

= Capitulation of Saldanha Bay =

The Capitulation of Saldanha Bay saw the surrender to the British Royal Navy of a Dutch expeditionary force sent to recapture the Dutch Cape Colony in 1796 during the French Revolutionary Wars . In 1794 the army of the French Republic overran the Dutch Republic which then became a French client state , the Batavian Republic . Concerned by the threat posed to the trade routes between Great Britain and British India by the Dutch Cape Colony in Southern Africa , a British expeditionary force had landed at Simon 's Town in June 1795 and forced the surrender of the colony in a short campaign . The British commander , Vice @-@ Admiral Sir George Elphinstone , then reinforced the garrison and stationed a naval squadron at the Cape to protect the British conquest .

The Batavian government immediately ordered an expeditionary force to sail to the Cape and recapture the colony . This force comprised two ships of the line and five smaller vessels , all under the command of Rear @-@ Admiral Engelbertus Lucas . Security regarding the plans was weak and the British knew of the operation before Lucas had sailed . The British warned Elphinstone , who further reinforced the Cape . Lucas 's journey took nearly six months , suffering shortages of drinking water leading to a near @-@ mutinous state among his crews . On arrival , the Batavian fleet anchored in Saldanha Bay to take on fresh water before deciding to abandon the operation and sail to the French base at Île de France in the Western Indian Ocean .

On 15 August 1796 Elphinstone 's larger fleet discovered Lucas 's force and trapped it in the bay . Aware that resistance would be futile and with his crews in open revolt , Lucas surrendered unconditionally . The ships of the captured Batavian force were taken into the Royal Navy , joining the squadron at the Cape ; Elphinstone was later made Baron Keith in recognition of his achievements . The Batavian operation did however force the cancellation of a planned British invasion of Île de France . Lucas faced a court martial on his return to the Netherlands , but died before it concluded by exonerating him for the defeat . The Cape Colony was not attacked again before the end of the war in 1802 , when the Treaty of Amiens returned it to the Batavian Republic .

= = Background = =

In the winter of 1794 the army of the French Republic overran the Dutch Republic . The French National Convention reformed the Dutch Republic into a revolutionary client state named the Batavian Republic . This event alarmed the government of Great Britain , erstwhile allies of the Dutch , as the Dutch Empire controlled a number of strategically important colonies in the East Indies . The key to controlling European access to the region was the Dutch Cape Colony on the tip of Southern Africa ; a naval force based there could dominate the trade routes between Europe and the East Indies , in particular the economically vital links between Britain and British India .

To ensure that the Cape Colony did not become a French naval base , the Secretary of State for War , Henry Dundas , ordered a large expeditionary force to sail for the Cape in March 1795 . The force comprised two squadrons and 500 troops , all under the overall control of Vice @-@ Admiral Sir George Elphinstone ; more substantial reinforcements followed . Arriving on 10 June in False Bay , Elphinstone then conducted two months of fruitless negotiations with the government at the Cape , led by Abraham Josias Sluysken . On 7 August , with negotiations stalled , Elphinstone ordered an attack on Dutch positions at Muizenberg . The Dutch defenders withdrew , but Elphinstone 's forces were low on food and ammunition and not numerous enough to launch a major attack on Cape Town . On 14 September the arrival of British reinforcements under General Alured Clarke convinced Sluysken to surrender the colony .

Elphinstone turned his attention to planning operations against the Dutch East Indies and the French island base of Île de France . He sailed for Madras in his flagship HMS Monarch to take command of the East Indies Station , but maintained a strong garrison and naval presence at the Cape under Sir James Henry Craig and Commodore John Blankett . Much of his squadron was subsequently dispersed on operations across the Indian Ocean . While Elphinstone was consolidating his position , the Batavian government determined to recapture the Cape . A squadron

was prepared under the command of Rear @-@ Admiral Engelbertus Lucas , who had sailed to the East Indies once in 1786 , but otherwise had no experience of long expeditionary campaigns . His force comprised two small 66 @-@ gun ships of the line , Dortrecht and Revolutie , and five smaller warships . After taking the Cape , Lucas was to continue his expedition in order to reinforce the Dutch East Indies .

