

CHAPTER FIVE

Naval Leadership in a ‘Fleet in Being’: The Spanish Navy and ‘Armed Neutrality’ in the Mid-Eighteenth Century

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Multiple ideas for the strategic function of the Spanish navy were tried and tested in the course of the eighteenth century. ‘Armed neutrality’ was but one of them and in place for only a brief period, during the reign of Ferdinand VI (1746–59), but it marked a significant phase in the development of eighteenth-century Spanish naval doctrine. Also, like many of the Spanish navy’s strategies at this time, it was defensive, devised at the heart of government by the King’s ministers and then communicated down to Spain’s naval bases and officers. The command structure developed for this transmission as well as the defensive nature of the strategy itself affected naval leadership and how it was exercised by Spain’s squadron commanders and ship captains. It is this relationship – between the command structure, a defensive policy and naval leadership – which will be studied here in the context of Spain’s European squadrons at a time when a new idea for the function of the fleet was being introduced.

Ferdinand VI implemented ‘armed neutrality’ beginning from 1748 at the suggestion of his chief minister, Zenón de Somodevilla y Bengoechea, Marqués de la Ensenada (1702–81), who, in turn, had devised the policy partly to

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convince a pacific Ferdinand to allow him free rein in expanding and modernising the fleet.¹¹² The arguments behind it were outlined in a series of memoranda where Ensenada reasoned, essentially, that the navy could be used as leverage between Spain's two greatest European rivals, Britain and France, without going to war.¹¹³ A sufficiently powerful Spanish fleet could threaten British superiority at sea when allied with the French and, therefore, the existence of such a force would oblige both France and Britain to seek a Spanish alliance. Its very existence, therefore, had a naval diplomatic value and it could act as a 'fleet in being'.¹¹⁴ While remaining neutral, Spain could wield the power the navy would generate to protect its interests, to roll back the trading concessions both powers had accumulated and, Ensenada even suggested, to have Gibraltar and Minorca returned by Britain and Bellaguardia by France.¹¹⁵ This was an idea that was not original to Ensenada – others had promoted similar ideas in the past and would continue to do so after – but this specific policy was actively pursued from the 1748 Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle to the signing of the Family Pact in 1761 during the reign of Charles III (1759–88).

While during these years Ensenada carried out his naval reform programme, the manner in which the fleet was structured remained largely unchanged from when his predecessor, José Patiño (1666–1736), had created the three Naval Departments of Ferrol, Cádiz and Cartagena in 1726.¹¹⁶ Each Naval Department deployed its own small squadron of two or three ships of the line for routine cruising, adding extra ships in times of crisis and arming additional squadrons for particular missions when necessary. In principle, tasks were also divided by Department. Cartagena was responsible for the protection of the Mediterranean and at the forefront of the fight against Barbary privateers. Cádiz supervised convoying trade and the monarchy's resources to and from Spain's trans-Atlantic empire, and Ferrol protected the Atlantic coast as far as the Azores and the Canary Islands. In practice, this organisation was much more elastic.

The operations of the Mediterranean squadron commanded by Jefe de Escuadra Pedro Mesía de la Cerda (1700–83) from May 1750 to January 1752 exemplify this. They also show the significance of the navy in the monarchy's lines of communication. In addition to routine cruising and organisational requirements such as turning over crews, collecting pay and repairing ships, Mesía de la Cerda's squadron of two ships of the line also completed the following tasks:

1. Convoying a group of register ships into the Atlantic.¹¹⁷
2. Convoying 15 troop transports to Ceuta.¹¹⁸
3. Carrying troops from Cartagena to Barcelona and Mallorca.¹¹⁹
4. Collecting four newly-purchased xebecs at Mallorca and testing their sailing qualities on the return to Cartagena.¹²⁰
5. Convoying Spanish shipping from Cartagena to Cádiz.¹²¹

