

History Highlight: The 2nd Carib War on St. Vincent



Peace and tranquility were hard to come by in early St. Vincent. If hurricanes and earthquakes were not enough to shake up the growing population, restless natives were another. Those natives were called Caribs, and St. Vincent had been their home for hundreds of years before European discovery. It was a home they were not willing to give up without a fight, despite the onslaught of settlers eager to use the land for profitable sugar cane production.

First, it was the French, then it was the English, who gained control of the island in 1763. But before the passing of a decade, the Caribs and English would go to war. The First Carib War ended in a stalemate in 1773, when the English forces (led by Sir William Young) conceded the windward coast to the Caribs. It was not an easy concession for the English since it was well-known that these “Carib lands” were the best suited for growing crops.

Despite that, the peace held between the English and the Caribs until 1795. From 1779 to 1783, the island had returned to French control but was restored to Britain by the treaty of Versailles. By the spring of 1795, St. Vincent’s governor, James SETON, had received word some Carib chiefs were planning an attack. His response was a call to arms for the island’s colonial militia, with reinforcements from English regiments. SETON called the militia together on the Parade Ground now called Victoria Park and assigned them their duty. Two days later, messages were sent to the two Carib chiefs CHATOYER and DU VALLE. However, negotiating another treaty was not on their minds, and the fighting soon began.

The Caribs had planned for CHATOYER and his fighters to attack from the Leeward side of the island, with DU VALLE and company coming from the Windward side. The news reached Kingstown on Sunday the 8th of March, 1795, that war had broken out. The first strike reported was that the Caribs at Marriaqua had plundered the Le CROIX Estate owned by Mme Le CROIX. Governor SETON wasted no time dispatching soldiers to Marriaqua. Troops led by his son Brigade Major James SETON and Major SHARPE succeeded in capturing eighteen of the Caribs, but the others got away.

At the same time further up the Windward coast of the island, another band of Caribs was reported to have destroyed estates at Three Rivers. More soldiers were sent, this time under the command of Captain James G. MORGAN with reinforcements headed by Lieutenant’s MacDOWALL and KEANE. The soldiers rested for the night at San Souci before resuming their march on the windward highway. It was not long before they encountered a group of Caribs on a hill, along with the road to Three Rivers, who opened fire with their muskets. Before they could retreat, Capt. MORGAN realized that they were now being attacked from behind as well. Suffering heavy casualties, they returned to Kingstown with thirty-one fewer men. This victory gave Carib chief DU VALLE something to celebrate. He and his men captured the post at Dorsetshire Hill and replaced the Union Jack with the flag of the French Republic.

While on the way to Dorsetshire Hill, other Carib forces captured three young Englishmen at Chateaubelair. They were identified as Duncan CRUIKSHANK, Peter CRUIKSHANK, and Alexander GRANT. By the time Chief CHATOYER reached Dorsetshire Hill, his rage for the English was in full force. The three captives bore the brunt of CHATOYER’s rage. It is said that he single-handedly hacked them to pieces. This is reported to have taken place on Saturday, 08 March 1795.

After Chatoyer and Du Valle had united their forces, their next objective was Kingstown. The people of the city on hearing this were alarmed, the Governor immediately moved his office to Berkshire Hill taking a few important documents. Both Berkshire Hill and Sion Hill were strengthening their fortifications. The Caribs meanwhile were strengthening their fortifications at Dorsetshire Hill and Fort Duvernette, which was erected by the French in the support of the Caribs.

The plantations around Kingstown were ordered to be burnt by the Governor, in order to have a clear view of the Caribs approaching Kingstown, who from time to time made appearances at the Redemption Estate and Liberty Lodge. A small body of Caribs had made an attempt to stage an attack at the Government House at which time was situated in Montrose Estate, but they were driven off by the strong guards who were posted there. The Caribs once made an attempt to go to Kingstown en route Sion Hill, but they were driven away by the guns on the fortifications at Sion Hill.

In the second week of March 1795, two warships docked into the harbour of Kingstown that had reinforcements sent by the English. The ship names were the Zebra and the Roebuck. On the 14th of March, at midnight, forces at Sion Hill divided into four and marched to Dorsetshire Hill in order to destroy it. The force consisted of:

- 1) detachments of soldiers both from the Zebra and the Roebuck.
- 2) Sailors and merchants from the harbour.
- 3) The Company of Forty-six.
- 4) the detachments of the local militia and armed Negroes at the rear.

The force moved up the hill in the darkness. Only when they were eighty yards from the fort did the Caribs and the Frenchmen who with the Caribs perceived them. The Caribs immediately opened a brisk fire. It was only when the English force was twenty yards away from the fort did they discharged. Most of the Caribs escaped in the darkness, but other Caribs and Frenchmen were harmed and killed. Only five of the attackers were dead and five were wounded. It was on this hill that Chatoyer died that night. He had challenged the Major Alexander Leith to a duel, because, he, Chatoyer was convinced that he could not be killed by mortal hands according to a legend, however, this legend did not come to the past because he was killed by the Major. The Major did not have much time to enjoy his victory because he was killed by the wounds Chatoyer placed on him. Chatoyer was considered a hero to the nation, although little information exists about him. Most of the information about him is hearsay. However, a remembrance monument has been put up for him at Dorsetshire Hill. There is also a memorial stone for the Major under the large chandelier of the Cathedral in Kingstown.

