

= Capture of Saint Vincent =

The Capture of Saint Vincent was a French invasion that took place on 16 - 18 June 1779 during the Anglo - French War . A French force commanded by Charles Marie de Trolong du Romain , landed on the West Indies isle of Saint Vincent , and quickly took over much of the British - controlled part of the island , assisted by the local Black Caribs who held the northern part of the island .

British Governor Valentine Morris and military commander Lieutenant Colonel George Etherington disagreed on how to react , and ended up surrendering without significant resistance . Both leaders were subjected to inquiries over the surrender . The period of French control begun by the capture resulted in solidified Black Carib control over northern parts of the island . The area remained in Carib hands until the Second Carib War of 1795 .

= = Background = =

Following the entry of France into the American War of Independence as an American ally in early 1778 , French Admiral the Comte d 'Estaing arrived in the West Indies in early December 1778 in command of a fleet consisting of 12 ships of the line and a number of smaller vessels . At about the same time a British fleet under Admiral William Hotham also arrived , augmenting the fleet of Admiral Samuel Barrington . The British then captured French - held St. Lucia , despite d 'Estaing 's attempt at relief . The British used St. Lucia to monitor the major French base at Martinique , where d 'Estaing was headquartered .

The British fleet was further reinforced in January 1779 by ten ships of the line under Admiral John Byron , who assumed command of the British Leeward Islands station . Throughout the first half of 1779 both fleets received further reinforcements , after which the French fleet was slightly superior to that of the British . Furthermore , Byron departed St. Lucia on June 6 in order to provide escort services to British merchant ships gathering at St. Kitts for a convoy to Europe , leaving d 'Estaing free to act . D 'Estaing and Governor the marquis de Bouillé seized the opportunity to begin a series of operations against nearby British possessions . Their first target was the isle of Saint Vincent , just south of St. Lucia .

The political situation on Saint Vincent was somewhat tense . The island was divided roughly in half between land controlled by white (principally British) planters and that controlled by the local Black Carib population . The line dividing these territories ran from the island 's north - west to its south - east , and had been agreed in a treaty signed in 1773 after the First Carib War . Neither side had been happy with the compromise agreement , and its terms were a continuing source of friction . The British had , uniquely among its Caribbean possessions , had to establish a chain of outposts to protect the planter population .

Saint Vincent 's colonial government and defences were in some disarray . Governor Valentine Morris had assumed office in 1776 when the isle was granted a separate government , and reported then that it had virtually no defences . In addition to the difficult relations with the Caribs , the British population was also sympathetic to the cause of colonial independence . The French capture of Dominica in 1778 had raised constitutional questions surrounding the imposition of martial law , and the colonial assembly had consequently refused to appropriate funds for improving the island defences . Governor Morris had spent his own funds instead on improvements , contributing to financial difficulties he would run into later .

The only British military presence on the island was a garrison of about 450 men from the Royal American Regiment under the command of Lieutenant Colonel George Etherington , most of whom were poorly trained recruits and about half of whom were unfit for duty . Etherington , rather than training and drilling his troops , or fully staffing the island 's outposts , was employing significant numbers of them to clear land on an estate on the north - west side of the island . Etherington 's estate was on territory on the Carib side of the island , and its grant (for Etherington 's service in the Seven Years ' War , but made under circumstances the Caribs viewed as illegal) was a major source of annoyance to the Caribs . Governor de Bouillé had established regular contact with the

Caribs , and was supplying them with arms . In late August 1778 French officials met with Carib leader Joseph Chatoyer , and in early September Governor Morris was confronted by Caribs bearing new French muskets on a tour of the border areas .

