelson ends this letter warmly: 'Let me have a good account of your health. I assure you I long to relieve you, and to get your Ship home. It will not I hope be much longer deferred. – Ever, my dear Sir, with the greatest esteem, your much obliged friend, NELSON & BRONTE.'¹⁵

Captain the Honorable Courtenay Boyle

Courtenay Boyle was the second son of Edmund, seventh Earl of Cork and Orrery. He began his naval service during the American War of Independence, after which he attended the naval academy at Greenwich, formally entering the navy on 12 September 1780 as a midshipman in *Latona*, Sir Hyde Parker.¹⁶ He served in the sixth-rate frigate *Boreas* (28) in the Caribbean under Nelson's command. He impressed Nelson and when *Boreas* was decommissioned, Nelson recommended him to Lord Hood in the second-rate *Barfleur* (90). Boyle was made lieutenant in 1790 and commander in 1795,



The Honorable Courtenay Boyle, engraving by Joyce Gold, 1813.

(© National Maritime Museum, Greenwich London)

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when he was given command of the brig *Kangaroo* (18). Posted captain in 1797, he commanded the sixth-rate frigate *Hyaena* (24), followed by another sixth-rate frigate, *Cormorant* (24), in 1799. *Cormorant* went aground and was wrecked in 1800 east of Alexandria, Egypt, due to extremely faulty navigation charts.¹⁷ After imprisonment by the French, Boyle was released and acquitted at court martial for the loss of his ship.¹⁸

Boyle received command of the fifth-rate frigate *Seahorse* (32) in 1803 following the breakdown of the Peace of Amiens and was sent to the Mediterranean under Nelson. Nelson was pleased to have Boyle under his command again, writing on 18 August 1803: 'My dear Boyle, I am very happy to have you in so fine a Frigate under my command, for I am ever, yours most faithfully, Nelson and Bronte.'¹⁹ Nelson, always lacking for frigates, entrusted *Seahorse* with multiple roles, especially with watching the French fleet at Toulon. Nelson reinforced Boyle's trustworthiness to Sir Evan Nepean, Secretary to the Board of Admiralty, affirming as accurate Boyle's account of the status of the French fleet in Toulon.²⁰ Upon leaving Toulon in January 1805, the French fleet chased *Seahorse*, along with the fifth-rate frigate *Active* (38) (Captain Richard Moubray). At one point, *Seahorse* was within pistol shot of the enemy.²¹

However, in reporting these movements, Boyle and Moubray left Nelson with a serious intelligence problem. Instead of either *Seahorse* or *Active* remaining to shadow the French fleet and determine any changes to its course, both sailed together to inform Nelson of this news at the British fleet's rendezvous at the Maddalena Archipelago north of Sicily. As valuable as the intelligence was, Nelson had no means of knowing of any change in direction the French might have subsequently taken.²² White stated that one ship not staying behind to further shadow the French was a serious error of judgement by two young frigate captains probably caught up in the moment, the results of which caused Nelson great anxiety. Yet, Nelson continued to hold Boyle and his abilities in high regard, and there was apparently no adverse professional consequence resulting from this lapse.

On immediately preparing the fleet for sea upon hearing this news, Nelson ordered Boyle to carry two highly visible lights in *Seahorse* and to lead the fleet through the narrow and difficult passage of Biche. This dangerous, yet direct, route would enable Nelson to get his fleet to sea to the east as rapidly as possible, as he then believed the French would approach from that direction. This transit could only be accomplished by skilled navigation and seamanship, as per the Duke of Clarence: 'The passage was so narrow, that only one of the fleet could pass at a time, and each was guided merely by the stern lights of the preceding ship.'²³

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The Letter Analysed

Nelson's letter to Sotheron can be broken down into three components: 1) concern that Captain Sotheron fully appreciates the local convoy situation and that in the future he will not retain *Seahorse* at Naples; 2) the impact of the situation and the wider consequences that it has had upon British commerce and indeed on Nelson personally; and 3) trust in Sotheron's judgement and his understanding of the importance that such a situation cannot happen again. Nelson ends his letter conversationally, discussing his opinion of the Neapolitan situation and providing a light note to metaphorically frame the Neapolitan situation, referencing the fable of The Wolves and the Sheep.

This letter demonstrates Nelson's trusting but direct leadership approach to a senior officer on station. It reflects an executive who achieves an appropriate tonal balance in calling a significant problem to the attention of a highly capable officer, indeed a close friend. Nelson ensures not only that Sotheron understands the criticality of the circumstances, but also emphasises that his commander trusts that Sotheron will innately understand the situation and that nothing more needs to be said.

