

Basic Detail Report



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Title

Navigateurs - Decouvreurs: Bougainville, Cook, La Perouse and Baudin

Date

1837

Primary Maker

Cazenave

Medium

Ink on paper

Dimensions

Image: 150 x 100 mm Overall: 206 x 125 mm, 0.01 kg

Sheet: 206 x 125 mm Sight: 150 x 100 mm

Name

Engraving

History

Jean-Francois de Galaup, Comte de la Perouse, was born in Albi, south-west France in 1741; he joined the French Navy in 1756. He served in North America, the West Indies and in the Indian Ocean during the Seven Years War (1756 - 1763) and in the American War Of Independence (1776-1783) By 1783 La Perouse was a post-captain ("capitaine de vaisseau"), a Knight of the Order of St. Louis and had become an adviser to the senior French naval administrator, Count Claret de Fleurieu. In the period of peace following the Treaty of Paris (1783), Fleurieu and La Perouse began planning for a major French scientific expedition to the Pacific. King Louis XVI took a personal interest in the planning; and consequently the expedition was extremely well-equipped and manned. In command of the expedition ships LA BOUSSOLE and L'ASTROLABE, La Perouse left Brest in August 1785 and sailed for the Pacific by way of Cape Horn. The expedition arrived in Chile in February 1786 and then sailed to Easter Island and the Hawaiian islands before carrying out a detailed survey of the north-west coast of North America. It was during this survey that 21 men were lost when their boat capsized in Lituya Bay (Alaska) In September 1786 the expedition left the Spanish settlement at Monterey (California) and sailed west across the North Pacific ocean to Macau where they arrived in January 1787. The expedition then headed for the Philippines and continued north-eastward to survey the seas around Japan and Korea. In early September 1787 the ships reached the Russian settlement of Petropavlovsk (Southern Kamchatka) where La Perouse received revised orders to sail to Botany Bay where a new English colony was about to be settled. At Petropavlovsk La Perouse took the opportunity to send an account of his voyage overland back to Paris

with one of his officers, Jean Baptiste Barthelemy de Lesseps. De Lesseps took a year to make the journey to Paris but successfully presented La Perouse's account of the expedition to French government officials. It proved to be the last correspondence received from La Perouse and was later published in 1797 as 'Voyage de La Perouse Autour du Monde', edited by General Milet-Mureau. From Petropavlovsk the expedition sailed for Botany Bay in New Holland (Australia) by way of Samoa, Tonga and Norfolk Island. At Tutuila in Samoa the expedition suffered a serious setback when Paul-Antoine Fleuriot de Langle (La Perouse's second-in-command) and 11 others were killed by natives while attempting to obtain fresh water. Despite this tragedy, La Perouse sailed on to Botany Bay, arriving there just as the fleet of British ships carrying the first European settlers were departing for the recently-discovered, superior harbour of Port Jackson a few miles to the north. The French ships remained at Botany Bay until 10 March 1788 when La Perouse sailed north-east into the (South-West) Pacific to complete his ambitious exploration voyage. It was expected that after the expedition had visited the South-west Pacific, La Perouse would order a course across the Coral Sea and pass through Torres Strait before crossing the Arafura Sea towards Mauritius in the Indian Ocean, before finally returning to France. But when by 1791 no news of the expedition had reached France, authorities hurriedly directed Admiral Bruny d'Entrecasteaux to lead an expedition in search of La Perouse's missing ships. D'Entrecasteaux's ships LA RECHERCHE and L'ESPERANCE left France in late September 1791. However, despite searching the western Pacific, the expedition found no evidence that would explain the disappearance of La Perouse's ships. The mystery of what had happened to the expedition remained unresolved until wreckage of the ASTROLABE was discovered at Vanikoro Island in the Solomon islands by the Franco- Irish adventurer Peter Dillon in 1827. A year later, another French explorer, Jules-Sebastien-Cesar Dumont d'Urville, visited Vanikoro to confirm the identity of the wreckage reported by Dillon and erected a monument to La Perouse. Dumont d'Urville also recovered anchors and cannon from the wreck site on the south-western side of the island which he took back to France. These were used to erect a memorial to La Perouse at his birthplace of Albi. The site of LA BOUSSOLE was not discovered until 1986 when a Franco-Australian archaeological team working with the Solomon Islands National Museum found more wreckage at a site called 'la Faille', approximately half a mile to the east of La Perouse's ASTROLABE wrecksite that had been investigated by the crews of several French naval vessels in the course of 19th century. Since the mid 1980s a number of Franco-Australian maritime archaeological expeditions visited Vanikoro and, with the consent of the Solomon Islands' government, recovered material from underwater and on land. It is now evident that the La Perouse expedition encountered a cyclone which forced the BOUSSOLE and ASTROLABE onto the reefs at Vanikoro. Archaeological evidence, supported by oral history, indicates that some of the crew survived the wrecking, but their ultimate fate remains unclear. At the time of Dillon's first visit in 1827, islanders related that the last of the survivors had only died a few years before Dillon's arrival and that, a considerable time before this, some of the survivors had left the island in a vessel built from some of the wrecked ships' timbers. A collection of archaeological material from the Vanikoro wrecks is now held in the Musee National de la Marine in Paris and the Musee d'Histoire Maritime de Nouvelle Caledonie in Noumea.