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The Forgotten Service: The French Navy of the Old Regime, 1650-1789

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THE FORGOTTEN SERVICE: THE FRENCH NAVY OF THE OLD REGIME, 1650-1789

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the effectiveness of the French navy during the Old Regime. The maritime strategies and policies of the French navy are evaluated in an effort to determine if the French navy of the Old Regime was successful in fulfilling state goals.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The overall performance of the French navy during the Old Regime is viewed as a failure by many historians. This unfavorable view stems from the French navy's inability to gain maritime supremacy over the British Royal Navy in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. From this perspective, the French navy was indeed a failure. Scholars judge the overall effectiveness of the Royal Navy, and the subsequent ineffectiveness of the French navy, by comparing their wins and losses in head-to-head battles. By following this methodology, historians have overemphasized the extent British victories at sea limited French naval strategy and effectiveness. Six hours of a heated naval engagement off the Spanish Coast in 1805 is a narrow standard by which to judge the French navy a failure. Yet many historians observe this benchmark in concluding that the early modern French navy was ineffective.

Should naval victories be the sole measure of the worth of a navy? Major fleet engagements were rare during the age of sail. Thus, it is misleading to place too much emphasis on the few sea battles that occurred during this period. The effectiveness of the French navy should not be judged by their infrequent encounters with the Royal Navy at sea. France had an entirely different strategic role for its navy than Britain. Therefore, the proper standard for defining the French navy's effectiveness should be whether or not it succeeded in fulfilling the crown's naval policies.

The purpose of the early modern French navy was to help build French commerce. By following the tenets of mercantilism, an economic theory stressing a state's ability to increase monetary assets by encouraging exports and discouraging imports, the French navy helped increase France's commercial and colonial networks. The revenue generated by mercantilism helped to modernize the French state, as well as manufacture, equip, and maintain its navy. The French navy was designed to protect France's commercial interests continentally and abroad. To this end French naval doctrine adopted two strategic positions: defensively, protect merchant trade and, offensively, disrupt the maritime trade of France's rivals—the English and Dutch. Thus, it was not the French navy's purpose to seek major fleet to fleet engagements with its adversaries. In the context associated with a mercantilist maritime strategy, did the French navy

accomplish the goals as set forth by the state in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries? Should the early modern French navy be seen as a failure during this period?

Historians have not emphasized the fact that at the end of the seventeenth century the French navy was lauded by the English and the Dutch as the finest fleet in the world. French naval doctrine and strategy became the blueprint for Western European powers seeking to emulate French success at sea. However, scholars have stressed the fact that at the turn of the eighteenth century the British Royal Navy began to wrest command of the seas from the French. Did this shift in naval power reflect the ineffectiveness of the French navy?

Towards the end of Louis XIV's rule, France was in social, political, and economic distress. France was at the tail end of a period which had seen continuous war. The overextension of France's borders due to the almost uninterrupted state of warfare during the Sun King's reign left the state near bankruptcy. Domestically, religious intolerance created a disrupted workforce which had disastrous effect on the economy; and, the aggression of the French state during the last half of the seventeenth century forged hostile relationships with many of France's continental neighbors.

At the turn of the eighteenth century, France was again embroiled in war. During the War of Spanish Succession (1701-1714), France found its borders threatened by an Anglo-Dutch force, an allied force that had recently expelled the French from its holdings in Italy, Germany, and the Low Countries. The War of Spanish Succession forced France to rethink its military objectives. National priorities during the war compelled France to place its navy in a subordinate role compared to that of its army. Naval issues took a backseat as France found itself fighting for its life on home soil during the latter part of the war. For the first time since Colbert's administration, naval affairs were set aside to concentrate on continental strategies.

The War of Spanish Succession had long-term effects on the French navy. Between 1714 and 1763, the French navy would play a secondary role to that of the army. The War of Spanish Succession marked the beginning of the precipitous decline in the production and success of the French navy. The period 1690-1763 signifies a period of continuous decline and neglect of the French navy. The rise and fall of the French navy directly coincided with France's decision to follow a continental military strategy.

In 1763, after losing most of its North American holdings during the Seven Years' War, French naval strategy was again revised. Fueled by the then Minister of the Navy Étienne

François, duc de Choiseul's desire to seek revenge for the loss to the British of French colonial holdings in Canada, France initiated a 'five-year plan' to build a navy capable of defeating the British Royal Navy. Louis XV and Choiseul believed that a strong French navy could disrupt Britain's current commercial and colonial monopoly by commanding the seas. Choiseul hoped that by 1768 France would achieve parity with the British fleet and match its rivals' readily available pool of experienced officers, seamen, and commanders. To pull even with British ships of the line, France would have to almost double the current size of its fleet, from 47 to 90 battleships. It would also have to recruit thousands of experienced seamen, officers, and commanders to man its fleet. The French government was able to shift its naval policies in 1763 for three reasons. First, by losing its colonial holdings in North America, France could now concentrate its resources to defend its most prosperous colonial holding, Saint Dominique. Second, by limiting its continental commitments, France was able to procure more funding for naval reconstruction efforts. And, third, determined to concentrate solely on naval operations, France used diplomacy to keep its traditional continental enemies neutral during this period of naval growth.¹

The French navy was highly effective after the Seven Years' War. During the American Revolution, French naval success against the British Royal Navy helped secure American Independence. The French navy's victory at the Battle of the Chesapeake paved the way for the decisive American victory at Yorktown during the American Revolution.

At all times, the French navy accomplished the goals set forth by the crown and the French Ministry of the Navy. The French navy prior to 1763 was designed to act as a commercial threat to Anglo-Dutch shipping. After 1763, the French navy was given two roles by the French state: defend its Caribbean holdings from British encroachment and help France regain the international and domestic prestige and power it had lost after the Seven Years' War. The French navy succeeded on both accounts.

Whatever the role assigned to it, the French navy was an active and integral part in advancing the overall strategic plan of France. Britain, for one, never saw the French navy as inefficient. The threat posed by the French navy to Britain and its colonial empire was ever-present.

¹ H.M. Scott, "The Importance of Bourbon Naval Reconstruction to the Strategy of Choiseul after the Seven Years' War" *International History Review*, vol. 1 (1979): p. 19.

Fourteen of every fifteen shillings in tax revenue collected by the English state went directly into supporting its navy.²

The historiography of the French navy during the Old Regime is dominated by pro-British and other Anglo-centric interpreters which give the French navy little credit for its achievements. This view is heavily influenced by the works of the preeminent naval historian, Alfred Mahan.³ Mahan stressed that naval success was contingent upon the buildup of large ships of the line designed specifically to win major fleet engagements against similarly designed and equally concentrated enemy fleets. In France, this strategy was called the *guerre d'escadre*. For Mahan, the British navy during the age of sail represented the blueprint for building empire. The Royal Navy was Mahan's ideal type.

Mahan's political and historical arguments promote the notion that the Royal Navy was the undisputed naval power in the world because of its strategy emphasizing major fleet to fleet engagements. As such, the Royal Navy's victory at Trafalgar in 1805 justified Mahan's thesis in the eyes of generations of naval historians. The ascendancy of the British Empire was forged by its navy. No one argues this point. However, Mahan's triumphalism unfairly downplayed the vitality of the French navy, and overlooked strategic alternatives to fleet-to-fleet combats.

Mahan and other British and Anglo-centric naval historians have intellectually stifled the growth of the field by adhering to what historian Mark Shulman calls the "Gun Club".⁴ This 'selective' perspective, one that focuses only on major fleet to fleet battles, has thrown the baby out with the bathwater by dismissing naval strategies other than the *guerre d'escadre* (i.e. the use of privateers and *guerre de course* as effective naval strategy). For example 'Mahanians' ignore the effectiveness of the French and American navies during the War of Independence, arguing instead that changes in British strategy during the war were the reason for the defeat of the Royal Navy. No credit is given to the effectiveness of the French fleet or French naval strategy during the war. By unconditionally accepting Mahan's thesis, Anglo-centric naval historians are

² Ian Toll, *Six Frigates: The Epic History of the Founding of the U.S. Navy* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2008), p. 42.

³ Alfred Mahan is the author of several books focusing on naval warfare. His most prominent works are, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History: 1660-1783* and, *The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire*. Mahan's work concentrates on a nation's use of its navy to effectively build empire. For Mahan, empire was built upon command of the seas. The command of the seas was quintessential for building and maintaining a strong nation.

⁴ Mark Shulman, "The Influence of Mahan Upon Sea Power" *Reviews in American History*, vol. 19 (1991): p. 523.

‘forced’ to ‘overlook’ competing naval strategies and doctrine opposed to the ‘big-gun’ navy orientation.

French scholarship on the subject, although more open to outside interpretations than the Anglo-centrists, is equally guilty of developing the effectiveness of the French navy of the Old Regime. Naval historian Jean Meyer was the French scholarly equivalent to Alfred Mahan; both made great strides in elevating academic interest in naval history. Meyer’s serious and intellectual depiction of French naval history is in a league of its own. Meyer is the eminent scholar of the French navy. Meyer’s works, most notably his *Histoire de la Marine française* and *Marines et révolution*, are monumental studies that focus on the social tensions between the nobles and non-nobles serving in the early modern French navy. These works were born from Meyer’s interest in the nobility of Brittany, particularly the Pontcallec Conspiracy, an event in the 1720s that brought into question the role of the nobility in the everyday lives of Bretons.

Meyer’s work was rested in the social history paradigm that dominated historical writing from the 1970s to the 1990s. Meyer was responsible for bringing social history to the forefront of French naval scholarship. Meyer’s work has influenced a new generation of scholars and historians who also concentrate on the social aspects of the French navy.

Social historians believe that social conflict is the key to understanding history. As such, social historians are continuously searching for dysfunction and conflict to help analyze or explain a period in history; social harmony does not attract the social historian. This methodological bias has led these historians to stress that social conflict in the French navy led to its ineffectiveness.

Over time, social historians have lengthened the list of reasons for why the French navy was ineffective during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Meyer identifies four reasons for the overall failure of the French navy. Other than the social conflict within the officer corps, Meyer lists state insolvency, overreliance on imported timber, and the insufficient number of trained seamen and officers as the ultimate reasons for the fall of the French navy. However, it is social conflict between naval personnel that has captivated his interest.

Historian Léon Guérin also concentrated on social conflict within the French ports. For Guérin, it was the administrative chaos in the ports that fueled the social antagonisms within the officer corps. The ineffectiveness of the navy’s administration at the local level provoked discord among members of the administrative elite and professional nobles by disrupting the

cohesion of the ports and dockyards. This ultimately led to the defeat of an “excellent” French fleet.⁵ Guérin identifies the administrative side of the navy as the key structural inefficiency within the service, while praising the professionalism of the military side of the navy’s officer corps.

Building on Guérin’s thesis was naval historian O. Troude. Troude believed that naval professionalism and success was the end result of officer education, training, and discipline. Troude felt that the French navy achieved greatness through the discipline of its high-ranking officers. It was the administrative side of the service that led to the disintegration of the overall efficiency of the officer corps. For Troude, naval inefficiency was created by the growing insubordination between the seafaring corps and the administrative corps of the navy beginning in the reform era of the 1750s.⁶

Historians Etienne Taillemite and Joseph Martray also argued that social sectarianism led to the ineffectiveness of the French navy. Taillemite subscribed to the notion that it was the French government’s chronic inability to understand the social culture of the navy that led to its eventual demise. For Taillemite, the French state was unable to develop a useful maritime strategy for its navy because it failed to understand the importance of having a strong navy. It was political as well as social disconnect and disinterest in naval affairs that led to an ineffective navy.⁷ In line with Taillemite’s thesis is the work of Joseph Martray. Martray and Taillemite stress that the social dysfunction of the navy was the direct result of factional standoffs which crippled the navy’s ability to accomplish state goals. Indiscipline, insubordination, and indifference to the professional navy hierarchy blocked the progress of the French navy.⁸

Canadian historian William Cormack offered a new twist to the social paradigm by focusing on the political culture of the French navy.⁹ Cormack, inspired by noted French historian Francois Furet, concluded that French naval dysfunction was the result of internal structural problems arising from the political ineptitude of France’s central administration. Cormack’s

⁵ Léon Guérin, *Histoire maritime de France*, As cited in Charles Lewis, *Admiral de Grasse and American Independence* (Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1945), p. 271.

⁶ As cited in William Cormack, *Revolution and Political Conflict in the French Navy 1789-1794* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 3-5.

⁷ Etienne Taillemite, *L’Histoire ignorée de la marine française* (Paris: Librairie Académique Perrin, 1988), pp. 98-101.

⁸ Joseph Martray, *La destruction de la marine française par la Révolution* (Charlottesville: The University of Virginia Press, 1988), pp. 12-15.

⁹ William Cormack, *Revolution and Political Conflict in the French Navy 1789-1794*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 15-17.

research on the French navy forgoes the analysis of war, geopolitics, and international affairs to delve into the issue of the French political system in place during the eighteenth century.

Building on Cormack's study is the work of Jonathan Dull. In his book, *The French navy and the Seven Years' War*, Dull identifies the political and financial problems as the decisive factors in leading to the downfall of the French navy. Dull downplays the social rivalries within the officer corps, suggesting that the social makeup of the navy officer corps had little to do with the navy's failure. Social malaise within the navy's officer corps was not decisive, poses Dull, especially when the French crown was forced to rent, sell, or decommission the majority of its fleet because of its financial problems.¹⁰

Building on Dull's and Cormack's similar perspective is the work of James Pritchard. Pritchard stresses that it was administrative problems at the organizational level which suspended the progress of the French navy. Dull emphasizes that the internal bickering between the administrative branch of the navy, officers of the pen, and the seafaring officers called the sword, ushered in a period of negligence which led to an inefficient and unproductive navy.¹¹

Current syntheses dealing with the overall performance of the early modern French navy give little attention to the navy's successes. William Cormack's, *Revolution and Political Conflict in the French Navy* covers the period 1715-1794, yet only one paragraph is devoted to the accomplishments of the French navy of the Old Regime.¹² Equally laconic is Dull's, *The French Navy and the Seven Years' War*. Dull stresses that the French army's victory at Clostercamp paved the way for the eventual French naval victory at Yorktown.¹³ Dull's monograph focuses on the French navy's "legacy of failure."¹⁴

'Comprehensive' naval works do little more than the monographs mentioned above to highlight the awareness of French naval successes during the Old Regime. Earnest Jenkins lends the most credibility to the French navy in his synthesis; however, he ignores the development of French naval policy—essential in defining the effectiveness of a navy. Jenkins concentrates on

¹⁰ Jonathan Dull, *The French Navy and the Seven Years' War* (Lincoln: The University of Nebraska Press, 2005), p. 9.

¹¹ James Pritchard, *Louis XV's Navy 1748-1762: A Study of Organization and Administration* (London: McGill-Queen's Press, 2009), p. xvi.

¹² *Ibid.*, 41. Here Cormack praises the professionalism of the *Grand Corps*, the French navy's high-ranking military officer corps. There is no mention of French naval victories throughout this work.

¹³ Jonathan Dull, *The French Navy and the Seven Years' War*, p. 181.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

the strategic side of naval battles. The ascendancy of the French navy in the mid to late seventeenth century and its role in the state's objectives is downplayed by Jenkins' brevity.¹⁵

Richard Harding goes one step further than Jenkins by acknowledging that the growth of the French navy in the 1660s was prodigious, but had little impact on the navies of the Dutch and British at the end of the seventeenth century. Harding stresses that Louis XIV's decision to build a galley fleet during Colbert's tenure instead of investing in the more modern ships was just one of many failed naval policies that kept the French navy a subordinate power in the Mediterranean during the 1680s. For Harding, the French navy is no more than a nuisance for the British and Dutch navies until 1734 when the French fleet sailed in support of Louis XV's father-in-law during the War of Polish Succession. Harding stresses that this particular fleet maneuver was in support of the continental land forces and had little to do with changing the balance of sea power in the early eighteenth century.¹⁶

The vast majority of scholarship produced over the last two centuries focusing on the French navy during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries follows the same line of reasoning: the fall of the French navy was the direct result of the British Royal Navy's tactical superiority and its increased level of officer professionalism. Historians have also believed that the Royal Navy possessed overwhelming advantages in seamanship, vessel construction, armament, and the ever important *esprit de corps* necessary to control the seas. One of the leading scholars on the Royal Navy, Nicholas Andrew Martin (NAM) Rodger, erroneously categorized the French navy of the eighteenth century as "thirty years behind" the technological innovation displayed by the English navy.¹⁷

Even more biased is historian Arthur Herman who grants all of one page to the achievements of the early modern French navy.¹⁸ Rodger and Herman are just two historians who ignore French naval success to overstate the might of the Royal Navy.

¹⁵ Earnest Jenkins, *A History of the French Navy From its Beginnings to Present Day* (London: Macdonald and Jane's, 1973), is just what the title suggests: A history of the navy covering 750 years of service. These 750 years of events are jammed into 350-pages, leaving little room for delving into anything but brief generalizations about the Old Regime's navy.

¹⁶ Richard Harding, *Seapower and Naval Warfare, 1659-1830* (London: UCL Press, 1999), p. 51.

¹⁷ NAM Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain 1649-1815* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004), p. 222.

¹⁸ Arthur Herman, *To Rule the Waves: How the British Navy Shaped the Modern World* (New York, Harper Collins, 2004).

The two dominant approaches—one focusing on fleet-to-fleet combat, the other on social tension between different categories of naval personnel—have left a major void. They have left the question of French naval effectiveness unexplored and unanswered. The only voice in the field—a sharply negative one—is that of Mahan and his Anglo-centric disciples.

This thesis seeks to shed light on the achievements of the early modern French navy by showing that it was often effective in carrying out the state's will. Presently, there is no work that measures the effectiveness of the French navy in terms of France's own maritime strategies and doctrines. The question this study seeks to answer is how effective was the French navy in carrying out the social, political, strategic, and economic policies of the Old Regime monarchy.

CHAPTER 2

THE RISE AND DECLINE OF THE FRENCH NAVY, 1660-1763

2.1 A SOUND BUREAUCRACY

A sound bureaucracy was the cornerstone of the professional success enjoyed by the early modern French navy. Bureaucratization of the French navy began during the reign of Louis XIII under the capable hands of the king's chief minister, Cardinal-Duc de Richelieu.

Richelieu was one of the first French ministers to recognize the geopolitical importance of obtaining dominion over the seas. He created the navy of France. For Richelieu sea power was a means to promote French commerce at a global level. Prior to Richelieu, France had no naval or maritime strategy. French naval strategy depended on the availability of state funding. Obtaining revenue for the navy was problematic due to the massive amount of money France spent on its army; thus, the building of a navy required the complete financial backing by the state. To achieve Richelieu's lofty maritime goals, France had to first secure and protect its domestic trade before overseas expansion could occur. The livelihood of the state's navy meant garnering the complete financial support of the French government. Louis XIII, demonstrating his willingness to build a state-sponsored navy, unflinchingly backed the economic and strategic policies of his first minister. To ensure Richelieu complete administrative authority over the French navy, Louis XIII appointed Richelieu superintendant of navigation and commerce in 1626. His special charge was administration of the navy and the French colonies.

Before Richelieu, the French government relied on vessels for hire—ships obtained from merchantmen or foreign countries. France did not have a single ship-of-the-line (battleship) to her name. Underlining the complete lack of French maritime assets before Richelieu's regime, on a diplomatic mission to Holland, the Cardinal had to suffer the embarrassment of traveling onboard a borrowed English vessel.¹⁹ The nonexistence of a navy was compounded by other problems: inadequate ports, arsenals, ship maintenance, and construction capacity. Richelieu would have to build the French navy from scratch.

¹⁹ James Breck Perkins, *Richelieu and the Growth of French Power* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1904), 225-227.