A few days after the Major and Chatoyer had died, Colonel Gordon, the head of the detachment force went to the town of Chateaubelair that was occupied by the Caribs and the French. He commanded that the town should be burnt down. The Caribs fled. The Chateaubelair Caribs and the Dorsetshire Hill Caribs met in the vicinity of Calliaqua, where they set up three camps. On the 21st of March, 1795, the important parts of Calliaqua were destroyed by fire set by these Caribs, the sugar mills in Arnos Vale, Villa, Belmont, and Fair Hall were destroyed by fire a few days later.

On the 5th of April, 1795, reinforcements of trained soldiers, sailed into the Kingstown Harbour on board the H.M.S. Montague. Other ships were soon to arrive such as the Experiment, the Thorn, the Alarm and the Scipio. The soldiers from the Montague were landed on shore and marched to their quarters in Berkshire Hill.

Captain Lowman made an attempt to attack the Carib camps at Calliaqua upon request by the Governor, on 10th of April. His attempt failed and he had to retreat to Kingstown, the next morning. The only people who were successful in getting rid of the Caribs were the Light Infantrymen, some Grenadiers and a detachment of the third battalion of the Sixtieth. They made a spirituous attack that made the Caribs flee in various directions.

Two armed schooners set sailed from the Kingstown Harbour, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Seton on the 25th of April. These schooners got reinforcements at Chateaubelair, where after, they set sailed to Du Valle’s village on the Windward coast. The attack made there on the 26th was quite successful, twenty-five houses were burnt and the Caribs’ canoes were destroyed.

The Marriaqua Caribs and some other Windward Caribs who were joined with a few French and English slaves, took up positions at the Vigie eastward of the upper Warrawarrou Valley not very far from the Fountain Estate.

Seven bands of Caribs, 800 in all, on the 7th of May were seen advancing to Calliaqua. Calliaqua at this time was occupied by troops under the command of Captain Molesworth. A shot from the English camp was heard by the advancing Caribs that made them stop. A messenger from the Carib was sent to the English bearing a flag of truce. The Messenger proposed that Captain Molesworth and his men should surrender. This proposal was rejected. Before any more negotiations should take place the frigate Alarm from Kingstown opened fire on the Caribs and landed 130 men. The Caribs fled in fright. While this incident was occurring in Calliaqua, another band of Caribs assisted by the French soldiers from Guadeloupe, consisted about 300 blacks and mulattoes had captured Dorsetshire Hill. The next day, the Lieutenant Seton made a successful attack on the Caribs near Calliaqua.

Reinforcements for the English arrived from Martinique with the much-needed artillery. On the 11th of June, the reinforcement troops were ordered to march to Marriaqua Valley to meet the Caribs. The troops advanced at night from Sion Hill. The troops were in several columns. The troops stationed themselves at the Augustine’s Ridge at the head of the Biabou Valley, at the Iambou Pass near the Mesopotamia sugar works and at Calder Ridge. The attack began at daybreak. The Caribs fled in terror. Sixteen of the twenty-three dead troops of the Caribs were French whites. Among the sixty people who were taken as prisoners was a French Commander. The English lost one English officer, 13 soldiers, and 3 militiamen. 3 officers and 55 privates were wounded. The Vigie fell into the hands of the English once again. The English continued to pursue the Caribs by three different routes. The English encamped at the Union Estate, where they waited for supplies from Kingstown. On the 15th of June, the supplies arrived and the march continued in quest of the Caribs. The English halted at the Bellevue Ridge and finally, they reached the Mount Young Carib settlement. The Caribs escaped and the English proceeded to Grand Sable where they smashed 200 canoes. Seven Englishmen died from fatigue during the march.

On the 23rd of June, English troops were dispatched to Owia aboard two droghers. They arrived at Owia on the 25th and captured it. The English had lost St. Lucia to the French again. This proves to be an advantage for the Caribs since they could have help from the French there. The Caribs made a new stand at Walliabou, but the guns of the Roebuck and the Thorn soon made them withdraw to a position above Chateaubelair where they opened fire upon the town of Chateaubelair, their success was small. Reinforcements from Kingstown soon arrived at Troumaca. The replacement troops included three six pounders and two howitzers. The Caribs soon fled to Morne Garou mountains.

On the 4th of August, an attack was made at Morne Ronde. After fighting for two hours, the Caribs retreated to the village of Du Valle. While going to Du Valle’s village they were overtaken by English forces who killed them and took them as

prisoners. Guards were posted both at Morne Ronde and at Richmond. The other troops were withdrawn to Mount Young.

At Owia, on the third of September, the Caribs made a raid at Owia. The English suffered a loss. Most of the English soldiers fled through the forest in the direction of Morne Ronde. The H.M.S. Experiment also rescued some soldiers who had taken refuge on a rock of the coast. On the 15th, 500 men from St.Lucia were sent to the Caribs at Owia. These men also brought provisions for them. The troops at Mount Young thought it would be best to evacuate, they arrived at Sion Hill on the 21st of September.

