

= Hudson Bay expedition =

The Hudson Bay expedition of Jean @-@ François de Galaup , comte de La Pérouse was a series of military raids on the lucrative fur trading posts and fortifications of the Hudson 's Bay Company on the shores of Hudson Bay by a squadron of the French Royal Navy . Setting sail from Cap @-@ Français in 1782 , the expedition was part of a global naval war between France and Great Britain during the American Revolutionary War .

Operating under secret orders from the Marquis de Castries , France 's marine minister , La Pérouse sailed from Cap @-@ Français in May 1782 , and arrived before the Prince of Wales Fort in early August . That fort and York Factory both surrendered without a fight , although some of the stored furs at York were spirited away by a company ship that evaded the French fleet .

Many of the British prisoners were put on a sloop which they sailed back to England . Men on La Pérouse 's fleet , which had sailed with minimal winter provisioning to maintain secrecy , suffered from scurvy and other diseases because of their hardships . The Hudson 's Bay Company finances suffered because of the raid , and it contributed to reductions in the native population that did business with the company .

= = Background = =

Jean @-@ François de Galaup , comte de La Pérouse , a captain in the French Navy , first proposed the idea of an expedition against the fur trading posts of the Hudson 's Bay Company to Charles Pierre Claret de Fleurieu , the French minister of ports , during a visit to France in late 1780 . France 's marine minister , the Marquis de Castries , and King Louis XVI approved the plan , and Castries issued La Pérouse secret orders that could override those of any fleet commander La Pérouse served under in the event an opportunity presented itself for such an expedition . The idea was to organize a small fleet in secret and make as rapid as possible a journey north to Hudson Bay from either Newport , Rhode Island or Boston , Massachusetts , the most northerly ports of North America open to French ships .

La Pérouse 's duties during the 1781 campaign season did not provide him with any chances to exercise his secret orders , but the aftermath of the disastrous French loss in the April 1782 Battle of the Saintes presented him with the opportunity . France and Spain had been planning an assault on Jamaica , but the losses incurred during the battle , including the capture of Admiral Paul , Comte de Grasse and his flagship Ville de Paris , led them to call off the expedition . La Pérouse , on his arrival at Cap @-@ Français after the battle , raised the idea with de Grasse 's successor , Louis @-@ Philippe de Vaudreuil . Vaudreuil approved of the plan , and provided La Pérouse with three ships : a ship of the line Sceptre (74 guns) , and the frigates Astrée (38) and Engageante (34) . Astrée was under the command of Paul Antoine Fleuriot de Langle , and Engageante was led by Lieutenant André Charles de la Jaille .

Preparations for the expedition were carried out secretly and in some haste , since the French were aware of the short season in the far north . The ships ' crews and most of their officers were not informed of the fleet 's destination , and La Pérouse , seeking to avoid all suspicion , even avoided carrying cold @-@ weather clothing . Admiral Vaudreuil recorded the fleet 's destination in his records as France , with possible stops in Newport or Boston , and Langle and la Jaille were given sealed orders to be opened only upon reaching the latitude of Nova Scotia . The fleet took on 250 regular infantry from the Régiment Auxerrois , 40 gunners , 4 field guns , and two mortars . These troops were told they were being sent to supplement the French army at Newport . After two weeks of preparation , the fleet sailed from Cap @-@ Français on May 31 , 1782 .

= = Expedition = =

The fleet reached Resolution Island at the entrance to the Hudson Strait without incident on July 17 , and proceeded through the strait and into Hudson Bay . While sailing in the bay , the fleet encountered the company ship Seahorse , which was making sail for Fort Prince of Wales . La

Pérouse sent one of the frigates to chase after her . Seahorse 's captain , William Cristopher , suspecting from its behavior that the French ship lacked good charts for the bay , escaped by a ruse . He gave orders to have his sails furled as if he was preparing to anchor ; this prompted the French captain , believing shallow waters to lie ahead , to actually drop his anchor . Once he had done so , Cristopher raised his sails and sped off before the Frenchman could raise the anchor again .

= = = Prince of Wales Fort = = =

On August 8 La Pérouse arrived at Prince of Wales Fort , an impressive but crumbling stone fortress that was defended by 39 civilians . Its governor , Samuel Hearne , surrendered the fort without firing a shot when the size of the French force became evident the next day . He did so despite requests from some of his men to " allow them to mow down the French troops with the heavy guns loaded with grapeshot " . After resupplying his ships and confiscating the fort 's guns , the French proceeded to loot the premises . According to Hearne , the French took more than 7 @, @ 500 beaver skins , 4 @, @ 000 marten pelts , and 17 @, @ 000 goose quills . They also spent two days trying to destroy the fort , but were only able to destroy the gun mounts and damage the upper ramparts . Many of the prisoners were put aboard the company sloop Severn , which had been anchored by the fort ; others were taken aboard the French ships , and some were incorporated into the French crews .

