

= Invasion of the Cape Colony (1795) =

The Invasion of the Cape Colony was a British military expedition launched in 1795 against the Dutch Cape Colony at the Cape of Good Hope , the southern tip of Southern Africa . The Dutch colony at the Cape , established in the seventeenth century , was at the time the only viable South African port for ships making the journey from Europe to the European colonies in the East Indies . It therefore held vital strategic importance , although it was otherwise economically insignificant . In the winter of 1794 , during the French Revolutionary Wars , French troops captured the Dutch Republic , which was reformed into the client state of the Batavian Republic . In response , Great Britain launched operations against the Dutch Empire to prevent the use of its facilities by the French Navy .

The British expedition was led by Vice @-@ Admiral Sir George Keith Elphinstone and sailed in April 1795 , arriving off Simon 's Town at the Cape in June . Attempts were made to negotiate a settlement with the colony , but talks achieved nothing and an amphibious landing was made on 7 August . A short battle was fought at Muizenberg , and skirmishing between British and Dutch forces continued until September when a larger military force landed . With Cape Town under threat , Dutch Governor Abraham Josias Sluysken surrendered the colony . Elphinstone subsequently strengthened the garrison against counterattack and stationed a Royal Navy squadron off the port . Almost a year later a Dutch reinforcement convoy reached the colony only to find that it was badly outnumbered , and surrendered without a fight . The British Cape Colony continued until the Peace of Amiens in 1802 when it was returned to the Dutch . In 1806 during the Napoleonic Wars a second British invasion recaptured the colony after the Battle of Blaauwberg and it remained a British colony until the establishment of the Union of South Africa in 1910 .

= = Background = =

The French Revolutionary Wars , which began in 1792 following the French Revolution , expanded in January 1793 when the French Republic declared war on the Dutch Republic and the Kingdom of Great Britain . This brought the war to the Indian Ocean , where both Britain and the Netherlands maintained lucrative empires . Trade from these empires was menaced by French privateers and warships operating from Île de France , (now Mauritius) but it was protected in the waters off Southern Africa by the presence of the Dutch Cape Colony . Situated at the Cape of Good Hope , the Cape Colony had been established in the seventeenth century to offer a harbour for shipping traveling between Europe and the East Indies , and in the 1790s it remained the only such station between Rio de Janeiro and British India .

The Cape Colony was administered from two towns , the larger Cape Town on the wide Table Bay facing west and smaller Simon 's Town on False Bay facing south . Neither bay was sheltered from Atlantic storms and both were notoriously dangerous , with winds , currents and rocks posing considerable threats to shipping . Beyond its importance as a resupply port for East Indies shipping the colony had little economic value in the 1790s , and was defended by a garrison of approximately 1 @,@ 000 Dutch regular soldiers supplemented by Boer militia and local Khoikhoi units , commanded by General Abraham Josias Sluysken and Colonel Robert Jacob Gordon , in total around 3 @,@ 600 troops . This garrison was centered on the Castle of Good Hope and operated from a series of coastal fortifications which protected Table Bay . False Bay was more weakly defended , covered by only two lightly armed batteries .

In the winter of 1794 , French soldiers invaded the Netherlands and captured Amsterdam . The French National Convention reconstituted the Dutch Republic into a revolutionary client state named the Batavian Republic , although the Stadtholder William of Orange fled to Britain . There he issued the Kew Letters instructing his colonial governors to cooperate with British occupation forces . At the urging of Sir Francis Baring , the Secretary of State for War Henry Dundas authorised a mission to ensure control of the Cape Colony and eliminate the potential threat it posed to the East Indian trade . The Admiralty sent two battle squadrons to the Cape on 3 April 1795 , one under Vice @-@ Admiral Sir George Keith Elphinstone and the other under Commodore John Blankett , carrying a

small expeditionary force of 515 soldiers from the 78th Regiment of Foot under Major @-@ General Sir James Henry Craig . A larger force under General Alured Clarke was instructed to follow these squadrons on 15 May with troops and supplies for a longer campaign , with orders to hold at Salvador until requested .

= = Invasion = =

Blankett and Elphinstone united off the Cape on 10 June 1795 and anchored in Simon 's Bay . There messages were sent to Sluysken offering an alliance against the French . The Dutch governor was inclined to resist however , evacuating the civilian population from Simon 's Town in early July and making preparations to raze the town . To prevent this , Craig landed 800 soldiers and Royal Marines on 14 July , who occupied Simon 's Town while the Dutch withdrew to the pass at Muizenberg , through which passed the road to Cape Town . For the next month the two armies observed an uneasy truce , broken by occasional patrols and sniping . During this period , Elphinstone and Sluysken continued negotiations for the surrender of the colony . These negotiations were stalled by disputes in the colonial government regarding the legitimacy of the deposed William of Orange and suspicion concerning British intentions . While the debates continued , British envoys were permitted free movement in Cape Town , making detailed observations of the defences .