= = Lucas 's voyage = =

Lucas 's expeditionary force sailed from the Texel on 23 February 1796 , intending to pass through the North Sea and around Scotland before entering the Atlantic and turning south . Unspecified French support for the operation had been promised by the National Convention , but did not materialise . The British North Sea Fleet was actively blockading the Texel and the 16 @-@ gun brig HMS Espiegle sighted the Batavian force putting to sea . Espiegle shadowed Lucas throughout the day , sending a message to Admiral Adam Duncan at Great Yarmouth . On 26 February a small British squadron led by Captain Henry Trollope in HMS Glatton detached from the cruising division of Rear @-@ Admiral Thomas Pringle and encountered the Batavians , the weaker British making off as Lucas formed a line of battle .

Having successfully evaded pursuit , Lucas followed his planned route , arriving at Las Palmas on Gran Canaria on 13 April . The journey had not been unobserved : a small British warship , the 20 @-@ gun HMS Mozelle under Captain Charles Brisbane , had sighted the Batavian force near Madeira while Mozelle was escorting two merchant ships to Barbados . Leaving the merchant ships to make their way unescorted , Mozelle followed Lucas for several days and then sailed south with all haste to bring a warning to the Cape . Despite noticing Mozelle , Lucas decided not to attack her .

After taking on supplies at Las Palmas , Lucas sailed to Praia on Cape Verde , before continuing south on 29 May in the direction of the Brazilian coast , hoping to profit from favourable winds and currents . In fact , due to persistent calms , a position off the Brazilian shore was only reached on 27 June . Because of the delay , Lucas decided not to supply himself but to sail directly to the Cape . Because Lucas made no stops on his journey between Cape Verde and the Cape , the fact that his voyage took far longer than a journey of this distance should have taken has surprised several authors . Historian C. Northcote Parkinson ascribed the delay , at least partially , to the poor quality of seamanship among Lucas 's crews . The Batavian expeditionary force did not speak to another vessel during this time and thus had no information regarding British dispositions when it eventually reached the Cape on 26 July . They first reconnoitred Saldanha Bay , then Table Bay to the south , and eventually on 6 August they anchored in Saldanha Bay .

British agents had observed Lucas 's preparations in the Netherlands and reported them in January , more than a month before the expedition sailed . The British Admiralty sent the frigate HMS Carysfort to the Cape with a warning . Carysfort arrived at the Cape in April , but vague accounts of Lucas 's mission had reached Elphinstone even earlier , appearing at Madras in March , less than a month after Lucas 's departure from the Texel . Sailing from Madras on 23 March , Elphinstone reached the Cape on 23 May where he received detailed reports of the size and status of the Batavian force heading for the Cape . The Admiralty had already responded to the threat by diverting substantial resources to the Cape : in addition to Elphinstone and Blankett 's forces a convoy of transports led by Captain William Essington arrived on 28 May and a small squadron under Pringle followed on 28 July , joined that day by Mozelle with the most detailed reports to date of Lucas 's movements . Subsequent reinforcements arrived from the squadron based in India , so that by August there were seven ships of the line and seven smaller vessels under Elphinstone 's command and the garrison of the Cape stood at 9 @, @ 400 British troops .

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Elphinstone was concerned that the Batavian force might not be sailing for the Cape at all . In May a powerful French frigate squadron under Contre @-@ amiral Pierre César Charles de Sercey had

sailed past the Cape without stopping , observed by HMS Sphynx , which it chased back to Simon 's Town . If the Batavian force was sailing for the East Indies , it might bypass the Cape altogether . Elphinstone therefore decided to take his fleet out to sea to search for the Batavians . On 6 August Elphinstone sailed southwest from False Bay in search of Lucas , but a fierce storm caught the British , inflicting damage on the ships , including the loss of the mainmast on Monarch and flooding on HMS Ruby . The fleet returned to Simon 's Bay in a battered state on 12 August , to learn on arrival that Lucas 's force lay at anchor to the north . The following day a storm swept the bay . Most of Elphinstone 's ships were damaged : both HMS Crescent and HMS Trident grounded , and HMS Tremendous dragged anchors and was almost wrecked .

