

Dispatches from Onboard the *Victory*

Scott A. M. Ross

Do you know what your problem is? Adherence to an updated ethos.

I can still smell Rudyard Kipling's aftershave on my pillow in the morning.

I saw the sunset glaring through the holes that Dervish spears had driven through Gordon's body until he was held together only by the thinnest strands of sinew and imperium, but I could not look directly into the light and had to squint to make it out.

The self-immolation of *noblesse oblige* will be followed by a meeting of the Weather Underground.

Do you know what your problem is? Self-definition through penetration.

The lines and spars have become tangled, but the clouds of dust over the shore speak of arrows flung against palisades and lumps of metal zipping through animal-hide shields and converting the matter behind into fine red mist and exposed bone.

Hold the target still! I can see your face poking out from behind.

The delegation from North Vietnam have discovered that not only can they not rely on Chinese assurances in their impending campaign, but indeed the whole of French Indochina has been tethered to billions of helium balloons and is now drifting several miles above the Pacific.

The *kulak* has been exterminated so let us prepare the stage for the follow-up act before the applause dies down.

Do you know what your problem is? Unenforced dereliction.

It is a common rumor that the Party has not adequately prepared for a chance of rain or packed enough napkins. Transmission of this rumor is a clear indication of the general decay of moral fiber affecting society at large.

The British Empire has expanded again and has laid claim to a stretch of territory two feet wide and approximately one mile long, situated ten feet above the ground. This new colonial acquisition appears to trace a path from my front door to an office in the Humanities Building and variously terminates in different downtown drinking establishments. Although it has yet to be discussed in national news or foreign policy journals I fear that very soon it will lead to an international row that could raise the specter of nuclear exchange.

Let it never be said that a lack of courage under fire cannot be made up for with an absence of resolve.

Do you know what your problem is? Triumphalism in the face of urban blight.

I went to check the expiration date on the eggs and saw that - save for one in the back - they had all become transmuted into porcelain caricatures of Greek philosophers, British prime ministers and lesser American presidents. The remaining egg had also become a porcelain figure, but this one bore the likeness of Chingiz Khan, and though no trace of movement could be detected among these no-longer-eggs I could not shake the feeling that he was eying the spaces occupied by Plato and Zachary Polk with sinister designs of expansion.

This garment is designed to trap pockets of warm air between flesh and fiber, insulating sensitive skin against potential damage by the elements or intermittent genital contact with outsiders.

I have embraced an ethic of caring, but I refuse to leave my apartment.

Do you know what your problem is? Lack of moral rectitude.

At night I am visited by the apparition of Lord Nelson. Sometimes it is early in his career, and he tells me of the drudgery of convoy duty and his thirst for glory and prestige. Usually he appears as an experienced captain, his empty right shirt sleeve pinned to the breast of his uniform and blind right eye gazing lazily at nothing. He speaks of his frustration after the victory at St Vincent and assures me that history will give him his due. In these cases I confirm that indeed, nobody in my time recalls the earldom unjustly claimed by John Jervis, only that his own quick thinking and daring initiative brilliantly carried the day, but in these instances he seems confused and does not appear to understand what I am telling him. The worst is when I see him in the days after Trafalgar – his hair cut off, clothed only in a shirt, sealed in a cask of brandy for the long voyage home, and though it is concealed from view I can feel the shot hole under his shoulder winking at me in puckered, licentious glee. On these nights he is terrified – he babbles frantically, asking why he is shut up in some container and where is Hardy and where is Collingwood and where has Doctor Beatty gone? On the occasions that I can calm him, and he does not lapse into immovable silence, I try to reassure him. I explain that the battle was won, that Napoleon could never again threaten invasion, that the entire nation found itself unable to celebrate the history-defining victory he had won because the trauma and agony of his death was such that his countrymen could hardly rouse themselves from their grief. What good is that to me, he asks, in a state such as this?

Do you know what your problem is? Mistaking facts for reality.