Richelieu concentrated on developing French commerce to help modernize France and its navy; both goals were achieved through the expansion, development, and protection of its overseas colonies.²⁰ Richelieu's economic plan for France required a navy that was capable of achieving two goals: protect and expand France's commercial interests, while simultaneously providing less expensive means to transport French goods abroad. French commerce was dependent on the creation of a self-reliant national navy.²¹ Because of his uneasiness in relying on imported goods and foreign naval officers, Richelieu relied heavily upon France's merchant marine to build the state's navy.²² Early naval policy under Richelieu revolved around three premises: protecting France's borders from British invasion, defeating Spain in the Thirty Years' War; and, most importantly, creating a fleet capable of keeping France in its preeminent global power-position through the protection of its maritime empire.²³

By building the navy from the merchant marine, Richelieu felt he could prevent the loss of millions of *livres* each year through the plunder of French merchantmen and privateers by pirates (not to mention the many ships of foreign nations that preyed on French merchantmen and privateer vessels). In 1616 it was estimated that France lost 3,000,000 *livres* in goods taken by Algerian corsairs from merchant vessels plying the Levant.²⁴ Richelieu conducted three assaults against Algeria in 1624-1627 to help gain political leverage over the Sultan. Through these naval and ground actions Richelieu was able to open trade with Algiers and Tunis. During the conflict, the French navy captured 80 Algerian vessels worth over 4,572,000 *livres*. Thus, France put itself in a position to reap the commercial rewards from free trade throughout the Mediterranean. The profits of this trade helped generate substantial revenue for the crown, some of which was placed back into the navy.

In 1626, Richelieu took personal control of the administration of naval affairs by proclaiming himself 'Grandmaster' of the navy. The following year Richelieu abolished the hereditary and honorific title of admiral by purchasing it from Montmorency for 1,200,000 *livres*. By controlling the French admiralty, Richelieu helped centralize the burgeoning French navy by

²⁰ Ibid., 225-227.

²¹ Franklin Palm, *The Economic Policies of Richelieu* (Champaign: University of Illinois, 1915), p. 105.

²² Sir Richard Lodge, *Richelieu: Foreign Statesman* (Berkeley: Macmillan and Co., 1896).

²³ Geoffrey Symcox, "The Navy of Louis XIV" *The Reign of Louis XIV* ed. Paul Sonnino (New Jersey: Humanities Press International, 1990), 128-129.

²⁴ Paul Masson, *Histoire du Commerce Francais dans le Levant au XVII Siécle* (Paris: Libraire Hachette & Co., 1896), p. 30

suppressing the excessive authority and independence associated with the admiral constablenesship. Centralization of the navy allowed Richelieu to control both naval finances and the recruitment of navy personnel. Through the *Ordonnance de la marine*, all coastal land was placed under direct state control. Richelieu was determined to create a navy capable of expanding and protecting France's interests.

Richelieu relied on a mercenary navy until France could produce its own fleet and find Frenchmen to man it. The Cardinal had no desire to retain foreign officers beyond their fixed terms of service. Richelieu's distrust of them grew over time. In 1628 the French fleet surrounding the Huguenots entrenched at La Rochelle consisted of sixty-seven privateers and various other ships-for-hire, the majority of which were captained by Dutch mercenaries. Reports of insubordination, in the form of Dutch officers refusing to carry out orders, reached Richelieu's desk. By 1638, Richelieu finally ended the employment of foreign officers in the French navy. Foreigners commanding French vessels were not the only problem Richelieu had with the manning of his navy; he also distrusted the appointment of courtiers as officers in his navy. He would have no "nobles with curled locks," but an officer corps consisting of "bold stout mariners, bred to salt water and the bottle."²⁵ The French navy would be officered by Spartan national professionals, hardened French seafarers.

Richelieu introduced the *règlement* of 1631 in an effort to unite the merchant and state navy. The *règlement* had a dual purpose. First, it called for the creation of a hierarchical commission of state officers at each major port in France. The ports at Toulon, Le Havre, and Brouage were headed by a commissary-general whose job it was to procure state funding and supplies for the fleet, and a *chef d'escadre* who concentrated on ship outfitting, manning, and construction. The *règlement* also called for the development of a Marine Council that was headed by Richelieu's immediate lieutenant, the Secretary-General. For the first time naval and commercial policies were integrated under the direct control of the state. This consolidation of naval policy and administration gave Richelieu the ability to open previously closed trade routes dominated by Barbary pirates in the Levant and Mediterranean. By reforming naval administration, increasing recruitment, and improving port facilities to help construct, provision, and staff a naval building

²⁵ Cited in Jaques Boulenger, *The Seventeenth Century: Volume 3 of the National History of France* (London: G. Putnam's Sons, 1920), 98.

program second to none in Europe at the time, Richelieu extended the authority of the state to levels previously unobtainable.

Richelieu expanded the role of mercantilism to encompass all facets of naval production, including: upgrading the arsenal at Toulon, materiel production, human resources, and the creation of a permanent, standing fleet of vessels.²⁶ For Richelieu, the tax revenue created by expanded French commerce would fuel the development and maintenance of a strong navy. As the navy increasingly demonstrated its capacity to protect French trade, Richelieu implemented the more aggressive phase of his maritime plan: to make France the preeminent power in Europe by harassing British and Spanish trade.²⁷

With France's domestic and Mediterranean shipping on a sound footing, Richelieu turned his attention to the Atlantic trade. Richelieu strengthened France's presence by establishing the Company of St Christophe in the West Indies. St Christophe became France's commercial foothold in the West Indies and a springboard for future commerce in the Antilles and North America. Perhaps Richelieu's greatest mercantile initiative was the creation of the *Compagnie des Indes*, a global trading company modeled after the highly productive British East India Company. The *Compagnie des Indes* would dominate trade with the Orient and Madagascar for the next twenty years, making France the richest country in Europe by the mid seventeenth century. The foundations of the French Empire were laid by Richelieu's geopolitical and commercial deployment of the French navy. It would be up to the navy to defend this growing Empire.²⁸

Towards the end of Richelieu's administration the French navy could claim twenty ships of the line and over eighty galleys and other smaller naval vessels. By the 1630s, the size of the French navy was on par with the British, Dutch, and Spanish fleets of the time.²⁹ In less than four years after Richelieu had taken over the administrative reins of the French navy, France's domestic and international presence had increased significantly. Commerce raiding by the Barbary pirates was dissuaded, Hapsburg power was checked; and, France's industries, trade,

²⁶ David McNally, *Political Economy and the rise of Capitalism: a Reinterpretation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 68-69.

²⁸ Ernest Jenkins, *A History of the French Navy: From its Beginnings to the Present Day* (London: Macdonald and James, 1973), p. 31.

²⁹ James Breck Perkins, *Richelieu and the Growth of French Power* (London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1904), p. 226.

and commerce were now capable of keeping France a power player on the international stage for years to come.

The development of the French navy was put on hold after the deaths of Louis XIII and the duc de Richelieu in 1643. Richelieu's successor Cardinal Jules Mazarin did not regard the navy as highly as his predecessor, opting to pursue Richelieu's anti-Hapsburg and expansionist policies via the army and diplomacy. But this changed in 1661 when Louis XIV began his personal rule.

One of Louis XIV's greatest political achievements was his appointment of Jean-Baptiste Colbert, the son of a great landed merchant family, to the post of clerk to the navy. In time, Colbert would become known as the 'father' of the French navy. No one person did more for the development of the modern French navy than Colbert. Colbert was a disciple of Richelieu. Colbert began his administrative career working as a clerk for Francois Surlet des Noyers, who was Richelieu's first assistant in the new naval administration. Colbert later became Mazarin's personal *intendant*, cutting his teeth administering Mazarin's massive fortune of cash, artwork, and personal property.

In 1663, Colbert was promoted to the position of *Intendant de la Marine*, the chief overseer of naval administration in the French ports. Similar to Richelieu, Colbert was a devout advocate of a navy-backed mercantilist policy—but with a twist. Reviling the Dutch for monopolizing trade with the East and West Indies, as well as the Levant, Colbert's goal to increase French trade rested on taking market share from the Dutch and British. Colbert's policies called for an ultra-protectionist stance, which could only be achieved through the complete centralization of maritime commerce and trade. For Colbert, commerce and national prosperity were to be obtained by selling as many products internationally as possible—while limiting the importation of foreign products.³⁰ He also believed in imposing harsh trade taxes on the Dutch and English in French ports, to keep trade primarily in French hands. These measures could be achieved only through expanded merchant shipping backed by the protection of a strong, centralized navy.

In 1669, Colbert was awarded the lofty position of Minister of the Navy and Colonies. Louis XIV wished to create a navy capable of extending his *gloire* onto the seas.³¹ Therefore, it was essential that France build up its existing fleet of battleships and personnel to man them. This

³⁰ Hugh Chisholm, *The Encyclopedia Britannica: A Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, Literature and General Information*, Vol. 10 (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1910).

³¹ Richard Harding, *Seapower and Naval Warfare, 1650-1830* (London: University College London, 1999), p. 80.

could not be accomplished without regulating the navy through the bureaucratic centralization of naval administration. In a single year, 1670, French dockyards, ports, and arsenals produced 75 ships of the line, all over 700 tons in size—three times the previous year’s output.³² In 1670 France boasted the second largest fleet of battleships, behind only the United Provinces, in Europe. Five years later, France had the largest battle-ready fleet in the maritime world.³³ This incredible buildup in French sea power required men to help construct, maintain, and man the fleet.

Provisioning of warships was taken over for the first time by the state—ensuring regular supplies. Government agents also began to pay sailors and officers directly, easing the financial burden of the earlier system of provisioning where the ships’ captains were saddled with the expenses associated with supplying food and drink for their own vessels. The presence of government agents inspired confidence in sailors joining the navy. State provisioning of its fleet ended the chaotic, unregulated prize system previously in place in the French ports.³⁴ After the decommissioning of a vessel, the captain of a ship was compensated for his expenses through the eventual sale of his ship to a privateer or merchant. Before Colbert, the *conseil des prises*, the prize court that directed these sales was rife with dirty deals, kickbacks, favoritism, and price gouging. After Colbert, the sale of decommissioned vessels was a straightforward and mostly honest procedure; one in which the state derived greater revenue from its regulatory efforts. Centralization helped build the French fleet, while adding revenue to the state’s depleted coffers. At the same time, it also helped cure another chronic problem of the time: shortage of manpower.

France was the first of the great naval powers to establish a permanent force of regular navy personnel. Colbert inherited the daunting task of recruiting sailors and officers from a limited pool of potential candidates. Colbert resisted the system of maritime recruitment used by the English Royal Navy, impressment. Instead, Colbert implemented a system of recruitment that fostered productivity within the ranks of the new navy, the *inscription maritime*. The *inscription maritime* was a broad, comprehensive code. It established standards of recruitment, pay, and benefits which helped build confidence and unity among newly enlisted and conscripted French

³² Jan Glete, *Navies and Nations: Warships, Navies and State Building in Europe and America, 1500-1860*, 2 vols (Stockholm: Acta Universitatis, 1993), p. 204.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ M.S. Anderson, *War and Society in Europe of the Old Regime 1618-1789* (Quebec: Fontana Paperbacks, 1988), p. 101.

sailors. This helped improve the work ethic of conscripted sailors by clearly defining the crews' job description, length of service, eligibility requirements, and the possibility of state benefits.

The *inscription maritime* recruited through a system called the *rôle des gens de mer* (list of sea men). The *rôle des gens de mer* required all men 18 and up who resided in or near coastal towns to enlist for naval service. Lists included all men currently employed as crewmen and officers of all commercial vessels, regardless of the sailor's hometown. The census used to establish the initial *rôle des gens de mer* brought Colbert potentially devastating news. In 1671 the census listed only 36,000 potential candidates for naval inscription. Commercial vessels were included to help increase the inscription numbers. As of 1672, all boats engaged in any maritime endeavors were included in the census. In just two years the *rôle des gens de mer* increased the amount of 'draftable' sailors by over 400%, a huge success. Enlistment required men to serve one year terms every three to five years (depending on the size of the town).

In essence, the *inscription maritime* placed every able-bodied French sailor at the navy's beck-and-call. As an incentive to register, the state provided many privileges in return for service in the navy. Tax exemptions, military pensions, fishing rights, free education, and life insurance for the families of lost seamen were offered as incentives.³⁵ In 1673, the *inscription maritime* amassed 151,830 names. The *inscription maritime* temporarily stimulated the market for the human resources required for the growing French navy, while effectively curtailing draft dodging and desertion in the coastal towns of France. With a growing fleet, and the men and materiel to man it, Colbert set in motion a maritime strategy that would sustain the French empire through overseas trade and colonization.

Colbert utilized the navy to help stimulate France's economy. Louis XIV's growing need for revenue to support his extravagant lifestyle and geopolitical ambitions was ever present during Colbert's tenure. Colbert, as Richelieu before him, believed that mercantilism would increase the demand for French goods. For Colbert, commerce was the means to save France from its excessive spending habits. Tax revenue created by expanding domestic and international trade provided France a trio of benefits: fiscally, it kept France in the black, it encouraged commerce and, most importantly, it was a means to annually increase state revenue for the navy.

³⁵ William Cormack, *Revolution and Political Conflict in the French Navy 1789-1794* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 24-25.

To stimulate domestic production in France, via the export market, Colbert called for the gradual buildup of France's maritime infrastructure, beginning with the naval dockyards. Colbert expanded the dockyard into a major operational structure. The ports at Brest, Toulon, Marseille, and Rochefort developed into centers of commerce. Colbert brought in master ship builders from around the world to help construct the greatest and most modern war fleet in the world. Colbert developed forges, foundries, and arsenals for the massive construction going on in the previously inadequate French dockyards. Seeking to maximize efficiency, Colbert improved the road and river system linking France's forests to its major ports. Integrated port and dockyard systems aided French commerce and the construction of its navy and merchant marine.

Colbert extended his program of dockyard improvements to France's interior in the form of mercantilism. Mercantilism in France became known as '*Colbertisme*,' a word that defined the impact that Colbert's policies had on the state's economy.³⁶ Direct centralization of the state economically integrated France, which allowed France the ability to manipulate previous market barriers to trade. Colbert began to develop France's maritime infrastructure to stimulate employment, broaden state revenue, and extend the market. Colbert built the Languedoc Canal to join the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea. Roads and bridges were also improved by Colbert to help interconnect intra-city commerce and trade throughout France—helping produce 'a dazzling magnificence of its cities'.³⁷

Jean-Baptiste Colbert transformed France into a great naval power. This was achieved by the construction of a new fleet of state-of-the-art battleships, improved dockyards and infrastructure, increased administrative efficiency, and the development of domestic and global commerce. In 1685 King James of England signaled his envy and fear of the French navy in a conversation with French naval expert Usson de Bonrepas, stating that, "the French navy was the best in Europe with the most modern type of warships".³⁸ James emphasized his desire to emulate French discipline, ship construction, and the experience of its officer corps in an attempt to bring

³⁶ Gustav Schacter, *Cultural Continuity in Advanced Economies: Britain and the U.S. Versus Continental Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2005), p. 80.

³⁷ Arthur Young, *Travels in France in the Years 1787, 1788, 1789* ed. Carl Maxwell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 166.

³⁸ Cited in Geoffrey Symcox, "The Navy of Louis XIV," in *The Reign of Louis XIV*, ed. Paul Sonnino (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1990), pp. 130-136.

the British navy out of its current “slackness in the dockyards, lewdness of discipline, and the overall miserable state of his navy”.³⁹

Under the administrative control of Richelieu and Colbert the French navy of the Old Regime grew from an inconsistent, privateer fleet to a highly proficient and modernized professional sea power in less than a quarter century. The French navy became the envy of Europe through the consolidation of private enterprise and governmental control. The navy was a beneficiary of this economic union between the state and private sector due primarily to the surplus expenditure available for development and upkeep of the growing state-sponsored navy. In each of Colbert’s first five years as Minister of the Navy he was able to increase government spending on the navy. During the nineteen years of Colbert’s reign as administrative head of the navy, France spent a whopping 216 million *livres* on the construction of new ships alone. The size of the French fleet grew over 600% during Colbert’s administration, beginning with 23 ships, and reaching 250 at the time of Colbert’s departure.

Through a hybrid form of mercantilism initiated by Richelieu and mastered by Colbert, France was able to enlarge the wealth of France. Much of the increase in state revenue went into the construction and maintenance of the navy. Thus, the French navy was able to expand international commerce through markets previously unavailable due to the earlier absence of the market protection and expansion provided by a credible navy. The growth of the French navy was due to the centralizing efforts of the state. The navy in turn helped maintain a strong central government through the spread of trade, the growth of capitalism, and new business relationships and opportunities overseas.⁴⁰ By increasing the range of French products in the market, French commerce was able to provide for the ascendancy of both France and the French navy. The crown was now able to channel more revenue into ship building and weapons for the navy.

By the end of the seventeenth century the French navy was in a position to redefine maritime power relationships in Europe. Not only was the French navy numerically superior to its main rivals the Spanish, Dutch, and English, France also held advantages in naval armaments, overall ship tonnage, and number of experienced seamen entering the service.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Henry Klassen, *A Business History of Alberta* (Alberta: University of Calgary Press, 1999), p. 8.

2.2 SHIP TECHNOLOGY

Eighteenth century naval officers believed that French warships were the finest in the world.⁴¹ Illustrating this fact was the British practice of turning captured French prizes into flagships.⁴² The development of French warship technology and construction dates back to the Colbert administration.

Maritime science improved as France's material strength increased. Increased state revenue allowed France to pursue technological advancements in ship development and construction. Superiority in French warships followed government initiatives to integrate the latest technology and science into the art of shipbuilding. Ship technology, construction, and armament fell under the auspices of the Navy Ministry. Colbert formed the council of naval construction after the peace of Nimeguen. Prompted by two of France's greatest military men of the time, Abraham DuQuesne and Marshal Sébastien Le Preste de Vauban, the council of naval constructions was presented with a new model of a ship of the line that would soon garner the admiration of France's maritime adversaries. French warship design and technology established the profession and defined the gold standard of naval architecture.

The new 'French-styled' ship of the line was faster and wielded more firepower than its opponents. The key to France's technological advancements in ship building was the abandonment of the traditional modes of ship architecture. Before the eighteenth century merchant vessels were outfitted for military purposes, and warships were just armed merchants. There was no design difference between a commercial vessel and a ship of war; they remained interchangeable to save on costs. It was the French navy, led by Colbert, which led the way.

Colbert and his son the Marquis de Seignelay put into place three governmental initiatives to help modernize the art of ship building in France. First, they institutionalized and professionalized all facets relating to France's shipwrights and naval construction efforts. Institutionalization and professionalization of ship technology was achieved by encouraging the *Academie royale des sciences*, France's premiere scientific society, to focus primarily on naval problems. Colbert looked to the scientific community for advice on a variety of maritime issues,

⁴¹ James Pritchard, "From Shipwright to Naval Constructor: The Professionalization of 18th-Century French Naval Shipbuilders" *Technology and Culture* 28, (1987): p. 1

⁴² Christopher Lloyd, "Armed Forces and the Art of War," *The New Cambridge Modern History, vol. 8, The American and French Revolutions, 1763-1793*, ed. A. Goodwin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), p. 186.

including navigation, ship building, military engineering, and cartography.⁴³ Scientists associated with the *Academie royale des sciences* employed a technical element in ship architecture that was ignored by previous generations of shipwrights. Early shipwrights did not use mathematical calculations nor planned blueprints when constructing a ship; they relied on the handed-down skills mastered by generations of craftsmen and apprentices working outside the state control of a shipbuilder's guild. This changed under Colbert.

Institutionalization of the shipbuilding industry in France allowed for improvement in warship design. Professionalization of the industry soon followed. Colbert kept a close eye on the educational and professional development of potential French shipwrights. By infusing the art of modern shipbuilding with science, the French navy garnered several advantages over its maritime competitors. Among these advantages was the development of a larger, faster hull created by Father Paul Hoste while studying the resistance, stability, and towing effects of a ship's bow in water.⁴⁴ By following Hoste's scientific principles the French were able to develop longer and broader warships. The added length and width of each warship allowed for added firepower and protection throughout the newly constructed fleet, without sacrificing speed and maneuverability.