On the 22nd of September, the Caribs gathered at the Marriaqua Valley and took up a stand at the Fairbairn's Ridge. This cut all communication links between Kingstown and Vigie. When the relief troop for Vigie was marching to their position they were unexpectedly charged after by the Caribs. The English fled to Villa and Prospect with the Caribs hot on their trail. They were able to escape to Fort Duvernette under the cover of the guns. The Caribs obtained most of the supplies the troops were taken to Vigie. The English losses amounted to sixty being killed and wounded.

It was necessary for the government to speak to the forces at Vigie but with the Caribs surrounded Vigie it was virtually impossible. The governor decided to dispatch two Negroes to go to Vigie. They took two different routes. Only one man returned, Thomas Nash. He was given his freedom for a reward and twenty Johannes.

In secret, the Vigie was evacuated and immediately occupied by the Caribs. This made the English more uneasy. On the 29th and the 30th September, reinforcements came on the H.M.S. Scipio. On the 2nd of October, a large force of 1650 men attacked the Caribs at Vigie. The attack lasted for a whole day. When night fell the English Commander bided his troops to retreat. The Caribs not aware of this fled in the darkness for a cover. So once more, the English occupied the Vigie.

The war continued, but it was not favourable to the English to the end of 1795, and 1796 held no brighter prospects. On the 8th of January, 1796, the Caribs launched an attack at the Vigie, the English retreated to Kingstown. The English losses were 135 privates and two volunteers, sixteen officers were wounded and one officer was taken as a prisoner. These events made the colonists feel despondent.

The English started to see promising prospects, when the Major General Hunter arrived from Martinique on the 12th of January, 1796. He soon got acquainted with the problems facing the English in St.Vincent. He set up a detachment group to watch the Vigie. The remainder of the army posted on the hillsides overlooking Kingstown. The Major on hearing that the Caribs were about to attack the Vigie, order it to be deserted on the 14th to Kingstown. The Caribs pleased by the fear the English felt for them, advanced closer to Kingstown, some stationed themselves at Baker's Ridge and the rest at Bow Wood. The Caribs were deciding to make an attack on Kingstown, but they were driven out by Island Rangers who had attacked them after the Caribs had set fire to the Bow Wood House. The English lost 50 men by killing and wounding. Joy spread into the hearts of the colonists when the H.M.S. Brunswick unloaded 300 men at the Kingstown Harbour.

The Caribs were forced to evacuate their position at Baker's Ridge on the 21st of January. The Caribs aimed shots to Dorsetshire Hill that reached the vicinity of Kingstown, however, no harm was done. The Caribs retreated to the Vigie, they had lost many fellow Carib men and many were wounded. The wounded were sent to Grand Sable.

The English General Abercrombie had attacked the island of St.Lucia on the 27th of January, and he captured it from the French. This episode had a weakening effect upon the Caribs since they depended on the artillery and the provisions sent by the French from there.

General Abercrombie who had re-established St.Lucia set sailed to St.Vincent to make peace and order. He arrived in St.Vincent on the 3rd of June. The next day a fleet of armed ships disembarked at the Kingstown Harbour. The governor in his welcoming speech to the General commended him on the find artillery he had. The troops from the ships were quartered at Arnos Vale, Sion Hill, and Cane Garden. The General recruited his army of 3,960 men and divided them into six sections. Each section was given specific directions where to fight, the first section was to fight at Marriaqua, the second to fight at Calder Ridge, the third to fight at Carapan Ridge, the fourth to fight at Belmont Ridge, the fifth to fight up the Warrawarrou Valley and the sixth who were the reserves were supposed to fight at the rear. Local people acted as guides. They advanced in the night. Between 6 am and 7 am on the 10th of June the Vigie was attacked, both gun shooting and cannon balls were discharged by the troops at Calder and Carapan Ridges and later by the troop at Belmont. At 2 pm all three divisions closed in, they stormed their way to the Vigie. The Caribs fled in terror down the hill, while the English took possession of the Vigie once more. All firing was ceased by both parties. At about 5 pm, when the English decided to start warfare again, Carib bearing a flag of truce approached them. The messenger said that the Caribs were ready to take the submission. The next morning the Governor was consulted at 9:00, terms of submission were agreed on by both sides.

This was a blow for the Caribs, although some Caribs still gave trouble, they were finally subjugated. The among the last to give themselves up were Du Valle and young Chatoyer. By 26th of October, 5,080 Caribs had surrendered. Most of the Caribs were then sent to Balliceaux and later to Bequia. On the 25th of February, 1797, Caribs were loaded on the H.M.S. Experiment and carry to the Coast of Honduras, stripped out of their homeland. A few Caribs remained, and dwelled in the part island called the Carib Country that extends from Black point to the most northern part of St.Vincent. Sandy Bay and Morne Ronde were the more populated villages. The Caribs tried to live in peace in the most rugged and uncultivated land in along the Windward Coast. The Black Caribs mostly lived in the village of Greiggs that is almost as unfavorable as this area.