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‘To prevent any succour to the insurgents’: Enslaved insurgency and the Royal Navy in the Caribbean, 1795-1832

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'To prevent any succour to the insurgents': Enslaved insurgency and the Royal Navy in the Caribbean, 1795–1832[1]

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Abstract

While the actions of foreign navies and enemy privateers in the Caribbean have occupied the minds of maritime scholars, the role of the Royal Navy as an instrument of counter-insurgency to be used in suppressing self-liberation struggles by the enslaved has received much less attention. Yet, across the Caribbean, the Royal Navy was instrumental in securing victory for the colonial elite. In addressing this lacuna, this article revisits Fédon's rebellion in Grenada and the Second Carib War in St Vincent in 1795–1796, and the Jamaican Rebellion in 1831–1832, to suggest the extent of naval activity in confronting internal threats, and how responses to revolts illuminate the complex relationship between the navy and enslavement. In adopting its counterinsurgency role, after 1815 the navy found itself in the seemingly paradoxical situation of protecting enslavement and suppressing the slave trade.

Keywords

Caribbean, enslaved revolt, Grenada, Jamaica, Royal Navy, St Vincent

The role of the Royal Navy in suppressing revolts by enslaved people has, until recently, received relatively little scholarly attention, perhaps because

1. Gordon Turnbull, *A Narrative of the Revolt and Insurrection of the French Inhabitants in the Island of Grenada* (Edinburgh, 1795), 80.

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insurgencies generally took place on land, while the navy operated as a maritime force.[2] Yet, in virtually every major rising across the anglophone Caribbean in the so-called Age of Abolition, the Royal Navy was instrumental in protecting and maintaining the colonial elite. To begin to address that gap, this article explores afresh the naval response to major uprisings by enslaved people, firstly, in the Windward Islands, where insurgencies in Grenada and St Vincent began within a week of each other in March 1795, and, secondly, in Jamaica in December 1831. It draws on archive material rarely used in explorations of enslaved revolts – namely, the records of naval vessels and correspondence to and from the Admiralty. Ships' logbooks, for example, notable often only for their quotidian content, reveal the specific locations and actions of naval forces against the enslaved.

The risings took place in very different contexts: the insurrections in Grenada and St Vincent coincided with a global war with France, which actively supported the risings, whereas the Jamaican Rebellion occurred at a time of peace between European powers. The nature and composition of the uprisings also varied. In Grenada, the revolt was led by French free people of colour; in St Vincent, the insurrection was fundamentally a continuation of the struggle by Kalinago people (known by the British as 'Black Caribs' as a result of intermixing between indigenous and enslaved African communities) for their own rights and security. In Jamaica, however, it was more straightforwardly a rising by the enslaved people for their self-liberation. Nonetheless, the extent of the enslaved involvement in the Windwards in 1795 is critical. As Kit Candlin has noted, for example, the vast majority of the active participants in Fédon's rebellion in Grenada were enslaved.[3] The pursuit of freedom by people in the Windwards was no less profound, and no less threatening to the British, than that by those in Jamaica a generation later.

The Royal Navy's principal role in the Caribbean was to protect the British colonies from external threats. Over decades, it refined how it dealt with those threats, including by taking offensive action against enemies. Amphibious operations, for example, had been widely employed in the region against French, Spanish and Dutch colonies, as well as the enslaved. During the Seven Years War, the 'conjunct operations' by the army and navy were the subject of an emergent doctrine, albeit one that recognized the 'hit-and-miss' nature of the operations. Before the Seven Years War, fewer than half of the attempted landings had been successful.[4] By the century's end, the tactic had developed: no

2. The most comprehensive account remains Michael Duffy, *Soldiers, Sugar and Seapower: The British Expeditions to the West Indies and the War against Revolutionary France* (Oxford, 1987), 146–53. See also Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (Ithaca, 2009), 130, 155, 172, 189–94; Andrew J. O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia 2000), 53, 147, 152. Vincent Brown, *Tacky's Revolt: The Story of an Atlantic Slave War* (Cambridge, MA, 2020) places significant emphasis on the role of the navy.
3. Kit Candlin, 'The Role of the Enslaved in the "Fedon Rebellion" of 1795', *Slavery and Abolition*, 39, No. 4 (2018), 685–707.
4. Andrew Young, 'Amphibious Genesis: Thomas More Molyneux and the Birth of Amphibious Doctrine', in Timothy Heck and B. A. Friedman, eds., *On Contested Shores:*

longer was the navy's primary task to transport the army to suitable landing places. This article argues that this evolution enabled the navy to emerge as a weapon to be employed against colonial insurgencies. In doing so, it shows that four key characteristics of modern forms of maritime counterinsurgency were in evidence by the 1790s at least.[5] In the first place, the navy was used to mobilize regular troops and munitions between and around islands, particularly where maritime routes were quicker and safer than those over land. Secondly, once there, naval vessels, particularly larger ones, operated as command centres and secure spaces for planters seeking refuge, and as places for imprisoning captured rebels. Thirdly, the navy provided protection from external threats, notably in the Windward Islands in the 1790s, where it played a critical role in disrupting insurgents' maritime supply and communication routes, especially those to French republican forces. Finally, the navy was called on to intervene directly in offensive action against the enslaved by providing gun support and in small-boat attacks ashore. In all these instances, control over sea routes was essential. Moreover, as Julius S. Scott, Tessa Murphy and others have argued, the sea was important not only for European navies. Caribbean seaways connected the islands and turned them from a scattering of separate territories under the control of different European powers into an interlinked archipelago in which experiences – both enslaved and free – were entangled.[6]

The indigenous Kalinago people – despite the devastating consequences of European invasions – continued to use small craft to traverse the short crossings between islands, just as they had long before Columbus's ships loomed on the horizon. Their presence and their skills were acknowledged in early European accounts of the islands, and they remained important to the end of the eighteenth century, to such an extent that there is evidence that the navy was required to intercept indigenous canoes carrying weapons between rival colonies.[7] Moreover, this kind of vessel was used not only to connect islands, but also to circumnavigate them. As late as the 1820s, Charles Shephard noted that it was better to travel around St Vincent rather than traverse it, with 'the passage by sea in canoes, being more easy and commodious'.[8] Indigenous technologies, therefore, were important elements in insurgents' strategies.

For the enslaved, too, a maritime perspective helps to explain how their insurrections proceeded. There is now a significant body of scholarship that emphasizes the importance of the sea for the enslaved, not least because the sea offered escapes from enslavement.

The Evolving Role of Amphibious Operations in the History of Warfare *(Quantico, VA, 2020), 39–42.*

5. Andrew Thomas White, 'Counterinsurgency Afloat: The Historical Importance and Future Potential of Maritime Counterinsurgency', *RUSI Journal*, 166, No. 1 (2021), 60–7.
6. Julius S. Scott, *The Common Wind: Afro-American Current in the Age of the Haitian Revolution* (London, 2018); Tessa Murphy, *The Creole Archipelago: Race and Borders in the Colonial Caribbean* (Philadelphia, 2021); Douglas Hamilton, '"Sailing on the same uncertain sea": The Windward Islands of the Caribbean', in Douglas Hamilton and John McAleer, eds., *Islands and the British Empire in the Age of Sail* (Oxford, 2021), 77–96.
7. Richard Ligon, *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbadoes* (1673; London, 1976), 24 and map; Murphy, *The Creole Archipelago*, 176–7.
8. Charles Shephard, *An Historical Account of the Island of St Vincent* (London, 1831), 4.

