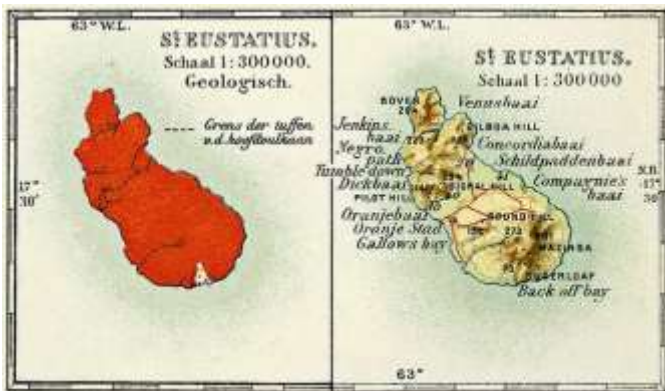


The First Salute



Painting by Phillips Melville, depicting Continental Brig *Andrew Doria* receiving a salute from the Dutch fort at St. Eustatius, West Indies, 16 November 1776

St. Eustatius, a small Dutch-controlled island in the West Indies, emerged as one of the most significant trading hubs of the eighteenth century despite its modest size. Functioning as an entrepôt, the island played a crucial role during the American War of Independence, particularly after a British naval blockade made it increasingly difficult for supplies to be shipped directly across the Atlantic to American ports. As a result, St. Eustatius became a vital conduit for military and commercial goods destined for the American colonies, and its harbor filled with American trading vessels.



The island's importance grew even further after France entered the war in 1778. St. Eustatius served as a key redistribution center for supplies not only to the American revolutionaries but also to the French West Indian islands. Contemporary estimates suggest that as much as half of all military supplies used by American forces passed through the island. These shipments relied on extensive merchant networks that were predominantly Dutch but also included a substantial Jewish trading community, many of whose members were residents of St. Eustatius. Through these networks,

arms, ammunition, and other essential goods reached revolutionary forces, while the island also became a central hub for communications between the United States and Europe.

In July 1776, the thirteen North American colonies formally declared their independence from British rule with the signing of the United States Declaration of Independence. On 16 November 1776, the American brig *Andrew Doria* entered the harbor of Sint Eustatius to load weapons and ammunition. The vessel was the first American ship flying the new Continental Union Flag to arrive at the island.

Governor Johannes de Graaff ordered that the *Andrew Doria* be received with full ceremonial honors. After the ship fired a salute upon entering the harbor, he instructed that it be answered by gunfire from Fort Orange. Following the exchange, the governor hosted a celebration for the ship's captain and extended an invitation to all Americans residing on the island. The return salute was widely interpreted by the Americans as the first formal recognition of the United States by a foreign power.

The salute exchanged at Sint Eustatius intensified tensions with Britain. London demanded that the States General condemn the incident and dismiss Governor Johannes de Graaff, but instead summoned him to The Hague. After repeated delays, De Graaff appeared in 1778 and submitted a misleading written defense, which the States General accepted largely because Amsterdam merchants profited from the island's illicit arms trade. Britain viewed this as proof of Dutch unreliability, further angered by Dutch neutrality and their bid to join the League of Armed Neutrality. When the Royal Navy intercepted a ship carrying American diplomat Henry Laurens and uncovered a Dutch-American commercial agreement, Britain declared war on 20 December 1780, beginning the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War.

In February 1781, Admiral George Rodney captured Sint Eustatius without resistance, motivated in part by personal resentment. He arrested residents, deported many, and seized vast amounts of property. Soon after, ill health forced Rodney to return to England, where his reputation suffered: his possessions were captured by the French, merchants sued him, and Parliament criticized his conduct, most notably in a speech by Edmund Burke.