

# The Second Carib War

With the onset of the French Revolution, when the French overthrew their monarchy with the cry of “*liberté, égalité, fraternité*”, they soon came into conflict once again with Britain and other European powers. In 1793 the French declared war on Britain. Victor Hugues, a leader amongst the French revolutionaries in the Caribbean, sent Chatoyer and Du Valleé gifts, including a French officer’s uniform, ammunition and a promise of victory over the British. Sir William Young the Younger later wrote in his book on the Black Caribs that there was no indication before the Garinagu attacked the British on 8<sup>th</sup> March 1795 that they would side with the French.



Victor Hugues

Sir William appears to have taken Chatoyer’s actions to not only be a betrayal of the treaty, but as a personal affront. In addition to frequently welcoming Chatoyer into his home as a guest, he had gifted Chatoyer the sword that once belonged to his younger brother Henry, which was found on Chatoyer’s body following his death, and he spoke of Chatoyer’s use of it in very negative terms in his account of the War. Nonetheless, Chatoyer issued a declaration on 12<sup>th</sup> March, allying himself and his people with French revolutionary ideals, using the language of the revolutionaries.

## **Chatoyer’s declaration, translated from the original French**

*“Where is the Frenchman who will not join his brothers, at a moment when the voice of liberty is heard by them? Let us then unite, citizens and brothers, round the colours flying in this island; and let us hasten to co-operate to that great piece of work which has been already commenced so gloriously. But should any timorous men still exist, should any Frenchman be held back through fear, we do hereby declare to them, in the name of the law, that those who will not be assembled with us in the course of the day, shall be deemed traitors to the country, and treated as enemies. We do swear that both fire and sword shall be employed against them, that we are going to burn their estates, and that we will murder their wives and children, in order to annihilate their race.”*

The French and Garinagu forces pushed forward towards Kingstown, destroying properties in their path, including their own plantations. Despite initial progress, Chatoyer died very early in the conflict. The Garinagu and French had taken up a position on Dorsetshire Hill, but the British militia performed a sneak attack on this position at 01:00 on the morning of 15<sup>th</sup> March. Chatoyer was amongst those killed in the attack. In the earliest reports, there is no mention of who killed Chatoyer, but soon afterwards, when Sir William Young published his ‘account of the Black Charaibs’, he mentioned one Major Alexander Leith of the militia as the man who did the deed.

Later myth seems to have expanded Major Leith’s action into a duel between the two combatants, but this is highly improbable for a number of reasons. Firstly, the action was a sneak attack, that took less than 15 minutes, hardly enough time for a formal duel. Secondly, Sir William, who does not talk of a duel, mentions that Major Leith dispatched Chatoyer with a bayonet,



St. George's Cathedral, Kingstown  
photo by Vicki Telfer

which is not a weapon used in duels, although, as a Major in the militia, it is reasonable to assume that Leith would have been equipped with a sword for a duel should the need have arisen. There is a memorial to Major Leith in St. George's (Anglican) Cathedral in Kingstown, erected by the British.

In previous conflicts, the Garinagu were able to use their superior knowledge of the landscape to their advantage and fight a guerrilla conflict. However, this time matters would be different. On this occasion, they had to defend fixed points and fought in tandem with their French allies, using more traditional European tactics. There was also a new military corps, the St. Vincent Ranger Corps, composed of slaves trained to fight in a similar way to the Garinagu and who were able to penetrate deep into their territories and destroy their provision grounds, thus robbing the Garinagu of their supplies.

The conflict raged on and, after seeing their fortune reversed, the French and Garinagu were able to turn the tables on the British once again and push them back toward Kingstown. However, the arrival of reinforcements from Sir Ralph Abercromby's expedition to the Caribbean (as part of the overall British strategy for the French Revolutionary Wars), caused the French forces to soon surrender.

The leading Planters of St. Vincent, including Sir William the Younger, called once again for the removal of the Garinagu from St. Vincent. This time, the British Government agreed, and the removal of the tribe became part of Abercromby's orders. When some Carib chiefs came out of the interior to negotiate, hoping to retain control of their lands, they were told that the only concession that would be guaranteed is that their lives would be spared if they surrendered. A group of chiefs that had come to Kingstown were told by Governor Seaton and General Hunter: *"Your having been guilty of numerous acts of Treachery, Murder and Treason, and having repeatedly violated your most solemn engagements with the British nation; it is determined you are to be sent from this Island."* Some chose to flee the conflict, travelling to Trinidad by using cotton wrapped around the blades of their oars to hide the sound of the departure of their canoes. One chief committed suicide by blowing up his own powder magazine. Many Garinagu, including Chatoyer's son, opted to fight on. But the British tactic of destroying their provision grounds weakened them and forced a surrender.