6. Ferrying the Bishop of Mallorca from Barcelona to Palma.¹²²
7. Transporting and exchanging 60,000 *vellon reals* for *vellon provincial* in Mallorca.¹²³
8. Transporting the Royal Regiment of Artillery from Barcelona to Cádiz.¹²⁴

Squadron deployment was arranged centrally at Court by the naval minister – the Marqués de la Ensenada until July 1754 and Julián de Arriaga y Ribera (1700–76) thereafter: the former was a bureaucrat who had risen through the ranks of naval administration and the latter a former naval officer.¹²⁵ Orders were then transmitted from Court to a Department's Comandante General, who would draw up formal instructions for a squadron commander or ship captain. If the planned operation was particularly important or secret, sealed orders were transmitted direct from the naval minister to the squadron commander as happened, for example, when the 60-gun *América* and the frigate *Esmeralda* were sent to convoy a group of wheat transports from Naples in 1753.¹²⁶

At the Naval Departments, Comandantes Generales were in charge of sea-going officers and men as well as naval operations.¹²⁷ These positions were awarded to senior serving officers. At Cádiz, from 1750 to 1772, we find Juan José Navarro, Marqués de la Victoria (1687–1772) and, since his was the most senior Department, the post was combined with that of Director General de la Armada. At Ferrol, the Teniente General Francisco de Orozco (1699–1761) was Comandante General from 1755 to 1760 and, at Cartagena, the Teniente General Benito Antonio Spínola, Marqués Spínola (1687–1774) was in charge from 1753 to 1761. These officers were expected to have a thorough understanding of naval affairs in their Departments and to be well acquainted with their subordinate officers. They were the principle bridge of communication between a Department's naval officers and the Court.

This command structure was practical in light of the peninsula's geopolitical requirements. Its proximity to the Barbary states, whose privateers intruded constantly into Spanish waters harassing its commerce and coasts, required the navy to respond rapidly. Financial and manpower constraints made it difficult to have a large coastal protection force and consequently the three arsenals had to coordinate to provide this when such a threat loomed. This could not be arranged at the arsenals themselves since the distance between them made communication difficult, so it proved best to do this centrally. Its effectiveness is demonstrated by Ensenada's rearrangement of the fleet in the Spring of 1752 following news from Lisbon that Barbary vessels had been sighted in the Atlantic at precisely the time when the *Fuerte*, an *azogue* ship loaded with bullion from Cartagena de Indias, was expected in Cádiz.¹²⁸

At that time, the *Dragón* (60) and *América* (60) were en route from Cádiz to Ferrol where they were to be laid up in ordinary so that their crews could be transferred to the newly launched *Asia* (70) and *Fernando* (70). In Ferrol,

the frigate *Galga* and the packet boat *Marte* were ready to sail for Cartagena in the Mediterranean while the *Asia* and *Fernando* were still fitting out for a voyage across the Atlantic. In Cartagena, the *Tigre* (70) and *Septentrión* (70) and four xebecs (*Galgo*, *Cazador*, *Liebre* and *Volante*) were ready for sea. The *Septentrión* and the xebecs were going to be sent to America, leaving the *Tigre*, the *Reyna* (70) (once her repairs were concluded) and another four xebecs (*Ibicenco*, *Mallorquin*, *Valenciano* and *Catalan*) to cruise in the Mediterranean.

With Algerian privateers in the Atlantic, however, this arrangement provided insufficient protection for the *Fuerte*. Instead, Ensenada ordered the *Tigre* and *Septentrión* to cruise in the Atlantic until the end of May then return to Cartagena; the packet boat *Marte* and the frigate *Galga* were to remain in Ferrol until the *Fernando* and *Asia* could escort them to the Straits of Gibraltar, and the xebecs to remain in the Mediterranean and be joined by the *Reyna* once her repairs were complete. In this manner, the *Fuerte*, the packet boat *Marte* and the frigate *Galga* would be safe, cruising would continue in the Mediterranean and there would be sufficient time for fitting out the ships at Ferrol. The only inconvenience was that the *Septentrión*, *Galga*, *Marte* and four xebecs set to cruise in the West Indies that summer would be delayed from taking up their station until the end of June.

