

Information sheet no 108

Cuthbert Collingwood

Cuthbert Collingwood was born on 26 September 1750 in Newcastle Upon Tyne. He received an early education in the city's grammar school but at the age of eleven, he entered the Royal Navy as a volunteer on board HMS *Shannon* under Captain Richard Brathwaite, his maternal cousin. In March 1772, Collingwood was appointed to HMS *Lennox* under Captain Roddam and then in 1774, he sailed with HMS *Preston* under Vice-Admiral Graves to serve in North America. During the American War of Independence, Collingwood was in charge of conveying supplies to the British army. After the Battle of Bunker Hill, he was promoted to Lieutenant on 17 June 1775.

In March 1776, Collingwood was appointed to HMS *Hornet*, which was sent to the Caribbean. He had little respect for his commanding officer, Captain Haswell, who later accused him of disobedience and neglect of duty. On 30 September 1777, Collingwood faced a court-martial for those charges but he was acquitted and he gained a compliment from the court for his cheerful and lively nature, which was regarded as an asset for the Royal Navy, This must have caught the attention of Admiral Parker who had him moved to HMS *Lowestoffe* as a First Lieutenant. Whilst serving on his vessel, Collingwood met Horatio Nelson, who was then a Lieutenant, with whom he would have a close friendship. Collingwood would go on to take over the command of the vessels that Nelson would leave as he made his way up the ranks.

In June 1779, Collingwood was appointed to HMS *Badger* when Nelson took command of HMS *Hinchinbrook*. Then, in March 1780, Collingwood was appointed to the *Hinchinbrook* as a post-Captain after Nelson had again been promoted and was moved to HMS *Janus*. In spring 1780, they fought alongside each other in a campaign against the Spanish fort of San Juan (as Spain was supportive of the American war against Britain). The expedition was affected by the area's pestilential climate and out of two hundred men in Collingwood's company, only twenty survived. In the following December, he took command of HMS *Pelican*, only to have it unfortunately wrecked on the Morant Keys in August 1781.

Until 1786, Collingwood commanded HMS *Mediator* and with his brother, Captain Wilfred Collingwood and Nelson, he took part in the seizure of American ships, which had been illegally trading with the British West Indian colonies. With the possibility of a war with Spain looming, Collingwood returned to the Caribbean on HMS *Mermaid* in 1790 until April 1791. He then returned to Newcastle and there he married Sarah Blackett, a granddaughter of Admiral Roddam, his old Captain on HMS *Lennox*. The couple settled at Morpeth, a quiet retreat just outside Newcastle and in the next two years, they had two daughters, Sarah, born in 1792 and Mary Patience, born in 1793. When France had declared war on Britain later that year, Collingwood became Captain of HMS *Barfleur*, in which he flew the flag of Rear-Admiral Bowyer and which was part of the Channel Fleet led by Lord Howe.

In the Battle of the First of June 1794, which took place to the west of Ushant, Collingwood was forced to take command after Bowyer had received a severe wound. Despite his prominent role in Howe's victory, Collingwood was surprised to learn that the Admiralty had ignored him in the presentation of gold medals to the officers involved. Bowyer, however, was granted a peerage. Collingwood moved onto HMS *Excellent* and was sent to the

Information sheet no 108

Mediterranean to take part in a long and tedious blockade of Toulon. After Spain had pledged allegiance with France and declared war, *Excellent* fought at the battle Cape of St. Vincent on 14 February 1797, under the direction of Admiral John Jervis. Collingwood distinguished himself by seizing two Spanish ships, *El Salvador del Mondo* and the *Santissima Trinidad*, a large, four-decker. He received the warm praise of Nelson, who had also been present at the battle. When Admiral Jervis informed Collingwood that he was to receive a gold medal, he refused to accept it whilst his role in the Battle of the First of June would remain officially unrecognized. In the end, he received the two gold medals, which acknowledged his role in both battles.

