

= Meermin slave mutiny =

The Meermin slave mutiny took place in February 1766 and lasted for three weeks . The Meermin was one of the Dutch East India Company 's fleet of slave ships . Her final voyage was cut short by the mutiny of her cargo of Malagasy people , who had been sold to Dutch East India Company officials on Madagascar to be used as company slaves in its Cape Colony in southern Africa . During the mutiny half the ship 's crew and almost 30 Malagasy lost their lives .

The Meermin set sail from Madagascar on 20 January 1766 , heading to the Cape Colony . Two days into the trip , Johann Godfried Krause , the ship 's chief merchant , persuaded the captain , Gerrit Cristoffel Muller , to release the Malagasy slaves from their shackles and thus avoid attrition by death and disease in their overcrowded living conditions . The Malagasy were put to working the ship and entertaining the crew . In mid February , Krause ordered the Malagasy to clean some Madagascan weapons , which they subsequently used to seize the ship in an attempt to regain their freedom ; Krause was among the first of the crew to be killed , and Muller was stabbed three times but survived .

The crew negotiated a truce , under the terms of which the Malagasy undertook to spare the lives of the surviving crew members . In exchange it was agreed that the Meermin would return to Madagascar , where the Malagasy would be released . But gambling on the Malagasy 's ignorance of navigation , the wounded Muller instead ordered his crew to head for the coast of southern Africa . After making landfall at Struisbaai , in the Cape Colony , which the Malagasy were assured was their homeland , 50 ? 70 of them went ashore . Their intention was to signal to the others still on board the Meermin if it was safe for them to follow , but the shore party soon found themselves confronted by a militia of farmers formed in response to the Meermin 's arrival ; the farmers had understood that as the ship was flying no flags , it was in distress .

The Meermin 's crew , now led by Krause 's assistant Olof Leij , managed to communicate with the militia on shore by means of messages in bottles , and persuaded them to light the signal fires for which the Malagasy still on board were waiting . On seeing the fires , the Malagasy cut the ship 's anchor cable and allowed the ship to drift towards the shore , after which she ran aground on an offshore sandbank . The Malagasy could then see the militia on the shore preparing to come to the ship 's assistance , and realised that their situation was hopeless ; they surrendered and were once again shackled . Captain Muller , ship 's mate Daniel Carel Gulik and Krause 's assistant Olof Leij were tried in the Dutch East India Company 's Council of Justice ; all three were fired from the Company , while Muller and Gulik were also stripped of their rank and wages . The slaves were not tried , but the two surviving leaders of the mutiny , named in Dutch East India Company records as Massavana and Koesaaij , were sent to Robben Island for observation , where Massavana died three years later ; Koesaaij survived there for another 20 years . In 2004 an ongoing search was begun for the Meermin 's remains .

= = Voyage = =

Between 1658 and 1799 the Dutch East India Company acquired and transported approximately 63 @, @ 000 slaves to its Cape Colony in southern Africa , now part of South Africa . In Dutch , the company 's name was Vereenigde Oost @-@ Indische Compagnie : abbreviated as " VOC " , the company 's initials were used in a monogram which appeared on company materials as a logo . The Meermin was a 480 @-@ ton square rigged ship of the Dutch " hoeker " type , with three masts , which was built in 1759 in the Dutch port of Amsterdam for the VOC 's African trade . From December 1765 she was working the coastline of Madagascar , under Captain Gerrit Muller and a crew of 56 , collecting Malagasy men , women and children for use as slaves in the Cape Colony . Carrying about 140 Malagasy , she set sail from " Betisboka Bay " on the north @-@ western coast of Madagascar on 20 January 1766 .