In order to maintain this system, however, the naval minister carefully monitored the seagoing fleet and its officers. Instructions were detailed and allowed for little deviation. The following, for example, were given to the Capitán de Fragata Juan Francisco Garganta in command of the packet boat *Marte* and the frigate *Galga* for a routine voyage from Ferrol to Cartagena in the Mediterranean:¹²⁹

1. Once the vessels are ready for sea and the weather permits, the *Marte* and *Galga* will sail with the local pilots on board as far as the open sea.
2. Both vessels will follow a direct course to the Port of Cartagena without delay, the captains making the most precise observations on the good and bad qualities of both vessels. Once they anchor at Cartagena, they will make the most punctual and detailed report for the Court of what they have experienced and await the instructions that in consequence they will be issued.
3. They will inform the Comandante General in Cartagena Department of any news that is pertinent to him.
4. The packet boat and frigate will keep together during sailing, avoiding all separation, for which reason the commander will ensure that he issues clear and distinct signals so that no allegation of wrongdoing can be brought.
5. Should they encounter any foreign squadrons or ships belonging to allied princes in the course of the voyage, they will treat them with all possible

courtesy, maintaining the best correspondence and adhere to the *Reales Ordenanzas* in relation to greetings.

6. They will without fail board and search all ships from Hamburg and if they find any warlike goods or munitions they will confiscate these leaving the rest of the ships' cargoes and the ships themselves at liberty.¹³⁰
7. Should they by chance come across any Algerian frigates or xebecs, they will attack them until they are taken or sunk depending on what is feasible. For this reason, both vessels will sail in a state ready to clear for action, ensuring that during the voyage the sailors and troops on board are trained in the use of the guns.
8. Should any blasphemers be found among the men and troops on board, these will be punished as instructed by the *Reales Ordenanzas*.
9. Should any vagrants be put on board either vessel, the captains will ensure that these men are not given any opportunity to desert and that they are trained in the profession of seamen.

All of which was left to 'the good conduct, prudence, zeal and courage of the commanders'. As can also be inferred from these instructions, the Spanish navy was governed by an additional code in the form of the *Ordenanzas de Su Magestad para el Gobierno Militar, Político y Económico de Su Armada Naval* published in 1748.

These *Ordenanzas*, which condensed previous rulings into this two-volume work, dictated the formation of the fleet, its squadrons and ships, delineating each person's duties on land and at sea, the judicial code and its processes, and the government of its Pilot, Marine, Artillery and Guardias Marinas Corps. And, as Ferdinand VI stated in the foreword, it was to be followed 'infallibly' and 'without any deviation'.¹³¹ All senior officers were obliged to have copies and were required to educate their subordinates in them so that none was ignorant of the law. Sections four and five in Volume One covered the duties of squadron commanders and ship captains in 60- and 76-paragraph entries respectively.¹³² These outlined how commanders were to behave in a wide range of scenarios, and any infraction could be tried by a Consejo de Guerra, the Spanish equivalent of a court martial.

On occasions when anything out of the ordinary occurred, this was investigated by the Comandantes Generales and reported to the naval minister. When the *África* (70) lost sight of the frigate *Aguila* at sea during a storm in 1754, for example, and the two ships returned to Cádiz days apart despite being instructed to sail together, the Marqués de la Victoria, as the Department's Comandante, informed Ensenada that he had examined the journals of the officers on board both vessels and concluded that no one was to blame for the separation.¹³³ Similarly, when the *San Felipe* (70) was damaged in a storm in February 1753, the Intendente at Ferrol wrote to Ensenada noting:

'I had all the other officers' and pilots' journals given to me, they are all in agreement with each other and they do not differ in even the most minor detail from the account given by the ship's commanding officer which I forward to Your Excellency without finding the least action worthy of reproach in the conduct of the captain or the officers.'¹³⁴

Joseph de Rojas y Beltran (1700–54), the captain of the unfortunate vessel, also felt the need to explain the accident in a letter written directly to Ensenada. He pleaded that it was 'the first such accident he had experienced in a long and active career and it has broken my health.'¹³⁵

The naval minister could also intervene directly with regard to the behaviour of naval officers. One such occasion was when Ensenada issued a warning to the commander of the Cádiz squadron, Capitán de Navío Alonso de la Rosa Labassor, Conde de Vegaflorida (1700–71), for putting into port too frequently 'with the somewhat feeble excuse of needing to carry out repairs.'¹³⁶ In this situation, however, Vegaflorida could reply, rebutting Ensenada's accusations and insisting that the repairs had been necessary.¹³⁷

The control exercised over naval commanders from the Court also extended to fighting at sea. During the era of 'armed neutrality', Spain might have been at peace with its European rivals but it remained in a state of conflict with the Barbary states of Tunis, Tripoli, Algiers and Morocco throughout. In the course of the eighteenth century, several offensive attempts were made against these, such as the capture of Oran in 1732, the attack on Algiers in 1775 and its bombardment in 1783. Even during Ferdinand's reign, an amphibious attack was planned against Algiers in 1749 but was cancelled at the eleventh hour.¹³⁸ Yet, on the whole, the Spanish navy adhered to a defensive strategy in this conflict, based on fending off intrusions. Commanders were thus regularly involved in small actions and skirmishes with Barbary privateers but their main priorities in these were to safeguard their own ships and resources as far as possible. This did not prevent there being many successes. In 1751, for example, the Capitán de Navío Pedro Stuart y Portugal (1720–89), in command of the *Dragón* (60), and Capitán de Navío Luis de Córdoba y Córdoba (1706–96), in command of the *América* (60), fought and destroyed the Algerian *Danzig* (60) and chased away the *Castillo Nuevo* (54) in a fierce action that lasted from 28 November to 2 December.¹³⁹ In June 1758, the squadron of Isidoro Garcia de Postigo y del Prado (1703–67), consisting of the ships *Soberano* (68), *Vencedor* (68) and *Héctor* (68), defeated and sank two Algerian ships of 60 and 40 guns.¹⁴⁰ Both were notable successes in which the naval commanders acted with daring and courage, but on both occasions the Spanish were challenging an enemy whom they outnumbered or outgunned. This was a stricture put upon them by the Court which insisted that commanders not challenge superior forces.

The forcefulness with which this was imposed can be understood from an exchange between Arriaga, as naval minister, and Teniente de Navío Joseph

Flon y Sesma, commander of the xebec squadron for 1755.¹⁴¹ Flon, as captain of the *Aventurero* (30) and in overall command of the xebecs *Catalan*, *Garzota*, *Ibicenco* and *Gávilan*, defeated three Algerian vessels on 16 April 1755 – a notable victory. While being ordered back to sea following this action, Flon was instructed to be very careful and to keep close to coasts and anchorages where he could take refuge since he could not equal the five Algerian xebecs that were known to be near the Balearics. If he did encounter these, he could try to reinforce his squadron with vessels and men from Mallorca and, if he succeeded, then challenge them but otherwise he was to avoid an encounter. He could not deviate from his orders 'even if he had reliable information that promised greater success'.¹⁴² Emboldened by his recent victory, Flon asked if his squadron could be reinforced with men and an additional vessel straight away so that he could attack the Algerian xebecs directly without having to seek reinforcements. When this was rejected, Flon repeated his request, explaining that Arriaga must know how 'all manoeuvres to flee the enemy will further stimulate their daring and tarnish the person in command'.¹⁴³ Arriaga only reiterated his original orders and added that Flon, being reassured that the King had 'as much faith in your courage as in your conduct', was to avoid exposing his forces unnecessarily and to keep in mind that 'squadrons do not refuse to sail with four to six ships even when they are aware that there are squadrons of eight, ten or twelve ships at sea'.¹⁴⁴ With this, Flon had no choice but to do as instructed.