In the mid seventeenth century construction schools were established in the major ports of France. The curriculum at these state-sponsored schools focused on the scientific rules associated with modern shipbuilding. It was believed that by giving officers the technical knowledge related to the structural integrity of a ship, a better understanding of its performance capabilities could be achieved. This proved true. French naval officers gained valuable experience from the curriculum at the many shipbuilding construction schools in France. By the late seventeenth century French naval officers were better equipped than the British to handle their ships.⁴⁵ Historian J.O. Lindsay attributes the superiority of French officer ship handling to France's decision to offer professional construction educational programs to its officers thirty years prior to the founding of similar schools in Britain.⁴⁶

⁴³ Karin Friedrich, *The Cultivation of Monarchy and the Rise of Berlin: Brandenburg-Prussia, 1700* (London: Ashgate Publishing Co., 2010), p. 168.

⁴⁴ Paul Hoste, "Théorie de la construction des vaisseaux" in *L'Art des armées navales ou traité des évolutions navales* (Lyon, 1697).

⁴⁵ J.O. Lindsay, *New Cambridge Modern History: The Old Regime, 1713-1763* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), p. 183.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

Seignelay, after his father's death in 1683, initiated the second step in professionalizing France's shipbuilding industry. Seignelay transcribed thirty years of Colbert's primary maritime edicts, declarations, and regulations to form the single most important naval code in French history—the Naval Ordinance of 1689. The Naval Ordinance of 1689 addressed many topics, including: the rank and duties of officers; the enrollment of seamen; the distribution of a ship's company; their quarters; pay and rations; the construction, armament, and equipment of ships; service afloat; preservation and governance of arsenals; naval jurisprudence; hospitals; and protection of the coast.⁴⁷ Thus Colbert's administrative genius was able to live well beyond his years as Minister of the Marine with the development of the Naval Ordinance of 1689. The Naval Ordinance of 1689 guided the administration of the French navy until 1765.

The third part of Colbert's and Seignelay's plan to professionalize naval shipyard construction and development focused primarily on elevating the status of shipwrights. As early as 1671 Colbert was exploring ways to place shipwrights on an equal social footing with the aristocrats in the navy's officer corps. Colbert believed that only through social and professional equality could general-grade officers, such as master shipwrights and the naval *intendants*, accomplish the lofty commissions set forth by the state to the development of its navy.⁴⁸

The Naval Ordinance of 1689 put into place a hierarchical system of advancement based on merit within the shipwright profession. By 1717 master shipwrights could claim the title of *maitres-constructeurs*, socially and professionally distancing themselves from the petty officers, boatswains, and master caulkers—positions without the possibility of advancement. A master shipwright was now a member of polite society.⁴⁹ Shipbuilders were no longer mere craftsmen. They were professional artisans with technical expertise, and a distinguished title. Not coincidentally, the professionalism and institutionalization of French shipbuilding at the turn of the eighteenth century produced noteworthy innovations in ship design that would revolutionize warship construction for the next century.

Between 1693 and 1719, France turned out a trio of warships that were technologically ahead of their time. The first was *Le Terrible*, a 92-gun ship of the line that could hold twenty-eight 36-pound cannons on her lower gun deck alone—a phenomenal achievement at the time. No

⁴⁷ Henri Paixhans, *An Account of the Experiments made in the French Navy for the Trial of Bomb Cannon*, etc. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1883), p. 76.

⁴⁸ Jean-Baptiste Colbert, *Lettres, Instructions et Mémoires de Colbert* (Paris: Kessinger Publishing, 1882), pp. 300-309.

⁴⁹ James Pritchard, "The Professionalism of French Naval Shipbuilders" p. 10.

other vessel plying the seven seas could match the incredible firepower of *Le Terrible*. The French also put to sea a frigate, *La Médée*, a single-deck vessel that could bear the weight of twenty-six 8-pounders. The third architectural marvel was *Le Tonnant*, the first eighty-gun ship able to mount heavy caliber guns on both decks. Each ship was technologically superior in speed and firepower to any ship as yet produced by any other maritime power in the world. Through the scientific development of shipbuilding ushered in by the master shipwrights and engineers, France was able to put to sea first-rate ships of the line that had the speed and maneuverability of frigates. Scientific inquiry into ship technology and design placed the French navy in an envied position. In 1750, British Admiral Charles Knowles staunchly believed that a French ship of 52-guns was equivalent to or better than an English one of 79-guns.⁵⁰ French warships during the eighteenth century were superior in every respect to any other ship afloat during the Old Regime. The British Royal Navy patterned their nineteenth century frigates, the same vessels that would garner much acclaim for their effectiveness during the French and Napoleonic Wars, from a captured French frigate, the *Endymion*.⁵¹

Naval historian Henri Paixhans best puts into perspective the French navy's often overlooked excellence in ship technology, stating "The fleets of Louis XIV and XV, though ultimately almost annihilated, were often in condition to dispute the supremacy of the seas with England and Holland; and even after the catastrophe at La Hogue were able with renewed strength to check and harass the English squadrons in the operations abroad. The annals of those days record no such triumphs as those of Nelson at the Nile and Trafalgar. The peculiar advantages of the French navy consist in the superior excellence of its materiel, ships built in the most enduring manner after models of surpassing beauty and speed, artillery of the best quality and finish, and in general the aid of every advantage that profound science and talent can attribute; whereas Britain had to borrow these qualities from their neighbor".⁵²

2.3 FINE OFFICER CORPS

The bulk of the early modern French navy's officer corps was made up of Frenchmen serving in the Order of Saint John, also known as the Knights of Malta. French kings actively pursued

⁵⁰ J.O. Lindsay, *New Cambridge Modern History: The Old Regime, 1713-1763* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), p. 185.

⁵¹ Robert Gardiner, *Frigates of the Napoleonic Wars* (London: Chatham Publishing, 2006), pp. 40-48.

⁵² Henri Paixhans, *An Account of the Experiments made in the French Navy for the Trial of Bomb Cannon, etc.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1883), pp.80-81.

amicable relations with members of the Knights of Malta, due to the Order's maritime power in the Mediterranean; the crown granted special privileges and posts to subjects joining the Order. Thus, the Knights of Malta were inextricably linked with many of the first families of France.⁵³ The Order's social code and chivalric values and traditions served as the basis for the professional attitudes of the *Grand Corps*.

The Knights of Malta were a religious-centered, chivalric sect, bent on defending the Christian faith against all infidels. Abbé Vertot, historian of the Knights, referred to the Order as a "fighting force composed of the most noble blood of the Christian world."⁵⁴ Officers in the Order, primarily veteran galley commanders, represented a rich source of experienced nobles, ready-made officers that formed the foundation of Louis XIV's burgeoning state-navy. Members of the Knights of Malta held the majority of captaincy positions during the reign of Louis XIV, and had a stranglehold on the vaunted positions in Louis' Galley Corps. The king insisted that 'Malta men receive preference over other persons seeking officer positions on galleys.'⁵⁵ The Knights of Malta brought a high level of courage, honor, and fighting spirit to the French navy. The *esprit du corps* so necessary to the effectiveness of a navy was the Order's gift.

The *Grand Corps*' origins date back to the service of two men: the chevalier de Cangé and Henri d'Escoubleau de Sourdis. De Cangé was born in the coastal province of Bretagne in Northwest France. De Cangé quickly earned the respect of his shipmates by demonstrating honor and valor during the navy's battle against the Spanish fleet at the Lérins Islands. Quick promotion through the navy ranks illustrated the meritocratic system of advancement common to the early marine royale. Cangé's vast sailing knowledge and maritime experience was acquired from his time with the Knights of Malta, and their constant skirmishes with the Barbary corsairs in the Mediterranean.

Chevalier de Cangé received the highest rank possible for a non-noble, *chef d'escadre* in the French navy. While captaining in a pitched battle off of the Barcelona coast, de Cangé was injured and chose to go down with his ship. De Cangé exemplified the qualities of the noble military ethos, helping forge the same noble-like qualities in the navy. Described as a fine

⁵³ Paul Bamford, "The Knights of Malta and the King of France, 1665-1700" *French Historical Studies* vol. 3 (1964), 429.

⁵⁴ Cited in Paul Bamford, "The Knights of Malta and the King of France" *French Historical Studies* vol. 3 (1964), 430.

⁵⁵ Jean-Baptiste Colbert, *letters, instructions et memoires*, ed. Pierre Clément, vol. III (Paris, 1862), 143.

fighting leader, and one of the most seamanlike officers in the early French navy, de Cangé became a role model for meritocratic, open promotion.

Another example of the assimilation of non-nobles in the navy officer corps comes from the incredible career, and life, of Henri de Sourdis. De Sourdis, incredibly, began his professional career as a member of the First Estate of France! Rising through the ecclesiastical ranks, de Sourdis became the archbishop of his hometown of Bordeaux. De Sourdis' fate changed once he became Richelieu's personal secretary. De Sourdis' spunk and fighting spirit caught Richelieu's eye while administering to the defenses at La Rochelle. One account of de Sourdis' exploits during the French siege of La Rochelle stated that the archbishop looked more like a musketeer than a churchman.⁵⁶ De Sourdis displayed a keen interest in the naval affairs of France, causing Richelieu to appoint him admiral of the Brittany squadron in 1636. Having no naval experience, de Sourdis learned the ways of the navy from his officers. De Sourdis' aggressive and unpretentious demeanor appealed to his men, creating a working relationship that brought the French navy early success against the Spanish.

De Sourdis was France's first admiral, and a good one. Unfortunately, political gamesmanship in Paris ultimately led to de Sourdis' expulsion from the navy. However, the period of unification among the French navy's diverse officer corps following the exit of de Sourdis could be considered the golden age of egalitarianism within the upper ranks of the service. The comradely state of the seagoing fleet and the *esprit de corps* among the crews of the navy during de Sourdis' tenure is illustrated by the fact that nine high ranking members of both the king's galley corps and several representatives of the pen, the non-military administrative branch of the navy's officer corps, protested Richelieu's firing of de Sourdis.

The *Grand Corps* created a hybrid system of naval administration that incorporated many of Colbert's original goals as set forth in his seafaring code of 1681. The funding for technology was one of Colbert's long-lasting legacies within the arena of naval administration. Colbert understood the importance in the fusion of science and technology onboard France's fighting fleet. Equipping the navy with modern chronometers allowed for the advancements in navigation, chart making, surveying, and many other fields related to scientific navigation and hydrography. It was up to the French naval commanders to learn, master, and advance the

⁵⁶ E. H. Jenkins, *A History of the French Navy: From its Beginnings to the Present Day* (London: Macdonald and Jane's, 1973), p. 22

fledgling navigational and hydrographical techniques throughout the officer corps. By the end of the seventeenth century, the French navy was the preeminent leader in maritime navigation, due largely in part to the practical experience received by French officers serving in the Knights of Malta.⁵⁷

The French navy's officer corps at the end of the seventeenth century was tactically superior to those of the Dutch and English fleets. The French navy was both feared and revered by its maritime rivals. Royal Navy historian William Laird Clowes described Colbert's navy as, "...superior to the combined fleets of England and Holland; and the officers and men of the service had learnt experience in the best schools of the day."⁵⁸

Colbert's navy was well stocked with a diverse officer corps. In fact, 40% of the navy's officer corps was made up of commoners. This fact can be attributed to the amalgamation of the merchant and military navy. The assimilation of this force into one group, so needed for the success of a seagoing navy, was achieved by the open recruitment and advancement of a broad range of men. The *inscription maritime*, along with the state's adoption of open recruitment, helped centralize the growing numbers of sailors and officers into a military collective through the theoretical and practical training which emphasized the navy hierarchy and traditions associated with the Naval Ordinance of 1681.

Colbert, through necessity, attempted to create a strong navy through the open recruitment of sailors from France's commercial marine. The recruitment of the Knights of Malta was originally implemented to generate a base for its fledgling navy. As the state-navy grew, so too did its need for more human resources. Thus, Colbert looked to entice French nationals serving in foreign navies to join the French navy. Still lacking the manpower necessary to man his navy, Colbert began transferring officers from the army officer corps into the navy's officer corps. These measures fell drastically short. Equally challenging was the task of unifying, educating, and training the extremely heterogeneous hodgepodge of recruits that were the foundation of the early French navy. The critical shortage of experienced officers able to train the large number of unskilled seamen and officers alike entering the navy, mostly from the merchant marine, inevitably fell upon the state to rectify.

⁵⁷ Ernest Jenkins, *A History of the French Navy: From its Beginnings to Present Day* (London: Macdonald and Jane's, 1973), p. 42.

⁵⁸ William Laird Clowes, *The Royal Navy: A History from the earliest times to the Present* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1996), 326.

The Knights of Malta were France's first military school, so to speak, devoted to teaching tactics and strategies to officers previously without naval warfare experience. Abraham DuQuesne is the quintessential example of this military internship for future French naval officers. DuQuesne was the son of a merchant captain who defied all odds by becoming an admiral of flag rank in the French navy. DuQuesne, like many merchant officers during the early seventeenth century gained valuable fighting experience in the privateer wars against the Barbary corsairs. DuQuesne took it upon himself to train the many ragtag, inexperienced naval seamen and officers entering the French navy during Richelieu's early days of building a state-sponsored navy. By 1672 DuQuesne and his well-trained fleet inflicted heavy casualties on arguably the greatest captain of the time, the Dutch admiral Michiel Adriaanszoon De Ruyter.

Anne Hilarion, the comte de Tourville, became one of Louis XIV's greatest naval commanders. Under the early tutelage of the Order, and later DuQuesne himself, Tourville acquired the attributes necessary to become a future hero of the French navy—aggression, patience, and demonstrated strategic and navigational skills. Tourville fought against all of France's maritime foes of the seventeenth century, amassing glory and fame for the French fleet at every turn. Tourville was a Norman noble who had no problems taking orders from an officer of common birth, as was DuQuesne. And like DuQuesne, Tourville actively supported France's shipbuilding and naval schools.

Tourville was considered by contemporaries to be the one French naval commander of the late seventeenth century capable of defeating France's arch maritime enemies, the English and Dutch.⁵⁹ Gaining fame from his victory at Beachy Head, Tourville established himself as the preeminent naval tactician and organizer. Tourville was the first French naval officer to understand that campaigning on the high seas required out of the box thinking; naval battles could not be directed or planned. Understanding the many unforeseen variables associated with naval battles of the time, Tourville wrote several books on line-of-battle tactics and fleet actions. Tourville believed that fleet coordination helped minimize any invariables while at sea. Tourville implemented the use of a signaling system that was far superior to anything being used by any other navy of the time. By incorporating a signaling, the French fleet was able to make

⁵⁹ Daniel Dessert, *Tourville* (Paris: Fayard, 2002), p. 371.

quick, decisive tactical maneuvers. Tourville was able to place the French navy in a highly enviable maritime position at the turn of the eighteenth century.⁶⁰

The French crown put into place a means to supply the navy's growing officer corps with a wellspring of highly proficient leaders. Technical schools were established to provide sound theoretical and practical training for all cadets seeking to join the French navy at the officer level. The *gardes*, naval cadets, upon graduation, possessed a 'technical' competence second to none. A 'practical' knowledge was also required in order to successfully manage a fighting vessel. Graduating cadets would gain practical experience serving under the tutelage of a senior naval officer, usually a member of the *Grand Corps*.

The *gardes du pavilion* and *gardes de la marine* were specialist institutions that trained its cadets the inner-workings of seamanship. Loyalty and pride were characteristics of graduating cadets entering the officer corps, helping add to the *esprit de corps* already prevalent in the early French navy's officer corps. The navy's *Grand Corps* reached their respective lofty ranks primarily by demonstrating advanced proficiency in hydrography, navigation, the natural sciences, and the ever growing advancements in ship weaponry and maritime military strategies. Social status did play a part but, as with the corporate world in early modern France, advancement to lieutenantcy and above required a knowledge base and experience at sea that was unavailable to individuals without the practical training by current *Grand Corps* members. This limited means of advancement in the navy created internal divisions and rivalries within both branches of the navy's officer corps.

Many members of the *Grand Corps* were progressive liberals—believing that the inclusion of a broad range of men into the officer corps was beneficial to the overall professional growth of the French navy.⁶¹ A direct result of this liberal attitude, a trait reserved primarily to the French navy's officer corps, was the consistent inclusion, training, and promotion of officers recruited from outside the navy establishment. Three of France's premier navy officers of the Old Regime, DuQuesne, Tourville, and Jean Bart, ascended the ranks of the officer corps without the hereditary lineage associated with the high-ranking naval aristocrats of the time.

⁶⁰ Along with a fine officer corps serving in the French navy, France had an outstanding corps of naval explorers. Samuel de Champlain, Jean-Francois de Galaup, Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville, and Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne de Bienville, were of note during the Old Regime; each were integral parts in establishing France's colonial possessions throughout North America.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

Admission into the ranks of the *Grand Corps* was reserved solely for nobles capable of demonstrating elite status among the nobility. Birth right alone did not guarantee a position within the *Grand Corps*. Entrance into the *Grand Corps* went well beyond aristocratic distinction. Membership required that all potential candidates graduate from one of two companies of *gardes*, cadet training centers. The *gardes de la marine* and the *gardes du pavilion* required potential cadets to demonstrate both an aristocratic pedigree and a letter of appointment confirming the existence of a naval lineage within the candidate's heritage.⁶² A hefty monetary tuition acted as the final obstacle to becoming a high-ranking officer in the king's navy. The prejudicial recruitment measures for entrance into the *Grand Corps* produced an air of arrogance, egotism, and social snobbery within the ranks of the French navy. Although the *Grand Corps* displayed prejudicial tendencies towards non-*gardes* and many of the members representing the navy's administrative corps, this animosity did not hinder the professionalism of the seagoing officer corps. The *gardes* did have a haughty demeanor as they made their way into the upper ranks of the navy officer corps; they belonged to a privileged, socially exclusive group. However, as the history of the early French navy will show, the increasing professionalism demonstrated by the hierarchical social structure of the navy was forged by the *Grand Corps'* ability to train and promote officers from outside the cadet system.

2.4 A SOUND BODY OF NAVAL DOCTRINE AND TACTICS

The French navy found itself in an uncommon and potentially perilous position in the late seventeenth century. Having beaten the acclaimed Anglo-Dutch fleet at Beachy Head in 1690, the French navy was on the point of becoming the preeminent maritime power of the world. The French crown was in desperate need of revenue in order to fund France's continental and maritime ambitions, not to mention the Sun King's lavish lifestyle. Unable to afford the massive expenses associated with simultaneously financing both a substantial army and navy, Louis XIV, disaffected by his navy's loss at Le Hogue, concentrated on a land-based geo-political policy for France—relegating naval operations to a supportive role. Thus, it was essential that the French navy adopt a policy capable of utilizing the state's minimal amount of funding to its utmost

⁶² William Cormack, *Revolution and Political Conflict in the French Navy 1789-1794* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 38.

potential. For France and its navy the most cost-effective measure to employ was to continue the mercantilist naval policy that had served the state and its navy so well in the past.

France's decision to pursue a commerce-backed naval strategy was a necessity for two reasons: the financial limitations of the state and the strategic effectiveness of the policy. Even with a rapidly expanding French navy during Colbert's administration the French fleet could not sustain such a rapid pace of growth and expansion due to the heavy drain on state revenue. By 1691, on the heels of the French navy's great victory over the Anglo-Dutch fleet at Beachy Head, France's naval production levels began to wane. Matching the combined English and Dutch fleets was impossible; thus, the *guerre de course* emerged as an alternative strategy to help clear the way for international and domestic French commerce.

France's reliance on the *guerre de course* was not a sign of naval weakness at the professional level; nor was it a perceived deficiency related to the lack of a clear, precise naval strategy. French naval strategy was at the mercy of the state's shifting military policies. Due to funds diverted for the use of the army, France could not afford to participate in a naval arms race with the Dutch and English. Therefore, a commerce-raiding and disruption policy was favored. The *guerre de course* was the only means by which France could simultaneously increase its state revenue to meet the expenses associated with expanding its army and navy.

