STATIA INVADED FROM SABA

In the middle of the night and with full assistance and support of the Saba Island Council, a ship with some 30 to 50 men on board set sail from Saba's rocky shores to St. Eustatius. It was the first stage of a plan that was designed to attack and conquer Statia — and that the members of the Saba Council had helped to put together — even though they had launched an "independent from Statia" revolt just over a year before. The date was July 25-26, 1690, and Saba was the only place in the Windward islands where the Dutch flag was still flying.

French Jealousy

A little more than a year before, after the outbreak of the Nine Years War (1688-1697), the Count De Fléan, military commander of the French forces in the Americas, following direct orders from the self-titled "Roi Soleil" King Louis XIV of France, had occupied Statia. In 1682 the Dutch West India Company (WIC) had taken over direct ownership of the island from the two "patrons" who had been leasing it before. The WIC invested in their new colony and even sent over tradesmen to serve the settlers — and a physician, Jan Simonsz Director. He was a point of deliberation in the island's history.

The WIC's policy paid off and led to the rise of the island as the commercial hub of the North-eastern Caribbean. The French could not keep up and even their own settlers had to rely on Statia to buy their sugar and sell them provisions. On top of everything, Statia was providing Franco's enemies, the English, with the supplies to wage war against them.

Statia gets its second fort

Commander of the island at the time was Lucas Schorer (appointed in 1686). He came from an upper-class family in Middelburg, the second largest commercial centre in the Netherlands, at the time, and was a member of the board of the WIC. He probably opted himself to be sent out for a career on Statia. But the contrast between his life on silk cushions between gilded leather clad walls and the realities of a colony that had only started from scratch on a small island 20 years before must have been enormous. Little did he know then that he would end his years in poverty in Saba...

Schorer was aware of the international tension and since Statia was still only defended by Fort Oranje, he decided to build the island's second fortification, the Waterfort or Fort Amsterdam. As he did not consider Fort Oranje capable of sheltering the entire population, including slaves and cattle, in case of an attack, he also started the construction of a fortified place of refuge on top of Gilboa Hill. However, his fellow members of the board of the WIC did not allow him to finish this fortification.

Human shield

Schorer (who had earlier complained that his whole garrison consisted of only five men and one corporal) did not have the means to stop De Fléan's superior forces consisting of ships and men from Guadeloupe, Martinique and French St. Kitts. He assembled some 90 civilian volunteers (something along the lines of our present VKE), but when their captain and three of his men got killed trying to stop the French from landing at Tumblownen Jet, they fled in disarray.

Eventually, Schorer was forced to abandon his castle with the last 30 of his prisoners as a human shield to be "massacred." He would then kill all the men, women and children inside the fort. This left Schorer no choice — especially since the French had meanwhile landed some canons that would reduce the improvised reinforcements of the fort's walls to pulp.

Refugees on Nevis

Schorer and his officers were shipped off to Nevis with their families — after being robbed by De Fléan's men of everything of value. Even the guards ordered by De Fléan to protect them and their wives and children who had been taken to St. Thomas. However, Schorer and others feared that Saba had managed to fight off the French, so he and his fellow refugees decided to move there (St. Maarten was controlled by the French at the time).

Saban revolt against Statia

Only a year before, the Sabans had revolted against Schorer who as Commander of Statia was also in charge of Saba. They accused him and his council of neglecting Saba and keeping the bulk of the supplies that were sent over from the Netherlands on their own island, not giving Saba the due (sounds familiar?). They had declared themselves independent of the Council of St. Eustatius and had proclaimed their Vice-Commander Engel van Beverhoudt Commander of
Saba. Nevertheless, when Schorber landed on Saba he was accepted as Commander again.

Schorber together with the Island Council then devised a plan to re-conquer Statia. On July 34, a ship arrived from St. Thomas that could be used to transport a reconnaissance party. It was hired for the purpose. The WIC surgeon Jan Doncker had meanwhile advanced to the position of Captain of the Civic Guard and was put in charge of this expedition – with Joan Reiners second in command. They had to land in Jenkins Bay and then return the ship to pick up Schorber and the rest of the Statians.

Statia scorched

Doncker’s landing was successful and his men took the two guards that the French left at Jenkins Bay prisoner. They were sent to Schorber in the ship that returned to Saba according to the plan. They told Schorber that Fort Oranje was defended by 40 soldiers and 30 planters and that the French had dug a moat around the fort in which they had placed a double row of palisades and bags with nails. They had placed twenty-two cannons in the fort and had provisions for 2 months. The remaining women and children they had transferred to St. Martin. The earthworks inside the fort were rendered unusable by throwing cadavers in them.

Schorber concluded that the French were serious about defending the island and that Doncker therefore needed his immediate help. So he sailed over right away together with the remaining sixteen volunteers of his “liberation army.”

In the meantime, Doncker’s men had inspected the island. They did not find it in the same state as they had left it just over a year ago. The French had burnt the sugar cane, houses and sugar mills as well as the main settlement. Everything they could move out they took to Martinique, including slaves, merchandise and cattle. All in all, left the French with booty worth 354,506 livres (about 3.14 ml). They only left Fort Oranje intact and the church plus some small dwellings that they used for their own accommodation.

Schorber and Doncker already had the French corralled inside the fort with their defeat only a matter of time so this new development was decidedly unwelcome. Schorber tried to beat the English to it by offering very attractive conditions of surrender to the French Commander, but to no avail. Statia’s plain full of soldiers

Statia’s so-called “Cultivation Plain” now became the scene of a stand-off between three European super powers. Schorber with his troop of fewer than 50 men and Schorber’s landing was successful and his men took the two guards that the French left at Jenkins Bay prisoner. They were sent to Schorber in the ship that returned to Saba according to the plan. They told Schorber that Fort Oranje was defended by 40 soldiers and 30 planters and that the French had dug a moat around the fort in which they had placed a double row of palisades and bags with nails. They had placed twenty-two cannons in the fort and had provisions for 2 months. The remaining women and children they had transferred to St. Martin. The earthworks inside the fort were rendered unusable by throwing cadavers in them.

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