This, then, was the command structure of the Spanish navy in European waters and the doctrine that the Court imposed on its naval officers through it. These officers were subject to a chain of command which, even in the case of their most mundane operations, began with the naval minister at Court, and through him the King, and provided specific instruction leaving little room for manoeuvre. Their activities were further controlled by a detailed code of conduct in the form of the *Ordenanzas*. The doctrine was mission-orientated, with great emphasis placed upon the navy's role in the crown's communications with its territories. At the same time, a defensive grand strategy existed in which the size of the fleet had diplomatic value and for which reason it was expected to act defensively like a 'fleet in being', so protective attitudes prevailed in relation to fighting at sea, and these stressed the safeguarding of resources. Naval leadership capabilities in squadron commanders and ship captains within this framework, however, remain significant.

With France and Britain at war from 1756, Spain pursued 'armed neutrality', as it had been conceived by the Marqués de la Ensenada to function within a state of European conflict, but intrinsic flaws began to emerge. Spanish neutrality and its navy were not such compelling diplomatic tools that Britain and France indulged Spanish interests against their own. Moreover, if France lost the war, which by 1759 seemed likely, there was nothing to prevent Britain attacking Spain without the prospect of French intervention.¹⁴⁵ As pertains to naval leadership, however, the navy was expected to enforce Spanish sovereignty and neutrality in its own

waters. For this reason, the peninsula's squadrons were reinforced with additional ships, and commanders instructed to intervene to protect neutrality and trade from French or British interference. At the same time, though, they were to continue routine relations with warships from these countries, avoiding situations which could inadvertently bring Spain into the conflict.¹⁴⁶

The difficulties with this soon became evident. In sailing the frigate *Palas* from Cartagena in the Mediterranean to Ferrol in November 1756, for example, Capitán de Navío Agustín de Idiáquez was stopped three times by British ships checking that his was not a French frigate. Doing so, and the manner in which it was done, was considered a violation of Spanish formalities and a challenge to Spain's sovereignty in its own waters. As a result, Idiáquez asked Arriaga, the naval minister, for a 'fixed instruction so that with its literal observation commanders can avoid acting wrongly and preserve the honour of the national flag.'¹⁴⁷

Once at Ferrol, command of the *Palas* was transferred for patrolling between Cape Ortegal and Vigo to Vicente González-Valor de Bassecourt, Marqués González (1721–62), who would later become known for his heroic death at the siege of Havana. Francisco de Orozco, Comandante General at Ferrol, forwarded the instructions he intended to give González to Arriaga, asking if they conformed to the current strategy. These Arriaga, in turn, passed to Ricardo Wall (1694–1777), Ferdinand's minister for Foreign Affairs and then chief minister in the Spanish government, asking if what they instructed 'is in agreement with the current system' because there was no 'fixed rule.'¹⁴⁸ Four days later, Arriaga wrote that the instructions were to be modified so that there was less chance of them causing a break with France and Britain. Rather than escort into its ports ships and goods that had potentially been illegally seized by privateers or naval vessels of either nation, only Spanish ships flying Spanish colours at the time they were taken could be escorted to its ports and then, only if they had been taken by privateers. If the ships that seized the vessel were naval ships, then only a protest could be launched, and if the *Palas* was outnumbered by either naval ships or privateers then it was to do nothing.¹⁴⁹

