



Anglo ~ Danish Maritime Archaeological Team

A Non-Profit Educational Organisation, Assisting Students To Participate In Maritime Archaeological Field Work
Protecting the Caribbean's Underwater Cultural Heritage



Anglo-Danish Maritime Archaeological Team (ADMAT) and its subsidiaries ADMAT USA and ADMAT-FRANCE, are proud to release the following information:



For Immediate Release PRESS RELEASE

ADMAT IDENTIFIES FRENCH 1783 WARSHIP *LE DRAGON*. The Last French Warship Lost During The American War Of Independence Found In The Caribbean.

Out gunned, surrounded by a fleet of English warships including a 74 gun third rate ship of the line, the French 18 gun warship *Le Dragon* fights for her life and is blown up by her own Captain to save her crew, the French "Spy", and secret documents onboard.

This wreck was located a few years ago and an initial survey was undertaken by ADMAT members Dr. Simon Spooner and Christine Nielsen. Since then they have been working with Oficina Nacional de Patrimonio Cultural Subacuático (ONPCS) the government department responsible for Underwater Cultural Heritage in the Dominican Republic, to monitor the wreck and protect it from looters and treasure hunters, while the team researched the archaeological findings.

Dr Spooner, Principal Investigator of the shipwreck site stated:

"This is a very important find. It is excellent news that the story behind the brave Captain and the French warship *Le Dragon* can now be finally be told. We have partially documented the wreck and analysed the wrecking taphonomic process of the wreck site to produce clues, which allowed our researchers to find the story in the French archives. The wreck is almost 20 metres long, 4 meters high, and has almost the entire lower hull intact with cannons still on the wreck. ADMAT has been working with the French Government authorities and DRASSM in relation to the findings. This shipwreck holds no interest to treasure hunting companies as there is nothing of much monetary value on it, but to archaeologists whose goal it is to gather information about the past by investigating the material remains left of past peoples, it is of great significance as it is a combination of English, French and American design.

Miss Florence Prudhomme and Dr Francois Gendron from ADMAT-FRANCE based at the Institut de Paléontologie Humaine, Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris together with assistance from Madam Frédérique Chaplay the Curator of Musée national de la Marine, have taken our archaeological evidence and as a result, have confirmed the full story in the archives, an excellent piece of detective team work all round".

Le Dragon was originally an English privateer travelling probably under a Royal Warrant or letter of Marque. She was captured in August 1781 in the English Channel. She was taken into the French Royal Navy and the King of France paid 9438. 16. 6 livres. She was then transferred to Lorient and converted into a Corvette with a brigantine rig. She was "pierced" for 20 cannons and was eventually armed with 18 Scottish nine pounders (the last of the nine pounders just before the "Carronade" was first made) made by the Carron Iron Foundry in Falkirk in Scotland and sold in America. She was rigged for up to 12 swivel cannons and had a crew of up to 120 men.

On the 1st April 1782 she was on convoy duty escorting merchant ships from Lorient to Brest and during this escort the Captain received orders to go to Philadelphia under the command of a French Nobleman, Captain le chevalier de L'Espine Marquis du Puy. During the voyage she encountered bad storms was severely damaged, and was not able to make it to Philadelphia. The Captain then sailed to Boston direct and arrived on the 16th May 1782. *Le Dragon* was placed in dry dock to inspect the hull and they found so much damage that it was necessary to build a new hull, this time using American shallow water design. *Le Dragon* then sailed back to France in September.

On the 11th December 1782 *Le Dragon* was ordered to Cap Français (Cap-Haïtien) on the north coast of what is now Haiti. On January 21, 1783, she carried onboard an important passenger, Mr. de Courregolles who may have been a

Anglo ~ Danish Maritime Archaeological Team Limited. Registered in England & Wales No: 42536648 VAT No: 758 1659 90
A.D.M.A.T. REGISTERED OFFICE: 12 PENNERS GARDENS, LANGLEY ROAD, SURBITON. SURREY.
KT6 6JW. ENGLAND. FIELD PHONE: +1-829-610-3400 OR UK +44-780-191-5946

E-Mail: maritime_archaeology@yahoo.co.uk Web: www.admat.org.uk

ADMAT-FRANCE is a non profit organisation based in the Institut de Paléontologie Humaine, Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris
ADMAT USA is an American Charity (Section 501 (c) 3), Dedicated To Protecting Historic Shipwrecks.
ADMAT USA & ADMAT-FRANCE are sub divisions of the Anglo ~ Danish Maritime Archaeological Team

“Spy” and was certainly a courier, as he carried secret packages and documents for the Governor of the French colony. The mission of this officer was vital, because France and England were drafting the peace treaty which was signed in Paris on February 3, 1783 and was ratified in September 1783. On the 21st January 1783, *Le Dragon* encountered on the north coast an English Schooner the *HMS Dorkin* and an English Frigate. On the 22nd January she encountered a blockade which stretched from one league west of Point Isabelique to Monte Cristi. These 18 warships blockading her were from the English Admiral Hood’s squadron with orders to capture the ship and the packages at all costs. *Le Dragon* realized the trap and fled as she entered the Punta Rucia reef system heading towards Monte Cristi, because although she was outgunned and outclassed by 18:1, Captain du Puy had to save his “Spy” and the documents from capture.

Le Dragon went between the reefs and the English sent two larger ships (according to the archives from the “Spy”, one was a third rate 74 gun, and the other a 54 gun) to follow her, each ship firing at *Le Dragon* and the battle commenced. You do not risk a third rate ship of the line of 74 guns so close the reefs to capture a 18 gun ship, unless there is something of vital importance on the French ship. *Le Dragon* was damaged and the Captain realized that he had no chance of escape, to save his crew on board and more importantly the “Spy” and the essential packages from capture, if he stands and fights or goes out from the coast. His only chance was to find somewhere to beach the ship, this was the only way he could enable all the crew and the “Spy” to get off safely. He posted lookouts on the topsails and they spotted, at the end of the reef chain, a channel through the inner reef and to the shore.

As *Le Dragon* had an American designed hull with shallower draft than the other vessels, she managed to get close to the shore and the Captain sailed his ship straight up the beach missing the reefs in a superb example of master seamanship. He therefore saved the documents, the “Spy,” and his loyal crew (of 110) who on the beach were armed with muskets. He kept on board a few “determined” crewmen, who removed the bow chasers and fixed them as stern chasers firing at the English ships. The English lowered a small boat which was rowed, and found a cut in the reef where their deeper drafted ships could enter and anchor in a firing position at the beached *Le Dragon*. The English then lowered small launches filled with armed men to capture *Le Dragon*. But these launches were “discouraged” from boarding by the stern chasers. The captain realising that he has done all that “the honour or war requires of him” gave orders to scuttle the ship, and he and seven men set the charges. When the stern of the ship blew up, all the crew on the beach was showered with pieces of ship and rigging. Whilst the ship was lost, the crew, “Spy” and packages were saved and the packages delivered to the Governor.

ADMAT plans to continue the survey in the near future to further document the important hull construction.

ADMAT, a non-profit specialist maritime archaeological organisation, has been working with Oficina Nacional de Patrimonio Cultural Subacuático (ONPCS) the government department responsible for Underwater Cultural Heritage in the Dominican Republic, to record document and identify a number shallow shipwrecks found on the north coast of the Dominican Republic.

#

If you would like more information on this story or any other projects ADMAT is undertaking please contact Dr Spooner at: simon@admat.org.uk

For further information on ADMAT and its work please visit www.admat.org.uk