

Edward Vernon (naval officer, 1684-1757)

Participation in the War of the Austrian Succession: *Battle of Porto Bello (War of Jenkin's Ear, shortly before the outbreak of war), Expedition to Cartagena de Indias*

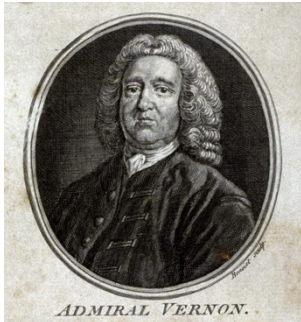


Figure 1: Portrait of Edward 'Old Grog' Vernon (1684-1757) by an unknown artist

Edward Vernon, born at Westminster on 12 November 1684 and died at Nacton on 30 October 1757, was a naval officer who rose through the ranks of the British Navy to admiral of the white. Shortly before the outbreak of the *War of the Austrian Succession* in 1740, he captured the Spanish town of Porto Bello (Panama) as part of the *War of Jenkins' Ear* on 20 and 21 November 1739. This achievement made him a national hero, which means that he was honoured as a freeman and his birthday became a British day of celebration.¹ He himself also seemed to be proud of his success, as in 1740 his poem *A new Ballad on the taking of Porto-Bello* was published, in

which Vernon praised himself. In the first of the eleven stanzas he wrote: *"Come attend British Boys, / I'll make you rejoice, / I will tell you, how Vernon did scare, / PORTO-BELLO the Strong, / Lay'd it's Castle along, / And all this, with but six Men of War."*² The eighth stanza continues: *"Now their Castle of Glory / You have levell'd before you, / To its Title yourself may pretend, / It is made your own Prize, / And where e're your Sail flies, / Shall on you, noble, Vernon attend."*³ Undoubtedly, this degree of self-confidence also contributed to the end of Vernon's career in the Royal Navy, as determined by the Admiralty on 11 April 1746. Prior to his dismissal, he had not only frequently complained about his rank, bad treatment and discrimination, but also published numerous correspondences with the Admiralty.

A few years before his dismissal from the Navy, Vernon took part in the *War of the Austrian Succession*, or more precisely, the already subsiding *War of Jenkins' Ear*. During this time, he commanded an expedition against Cartagena de Indias in cooperation with the army commander Lord Cathcart and attacked the fortress unsuccessfully on 10 April 1741.⁴ In whole, the expedition lasted from March to May 1741.⁵ Further attacks against Cuba and Panama in the same year were also unsuccessful. Vernon received his last great contract in the Navy on 8 August 1745, when he was sent to the downs, now already in the position of an admiral of the white, "where the latest intelligence

¹ cf. Harding, Richard: Vernon, Edward, 03.01.2008, in: Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/28237>.

² Vernon, Edward: *A new Ballad on the taking of Porto-Bello*, London 1740, p. 3.

³ *ibid.* p. 8.

⁴ Oxford Dictionary: Vernon: Edward [internet recourse].

⁵ Tucker, Spencer Coakley (Ed.): *A Global Chronology of Conflict. From the Ancient World to the Modern Middle East Vol. I*, Santa Barbara 2010, p. 737.

suggested French invasion forces were assembling to support the Jacobite rising in Scotland.”⁶ In addition to his work in the Royal Navy, he also held the post of Member of Parliament for Ipswich from 1741 until his death.⁷

Transcribed poem: A new Ballad on the taking of Porto-Bello by Admiral Vernon

<p>I. Come attend British Boys, I'll make you rejoice, I will tell you, how Vernon did scare, PORTO-BELLO the Strong, Lay'd it's Castle along, And all this, with but six Men of War.</p>	<p>V. "Then my Lads, have no dread Of this Hectoring Blade, For I'm certain, tho' sent from, so far, He Introductions has none, To let Fly one poor Gun, Neither he, nor his six Men of War."</p>	<p>IX. Of this Victory rare You secur'd the best Share For the Spanish King's Dollars and Pels, You most gallantly gave To your Mariners Brave And with the Glory rewarded yourself.</p>
<p>II. When he first came in Sight Cries the Governour "Shite! From this Fellow what have we to fear? Did not Hosier the Brave, Hither fail to his Grave, Tho's with more than Thrice six Men of war"</p>	<p>VI. But soon Vernon's hot Fire Prov'd the Spaniard at Liar, To Capitulate, soon is his Story; And to save his Retreat, Sees his Castles of iron and Glory.</p>	<p>X. Now, old England, tho' long Thou hast been but a Song Of Reproach to the meanest of Nations, Tho' thy Flag has been sham'd, And thy Strength has been maim'd By our Depts and our Negotiations;</p>
<p>III. "Thirteen Captains outright, Subalterns, a damn'd Sight, And of Sailors each one a stout Fellow, Full three Thousand and odd Perish'd, Rotten by G--d. Without firing against PORTO-BELLO.</p>	<p>VII. Whence these Fortresses came Such high Titles to claim I forbear to recite in this Place, Tho' our swaggering Foes, One might fairly suppose. Did assume them on Hosier's Disgrace</p>	<p>XI. Be no more in the Dumps Thou may'st still stir thy Stumps, And recover, for this Contention, I may venture to swear, Thou hast nothing to fear, By St. George, but another Convention.</p>
<p>IV. "Hence our Queen did declare The blue string'd Cavalier Her good Friend, since he serv'd her for well; And did kindly incline His Convention to sign, For his Care to preserve PORTO-BELL."</p>	<p>VIII. Now their Castle of Glory You have levell'd before you, To its Title yourself may pretend, It is made your own Prize, And where e're your Sail flies, Shall on you, noble, Vernon attend.</p>	

Vernon, Edward: A new Ballad on the taking of Porto-Bello by Admiral Vernon, (British Library), London 1740.

Literature:

HARDING, Richard: Vernon, Edward, 03.01.2008, in: Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/28237>.

TUCKER, Spencer Coakley (Ed.): A Global Chronology of Conflict. From the Ancient World to the Modern Middle East Vol. I, Santa Barbara 2010, p. 737.

Sources:

VERNON, Edward: A new Ballad on the taking of Porto-Bello, London 1740.

⁶ Oxford Dictionary: Vernon: Edward [internet recourse].

⁷ cf. *ibid.*