

ENGLISH LINE OF BATTLE

29 March 1653

By the Right Honorable the Generals and Admirals of the Fleet, Instructions for the Better Ordering of the Fleet in Fighting

1. Upon the discovery of a fleet, receiving a sign from the general (which is to be striking the general's ensign) and making a weft, two frigates appointed out of each squadron are to make sail and stand with them so nigh as they may conveniently, the better to gain a knowledge of them what they are, and of what quality, and how many fireships and others, and in what posture the fleet is; which being done the frigates are to speak together and conclude in that report they are to give and accordingly repair to their respective squadrons and commanders-in-chief, and not to engage if the enemy exceed them in number, except it shall appear to them on the place they have the advantage.
2. At sight of the said fleet the vice admiral, or he that commands in chief in the second place and his squadron, as also the rear admiral, or he that commands in chief in the third place and his squadron are to make what sail they can to come up with the admiral on each wing, the vice admiral on the right wing, and the rear admiral on the left wing, leaving a competent distance for the admiral's squadron if the wind will permit and there be searoom enough.
3. As soon as they shall see the general engage, or make a signal by shooting off two guns and putting a red flag over the fore topmast-head, that then each squadron shall take the best advantage they can to engage with the enemy next unto them; and in order thereunto all the ships of every squadron shall endeavor to keep in a line with the chief unless the chief be maimed or otherwise disabled (which God forbid!), whereby the said ship that wears the flag should not come in to do the service which is requisite. Then every ship of the said squadron shall endeavor to keep in a line with the admiral, or he that commands in chief next unto him, and nearest the enemy.
4. If any squadron shall happen to be overcharged or distressed, the next squadron or ships are speedily to make toward their relief and assistance upon a signal given them; which signal shall be, in the admiral's squadron a pennant on the fore topmast-head, the vice admiral (or he that commands in chief in the second place) a pennant on the main topmast-head, the rear admiral's squadron the like.
5. If in case any ship shall be distressed or disabled for lack of masts, shot under water, or otherwise in danger of sinking or taking, he or they thus distressed shall make a sign by the weft of his jack or ensign, and those next him are strictly required to relieve him.
6. That if any ship shall be necessitated to bear away from the enemy to stop a leak or mend what else is amiss, which cannot be otherwise repaired, he is to put out a pennant on the mizzen yard-arm or ensign staff, whereby the rest of the ships may have notice what it is for; and if it should be that the admiral or any flagship should do so, the ships of the fleet or the respective squadrons are to endeavor to keep up in a line as close as they can between him and the enemy, having always one eye to defend him in case the enemy should come to annoy him in that condition.
7. In case the admiral should have the wind of the enemy, and that other ships of the fleet are to windward of the admiral, then upon hoisting up a blue flag at the mizzen yard, or the mizzen topmast, every such ship then is to bear up into his wake and grain, upon severest punishment. In case the admiral be to leeward of the enemy, and his fleet or any part thereof to leeward of him, to the end such ships to leeward may come up into the line with their admiral, if he shall put abroad a flag as before and bear up, none that are to leeward are to bear up, but to keep his or their luff to gain the wake or grain.
8. If the admiral will have any of the ships to endeavor by tacking or otherwise to gain the wind of the enemy, he will put abroad a red flag at his spritsail, topmast shrouds, forestay or main topmast stay. He that first discovers the signal shall make sail and hoist and lower his sail or ensign, that the rest of the ships may take notice of it and follow.
9. If we put out a red flag on the mizzen shrouds, or mizzen yardarm, we will have all the flagships to come up in the grain and wake of us.

10. If in time of fight God shall deliver any of the enemy's ships into our hand, special care is to be taken to save their men as the present state of our condition will permit in such a case, but that the ships be immediately destroyed, by sinking or burning the same, so that our own ships be not disabled or any work interrupted by the departing of men or boats from the ships; and this we require all commanders to be more than mindful of.
11. None shall fire upon any ship of the enemy that is laid aboard by any of our own ships, but so that he may be sure he endamage not his friend.
12. That it is the duty of commanders and masters of all small frigates, ketches, and smacks belonging to the several squadrons to know the fireships belonging to the enemy, and accordingly by observing their motions to do their utmost to cut off their boats if possible, or, if opportunity be, that they lay them aboard, seize, or destroy them. And to this purpose they are to keep to windward of their squadrons in time of service. But in case they cannot prevent the fireships [coming] on board by clapping between us and them (which by all means possible they are to endeavor), that then in such cases they show themselves men in such an exigent and steer on board them, and with their boats, grapnels, and other means clear them from us and destroy them; which service (if honorably done) according to its merit shall be rewarded, but the neglect severely to be called to account.
13. That the fireships in the several squadrons endeavor to keep the wind; and they with the small frigates to be as near the great ships as they can, to attend the signal from the general or commander-in-chief, and to act accordingly. If the general hoist up a white flag on the mizzen yardarm or topmast-head, all small frigates in his squadron are to come under his stern for orders.
14. That if any engagement by day shall continue until night and the general shall please to anchor, then upon signal given they all anchor in as good order as may be, the signal being as in the "Instructions for Sailing"; and if the general please to retreat without anchoring, the signal to be firing two guns, the one so nigh the other as the report may be distinguished, and within three minutes after to do the like with two guns more.

J.S. Corbett, ed. *Fighting Instructions 1530–1816* (London: 1903): 99–104.