For pilots temporarily in control of ships of the line, or fishermen freed for a few hours from the constant abuses ashore, maritime activity represented a different kind of enslavement.[9] But it also, of course, offered a means of resistance. Processes of maritime marronage – in which enslaved people used their maritime knowledge and opportunities to escape their enslavement – have been outlined in the scholarship.[10]

Vincent Brown has demonstrated that during Tacky's Revolt in Jamaica in the spring of 1760, the enslaved also actively utilized the sea to connect to allies in other islands and to move along coastal regions. The island's secluded coves on the north coast offered insurrectionary forces access to the sea and thence to other territories, with both Spanish Cuba and French St Domingue relatively easily accessible.[11] During that rising, then, both the enslaved and the enslavers used the sea. The Royal Navy – in the form of the *Lively* and the *Port Antonio* – was sent to offer relief on the northern coast. The navy, and a series of other ships, carried the counterinsurgency and secured the seaways. The capacity of the navy to block insurgents' access to the sea was important in the response to Tacky's Revolt.[12]

Three years later, after Tacky's Revolt had been brutally suppressed, British naval personnel helped to put down another rising, this time in the Dutch territory of Berbice. In February 1763, enslaved people in the colony rose up. The rebellion spread rapidly until almost all the enslaved in Berbice were in open revolt. Despite the threat to the planters and their families, the private Berbice Company, which ran the colony, had no capacity to respond, and it relied on the help of the neighbouring colonies of Surinam and Demerara until more troops arrived from Dutch St Eustatius in May. In the meantime, a private expedition, organized and paid for by the Barbados merchant Gedney Clarke, left from Bridgetown to support the Dutch. Clarke, largely through his connections with naval officers, had secured one hundred naval personnel from HMS *Pembroke*, a 60-gun ship of the line, who were dispatched to help quell a revolt in a Dutch rather than British colony.[13]

The capacity of the navy to respond was generally greater in wartime, as the size of the fleet and the number of crew increased. Responses to both Tacky's Revolt and the later Berbice Rising in 1763–1764 drew on a greater level of resourcing. The squadron based

9. Kevin Dawson, *Undercurrents of Power: Aquatic Culture in the African Diaspora* (Philadelphia, 2018), 164–90; Michael J. Jarvis, 'Maritime Masters and Seafaring Slaves in Bermuda, 1680–1783', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 59, No. 3 (2002), 585–622; W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge, MA, 1997).
10. N. A. T. Hall, 'Maritime Maroons: Grand Marronage from the Danish West Indies', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 42, No. 4 (1985), 476–98.
11. Brown, *Tacky's Revolt*, 144–50.
12. Brown, *Tacky's Revolt*, 180–5.
13. The key study of the Berbice revolt is Marjoleine Kars, *Blood on the River: A Chronicle of Mutiny and Freedom on the Wild Coast* (New York, 2020). See also Barbara L. Blair, 'Wilfert Simon von Hoogenheim in the Berbice Slave Revolt of 1763–64', *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land-, en Volkenkunde*, 140, No. 1 (1984), 56–76; Douglas Hamilton, 'Brothers in Arms: Crossing Imperial Boundaries in the Eighteenth-Century Caribbean', in Stephanie Barczewski and Martin Farr, eds., *The MacKenzie Moment and Imperial History: Essays in Honour of John M. MacKenzie* (Basingstoke, 2019), 287–310.

at Port Royal in Jamaica in 1760 was about double the size normally there in peacetime, while even at the end of the Seven Years War, the British were able to deploy support to Berbice (a Dutch colony) because of their wartime capacity.[14]

Three decades later, the navy's ability to mobilize troops and to restrict an enemy's access to the sea was employed against St Domingue after 1791. The naval blockade of St Domingue was as much about preventing revolution and revolutionaries from getting out as it was about impeding French access to supplies. The navy, along with the rest of the British state, had no desire to see revolution spread to Jamaica.[15] At the same time, however, local commanders in Jamaica were keen to see their enemy, France, suffer. Unlike any revolt in a British colony, the Royal Navy provided support to Haitian rebel forces by smuggling weapons on naval vessels.[16] The extraordinary tumult created by the French Revolution, the Haitian Revolution and the global war that followed after 1793 provides the backdrop to the insurrections in Grenada and St Vincent in March 1795. Thereafter, the article discusses the Jamaican Rebellion of 1831–1832, which is notable not just for its scale but also – from a naval perspective – for its coincidence with the Royal Navy's task of suppressing the slave trade. It provides a moment to explore a paradox in naval strategy and, indeed, in British government policy. At precisely the same time as the navy presented itself as an upholder of liberty and virtue in suppressing the trafficking of Africans, it worked assiduously to ensure the continuation of enslavement itself.

Fédon's rebellion, Grenada, 1795–1796

Grenada, situated in the south of the chain of islands that makes up the Windwards, was closely connected to the rest of the archipelago, which was made up of alternating French and British colonies. Initially neutral – at least nominally – in the early part of the eighteenth century, Grenada was fought over by the British and French from bases in other Windward islands. Seized from France by Britain during the Seven Years War, it was recaptured by the French in the 1780s in the American War of Independence, before being returned to Britain at the war's end. Its inhabitants were a polyglot mix of French and British settlers and a rapidly expanding enslaved population swollen by the trafficking of 110,000 people between the end of the Seven Years War and the eve of the insurrection.[17] It was a tinderbox of disputes, between enslaved and free, black and white, British and French, Protestant and Catholic. In the wake of the French and Haitian revolutions, the island populations became increasingly fractious. The renewal of hostilities between Britain and France from February 1793 pitted a huge European

14. In July 1760, there were 16 ships and 4,525 crew at Port Royal compared to 8 ships and 1,135 crew in 1766. The National Archives, Kew (hereafter, TNA), ADM 8/35, ADM 8/42.
15. C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins* (1938; London, 2001); Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, MA, 2005).
16. Douglas Hamilton, '"A most active, enterprising officer": Captain John Perkins, the Royal Navy and the Boundaries of Slavery and Liberty in the Caribbean', *Slavery and Abolition*, 39, No. 1 (2018), 80–100.
17. Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, https://www.slavevoyages.org (accessed 4 November 2022).

land force against a great maritime power: the Caribbean was one of the few places in the 1790s where they could get at each other directly. Both sides sent powerful military forces to the region, which enabled Britain to seize Martinique and Guadeloupe from France in 1794, before France promptly recovered Guadeloupe and used revolution as a weapon to undermine British colonies. In the process, republican France emerged as a vital new ally for insurrectionary forces. Even before Fédon's rebellion, the lieutenant governor of Grenada, Ninian Home, had been expecting a French invasion attempt. He did not envisage an enslaved revolt, however.[18]

It was against this backdrop that Julien Fédon, a free man of colour, organized and began a rebellion against the British in Grenada on 2 March 1795. For inhabitants of French origin, or people of colour like Fédon, the rebellion was primarily about their rights as free people and partly about attacking an enemy of France; in contrast, for the enslaved who flocked to the rebellion, it was a self-liberation struggle.[19] Within a fortnight of the revolt beginning, the British president of the council estimated that some 4,000 enslaved people were involved, compared to around 350 people of colour. From that point, enslaved people rose up in ever larger numbers.[20]

The revolt was actively encouraged by French revolutionary forces elsewhere in the archipelago. The circumstances of the 1790s forged an alliance between the enslaved and French revolutionary fervour. Given the connections along the archipelago, the enslaved in Grenada almost certainly knew that the French had freed enslaved people in Guadeloupe and that emancipated forces had ousted the British from the island in the summer of 1794. In the aftermath of the expulsion of British forces, Victor Hugues – appointed by Robespierre as the commissioner of the National Convention in the Windwards – acknowledged the role of the 'citoyens noirs who, thankful for the blessings of the French nation, have shared in our victories by fighting for liberty'.[21] For enslaved Grenadians, the possibilities shown in a neighbouring island, where differing demands for liberty by republicans and the enslaved made common cause, are likely to have led to their alignment with Fédon.[22]

On 2 March 1795, General Sir John Vaughan, commander-in-chief of the British army in the Windward Islands, wrote from Martinique to the Secretary for War, Henry Dundas, to reassure him that 'nothing particular has happened here since my last to you'.[23] Unknown to Vaughan, later that day, rebel forces attacked. They seized the harbour towns of Gouyave in the west of Grenada and La Baye in the east (which the British

18. Turnbull, *Narrative*, 17.
19. Tessa Murphy, 'A Reassertion of Rights: Fedon's Rebellion, Grenada, 1795–96', *La Révolution Française*, 14 (2018), http://journals.openedition.org/lrf/2017; Candlin, 'Role of the Enslaved'.
20. TNA, CO 101/34(25), Kenneth Francis MacKenzie to the Duke of Portland, 28 March 1795; Candlin, 'Role of the Enslaved', 696.
21. Quoted in Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787–1804* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2004), 193.
22. This view was expressed at the time by Gordon Turnbull, a planter in Grenada. Turnbull, *Narrative*, 15.
23. TNA, WO 1/83(136), General Sir John Vaughan to Henry Dundas, 2 March 1795.