Elphinstone became concerned that the Dutch positions were too strong for his forces to overwhelm , and on 19 June he sent HMS Sphinx to request assistance from Clarke 's fleet . On 7 August , with negotiations stalled , Elphinstone ordered an attack on the pass at Muizenberg . Craig 's forces were supplemented with 1 @,@ 000 sailors from Elphinstone 's squadron redeployed on land under Captains Temple Hardy and John William Spranger . Among this force were a number of American citizens who immediately deserted to the Dutch and were promised repatriation . At noon on 7 August HMS America , HMS Stately , HMS Echo and HMS Rattlesnake opened fire on Dutch forward positions . Return fire from Dutch field guns killed two men on America and wounded three more , but Craig 's troops were able to advance against the Dutch positions and seize them , the Dutch defenders falling back in confusion . A second attack by soldiers of the 78th captured a rocky height nearby and a Dutch counterattack the following morning was driven off by Hardy 's sailors and marines .

The Dutch fell back to Wynberg but British forces were not strong enough to advance , suffering shortages of food and ammunition . Elphinstone 's positions were however improved by reinforcements , which arrived in the Arniston on 9 August , as well as disorganisation in the Dutch command resulting in stalemate . The British commander subsequently authorised the seizure of five Dutch East Indiamen merchant ships at anchor at Simon 's Town on 18 August . Skirmishing continued throughout the month , with stronger Dutch attacks on 1 and 2 September followed by a larger planned assault on Simon 's Town on 3 September in which Sluysken committed all his reserves including 18 cannon . That morning however 14 East India Company ships were seen arriving in Simon 's Bay and the attack was cancelled . These ships were the reinforcement fleet under Clarke , who landed 4 @,@ 000 troops from the 78th , 93rd and 98th Regiments of Foot and a unit from Saint Helena , at Simon 's Town for an overland campaign against Cape Town . Clarke 's army then advanced against Dutch piquets , losing one killed and 17 wounded in skirmishes . To support this operation , Elphinstone sent America , Rattlesnake , Echo and the Indiaman Bombay Castle to blockade Cape Town and provide artillery support . Outnumbered and surrounded , Sluysken requested a 48 @-@ hour truce from Clarke , but was given a 24 @-@ hour ultimatum to surrender . With no alternative , the Dutch governor passed control of his colony to the British on 15 September 1795 , although he allowed approximately 40 British deserters in Cape Town , mostly impressed Americans , to escape into the countryside before the deadline passed .

= = = Elphinstone 's order of battle = = =

= = Aftermath = =

Total British losses were four killed and 54 wounded . Captured in Table Bay were the Dutch East Indiaman *Castor* and the 14 @-@ gun naval brig *Star* , which was renamed *HMS Hope* . Elphinstone 's substantial squadron remained on station at the Cape to deter efforts to recapture the colony . Parts of this force were subsequently deployed to bolster British forces in the Indian Ocean . The blockade of Île de France was restored and *Arrogant* and *Victorious* were sent to the Dutch East Indies where they would fight an inconclusive battle with a French squadron off Sumatra in September 1796 . Elphinstone himself sailed for Madras , where he received reports that a Dutch force had sailed from the Netherlands to retake the Cape Colony . The admiral returned to Cape Town , assembling a large squadron to await the Dutch arrival . Further reports revealed the strength and progress of the Dutch and Elphinstone had ample time to prepare his squadron for their arrival and increase the garrison ashore . The Dutch Rear @-@ Admiral Engelbertus Lucas spent almost six months on the passage and gathered no intelligence on British defences . Thus when he arrived off the Cape he was soon discovered by Elphinstone in Saldanha Bay and intimidated into surrender without a fight .

No further attacks on the Cape Colony were made during the course of the war . Elphinstone returned to Britain in October 1796 and was subsequently awarded the title of Baron Keith for his service in the capture and defence of the Cape , a reward that historian C. Northcote Parkinson calls " on the whole , easily earned " . At the Peace of Amiens in 1802 one of the treaty terms returned the Cape Colony , along with all captured Dutch colonies except Ceylon , to the Batavian Republic . The peace was short @-@ lived , and after the outbreak of the Napoleonic Wars in 1803 a second British invasion was planned , executed in 1806 and victory secured following the Battle of Blaauwberg . The Cape Colony remained part of the British Empire until its independence as part of a unified South Africa in 1910 .