

= Action of 21 October 1794 =

The Action of 21 October 1794 was a minor naval engagement between Great Britain and France fought off the Breton coast of France during the second year of the French Revolutionary Wars . French frigates had been raiding British Atlantic trade routes with considerable success since the outbreak of the war , and in response the Admiralty had formed a frigate squadron to patrol the French Channel and Atlantic coasts in search of French raiders . On 13 October 1794 , the large , modern and powerful 40 @-@ gun French frigate *Révolutionnaire* under the command of Captain Antoine René Thévenard sailed from Le Havre for a raiding cruise against British trade routes in the Atlantic . Eight days later , while rounding the Breton headland of Ushant about 25 ? 30 nautical miles (56 km) miles out to sea , *Révolutionnaire* encountered the British frigate squadron , commanded by Commodore Sir Edward Pellew , which had secured a number of victories over French raiding frigates during the previous two years .

Pellew ordered his ships to give chase , as Thévenard fled towards the French coast before the British numerical supremacy . One British ship was faster than the others , the 38 @-@ gun HMS *Artois* under Captain Edmund Nagle cutting *Révolutionnaire* off from the shore and bringing the larger French ship to action . For 45 minutes *Artois* battled *Révolutionnaire* until support arrived , at which point the French frigate 's crew surrendered their ship in defiance of their captain 's orders . Casualties and damage were light on both sides , and *Révolutionnaire* was rapidly commissioned into the Royal Navy , joining the squadron that had captured her and subsequently capturing the French frigate *Unité* at the Action of 13 April 1796 .

= = Background = =

Following the French Republic 's declaration of war on Great Britain in February 1793 , the French Navy immediately launched squadrons , individual cruisers and privateers against British trade routes in the Eastern Atlantic . The French Atlantic fleet , based at the fortified port of Brest in Brittany , was in a state of political turmoil during the early years of the war , suffering a mutiny in August 1793 , and then defeat at the battle of Glorious First of June in 1794 . In spite of these difficulties , the independent raiders caused considerable damage to British commerce , and in response the Admiralty ordered a squadron of frigates from the Channel Fleet to cruise the French coastline in search of these raiders . This force , known as the flying squadron and initially commanded by Sir John Borlase Warren , achieved a number of successes in the first year of the war , most notably in the Action of 23 April 1794 , when a French frigate squadron was destroyed .

By the autumn of 1794 , the squadron was under the command of Commodore Sir Edward Pellew in the frigate HMS *Arethusa* , accompanied by HMS *Artois* under Captain Edmund Nagle , HMS *Diamond* under Captain Sir Sidney Smith and HMS *Galatea* under Captain Richard Goodwin Keats . All four ships had specially selected crews and equipment and the squadron formed the elite force of the Channel Fleet 's light warships . Pellew led his squadron out of Cawsand Bay on 19 October with the intention of cruising off the entrance to Brest and intercepting shipping entering or leaving the port . The French fleet , its principal squadrons blockaded in Brest , continued to send raiders to sea . One such ship , was the large newly commissioned 40 @-@ gun frigate *Révolutionnaire* under Captain Antoine René Thévenard with a hastily assembled and disaffected crew and a main battery of 18 ? pounder cannon , which departed from the Channel port of Le Havre on 13 October , sailing westwards towards the Atlantic .

= = Battle = =

On 21 October , eight days after leaving Le Havre , and between 25 ? 30 nautical miles (56 km) off the island of Ushant at the tip of the Breton Peninsula , *Révolutionnaire* was discovered at dawn by Pellew 's squadron . Pellew immediately ordered his ships to give chase while Thévenard turned away in an effort to reach the shoreline before the larger British squadron could overwhelm his ship . Pellew 's squadron was however to windward of the French ship , thus cutting it off from the relative

safety of the shore and instead *Révolutionnaire* swung southeast in an effort to outdistance the British squadron and pull ahead of Pellew 's ships in the hazy weather .

One British frigate , *Nagle* 's *Artois* , was however faster than the others . *Artois* was a strong modern frigate with a main battery of 9 7 pounder cannon and 32 7 pounder carronades on the quarterdeck , and *Nagle* was able to bring his frigate alongside the slightly larger French vessel . For forty minutes the two frigates traded broadsides , *Nagle* 's fire damaging the French ship 's rigging and slowing *Révolutionnaire* enough that the rest of Pellew 's squadron could come up . Captain Smith 's *Diamond* was the first to reach the combat , Smith ranging his ship up below *Thévenard* 's stern and firing two warning shots to indicate that unless the French ship surrendered he would fire a devastating raking broadside into the French ship 's stern . *Arethusa* and *Galatea* were close behind *Diamond* , and although *Thévenard* wished to continue the engagement , his men refused and the French captain was forced to surrender . At the point *Révolutionnaire* surrendered , breakers from the waves striking the *Saints Rocks* could be seen dead ahead .

= = = Combatant summary = = =

In this table , " Guns " refers to all cannon carried by the ship , including the maindeck guns which were taken into consideration when calculating it 's rate , as well as any carronades carried aboard . Broadside weight records the combined weight of shot which could be fired in a single simultaneous discharge of an entire broadside .

= = Aftermath = =

Casualties were light on both sides ; *Révolutionnaire* lost five men killed and four wounded , including *Thévenard* who had suffered minor wounds , while *Artois* was the only British ship engaged , losing two sailors and a lieutenant of Royal Marines killed and five men wounded . Pellew 's squadron brought *Révolutionnaire* back to Falmouth immediately , having discovered an outbreak of small pox among the prisoners of war taken from the French frigate . Subsequently , the light damage the ship had suffered enabled the Royal Navy to rapidly purchase and commission the frigate as the 38 @-@ gun HMS *Révolutionnaire* under the command of Captain Francis Cole and attach the ship to Pellew 's squadron . Eighteen months later , *Révolutionnaire* fought and captured the French frigate *Unité* at the Action of 12 April 1796 , and remained in the Royal Navy throughout the following 21 years of warfare . The arrival of *Révolutionnaire* in Britain caused a stir among naval architects as the frigate was significantly larger than those produced in Britain at the time . The ship was extensively planned and modelled and a ship was commissioned for the Royal Navy to the design of *Révolutionnaire* , although severe delays at the shipyards meant that HMS *Forte* , as the ship was eventually named , was not launched until 1814 .

In reward for his action against *Révolutionnaire* , *Nagle* was made a Knight Bachelor , and first Lieutenant Robert Dudley Oliver was promoted to commander . Pellew , in his report on the action , stated that " the crippled state of the Enemy allows me the Opportunity of saying , that her Resilience could have been of no Avail , had the *Artois* been alone " , but historian William James was more reserved , noting in 1827 that the ships " would have been a well matched pair of combatants , had the *Artois* been alone . " The prize money was extensive : part payment of £ 10 @,@ 000 (£ 1 @,@ 036 @,@ 111 as of 2016) was made in January 1795 , the reward shared between the entire squadron . Pellew , who had been knighted the previous year following the Action of 18 June 1793 , was reported to be unhappy that *Nagle* had been honoured for his part in this action and complained to the Admiralty about the condition and speed of *Arethusa* , requesting a faster vessel . The following year he would receive command of the 44 @-@ gun razee HMS *Indefatigable* as a result .