France was one of the first early modern sea powers to study the history of past maritime empires. Colbert fastidiously studied the effectiveness of the British navy during their war with the Dutch in 1652-1767. Colbert believed that by combining past naval doctrine used by the great maritime forces with an updated contemporary doctrine to fit France's goals, development of a strong navy was only a matter of time. The *guerre de course* strategy was a rational decision made by France. It was based on years of study and research. France was the first country to examine the past battles of rival navies to help learn and formulate models of strategic effectiveness.

The *guerre de course* should not be thought of as a purely 'defensive' strategy, for combat prowess goes hand-in-hand with doctrinal development. French naval doctrine, while based on commerce disruption, evolved during the eighteenth century to include offensive measures aimed more at destroying their rivals' ability to wage war. The early eighteenth century represents the beginning of an advance in French naval doctrine, incorporating past naval combat performances while updating strategies for current and future diplomacy.

The limited funding available to the French navy at the end of the seventeenth century required the state to create a unique blend of naval doctrine and tactics that was second to none in the period. The French could not afford to engage in, let alone be defeated in a protracted naval engagement. Following Colbert's maritime strategy that made the protection and growth of commerce the highest goal for the French navy, the *mémoire de la course*, a compilation of Colbert's naval administrative legislation became the basic outline for French naval doctrine throughout the period of the Old Regime.

Elucidating France's decision to follow the *guerre de course* instead of more aggressive strategies, the great military strategist Vauban stated that, "it is thus necessary to follow the easiest means, the least expensive, least hazardous, and to lessen the load of the state as much as even the losses will not discourage the king from further ventures; for it is necessary to follow to make good officers to the king and reduce in little time the enemies to make peace".⁶³ Louis XIV was encouraged by his Minister of War's approval and put this commercial-based naval strategy into effect. The *mémoire de la course* was a strategic precursor to France's *guerre de course*; the natural position of a country seeking to stimulate domestic trade and commerce while limiting the massive expenditure associated with main-fleet strategy.

French naval administrators were left with the challenging task of devising a maritime strategy that would fulfill France's mercantile and colonial goals on a limited budget. Every French vessel was critical in supporting mercantilism; thus, a navy capable of interrupting English and Dutch commerce and, when needed, mount an aggressive offensive strategy against its enemies became the basis for French naval strategy. Through the use of mathematics, technology, and revised technical maritime strategies the French navy was capable of achieving great success while minimizing state naval expenditures.

The French navy's exclusive signaling system was born while Tourville and Hoste were engaged in battle with the Anglo-Dutch fleet at Beachy Head in 1690. Hoste's work, *A Treatise on Naval Tactics* was a broad tactical narrative created during the Battle of Beachy Head. Hoste meticulously followed the French fleet's progress during the nineteen days of maneuvering and engagement. Tourville suggested that Hoste use his scientific background to help apply

⁶³ Lettres de Duguay-Trouin, found in www.netmarine.net/bat/fregates/duguay/celebre2.htm downloaded 12/22/2010.

mathematical theory to his tactical ideas. The end result of this marriage of mathematics and naval strategy produced the work, *L'Art des armées navales*.

L'Art des armées navales emphasized the importance of a fleet commander's maintenance of strict control over the French navy's 'limited' assets. *L'Art des armées navales* is an outline which explains how to maneuver a fleet into the most advantageous position for attacking, or defending itself against an enemy. For Tourville and Hoste naval tactics were in a constant state of flux, with luck playing a large role in the outcome of many engagements; therefore, a certain amount of discretion was left to the naval officers in command leading up to and during battle. *L'Art des armées navales* emphasized the use of 'evolutions', or premeditated maneuvers, by admirals to help limit the role of chance in the outcome of any naval battle.

Hoste's system of maneuvers was based on sailing orders called, *ordres de marche*. The *ordres de marche* were directions to help French naval officers form and carry out close-action maneuvers against an enemy ship or fleet. The main theme in Hoste's work was the defensive positioning of a fleet. For Hoste, the ability to outmaneuver a superior opponent was the quintessential means for winning a tactical naval battle. The pre-positioning of a fleet could protect a weaker naval force from being outgunned, or to fight another day with a more advantageous position. Hoste's work held valuable strategic advice for navies finding themselves caught up in myriad of circumstances: outgunned, under-gunned, and against the weather gauge, tides, and wind. Hoste's naval stratagems required a precise system of intra-fleet communication in order to be effective.

Ship to ship and ship to shore communication has been around since the ancient Greeks plied the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas. However, it was not until the early sixteenth century when a Frenchman, Antoine de Conflans, decided that using flags for signals would revolutionize naval communication.⁶⁴ Conflans helped develop the most advanced system of signal flags known to any navy of the time. Conflans' flag signal system was so comprehensive and ahead of its time that the French enjoyed three centuries of unrivaled mastery of sea communication.⁶⁵ Conflans integrated flags, sails, cannonades, banners, and lanterns into a complex system of naval interchange. Whereas it was with Conflans that naval signals were first devised, it was Tourville who institutionalized and set to practical use naval signaling.

⁶⁴ William Miller, "The Background and Development of Naval Signal Flags" *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society, Third Series* 68, (1944): p. 61.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 61-62.

Tourville used an advanced system of signals that utilized 36 independent flags that could be used singularly, or interconnected by means of using all three masts at once. Signal flags afforded Tourville the ability to synchronize battle fleet action that utilized the breaking up of the fleet into separate tactical groups.

France divided its fleet into three squadrons during battle, an action that was exclusive to the French navy. Hoste and Tourville believed that by using a vanguard in the front, a center squadron, followed by a rear guard, the 'van' as a whole was both protected and, more importantly, in an offensive position to focus the most firepower against a single position. Separate squadrons allowed for swift, concise execution of orders; and, the ability to lend support, concentrate firepower, or retreat at a moment's notice.

Each squadron was designated by its own flag color, according to the ranking officer onboard the flagship. Private ships of the fleet used numbers and pendants. Numbers, colors, and pendants were used to help form battle lines among the fleet. Frigates and smaller ships were positioned to the windward side of the van, allowing the fleet admiral quicker dissemination and dispatch of his orders among the battle lines, and the ability to assess enemy movements at quicker intervals. Each commanding officer placed his ship in the center of his own division to create an administrative command center. Fleet signals originated at the center of the van and emanated outward, limiting miscommunication between admirals, commanders, and captains of the French fleet. Swift and accurate communication allowed the French fleet to quickly disseminate and execute commands from the flagship.

The French navy granted its commanding officers the discretionary independence necessary to employ 'on-the-spot' naval doctrine, when needed. A defensive posture was standard operating procedure for the French navy. However, in certain circumstances, French commanders were allowed to go on the offensive, as long as there was no threat to French merchant shipping or commerce. The state could not afford risking its fleet to irrational, aggressive doctrine; thus, an umbrella of independence was allowed solely for the implementation of defensive posturing at the turn of the eighteenth century. France had to avoid being drawn into any conflict that could result in the annihilation of its fleet.

Throughout the eighteenth century the French navy continually outpaced its opponents thorough the constant development of maritime battle tactics and signaling. The defensive position of France's *guerre de course* would not change, nor would a sharp deviation from

Tourville and Hoste's original doctrine occur. However, several books on naval strategy and onboard signaling were published during the eighteenth century to help maintain France's commitment to a naval doctrine that was best suited for the time. Under Louis XV's capable Minister of the Navy, Étienne François, duc de Choiseul, the concepts surrounding current French naval doctrine were questioned due to the heavy losses suffered by the French navy during the Seven Years' War. As a result several treatises on naval tactics and signaling were published between 1759 and up to the American Revolutionary War.

The first doctrinal pamphlet written during the reform era of Choiseul was Captain Sébastien-François de Bigot, Vicomte de Morogues' *Tactique navale ou traité des évolutions et des signaux*. *Tactique navale* was a treatise based on Morogues' experience at the Battle of Quiberon Bay in 1759. Building on Hoste's earlier work, *Tactique navale* was written by a navy officer for navy officers. More practical than theoretical, Morogues concentrates on a more elaborate use of signals to help a smaller force go on the offensive against a larger foe. Morogues is one of the first French officers to mention the potential success in breaking an enemies' battle line, and subsequently outflanking him. Side to side broadsides was the traditional tactical battle formation of the time. Breaking the line of battle was a highly aggressive maneuver that did not coincide with the French *guerre de course*; nevertheless, Choiseul and the French navy were pressed to find a way to defend France from the growing threat that was the Royal Navy in the mid to late eighteenth century.

Tactique navale became a textbook for naval cadets entering the academy at Brest. Historians have debated the overall use and practical effectiveness of using *Tactique navale* as a training source for naval cadets, seeing that France rarely deviated from a defensive posture during the naval wars of the eighteenth century. But the French navy did adopt more aggressive behavior during Choiseul's tenure as head of the navy. This can be seen by both the reform measures taken to strengthen the French navy at mid century, primarily in Choiseul's decision to give doctrinal command to the navy officers of the sword over the administrative pen based on the formers' experience at sea.

Captain Jacques Bourdé de Villehuet, an officer in the French East India Company, wrote *Manoeuvrier, ou essai sur la théorie et la pratique des mouvements du navire et ses évolutions navales* in 1765. Here Villehuet concentrates on preparing French crews for battle, particularly face to face fighting techniques while boarding an enemy vessel. Other sections of Villehuet's

book include doctrine for engaging enemy ships, transferring from lines of transit to battle formations, and the importance of a certain degree of independence from the centralized policy for commanders battling the many unforeseeable variables found in the ever-changing conditions during head to head conflicts.

As the eighteenth century wore on, the French navy learned from its victories and defeats at sea. In an effort to maximize efficiency of its fleet, French naval ministers loosened the once strict state doctrinal stance which stressed defense. Individual fleet commanders who had proven their worth in battle were afforded the opportunity to create their own independent instructions to act as a supplement to the current centralized doctrine. The Naval Ministry was well aware of its navy's missed opportunities to inflict greater damage on their respective maritime competitors due to the lack of initiative that was handcuffing its officer corps. A hybrid form of the *guerre de course* was devised in the early 1700s as a means to put greater pressure on British and Dutch trading vessels.

The state naval administration loosened the reins, to a degree, on its fleet admirals and commanders by adopting a more aggressive maritime doctrine. This was primarily the case when a French fleet encountered the possibility of capturing merchant ships. However, French commanders were bound to follow the doctrine associated with evolution of maneuvers, regardless of the position they found themselves in. Outmaneuvering an opponent into submission was far more beneficial than destroying it, for prizes were worth more in a salvageable state. French naval commanders were shown no leeway when escorting merchant vessels. Severe penalties were inflicted if a French commander left his convoy to engage any enemy vessel or merchantman, regardless of the advantage. Likewise, French officers were instructed to fight gallantly and aggressively when defending French merchant and commercial vessels.

2.5 FRENCH NAVAL VICTORIES IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Professionalization, advancements in ship technology, the development of a fine officer corps, and the establishment of a sound body of naval doctrine and tactics can best be illustrated by the French navy's performance, and defeats, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

In 1672 the French navy made its first substantial impact on the maritime world when it faced off against one of the perennial naval powers of the day, the Dutch, at the Battle of Agosta.

Tourville commanded the French fleet; he entered the battle by adhering to the tenets set forth in the *ordres de marche*. Following these naval strategies, Tourville assembled his fleet into three squadrons to meet Ruyter's fleet off the Lipari Islands. Ruyter held the wind gauge; the French had the advantage in speed and firepower. Ruyter went on the defensive, while Tourville and DuQuesne set into effect the evolutions necessary to gain a tactical advantage before the first salvo was fired. The opposing fleets assembled into the common 'line of battle' formation of the time and began a steady barrage of cannon fire. The Allied navy was left with little maneuverable space due to the French navy holding the wind and current. The end result was the heavy losses of Dutch men and materiel. The greatest Dutch loss at Agosta was the death of Ruyter to French fire.

At Agosta the French navy defeated what was arguably the greatest navy of its era, de Ruyter's force of eighteen warships. The Battle of Agosta was significant for the French navy because its victorious outcome began to pave the way for the adoption of a *guerre d'escadre*. France was beginning to move away from the navy doctrine associated with *guerre de course* that had helped build and strengthen its nation, and its navy. Perhaps overconfident from its win at Agosta, the French naval ministry began to alter its traditional maritime strategy.

The *guerre de course* had served France and its navy well. French naval activity in the Mediterranean was eating away at Spanish and Dutch commerce, not to mention the fiscal depredations that French privateers were inflicting on the region. French privateers and commerce raiding had seriously limited the ability of the Dutch and Spanish to mount a sizeable defense against the French navy's seizure of the harbor at Messina. The combined Dutch-Spanish coalition could only muster a fighting force of twenty four ships against the French threat off the coast of Spain.

The defeat of the Dutch-Spanish fleet at Agosta opened the door for the French navy in both the Mediterranean and Atlantic. France quickly took advantage of the disabled Dutch fleet and pressed for the acquisition of Curacao, Tobago, and Palermo. French privateering spread into the Atlantic from its usual Mediterranean domain and wreaked further havoc on Dutch commercial shipping. French privateer Jean Bart claimed to have sunk or taken over 300 merchantmen during this period, mostly of Dutch origin.⁶⁶ The massive naval success at Agosta and the subsequent disruption of enemy trade led Seignelay to press forward the *guerre*

⁶⁶ E.H. Jenkins, *A History of the French Navy*, p. 63.

d'escadre. The decision to back an offensive naval policy was made all the more easy by the French army's failure in invading England.

The Battle of Beachy Head was the culmination of the French navy's push to follow a *course d'escadre* doctrine. Again, following the strategy that would in two years' time be standard French navy battle doctrine, Tourville maneuvered his 70-ship fleet for fifteen days looking to gain a tactical advantage over his rivals. The precise moment that Tourville detected a windward edge he immediately loosed signal flags from his flagship nestled in the middle of the fleet for better fleet-wide visibility. The French navy quickly divided into three squadrons and attacked the Dutch-British fleet. The Count d'Estres, who commanded the forward squadron, and the Count de Chataurenard the windward, did their respective jobs so well that by the time Tourville's center was ready for action there was not an enemy ship left to fight. Tourville thus led his squadron on a mop up flanking operation against the allies' beleaguered fleet. If not for the sudden appearance of a dense fog off the English coast the combined Dutch and English fleet would have been completely destroyed by the French. The Dutch-British fleet lost six ships of the line during battle, and another sixteen ships as the French hounded the allies as far as the Downs. The French navy did not lose a single ship at the Battle of Beachy Head. A more complete victory could hardly have been imagined.

The French victory at Beachy Head was short-lived. In May, 1692, a French naval force of 44 ships led by Tourville attempted to invade England to help restore James II to the British throne. The French were still riding high from their victory at Beachy Head two years earlier. Louis XIV had given Tourville the unprecedented authority to take the battle to the English after the naval success at Beachy Head. The Sun King perhaps was still questioning his earlier refusal of Tourville's request in 1690 to invade England and reinstate England's ex-king. Tourville was now allowed to pursue an ultra-aggressive course during the naval battles of 1692.⁶⁷ However, Louis' hesitance in granting Tourville the ability to actively pursue and destroy the surviving Anglo-Dutch fleet after Beachy Head proved detrimental to the French navy. The battles at Barfleur and La Hogue were the end result of the French navy's failure to ultimately destroy the Dutch-Spanish fleet at Beachy Head.

Tourville commanded 44 ships of the line as he and James II headed to the south coast of England. The French were expecting little resistance from the Royal Navy. Misled by reports

⁶⁷ Alfred Mahan, *Sea Power and World History: 1660-1783* (Tucson: Fireship Press, LLC, 2009), p. 135.

from England which emphasized that the Royal Navy was rife with desertion, and that the slightest French provocation would entice more to run, Tourville and the French navy were overly confident leading up to battle.⁶⁸ Upon seeing an allied Dutch and English fleet of 99 ships of the line Tourville gave the signal to engage. Suffering a great disadvantage in numbers, the French fleet fought the allied fleet to a draw at the end of the first day of battle. When the smoke eventually cleared on that first day, not one French ship had been lost. It was obvious that the French navy, even when facing far superior numbers, was tactically superior to its Dutch and English counterparts.

After appraising the current situation Tourville decided it best to retreat to a safe port to begin repairing the damage sustained to his fleet at the Battle of Beachy Head. While entering the treacherous shoals and shallow port at Cape La Hogue the French navy was set upon by the allies, eventually losing fifteen of France's finest ships in the process. Louis XIV summarily dropped further funding and support for his navy, seeking to concentrate his efforts on a continental campaign against Spain in Europe. The French navy's defeat at La Hogue was more psychologically than materially devastating. After La Hogue the French returned to a defensive stance for the navy, seeking again to disrupt the commerce of their enemies. France had no alternative at the time but to continue to favor a privateer-based war on its maritime foes, for the nation was on the brink of bankruptcy.

It was France's intention to maintain a steady naval presence in the Atlantic, Mediterranean, and Levant at the beginning of the eighteenth century. However, due to financial problems and the military setbacks suffered by the French army, privateer commerce raiding dominated French naval strategy until after the Seven Years' War. After 1693, the upkeep of the French navy was ignored by the then Minister of the Navy, Phélypeaux de Pontchartrain. Pontchartrain openly disdained the navy, using every opportunity to disparage the service.⁶⁹ It was during the Pontchartrain administration that the French navy began its decline.

Pontchartrain's term as naval minister was the first in a succession of many that relied on the administrative tenets set forth by Richelieu and Colbert to help properly maintain the French navy. A sound theory, but one that needed the energy and vision associated with a Richelieu, Colbert, or Seignelay to succeed. The modernization of naval warfare in the eighteenth century

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 136.

⁶⁹ E.H. Jenkins, *A History of the French Navy* (London: Macdonald and Jane's, 1973), p. 94.

required the state to be an active participant in the administration of its navy. Naval conflicts were increasing in both size and frequency. The numbers of ships involved—not to mention the growing role in supporting the continental affairs of the army, required the utmost administrative diligence. Therefore, the battle readiness of a fleet was contingent upon the resilience of its land-based management.

Towards the end of Louis XIV's reign, many of the navy's policies implemented during Colbert's era began to disintegrate due to the absence of a commanding presence within the naval administration. Colbert's personal influence, authority, and attention to detail were sorely missed. The previous Colbertian unification of naval administration unraveled under Pontchartrain's tenure. Pontchartrain was inattentive to the requirements of the position of navy minister; his neglect of naval matters spilled over into the supervision of the bureau of commerce, consulates, and the colonies—subordinate positions included within the navy minister's duties.⁷⁰

The phenomenal growth of the French navy was both a boon and a bust for France, politically. While its navy helped France secure the domestic and overseas trade necessary to promote commerce and protect its colonial interests, the burden associated with the growing naval effort created a disconnect between the landsmen administration and the seagoing officer corps in charge of the management of the fleet while at sea. Naval administration found itself in uncharted waters under the Pontchartrain administration, primarily due to the state's inability to fiscally match the growing strength and size of the British Royal Navy. Revolving naval doctrine precipitated by the annual reductions in the navy's budget, particularly the flip flop between *guerre de course* and *course d'escadre* strategies required the ministry to remodel its administrative agencies to account for the change.

The shifting policies of the state as for the use of its navy created confusion between the navy's central bureau and its local agents. Reliance on past administrative doctrine was no longer sufficient. Pontchartrain, in an effort to centralize and control naval expansion, French commerce, and the colonies, widened the breadth of the naval bureaucracy by increasing the number of administrative positions in the service. Whereas the French navy's central administration remained at a relatively small number of administrators during Colbert's time,

⁷⁰ James Pritchard, *Louis XV's Navy 1748-1762: A Study of Organization and Administration* (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), p. 20.

due to Colbert's unmatched ability to multitask naval organization and the state's staunch backing in funding and promoting a *course de guerre*, subsequent ministers sought to outsource their responsibilities by increasing the number of bureaus and bureaucrats in an effort to maintain the functionality of the navy.