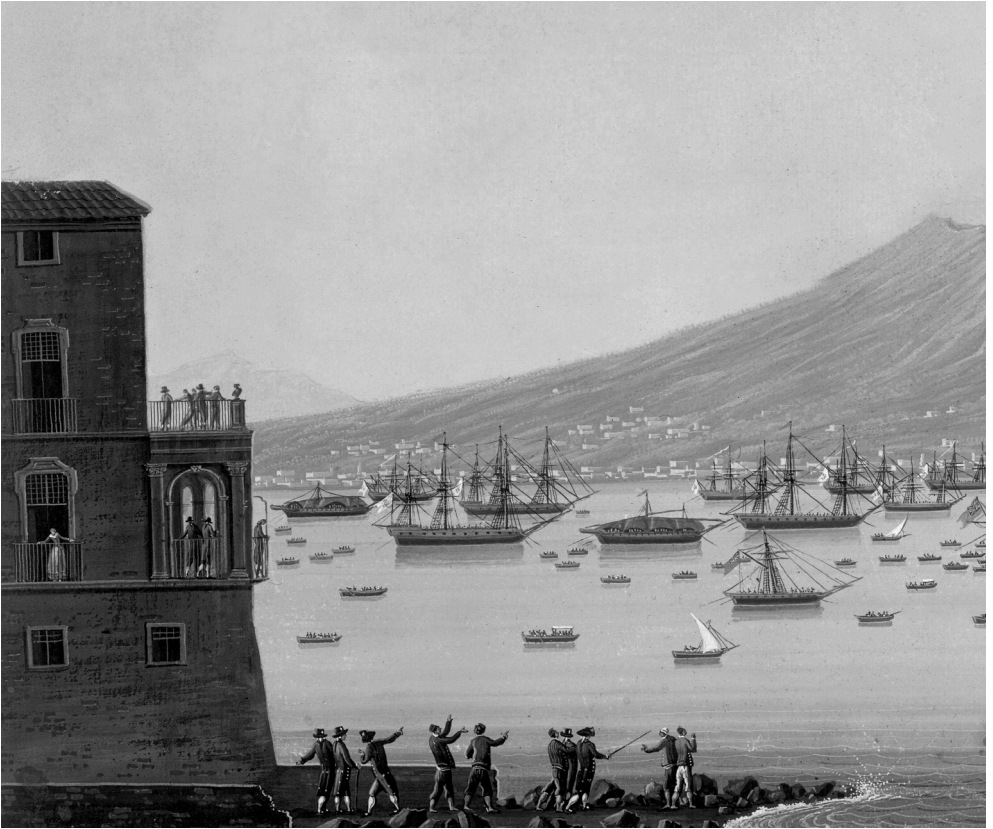
A. The Concern

Nelson begins on a positive note by stating that he is pleased to have received several letters from Sotheron who, on station at Naples, is keeping him up to date. The sensitivity of the Neapolitan situation demanded a constant, active communication channel. Should Nelson have been first informed of any situation via a third party, e.g., the British envoy Elliott, it certainly would not have sat well with him and likely would have called forth a different tone in this and other letters to Sotheron. Sotheron had the professional maturity to keep his commander-in-chief informed and demonstrates that he understood his place in a much larger machine.

Nelson then states directly that he was 'much surprized' to find that *Seahorse* was not at Malta. The word 'surprized' carries much weight. Nelson appears genuinely upset at this situation, presupposing *Seahorse* to be at Malta for very important convoy duty. The situation illustrates the competing management concerns that Nelson dealt with as commander-in-chief. He had to ensure that convoys sailed so that valuable British commerce could continue in a hostile and unstable area of the world. At the same time, the always complex situation at Naples, including the challenge of preserving the safety of the royal family of that kingdom, was worsening and demanded his constant attention.

In the 1801 Treaty of Florence, King Ferdinand IV made important concessions to France, strengthening that country's power in Italy. Napoleon

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occupied the southern Italian ports of Otranto and Taranto.²⁴ Any attempt by the French to close additional Italian ports to the British, especially Naples, would be extremely detrimental to British interests. Ferdinand's decision to ally himself with the Third Coalition in 1805 made his position more tenuous, leading to his 1806 loss to the French at the Battle of Campo Tenese and the installation of Joseph Bonaparte on the Neapolitan throne. Ferdinand IV and his family did ultimately flee to Sicily and were defended by the Royal Navy for the remainder of the Napoleonic Wars.