= = Capture = =

D 'Estaing organized a force of 300 to 500 troops , including French regulars drawn from the regiments Champagne , Viennois , and Martinique , and about 200 volunteer militia from Martinique . The invasion force was placed under the command of Lieutenant de vaisseau Charles Marie de Trolong du Romain , who had recently distinguished himself by taking over British @-@ controlled Saint Martin in March 1779 . The force was embarked on a fleet consisting of the frigate Lively , the corvettes Lys and Balleastre , and two privateers . Du Romain sailed from Martinique on 9 June , and reached the waters off Saint Vincent on the 16th . One of the privateers was driven ashore on the windward side of the island , losing 82 men .

Two of the ships anchored in Young 's Bay , near Calliaqua , while the third anchored off Kingstown . The ships flew no national colours , leading to local speculation as to their intent . Local planters who thought they might be merchant vessels expected to pick up the sugar harvest prevented a sentry at one of the island 's coastal fortifications from firing a signal cannon , and one man sent out to one of the ships was taken prisoner . As the French began landing their troops , a small company under Captain Percin de la Roque was landed on the eastern shore to mobilise the Caribs . These irregular forces , which grew to number about 800 , quickly overran British settlements near the borders between the British lands and those of the Caribs , while du Romain led his main body of troops toward Kingstown .

The alarm was eventually raised , and Governor Morris thought it would be possible to make a stand against the French in the hills above Kingstown , in hopes that the Royal Navy would bring relief . Lieutenant Colonel Etherington was however opposed to this , especially when the size of the approaching Carib force became apparent , and a truce flag was sent to the French . Du Romain demanded an unconditional surrender , which Morris rejected . During the negotiations , three ships were spotted flying British flags . Du Romain returned to his ship , and quickly determined that the strangers were supply ships ; two he captured , but the third got away . After further negotiations terms were agreed that were similar to those granted by de Bouillé in the 1778 capture of Dominica .

= = Aftermath = =

After du Romain 's success , d 'Estaing sailed with his entire fleet for Barbados at the end of June , but was unable to make significant progress against the prevailing winds . He gave up the attempt , sailing instead for Grenada , which he captured on 5 July . Admiral Byron had been alerted to the capture of Saint Vincent on 1 July , and was preparing a force to retake it when he learnt of the attack on Grenada . He immediately sailed there , arriving on the morning of 6 June . The fleets battled off Grenada , with d 'Estaing prevailing over Byron 's disorganized attack . Both Grenada and Saint Vincent remained in French hands until the end of the war , when they were returned to Britain under the terms of the 1783 Treaty of Paris .

Admiral George Brydges Rodney made an attempt to recover Saint Vincent in December 1780 . Arriving in the Caribbean after one of the worst hurricane seasons on record , Rodney acted on rumours that Saint Vincent 's defences had been devastated by an October hurricane that wrought havoc throughout the West Indies , and sailed to Saint Vincent with ten ships of the line and 250 soldiers under General John Vaughan . Although Saint Vincent had suffered significant damage (most of the buildings in Kingstown were destroyed) , the defences above Kingstown were in good condition and defended by 1 @, @ 000 French and Carib soldiers . Vaughan 's troops were landed , but they found the going difficult due to the conditions , and were re @-@ embarked after only one day .

Lieutenant Colonel Etherington was subjected to an enquiry at St. Lucia in 1781 over his conduct

during the invasion , and exonerated . Governor Morris , a long @-@ time resident of the island , demanded an inquiry into his behaviour , alleging it had been misrepresented in the press and other writings ; he was also vindicated . He never returned to the island , dying in England in 1789 after spending seven years in King 's Bench Prison over debts incurred in part due to spending on Saint Vincent 's defences .

The Black Caribs actively harassed British settlers during the French occupation , at times requiring intervention of the French military to minimize bloodshed . After the return to British control , an uneasy peace existed between the British and Caribs until the 1790s , when the Caribs again rose up in the Second Carib War (part of radical French efforts to export the French Revolution) . The Caribs were then deported by the British to Roatán , an island off the coast of present @-@ day Honduras , where their descendants are now known as the Garifuna people . Saint Vincent and the Grenadines gained its independence from Britain in 1979 .