The expansion of naval administration beginning in the 1690s led to confusion and dysfunction within the ranks of the navy's officer corps. The crux of these complications can be traced back to two problems: the mismanagement of bureaucratic offices by the governing elite, and the development of intra-office conflict and competition stemming from social and political rivalries.

Strife among the two services of the navy, the administrative and the professional officer corps, was a byproduct of ministerial neglect. Pontchartrain's choice to expand the naval bureaucracy by attracting inexperienced and inattentive men due to their respective social and political rank was a common practice in Old Regime France. However, by adhering to favoritism and patron-client associations, Pontchartrain disrupted the political balance of power and privilege in the navy—particularly within the navy's officer corps, where nobles of the pen and sword had previously enjoyed a productive equilibrium.

Pontchartrain's heritage dictated his administrative policies. The Phélypeaux were a distinguished French family with a noble lineage that could be traced back to fourteenth century Blois. The Phélypeaux were the quintessential Old Regime family of the pen, the administrative nobility. For generations, the Pontchartrain clan held the highest offices in France. The comte de Pontchartrain, as mentioned earlier, was in charge of the administration of the navy, commerce, and the colonies. Before serving as Minister of the Navy, Pontchartrain held the office of chancellor of France—a position which helped Pontchartrain become the chief legal officer of France, as well as the head of Louis XIV's *Conseil d'en haut* (council of ministers)—a position that placed Pontchartrain in the middle of the French government's social and political networks. In other words, Louis Phélypeaux was the consummate politician and statesman. The Pontchartrains favored distinguished civil servants, or *commissaires*, who found themselves at opposing philosophical ends with the *officiers*, pen representatives of what Louis XIV called, *nouveaux arrives*, the newly arrived.⁷¹

⁷¹ As cited in, John Rule, "Jean-Frédéric Phélypeaux, comte de Pontchartrain et Maurepas: Reflections on His Life and His Papers" *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* vol. 6 (1965): p. 368.

The civilian staff created by Colbert and Seignelay was a tight knit group. The administrative staffs were relatively small during Colbert's era, creating a high degree of effectiveness due to the systematic bureaucratic network in place. Seignelay's naval bureau at the state level consisted of eight to ten assistants who managed the *intendants* of the major ports of Brest, Rochefort, Le Havre, Dunkirk, and Toulon. Local level administration required more agents to supervise their respective spheres of influence. There were fifty-nine *commissaires* whose job it was to oversee the local operations of the navy; a relatively small number of agents compared to those civil administrators employed in the eighteenth century.⁷² The increase in personnel was initiated to help supervise the immense responsibilities associated with naval administration. It was at the local level in which the navy's growing bureaucracy showed the first signs of political instability during Pontchartrain's tenure.

Scholars have unduly placed much of the blame for the decline in the French navy during the Regency and beyond on Louis Phélypeaux. However, the seeds of departmental problems suffered during the comte de Pontchartrain's reign were unknowingly laid by Colbert a generation earlier. Colbert initiated an administrative check on naval affairs to prevent the possibility of a political monopolization by any one group or individual. A bicameral powerbase was put into place in an effort to lessen the potential abuses of absolute sovereignty in the navy. Colbert did not want any one group or individual to dominate naval administration. He felt that the two administrations within the navy corps would help centralize the service. The successful model of naval centralization, the development of two agencies within the navy corps, fractured during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries due to political rivalries and infighting between pen and sword nobles.

Colbert believed that the division of power was the ultimate administrative check on the possibility of bureaucratic or military despotism. Thus, Colbert set into motion a means to establish political equilibrium within naval administration. Colbert's plan placed the pen nobles in a position of power and authority ashore; while bequeathing the sword nobility dominion on the seas. Colbert unknowingly adopted a measure that would slow the progress of the French navy. Naval administration was redefined by the state in repeated efforts to establish peace between rival factions suing for social and political power within the navy hierarchy. To the

⁷² Donald Pilgrim, "The Colbert-Seignelay Naval Reforms and the Beginnings of the War of the League of Augsburg" *French Historical Studies* vol. 9 (1975): p. 238.

sword, members of the pen were “vile bourgeoisie” born with an inferior social status; and, possessed no ability of knowledge to administer to the affairs of the seagoing navy. The pen nobility looked upon the sword nobles as ‘overbearing, talentless and unprofessional’.⁷³

By the time Louis Phélypeaux took charge of the navy, factional infighting between the *commissaires* and *officiers* was further enflamed by the additional infighting and squabbling growing between the pen and sword nobility. The increasing number of vested interests among individuals and groups representing the navy corps grew substantially in the eighteenth century navy, making the organizational efficiency of the navy increasingly problematic for the state. The social tensions present in the navy, as well as the severe fiscal crisis affecting France from the disruption of commerce after the grain shortages beginning in 1693, further agitated the social hierarchy within the navy corps. The French government found it difficult to assert its executive authority due to the growing disconnection between naval administrators and officers throughout the ports, dockyards, and arsenals of France.

Adding to the social and political discontent building within the administrative branches of the French navy at the turn of the eighteenth century, was the crown’s increasing use of venality as a means to create revenue. These patron-client relationships found their way into the navy’s administration corps, not the military side of the officer corps. Venality was unavailable to those seeking positions in the navy’s seagoing officer corps. However, the Pontchartrain’s were devout practitioners of developing venal relationships within the various administrative branches of the navy.

As the navy bureaucracy grew due to the influx of administrative personnel, so too did the need for an influential central bureau to act as the middle man between state and local naval affairs. Strategic direction of the navy lay in the hands of the king and his ministers. Yet, naval administration was devolving from its earlier simplicity; this disconnect between the growing chain of insubordinates convoluted communication between the state, its bureaucratic network, and the fleet. Successive Ministers of the Navy relied increasingly on these subordinate networks of state agents to insure the proper maintenance and functionality of the navy. This ‘chain of command’ was growing more impersonal every day, mirroring the shift in power between the administrative and professional branches of the navy.

⁷³ Malcolm Crook, *Toulon in War and Revolution: From the Ancien Régime to the Restoration, 1750-1820* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), p. 56.

Pontchartrain forged the ‘impersonality’ of the navy corps by substantially expanding the number of under secretaries and clerks working in the department. Recruitment for these positions was based on those fitting into two categories: personal and professional favorites of the Pontchartrain family. The rapid increase of a land-based royal bureaucracy was a sign of the times for the French navy. It was the administrative chaos consistent with the new wave of bureaucratic landmen and *anoblis*, new nobles, that was largely to blame for the lack of cohesion and leadership in the navy. The steady growth of executive bureaus, and the subsequent rise of its personnel officers, fostered the burgeoning animosity growing within the navy’s officer corps, which in turn created more confusion in the organization, implementation, and accomplishment of state directives.

During the Regency period the navy’s central bureau, the *premiers commis*, quadrupled in size. By mid-century, there were twelve bureaus that oversaw naval administration of which 105 clerks were employed to record the annual legislation of royal edicts, ordinances, decrees, and authorizations pertaining to naval affairs.⁷⁴ Judging from the colossal increase in the naval administration, and the massive amount of related correspondence, it was evident that the state was having difficulty effectively administering to the needs of its navy.

Of the many deficiencies inherent within the administrative branches of the navy, none was more damaging than the state’s politically-fueled removal of officers of the sword in an attempt to strengthen the navy’s traditional *intendant des classes*. The downsizing of the sword nobles from administrative positions and authority within naval affairs created irreparable damage to the overall production of the navy. *Intendants* became the sole spokespersons between port, central government, and the navy. Naval administration in the early to mid eighteenth century promoted the socio-political aspirations of courtiers: especially those nobles having no sea experience who sought positions that were easily transferable to family members or included a sinecure upon retirement. The lines of communication between the state and its navy became distorted by the addition of a hundreds of governmental agents, all of which were officers of the pen. The *intendant*, incorporated to improve the lines of communication between the state and its fleet, became marginalized due to the redefining relationships between port administrators, naval officers, and members of the central bureau.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 19-22.

In an attempt to open the previously closed channels of advancement, while simultaneously consolidating support, the *premiers commis*, functionary bureau chiefs appointed by the Secretaries' of State due to their close family relationships, quickly infiltrated administrative positions within the many bureaus representing the navy. The previously unenviable titles associated with the navy were now favorable to a wider range of noblesse. Many nobles, the majority of which were pen, found that titles and posts in the navy could be secured without stepping foot on a ship—let alone leaving the safe confines of Paris. The French navy became fertile ground for nobles seeking the securities and benefits of public office.

Pontchartrain amended previous legislation which required *intendants* to possess naval experience.⁷⁵ The doors were now open to all with the political connections necessary for obtaining positions in the navy administration. The *premiers commis* disrupted central power through the gradual monopolization of local level administrative positions. Nobles of the pen, in ever increasing numbers, found professional refuge within the confines of naval administration. The pen had administrative power over all naval affairs outside the parameters of actual warfare. The Naval Ordinance of 1689 ceded to officers of the pen governance of several administrative functions; yet it would be another generation, that of the Pontchartrains, for members of the pen to gain the majority in administrative responsibilities over naval affairs.

The pen's umbrella of influence soon covered such areas as rank, duties, and emoluments of officers, the enrollment of seamen, the distribution of a ship's company, their quarters, pay, and rations, the construction, armament, and equipment of ships, service afloat, preservation and government of arsenals, naval jurisprudence, and protection of the coast;⁷⁶ the pen controlled the governance and management of the navy at the turn of the eighteenth century; and inopportune time to incorporate a change in naval administration. As a result of this change in naval management, the French navy was ill-prepared to contribute to France's entry into the War of Spanish Succession.

The French navy performed during the early stages of the War of Spanish Succession. Concentrating its effort on protecting Spain's merchant fleet, the French fleet's priority was to maintain France's trade routes. In 1702, the French vice-admiral, Chateau-Renault, was given

⁷⁵ Roland Mousnier, *The institutions of France Under the Absolute Monarchy, 1598-1789: The Organs of State and Society* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984), 212-215.

⁷⁶ Henri Paixhans, *An Account of the Experiments made in the French Navy for the trial of Bomb Cannon, etc.* (London: E.G. Dorsey, 1838), 76.

thirty ships of the line to provide escort to the annual Spanish shipment of silver and bullion bound for Spain from America and the West Indies. Half of Château-Renault's fleet was unseaworthy and was sent back to France for repairs. Only fifteen ships were left to defend the Spanish treasure convoy. The British Admiral, George Rooke, seized the opportunity to attack the undermanned French fleet off the Spanish Coast at Vigo Bay. A more one-sided victory could not have been imagined by Rooke's force of 25 ships of the line before the events unfolded on the morning of October 23, 1702.

Château-Renault's fleet was trapped in the Ria de Vigo Bay due to the narrow peninsula and shallow jetties around the Spanish coastline. The French fleet was caught in a defensive posture at Vigo Bay. Château-Renault compromised his fleet's position by relying on the placement of a boom spar laden with sails and chains laid across the entry of the bay. According to Rooke's journal, the Anglo-Dutch fleet broke through the French defensive boom thanks to a favorable wind.⁷⁷ Once the allied fleet broke into the bay with a favoring wind, the French squadron was defenseless.

The Battle of Vigo Bay was a disaster for the French fleet; not a single vessel escaped. Of the fifteen French ships taking part in the battle, five were taken as prizes and the other ten were burned by French sailors to prevent further prize taking by the Anglo-Dutch victors. Fortunately for the French, the Spanish treasure convoy unloaded the majority of their valuable cargo before the arrival of the Anglo-Dutch fleet at Vigo Bay keeping it out of English and Dutch hands. The loss at Vigo Bay was far more costly to the Spanish than the French. While the French were able to regroup and continue to use their navy as a defensive weapon during the War of Spanish Succession, the psychological losses at Vigo Bay ended all further attempts by the Spanish to utilize their navy during the war. The French were not ready to leave the sea to her enemies. In fact, the Spanish treasure convoy was left untouched for the remaining years of the war due to the French navy's ability to maintain a large fleet presence in the Atlantic, helping to keep English and Dutch privateers from preying on French and Spanish merchantmen. Although beaten at the Battle of Vigo Bay, the French fleet was a reliable tool for carrying out France's maritime objectives during the war.

⁷⁷ Sir George Rooke, *The Journal of Sir George Rooke, Admiral of the Fleet, 1700-1702* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1897), p. 242.

The Royal Navy gained control of the Mediterranean during the War of Spanish Succession after Minorca was taken with its valuable harbor at Mahon in 1707. The French navy thus continued to follow the *guerre de course*, hoping to cripple the Anglo-Dutch fleet through the disruption of trade and commerce. While French privateers feasted on English and Dutch merchant shipping⁷⁸, the French navy found itself in dire straits. The French navy's defeat in the Battle of Toulon left it unable to pursue its enemies outside of the Mediterranean; France's maritime rivals were able to maneuver their fleets in the West Indies and American waters fearless of a French attack. The French navy was unable to protect its overseas holdings in the Indies and America. As a result, the British Royal Navy quickly commandeered or destroyed virtually all of France's fleet stationed in the West Indies and Nova Scotia. Coupled with the French army's defeat in Europe, Louis XIV had no choice but to accept the humiliating terms associated with the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713.

After the death of Louis XIV in 1715, the French navy as an institution found itself searching for political identity. Regime change, particularly within an absolutist government, required a remodeling of its infrastructure to meet the demands of the incoming monarch and his policies for the navy. The era of political stability and financial support for the French navy ended with the death of the Sun King. Louis XIV's reign ended on a sour note for the French navy. The financial losses coupled with the navy's defeat at Toulon punctuated the end of an era. The losses of ships during the Battle of Toulon in 1707 were irreplaceable.⁷⁹

Louis XIV's death ushered in the Regency period in France. The Sun King's uncle, the duc d'Orleans, became the interim leader of France until Louis XIV's great-grandson came of age. The duc d'Orleans died in 1723, marking the beginning of Louis XV's absolute rule; and, the further decline of the French navy.

The Regency was an unproductive one for the French navy. Compounding this period of inefficiency was Louis XV's disinterest in the navy and naval affairs; which meant that the internal conflict within the navy corps would continue unabashed. The French navy lay in stasis,

⁷⁸ Privateers out of Dunkirk had taken some 1,600 English and Dutch ships with cargos worth over a reported thirty million *livres*.

⁷⁹ At the Battle of Toulon, Louis XIV, for fear of the Toulon fleet falling into the hands of the British, ordered the raising, sinking, and scuttling of the squadron harbored in the port at Toulon. 15 ships of the line were sunk with the intention of resurfacing and refitting them at a later date. These losses became irreplaceable during the Regency and Louis XV's reign due to the inability to pay for such an expensive endeavor. Thus, the French navy lost parity with the Royal Navy.

waiting for the return of a capable minister. In 1725, Jean-Frédéric Phélypeaux, the son of Jérôme Phélypeaux, became Minister of the Navy. Jean-Frédéric followed the policies that two generations of Pontchartrains had etched into stone during their time in office. The most notable political legacy inherited by Jean-Frédéric from the previous two generations of Pontchartrain rule was the unneeded appointment of inexperienced administrative personnel to the offices that watched over a stagnate navy continuously moored at port.

Jean-Frédéric's administration relied exclusively on the six *premiers commis* he elected to oversee naval affairs. Jean-Frédéric's reign as navy minister did little more than accentuate the patron-client relationships favored by generations of Pontchartrains to the detriment of the functionality of the navy. Jean-Frédéric's sole administrative endeavor was to once again place the *commissaires* in power over the *polysynodie*—who had gained consular control over the *commissaires* during the end of Louis XIV's reign.

There were bright spots for the navy during Jean-Frédéric's tenure as minister. His prized relationship with Louis XV was an advantageous one for the navy. In 1739, Jean-Frédéric was able to procure 19.2 million *livres* for the navy—double that of the naval budget in 1720. Regrettably, this increase in naval funding went primarily to small fleet exercises in the Baltic Sea, the Antilles, and the Caribbean. There were no notable fleet engagements during Jean-Frédéric's tenure as minister of the navy; which was due in part to France's defensive posture which followed the dictates of the *guerre de course*. However, it was clear that naval affairs would remain on the periphery of Jean-Frédéric's mind throughout his tenure as Minister of the Navy. Jean-Frédéric is best known for his derisive and inflammatory remarks targeting the administrators and naval officers alike within both branches of the navy corps. Jean-Frédéric's ill-fated jests at his colleagues did little to bring the factious atmosphere within the navy under control.

From 1715 to 1749 the French navy was hampered by a string of navy ministers who did not have the will, inclination, or the foresight to politically and financially support the necessary growth of a navy capable of acting as a geopolitical force for France. Witness to the declining state and readiness of the French naval administration were the humiliating defeats suffered during the War of Austrian Succession and the Seven Years' War.

For the French navy, the War of Austrian Succession and the Seven Years' War were the culmination of a generation of royal and ministerial neglect. During the early part of Louis XV's

rule, the majority of the French fleet was either decommissioned or left to rot in a state of disrepair in order to help reduce the massive debt inherited from the losses incurred at the end of Louis XIV's reign. Officers, sailors, and crews were paid and then summarily discharged from service; many of whom went ashore destitute and in need of employment elsewhere. Mobilizing French crews for future service would pose a difficult, if not impossible, endeavor for future navy ministers to accomplish.

Adding to the problematic condition that the navy found itself in during the first half of the eighteenth century was the dismal state of its ports and arsenals. Financial woes of the state affected both the workers in the ports and arsenals as well as disrupted the supplies needed to keep the many shipyards in France operational. Colbert spent over 200 million *livres* in creating a powerful navy; a generation later the navy's worth was in the red. Where did the money go? Dockyard workers were constantly kept in the arrears for pay. The restocking of the arsenals was either late or nonexistent. Inventory-wise, naval armaments in the dockyards were at an all-time low. Naval neglect produced material shortages in wood, powder, tar, and pitch—all vitally important in keeping the French fleet ready for action. Thus, the few ships the French could muster for wartime mobilization had little margin for error—for replacements and repair of any damaged or destroyed vessel would be impossible to recoup.

The state of unpreparedness of the navy stemming from administrative dysfunction had major repercussions on the battle readiness of the fleet and its strategic course of action during the wars of the eighteenth century. Administrative and financial inefficiencies forced the navy ministry to use privateers to execute the navy's only viable means of action: *guerre de course*. By relying on privateers and merchant vessels, potential assets from captured prizes ended up frozen in claims courts instead of feeding the empty coffers of the French treasury. Competition over prize money and the reimbursement for a privateer's service to the nation further limited potential income for the navy. Commerce disruption via a war of privateers was the state's only viable option due to the low number of navy vessels ready from commission, and the limited income available to maintain its present fleet.

As conflict with Britain grew inevitably closer in the War of Austrian Succession, the French navy was beaten before the first shots were fired. Insufficient ship construction—only three ships of the line were built during the period of peace between France and England placed the French navy at a numerical disadvantage at the beginning of the war. The shortage of newly

built ships, along with the dismantling of the navy's past inventory, beginning with the events at Toulon, gave the Royal Navy a two-to-one advantage in battleships and frigates in the upcoming wars. Furthermore, the lack of men and materiel in the ports, arsenals, and dockyards in France made the ability to refit, repair, and replenish the many French vessels nearing retirement (which equated to 1/3 of the current Fleet) impossible.

Barbary pirates began to take advantage of France's weak maritime position by boldly attacking French merchantmen and privateers. The Barbary pirates provoked the then Minister of the Navy, the comte de Maurepas, to petition the king for increased funding to strengthen the navy. In 1727, the naval budget was 9,000,000 *livres*. Maurepas wished to maintain a fleet of 50 ships, including the infrastructure necessary to provided support for the navy (i.e. administration, dockyard updating, and refitting materiel). The French navy expanded modestly during the following decade. Naval expenditure was increased by 1,000,000 *livres* annually from 1730 to 1740.