B. The Impact

Nelson, as a wise leader and mentor, does not just tell Sotheron that there is a problem that he must address; he also succinctly states the problem's impact. Nelson had had no inkling that *Seahorse* was not where he expected her to be. As a mentor, he conveys to Sotheron that the astute management of convoys

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*British Fleet under Rear Admiral Sir Horatio Nelson, KB, at anchor in the Bay of Naples,
June 17th 1798, c1800, by Giacomo Guardi (1764–1835).
(© National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London)*

was vital to the safe conduct of commerce between the Mediterranean and the British Isles. Any delay would certainly result in ‘infinite detriment’ to British commerce. Nelson further emphasises the importance of *Seahorse* being at Malta as required, because *Camelion*, the only other ship at Malta, had been sent to Trieste with dispatches from Hugh Elliott, the British envoy to Naples. Cargo ships were sitting idle in Malta with no ship to convoy them. Ambassador Elliott had tied up two of Nelson’s precious smaller vessels and, as Colin White put it, ‘dislocated his finely balanced chain of ships’.²⁵ Nelson had also sent an earlier letter to Sotherton dated 25 January 1805, referencing instructions he had given to Captain Boyle directly:

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You will see by Capt: Boyles order that the Seahorse is not to anchor or to have any further communication with the bay of Naples than giving the letters for Mr Elloit & the Queen. You will upon no consideration or requisition allow the Seahorse to stay one moment longer than giving you the letter (I send you the most positive order for that purpose).²⁶

Nelson then indicates what the delay does to him personally; this is an important consideration and reflects the close relationship Nelson has with his subordinates. While Sotheron was not one of Nelson's 'Band of Brothers' at Trafalgar, he was part of Nelson's extended command family. All captains serving under Nelson understood the consideration that Nelson always showed to those who did their duty, respecting and loving him for it. They understood Nelson's widespread responsibilities as commander-in-chief, not only military responsibilities, but also political and economic. Nelson, in effect, tells Sotheron that he does not need additional aggravation from the merchants concerning something that should not have happened in the first place. Nelson impresses upon Sotheron the wider political and economic impact of the situation, and indeed its impact on Nelson personally.

When Nelson 'earnestly begs' any captain to take or not to take a specific action, there is no mistaking its meaning as a direct order. However, Nelson's word choice here implies his confidence that Sotheron will not let this happen again – that Sotheron will not hold ships in Naples to act as messengers for the envoy. Nelson fully understands that it would be easy for Sotheron to come under undue influence of the envoy; Nelson wants to ensure that this does not happen. Perhaps he is remembering his own experience in 1799–1800 with the Hamiltons and the Neapolitan Court, and is now seeing Naples through the different, more mature lens of commander-in-chief. He is all too familiar with how the various competing influences of Naples can affect a naval officer's judgement.

Nelson permits Sotheron to give Elliott a reasonable amount of time to provide his letters for transport, rightly leaving it to Sotheron to determine what 'reasonable' is. Nelson also, however, reminds Sotheron that Elliott really has no appreciation for the consequences to Nelson of losing even one small ship, telling Sotheron that 'my means are decreased as my wants increase'. Elliott likely does not understand that the want of a single ship means that a convoy of great value cannot sail. Sotheron must play the needs of the envoy against the needs of the broader picture that Nelson is laying out for him.

C. The Trust

'I am truly sensible that you always act in the most correct manner ...'

Once he has explained to Sotheron that he is concerned and why, and has

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then explained some of the finer points of the situation, Nelson now administers the pat on the back to his trusted subordinate. Frank Sotheron is indeed a very capable commander and team leader. Nelson, being Nelson, would not entrust the sensitive Naples situation to anyone in whom he did not have a great deal of trust. He has this in Sotheron. Nelson again indicates to Sotheron how important it is that none of the small ships remain in port any longer than necessary. It may seem that Nelson is repeating himself unnecessarily and dwelling on a problem that Sotheron should have understood by this time, but in doing so again, Nelson reinforces its importance to him personally. Therefore, Sotheron hopefully would not dwell in his mind on the *Seahorse* incident *per se* but would appreciate and focus on the strategic situation Nelson has shared with him and for which he carries responsibility on Nelson's behalf. A rebuke, however mild, is much more effective and understandable if it is couched in terms of the mistake's effect on others.