A medal commemorating the St. Vincent Black Corps, with winged Victory standing over a defeated Garifuna and a slave soldier on the reverse



THE MEMORIAL OF THE PLANTERS AND MERCHANTS  
CONCERNED IN THE ISLAND OF SAINT VINCENT  
TO THE DUKE OF PORTLAND, MR. PITT AND MR.  
DUNDAS (1795),

*Humbly represents,*

*That at the time of the cession of the Island of Saint Vincent to his Majesty's Government by the Crown of France, by treaty, dated one thousand seven hundred and sixty-three, a part of the Island was occupied by a few Red Indians, and by about two thousand descendants of African Negroes, who had escaped from an African slave ship, wrecked on the coast of a neighbouring island, towards the close of the last century.*

*That it was in contemplation of His Majesty's Government in the first instance to remove off these Negroes, and transplant them to the coast of Africa, or some island adjacent.*

*That in one thousand seven hundred and sixty-eight, in consequence of representations that they might remain at St. Vincent without prejudice to the colony, instructions were sent to the Commissioners to appropriate and regulate their settlement in a Quarter of the island.*

*That whatever appearances of loyalty or peaceable demeanour had induced the Commissioners to make such representations against their removal, or His Majesty's Ministers to adopt them, the Black Caribs (so improperly though generally termed) quickly shewed a disposition little worthy of the royal favour, or sovereign protection, by withdrawing their allegiance and attacking the King's troops attending the surveyors then marking out the public roads. Such attack was by the Caribs avowed as a measure determined on by them to prevent His Majesty's forces having any passage or communication within the country they chose to occupy, and proceeded to such extremity, that at great charge and expense, an army under General Dalrymple was employed to reduce them, and with views on their being subdued, to enforce the original purpose of their removal. After several months of cruel warfare, it was thought expedient to relinquish the Idea of removing these Africans, and terms of compromise were entered into in one thousand seven hundred and seventy-three, and the chiefs signed conditions and took the oaths of allegiance to His Majesty. From the very date of taking such oaths, and promising to be good and faithful subjects, they have omitted severally, or in the aggregate, no opportunity of treason, or giving assistance to His Majesty's enemies.*

*That in the last war they called in the French, and assisted them in wresting the Island of Saint Vincent from the sovereignty of Great Britain, but restrained by the then mild and generous tempers of the French officers, did not display their natural and ferocious tempers, the fatal effects of which necessitate the present application of your Memorialists. That during the present war, in April, one thousand seven hundred and ninety-four, His Majesty's Governor and Council of Saint Vincent, well apprised of the spirit*

*of perfidy and disloyalty which had ever shewn itself among the Black Caribs, (or rather Negro invaders and destroyers of the original Carib or Indian of the country) called together their chiefs, and giving them a treat in the name of the King, explained to them the nature of the oath of allegiance they had taken, and what was the conduct expected from them, which they promised faithfully to pursue.*

*That it is apprehended from the very period of their promise, they considered merely how with safety to infringe it; their character of perfidy and deception on the late unhappy occasion, being masked by the most fair and delusive language and conduct to the British colonists in Saint Vincent, when they were on the very eve of setting forth to devastate all property, and declaredly to massacre and extirpate every English white inhabitant.*

*That this they unfortunately accomplished to a great degree, on the richest and most extensive part of the island, to the great grief of your Memorialists, from the murder of their friends and Negroes, and to their utter ruin, if not assisted in the settlement of their estates, by benevolent measures adequate in their case, to be adopted in this country.*

*That above all, such re-settlement will not be practicable, or cannot be adopted, or pursued, with credit from the British merchants, or with general safety to your Memorialists, if the African Negroes (usurping the Indian name of Caribs) are permitted to remain on the island; and they humbly call to the recollection of His Majesty's Ministers, the original plan of transporting them to a part of the world congenial to their origin, temper, and customs, has become indispensable to the safety of your Memorialists who have colonized and settled the most beautiful and fertile island of Saint Vincent by purchase from Government, and with much loyalty, industry, and exertion, a benefit, which as they humbly conceive, admits as little of comparison in point of justice, as of competition in point of national service, when contrasted with the conduct of those they plead the alternative of banishment against, for if these Africans remain your Memorialists must be driven from the island. The great losses your Memorialists have suffered in their fortunes, and the considerable loss of public revenue, they will presume humbly to state for consideration when more accurate details arrive; but they could not in justice to themselves, their friends, and their country, omit taking the very first and earliest occasion of soliciting the attention of His Majesty's Ministers to the conduct of the Black Caribs, and for such measures to be taken respecting those people as the wisdom of His Majesty's Councils shall deem right and proper.*

WILLIAM YOUNG,  
Chairman

9<sup>th</sup> May, London, 1795