called Charlotte Town and Granville Bay, respectively), and moved inland to establish a mountain stronghold at Belvidere in the heart of the island. In effect, they immediately cut off the northern half of the island and retained seaborne access to allies in islands to the north. The extent of the growing revolt meant that British and French royalist settlers were pushed back into the island's capital, St George's, and that rebel forces had effective control over the rest of the island. When news reached British officials in St George's the next day, they thought it was an invasion by French forces and sent messages to that effect to the military commanders in the region (General Vaughan included), to the governor of neighbouring St Vincent, to Spanish officials in Trinidad, and to all naval captains in the vicinity.[24] The first of these advice boats met the *Roebuck*, fitted out as a hospital ship but capable of carrying 44 guns, on 5 March and the *Quebec*, a 32-gun ship, off St Vincent a day later. The *Quebec* returned to St George's the faster, arriving that same day. It was immediately turned around and sent with additional marines to Gouyave to counter the rebellion. The *Roebuck* took longer to sail but then joined in the troop movements before being redeployed to St Vincent.[25] Before that, the *Resource*, a 28-gun frigate, arrived in Grenada and was sent to Gouyave in support of the *Quebec*.[26] All three ships carried men and ammunitions to the front line much more quickly and safely than could have been accomplished by a land route.

The British lack of preparedness for an internal insurrection enabled Fédon's forces to make significant early gains. At the time of the attack, Ninian Home, the lieutenant governor, was staying at his Paraclete estate when news of the uprising reached him from La Baye. He set out to return to the capital and travelled to the north coast before boarding a sloop to sail around the western side of the island to St George's. As they passed Gouyave, their vessel was fired on from land and pursued by a French privateer. Rather than trying to continue, Home and his colleagues went ashore and were captured and taken to the insurgent camp in the mountains at Belvidere. The sloop continued without them and brought news of their capture when it arrived safely in St George's.[27] In all, more than 40 members of the white elite were held hostage by the insurgents, and freeing them became a priority for the authorities.

Kenneth Francis MacKenzie, president of the Grenada Council, ordered 150 troops to Gouyave and then to march on Belvidere; at the same time, another force sailed to La Baye. Neither was successful – the regiment at Gouyave delayed an attack because of 'fatigue' among the troops. Even the arrival of reinforcements on the *Quebec* on 7 March and the *Resource* on 9 March proved insufficient, as members of the St George's militia

24. Thomas Turner Wise, *A Review of the Events, Which Have Happened in Grenada, from the Commencement of the Insurrection to the 1st of May* (St George's, 1795), 5–6; Turnbull, *Narrative*, 21, 30–1.
25. TNA, ADM 52/3330(3), Master's Log of the *Quebec*; ADM 51/1143/8, Captain's Log of the *Roebuck*.
26. TNA, ADM 51/1177, Captain's Log of the *Resource*.
27. TNA, ADM 51/1177, Captain's Log of the *Resource*; Wise, *Review of the Events*, 5–7; Turnbull, *Narrative*, 26–8.

declined to advance and instead chose to return to defend their properties.[28] Meanwhile, at La Baye on the other side of the island, local commanders decided it was too dangerous to leave the ships. MacKenzie was predictably furious:

> The critical situation of this island required your instant obedience to my orders, and not your debates on the eligibility of them … . The island is to be saved by your united exertions against the enemy, and not by hiding your regiments on board ships at La Baye.[29]

With the army and militia unable or unwilling to proceed until more troops arrived, naval vessels made direct interventions against the rebels, who were growing in number as news of the insurrection spread across the island. While more troops were being landed, for example, the *Resource* 'fired two guns double shotted at a number of the Enemy on Shore'. Two days later, while chasing vessels along the coast, it came under fire from shore.[30]

By 15 March, reinforcements led by Brigadier General Colin Lindsay arrived from Martinique and were landed by the navy at Gouyave, from where they marched to Fédon's headquarters at Belvidere. Their advance was marked by a series of delays and hampered by heavy rains. They also faced stiff resistance from the insurgents, whose counterattacks killed three and wounded 16 soldiers. Lindsay probably suffered from what we would now understand as acute mental illness and, faced with ever mounting setbacks, took his own life a week into the campaign.[31] The failure of Lindsay's mission convinced local commanders and politicians that the insurgents' camp was more or less impregnable, save by an attack on four sides. MacKenzie, the embattled president of the island, wrote to Vaughan, indicating that significant additional support would be required.[32] Throughout March and into April, naval forces continued their attacks nonetheless. On 20 March, men from the *Resource* were sent ashore to destroy the guns at Grand Pauvre, north of Gouyave, and, in early April, the ship was sent in support of an ill-starred attempt to seize the port of La Baye.

On 8 April, a force of at least 90 men from the *Resource* joined with others to form a naval force of 150, led by Captain Watkins. They went ashore and moved inland from Gouyave to reinforce regular troops positioning themselves to move on the insurgents' camp and free the hostages held there, Lieutenant Governor Home included. Despite naval forces on one flank and troops advancing from another, the attack struggled to traverse the difficult terrain in the face of fierce enslaved resistance. It took a heavy toll on British forces, while insurgents 'suffered but little' by comparison.[33] Two days before the

28. Turnbull, *Narrative*, 66; TNA, ADM 52/3330(3), Master's Log of the *Quebec*, 7 and 9 March 1795; ADM 51/1177, Captain's Log of the *Resource*, 9 March 1795.
29. Quoted in Turnbull, *Narrative*, 59.
30. TNA, ADM 51/1177, Captain's Log of the *Resource*, 13 and 15 March 1795.
31. Henry Thornhill, *A Narrative of the Insurrection and Rebellion in the Island of Grenada* (Barbados, 1798), 15–17.
32. TNA, WO 1/83(159–159v), MacKenzie to Vaughan, 24 March 1795.
33. TNA, ADM 51/1177, Captain's Log of the *Resource*, 8 April 1795; ADM 1/317(49), Captain Watkins to Admiral Caldwell, 9 April 1795; Turnbull, *Narrative*, 97–102; Thornhill, *Narrative of the Insurrection*, 27–32.

attack, the authorities in St George's had received a warning from Fédon that an attack on his camp would result in the deaths of all the hostages held there, including the lieutenant governor. Fédon was true to his word: the attack prompted the rebels to kill all the hostages in the camp, much to the horror of contemporary observers.

The failure of the British assault also effectively ceded the greater part of the island to the insurgency. Strikingly, contemporary observers, who were critical of military officers through a succession of failed operations in Grenada, all absolved naval personnel from responsibility. Gordon Turnbull praised the 'gallant' Captain Watkins and the 'brave' seamen, while Henry Thornhill recorded his approbation of the 'spirited exertions' of the *Resource*'s crew.[34] Notably, too, while this amphibious assault by naval forces failed (as many did during the eighteenth century), it suggests that naval personnel were prepared and ready to participate in combined operations in circumstances far removed from standard naval activity. Naval willingness notwithstanding, it quickly became apparent that British forces faced a considerable problem in Grenada, where its resources seemed thinly stretched. The extent of their difficulties grew very quickly.

