



## Fearless Nelson

Throughout Great Britain, students are familiar with the story of Horatio Nelson's bravery at sea. This admiral of the British Navy commanded ships in many battles, despite his serious injuries.

Horatio Nelson was born in 1758, the sixth of 11 children. When Nelson was nine, his mother died. Nelson was sent away to a school headed by a parson who beat misbehaving students. Undeterred by the risk he faced, Nelson may have stolen pears from the parson's trees, doing so only because the other boys were afraid. Another time, the boy was nearly lost in a flooded river. He reportedly told his grandmother, "I never saw fear. What is it? It never came near me."

Nelson's uncle, a captain in the British Navy, stepped in to help the motherless family. He took his nephew to sea when the boy was 12. Just eight years later, Horatio became captain of his own ship. He ventured to many parts of the globe, including the island of Nevis, where he married Frances Nisbet in 1787.

When Britain went to war against the French in 1793, Nelson took command of the ship *Agamemnon*. In a battle at Calvi on the Mediterranean island of Corsica, he was blinded in one eye. Several years later at the Battle of Copenhagen, Nelson refused to obey a flag signaling him to stand down. He reportedly held a spyglass up to his blind eye and said that he could not see the signal. "I have only one eye,—I have a right to be blind sometimes . . . I really do not see the signal!" he explained.

Through many battles, Nelson added to his reputation for fearlessness. In 1798, he defeated Napoleon's navy at the Battle of the Nile. In another sea battle with 27 Spanish ships, Nelson was able to hold off seven of the ships at once, capturing two of them. Nelson was wounded in another battle at Tenerife in the Canary Islands. Part of his arm was amputated to spare his life. Still, he returned to sea as soon as his health allowed.

In numerous other battles, Nelson proved himself a brave and daring commander. Nelson's final command, in 1805, was aboard a full-rigged ship of the line called the *Victory*. It carried a crew of 800. The ship sailed to the coast of Spain to blockade French and Spanish ships off the Cape of Trafalgar.

History suggests that a French sniper at the Battle of Trafalgar was able to identify Nelson by his familiar profile, with his large cocked hat, waistcoat and breeches. Nelson was struck with a bullet and carried below decks. His dying words were, "Thank God I have done my duty."

Despite Nelson's death, the British won the battle. Trafalgar Square in London memorializes this hero. In the center of the square stands Nelson's 17-foot-tall statue, atop a column over 150 feet in the air.

Naval history lost one of its most intrepid sailors and commanders with Nelson's tragic end. This year, 2005, commemorates the bicentennial of Lord Nelson's death at Trafalgar.

### TIDBITS

#### Sayings of Lord Nelson

Below are some quotes attributed to Admiral Nelson:

"Desperate affairs require desperate measures."

"England expects that every man will do his duty."

"I have always been a quarter of an hour before my time and it has made a man of me."

"I cannot command winds and weather."

"Before this time to-morrow I shall have gained a peerage, or Westminster Abbey."

#### Web Link

For more on the HMS *Victory*, go to [www.hms-victory.com](http://www.hms-victory.com)