



# THE NOBLE HEART™

## The Great King's Stronghold

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*"Late that night, Simon and I made our way to one of three long, low roof buildings -- the Warriors Houses, he called them -- to wrap ourselves in woolen cloaks and lie upon pallets of fresh straw. In the soft darkness, which ebbed and flowed with the sea swell of the warriors' breathing, I have seldom felt so sheltered and secure as I did that night, nor known so rich and deep a rest. Within the walls of the Great King's stronghold, among men who would give blood and life for one another without hesitation, I slept. And I woke before dawn, thinking: What would I give to wake among such men always?" (The Paradise War)*

I boarded a train in London with my son one autumn day seven years ago and we set out for the coast of England. I was on a pilgrimage of sorts to pay my respect to a man whose story has had a profound impact on my life. I wanted to see his ship for myself and see where he died 200 years ago.

We arrived in Portsmouth and walked to the docks: There she stood, a 104-gun, triple-decker, first-rate, man-of-war ship - *The Victory*.

She took my breath away.

Lord Nelson was the Admiral of a fleet of ships that were England's lone defense against the ambitions of revolutionary France. Napoleon was not only a threat to Europe but was a concern to our young republic. The problem was, out of The French Revolution arose an *emperor*, this was what we Americans feared the most. Could that happen here? John Adams wrote to Jefferson describing Napoleon's conquest as those written about in the book of Daniel connecting the ten toes in Europe and together they wondered if Napoleon was indeed the anti-christ.

William Pitt said of Jacobinism that once stripped of its pretext of liberty it had "shown itself to be capable only of destroying, not of building, and that it must necessarily end in military despotism."

So in 1805 Nelson's fleet entered Trafalgar badly outnumbered . Their wooden walls however represented the irreducible strength of England standing impervious to the chaos of revolutionary France. In order to beat an overwhelming force at Trafalgar the British had to employ superior gunnery action. They needed to fire their cannons two or even three times, faster than the French and Spanish. Each soldier had to be at his best and in order to accomplish this the English employed encouragement to train their men instead of using the whip as the French did. In fact, Nelson himself use to "run up the

ratlines" (ropes that climbed to the sails) alongside the junior midshipmen going aloft for the first time. He encouraged them upwards, by example of his ease and grace in the predicament they feared.

The essence of Trafalgar was *the liberation of individual energies to ensure victory*. These men didn't look to avoid battle, rather they looked at it as a place where honor was validated.

In the book, *Seize the Fire*, Adam Nicolson says, "Leaving aside for a moment its obvious terrors and suffering, battle was not the place of agony but the moment at which agony was over. To be denied it was to be denied the great resolution of the navel officers' life."

This is how to fight men: "An Englishman enters a naval action with the firm conviction that his duty is to hurt his enemy and help his friends and allies without looking for directions in the midst of the fight; and while he thus clears his mind of all subsidiary distractions he rests in confidence on the certainty that his comrades, actuated by the same principles as himself, will be bound by the sacred and priceless principle of mutual support."

So men, for the battle you are in right now (diminishment, feeling worthless, struggles with work, or battling for your marriage, or for your kids' hearts), clear your minds and know with confidence the One who has been "running the ratlines" with you, training you, calling you up for such an event as this. He is fighting with you and He remains impervious to the chaos of this world. The answer is not "out there", the answer is "in you".

Sleep well tonight for you are in the walls of the Great King's stronghold.

*Strength and honor*

*Your ally*

*Jeff*

Note: The Victory was the first ship to penetrate the French line. Nelson defeated the French that day freeing them from the threat of Napoleon.

It cost him his life.