St Vincent, 1795–1796

Less than a week after the beginning of Fédon's rebellion in Grenada, on 8 March insurgents in St Vincent rose up and, like the Grenadians, exploited the fevered conditions of the 1790s. The Kalinago dispute with the British over the occupation of their lands was long-standing and had been the subject of a previous conflict between them in the 1770s. The settlement of the British in 1763 had enshrined Kalinago rights to most of the north and east of the island, but the terms of the peace treaty in 1773 restricted them to the northern quarter – and even those territories were coveted by British colonists. These disputes, which had never fully been resolved, were reignited in the 1790s and inflamed by the language of the French Revolution, and were backed by the Hugues regime in Guadeloupe.[35] For the British, and for the navy in particular, it meant confronting two separate insurrections in addition to the wider conflict with revolutionary France across the Caribbean archipelago.[36] The authorities in St Vincent under Governor James Seton had been forewarned by the news of the insurgency in Grenada, but they were unable to prevent the Kalinago and their enslaved allies rising up. The island also remained vulnerable because all available naval vessels – not least the *Quebec* – had made sail for Grenada, with the *Zebra*, a 16-gun sloop, only sailing from Martinique to St Vincent on 10 March.[37]

34. Turnbull, *Narrative*, 97, 99; Thornhill, *Narrative of the Insurrection*, 27.
35. Bernard Marshall, 'The Black Caribs – Native Resistance to British Penetration into the Windward Side of St Vincent, 1763–73', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 14, No. 4 (1973), 4–19; Julie Chun Kim, 'The Caribs of St Vincent and Indigenous Resistance during the Age of Revolution', *Early American Studies*, 11, No. 1 (2013), 117–32; Heather Freund, 'Who Should Be Treated "with every degree of humanity"? Debating Rights for Planters, Soldiers and Caribs/Kalinago on St Vincent, 1763–73', *Atlantic Studies*, 13, No. 1 (2016), 125–43; Murphy, *The Creole Archipelago*, 156–70, 216–21.
36. For the broader context, see Duffy, *Soldiers, Sugar and Seapower*; Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens*.
37. TNA, ADM 1/317(30), Caldwell to the Admiralty, 15 March 1795.

Kalinago forces, led by Joseph Chatoyer, first attacked plantations situated on lands in the east of the island, which had previously been claimed by the Kalinago but were taken from them in the 1770s. They then turned their fire on Chateaubelair, in the west of the island. By 12 March, they had reached the outskirts of Kingstown, the main settlement in St Vincent, and seized the British fort at Dorsetshire Hill. Just as in Grenada, naval forces were swiftly deployed ashore. Some 60 men from the *Zebra* and the *Roebuck* joined sailors from other commercial shipping in Kingstown harbour and troops from the 46th Regiment and the militia to retake Dorsetshire Hill. In reporting the news to the Secretary of State in London, Governor Seton highlighted the important contributions of naval personnel. He also noted, however, the extensive threat still facing the island. The retaking of the fort was important, and the assault resulted in the death of Chatoyer (who was replaced by his son, Chatoyé), but the danger to the island was far from over.[38]

At the end of March, with the insurgents no closer to the capital than before but with the British lacking the resources to end the insurrection, the governor revealed his profoundly racialized view of the enemy. The Kalinago were not simply to be defeated as a European force might; for Seton, the solution was 'totally to exterminate this savage & merciless race of Charaibs, with whom no treaties are binding, nor favours conciliating, nor any Laws Divine or Human restraining'. This aim was not in sight, however. Writing to the Duke of Portland, he hoped that the 'arrival of the fleet will soon relieve us from our dreadful situation', and he singled out Lieutenant McIver, acting commander of the *Roebuck*, for 'particular thanks'. In response, Portland expressed his 'particular satisfaction' to learn of the contributions made by those on the *Zebra* and *Roebuck*.[39] The role of naval forces in the counterinsurgency continued to be noted. On 11 April, the *Roebuck*'s log recorded that Lieutenant Grove and 30 men joined troops and militia to storm the enemy's camp, and took the village of Calliagua, while Kalinago forces were ousted from the hills around it.[40]

It was not until May that Dorsetshire Hill, overlooking St Vincent's capital, was recovered by the British, who pushed the insurgents back to a new camp at Vigie. In early June, the arrival of 'Black Rangers' from Martinique and four troop transports brought under convoy by the *Mermaid* from Barbados allowed British forces to launch an attack on the rebel camp. Rather than leave Dorsetshire Hill undefended, 40 men from the *Roebuck* were deployed to secure it. They remained there until the end of the month. The *Roebuck* – which had been fitted as a hospital ship – also provided support to the attack, taking aboard captured prisoners and sending 24 hammocks ashore 'for the men wounded at Storming the Enemys Camp'. In all, 12 British troops were injured and 53 wounded, but their losses were far fewer than the rebels, who lost some 220. Among them, it was reported that there were 43 'whites', suggesting an important French revolutionary presence among the insurgents.[41]

38. TNA, CO 260/13(13–14v), James Seton to Portland, 16 March 1795.
39. TNA, CO 260/13(29–29v), Seton to Portland, 29 March 1795; CO 260/13(33–33v), Portland to Seton, June 1795.
40. TNA, ADM 51/1143/8, Captain's Log of the *Roebuck*, 11 April 1795; CO 260/13(40–40v), Seton to Portland, 11 April 1795.
41. The attack is described in TNA, CO 260/13(70–71), Seton to Portland, 23 June 1795; ADM 51/1114, Captain's Log of the *Roebuck*.

Despite an occasional victory, like that in St Vincent in June 1795, throughout 1795 and well into 1796 insurgents in both islands, supplied by French allies, maintained their gains, but without being able to seize the islands' capitals. With fewer troops than expected departing from Britain and leaving significantly later than planned, and with those who arrived weakened by disease, it proved impossible to deploy British regular troops against the rebels in both Grenada and St Vincent for another year.[42] Before he died, General Lindsay noted the importance of the navy as more than just a troop transport: 'I rely upon the navy, that they will prevent supplies from getting to the enemy from Guadeloupe or elsewhere'.[43] In the absence of sufficiently large offensives on land, the maritime conflict, and the navy, assumed even greater significance.

Cruising the Windwards

Lindsay's concerns were well founded and were acted on. From the beginning of the revolt, naval officials recognized the threat and, after mid March, the *Resource* and the *Roebuck* were 'kept cruising to prevent the Insurgents receiving supplies of Arms or Ammunition'.[44] A great deal of effort was thus based on securing the waters around, firstly, Grenada and then St Vincent. All along the archipelago, merchant ships were intercepted: some were released, while others were found to be connected to rebels in either Grenada or St Vincent.

In late March, HMS *Resource* captured two vessels. On 22 March, it intercepted one going to Grenada from Guadeloupe with 'shot and powder for the rebels'. On 26 March, it stopped a schooner – the *Félicité* – flying Spanish colours sailing from Trinidad to Guadeloupe. The *Resource* found that it was crewed by French residents of Grenada and carrying emissaries to Guadeloupe. Among them was Pierre Alexandre, an associate of Fédon, who was tried for attempting to subvert the King's government and executed on 2 April. According to MacKenzie, these emissaries intended to buy munitions for the rebel forces. It is likely that they had sailed from Grenada to Trinidad, where they ordered munitions before going on to Guadeloupe with correspondence for Victor Hugues.[45] These two incidents demonstrate the importance of the maritime aspects of the revolt, both for the rebels reliant on connections to the outside world and for the British in trying to constrain them.

Throughout the middle part of 1795, HMS *Mermaid* cruised along the Grenadines, from Grenada northwards to Carriacou and Union Island, roughly halfway between Grenada and St Vincent. These small islands provided safe anchorages where naval vessels could access water and supplies and lie in wait for Grenada-bound shipping. Taking no chances, they intercepted shipping of all nations, including vessels flying Danish or American flags.[46] To the north, off St Vincent, the *Roebuck* performed a

42. Duffy, *Soldiers, Sugar and Seapower*, 159–215.
43. Quoted in Turnbull, *Narrative*, 77.
44. TNA, ADM 1/317(30v), Caldwell to the Admiralty, 15 March 1795.
45. TNA, ADM 51/1177, Captain's Log of the *Resource*; Turnbull, *Narrative*, 80; Wise, *Review of the Events*, 52, 55; Thornhill, *Narrative of the Insurrection*, 19–20; TNA, CO 101/34(40), MacKenzie to Portland, 29 March 1795.
46. TNA, ADM 51/1118/11, Captain's Log of the *Mermaid.*

similar role and, like the *Mermaid*, found that it was not always a straightforward task. In May 1795, Captain MacIver received news of a sighting of a vessel 'suposed [*sic*] to be an enemy'. Early next morning, he saw a sloop coming out of a bay and fired three shots to bring it to a stop, but found it to be a British ship.[47]