Until the end of 1798, Collingwood remained in HMS *Excellent* off Cadiz, to keep watch on French and Spanish movements but this task gradually began to test both his temper and his patience. When HMS *Excellent* was paid off at Portsmouth in January 1799, Collingwood became a Rear-Admiral. He raised his flag on HMS *Triumph* and went to join Lord Keith's fleet in the Mediterranean. The Royal Navy were later mortified to learn that they had failed to prevent the French fleet from uniting with the Spanish fleet at Cartagena and was then proceeding through the Straits of Gibraltar. Collingwood returned to HMS *Barfleur* to take part in a blockade of Brest, where he remained until the Treaty of Amiens was completed in February 1802. He then returned to his family in Morpeth.

In May 1803, with the renewal of hostilities between Britain and France, Collingwood was sent with a fleet under Admiral Cornwallis to be stationed off Brest. On 23 April 1804, Collingwood was promoted to Vice-Admiral. During the following year, he was stationed off Cadiz to again monitor the movements of French and Spanish vessels, with the expectation that the Emperor Napoleon was planning an invasion of the British Isles. Collingwood remained at Cadiz, whilst Nelson, on HMS *Victory*, pursued the fleet of the French Admiral, Pierre Villeneuve to the West Indies and back to Europe.

On 28 September 1805, Nelson returned to the fleet at Cadiz with HMS *Victory* to join Collingwood. Nelson attempted to keep his fleet concealed in order to encourage Villeneuve to lead his fleet from Cadiz. On 21 October 1805, the British fleets advanced on Villeneuve's fleet in two parallel lines off the Cape of Trafalgar. One line was led by Nelson on the *Victory*, with the other line led by Collingwood on HMS *Royal Sovereign*. When he saw HMS *Victory* setting her studding sails, Collingwood did the same and took the *Royal Sovereign* in advance to break through the enemy's line. The *Royal Sovereign's* main battle was with a Spanish flagship and the *Santa Anna*. After being informed that Nelson had been mortally wounded, Collingwood took command of the fleet. He removed his flag to HMS *Euryalus*, taking the damaged HMS *Royal Sovereign* in tow.

After the battle had resulted in a British victory, Collingwood received a pension of £2,000 per annum and was made Baron Collingwood of Caldburne and Hethpoole in Northumberland. On 9 November 1805, he was promoted to Vice-Admiral of the Red. Succeeding Nelson as the Commander in Chief of the Mediterranean fleet, Collingwood returned to the station off Cadiz. He was now responsible for ensuring that the French fleet was kept out of the Mediterranean and was prevented from uniting with the Spanish forces again. It was a task that put Collingwood under much pressure. In 1807, he was becoming concerned over Turkey's growing sympathies towards the French campaign against Russia. In the June of that year, in order to force Turkey to negotiate on British demands,



Information sheet no 108

Collingwood sent a fleet under Admiral Duckworth through the Dardanelles to attack Turkish warships but he was mortified when this came to no avail.

By now, Collingwood's health was beginning to deteriorate; he would work at his desk for hours dealing with fleet administration and he rarely went onto the deck of his ship. This period of command was largely uneventful except for two skirmishes in 1809. In the first engagement, which occurred in spring 1809, Collingwood was unable to prevent five French convoys from transporting reinforcements of troops and supplies from Barcelona to Toulon. However in the second engagement which took place in the following October, succeeded in intercepting three French vessels, two of which were driven to the shore and destroyed.

Collingwood's health continued to suffer and he hoped that the Admiralty would grant him permission to return to Northumberland to see his family. On 3 March 1810, after finally receiving the orders to return home, Collingwood departed from Port Mahon on the *Ville de Paris*. Although in cheerful anticipation of his return, Lord Collingwood died on the evening of 7 March 1810 before he reached England. His remains were laid in state at the Painted Hall in Greenwich, before he was buried at St. Paul's Cathedral, beside the tomb of his friend Nelson. With no male heir, his peerage became extinct.