After one of the longest stretches of peace between France and England came to an end in 1740, hostilities between the two archrivals once again erupted during the War of Austrian Succession. The comte de Maurepas, the Secretary of the Navy at the time, fueled by the desires of army administrators, the marshal de Belle-Isle and the duc de Choiseul to bring the fight to England, attempted to invade Britain in 1744. On the eve of the planned invasion of Britain, France and their Spanish allies fielded 68 ships of the line against England's 77 battleships—the closest France had been to par in years. Seeing its best chance to wrestle away Britain's command of the seas, and increase her own commercial interests, France turned to its navy to help cripple British control of the English Channel and the Mediterranean.⁸⁰

The invasion of England ultimately failed due to the inability of the French naval ministry and the Ministry of War to agree on a viable strategy that incorporated simultaneous attacks by France's ground and sea forces. Political instability within the Ministry of the Navy, punctuated by the ineffectiveness of its navy during the War of Spanish Succession, created internal divisions which decapitated any coordinated attempts to use the navy as a viable tool. The French army, led by the king himself, took precedence over the navy as a land campaign was chosen as the most competent means to defeat the Austrians. In the wake of the continental campaign lay a navy that used its own funds, 30-million *livres*, to construct the invasion barges

⁸⁰ Reed Browning, *The War of Austrian Succession* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995), 149-151.

and supporting vessels needed for the failed invasion of England.⁸¹ Thirty ships of the line could have been built for the money spent on the aborted mission. In an effort to make up their losses, the arsenals of France would remain starved for funds for the next five years. The surge in demand for naval stores and ordinance during the war could not be met by France's starving arsenals, ports, and dockyards.

The French navy was crippled during the War of Austrian Succession for several reasons; chief among them was the financial limitations enacted by major budgetary constraints on wages, material, and ship construction. Maurepas favored a mercantilist strategy for his navy—seeking to build smaller, faster ships to lend support to merchant convoys. Aggressive, offensive naval campaigns required the costly production of 90 and 100-gun ships of the line that could compete with the British Royal Navy. The costs of such an endeavor was more than the French crown was able to bear. More damaging to the French navy was the political disconnect created by a series of failed administrative policies stemming from Maurepas' decision to create the *bureau des officiers*. The officer bureau, which supplanted officers of the sword from all funding matters related to the navy made the procurement of funding all the more difficult for the navy. By 1749, the time of Maurepas' departure from the navy ministry, the role of the *bureau des officiers* was unclear, as was the role of many naval subordinates; as such, the officer bureau in charge of overseeing naval affairs devolved further into an administrative abyss.

Maurepas was fired in 1749 when the navy minister asked for more financial assistance from the crown. Louis' first order of business in 1749 had nothing to do with naval affairs; his sole goal that year was to pave the way for the *vingtième* tax. The *vingtième* was necessary to farm additional state revenue desperately needed to keep the state solvent, most of which would never make its way into the navy. Financial problems aside, the French navy was equally hamstrung by the friction and political infighting between pen and sword nobles in the ports. Even with adequate supplies and the availability of a greater number of fighting vessels, the inability to put ships to sea and keep them there due to sociopolitical discord was the greater of the two evils plaguing the French navy in the 1750s and 1760s.

The navy's performance during the War of Austrian Succession illustrated the procedural problems associated with a convoluted naval administration faced with social problems and no

⁸¹ Yves, Durand, ed., "Memoires de Jean-Joseph de Laborde fermier-général et banquier de la cour" *Annuaire-Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire de France* (Paris, 1971): p. 151.

comprehensive naval strategy. In the face of interrupted trade and commerce, the French government was left with no alternative but to face, reform, and reorganize the navy. French bureaucrats, unable to identify the root of naval inefficiency applied reformative measures used for the army on the navy. Successive Ministers of the Navy incorrectly focused on reforming the officer corps as a means to bring stability to naval administration, while the root of the problem—the entrenched *premiers commis* and their horde of inefficient bureaucrats, were left in charge of overseeing naval administration. All of the *premiers commis* were landmen with no comprehension of how to administer to the needs of the navy. Instead of moving forward during the brief interval of peace between the War of Austrian Succession and the Seven Years' War, preparation for the upcoming conflict with Britain was again muted by state inaction and local dysfunction.

After the War of Austrian Succession, Antoine Louis Rouillé became the Minister of the Navy (1749-1754). He was the first navy minister in half a century to understand the geopolitical repercussions surrounding the fielding of a weak navy. Rouillé tried diligently to bring the French navy to a competitive state of readiness before the outbreak of war in 1756. Whereas Rouillé focused his ministry on building up men, materiel, and the ships necessary to defend France against her maritime enemies, the French state ignored the process of naval mobilization to instead divert its focus to the social problems within the navy's two officer corps.

Opening the doors of recruitment in the navy officer corps by altering the navy's hierarchical structure was the state's answer for dealing with the prejudices existing within all the levels of navy administration and maintenance. Ensuing regulation of dockyard administration became the battleground for governmental efforts aimed at ultimately redistributing the municipality of the ports to encompass non-military personnel. The French government sought to create a homogenous workforce in its ports to produce the professionalization necessary to keep its navy working at the highest possible level. Mid-eighteenth century naval reformists' believed that reforming the military officer corps would bring an end to the anachronistic, intra-class rivalries currently paralyzing productivity at all levels of naval administration.⁸²

In the 1750s, the French government reinstated the development of specialized institutions for military training.⁸³ There was no debate as to the necessity of teaching navy officers the

⁸² René Jouan, *Histoire de la Marine Française* (Paris: Payot, 1950), 93.

⁸³ The first specialized institutions built specifically for naval military training began in 1650 during Colbert's era.

importance of an education based in math, hydrography, navigation, and artillery. As per the norms associated with Old Regime society, an education was one way of achieving acclaim and social status; however, similar to the civil society, the military had an equally segregated system of education. Military school scholarships for commoners and lower provincial nobility, offered more as a gesture of equality by the government, produced negligible numbers of graduates able to serve in the officer corps.⁸⁴ Thus, these early attempts at restructuring the service received little attention from the military nobility. The state's response was equally tepid to its own proposals, as the issue of officer reform became secondary to the more pressing needs of the time: manning its fleet.

Repeated efforts to restructure the navy officer corps' traditional hierarchy occurred frequently after the War of Austrian Succession. Again, the state sought to attack social reform in the navy at its perceived base: recruitment. Whereas a century earlier the French government sought to establish military schools complementing the existing modes of entrance into the navy's officer ranks, by the mid eighteenth century the state sought to completely dismantle the military nobles' hold on recruitment and promotion.

The *Académie royale de Marine* was founded at Brest in 1752 to help instill a bevy of skills that the reformists felt were required to be a competent sea officer, and the funnel more officers into the already undermanned navy officer corps. Sword nobles in the navy were incorrectly seen as what William Cormack terms, "an arrogant caste of insubordinate provincial reactionaries." However, it was the perception of the Navy Ministry that prevailed in the end, most of whom felt that social reform was needed in the officer corps to promote professionalism. Naval military education, beginning in 1752, sought to reform the caste system inherent with the naval military elites. The *Académie royale de Marine* indoctrinated science, hydrography, astronomy, and mathematics into an educational system geared to significantly contribute to the modernization of the French navy. Reformists hoped to develop new avenues for advancement within the highest echelons of the navy officer corps in an effort to reform the prejudices fueled by the current officer hierarchy.⁸⁵ However, the *Académie royale de Marine* lacked the financial

⁸⁴ Guy Chaussinand-Nogaret, *The French Nobility in the Eighteenth Century: From Feudalism to Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 68-69.

⁸⁵ The *Grand Corps* monopolized the positions of lieutenant and higher in the navy. Ascendancy to a lieutenant position or higher in the mid 1700s required a combination of events to occur: proof of hereditary nobility, financial backing, graduation as a *gardes*, and the practical training provided by the *Grand Corps*. Success during battle was another road to a lieutenantcy or better (even for non-nobles).

ability to practically train its cadets. Providing a working ship of the line capable of training cadets the finer points of navigation, seamanship, battle tactics, and firepower was impossible due to the high costs involved with the use of a battle ship or frigate for practice.

France seemed content to let its navy play a supportive role to its military objectives leading up to the Seven Years' War. It was during the Seven Years' War that France saw its chance to take the offensive against the English. France knew that England would have difficulties fighting a two-front war. Thus it was decided that now was the time to use the French navy as an offensive weapon. By taking the war to England, the French hoped to put an immediate end to both the British commercial threat to France's mercantile efforts, and help end the war.

The British navy was harassing French commercial sea lanes leading up to the Seven Years' War. This commercial interruption, coinciding with the expense of a new war, precipitated the need for the French navy to act in an aggressive manner. In 1755, the first year of the war which saw limited naval action, the French navy spent 31-million *livres*—twice the budget of 1754.⁸⁶ Under the steady hand of Antoine Louis Rouillé, the French navy secured 75-million *livres* from the royal treasury in 1756 to take the offensive against the British. Rouillé immediately began to strengthen his navy by directing Toulon to build and refit 45 ships of the line for immediate service. To find sailors and officers to man the growing fleet, Rouillé combined the Mediterranean and Atlantic fleets, while simultaneously doubling the size of each company within the two fleets. Rouillé faced drastic shortages in experienced officers, wood, cannon, shot, and dry dock supplies. But Rouillé's administration did a formidable job getting the French navy prepared to take on its long-time archrival at sea.

The opening naval battle of the Seven Years' War occurred off the Mediterranean Island of Minorca. Minorca was a British possession since 1708, and served as a privateering center to launch raids against two of France's most productive ports: Toulon and Marseilles. France feigned an invasion of England in an attempt to divert the Royal Navy from strengthening its force at Minorca. The ruse worked. Only eleven British warships were available as the French navy bore down on Minorca.⁸⁷

The French assault force consisted of two fleets: the amphibious assault force led by Louis-Francois-Armand Vignerot du Plessis, duc de Richelieu, and an escorting/support fleet

⁸⁶ Henri Legohérel, *Les Trésoriers généraux de la marine, 1517-1788* (Paris: Cujas, 1965), pp. 177-186.

⁸⁷ Jonathan Dull, *The French Navy and the Seven Years' War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), pp. 50-51.

commanded by Roland-Michel Barrin, marquis de La Galissonnière. The French assault force and support group was massive; 15,000 soldiers, 50-transport ships, 130 supply ships, 13 ships of the line, and 5 frigates. By the time the British fleet arrived to defend Minorca, the French navy had deployed its supplies of men and materiel. At the onset of the naval battle of Minorca, the French navy had one directive: support French land forces by not getting beaten by the Royal Navy.

The French navy followed defensive doctrine at Minorca. The British Royal Navy had the wind gauge, but could not split and flank the French fleet. After three hours of battle, the British had suffered the loss of three ships of the line. The French had lost none. The English Admiral John Byng claimed that the Royal Navy's defeat at Minorca, even though equal in numbers, was due to the larger, cleaner (better built), and more powerful French fleet.⁸⁸ Though the French were unable to take any prizes their victory lay in the fact that the British were unable to lend support to their besieged forces at Minorca. France was able to take the strategic island of Minorca. However, the English were unwilling to end the war. Byng was tried and executed under Article XII of the Articles of War for negligence at Minorca. Byng's death mobilized and energized England to remain in the war. The Royal Navy would continue to disrupt French trade and fleet movements along the French coast and the English Channel for the remaining five years of the Seven Years' War.

Beginning in the 1750s, when officers of the pen were deeply offended by the lack of gratitude proffered to them by Machault d'Arnouville after the French navy's victory at Minorca, instigated a series of social affronts on members of the sword. Seeking independence in an effort to reclaim the social prestige it had lost, officers of the pen undermined any and all cooperative efforts with the sword. Quarrels, altercations, and duels were common in the ports.⁸⁹ *Intendants* could not perform their jobs in the arsenals for fear of physical or verbal assault from junior naval officers.⁹⁰

Arsenal productivity was based on self-sufficiency—an impossible task when confronted with the social challenges prevalent when its heads of organization, labor, and administration were locked in continuous bouts of insubordination. Following d'Arnouville's downgrade of the

⁸⁸ Admiral John Byng's account of the Battle of Minorca (1756), found in *Proceedings of the Court-Martial on the Trial of Admiral Byng ...* (London: Green and Russell, 1757).

⁸⁹ James Pritchard, *Louis XV's Navy*, 49.

⁹⁰ Francois de Veillechere de la Mardiere, *L'Evolution historique du controle de la marine* (Societe francaise d'imprimerie et de librairie, 1912).

pen, the comte d’Morville, further suppressed the pen’s prestige by confining its authority at the ports to the minor role of purveying materials, paying wages, and other subordinate, perfunctory roles. The measures placed on the administrative branch of the navy during d’Arnouville’s and d’Morville’s tenure completely reorganized the hierarchies of the dockyards by awarding the naval commandant power over the *intendant* on shore.⁹¹ It would not be until the reign of Antoine de Sartine, the first Secretary of the Navy under Louis XVI, that the attempt at sociopolitical equilibrium within the navy’s officer corps would be attempted.

Fruitless negotiations between France and Britain in 1754 did little for the French effort to mobilize its navy for war. Getting things done were exasperating for the majority of naval ministers during the Seven Years’ War. Supplies, financial woes, inferior numbers of ships, and a complete lack of readiness limited the French naval ministries’ ability to do much more than negotiate with France’s enemies. An example of the king’s benevolence of the navy can best be seen by Louis XV’s dismissal of the highly productive minister, comte de Maurepas.

With no other alternative in sight, the crown turned to a tried and true means to secure money for naval mobilization before the war: borrowing on credit. In 1756 Louis obtained a loan from the Farmers General, bankers who profited from the right to collect a percentage of state taxes. In addition to this loan from the Farmers General, the French government sold more of its debt to add 120 million *livres* to the war effort.⁹² The navy received about 4.5 million *livres* of this total in 1756. Underfunded, outnumbered, and undermanned, the French navy held its own during the early parts of the war mostly due to the professionalism within the French fleet’s officer corps. However, despite the professionalism of the seagoing officer corps which kept the fleet at high levels of operational status and functionality, the administrative wing of the corps was diminishing the fleet commanders’ capacity to accomplish their respective goals and commissions.

The French navy could only go so far relying on its officers, commanders, and admirals when their ability to take to sea with inadequate amounts of provisions, powder, ammunition, backup sails, rigging, masts, and other materiel necessary to keep a ship at sea was becoming more difficult due to growing administrative mismanagement on the home front. Navy minister Moras increased the spirit of insubordination growing within the navy’s officer corps by failing to

⁹¹ Malcolm Crook, *Toulon in War and Revolution* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), 54-55.

⁹² As cited in Jonathan Dull, *The French Navy and the Seven Years’ War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), p. 46.

promote sword officers, as was customary, for their various accomplishments and valor in the naval successes achieved early in the war.

By 1758, shortages in men and materiel and the inefficiency of naval administration created unavoidable obstacles for the French navy. As the war progressed, these material disadvantages suffered by the French navy began to turn the tides of war. Early French victories were nullified as the Seven Years' War showed no signs of ending by 1759. The French navy soon found itself stretched too far to protect their North American outposts in New France as well as French holdings in the West Indies. The French Ministry of War ordered the navy to defend both areas of interest, leaving the coast of France completely unguarded. The protection of coastal convoys was debilitated and distressed from the lack of military support. French commerce was hit hard during the war, suffering a 50% drop in imports and a 25% loss in exports. The economic foundation of the French navy, mercantilism was in jeopardy as the English threatened France's commercial empire. The planned British invasion of Rochefort further derailed plans for naval mobilization aimed at aiding the French colonies in Quebec. The subsequent British naval blockade of Rochefort and Brest nullified the French navy for the remainder of the war.

One of the Ministers of the Navy during the Seven Years' War, Nicholas René Berryer, summed up the French nation's dispassion towards the navy when he said, 'Monsieur, when the house is on fire one does not bother oneself about the stables'.⁹³ This attitude would cost the French most of its North American Empire.

Throughout this low period in French naval history, Louis XV remained ambivalent towards naval affairs, accentuated by the fact that he never visited France's arsenals. Only once did the king visit the smaller port of Le Havre during his long reign. Neglect from the king trickled down to affect all facets of naval administration. Up to 1761, the navy Secretary of State was not considered a minister by the crown. As such, heads of the navy were not permitted to enter the council of state discussions on foreign policy and war strategy.⁹⁴ The French navy was placed into a relegated position within national and international affairs. The conflict with England surprised no one, yet the French crown, its royal agents in charge of naval affairs, and the general population as a whole viewed the navy disinterestedly. Minister of the Navy, Nicholas René Berryer, summed up the French nation's dispassion towards the navy when he said, 'Monsieur,

⁹³ As cited in, E.H. Jenkins, *A History of the French Navy: From its Beginnings to the Present Day* (London: Macdonald and Jane's, 1973), p. 107.

⁹⁴ Pritchard, *Louis XV's Navy*, p. 3.

when the house is on fire one does not bother oneself about the stables'.⁹⁵ This attitude would cost the French most of its North American Empire.

The War of Austrian Succession and Seven Years' War had debilitating repercussions on the mental, political, social, and financial aspects of the French navy going forward towards the last third of the eighteenth century. The high turnover rate of navy ministers exemplified the problems inherent with a government looking to find the right man to implement a viable strategy and doctrine to make the navy run more efficiently. Fifteen different Ministers of the Navy held the post between 1722 and 1760. Only one navy minister served more than five years, that being Maurepas' incredible 26-year tenure. The highest turnover occurred during the Seven Years' War, where Choiseul's term of five years was lengthier than D'Arnouville's, Moras', and Masssiac's combined. Each administration had their own sociopolitical objectives for the direction they wished to take the navy. The personal stances and objectives of successive ministers made solidarity between the navy nobility difficult to achieve when searching for a way to unite the navy corps.

Ironically, naval administration reached its apogee of power in the mid eighteenth century; yet, no one minister could speak for the best interests of the state. Navy councils lacked cohesion. The independence of state agents produced havoc in the ports, arsenals, and dockyards. Ministers of the Navy sought to ally themselves to any group or individual, regardless of political association, to help consolidate power, regardless of the consequences facing naval performance. James Pritchard calls the independence of the naval ministry a result of 'circumstances rather than will governing the relations between Louis XV and his navy'.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ As cited in, E.H. Jenkins, *A History of the French Navy: From its Beginnings to the Present Day* (London: Macdonald and Jane's, 1973), p. 107.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

CHAPTER 3

THE NAVY RISES AGAIN, 1763-1789

At the end of the Seven Years' War a shift in French naval policy occurred. The French navy became more of a priority for the state in the years following the war. The revival of the French navy was expressed in two ways. The first priority was to increase the navy's budget to help build, maintain, and man a larger fleet comparable to that of the Royal Navy. The second step in the revival of the French navy was the resurgence of the sword to its earlier prominence within the affairs and administration of the navy. After the Seven Years' War, the sword nobles narrowed the scope of recruitment into the navy officer corps. The sword reverted to a caste system which closed access to the officer corps. The reasoning behind the instigation of an exclusivist policy was based on the premise that the military performance in the previous two wars was horrible. It was believed that much of the unprofessionalism in the officer corps was due to the frivolous attitude of many of its officers. It was this amateurism within the officer corps that led to reform aimed to improve the quality of the officer corps. For the elite sword nobles in the navy, professionalization of the service could only be obtained by kicking out the 'wrong' men (the newly ennobled, commoners, and merchant officers) and replace them with the 'right' men (hereditary nobles with a military lineage).

At the conclusion of the Seven Years' War, France found itself in the unenviable position of having to negotiate away most of its holdings in North America. The French were humiliated in having to settle for peace, yet they were too exhausted to continue the fight. The only bright spot for France during negotiations for peace was that the French navy was not completely disabled. Terms of the peace were harsh for the French but, in the end, France was left with the capacity to compete as a naval power.⁹⁷ In fact, Choiseul was already hashing out plans to rebuild the French navy to unprecedented levels at the end of the Seven Years' War. Choiseul wanted to fashion a navy capable of exacting revenge and retribution on the British.