The British were concerned not just about French crews or European-style vessels. Kalinago seagoing canoes enabled insurgents to secure supplies of ammunition from St Lucia.[48] As early as April 1795, Governor Seton of St Vincent 'judg[ed] it highly necessary' to destroy 'a number of Charaib Canoes … in a Bay on the North side of the Island', only some 30 miles from St Lucia. Thirty-three sailors and an officer from the *Roebuck* joined the attack on the beach, which was initially repelled by the rebels. After a day's intensive fighting, the landing party was able to destroy 16 canoes, some of which were described as large enough to carry 30 men. Described prosaically in the *Roebuck*'s logbook as 'an expedition which they succeeded in', its success came at the cost of an unknown number of insurgents and around 20 British casualties and four fatalities. The *Roebuck* alone lost three crew: John Bell, Jacob West and Thomas Collingwood.[49]

Despite the vigilance of these patrols, however, they were able only to hamper French efforts to supply the islands. As Admiral Benjamin Caldwell, commander-in-chief of the Leeward Islands, wrote to the Admiralty as he prepared to demit office in May 1795: 'the Enemy get frequent supplies into the revolted Islands, and which nothing but an additional number of Frigates, Sloops &c can prevent'.[50] Caldwell's successor, Admiral Sir John Laforey, concurred, and wrote of his desperation to acquire more ships both to secure the islands and to prevent interactions between them. By August, he had spent some £6,000 sterling buying three armed sloops.[51] Of the 28 ships in the Leewards fleet in April 1795, only four were stationed at Grenada and St Vincent (two at each) more than a month after the revolts began, as the navy struggled to secure the 600-mile arc of war-torn Caribbean islands from the Virgin Islands in the north to Tobago in the south. Their greatest area of strength lay in the blockade of Guadeloupe, which was designed to prevent French forces there being strengthened. It was also supposed to limit communications between it and the islands of Grenada and St Vincent, but that concentration left weaknesses elsewhere.[52]

Even with attacks on Kalinago canoes and with Guadeloupe under observation, the French recovery of St Lucia in June 1795 was, as far as the British were concerned, 'much to be dreaded for the safety of St Vincents'.[53] St Vincent was easily accessible

47. TNA, ADM 51/1114/5, Captain's Log of the *Roebuck*, 13 May 1795.
48. Murphy, *The Creole Archipelago*, 23; Shephard, *Historical Account*, 106–7, 120, 134.
49. TNA, CO 260/13(53–53v), Seton to Portland, 29 April 1795; ADM 51/1114/5, Captain's Log of the *Roebuck*, 16 and 28 April 1795.
50. TNA, ADM 1/317(73), Caldwell to the Admiralty, 14 May 1795.
51. TNA, ADM 1/317(92–94), Admiral Sir John Laforey to the Admiralty, 6 and 17 August 1795.
52. TNA, ADM 1/317(48), Caldwell to the Admiralty, enclosed 'Disposition of the Squadron … 14 April 1795'.
53. TNA, ADM 1/317(92), Laforey to the Admiralty, 6 August 1795.

from St Lucia, by Europeans and by enslaved or Kalinago insurgents, and it soon became apparent that Laforey's concern was not an idle one: in August, Captain Barrett of the *Experiment*, patrolling between St Lucia and St Vincent, discovered that three canoes had crossed undetected by night through heavy seas.[54] Indigenous vessels, and Kalinago knowledge of the seas, had the advantage over naval vessels in these conditions. It was clear to Admiral Laforey that French resources continued to reach Grenada and St Vincent: 'the Enemy have been every where in Motion, they have by means of small Schooners thrown more amunition [*sic*] into Grenada from St Lucie, which appears to be a place of Arms'. At the same time, Laforey noted the likely involvement of French soldiers in attacks in St Vincent, either by those already in the island 'or by a fresh detachment from St Lucie'.[55]

Even when the navy succeeded in stopping French shipping, the consequences were not always favourable. In the first two weeks of October 1795, the *Mermaid* patrolled off the east coast of Grenada and noted frequent sightings of 'strange ships'. On 10 October, it came upon two French vessels off La Baye on Grenada's east coast. They quickly set sail southwards, but the smaller vessel was discovered at anchor in Requin (or Requiem) Bay. The captain's logbook of the *Mermaid* identified the ship as the *Brutus*, 'a French National brigg with 70 soldiers & 50 seamen'. The crew of the *Mermaid* fired on the *Brutus*, setting fire to it, but failed to prevent French forces from landing. The *Brutus* was taken as a naval prize and sent to St George's but, in disembarking French troops, the ship had been successful in providing support and relief to the insurgency.[56] The *Mermaid* continued its patrol and, on 15 October, fired on the larger vessel, which proved to be a French frigate, the *Republicain*. After a chase of several hours and at the cost of one British and around 20 French lives, the *Republicain* was also taken as a prize, along with approximately 20 prisoners. Given that there was estimated to be about 260 men originally aboard the *Republicain*, it seems likely that almost 350 men from the two French ships were able to land before their vessels were captured.[57] These British perceptions challenge a view that 'Republican authorities were ultimately able to offer little support to insurgents in Grenada' – Hugues' political opponents might have thought so, but the Royal Navy saw it very differently.[58] As far as the navy was concerned, the French appeared to be trying hard to support the insurgency.

These incidents indicate clearly how important maritime access to support was for the rebels (and the extent of it), as well as how critical the navy's capacity to intercede might be. The capture of the *Brutus* and the *Republicain* garnered coverage in Britain, both in images and in the newspapers, but, as the *Morning Chronicle* noted, when the *Mermaid* returned with the captured vessels, the captain and crew discovered that the port on the other side of the island (at Gouyave) had been recaptured by the insurgents. As Admiral Laforey reported to the Admiralty, Captain Warre 'acquainted me that upon his return with his prize he had the mortification to find that the important Post of

54. TNA, ADM 1/317(97), Captain Barrett to Laforey, 9 September 1795.
55. TNA, ADM 1/317(96), Laforey to the Admiralty, 11 September 1795.
56. TNA, ADM 51/1118(51), Captain's Log of the *Mermaid*, 10 October 1795.
57. TNA, ADM 51/1118(52), Captain's Log of the *Mermaid*, 15 October 1795.
58. Quoted in Murphy, *The Creole Archipelago*, 214.

Gouyave or Charlotte Town had been taken by the Enemy the night before'. Just as the navy had a key role in suppressing revolt, an understrength or overstretched navy risked revolts being successful.[59]

Patrolling the waters off Grenada and St Vincent also gave rise to opportunistic naval attacks on the enslaved. In mid April 1795, for example, the *Resource* cruised along the Grenada coast and sent 10 men and an officer ashore to Soubise (just south of La Baye) to 'dismantle some guns'. They returned to the ship the following day, having 'render'd useless several guns & burnt some'. On 9 July, HMS *Zebra* sent two boats ashore 'to annoy the enemy', while at the end of July 1795, the *Mermaid* 'fired several guns loaded with round & grape shot at the Brigands ashore', and in August reported firing '12 pounders at ye enemy along shore'. The *Roebuck*, off St Vincent, 'fired 2 nine pounders to silence the Negroes on shore' on, 19 March and, later, in July, 'saw the Enemy encamped upon a hill to Windward of [Chateaubelair and] fired a number of nine and six pounders at them'.[60] These attacks ensured that the insurgents needed to be conscious of seaborne threats, even as the conflict ashore ground to a stalemate.

