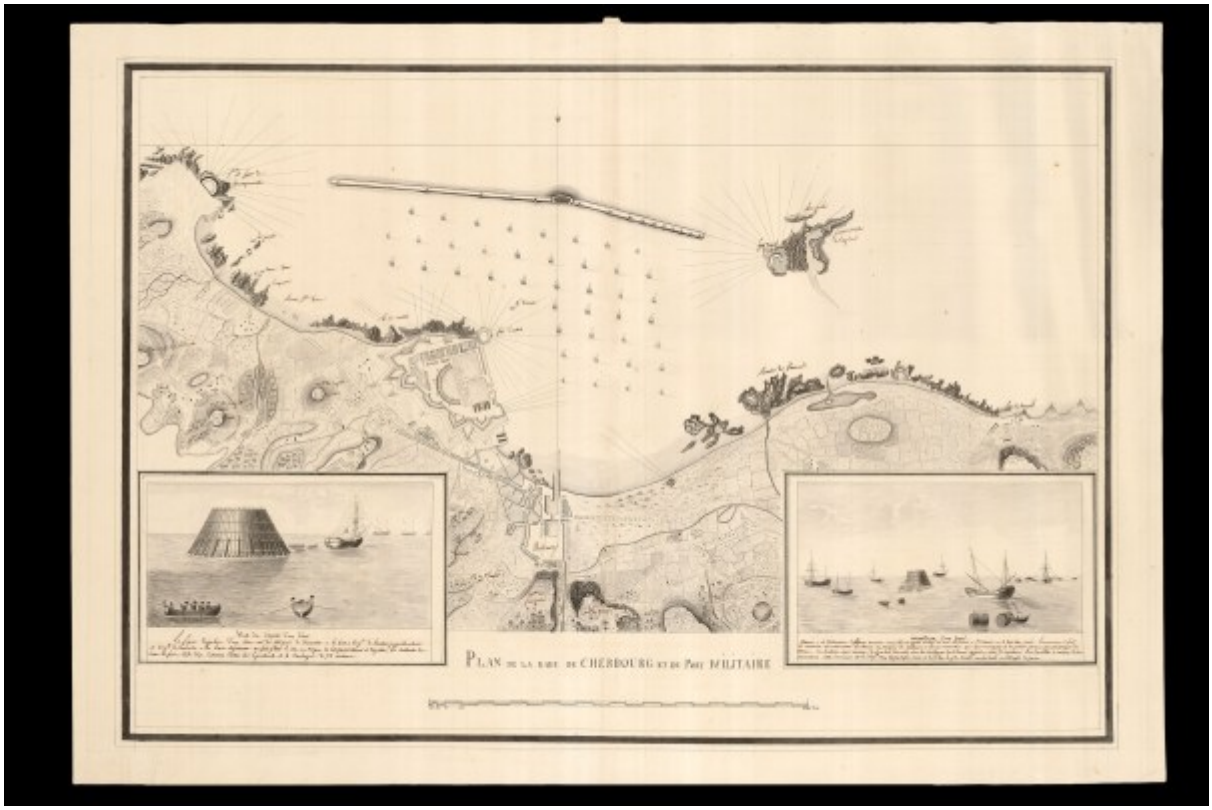


Original manuscript bird’s-eye view, pen and ink and colour wash on laid paper, watermarked with Napoleon’s crowned imperial eagle.

THE ACTION OF NOVEMBER 15TH, 1810

Plan de la rade de Cherbourg et du Port Militaire.

Author
ANONYMOUS; FREYCINET, Louis Henri de Saulces de

Publication date
after 1806].

Publisher

Publication place
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Physical description
Original manuscript bird’s-eye view, pen and ink and colour wash on laid paper, watermarked with Napoleon’s crowned imperial eagle.

Dimensions
625 by 900mm (24.5 by 35.5 inches).

Notes
A superb bird’s-eye view of the strategic defensive harbour of Cherbourg on the French side of the English Channel, where Henri Freycinet met his nadir. During the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1814), the superior British Navy adopted a (largely successful) strategy of blockading French ports, so-much-so that the French were finding it hard to operate in their own territorial waters. During the autumn

of 1810, a British squadron patrolling the Baie de la Seine, isolated the French squadrons at La Havre and Cherbourg. In November of 1810, while Henri, in command of the 'Elisa' was attempting to sail from Le Havre meet the main French fleet at Cherbourg. His vessel ran aground and came under heavy British fire, ultimately foundering on rocks between Tatihou Island and Reville, near La Hougue. Henri was court- martialed, but acquitted, and never commanded an official vessel again.

In 1802, as part of his master plan to invade Britain, Napoleon Bonaparte re-ignited work on the fortification of Cherbourg harbour that had begun under Louis LVI and his engineer Louis Alexandre de Cessart (1719-1806) as early as 1781, but foundered during the Revolution. The vignettes to either side of the map view, directly relate to the remarkable engineering projects initiated by de Cessart. As described in great detail in the second volume of his 'Description des travaux hydrauliques' (1806-1808), Cessart's plans for the harbour wall construction included the deployment of enormous timber "cônes", which would be built on shore and towed into place before being sunk in place to form the basic skeleton for the entire outer wall or "mole".

Henri Freycinet (1777-1840) was just sixteen years old when he enlisted in the French Revolutionary Navy in 1794. He distinguished himself aboard the 'Heureux', and was promoted to Enseign in 1796. However, the true making of him, and his younger brother Louis, was when they were both appointed to the Baudin expedition to "les terres australes", in 1800; Henri aboard the 'Géographe', and his brother, aboard the 'Naturaliste'. Together they were responsible for charting large swathes of the Western Australian coastline and Tasmania.

On returning to France in 1804, Henri was placed in command of the 'Phaeton'. Initially patrolling the North Sea, his flotilla sailed for the Caribbean in 1805. By early 1806 they had reached Cayenne. On the 25th of March the 'Phaeton' was returning to Santo Domingo when it encountered the British 'Reindeer'. In the ensuing skirmish, Henri was injured in the leg. The following day, the 'Phaeton' was again spotted, this time by the British vessel, the 'Pique', and another skirmish was soon underway. Again, Henri was injured, this time by being shot in the left shoulder, but more significantly by losing his right arm to a canon ball. The 'Phaeton' surrendered, Henri was taken prisoner, and to Jamaica, but by the 12th of June he was back in Santo Domingo, as part of a prisoner exchange.

In July of 1808, Henri was promoted to "capitaine de frégate", and in 1809, took command of the 'Elisa'. In November of 1810, while Henri was attempting to sail from Le Havre meet the main French fleet at Cherbourg, the 'Elisa' ran aground and came under heavy British fire, ultimately foundering on rocks between Tatihou Island and Reville, near La Hougue. Henri was court-martialed, but acquitted, and never commanded an official vessel again.

However, after the restoration of the monarchy in 1814, Henri embarked on a second career, as a colonial administrator: firstly of the Isle de Bourbon, now Reunion, from 1821 to 1827; then of French Guiana, from 1827 to 1829, during which he was promoted to Rear-Admiral, and Baron; and lastly of Martinique, from 1829 to 1830. He died in Rochefort, Charente-Maritime, in southwest France, in 1840.

Bibliography

See 'Napoleonic Wars', Britannica online.

Provenance

Provenance
1. Louis Henri de Saulces de Freycinet;
2. Freycinet family archives

Price: £500

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