At the end of the Seven Years' War the French navy consisted of 47 ships of the line. The British had 111 ships of the line. In order for Choiseul to accomplish his dream of disgracing

⁹⁷ Jonathan Dull, *The French Navy*, p. 243.

and defeating the British Royal Navy, France would need to ramp up its naval building programs once again. Louis XV and Choiseul agreed that the French navy needed at least 80 heavily armed battleships to compete with the British navy. In order to double France's fleet, the ministry of the navy proposed a five-year plan that required both the generous monetary contributions of France's elite and the complete restructuring of its naval administration to succeed.

Étienne Francois, duc de Choiseul, France's Foreign Minister of War, took over as the minister of the navy in 1761. Choiseul's tenure as naval minister was punctuated by his deep-seated desire to exact revenge on the British for the humiliation suffered by the French during the Seven Years' War. For Choiseul, the French military's dismal performance during the War of Austrian Succession and the Seven Years' War was due to the navy's insufficient access to men and materiel, and the inability of the navy's officer corps to work in an efficient and comprehensive effort. Choiseul was the first Secretary of the Navy to adopt a series of reforming measures aimed at addressing the shortage of officers and crew, and correcting the social divisiveness within the ranks of the pen and sword officer corps. Choiseul believed that manning problems and the impaired cooperation between pen and sword nobles was the crux of naval dysfunction; yet Choiseul's military policies to alleviate these problems further isolated the navy's officer corps.⁹⁸

Choiseul was the first Minister of the Navy to outright define elements within the *Grand Corps*, the highest ranking officers in the seagoing navy corps, as terminally detrimental to the centralization and effectiveness of the navy. Choiseul was fully aware of the infighting prevalent within the two corps of the navy stating, "Administrative control of the navy revolves around the conflict between officers of the plume and épée, its origins more social than legal. The body of navy officers, where ambition and the desire to arrive creates a spirit of jealousy and systematic denigration in the navy; and, among its officers say evil of the Ministers, the office, and the different ones."⁹⁹ Clearly Choiseul singled out the sword as the harbingers of disunity and the manifestation of all things corrupt in the navy. The incorrigible performance of army officers during France's last two wars weighed heavily on Choiseul's reformative measures aimed

⁹⁸ Eugène Daubigny, *Choiseul et la France d'outre-mer après le traité de Paris: étude sur la politique colonial au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Hachette et cie, 1892), 178-181.

⁹⁹ Etienne Francois, *Memoire du duc de Choiseul*, eds. Guicciardi and Bonnet (Paris: Mercure de France, 1982), 125-128.

against the navy's officer corps. Consequent reform measures were aimed at penetrating, and subsequently disintegrating the sword's sociopolitical hold on the navy.

Disenfranchised by the dereliction of duty in the army's officer corps during the war, Choiseul showed little tolerance for naval officers unable to fulfill their assignments, particularly those officers belonging to the sword nobility. Choiseul's distrust of the members in the seagoing officer corps can best be judged by his belief that, "the sole remedy was the complete suppression of the corps of the sword and its recreation under a different footing."¹⁰⁰ Choiseul repeatedly castigated veteran officers of the navy for any perceived ineptitude, choosing to aggrandize junior officers displaying valor in the face of the enemy—granting promotions to these men outside the traditional modes of advancement within the navy officer corps.

Promotion from personal merit was a bourgeois concept that went against the aristocratic officer mentality of the Old Regime. Meritocracy was present in the navy; the meritocratic tenets in the navy went unnoticed by state reformists. Choiseul repeatedly promoted junior officers with the complete disregard of the officer corps' chain of command. It was not uncommon for junior members of the navy (rank of lieutenant and below) to receive captaincy and *chef d'escadre* (squadron leader) positions in the navy via Choiseul's declaration; Choiseul's decision to promote officers outside the customary traditions of naval advancement was an attempt to reform the present naval hierarchies. The breach in officer promotion initiated by Choiseul after the Seven Years' War had disastrous repercussions on the ability of French commanders to lead their vessels into battle. The chain of command in the French fleet was weakened by the growing discontent among the officer corps and their subordinates. Officers of the *Grand Corps* encountered increasing acts of insubordination, both at sea and in the arsenals. The growing division within the ranks of the professional officer corps made it more difficult for the *Grand Corps* to fulfill their commissions.¹⁰¹ Completing his intended reform on the navy's officer corps, Choiseul turned his attention to the dismal state of France's ports and arsenals.

Seeking to shore up the logistical problems previously hindering military cooperation between land and sea forces during times of conflict, and to buffer protection of France's overseas holdings, Choiseul attempted to transform the ports at Toulon, Brest, and Marseille into arsenals capable of supporting the navy's advancing position within the state's military

¹⁰⁰ As cited in James Pritchard, *Louis XV's Navy* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1987), 240.

¹⁰¹ Terry Crowley, *French Warship Crews 1789-1805: From the French Revolution to Trafalgar* (New York: Osprey Publishing, 2005), 12.

strategies. Choiseul wished to initiate a revolutionary plan that Richelieu and Colbert had envisioned over a century ago: assimilate the merchant marine into the ranks of the regular navy. Choiseul sought to combine the merchant marine with the state's navy to acquire the necessary vessels capable of 'creating a force in peace and war; 80 vessels and 35 frigates of ancient construction needed the appropriate provisioning necessary to sufficiently go on offense or defense to compete with the superior number of ships in the English navy.'¹⁰²

In an attempt to help rebuild the French navy into a fleet capable of contending with the British Royal Navy, several economic measures were implemented by Choiseul towards the end of his tenure in 1766 to bring the navy to par with the British fleet.¹⁰³ First, non-noble officers from the merchant service were employed part-time to help man the fleet. Commoners working in the merchant marine were also used in the French ports and dockyards to act as repair crews for repairing and refitting naval vessels. The influx of commoners into the service created conflict within the navy's officer corps. Animosity increased between these newly employed non-noble auxiliary corpsmen, called *officiers bleus*, and the members of the navy's officer corps, *officiers rouges*.

The growing conflict between these two groups stemmed from the fear that *bleus* would undermine the ability of the *rouges* to ascend to positions of lieutenant or above onboard a ship of the line or frigate. The quality and quantity of the auxiliary officers entering the navy on a part-time basis exasperated a new wave of prejudices between officers of the *rouges* and *bleus*.¹⁰⁴ Furthering the social conflict between the *bleus* and the *rouges* was the state's inability to pay the auxiliary corpsmen their wages. Inconsistencies in promotion and pay were a direct result of the navy's command structure.¹⁰⁵ The French navy of the mid to late eighteenth century was an institution that lacked a central command structure capable of promoting unifying direction and leadership to its senior officers (both administrative and professional officer corps).

¹⁰² Mémoires de M. le duc de Choiseul (Paris, 1790) as cited in Andrew Haggard, *The Real Louis XV* vol. 2 (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1902), p. 481.

¹⁰³ Funds appropriated for the navy were increasingly becoming harder to come by in 1767 and beyond. Poor credit ratings made the acquisition of timber and other necessary supplies equally as difficult to procure. Merchants and contractors were unwilling to commit more supplies to the navy on credit. Naval payments by 1770 were already in the arrears. Those contractors and merchants willing to work with the navy negotiated contracts where the navy had to pay excessive prices for goods and supplies, along with high monthly interest rates.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

¹⁰⁵ William Cormack, *Revolution and Political Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 40.

Depending on the closeness to Louis XV, the influence of bureaucrats could supersede that of the Minister of the Navy in the affairs of the navy.

The second measure Choiseul implemented to create a stronger fleet on a limited but growing budget was to assimilate France's commercial fleet with the navy. Several ships of the French East India Company were outfitted for battle to be used for commerce raiding and merchant convoy protection. Three frigates were refitted from commercial vessels to battle readiness in 1774, illustrating the point that the expansion of the French navy was lagging far behind its proposed quota. Choiseul was left with no other alternative but to commission ships from the merchant marine and the fishing fleets to temporarily bolster the number of ships available for mobilization.¹⁰⁶

Choiseul turned the ports at Toulon, Brest, and Marseille into arsenals capable of transforming these coastal cities into maritime fortresses. Choiseul needed to assimilate merchant and commercial vessels with the state's navy to acquire a fleet capable of 'creating a force in peace and war.'¹⁰⁷ While Choiseul did a stupendous job rebuilding the French navy, it was all for naught. His vision of opening the officer corps to commoners failed due to the growing resistance of the naval officer corps to change. Louis XV's change in naval policy punctuated Choiseul's failure to fully implement his social and material goals for the navy.

Louis XV was adamant in securing peace between France and England towards the end of his reign. Choiseul was fired from his position as Minister of the Marine in 1766 because of his unquenchable desire to bring France to war with the British. Choiseul was replaced by a series of navy ministers seeking diplomatic resolutions to keep France from war with Britain. From 1766 to 1774, war with Britain seemed impossible. However, upon Louis XV's death in 1774, things began to change. Louis XVI, an advocate of mercantilism, believed that a strong navy was necessary to secure France's commercial and political interests. The thought of a French war with Britain seemed virtually impossible after Choiseul's release as minister of the navy in 1766; however, less than a decade later, war with Britain seemed inevitable. the political upheaval associated with a change in the state regime as well as the Ministry of the Navy in 1774.

¹⁰⁶ P. Charliat, *Trois Siècles D'Economie Maritime Francaise* (Paris: Libraire des Sciences Politiques et Sociales, 1931), pp. 75-77. By 1783, the French navy would incorporate nearly 1,100 merchant and civil vessels to assist in their naval effort against the British during the American Revolution.

¹⁰⁷ Margaret Morison, "The Duc de Choiseul and the Invasion of England, 1768-1770" *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, Third Series*, 4, (1910): pp. 84-88.

In 1774, France saw a unique opportunity to gain revenge on Britain and return France to its glory days. Gabriel Sartine became Minister of the Marine in 1774. A staunch supporter of France's current foreign minister, Charles Gravier, comte de Vergennes, who wholly backed supporting the American cause during the Revolution to weaken British international dominance. Sartine and Vergennes convinced Louis XVI to lend America men, materiel, money and, most importantly, the navy to the American cause. To bolster the fighting capacity of the French navy, Sartine's first order of business was to undo many of the social measures placed on the navy's officer corps during Boynes' brief reign as Minister of the Navy.

For Sartine, it was abundantly clear leading up to France's participation in the American Revolution that the French fleet was incapable of defending the state's geo-political goals. This fact can be traced back to the reform measures surfacing at the end of Louis XV's reign. Louis XV's last Minister of the Navy, Pierre Etienne Bourgeois de Boynes, in an attempt to increase the readiness of his navy, tried to assimilate the navy forces to mirror that of the army's. A devout disciple of Choiseul's reforms aimed at the evils associated with naval exclusivism, Boynes tried to loosen the grip that the sword nobles had on recruitment by increasing the size of the officer corps. Boynes divided the navy, both its ships and officers, into eight brigades. An officer could only be promoted from within his own brigade, creating eight autonomous sections for the state to administer.¹⁰⁸ To make matters worse, each brigade was in charge of outfitting their own ships with the independent stores of each brigade.*

The monumental change in the traditional avenues of promotion and procurement in the navy did not go unnoticed by the navy's officer corps. With resentment and hostility at an all-time high, Boynes added fuel to the fire when he established a naval academy at Le Havre with the sole purpose of breaking the system of family patronage by reconstructing one of the foundations of the navy officer corps: cadet education and promotion. Again, the core of the navy nobility was being threatened by state-initiated reform and revolving policies.

At the beginning of Louis XVI's reign, 832 of the 944 naval officers graduated from one of two cadet schools, *gardes de pavillon* or the *gardes de la marine*, before completing an

¹⁰⁸ Jonathan Dull, *The French Navy and American Independence: A Study of Arms and Diplomacy, 1774-1787* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 12-15.

* The government's temporary abandonment in the outfitting and supply of its fleet illustrated the vastness of the state's debt as it tried to survive the death throes of financial insolvency.

internship aboard a navy vessel. Louis XVI quickly addressed the problematic state of the navy by appointing Gabriel de Sartine head of the Department of the Navy. Sartine became known as one of the most capable Ministers of the Navy. His naval ideologies were based on the philosophy that the officers in charge of the fleet required the utmost administrative attention.

For Sartine, the navy proper was the engine that propelled the other apparatus of the navy's sphere of influence: administration of the colonies, maritime commerce, and France's numerous consulates. Sartine quickly abolished all of Boynes' reform measures, particularly the reinstatement of the old system of *gardes*, in an effort to reestablish order and cooperation in the ports. By streamlining navy administration, vis-à-vis cutting back on the navy's infantry and artillery units, Sartine hoped to restore the traditional modes of navy doctrine back to where it began: the *Grand Corps*. Evidence of this philosophy can be gleaned from Sartine's discontinuation of Boynes' Royal Academy of the Navy at Le Havre. Sartine believed that the traditions inherent with the professional corps serving at sea were the cornerstone for naval effectiveness.

Clearly Sartine did not want to further water down the officer corps with cadets or auxiliary officers whom fell into a group consisting of three perceived deficiencies: commoners without proof of nobility; those possessing insufficient income to become officers, or individuals without a navy heritage—all of which fell into the stereotypical cadet or merchantman that Jonathan Dull stresses in his work as being socially detrimental to the corps.¹⁰⁹ However, this generalization of the cadet and auxiliary corps is insufficient; many of these men were capable seamen unfairly categorized as arrogant and insubordinate to higher-ranking officers.

Sartine placed extraordinary value on the practical training provided by the *Grand Corps* to naval cadets—arguing that the Naval Academy at Le Havre failed to produce quality officers due to the Academy's inability to train its students at sea.¹¹⁰ Sartine bolstered navy production and cooperation by concentrating on men and materiel rather than addressing the social feuds involving the pen and sword and the *bleu* and *rouge*. Unfortunately, during Sartine's administration, the hostilities fermenting within the navy's social groups led to chronic bouts of inefficiency in dockyard productivity and professionalism.

¹⁰⁹ Jonathan Dull, *The French Navy and American Independence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 15.

¹¹⁰ Abbé Anthiaume, *Un ancêtre du Borda au Havre* (Paris: Ernest Dumont, 1920).

Sartine had no prior experience with the affairs of the navy before ascending to the position of navy minister. Sartine's out-of-the-box perspective on naval affairs granted the Secretary of the Navy a unique means by which to professionalize the navy. Sartine recognized that the *Grand Corps* had a tradition of assimilating diverse individuals, many untrained, uneducated, and unfamiliar with life at sea into productive members in the navy's officer corps. Of great influence on Sartine's tenure as Secretary of the Navy was the insight provided by Charles-Pierre Claret, comte de Fleurieu.

Fleurieu joined the navy as a *garde de la marine* in 1755 at the age of 13. Fleurieu gained valuable experience in several sea battles during the Seven Years' War; after which, he was promoted to brigadier in the *gardes*. Deficient in the current prerequisite requiring *gardes* to serve a minimum of 10 years before gaining the opportunity at becoming an *enseigne de vaisseau*, Fleurieu needed help securing an officer position in the corps. Choiseul, in a letter to the king, pleaded Fleurieu's merit-based case for sidetracking the navy's promotion regulations in becoming an *officier de vaisseau* stating, "He combines the wisest conduct with the greatest application of extraordinary knowledge and disposition to become an officer of distinction."¹¹¹ Clearly Sartine, using Fleurieu's naval experience and heredity as a model, believed in the concept that the noble alone embodied the spirit of honorable service and duty. Sartine's traditional views concerning the nobilities' unique personal characteristics were essential in creating the ideal naval officer. Sartine's beliefs were challenged by the navy's chronic shortage of men.

The American Revolution served as a rallying cry for the French navy; it temporarily galvanizing the officer corps in its wake. The nation's need for experienced officers and seamen to manage its fleet was at an all-time high. The state was left with a perplexing problem that centered on the current pace of officer recruitment and advancement through the matriculation of *gardes*. Traditional modes of recruitment and advancement via the *gardes* were not fitting the bill; this process could no longer produce enough men to man the ships necessary to defeat Britain.

The French did not officially enter the War of Independence until 1778; however, secretly, France began sending large amounts of gunpowder and ammunition to the Americans two years

¹¹¹ Marie-Nicolas Bouillet, "Charles Pierre Claret de Fleurieu" *Dictionnaire universel d'histoire et de géographie*, 1878 (Paris: Librairie de L. Hachette, 1869), 1312.

earlier. Close to a million pounds of gunpowder was sent by way of the ‘neutral’ port of Saint Eustatius to help alleviate the rebels’ depleted stores of the precious powder. French ports accommodated American privateers and warships alike, trading the war materiel that kept the American war effort going. On March 17, 1778, Britain declared war on France. Almost immediately the French navy turned the tides of war in favor of the Americans in their struggle for independence.

France again used deception as a strategy early in 1778. Feigning a French invasion of England supported by the fleet at Brest, the English had no alternative but to split their naval forces currently blockading American waters to help counter any potential action against the British home front. Thus, the British took a significant step away from the naval doctrine which had guided the Royal Navy for the last century: concentrated superior force was the key to ruling the seas.¹¹²

It was clear at the beginning of the Revolutionary War that the Franco-American alliance would pursue a commerce disruption strategy against the British. The Continental Congress and George Washington witnessed firsthand the degree to which a privateer fleet could disrupt vital supply lines from the British ports to their soldiers fighting across the Atlantic. At sea, the first half of the American Revolution was fought predominantly by American privateers against British sloops, frigates, and other smaller transport vessels. Vergennes and the Continental Congress agreed to let France outfit a small squadron of privateers with specific orders to take prizes along the Atlantic trade routes. This ‘French’ privateer fleet would fly the American colors on its masts to help protect against British belligerents on the lookout for French privateers.¹¹³ Two French-made and manned privateers commissioned by Congress, the *Black Prince* and the *Princess*, during the latter half of 1778 and early 1779, had taken over 120 prizes off the British coast heading for America with valuable cargo and supplies.

Seeing the disruptive impact that a privateer fleet could have on commerce, Congress allowed each state the right to man, outfit, and arm privateers. By 1780, over 300 letters of marque were granted to state privateers.¹¹⁴ That same year American and French privateers took twice as many British merchantmen and privateers as were lost. In 1781, Congress issued 550 letters of

¹¹² Alfred Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1600-1783* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1898), p. 341.

¹¹³ Gardner Allen, *A Naval History of the American Revolution* vol. II (New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1962), pp. 535-537.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 544.

marque. As with generations of French naval strategy, the Franco-American maritime strategy during the American Revolution would clearly favor a privateer war until the opportunity to go on a larger-scale offensive presented itself.

As noted earlier, the threat of a French invasion divided the force of the Royal Navy fighting off the coast of North America, the Caribbean, and the Atlantic. By the time France formally entered the American Revolution in 1778, the British Royal Navy dominated the North American coast. Having taken the coastal towns of Charleston and Savannah in late 1779 and early 1780, respectively, the British sought to divide and conquer the rebellious colonies. The intervention of the French navy in the War of Independence was a crucial reason why this British plan failed. In less than three years, Franco-American disruption of British trade was having dire consequences on British possessions in the Antilles. So much so, the French were about to revamp their naval policy to include the possibility of major ship to ship action in the latter stages of the Revolutionary War. Much of this renewed naval policy during the American Revolution emanated from France's confidence in its naval commanders. A testament to France's faith in its naval commanders during the American Revolution can be witnessed by the freedom from orthodox naval policy granted to André de Suffren.