By the summer of 1795, the risings in both islands had reached an impasse. With British forces insufficient to suppress the insurgency but powerful enough to prevent significant reinforcements reaching the rebels, the insurgents were unable to press home their advantages. As result, the enslaved risings controlled most of the territory on both islands, but the British remained relatively secure in the island capitals of St George's and Kingstown. Grenada was 'totally possessed or open to the Enemy without the reach of the Guns or Shells of the Fortifications', while, in St Vincent, 'the enemy after being dislodged from the Windward Part have now taken possession of a Post upon the Leeward side of it at Chateau Belair where they have lately repulsed an attempt that was made to dislodge them'.[61]

By December, Admiral Laforey reported that, on both Grenada and St Vincent, 'everything remains at a stand, each side continuing on the defensive'.[62] Serious logistical and political delays in Britain had meant that although plans for an expedition to the West Indies numbering more than 200 ships and 30,000 men had been in place since August, none had arrived, while the insurgents continued to find ways through the overstretched British blockade and to land in remote and unpopulated coves.[63] So inadequate were resources that some in the British government wondered whether the extent of the British Empire in

59. TNA, ADM 1/317(139), Laforey to the Admiralty, 22 October 1795; *Morning Chronicle*, 4 January 1796; National Maritime Museum, Greenwich (hereafter, NMM), PAD8760, Nicholas Pocock, 'Mermaid, Grenada', *circa* 1795; PAD8761, Pocock, 'Mermaid, Capt. Warre, in Requieum Bay, Grenada', *circa* 1795; PAI5713, Robert Pollard, 'The Situation of the Mermaid on 19th October 1795', 1798.
60. TNA, ADM 51/1177, Captain's Log of the *Resource*, 19–20 April 1795; ADM 51/118/11, Captain's Log of the *Mermaid*, 9 July, 28 July and 25 August 1795; ADM 51/1143/8, Captain's Log of the *Roebuck*, 19 March 1795; ADM 51/1114/5, Captain's Log of the *Roebuck*, 2 July 1795.
61. TNA, ADM 1/317(92), Laforey to the Admiralty, 6 August 1795.
62. TNA, ADM 1/317(199), Laforey to the Admiralty, 9 December 1795.
63. Duffy, *Soldiers, Sugar and Seapower*, 159–98.

the Caribbean might need to be reduced and some colonies given up. In January 1796, Earl Spencer, the First Lord of the Admiralty, wrote to Dundas supporting an attack on St Domingue, even though it risked 'most if not all of our Islands to windward'. He wrote:

> We must, therefore … make up our minds to the probable loss of all our Leeward Island dominions, and be prepared to stage the probable acquisition of St Domingo and consequent security of Jamaica as a sufficient equivalent for that loss.[64]

In the event, the reverse was true: reinforcements for St Domingue were instead eventually diverted to secure Grenada and St Vincent. Plans to send the expedition from Britain were blighted by a series of rows and then, when the fleet attempted to sail in November 1795, it was driven back by storms in the English Channel. The relief fleet finally arrived in the Caribbean, at Barbados, in April 1796. Under General Abercromby's command, some 6,000 men were divided between St Vincent and Grenada. On 10 June 1796, following a naval bombardment of Gouyave, 3,000 troops landed and marched to Fédon's stronghold on 18 June. In St Vincent, the Kalinago surrendered in the same month in the face of overwhelming numbers.[65]

In all, perhaps 7,000 enslaved people died in Grenada alone, along with hundreds of free people of colour and whites.[66] Fédon's rebellion, which came as close as any to overthrowing British rule, was estimated to have caused £2.5 million sterling in damage, while losses in St Vincent by a 'strictly moderate computation' were reckoned to be over £900,000 sterling.[67] Rebuilding the islands' estates took years. Among the insurgents in Grenada, some 460 white rebels and people of colour were tried for their part in the rising, with 100 being executed and the rest exiled. No enslaved people seem to have been tried, although it is probable that many were summarily punished. The colonial state also needed their continued labour.[68] In St Vincent, Governor Seton had argued within a fortnight of the conflict beginning that 'it appears to me that the only method we can repossess and retain what we have lost will be by extirpating the Charaibs'. General Vaughan's comment in forwarding the letter to Dundas was less certain: 'Governor Seton's Idea, that the colony cannot thrive unless the Charibs are extirpated, that is totally removed, I believe is well founded: But I apprehend the execution of this Measure is more difficult than he seems to think'. Solutions were found, however, and the Kalinago community was forcibly removed from St Vincent, first to Baliceaux from July 1796 and then to Roatán Island in the Bay of Honduras in March 1797. The consequences were devastating: of the 4,776 people banished to Baliceaux, only 2,248 survived to be relocated again a year later.[69] After the 1790s, neither Grenada nor St Vincent was

64. H. W. Richmond, *Private Papers of George, Second Earl Spencer*, vol. 3 (London, 1924), 223–4.
65. Duffy, *Soldiers, Sugar and Seapower*, 236–40; Shephard, *Historical Account*, 149–60.
66. Candlin, 'Role of the Enslaved', 685.
67. Turnbull, *Narrative*, 163; Shephard, *Historical Account*, 174.
68. Murphy, *The Creole Archipelago*, 222–4.
69. TNA, WO 1/83(154–5), Seton to Vaughan, 22 March 1795; Vaughan to Dundas, 25 March 1795; Murphy, *The Creole Archipelago*, 225–6.

seriously threatened by full-scale enslaved revolt, although, in Jamaica (and indeed elsewhere), the risk of insurgency among the enslaved remained well into the nineteenth century.

The Jamaican Rebellion, 1831–1832[70]

A few days before Christmas 1831, a widespread labour dispute began at Salt Spring estate in St Elizabeth Parish in northern Jamaica. The strike action by enslaved workers, planned through Baptist networks and led by Samuel Sharpe, quickly turned violent. Admiral Edward Griffith Colpoys, commander of the North American and West Indies Station (of which Jamaica was then a part), had recently been assured of the 'tranquillity of Jamaica' and had sailed southwards, 'where it was reported … that a spirit of insubordination had manifested itself in the islands of St Lucia and Antigua'. As Colpoys presented it, he mobilized in case of enslaved revolt; the problem was that he went to the wrong place.[71]

On 27 December, the Kensington estate, in the hills above Montego Bay, was torched. When dispatches reached the governor, he immediately called out the militia and sent two armed vessels to the harbours at Montego Bay and Black River, while a detachment of regular troops was readied aboard HMS *Sparrowhawk* at Port Royal. By 29 December, news of widespread estate-burning across the northern parishes arrived in Spanish Town. In its brutal suppression of the Jamaican Rebellion of 1831–1832, the British sent in regular troops and deployed the Royal Navy.[72] Unlike Grenada and St Vincent, which had no permanent naval base, Jamaica was home to a major squadron at Port Royal. Equally significantly, the Jamaican Rebellion did not erupt while Britain was fighting a major conflict. Although that meant there were smaller fleets in the region than in wartime, the Jamaican colonial authorities were able to concentrate on the insurgency rather than stretching their resources to combat multiple threats. In confronting this rebellion, as in the Windwards a generation earlier, the navy was again used as more than a part of the logistical or defensive operation: it was an active part of the counterinsurgency.

The early skirmishes went badly for the Jamaican militia. Confronted by the enslaved forces at the Montpelier estate, the militia's commander – in a decision slated by contemporary observers – chose to retreat to Montego Bay. In doing so, he left the western third of

70. The rebellion is known variously as the Christmas Rising and the Baptist War. For consistency, it is referred to here as the Jamaican Rebellion.
71. TNA, ADM 1/287(41), Admiral Edward Griffith Colpoys to the Admiralty, 14 February 1832.
72. Relatively little has been written about the rebellion, despite its significance: Mary Reckord, 'The Jamaica Slave Rebellion of 1831–32', *Past and Present*, 40 (1968), 108–25; Tom Zoellner, *Island on Fire: The Revolt That Ended Slavery in the British Empire* (Cambridge, MA, 2020); Mary Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries: The Disintegration of Jamaican Slave Society* (Kingston, 1982); Craton, *Testing the Chains*, 291–321; B. W. Higman, *Montpelier, Jamaica: A Plantation Community in Slavery and Freedom, 1739–1912* (Barbados, 1998), 262–5; *The Times*, 'The London Gazette Extraordinary', 23 February 1832. *The Times* reprinted correspondence to and from Lord Belmore, Governor of Jamaica. It was also published in the *Morning Post* on the same day.

the island in the hands of the rebels: 'for about eight days scarcely a white man was to be seen from Montego Bay to Savannah-la-Mar, and from Black River to Lucea'.[73] While the local militia was 'paralysed at the apparent extent of the danger', the first naval vessel reached Montego Bay. When the 18-gun sloop *Racehorse* arrived, it 'observed additional fires & sent boats for small armed men & marines'. This initial intervention came to be regarded as of critical importance. Colpoys reported later that Commander Charles Williams of the *Racehorse* led his men against the insurgents, and that this intervention was 'unquestionably the means of saving Montego from destruction'.[74] In the meantime, on 30 December 1831, the *Sparrowhawk* had been dispatched from Port Royal carrying two companies of the 84th Regiment commanded by Willoughby Cotton. It arrived two days later at Montego Bay. The next day, HMS *Blanche*, a 46-gun ship under Commodore Sir Arthur Farquhar, was loaded with ordnance, stores and 355 troops at Port Royal, and sailed for Montego Bay, arriving on 2 January 1832.[75] The arrival of the *Blanche* meant that, in Colpoys' absence, Jamaica's next most senior naval commander was in the immediate vicinity of the insurrection.

