

TomPaine.com **common sense**

A Journal of Opinion

TomPaine.com  
Needs YOU! [click here](#)

- ★ Take <sup>on</sup> the News
- ★ History
- ★ Opinion
- ★ Features
- ★ <sup>who</sup> We Are
- ★ Archives
- ★ Contact

search

Receive our newsletter  
by typing your email  
address below.

subscribe

## SHOULD WE HOLD MILITARY LEADERS UP TO CIVILIAN SOCIAL STANDARDS?

A Controversial Essay

*Henry Butterfield Ryan is a Life Member of Clare Hall, Cambridge, England and an associate of Georgetown University's Institute for the Study of Diplomacy.*



[Subscribe to our mailing list.](#)



[Respond to this article.](#)



[Email the text of this article to yourself or to a friend.](#)



[Get a print-friendly version of this article.](#)

"Kiss me, Hardy." That's what the man said, or so we are told. Admiral Horatio Nelson; he had just beat the stuffing out of Napoleon's navy at Trafalgar, did more than anyone except the Duke of Wellington to save the Brits from café au lait and croissants in the morning and God knows what other French abominations, got himself mortally wounded in the effort, and what were his last words? "Kiss me, Hardy."

Now, I don't want to wallow in the implications of that, but let's just think about it for a moment. Some might say it was a last delirious fantasy about his dear Emma Hamilton. He was telling her how to kiss him -- "kiss me hardy" as opposed perhaps to "kiss me flimsy." But that won't fly. For one thing the grammar is all wrong.

Yes, ladies and gentlemen, especially all you in uniform who are having so much kissy trouble these days, let your minds boggle over this episode. "Hardy" was not an adverb, Hardy was an officer under Nelson's command and he was very much of the male persuasion.

The British government had already lavished a fortune on Nelson as a reward for his victories. Governments used to do that. And before long they would build an enormous great column in the middle of London with his statue on the top, so high only the pigeons could get to it. It would be set in the middle of a square named after the great battle -- Trafalgar.

Now, let's contort history for a while, just for fun. Remember that the Americans were also at war with the British. We call it the War of 1812 and claim that we won it, despite considerable evidence to the contrary. But let's suppose we really did win it, and win it big time. In fact, let's suppose we took over the British government, including the navy. And one more thing, let's imagine that old kissy-puss Nelson survived.

He would very soon wish he hadn't!

There would, of course, be an inquiry.

I imagine it headed by Admiral Chesty Hardthumper, U.S. Navy, 107th in his class at Annapolis, noted for wearing two pearl-handled grappling hooks. Grappling was a naval tactic then and not to be confused with contemporary groping.

I imagine Hardthumper is joined in the inquiry by Admiral Brunhilda Smythe (I said we were going to contort history, didn't I?).

"Mr. Nelson, have you any defense?" asks Hardthumper.

"Admiral Nelson, if you don't mind? Defense about what?" comes the reply reeking with attitude.

"Are you pretending you damn well don't know the charges?" Hardthumper snorts, rattling the grappling hooks.

Well, to keep it short, Nelson indeed pretends he doesn't know the charge and Hardthumper points out that Nelson's entire crew heard him make an improper sexual suggestion to a subordinate officer, a case of egregious sexual harassment by anybody's standards.

Nelson says something irrelevant like, "My good man, might I remind you that I destroyed the French navy for king and country."

He is told in no uncertain terms not to take high and mighty airs with a duly authorized and established board of inquiry of the United States Navy to which he now must answer.

He says something sullen like, "A pox on the United States Navy." Whereupon Hardthumper informs him that that sort of attitude won't help him one little bit.

Admiral Smythe adds that she really didn't want to see charges brought. She hoped he would be demobilized and slink home quietly, but then she heard that he was being considered for another command. Well, that just couldn't be. Not for a man like Nelson. The whole dreadful thing with Mrs. Hamilton was reason to cashier him ages ago, which certainly would have happened in a navy with any moral standards, she says, but this "kiss me thing was more than any fighting force could tolerate.

And this time it wasn't even a woman!

An overt homosexual act! Alright, if some people are going to be oriented little that way, perhaps the Navy can look the other way, but before a whole ship's company, and the command ship at that. The mind reels.

"Madam," says Nelson, who still doesn't quite get it, "whatever ship I am is the command ship."

"Was, buster, was," puts in Hardthumper, smashing a grappling hook into the desk. "Your command days are over. You are being mustered out with the rank of seaman third class, you perverted little -- "

"Admiral, control yourself," says Smythe. "You're very close to making an improper remark to an enlisted man."

Nelson roars and rants, but all to no avail. And then he says, "And what about my column?"

"Ah, the column," says Hardthumper. "There are a couple of thoughts abc that. One is to top it off with a statue of John Paul Jones, the other is to t it off with John Paul Jones with a pigeon carved on his head, sort of a pre-emptive strike."

"But I won the battle; I saved Britain from the French."

"Ah," notes Smythe, "but not from the Americans. I think that's all, Seaman Nelson. Good day." With that, two United States Marines drag ou Nelson, who is spluttering incoherently.

"Well, a nasty business," says Smythe, "but it had to be done."

"Damn right, that (bleep)."

"Admiral, watch your language."

"Sorry, my dear," says Hardthumper. "Sometimes, I get carried away."

"Try to control yourself."

"That's difficult when I'm near you."

"Admiral," says Smythe, "there is something strange on my knee."

"Yes, I know. Kiss me, sweetie."

"What?" she screams, leaping up and upsetting the table. "Do you know what you are? You are toast, that's what you are, Seaman Hardthumper. Marines! Marines! Oh God, where are they when you need them?"

[TAKE ON THE NEWS](#) | [HISTORY](#) | [OPINION](#)  
[FEATURES](#) | [OP AD](#) | [WHO WE ARE](#)  
[CONTACT](#) | [ARCHIVES](#)

© 1999-2000 The Florence Fund