And yet, future instructions continued to press upon naval officers that they should make 'the King's flag and coasts be respected as they should be' by Britain and France.¹⁵⁰ This is what Andrés Reggio y Brachiforte (1692–1780) was ordered to do while in command of a grand squadron that was deployed in the Atlantic in 1758 partly to meet the incoming *flota* and partly as a show of force against the warring powers. When the Conde de Vegaflorida, his deputy, and in command of the division guarding the entrance to Cádiz Bay, complained that British warships were deliberately harassing shipping just beyond gunshot of him, thus making it against his instructions to react, he asked if something could be done. The answer from Court, however, was merely to follow his existing instructions.¹⁵¹

Thus while Ferdinand VI's government was asking its naval commanders to enforce neutrality in Spanish waters, it was also leaving them hamstrung as

to how to do so. They, meanwhile, were conscious of this contradiction and repeatedly sought clarification. They did so working within the existing system that made specific instructions from Court necessary, especially when proposing a more aggressive stance that could cause the loss of naval resources. Ultimately it was the Court that had the decision-making capacity and it failed to respond to the strategic flaw that its naval officers had signalled, but the situation shows that these officers, nevertheless, needed to command Spain's ships with an understanding of the strategy.

At a tactical level too, courage, the determination to fight (within the right context), seamanship and tactical creativity, as well as coordination and communication between commanders, were vital naval leadership qualities, as demonstrated in the frequent skirmishes with North African privateers. One such instance is provided by the Cartagena xebec squadron, in an action that lasted from 29 September to 2 October 1753.¹⁵² Having gathered intelligence that enemy xebecs were harassing shipping near the Straits of Gibraltar, the *Garzota* (commanded by Martin de Ortega), *Gávilan* (Francisco de Vera) and *Aventurero* (Martin de Lastarria) sailed to the area and there discovered an Algerian vessel. In attempting to catch it, it became evident that it would out-sail them, so Ortega, who was in overall command, signalled to continue the chase but simultaneously raised the Algerian standard and veered his vessel to act as a lure. This was understood by Vera and Lastarria who immediately followed suit. The plan succeeded as the vessel turned and realised its mistake only once it reached them before attempting to escape once more. The distance closed, the chase continued with fighting into the night but both the *Aventurero* and *Gávilan* fell behind to repair broken masts and lost sight of the *Garzota*, which in the end only rejoined the group on 3 October.

The following day the *Gávilan* and *Aventurero* resumed the pursuit but calm seas made it unlikely they would reach the xebec before it reached the North African coast so at about midday they turned for the rendezvous at Torremolinos. Then, on the afternoon of 1 October, two Algerian xebecs were seen sailing towards them. Thinking that they could entice these to attempt a boarding that night and then catch them off guard, Vera and Lastarria agreed on a ruse to send off their launches noticeably full of men making it appear that, intimidated by the Algerians, they were abandoning ship. The launches were, in fact, to return quietly after dark. Meanwhile those who remained on board the *Gávilan* and *Aventurero* were armed, at their stations and divided into four-hour watches to ensure the men got as much rest as possible. Unfortunately for these commanders, those on the Algerian xebecs were evidently not fooled and did not approach until the following morning.

During the fighting on 2 October, the Algerians attempted to board first the *Gávilan* followed by the *Aventurero* but they were fought off with each Spanish xebec coming to the other's aid. Following a long gunnery and musketry battle, the severely damaged Algerian xebecs decided to abandon the fight in

the early afternoon but were followed by the *Gávilan* and *Aventurero*, the gun battle continuing throughout. During this phase of the action, Vera sent his launch to help tow the *Aventurero* and moderated his own sail knowing that the *Aventurero* was a slower sailor and their instructions required that they remain grouped. The skirmish continued for several hours after this but the chase was called off once the *Gávilan* had completely exhausted its ammunition. The Algerian xebecs escaped but were severely damaged.

