



Signals and Despatches – HMS Victory Departing Rosia Bay, Gibraltar – P.M. 7th May, 1805

by Peter Power

Published as a single edition limited to 850 copies, signed by the artist and
Lt. Cdr. Peter Whitlock M.B.E., R.N. Commanding Officer H.M.S. Victory
1974-1978.

Council Member of the Society for Nautical Research and recognised
authority on the rigging and structure of the Sailing Fighting Ship.
Naval History Advisor with the Mary Rose Trust.

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The enemy is at sea! Welcome news to Vice Admiral Lord Nelson aboard HMS Victory and his fleet which for many weary months had patrolled the seas of the Mediterranean in a bid to bring the French fleet to battle. A patrolling frigate had spotted them at sea and Nelson was alerted.

Wasting no time Nelson sent a despatch to Captain Richard Keats in. 'Superb' ordering him to make sail and join the rest of the squadron which was proceeding to make the Straits of Gibraltar.

On 7th May, because the wind was failing, the fleet, led by Nelson in 'Victory' was forced to close Gibraltar to anchor off Rosia Bay. Nelson instructed Rear Admiral Bickerton of the Red Squadron to transfer his flag from 'Royal Sovereign' to the frigate 'Amfitrite' 40 guns to take command the Mediterranean Station (This Ship captured from the Spanish by Donegal 25th November 1804).

At 6 p.m. the light easterly returned and Nelson immediately signalled his orders for the chase to the west. From 'Victory's' starboard fore topsail yard the Union Flag superior to the signal hoist indicates that a particular ship is being addressed, in this case 'Amfitrite'. Below is signal 122 (The ship(s) pointed out by signal are to part company on the service for which they have been previously appointed"). The last flag in this signal hoist represents 2 by use of the second substitute flag, necessary because of the numbers of numerical flags indicating 2 being used at the same time.

From the main topmast signal 67 instructs all ships under sail to keep under sail and not to anchor; whilst from the port main topsail yard signal 226 commands that all boats and persons belonging to the fleet are to repair on board their respective ships immediately and no boats are to be sent on shore without leave of the Admiral.

The topsail schooner bearing down is flying signal 387 (signified by flag shapes and not colours as she is not carrying full outfit of flags) "The ship or vessel making this signal is charged with despatches and is ordered to proceed without delay".

The chase was finally brought to a conclusion on October 21st 1805 with the Battle of Trafalgar.

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