By the beginning of January, any illusion that the rising by the enslaved could quickly be contained had been shattered. The burning of Kensington on 27 December and other hilltop estates had acted as beacons to the enslaved across the parishes of St James, Hanover, St Elizabeth and Trelawny. Enslaved forces, including the 150-strong Black Regiment led by Colonel Johnson of the Retrieve estate, pushed the planters' militia forces back and gained control of large swathes of the Jamaican interior.[76] In all, perhaps 60,000 enslaved people rose up against planter rule.[77]

The navy quickly encircled Jamaica by sending at least eight ships to ports around the island to carry troops and ordnance to the immediate locus of revolt in Montego Bay and Great River, as well as to Falmouth and Lucea on the north coast, to Black River and Savannah-la-Mar in the south-west, and to Port Antonio in the east of the island. Although Jamaican rebels had often used the sea to move along the coast and to connect to allies in other colonies, notably Haiti and Cuba, the navy was much less concerned about that in the 1830s, and spent less time obstructing sea routes than it had in the Windwards in the 1790s. While it could effectively secure Jamaica's harbours, it did not patrol the many coves along Jamaica's much longer coastline. Instead, naval vessels provided safe, mobile centres of command, as well as places of refuge for the fleeing white inhabitants. It was also believed, at least by the navy, that its vessels had an intimidating effect on would-be insurgents. Colpoys, for example, noted that the arrival of the

73. Henry Bleby, *Death Struggles of Slavery: Being a Narrative of Facts and Incidents, Which Occurred in a British Colony, during the Two Years Immediately Preceding Negro Emancipation* (London, 1868), 14. See also Zoellner, *Island on Fire*, 129–32.
74. TNA, ADM 51/3390, Captain's Log of the *Racehorse*, 31 December 1831, 1 January 1832; ADM 1/287(61), Colpoys to the Admiralty, 8 March 1832.
75. TNA, ADM 51/3145, Captain's Log of the *Sparrowhawk*; ADM 53/205, Ship's Log of the *Blanche.*
76. Reckord, 'Jamaican Slave Rebellion', 118.
77. Craton, *Testing the Chains*, 291.

Champion at Port Antonio scared off rebels who were preparing to set fire to a beacon summoning insurrection in the east of the island.[78]

Throughout January, naval forces launched attacks on rebels ashore using amphibious tactics for which crew had been specifically trained. It is clear from the logbooks of the *Blanche* that crew and marines actively prepared for such assaults, even if they did not know precisely against whom they might be deployed. In late 1830, a year before the Jamaican Rebellion, when there was little serious prospect of war with European rivals, sailors on the *Blanche* practised drills with cutter crews, trained men in small-arms attacks, and readied gun crews while they cruised off the coast of Cartagena.[79] In late December 1831, en route to Montego Bay to counter the revolt, the *Racehorse* had been off Negril, in the west of the island, where crew and marines 'exercised small arms'. On December 29, they had practised landing troops, sending ashore 'all the Marines and Small Armed Men and part of the Officers'. The next day, they practised gunnery. As the sloop sailed on towards Montego Bay, the crew saw 'several fires in the country', and it was apparent that their training was about to be put into practice.[80] It is also evident that the navy prepared specifically to counter enslaved revolt using amphibious tactics developed over many years, and was a key part of the direct action to maintain enslavement.

On the *Blanche*, after the Articles of War were read and troops and ammunition were unloaded, the crew sailed to the western side of Montego Bay on 3 January to prepare an assault. The captain's logbook notes that the first attack took place later that day, when five boats were sent ashore, 'manned & Arm'd with party of Marines'. This initial incursion went badly and, some three hours later, 'observing the party on shore to be warmly attacked, … more ammunition and assistance [was sent]', which was evidently more successful as the boats returned with prisoners shortly afterwards.[81] It took at least two days to quell the attack on the Bogue estates; even afterwards, considerable nervousness remained, and a party of marines and seamen was sent ashore every evening until early February, after the rebellion is usually regarded to have finished. A discernible pattern emerged: the boats went ashore in the late afternoon and they returned at first light the next morning. Farquhar and his officers were clearly concerned about the threat of rebels returning under the cover of darkness.[82]

On 4 January, Farquhar ordered the *Sparrowhawk* to sail to the mouth of the Great River – to the west of Montego Bay – where it landed 60 men the next day. While the men were ashore, the ship's guns were turned on enslaved people on shore.[83] In a similar

78. TNA, ADM 1/287(41), Colpoys to the Admiralty, 14 February 1832.
79. TNA, ADM 53/205, Ship's Log of the *Blanche*, 26 February 1830–2 November 1833, entries in December 1830.
80. TNA, ADM 51/3390, Captain's Log of the *Racehorse*.
81. TNA, ADM 51/3077, Captain's Log of the *Blanche*, 16 February 1830–2 November 1833, 3 January 1833.
82. TNA, ADM 51/3077, Captain's Log of the *Blanche*, 16 February 1830–2 November 1833, 3 January 1833.
83. TNA, ADM 51/3077, Captain's Log of the *Blanche*; ADM 51/3145, Captain's Log of the *Sparrowhawk.* The scale of the attack is represented in two paintings: NMM, ZBA1585, James Fuller Boxer, *Destruction of the Boyne [Bogue] Estates by the Rebel Slaves in 1831*; ZBA1586, Boxer, *Attack and Capture of the Rebels Positions Near Morant Bay*, 1830s.

vein, having helped to secure Montego Bay, the *Racehorse* was used to land soldiers as the British built up troop reinforcements until the middle of January. As those detachments of regular soldiers set out into the interior, sailors were twice more sent ashore, 'to protect the Fort' on 7 January and 'for the protection of the Town' on 14 January.[84] As Colpoys put it a few weeks later:

> The Seamen and Marines being landed from the several ships occupied and protected the principal Towns in the disturbed districts, by which means the whole of the King's Troops and Militia were left at Liberty to attack and pursue the Rebels to the interior whilst the ships themselves afforded safe places of refuge to the families and children.[85]

By late January, it was deemed to be sufficiently safe for Governor Belmore to tour the north coast of the island aboard HMS *North Star*. The *North Star* had cruised along the Haitian coast as the rebellion began and returned to Port Royal only on 10 January. On 29 January, Belmore embarked and the ship set sail for Montego Bay. There, the governor joined Farquhar on the *Blanche*, while officers and crew from the *North Star* served 'as a militia guard to the Town' every night for a week.[86]

By early February, the danger from this particular quarter had passed. Across the island, the British had crushed the revolt with their customary brutality, and the *Blanche* returned to Port Royal on 8 February. Before she did so, it is likely that some 72 enslaved people had been killed and another 260 captured in the *Blanche*'s attacks on rebels on the Bogue estates.[87] Officially, 207 enslaved people died across the entire rebellion, with another 312 executed. Either this confrontation involving the *Blanche* was especially violent, therefore, and accounted for around a third of all combat deaths among the enslaved, or – as Mary Reckord argued long ago – the official toll seriously underestimates the number of people who lost their lives.[88] The Jamaican Rebellion caused more than £1 million sterling worth of damage in little over a month.[89] While it did not immediately result in emancipation, historians increasingly suggest that the bloodshed associated with it was used by abolitionists as evidence of both the brutality and unsustainability of enslavement.[90] The rebellion, while it came in peacetime, also coincided with a period of real or imagined threat from enslaved insurgency. The Jamaican Rebellion followed closely behind the United States' largest enslaved rising, which had been led by Nat Turner the previous August. News from Jamaica then