= = = Mutiny = = =

In 1766 supercargo Johann Krause was probably the most experienced merchant trading in Madagascar , although he had been " guilty of an earlier indiscretion in 1760 " , on the VOC ship Neptunus . To avoid the loss of profit caused by captive Malagasy dying while at sea , Krause convinced Captain Muller , who was in his first command and was unwell at the time , to unshackle some of them and let them work on deck . Disease was spreading among the Malagasy in the unsanitary conditions below deck , and the ship 's surgeon had reported that , while there were no suitable medicines on board , disease was spreading to the crew . Consequently , two days after the ship had left Madagascar , the crew released a " large party of [Malagasy] " from confinement , the men assisting the crew and the women providing entertainment by dancing and singing . The Malagasy Massavana and some others were set to controlling and taking care of the sails , which has been described as " unheard of , and certainly against all [VOC] regulations " . Allowing slaves into secure areas on deck was common practice on most European vessels , and VOC regulations did permit slaves to be released onto the deck from time to time , under careful supervision . But the chief concern was that slaves might jump overboard to escape , rather than that they might mutiny , despite a slave mutiny on the VOC ship Drie Heuvelen in 1753 . That mutiny was quickly suppressed , but clearly it could happen again , making Captain Muller 's agreement to the kind of release that occurred on the Meermin " appear all the more foolish . "

According to crew member Harmen Koops , on 18 February 1766 , Krause ordered him to bring on deck some assegais , or African spears , and some swords , for the Malagasy to clean . The assegais had been acquired on Madagascar along with the Malagasy , some of whom were experienced in the use of this weapon . Krause believed himself to be intellectually superior to the Malagasy , and is reported to have laughed when issuing his order , saying he was sure that others would doubt his wisdom ; having set the task , he went below deck for a meal . When the Malagasy had cleaned the weapons and were ordered to return them , they attacked the ship 's crew , killing all who were left on deck , including Krause , who had returned when the attack began . Also killed in this fight were two of the ship 's mates , Bender and Albert , leaving only Daniel Carel Gulik surviving of that rank . Some of the surviving crew climbed into the rigging , and others , including Gulik , Koops , Jan de Leeuw , and Krause 's assistant Olof Leij , withdrew to the Constapelskamer , or gunroom , which was below decks at the stern of the ship , near the rudder . Captain Muller , who stated that he had been " gazing out over the sea " at the time of the attack , was taken by surprise and stabbed three times by Massavana . Muller escaped to his cabin and soon climbed down from a window , via the rudder , to join the others in the gunroom . Crew member Rijk Meyer , who had been thrown overboard with others from the rigging , managed to swim around the ship to a rope hanging from the gunroom window , and was pulled to safety by his shipmates . Although the crew who had climbed into the rigging threatened the Malagasy from the fore @-@ mast with hand grenades , " only those that reached the safety of the barricaded [gunroom] ... escaped a brutal death . " With Krause dead and Muller wounded , Olof Leij was left in charge of the remaining crew below deck .

The mutiny began under the de facto leadership of three men : the primary leader is unknown , but the names of the others were recorded as Massavana and Koesaaij . Massavana , a man of 26 , had been enslaved by " the king of Toulia " , now Toliara , through an elaborate deception . Although Krause had presented the Malagasy with an opportunity to mutiny by allowing them on deck and handing them familiar weapons , the mutiny had been premeditated and organised by the Malagasy , who intended to kill all Europeans on board the ship , and to return to Madagascar . According to Massavana , the Malagasy had " planned for a long time to become masters of the ship [and their] aim was to go back to [their] own country . " It may be that the Malagasy had originally intended to sail the ship themselves , as did slaves involved in a later mutiny on the VOC ship De Zon , in 1775 ; but they found that they could not control the ship , and the Meermin drifted for three days .

== = Truces and betrayal == =

The crew members on the fore @-@ mast initially reached an agreement with the Malagasy : the

crew 's lives were to be spared on condition that they sailed the Meermin back to Madagascar ; but this truce broke down , as a result of which most of those crew members were also killed , and all were thrown overboard . The crew in the gunroom were short of food and drink ; Muller decided that they should attempt to regain control of the Meermin . Neither Muller nor Gulik took part in the attack , as both were wounded . It was led by bosun Laurens Pieters ; twelve crewmen left the gunroom , shooting as they went . Pieters and another of the attack party were killed on deck ; the rest retreated back to the gunroom , where another crewman , who had been severely wounded , later died .

On the third day the crew trapped in the gunroom created a small explosion just outside it , using gunpowder , in which Gulik was injured again . Their hope was to frighten the Malagasy into submission , and a female Malagasy who had been held in the gunroom was instructed to tell the other Malagasy that , if they did not surrender , the crew would blow up the ship . The Malagasy responded by saying that they had seen the fearful effect that the explosion also had on the crew , and refused to surrender , again demanding that they be returned to Madagascar . Olof Leij agreed , but Captain Muller ordered the crew to sail the ship towards Cape Agulhas , the southernmost point of Africa . Muller 's assessment was that the Malagasy had little skill in seafaring and navigation and therefore would be unlikely to notice the deception , which proved to be the case . After three or four days ' sailing they sighted land , the VOC settlement of Struisbaai .