Both commanders praised the courage of their officers and men, and made recommendations for the future in their official reports. Lastarria in the *Aventurero* advised that eight-pounder bow chasers would be more suitable than three-pounders and that he had had insufficient men, which had forced him to choose between firing the guns and handling the ship. Vera in the *Gávilan* commented that despite his men being very raw he felt confident that he could train them up soon but that he had been issued with the insufficient amount of only 20 rounds per gun. Actions such as these, though seemingly small-scale and insignificant, are representative of when fighting at sea was permissible and the manner in which it could be carried out.

Seamanship, in both its theoretical and practical application, was accorded great significance as a feature of naval leadership in the Spanish navy. Education at the Academia de Guardias Marinas attempted to combine the British and French models in order to provide cadets with the academic knowledge to understand the workings of a sailing ship as well as give practical experience.¹⁵³ Greater emphasis was placed on the production of gentlemen officers illustrative of Spain's standing relative to the Enlightenment and the scientific revolution, but small detachments of students from the Academy were regularly sent as midshipmen on board Spain's warships, and applicants to it were encouraged first to serve in the Order of St John's galleys in Malta in order to prepare them for a life at sea.¹⁵⁴ The skills they learnt were tested throughout their careers as they were required to report and explain to the Court the sailing properties of the ships on which they served. This was especially the case during times such as the 1750s when the fleet was being substantially expanded – 48 new ships of the line were added to it in the 13 years of Ferdinand VI's reign – and a new system of naval construction was being introduced.¹⁵⁵ In addition, the Spanish navy, like many other fleets, had chronic manning difficulties and these were further exacerbated by a recruitment system that meant men served only short periods at sea and crews were constantly changing.¹⁵⁶ Complaints that the men were 'useless, most of them being very youthful, raised in the rivers in the practice of fishing, ignorant of how to handle themselves on the deck of a ship, manoeuvre one or climb a spar' were not uncommon and so, much pressure was put upon naval officers to instil seamanship skills in their crews.¹⁵⁷

There are at present few known accounts of life at sea for ordinary seamen in the eighteenth-century Spanish navy, making it difficult to judge naval leadership from their perspective. Further research on the numerous petitions for

pensions or employment preserved at the National Archives in Simancas, along with their accompanying references from commanding officers, could go some way towards filling this gap.¹⁵⁸ These petitions and references, however, served an official function and generally followed a specific format. Another source useful in understanding the leadership provided by officers to ordinary seamen is the previously mentioned *Ordenanzas de Su Magestad para el Gobierno Militar, Político y Económico de Su Armada Naval* issued in 1748. Since these regulations provided a code of conduct for those serving in the Spanish navy, they show if not necessarily the reality then at least the ideal of naval leadership with which officers were required to provide their subordinates. From this it is possible to see that naval officers were expected to exercise many of the characteristics that are today considered vital for good leadership. It was the naval commander's duty to know the state of his ships and men, and to ensure that his subordinates knew what was expected of them. Officers had to ensure that the men were properly instructed and trained in their duties. And the men had a right to be governed justly and well, as dictated by the *Ordenanzas* in terms of daily routine, diet, discipline, etc. Any perceived violations of this code experienced by the men could be reported by them to the Comandante General of a Department who would then investigate the officers involved.

Another feature of naval leadership which was pertinent to the Spanish navy was the significant role played by the concept of the naval hero. Spain was not involved in any large-scale fleet engagements during the 1750s and therefore there were few opportunities for heroics, though commanders in small actions, such as Stuart y Portugal, who was promoted to Jefe de Escuadra for his victory over the *Danzig*, were much extolled. On the other hand, the conflicts to either side of this period, the War of Jenkins' Ear and the Seven Years' War, provide notable examples. Perhaps the most famous is Blas de Lezo y Olavarrieta (1689–1741) for his heroic leadership in the defence of Cartagena de Indias in 1741, which cost him his life while succeeding in repulsing the British attack. Also lauded for successfully withstanding the British was Juan José Navarro at the Battle of Toulon (Cape Sicié) in 1744, for which he was rewarded with the title Marqués de la Victoria, which, when translated into English as 'Marquis of Victory', becomes more revealing. In the Seven Years' War, Luis Vicente de Velasco (1711–62) and the previously mentioned Marqués González fought unsuccessfully but died courageously defending Morro Castle at Havana in 1762. Their valour was celebrated in various ways: medals were struck; their portraits were displayed at the Real Academia de San Fernando, and a state-run literary competition to commemorate this was won by Nicolás Fernández de Moratín (1737–80). In his *Egloga*, Velasco and González fight courageously while desperately outnumbered, both knowingly giving up their lives in the process, so that the British would not be handed 'victory cheap'.¹⁵⁹