84. TNA, ADM 51/3390, Captain's Log of the *Racehorse*.
85. TNA, ADM 1/287/41(5–6), Colpoys to the Admiralty, 14 February 1832.
86. TNA, ADM 51/3318, Captain's Log of the *North Star*.
87. NMM, ZBA1585, Boxer, *Destruction*.
88. Reckord, 'Jamaican Slave Rebellion', 122.
89. Zoellner, *Island on Fire*, 147.
90. Zoellner, *Island on Fire*, 257–9; Gelien Matthews, *Caribbean Slave Revolts and the British Abolitionist Movement* (Baton Rouge, LA, 2006).

sparked panic in Trinidad, where accidental fires on an estate were mistaken for insurrection by an increasingly jumpy plantocracy.[91]

In many ways, the insurrections in Jamaica in the 1830s and in the Windwards in the 1790s were very different: the latter was enmired with the French Revolution and rights for indigenous and free French people, while the former much more closely resembles a 'classic' self-liberation struggle. The Jamaican Rebellion was different in one other key respect: unlike all the other revolts, this one took place when the abolition of enslavement seemed imminent, carried on a wave of widespread public and political support. Crushing insurgencies in the 1760s – when almost nobody in Europe seriously imagined the end of enslavement – or during the war with France in the 1790s seemed to present few moral dilemmas for naval personnel. By the 1830s, the political landscape had shifted fundamentally, and so the final section of this article begins to explore how the abolitionist context might have shaped responses.

In 1831–1832, as before, the navy acted as an instrument of the British state, so the fact that it was involved in suppressing rebellions is unsurprising. But at the same time as it essentially supported the maintenance of slavery, it was also actively trying to suppress the trade off the West African coast and in the Caribbean. Preventing the trafficking of Africans after 1807 had not precluded the continuation of enslavement itself in British government policy, but those conceptual and political contortions were much harder to sustain in the early 1830s. Even so, at the same time as the *Blanche* led attacks in support of enslavement in Jamaica, the famed threesome of the *Dryad*, the *Fair Rosamond* and the *Black Joke* was on patrol off West Africa. The *Black Joke* captured its final slave ship exactly a week after the *Blanche* returned to Port Royal in February 1832, having led the suppression of the rising by enslaved people in Jamaica.[92] The *Sparrowhawk*, which was key to the initial response to the Jamaican Rebellion, had already been part of the suppression of the slave trade in the Caribbean itself, and captured a Spanish ship, the *Santiago*, off Cuba in 1830. Some of the sailors on the *North Star*, who had been involved in freeing over 1,000 people from slave traders off the African coast in 1828 alone, now found themselves participating in action to maintain enslavement.[93] In this way, from an anti-slavery perspective, the navy found itself occupying contradictory positions in a way that mirrors its paradoxical relationship to enslavement.

91. On Nat Turner, see David F. Allmendinger Jr., *Nat Turner and the Rising in Southampton County* (Baltimore, 2014); Patrick H. Breen, *The Land Shall Be Deluged in Blood: A New History of the Nat Turner Revolt* (New York, 2016). On Trinidad, see Bridget Brereton, 'Resistance to Enslavement and Oppression in Trinidad, 1802–1849', *Journal of Caribbean History*, 43, No. 2 (2009), 167–8; TNA, CO 295/92(239–241), Governor Grant to Lord Howick, 26 March 1832.
92. Peter Grindal, *Opposing the Slavers: The Royal Navy's Campaign against the Atlantic Slave Trade* (London, 2016), Appendix.
93. UK Parliamentary Papers, https://parlipapers.proquest.com/parlipapers/search/basic/hcppbasicsearch (accessed 19 December 2022). For the *North Star*, see *Correspondence with the British Commissioners of Sierra Leone, Havana, Rio de Janiero and Surinam, Relating to the Slave Trade* (London, 1830), 6. For the *Sparrowhawk*, see *Correspondence with British Commissioners* (1831), 101–10.

It is also clear that many men among naval crews were abolitionists by the 1830s, in a marked shift from earlier generations. Claude Henry Buckle, who served in the anti-slavery patrols in the 1820s and then commanded the *Growler* off West Africa in the 1840s, was deeply religious and staunchly opposed to enslavement. Captain Charles Phillips, who advocated the use of free labour in the 1820s, captured slave ships in 1822. Men from the ranks also drew attention in their roles in the anti-slavery squadron: Whaley Armitage was known for his action against the *Joaquina* and *Mannalita*, and Samuel Otway Wooldridge gained a commission for his role in 'liberating' 422 Africans in 1836.[94]

What connects all these individuals, other than their abolitionist beliefs, is that they were all in the Jamaica squadron at the time of the rebellion. Armitage was a mate on the *Sparrowhawk*, which was sent to Montego Bay as soon as the rebellion broke out. Wooldridge served under Captain Phillips on the *Ariadne* off Montego Bay, while Buckle – then a lieutenant – was aboard the *North Star* in Jamaica in January 1832, which itself had seen active service on the African coast. These men, who clearly regarded themselves as abolitionists, took active parts (however they felt) in maintaining enslavement in Jamaica. It is a reminder that naval personnel were required to follow orders, regardless of their personal opinions.

It is also highly likely that some of the crew on these naval vessels were of African descent. A burgeoning scholarship on black mariners – free and enslaved – has demonstrated the extent of the multiracial composition of maritime society.[95] Dozens of the men serving on ships were not of European origin, and some might even have been enslaved themselves earlier in their lives. Yet despite this, and despite changing attitudes to enslavement among naval personnel by the 1830s, how the navy responded to the practice of enslavement or, importantly, to challenges to it from the enslaved themselves remained consistent. The navy's role was to maintain the security of the colonies, and that entailed ensuring the continuation of enslavement up to emancipation.

Conclusion

Our understanding of enslaved revolts is made more nuanced by thinking about their maritime contexts, both for enslaved and indigenous people – whose representatives used long-established navigable sea routes to maintain ties to other islands and so drew in ideas and weapons to their struggles – and for the enslavers – who were able to deploy the Royal Navy in their defence. This article has argued that the navy's

94. West Sussex Record Office, Chichester, Buckle ms. 6, 'Memorials of the Naval Members of the Buckle Family', vol. 1; Mary Wills, *Envoys of Abolition: British Naval Officers and the Campaign against the Slave Trade in West Africa* (Liverpool, 2019), 49, 72–4; William Richard O'Byrne *A Naval Biographical Dictionary* (1849), https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/A_Naval_Biographical_Dictionary (accessed 19 December 2022).
95. Scott, *The Common Wind*, 73–5; Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: The Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (London, 2000), 132; Charles S. Foy, 'The Royal Navy's Employment of Black Mariners and Maritime Workers, 1754–1783', *International Journal of Maritime History*, 28, No. 1 (2016), 6–35; Hamilton, '"A most active, enterprising officer"', 80–100.

particular role in suppressing revolts was more significant than the scholarship suggests. Without naval power, the British would not have had the capacity to move men and guns, or effectively to deny the rebels communications and supplies with allies elsewhere, or indeed to launch amphibious attacks on rebel positions directly – all of which were important in suppressing insurrections.

In this period, the navy emerged as an effective counterinsurgency force. In Grenada and St Vincent, its ability to respond was limited by its capacity during a global conflict rather than its capability. As a result, suppressing the Windward risings took well over a year. In Jamaica, where the rebellion of 1831–1832 occurred in peacetime, the full force of the navy in the area was deployed. Even though it was a much larger insurrection, the counterinsurgency of which the navy was a key part was able to suppress it in little more than a month.

Finally, it is clear that although the Royal Navy was actively involved in trying to suppress the trafficking of Africans in the nineteenth century, its main role overseas continued to be the maintenance of the British Empire. In the Caribbean, this meant developing its capability to suppress enslaved insurgency. During the Jamaican Rebellion, the navy's paradoxical relationship to enslavement is apparent: at precisely the same time as some naval personnel helped crush the demand for self-liberation by 60,000 Jamaicans, others drew plaudits for their actions off West Africa. Although the suppression of revolt and securing the Empire remained the navy's core business overseas, more needs to be done to understand how naval personnel – some, perhaps many, of whom would have described themselves as abolitionists – responded to these contradictory sets of orders.

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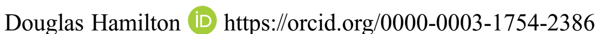
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