The leader of the mutineers was by now suspicious . The orientation of the sunrise , and birds the Malagasy had seen , did not match those of his homeland , which he pointed out to Leij , who spoke enough of the Malagasy language to tell him that the land they saw was a different part of Madagascar . They dropped anchor when the ship was " a mile [1 @. @ 6 km] offshore " , and the mutiny 's leader , with more than fifty ? perhaps as many as seventy ? other Malagasy men and women set off for the shore in the ship 's longboat and pinnace . They had promised their fellow Malagasy that they would light signal fires on the beach and send the boats back if it was safe for them to follow .

Dutch farmers had spotted the ship , and observing that she was flying no flags understood that to be a distress signal . On coming ashore , the Malagasy reached a farm belonging to Dutchman Matthijs Rostok and discovered that they had been deceived by the ship 's crew . Local officials had ordered local Dutch farmers and burghers to form an impromptu militia ; some of the Malagasy were shot dead and some were imprisoned at Wessels Wesselsen 's property close by . On 27 February a local official named Hentz wrote a letter describing events to Johannes Le Sueur , the VOC magistrate for Stellenbosch , about 146 kilometres (91 mi) to the north @-@ west . Two days later Le Sueur arrived in Soetendaal 's Valleij , a little more than 6 kilometres (4 mi) north @-@ west of Struisbaai , and " installed himself " in the home of farmer Barend Geldenhuijs . Le Sueur then went to Wesselsen 's property , where he interrogated eighteen male Malagasy in an attempt to assess the situation on board the Meermin . On 3 March he went from there to Matthijs Rostok 's farm and began corresponding with the VOC 's Cape Colony government , based in what is now the city of Cape Town . A crew member who had come ashore with the Malagasy and subsequently escaped was taken to Le Sueur , who sent him to report in person to the authorities at Cape Town . Meanwhile , local farmers and burghers were recapturing Malagasy in small groups . The authorities at Cape Town sent two hoekers , the Neptunus and the Snelheid , with a party of soldiers under two corporals and a sergeant , to assist in retaking the Meermin , but the ships did not arrive until the action was over .

= = = Final stages = = =

About 90 Malagasy remained on the ship throughout the following week , waiting for the promised signal fires and growing increasingly impatient . Some of the mutineers decided to build a raft to carry them to the shore in an effort to establish exactly where they were . In a stroke of luck for the crew , they encountered a black shepherd , but he ran away before they could speak to him ; believing that they were indeed in Madagascar , they returned to the ship . Meanwhile , the surviving crew members were becoming desperate ; having observed that the ocean current was setting

onshore , and knowing of the arrangements for signal fires , they wrote messages asking for Dutchmen on land to light three fires on the shore to deceive the Malagasy on the ship into believing they were close to home rather than in a " Christian country " , and to guard them " should the ship run aground " .

Convinced they would be killed if the Malagasy discovered the truth while still on board ship , the crew sealed their messages in bottles and dropped them into the onshore current . The VOC authorities in Cape Town had sent their chief ship 's carpenter , Philip van den Berg , with two other ship 's carpenters , two pilots , a quartermaster and 20 sailors overland . Carpenters were needed since neither of the Meermin 's boats , now onshore , could be used : one was buried in the sand , and the other was in need of repair . The party from Cape Town had arrived by 6 March , and , while Johannes Le Sueur was overseeing the carpenters ' examination of the Meermin 's boats , he was handed a bottle containing a message signed by Jan de Leeuw . A second bottle , containing a message signed by Olof Leij , was also found and handed to Le Sueur , and the fires were lit on 7 March . One of the messages is preserved in the Cape Archives Repository .