= = = York Factory = = =

La Pérouse then collected most of the company 's small boats , and sailed for York Factory , a company outpost on a peninsula between the Hayes and Nelson Rivers , on August 11 . According to Pérouse 's report , he arrived in the area , about 5 leagues (15 miles ; 24 km) from York , on August 20 . The fort 's defenses faced the Hayes River , where the company ship King George was anchored , and the fast @-@ flowing Hayes River would have made an approach there impractical in the face of that opposition .

La Pérouse sailed into the mouth of the Nelson , and moved the troops to the smaller company ships on August 21 to prepare for an amphibious landing , with the plan of approaching the fort from the rear , a distance of about 16 miles (26 km) . He then proceeded with his engineer to take soundings in the Nelson River , and discovered that even the smaller boats would have difficulty approaching proper land due to its shallowness . His small boat then became mired in mud by the receding tide , and did not become freed until 3 am the next morning . Captain Langle then proposed to Major Rostaing , the commander of the troops , that they cross the muddy shallows on foot . He was agreeable , and the troops then set out to across the shallows . Unknown to them , conditions improved only marginally once land was reached , and they spent the next two days wading through bogs and muck to reach the fort . While they did this , La Pérouse returned to the fleet , because bad weather was threatening the safety of the fleet . Both frigates lost their anchors when sharp rocks underwater cut through their cables in the turbulent conditions .

York Factory was occupied by 60 white men and 12 Indians . When the French ships were spotted , Governor Humphrey Marten loaded trade goods onto the King George so they would not fall into French hands . When the French arrived on August 24 , Marten surrendered the fort . (Although La Pérouse sent a frigate after the King George when she sailed off during the night after the fleet 's arrival , her captain , Jonathan Fowler , successfully eluded the pursuit due to his superior knowledge of the shallow waters of the bay .) Major Rostaing took the British of the garrison prisoner , destroyed what goods he could not take , and burned the wooden fort to the ground . He was careful to preserve a cache of supplies for use by Indians that came to fort to trade . (These acts of kindness and others by La Pérouse in the treatment of his captives brought him recognition from Hearne , Louis XVI , and the British government .)

La Pérouse did not learn of the capitulation until August 26 , and continuing bad weather and difficulties with the frigates meant that he did not effect a junction with Rostaing until August 31 . The terms of capitulation included the surrender of Fort Severn , another small outpost . He chose not to

actually go to Fort Severn on account of the lateness of the season and the poor condition of his ships and men , who were suffering from scurvy and other maladies . During the process of loading goods and supplies onto the fleet , five small boats overturned and 15 men drowned .

= = Aftermath = =

La Pérouse then began the journey back to the Atlantic , towing the Severn as far as Cape Resolution . There she was cut loose to make her way back to England , while La Pérouse sailed for Cadiz with Sceptre and Engageante ; Astrée made sail for Brest to deliver news of the expedition 's success to Paris . The expedition took a tremendous toll on his ships ' crews . By the time the ships returned to Europe , Sceptre had only 60 men (out of an original complement , including land troops , of almost 500) fit to work ; about 70 men died of scurvy . Engageante had suffered 15 deaths from scurvy , and almost everyone was sick with one malady or another . Both ships had also suffered damage due to cold weather and battering by ice floes . Fleuriot de Langle received a brevet promotion to capitaine de vaisseau upon his arrival in Brest in late October .

According to the company , the goods taken at Prince of Wales alone were worth more than £ 14 @, @ 000 , and La Pérouse 's raid so damaged the company finances that it paid no dividends until 1786 . When peace finally came with the 1783 Treaty of Paris , the French agreed to compensate the company for its losses . The raid did permanent damage to the company 's trading relationships . The Chipewyans who traded with the company suffered severely due to the company 's inability to provision them , and by an ongoing smallpox epidemic that was ravaging Indian populations throughout North America ; the Chipewyans lost half their population by some estimates . The company 's inability to trade with them for two season drove many survivors to develop trading relationships with Montreal .

Neither Hearne nor Marten was sanctioned by the company for surrendering ; both returned to their posts the following year . When the French took Prince of Wales Fort , they found Samuel Hearne 's journal , which La Pérouse claimed as a prize . The journal contained Hearne 's accounts of his explorations of the northern reaches of North America . Hearne pleaded with La Pérouse for its return , a request the latter granted on condition that it be published . Whether Hearne had intended to publish it anyway is unclear , but by 1792 , the year of Hearne 's death , he had prepared a manuscript , and submitted it for publication . It was published in 1795 as A Journey from Prince of Wales 's Fort in Hudson 's Bay to the Northern Ocean .

La Pérouse was rewarded by King Louis with a rise in pay of 800 livres ; the exploit also drew popular acclaim in Europe and North America . His next major assignment was to lead a voyage of exploration into the Pacific Ocean in 1785 . His fleet , in which Fleuriot de Langle served as second in command , was last seen in the vicinity of Australia in spring 1788 ; although remnants of the expedition have been found , his fate is unknown .