Nelson concludes the letter with a final discussion of the strategic situation and with a warm and lighthearted ending. Nelson is now talking with a trusted friend, and is apprising Sotheron of his feelings concerning a situation that Sotheron might find himself in. With a deteriorating situation in Naples, Sotheron could be called upon to evacuate the British envoy and his family, in which case he should do so. However, Nelson does not think it likely, at least not at present. He shares with Sotheron his fear that if things get so bad that Elliott and his family would need to be evacuated, then the future of the Neapolitan kingdom would be in jeopardy, resulting in the probable loss of Britain's access to the kingdom, and a serious strategic blow to British presence in the Mediterranean.

Nelson confides to Sotheron that he understands the fluidity of the situation and cannot predict the ultimate outcome, or the extent to which the French 'will next force Naples'. Nelson is speaking with a knowledgeable commander in the area; he can readily share his thoughts, his concerns and fears, and the fact that he really does not know how the situation in Naples will play out. In the end he trusts that Sotheron will make the right decisions.

Nelson's reference to Aesop's fable of The Wolves and the Sheep sums up his fears concerning the Neapolitan situation. The Townsend version of the fable makes it easy to see where Nelson's mind is:

Why should there always be this fear and slaughter between us?' said the Wolves to the Sheep. 'Those evil-disposed Dogs have much to answer for. They always bark whenever we approach you and attack us before we have done any harm. If you would only dismiss them from your heels, there might soon be treaties of peace and reconciliation between us.' The

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Sheep, poor silly creatures, were easily beguiled and dismissed the Dogs, whereupon the Wolves destroyed the unguarded flock at their own pleasure.²⁷

That concern for Naples would continue to consume scarce naval assets was reflected in another of Nelson's letters to Sotheron not long after the letter discussed here. It shows Nelson's extreme anxiety over the activities of the French, who have at last left Toulon, and his lack of knowledge that could have been provided by a frigate shadowing them. It is short and very much to the point:

My dear Sir, Don't keep Amazon one moment longer than my orders to Captain Parker; and if Termagant is still at Naples, send her to me; for I want all the Vessels I have under my command to send for information. I am entirely adrift by my Frigates losing sight of the French Fleet so soon after their coming out of Port.²⁸

Conclusion

Nelson's correspondence gives us remarkable insight into how he so capably led his officers and managed his far-flung fleet, and how he interacted with those under his command. His letters are the communication sinews that hold the body of his command together, and his leadership and management style reflect in many aspects the best leadership and management philosophies of today. The letter of 28 March 1805 is but one example. The great cabin on board *Victory* was a continual hotbed of administrative, diplomatic and intelligence activity. Nelson was keenly aware of all the constantly moving pieces of his command and how they fitted into the big picture. As his letter to Sotheron demonstrates, the single incident of a ship remaining too long in port could have a ripple effect far beyond its perceived immediate impact.

Nelson's response to Captain Sotheron also incorporates empathy and mentorship. Sam Walker, in his article for the 14 November 2020 *Wall Street Journal*, describes the pros and cons of empathy in a leader. Walker states that 'there is a growing pile of evidence that people who build and maintain effective relationships ... make the most successful leaders. In fact, this skill may outrank all others.' Nelson was highly effective in this area, and all the more so as he matured in his profession. Walker further states that there is an empathetic way to deliver criticism: 'The trick is to aim your criticism at a person's behaviour without attacking their character.'²⁹ Nelson's letter to Sotheron clearly demonstrates this important leadership skill.

The incidents referenced in the 28 March letter do not appear to have had

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any negative impacts on the careers of either Sotheron or Boyle. Both continued successfully in their profession. Sotheron was made rear admiral in 1811, represented Nottinghamshire for many years in Parliament beginning in 1814 and was made vice admiral in 1819. He died in 1839. Boyle progressed capably up the Royal Navy ladder of success. He held various commands, was given charge of the Sheerness dockyard in 1814 and later obtained a seat on the Navy Board. He achieved the rank of rear admiral in 1830 and vice admiral in 1841. He died on 21 May 1844. In a letter addressed to Boyle's father on 15 July 1787, Nelson, with foresight, summed up his opinion of the younger Boyle: 'In his professional life he is inferior to none. His virtues are superior to most.'³⁰

Through his letters, Nelson often demonstrates succinctness, directness and empathy, all of which are excellent leadership practices. Most officers were the better for their relationships with Nelson. The letter discussed here is one illustration of Colin White's contention that Nelson was constantly maturing in all aspects of his profession, and that his competence and capabilities had nowhere to go but up.