

Information sheet no 009

Samuel Hood

Samuel Hood was born 12 December 1724 at Butleigh in Somerset. He entered the navy as Captain's Servant on HMS *Romney* on 6 May 1741 and later joined HMS *Garland* as an Able Seaman in 1743. This was a common form of entry for young gentlemen to start their sea service until a space occurred to be officially carried as part of the officer complement. In 1744 he was appointed Midshipman of HMS *Sheerness* under Lord George Rodney and then served in HMS *Ludlow Castle* until 1745. After passing his Lieutenant's examination in June 1746, he was appointed to HMS *Winchelsea* serving off the north coast of Scotland, the North Sea and the Channel. On 19 November 1746, while cruising off the Scilly Isles, HMS *Winchelsea* was engaged in action with the French frigate *Subtile*. During this action, Hood was wounded in the hand. In March 1748 Hood was appointed to HMS *Greenwich* and a few months later transferred to HMS *Lyon*, serving in North America. The ship returned home and paid off in November 1748 and Hood was placed on half pay. The following year, he married Susannah Linzee. In January 1753, he returned to active service in HMS *Invincible*, a guard-ship at Portsmouth and then in May to HMS *Terrible*. Hood was promoted Captain in 1754, appointed to HMS *Jamaica* and returned once again to the North American station. During his time on the station, he also commanded HMSs *Lively* and *Grafton* before returning to England at the end of 1756.

In January 1757, Hood offered to take temporary command of any ship whose captain was absent due to the court martial of Admiral Byng and this led to temporary commands in HMSs *Torbay*, *Tartar* and *Antelope*. On 14 May, while commanding *Antelope*, he drove ashore and wrecked the French ship *Aquilon* in Audierne Bay. A week later, he captured two privateers and took the crews as prisoners. These actions received much approval from the Admiralty and he was given command of the frigate HMS *Bideford* as part of Sir Edward Hawke's squadron in the Bay of Biscay. On 7 February 1758, he joined HMS *Vestal* and was again in Hawke's squadron in the Basque Roads and participated in the destruction of fortifications on the Isle of Aix. *Vestal* was then ordered to North America. While on the outward passage off Cape Finisterre, *Vestal* attacked and captured the French *Bellona*. *Vestal* was badly damaged during this action and had to return to Spithead. After being refitted, the ship joined Rodney's squadron in the English Channel to blockade the French coast. This service also included the bombardment of Le Havre. In the spring of 1760, at his own special request, Hood was sent to the Mediterranean where he spent three years in the Levant on convoy service. He returned to England in April 1763.

After a short period of inactivity, he was appointed to HMS *Thunderer*, a guard-ship at Portsmouth. During this period he carried infantry to North America. In April 1767, he was appointed Commander-in-Chief in North America, with HMS *Romney* as his flagship. On his return home, he was appointed to the Portsmouth guard-ship, HMS *Royal William*, until November 1773. During this time, he built a house outside of Portsmouth in the village of Catherington. He was then appointed to HMS *Marlborough* until 1776. He was appointed Commissioner at Portsmouth and Governor of the Naval Academy in January 1778 and created a baronet in May 1779 during a visit by the King to Portsmouth.

In 1780, Hood was promoted Rear-Admiral of the Blue and commanded a squadron sent out to reinforce Rodney's fleet in the West Indies during the American War of Independence. The squadron joined Rodney at St Lucia in

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January 1781. On 29 April 1781, Hood was in action against slightly larger French fleet under Admiral Comte de Grasse to prevent the French squadron from reaching Fort Royal with reinforcements. He was unsuccessful this. Later, with Admiral Thomas Graves, the English fleet were again unsuccessful in their attempt to relieve the British army at Yorktown being driven off by Admiral de Grasse's fleet during the battle at Chesapeake Bay.

In January 1782, Hood attempted to prevent the superior French from capturing St Kitts and Nevis and with a series of bold moves he forced the French fleet from their anchorage at Basseterre, St Kitts and repelled their attacks.

On 9 – 12 April 1782, Rodney and Hood defeated a combined force of French and Spanish ships during a planned invasion of Jamaica. During this battle, known as the Battles of the Saintes, Admiral de Grasse and four French ships were captured. It is during this battle that, owing to a change in the wind direction, Rodney was forced to break through his own line of ships and pass through that of the enemy. It is possibly the first time that this manoeuvre, known as "breaking the line", was attempted with decisive effect, radically changing naval fighting tactics.

While in the West Indies, Hood became mentor to both Prince William and Captain Horatio Nelson and he became good friends with both. Hood returned to England in June 1783 and he was made an Irish peer, Baron Hood of Catherington. He also received the Freedom of the City of London. In the 1784 general election, he was returned to Parliament as MP for Westminster.

In 1787, he was appointed Commander-in-Chief at Portsmouth, with HMS *Barfleur* as his flagship and promoted Vice-Admiral of the Blue on 24 September 1787. In July 1788, Hood was appointed to the Board of Admiralty. In 1792, he presided over the court-martial of the alleged mutineers of the *Bounty*. With the outbreak of the French Revolution in February 1793, he left Portsmouth having been appointed Commander-in-Chief for the Mediterranean. Among the officers that accompanied him was Horatio Nelson.

Hood oversaw the occupation of forces in Toulon supporting the French royalists until the port fell to the revolutionaries. This was followed by an occupation, by invitation of the island's leader Paoli, to secure Corsica as a naval base. He was recalled to England in 1794.

On 4 April 1795, he was promoted to Admiral of the Blue. In recognition of his services, he was made an Elder of Trinity House and Viscount Hood of Whitley (Warwickshire) while his wife was created Baroness Hood of Catherington in her own right. In 1796 he was appointed Governor of Greenwich Hospital. He held this post until his death at the age of 92 on 27 January 1816 at Greenwich. He was buried in the old cemetery of the hospital. His Hampshire home, Catherington House, is now a private school.

Note: The use of the abbreviations HMS in this information sheet is to clearly define the ships of Royal Navy. The abbreviation did not come into common use until c.1790s