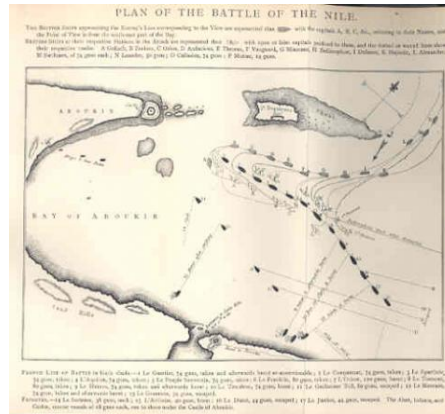




In his quest to gain more and more territory for France - and to limit Britain's growing power in India - Napoleon Bonaparte sent his naval fleet to Egypt. In late July of 1798, about seventeen French ships were anchored at Abu Qir Bay (located on the Mediterranean coast about 20 miles / 32 km from Alexandria), near the mouth of the Nile River.

British ships, under the command of Horatio Nelson, surprised the French when they unexpectedly located the whereabouts of the anchored vessels. Nelson immediately ordered an attack.

Although the French commander - Vice-Admiral François-Paul Brueys D'Aigalliers - believed that his ships were situated in a very good defensive position, Nelson took advantage of the situation. He split his forces in two, trapping some of France's warships. After a three-hour battering, nine French ships of the line were forced to surrender.

When British reinforcements arrived on the scene - on August 1st, 1798 - the Royal Navy was able to renew its attack. Destroying many opposing vessels, a decisive moment of the battle occurred around 10 PM that night when the French flagship L'Orient exploded. The French commander was on board the ruined, burning ship. He was one of the casualties.

With Admiral Brueys now dead, surviving French ships tried to break out of the bay. Those efforts were minimally successful with two ships of the line and two frigates able to escape.

The battle was not just a victory for Horatio Nelson and the Royal Navy. Its results marked a turning-point in the war because momentum on the sea had shifted from France to Britain.

For the rest of the war, the Royal Navy dominated the Mediterranean.

Credits:

Image of the "Plan of the Battle of the Nile," online courtesy Line of Battle.org

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