

Basic Detail Report



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Title

Captain Samuel Wallis and the DOLPHIN attacked by Otahitians

Date

c 1800

Medium

Casein and paint on canvas attached to a wooden framework.

Dimensions

Overall: 1840 x 2192 mm, 17.1 kg

Name

Painting

History

During the late 18th century the British Admiralty organised a number of expeditions to navigate and explore the Pacific. In 1766 Captain Samuel Wallis (1728-1795) was given command of HMS DOLPHIN on a voyage to search for unknown lands and islands in the southern hemisphere. The DOLPHIN sailed in company with the HMS SWALLOW under Philip Carteret, but the two ships became separated after passing through the Straits of Magellan, at the southern extreme of South America. Wallis headed the DOLPHIN northwest across the Pacific Ocean. In June 1767, the crew saw a cloud covered mountain on the horizon and initially thought they had discovered a great southern continent. On the 24 June the DOLPHIN anchored in Matavai Bay, Tahiti, with Wallis naming it King George Island. The Tahitians launched an assault on the DOLPHIN, throwing stones from their canoes. The DOLPHIN's crew were suffering severely from scurvy and Captain Wallis was keen to gain fresh provisions. He responded to the Tahitian attack with musketry and cannon fire, forcing them to recommence trading with the Europeans. The DOLPHIN expedition did not find the supposed Great South Land, but it was the first European ship to encounter the Tahitian islands. Wallis's reports led to later voyages including Cook's 1769 ENDEAVOUR expedition where Tahiti was chosen as a site to view the Transit of Venus across the sun.