Suffren earned strategic independence during the Revolutionary War for his exploits during France's retaking of Minorca in 1746. Suffren displayed the mastery of tactics and strategy that would eventually earn him veneration as a naval commander, second to neither Nelson nor Ruyter in the eyes of French naval historians. A veteran of the War of Spanish Succession and the Seven Years' War, Suffren quickly realized the advantages associated with following an aggressive stance towards his enemies while commanding the Toulon fleet. Suffren vigorously studied and applied the professional experiences of de Ruyter to help create his own style of command. Suffren's style of command was ultra-aggressive, repeatedly taking the fight to his foes in the West Indies during the Revolution. Suffren continually went on the offensive during the War for American Independence, seeking out a fight whenever possible, regardless of the situation. Suffren had great disregard for the navy's subordinate status to that of the army's within France's military policy; his quasi independence from naval doctrine resulted in several victories for the French navy. However, Suffren's naked aggression led to the castigation of many of his captains who felt that his style of command was insubordinate to naval policy.

Regardless of Suffren's ability to take the fight to France's maritime enemies, the lack of cooperation among subordinates and underfunding made it impossible for the French navy to adopt a long-term *guerre d'escadre* strategy. Suffren proved that even when facing superior numbers during fleet engagements with the Royal Navy, the French navy could hold their own. Suffren repeatedly accomplished the tasks assigned to him by the navy ministry. When French commerce was disrupted by Barbary Pirates, Suffren brought order to France's Mediterranean trade routes by the force of his fleet. During the American Revolution, Suffren helped divide the British navy by the constant presence of the Toulon fleet in Caribbean waters. Repeatedly during battle Suffren used various strategies to help his fleet get the best of the Royal Navy. By incorporating speedy frigates to disrupt his adversaries' line, Suffren's 'skirmishers' allowed the French to concentrate their force on the enemies' center, helping achieve tactical advantage even when facing a superior force. Suffren's naval success during the Revolutionary War forced Britain to change its naval strategy.

Having lost Saint Lucia, St. Vincent, and Grenada, England was left with no choice but to further extend its navy in an effort to staunch the losses to its colonial sphere of influence. The French navy pursued a more aggressive stance at the Battle of Grenada. Heavily outnumbered and without the wind gauge, the French navy under Charles Hector, comte D'Estaing took on Vice Admiral John Byron's fleet. D'Estaing, a commissioned officer of the French army, had little experience commanding a naval squadron in battle. Byron and D'Estaing aligned their respective fleets into traditional battle lines. The first skirmish saw the French fleet emerge without a single loss. The Royal Navy was not so fortunate, suffering the crippling of seven ships of the line. The second and final attack wave was the culmination of two very different national strategies. Whereas the English prided themselves in the taking of prizes—a vainglorious strategy having little overall impact on the overall war, France sought to strike at the center of the British Empire: commercial wealth. Thus after a subdued second-round of ship to ship broadsides, D'Estaing led his victorious fleet back to port. Byron was left to lead his tattered force back to Gibraltar for repair. The French navy was in the process of seizing command of the sea. Never was this change in sea power more evident than with the Franco-American land and naval victories at Yorktown and the Chesapeake in 1781.

The naval Battle of the Chesapeake paved the way for the Franco-American victory at the decisive battle of the Revolutionary War, Yorktown. By 1780, George Washington knew that

America needed the French navy to win the war.¹¹⁵ Washington also knew that command of the sea was essential to win independence from the British. The French navy played an integral role in deciding the Battle of Yorktown. The French navy broke through the British blockade at Brest to deliver the much needed men and materiel for Washington's offensive against Yorktown. Furthermore, it was the French navy which transported 5,500 soldiers to Rhode Island in the *Expédition Particulière* to help contain the British forces in and around Virginia and New York. As the battle for Yorktown neared, coordinated amphibious landings by the French enabled the Franco-American forces the ability to build and protect their advancing lines that would eventually pin the British forces in at Yorktown.

Charles-René Dominique Sochet, Chevalier Destouches was the commander of the French naval forces in America. Destouches was an aggressive-minded captain who set in motion the steps leading to the final naval confrontation at the Chesapeake. While DeTilly, commander of the French squadron, lay at the mouth of the Chesapeake clearing the river of British privateers, merchantmen, and sloops, Rochambeau sent Destouches' fleet to Cape Henry to blockade British support to their ground forces at Yorktown. The ensuing Battle of Cape Henry was considered a draw. Although the British had superior numbers and firepower, plus the wind gauge, the two opposing fleets inflicted similar damage on one another.

British Vice Admiral Marriot Arbuthnot was outmaneuvered at every instance by his French counterpart Destouches. The ever-present French fleet forced Arbuthnot's squadron out of the Chesapeake Bay, preventing the British Royal Navy from resupplying or reinforcing English positions in Virginia. The French navy's position in American waters proved to be a formidable obstacle for the English. The Royal Navy could not openly operate in the seas between New York and Virginia. Thus, the Franco-American forces were able to converge by sea and land unopposed by the British forces cut off from the outside world at Yorktown. The Battle of the Chesapeake was the climactic battle of the American Revolution. The French navy's ability to control the American eastern seaboard and the mouth of the Chesapeake inevitably allowed the Franco-American forces the ability to slowly constrict British forces at Yorktown into surrender. Cornwallis's fate depended absolutely upon the sea.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ James Nelson, *George Washington's Great Gamble: And the Sea Battle that Won the American Revolution* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010), p. 41.

¹¹⁶ Alfred Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power*, p. 373.

The Battle of the Capes pitted British Rear Admiral Sir Thomas Graves against the French Rear Admiral and commander of the North American squadron, Francois Joseph Paul, comte de Grasse. Rochambeau and de Grasse elected to begin a combined sea and land offensive in and around Yorktown. Washington was hesitant about the chosen location for the assault, but soon agreed with the French plan. The British did not know if the French navy would attack in Virginia or New York. Graves believed that the French navy would support an amphibious assault at Chesapeake Bay. Graves' fleet arrived at the Chesapeake only to find the French fleet already at anchor in the bay. De Grasse led his fleet to meet the British squadron. Evenly matched, the French accomplished two major victories on the first day of battle. First, the French navy inflicted heavy damage on the British fleet, thus gaining the advantage for the following day's fight. Secondly, de Grasse's squadron was able to lure Graves' fleet away from the Chesapeake where the French Admiral, Jacques-Melchior Saint-Laurent, comte de Barras, was in route to the American coast with further troops and supplies bound for Yorktown.

The Royal Navy held the wind and weather gauge heading into the second day of what would become known as the Battle of the Capes. Yet, it was de Grasse who at every turn outmaneuvered the British fleet. Of Graves' 27 ships of the line 5 were destroyed in the first pass. Graves and Hood had difficulty orchestrating their fleet movements during the Battle of the Capes, as their signaling system could not match that of the French. Later, the British admiralty learned that de Barras' fleet had already dispatched men and supplies to Yorktown; clearly, the British had been outwitted, outmaneuvered, and decisively beaten at the Battle of the Capes. Hood and Graves decided it best to head back to New York due to, "the truly lamentable state we have brought ourselves".¹¹⁷ Cornwallis surrendered two days after the Battle of the Capes. Negotiations between France, England, and America commenced soon thereafter, bringing to an end the American Revolution.

The American Revolution represented one of the highest points in the history of the early modern French navy. The French navy clearly played a decisive role in the conflict between America and Britain. The French navy was able to regain its international status by its exploits during the War of Independence; and, ratchet back Britain's growing global maritime trade dominance that was adversely impacting France's maritime endeavors. The overall dominance of the French navy during the American Revolution served as a wakeup call to the British Royal

¹¹⁷ Harold Larrabee, *Decision at the Chesapeake* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1964), p. 42.

Navy. England depended on the sea for its geopolitical survival. Therefore, it was paramount for the British to revamp and rebuild their navy to better resemble the French navy of the time.¹¹⁸ The French were left with the difficult decision whether to continue an aggressive maritime strategy or return to the more cost-efficient ways of *guerre de course*. The Battle of the Saints, and the heavy financial burden facing France after the American Revolution determined France's maritime direction leading up to and during the French Revolution.

The Battle of the Saints took place in April, 1782; it was the largest naval battle of the American Revolution. Fearing a French invasion of Jamaica, the British sent a fleet of 36 ships of the line to intercept de Grasse's forces. Just off the Dominican coast the two fleets met. Again, it was de Grasse and the French navy who took the offensive against their evenly-matched foe. De Grasse chose to take on the British fleet even though many of his ships were full of marines and supplies destined for the assault on Jamaica. The first columns of French and English ships passed with little effect. However, on the second pass the British admiral Sir Charles Douglas saw an opening in the middle of the French van. After much consultation with his officers, Douglas broke the traditional line of battle and sought to split the French line. The French fleet was broken into three separate bodies, disorder among the French fleet ensued. De Grasse's flagship, the *Ville de Paris*, one of France's finest ships of the line, was left isolated and vulnerable. Admiral George Rodney directed the English fleet towards de Grasse's flagship, ignoring the bulk of the French fleet. The *Ville de Paris* was captured along with five other French ships coming to the aid of de Grasse, while the remaining French squadron scattered. De Grasse was the first French naval commander to be taken in battle.

The repercussions of the Battle of the Saints were great for both the English and French. For England and the Royal Navy, the Battle of the Saints was a reprieve for its dismal military record during the American Revolution. The Saints also prompted a recasting of British naval policy. Henceforth, the British would steadfastly follow naval strategy which emphasized strength in numbers. British naval strength would be defined by the state's drive for revenue in which to build a fleet capable of meeting England's geopolitical and strategic goals for national defense—which, of course, depended heavily upon overpowering its enemies either by blockade or head-

¹¹⁸ Repeatedly the British used captured French ships of the line and frigates as models for their own construction efforts. Often, captured French vessels were merely renamed and put into service by the Royal Navy.

to-head battle. Britain would allocate substantial tax revenue to support naval buildup and improvement projects by the turn of the nineteenth century.¹¹⁹

For France and the French navy, the Saints provoked reflection upon the current state of French naval affairs. De Grasse's decision to forgo the traditional doctrine of supporting land gains to pursue the less important, but glorified, aim of taking prizes, forced the naval ministry to return to the orthodox policy of *guerre de course*. Furthermore, de Grasse's aggressive strategy placed the French fleet in a 'winner take all' position—again falling outside traditional French naval policy of the time. France would entertain the thought of competing with England leading up to the foes' next war; however, the depletion of France's national treasury from the disastrous Seven Years' War and the prohibitive costs associated with its participation in the American Revolution limited its ability to achieve maritime supremacy over Britain. In 1781, British naval expenditure was already the equivalent of 9-million *livres*¹²⁰—an annual amount that would increase each year. Although not an extravagant sum, nonetheless, the French could not possibly keep up.

After its participation in the American Revolution the French navy under the leadership of Charles Eugène Gabriel de la Croix, marquis de Castries, appointed Secretary of the Navy in 1780, did everything in his power to increase the readiness of the French navy. Believing that the Treaty of Paris would not keep Britain and France from renewed war, Castries felt war with Britain was inevitable. In an effort to prepare the navy for war, Castries implemented a two-pronged attack in mobilizing and enhancing the navy's effectiveness. Castries' first order of business was to increase the numbers of ships of the line. Traditionally set at sixty ships, a number in line with the budget restraints facing the navy, Castries proposed expanding the number of battleships to eighty. This put enormous pressure on the arsenals, not to mention the nation's ability to increase their production output in the face of limited materiel and a limited naval budget.

Castries' second order of business was to restructure naval management, specifically the administrative officer corps. Seeking to further professionalize the French navy, Castries made the *élèves de la marine* (naval cadets) the chief recruitment source for naval officers. Castries

¹¹⁹ Ian Toll, *Six Frigates: The Epic History of the Founding of the U.S. Navy* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006), p. 42.

¹²⁰ Cited in Peter Padfield, *Maritime Supremacy and the Opening of the Western Mind: Naval Campaigns that Shaped the Modern World* (Woodstock: Overlook Press, 2000), p. 257.

hoped to implement a more meritocratic system of recruitment and advancement by allowing a greater number of *aspirants* and volunteers the chance to pursue naval careers and, more importantly, drastically increase the amount of officer reserves for the next conflict with the Royal Navy. Finances, along with a critical shortage of manpower, proved to be the ultimate handicap in France's efforts to meet the nation's next maritime threat.

As with the American Revolution, France's next war with England would be wholly dependent on the balance of sea power in determining the next victor.¹²¹

¹²¹ Alfred Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1898), p. 541.

CONCLUSION

The push after 1763 for naval reform and growth produced new tensions within the officer corps and society.

After its participation in the American Revolution, the French navy under the leadership of Charles Eugène Gabriel de la Croix, marquis de Castries, the newly elected Secretary of the Navy in 1780, did everything in his power to substantially increase the readiness of the French navy after the war. Castries also believed that the peace associated with the Treaty of Paris held little weight in keeping Britain and France from renewed war. Thus, the French navy needed to increase production of its human and materiel resources. This put enormous pressure on the arsenals, not to mention the navy's ability to increase the production of ships with its moderate but growing budget. It was the lack of manpower that proved to be the ultimate handicap in the navy's efforts at expanding its fleet. For the navy to succeed, Castries needed the utmost production and professionalism from the navy's officer corps.

In 1786, Castries abolished the *gardes de la marine* in an effort to staunch the flow of arrogant and insubordinate cadets serving in the *Grand Corps*. Officer recruitment under Castries, and his successor César-Henri, comte La Luzerne, made it mandatory for cadets to enter the navy only after enrolling in a naval college as an *élèves de la marine*. Upon completion of a series of exams, aspirants from the naval colleges at Vannes and Alais began practical training at sea. Nobility was required for *élèves* to advance to *élèves-aspirants*; however, the law was less restrictive than the army's Ségur Ordinance.¹²² Castries' regulations made it abundantly clear that the nation was striving to open admission to a wider range of applicants. Aspirants for the navy officer corps were chosen from the sons of gentlemen, sub-lieutenants serving in the ports, sons of wealthy merchants, and captains in the merchant marine.

On the eve of the French Revolution administration of the French navy, particularly its officer corps, was transitioning to reform its antiquated system of officer hierarchy; however, as seen by

¹²² Maurice Loir, *La Marine royale en 1789* (Paris: Armand Colin et Cie, 1892), 13-16. Loir stresses that the Ségur Law was less restrictive in the navy than in the army. It is not clear whether Loir believes this to be part of an "aristocratic reaction" or an attempt by the French Ministers of War and the Navy to professionalize the military. This study suggests that the Ségur Law was relaxed in order to accommodate a greater pool of officer candidates--both nobles and non-nobles—for the state's dire need of officers to man their growing fleet. However, these measures to open recruitment before 1789 were stymied by members of the sword seeking to professionalize the officer corps by adhering to a policy of exclusivism.

the “Code de Castries,” a cluster of reform measures initiated between 1784 and 1788, a definitive division remained between the conceptualization of how merit and privilege would cohabitate in the forming of an egalitarian navy corps. Many within the *Grand Corps* encouraged open recruitment and the advancement of commoners, hoping that the newcomers to the navy would foster advancement through competition—a notion previously lost in the system of privilege and the *mérite* associated exclusively with the corps’ nobility. Navy officer Albert de Rioms defined the traditions inherent with the *Grand Corps* by his stalwart defense of Castries’ officer reform in a letter to a fellow navy officer, Luther Martin. Rioms is nothing but optimistic about the potential for a competitive navy based on the removal of the barriers currently blocking the upward mobility of its officers.¹²³

The current face of advancement in the navy, another officer argued, does not stimulate promotion and competition, inferring that by leveling the norms of advancement the navy would create equality by forcing all to excel in the respective duties as officers.¹²⁴ Loyalty to the service united the ranks and branches of the navy; these traditions were fostered by the professionalism of its military officer corps. With the potential to organize one of the strongest and most professional corps of sea officers in the world, the political upheaval associated with the French Revolution, and the crown’s inability to obtain the financial resources necessary to succeed, the French navy’s officer corps was ultimately doomed by the social and economical dysfunction within the administrative wing of the navy. The relatively poor performance of the French navy during the Napoleonic Wars would forever cast the service in a poor light historically; taking with it the forgotten service and professionalism associated with its seagoing officer corps.

The continuation of French naval power into the eighteenth century and beyond required the acquiescence of several social and economic factors; most important among these conditions was the overall cooperation of the administrative personnel connecting Versailles to the various ports and arsenals of France. Secondly, the need for continued financial support from the crown and industrial entrepreneurs whom made substantial investments in the production of ships of the line was required to maintain a strong navy. Historian Donald Pilgrim adds that in order for the French navy to prosper it was paramount that sailors be well disciplined. And, above all,

¹²³ Academie de Stanislas, *Mémoires de l’Académie de Stanislas* (Nancy: Imprimerie Berger-Levrault, 1892), 191-195.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 111.

officers, administrators, and sailors must remain willing and cooperative in the execution of their responsibilities.¹²⁵ Perhaps foreshadowing the events of 1789, Pilgrim identifies that loyalty and the willing responsiveness of the aristocratic officer corps was a necessary prerequisite in maintaining a sound, healthy navy.¹²⁶

The political rivalries between the pen and sword ushered in a period in the French navy where the earlier diversity within the service was lost to the highly competitive nature associated with the unavailability of high-ranking positions, and the difficulty obtaining promotion once in the service. During the Regency, the French navy developed a strict caste spirit.¹²⁷ Historians have debated how the era of open recruitment and promotion initiated by Colbert so quickly reverted to closed exclusivism. Michel Vergé-Franceschi, in his doctoral thesis, attributed the rise of family networks to the development of a caste system in the French officer corps. Associating the Colbert era of government advancement as a pseudo form of inheritance, where high administrative positions were given to family relatives, Vergé-Franceschi stresses the importance of family “clans” as an integral part of advancement in the navy officer corps.¹²⁸ Although Colbert did favor relatives for administrative positions, he ardently followed, as necessity dictated, open recruitment, not only to the nobles in coastal provinces, but also non-nobles throughout France to help alleviate the critical shortage of manpower in the navy.

William Cormack lends a more plausible explanation to the events by explaining that increasing numbers of officers were exclusively recruited from navy families living in the provinces of Provence and Brittany.¹²⁹ Cormack’s thesis corresponds directly with what was occurring in the French navy during the eighteenth century: the military officer corps was controlling the paths of recruitment into their ranks due to the growing state decentralization, inefficiency, and fiscal insolvency—issues that were continually hampering state and local levels of administration in the navy. However, in the early eighteenth century there was an altogether

¹²⁵ Donald Pilgrim, “The Colbert-Seignelay Naval Reforms and the Beginning of the War of the League of Augsburg” *French Historical Studies*, vol. 9 (1975): p. 238.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

¹²⁷ William Cormack, *Revolution and Political Conflict in the French Navy 1789-1794* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 39.

¹²⁸ Michel Vergé-Franceschi, *Les Officiers généraux de la marine royale 1715-1774* (Thèse en vue de l’obtention du Doctorat d’Etat Paris, 1987), pp. 15-18.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 39.

different reason for the navy officer corps' change in ideological stance towards officer recruitment: competition. Even though the navy's seagoing officer corps had a long history of amalgamating commoners and nobles into the service for more than half a century, revolving policies by the naval ministry necessitated the beginning of a closed-caste system that would dominate the affairs of the navy until the outbreak of the French Revolution.

It was the encroachment on the traditional affairs of naval administration that precipitated the navy elites to close their ranks to outsiders. Administrational inefficiency and negligence prompted the sword nobles into taking a defensive posture against the recruitment and promotion of outsiders—anyone who was seen as a potential threat to their privileged status. The fear inherent with the loss of authority within the officer corps was necessitated by the growing number of governmental agents in the ports and arsenals. The growing amount of subordinates in the service, coinciding with the power-plays occurring in the central bureau and trickling down to the officers of the pen and sword, created the intra-class conflict in the ports and arsenals throughout France; and, subsequently, ushered in a period of uncooperativeness between the two branches of the navy. Coupled with the state's foray into the recruitment of *roturiers*, or commoners, into an already fractional state of existence between the navy nobility, the sword nobility formed ranks in an effort to maintain their social and political status in the military. One of the main reasons for the operational inefficiency of the French navy in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was the many attempts made by landmen politicians seeking to redefine the hierarchical structure within the navy's officer corps. Professionally, the French navy of the Old Regime was highly effective in carrying out France's maritime strategies.

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