No mention is made in Moratín's pastoral poem, however, of the inept Gutierre de Hevia y Valdés, Marqués de Real Transporte (1720–72), under whose

command Velasco and González lost their lives. On this occasion Real Transporte mishandled his command through his own personal failings: by making rudimentary tactical errors, consistently disregarding the opinions of his subordinate officers, and displaying a lack of personal courage. These failures saw him face a Consejo de Guerra on his return to Spain on seven counts of failing to follow the *Ordenanzas de Marina*, which resulted in the relatively light sentence of suspension from the navy and banishment from Court for ten years.¹⁶⁰ This was reversed within the year and he was reinstated in the navy. The difficulty with attributing Real Transporte's failings as solely personal, however, is that many of his mistakes were not only tolerated by the organisation in which he served but were even the product of it. Throughout his command at Havana, Real Transporte was convinced that with fewer forces than his opponents he could do nothing at sea; his decisions were motivated by the need to protect his forces and, despite the distance between Cuba and Spain, he still sought specific instructions from Madrid.¹⁶¹ All three of these factors would have been familiar to Spanish naval commanders operating in European waters, which Real Transporte had of course been from 1756 to 1761.

At the same time, however, this same organisation produced talented naval leaders such as Juan Francisco de Lángara y Huarte (1736–1806), Luis de Córdoba y Córdoba (1706–96) and José de Mazarredo y Salazar de Muñatones Cortázar (1745–1812). These officers could operate within the Spanish system to advantage, especially once the aim of expanding the navy to threaten British naval supremacy when combined with the French finally materialised during the American War of Independence (1775–83).

During Ferdinand's reign and the years during which the policy of 'armed neutrality' was being pursued from 1748 to 1761, the navy was run in European waters through a highly-centralised command structure. Using this, the state imposed a defensive strategy which, by focusing on the protection of naval resources, further limited the independence of action that naval officers were allowed. The behaviour of squadron commanders and ship captains during these years reveals that these factors did have a conditioning effect on them. Conscious that acting without instruction or being responsible for loss or damage was viewed as suspect by the Crown and likely to make naval leaders liable, especially when perceived as the result of unnecessary risks, commanders tended to err on the side of caution on occasions when they did have the strength to achieve greater results. Despite this, though it seems self-evident, characteristics more frequently associated with good naval leadership in fleets employing more aggressive strategies and flexible command structures, such as strategic understanding, tactical skill, seamanship, personal leadership and courage, were required all the same in a fleet with a non-flexible command structure and defensive strategy.¹⁶² Perhaps this helps explain why the Spanish navy failed to punish and remove incompetent commanders like Real Transporte but still fostered those with greater naval leadership capability such as Lángara,

Córdoba and Mazarredo. Despite a number of recent significant biographies of Spanish naval officers, there is still much that is uncertain. Who were the naval officers beyond the mere facts of where they were born, served and died? What were their personal opinions about leadership, the navy and the strategies they followed? What leadership and patronage networks did they belong to? And how were they judged as leaders by those who served under them? If this information were available to place alongside our present understanding of the command structure and the strategies practised, it would be possible to obtain a more nuanced picture of naval leadership in the eighteenth-century Spanish navy.

