

= Action of 24 March 1811 =

The Action of 24 March 1811 was a minor naval engagement of the Napoleonic Wars , fought as part of the Royal Navy blockade of the French English Channel ports . By 1811 , Royal Navy control of the French coast was so entrenched that French ships were unable to travel safely even in French territorial waters . In late 1810 , French frigates Elisa and Amazone sailed from Le Havre to join with a larger squadron at Cherbourg , but were intercepted by a British frigate squadron and forced to shelter at Saint @-@ Vaast @-@ la @-@ Hougue . There they came under sustained attack and Elisa was destroyed , Amazone successfully slipping back to Le Havre under cover of darkness . To prevent Amazone from escaping once more , the British blockade squadron was reinforced .

On the evening of 23 March 1811 , Amazone left Le Havre once more , sailing west towards Cherbourg through the night . Escaping the ships watching Le Havre , Amazone was sighted at dawn on 24 March weathering Cape Barfleur by ship of the line HMS Berwick , which pursued the French frigate into a bay 1 nautical mile (1 @.@ 9 km) west of the Phare de Gatteville lighthouse . There Berwick , reinforced by a squadron of smaller ships , attacked Amazone but was unable to approach through the rocks and shoals of the coast . Plans were made overnight to attack the frigate with ship 's boats , but on the following day the French Captain Bernard @-@ Louis Rosseau set his ship on fire to prevent its capture .

= = Action = =

By the autumn of 1810 the Napoleonic Wars had lasted for seven years and the French Navy , over the course of the conflict , had been successively driven from the Atlantic until every French port was watched by a Royal Navy close blockade , ready to attack any French ship which emerged from harbour . In 1809 , the main French fleet at Brest had attempted to break out into open water , only to be driven back and defeated at the Battle of Basque Roads . Much of the French effort at sea subsequently fell on commerce raiders , including privateers and frigate squadrons , often operating from smaller harbours such as those on the Northern coast of France in the English Channel . The two principal raiding ports were Cherbourg and Le Havre in Normandy , each of which maintained squadrons . In 1810 , Cherbourg 's anchorage held two ships of the line and a large , newly built frigate Iphigénie , while the frigates Elisa and Amazone were stationed at Le Havre .

Both ports were watched closely by a blockade squadron detached from the Channel Fleet , including ships of the line off Cherbourg and two frigates , HMS Diana and HMS Niobe , off Le Havre . On 12 November 1810 Elisa and Amazone attempted to break out of Le Havre and join with the squadron at Cherbourg , slipping past the blockade in the darkness . Spotted in the early hours of 13 November , the frigates managed to anchor at the well @-@ defended harbour of Saint @-@ Vaast @-@ la @-@ Hougue , where on 15 November they were attacked by the combined blockade forces from Cherbourg and Le Havre . Although the attack was beaten back , Elisa was too badly damaged to continue the mission and on 27 November Amazone successfully returned to Le Havre without encountering the British forces . Elisa was subsequently driven onshore and destroyed by the British squadron .

= = = Amazone 's journey = = =

Amazone , commanded by Captain Bernard @-@ Louis Rosseau , attempted to sail to Cherbourg again on 23 March 1811 . On this occasion Rosseau successfully evaded the blockade of Le Havre and by dawn on 24 March was weathering the point of Cape Barfleur . As the frigate passed the Phare de Gatteville lighthouse , only a few miles from her destination , she was spotted by a British ship of the line recently sailed from the British fleet anchorage at St Helens , the 74 @-@ gun HMS Berwick under Captain James Macnamara , then sailing approximately 12 nautical miles (22 km) offshore . Macnamara took Berwick in pursuit , seeking to cut off Rosseau 's advance , and the French captain managed to evade Berwick by taking shelter in a small bay 1 nautical mile (1 @.@

9 km) west of the lighthouse .

Navigation through the rocks of the bay had been difficult , and as she entered the bay Amazone 's rudder had been torn away , rendering the ship unmanoeuvrable . With Amazone trapped , Macnamara called up the rest of the Cherbourg squadron , the frigate HMS Amelia under Captain Frederick Paul Irby and the brig @-@ sloops HMS Goshawk under Commander James Lilburn and HMS Hawk under Commander Henry Bouchier . This force was required to remain a substantial distance offshore as the rocky coastline posed a considerable danger to the British ships . Macnamara 's plan was to wait for high tide and then bring the squadron closer inshore to bombard the French frigate into surrender . As they waited , the squadron was joined by Niobe from the Le Havre under Captain John Wentworth Loring . At 16 : 00 the tides were optimal for the attack and Niobe , Amelia and Berwick sailed into the bay . However , Rosseau had situated Amazone in a strong position , protected from close attack by rocks and shoals and in consequence the British ships could only fire as they wore around , resulting in scattered and inaccurate fire . As they advanced , the British ships came under fire from Amazone , which killed one sailor on Berwick and killed one and wounded another on Amelia , while the British fire had no effect on the French ship . At 18 : 00 , Macnamara withdrew his ships from the bay , all three vessels having suffered considerable damage to their rigging and sails from Amazone 's shot .

= = = Aftermath = = =

Macnamara considered plans to use ship 's boats to attack Amazone directly , but resolved to attempt to enter the bay again on the morning of 25 March . As dawn broke however it became apparent that Rosseau had abandoned his damaged ship with his crew , setting the frigate on fire as he departed . By the end of the day Amazone had been burnt to the waterline and destroyed . Macnamara 's squadron returned to their blockade duties off Cherbourg . The remaining frigate in the region , Iphigénie , did eventually succeed in breaking out of Cherbourg , but was intercepted and captured in the Atlantic during a raiding mission in January 1814 .