

Heroes of Trafalgar

*Nelson's ships are sailing straining at the breeze
battling wind and tide ploughing Spanish seas
seeking out the enemy to cut off their escape
and bring them into battle beyond Trafalgar Cape
it will be glory or dishonour before the coming night
soon there will be gunfire for the enemy is in sight*

*at Victory's masthead pennants fly
fluttering bravely against the sky
as Nelson signals to his men
expressing his faith in them once again
that 'England expects' them on this day
'to do their duty' in the coming fray*

*the ships advance and churn the waters
as drummer boys beat 'to quarters'
whilst the shrilling notes of bosun's calls
echo around the oaken walls
summonsing men to their battle stations
who fill the air with imprecations
gunners muster at the long guns
prepare the matches, remove the tompions
royal marines prime their muskets
surgeons arrange their saws and lancets
shipwrights prepare for battle damage
all hands ready to show their courage*

*galley fires are damped and doused
all loose objects stowed and housed
the chain of command is the status quo
as orders are passed to and fro
lieutenants report the state of readiness
warrant officers direct with steadiness
midshipmen and petty officers too
all support and steady the crew*

*a final signal orders closer action
and all expect a fierce reaction
then into battle with muttered prayer
as death and terror ride the air
when cannonballs and splinters fly
the first of many begin to die
but the British sailors hold their nerve
and with dedication the gunners serve
through acrid smoke and thunderous sound
defiant screams and shouts abound
as the men respond and give their all
heeding Nelson's rallying call*

*the enemy's fire begins to take its toll
as they discharge their guns on the upward roll
firing madly without check
hurling spars and rigging onto the deck
the British guns respond in kind
and with disciplined salvos they begin to grind
the enemy ships into shattered wrecks
discharging death into their lower decks
the long guns roar, the carronades crash
their dual purpose to destroy and smash
each mighty blast like a deathly knell
erupting forth from the depths of hell
accompanied by shrieks and moans
the smell of blood and shattered bones*

*with great ferocity the conflict rages
as the fighting reaches it's critical stages
with neither side giving quarter
whilst trying to inflict the greater slaughter
but British might begins to tell
their long experience serves them well
with disciplined fire they continue to pound
the enemy ships round by round
Nelson's tactics showed the way
his men determined, carry the day
and though the fighting is almost done
a terrible tragedy is yet to come*

*on Victory's deck Lord Nelson proud
stands defiant his head unbowed
slight of stature and battle-scarred
his personal safety of small regard
a prime target for that musket ball
a tiny missile, no cannonball
which strikes him down in his hour of victory
a bitter-sweet moment in naval history*

*Collingwood takes commands of the fleet
as the French and Spanish accept defeat
their ships destroyed, burned and scattered
their men disheartened, crushed and battered
with British victory quite assured
a triumph of arms and skill secured
to the victors, the glory and freedom of the main
to the vanquished nothing but the memories and their pain*

*the carronades at last are silent the cannons have ceased to roar
the gun-decks no longer clamour with the cacophony of war
as normal life returns between the decks and through the ranks
all souls who survived express their silent thanks
and take time to nurse the wounded, time to count the cost
time to tend the fallen and say farewell to the lost
as the British fleet turns westward toward the setting sun
a fleet that is manned by heroes each man his duty done
but the butcher's bill is high when all is done and said
they're returning home to England with Nelson lying dead*