Lucas had arrived off the Cape on 26 July with no knowledge of Elphinstone 's dispositions . He had more pressing concerns : it had been several months since his ships had sighted land and his supplies of drinking water were running dangerously low . A significant proportion of his crews were suffering from disease and he had decided to send these men to an encampment ashore to allow for better treatment . Lucas even ordered that the sails on his ships be removed for repairs , rendering his ships temporarily immobile . On 9 August , Lucas was warned by a servant of a Dutch inhabitant of the Cape that a superior English force was present . He was informed that the Dutch population would not assist an attack on the British and strongly advised to sail away . Lucas however , on hearing this sailed deeper into the bay . Sir James Craig sent cavalry to Saldanha Bay to harry Batavian shore parties and organised the withdrawal of the local population and livestock to prevent their capture , following with a larger force under his own command . Lucas held a council with his senior officers , debating whether an attack on Cape Town was practical or whether they should abandon the operation . By 16 August the decision had been made to sail for Île de France , but Lucas delayed , unwilling to leave his sick men ashore .

As the Batavian force prepared to sail , on 16 August Elphinstone 's fleet appeared off the bay , led by the scouting frigate Crescent . He sent a letter to Lucas demanding his surrender but this was refused . Ascertaining the strength of the Batavian force , on 17 August Elphinstone led his fleet into the bay in line of battle and brought the line to anchor at close gunshot range from Lucas 's ships . Trapped between the coast and the British , Lucas immediately raised a flag of truce . He then sent an officer to negotiate terms with Elphinstone . By 17 : 00 , hopelessly outnumbered and his crews in open rebellion , Lucas agreed to terms that dictated an almost unconditional surrender of the Batavian force . Elphinstone furthermore refused Lucas 's request for cartels to immediately send his crews back to the Netherlands .

= = Orders of battle = =

= = = Lucas 's order of battle = = =

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

= = Aftermath = =

The warships of the Batavian squadron were all commissioned into the Royal Navy and attached to the squadron at the Cape , an action for which Elphinstone was criticised by the Admiralty . Elphinstone returned to Britain in October 1796 . There he was made Baron Keith for his capture and retention of the Cape Colony . Most of the sailors and soldiers in the Dutch force were Germans and nearly all entered British service , either with the Royal Navy or the East India Company . Lucas and the Dutch officers later returned to Europe in the cartel Gertruida . One of the captured ships , HMS Dortrecht became notorious the following year when the crew mutinied at Saint Helena in imitation of the Spithead and Nore mutinies in Britain . Only the intervention of Captain Charles Brisbane , who threw a noose around the ringleader 's neck and threatened death if the

disobedience was repeated , succeeded in intimidating the rebellious seamen . In the Batavian Republic Lucas 's surrender caused popular outrage . On the admiral 's return he faced a court martial by the National Assembly of the Batavian Republic on 11 April 1797 and an investigation by Jacobus Spoors . Lucas did not survive to see the conclusion of the trial , dying of natural causes on 21 June 1797 , but he was ultimately exonerated in December 1797 .

Historians have held Lucas blameworthy for refusing to fight Elphinstone 's force , which was far superior in both ships and men . Elphinstone 's ships carried more than twice as many men as the Batavian expedition , even before the British troops ashore are taken into account . Lucas could only muster 1 092 men compared with the 4 291 under Elphinstone 's command . The expedition has however been criticised for its lack of preparedness ; while it is true that promised French support failed to appear , the Batavian troops were insufficient in number to seriously threaten the British garrison . As Parkinson noted : " what could be the point of landing a few hundred men on a shore bristling with English bayonets ? " An unintended side effect of the campaign however was to forestall a British invasion of Île de France , which Elphinstone had postponed to prepare for Lucas 's arrival and which was ultimately cancelled entirely .

There were no further attacks on the Cape Colony during the war . The Treaty of Amiens in 1802 returned all captured Dutch colonies except Ceylon to the Batavian Republic , including the Cape Colony . The peace was short lived , and early in the Napoleonic Wars a second British expeditionary force was prepared . In 1806 the British seized the Cape Colony a second time following the Battle of Blaauwberg . Cape Colony remained part of the British Empire until its independence as part of a unified South Africa in 1910 .