The Malagasy on the ship , seeing the signal fires , cut the anchor cable , allowing the Meermin to drift shorewards , where it grounded on a sandbank . Crew member Rijk Meyer , who had earlier been thrown overboard and swum around the ship to the safety of the gunroom , now swam from the ship to the shore and was brought to Le Sueur . He informed Le Sueur that the Malagasy on the ship had told him to find out whether the earlier landing party was there , but that he had secretly arranged with the other crew members that , if help was available on shore , he would signal back to the ship by waving a handkerchief above his head . Six Malagasy and another crew member also left the Meermin in a canoe , but a unit of the militia immediately surrounded the party when they landed . One Malagasy was shot dead and three others taken prisoner ; the dead Malagasy was later identified by one of the ship 's crew as the mutiny 's overall ringleader , but his name was not recorded . Of the remaining two , one swam away and the other was believed either to have swum back to the ship or drowned in the attempt . Enraged by the crew 's deception , the Malagasy still on the Meermin launched an attack on the crew which lasted for three hours , but the crew were able to defend themselves .

On 9 March the ship 's carpenters from Cape Town completed repairs to one of Meermin 's two boats , described as a " schuit " . The Malagasy saw how close they were to defeat ; the ship was grounded and a force of Dutchmen on shore was preparing to go to the ship 's assistance . Olof Leij persuaded the remaining Malagasy to surrender ; he promised that , if they allowed themselves to be shackled again , they would not be punished further . A second canoe , manned by Leij , Daniel Gulik and a ship 's boy , went ashore to deliver news of the surrender .

The weather had begun to deteriorate , and it was decided that the schuit was not strong enough to bring the remaining Malagasy ashore . One end of a rope was anchored to the shore , and at low tide volunteers from the Dutch group on shore swam out to the Meermin , bringing the other end of the rope with them and handing it up to the crew on the ship . The crew then helped the remaining fifty @-@ three Malagasy climb down to the Dutch volunteers , who helped them to shore , some carrying children on their backs . The Dutch built a fire to warm the Malagasy after their immersion in the water , and fed them ; three wagons took them to Cape Town on 12 March . Of the 140 or so Malagasy who had been shipped , 112 reached the Cape Colony as slaves .

= = Aftermath = =

The VOC authorities salvaged as much as possible from the beached Meermin . They recovered nearly 300 firearms , gunpowder and musket balls , compasses and five bayonets ; they auctioned cables , ropes and other items from the ship on the shore . The Meermin was left to break up where she grounded .

On 30 October 1766 the VOC 's Council of Justice found Captain Muller and the surviving ship 's mate , Daniel Carel Gulik , guilty of culpable negligence and sentenced them to demotion and dismissal from the company ; they lost their rank and their pay was docked . They were also ordered to pay the costs of the case and were sent home to Amsterdam , having to work their passage ;

Muller was banned from the Cape Colony and was banned for life from working for the VOC . Olof Leij was also dismissed from the VOC . The burghers of Struisbaai were considered to have played an " exemplary role " in assisting Le Sueur 's efforts to terminate the mutiny .

Other rulings made in this case represented a " huge step in the recognition of oppressed people [such as slaves] as free @-@ thinking individuals . " The VOC 's normal punishment for a slave who attacked his master was " death by impalement " , but none of the slaves were tried . For lack of sufficient evidence it was decided that the remaining mutiny leaders Massavana and Koesaaij should be ? put on [Robben Island] until further instructions . ? The purpose of this was for observation of their behaviour , in the hope that Massavana and Koesaaij might shed further light on how the mutiny had arisen . Massavana died on Robben Island on 20 December 1769 ; Koesaaij survived there for another 20 years .

= = Archaeology = =

On 24 September 1998 ? South Africa 's Heritage Day ? the building housing the South Africa Cultural History Museum , a branch of Iziko Museums , was renamed the Old Slave Lodge , commemorating its accommodation of about 9 @,@ 000 government @-@ owned slaves between the 17th and early 19th centuries . In 2004 Iziko Museums started a maritime archaeology project , associated with the Old Slave Lodge museum , to find and salvage the wreck of the Meermin ; supporting historical and archaeological research was also commissioned , funded by the South African National Lottery .

Jaco Boshoff of Iziko Museums , who is in charge of the research , retrieved the Meermin 's plans from the Netherlands to help identify this wreck among the numerous ships reputed to have run aground in the Struisbaai area . In 2011 the Iziko Museums ' travelling exhibition " Finding Meermin " included updates on the progress of Jaco Boshoff 's work with the archaeological research team , but , as of 2013 , the search for the Meermin continues .