

# Robert Surcouf

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## Robert Surcouf



Surcouf c. 1820

<b>Born</b>	12 December 1773 <a href="#">Saint-Malo</a> , <a href="#">Brittany</a> , <a href="#">Kingdom of France</a>
<b>Died</b>	8 July 1827 (aged 53) <a href="#">Saint-Servan</a> , <a href="#">Brittany</a> , <a href="#">Kingdom of France</a>
<b>Allegiance</b>	 <a href="#">French Empire</a>  <a href="#">Kingdom of France</a>
<b>Service / branch</b>	 <a href="#">French Navy</a> (briefly)
<b>Years of service</b>	1798–1809
<b>Rank</b>	<a href="#">Privateer</a>
<b>Commands</b>	<a href="#"><i>Émilie</i></a> <a href="#"><i>Clarisse</i></a> <a href="#"><i>Confiance</i></a> <a href="#"><i>Revenant</i></a>
<b>Awards</b>	<a href="#">Sabre of honour</a> <a href="#">Legion of Honour</a>

<b>Spouse(s)</b>	Marie Blaize
<b>Relations</b>	Brother to <a href="#">Nicolas Surcouf</a> Cousin to <a href="#">Joseph Potier</a>
<b>Other work</b>	ship-owner of <a href="#">privateer</a> and merchantmen
<b>Signature</b>	

**Robert Surcouf** (French pronunciation: [ʁɔbɛʁ syʁkuf]; 12 December 1773 – 8 July 1827) was a French privateer, businessman and slave trader who operated in the [Indian Ocean](#) from 1789 to 1808 during the [French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars](#). Capturing over 40 [prizes](#), he later amassed a large fortune from a variety of commercial activities, such as [ship-owning](#), [privateering](#), [slave trading](#) and owning land.<sup>[1][2][3]</sup>

Surcouf started his maritime career as an officer on the ships *Aurore*, *Courrier d'Afrique* and *Navigateur*. Having risen to the rank of captain, he illegally engaged in slave trading onboard the [slave ship](#) *Créole*. Surcouf then captained the merchantman *Émilie*, on which he engaged in [commerce raiding](#) despite lacking a [letter of marque](#). He preyed on British shipping, capturing several merchantmen including the [East Indiaman](#) *Triton*, before returning to the [Isle de France](#) where his prizes were confiscated. Surcouf then returned to France, where he obtained prize money from the government. Returning to the Indian Ocean, Surcouf captained the privateers *Clarisse* and *Confiance*, raiding British, American, and Portuguese shipping. He captured the East Indiaman *Kent* on 7 October 1800. Returning to France, Surcouf was awarded the [Legion of Honour](#) and settled down as a businessman.

He briefly returned to the Indian Ocean in 1807 on the corvette *Revenant* before returning to France. There, Surcouf sponsored privateers and merchantmen, including slave ships. His privateers led campaigns against British trade in the Indian Ocean and the [English Channel](#). The [cutter](#) *Renard*, a ship of his, achieved fame in her victory over *HMS Alpheia* on 9 September 1812, with *Alpheia* exploding after repulsing French attempts at boarding her. After the [Bourbon Restoration in France](#), Surcouf organised fishing expeditions to [Newfoundland](#) and amassed a considerable fortune. He died in 1827 and was buried in [Saint-Malo](#).

## Career

### Youth

Robert Surcouf was born 12 December 1773 in Saint-Malo to a family of [ship-owners](#).<sup>[4]</sup> His father, Charles-Ange Surcouf de Boisgris, was the grandson of [Robert Surcouf de Maisonneuve](#),<sup>[5]</sup> who had captained the privateer *Aimable* during the reign of [Louis XIV](#).<sup>[6]</sup> On his mother's side, Robert was a distant relative of [René Duguay-Trouin](#).<sup>[7]</sup> When his parents sent him to [Dinan](#) college to become a priest, he fled at age thirteen to enlist on the merchantman *Héron*, which shuttled between Saint-Malo and [Cadiz](#).<sup>[8]</sup>

On 3 March 1789, he enlisted as a volunteer on the 700-ton *Aurore*,<sup>[6]</sup> a [slave ship](#)<sup>[3]</sup> bound for India under Captain Tardivet.<sup>[4]</sup> *Aurore* sailed to [Pondicherry](#) and ferried troops<sup>[8]</sup> bound for [Isle de France](#).<sup>[6]</sup> On her next journey, seeking to [purchase slaves](#) on the [Horn of Africa](#), *Aurore* was wrecked in the [Mozambique Channel](#), drowning 400 enslaved Africans chained in the [orlop](#).<sup>[8]</sup> Tardivet chartered the Portuguese *San Antoine* in October 1790 to return to Port-Louis, but had to divert to [Sumatra](#) because of the weather, and only returned to Port-Louis in late 1790, on a French ship via the French colony of Pondicherry.<sup>[8]</sup> Promoted to officer, Surcouf enlisted on the *Courrier d'Afrique*, another slave ship,<sup>[3]</sup> bound for [Mozambique](#) under Captain Garnier.<sup>[6]</sup> Captain Tardivet then brought him over as Lieutenant on his new ship, *Revanche*.<sup>[9]</sup> On *Revanche*, Surcouf made several expeditions off [Madagascar](#).<sup>[6][9]</sup>

Surcouf enlisted as a helmsman on the French Royal Navy's 20-gun [fluyt \*Bienvenue\*](#), under Lieutenant Haumont,<sup>[10]</sup> bound for France.<sup>[11]</sup> *Bienvenue* arrived at Lorient on 2 January 1792, where Surcouf discovered the political changes France had undergone in the wake of the [French Revolution](#).<sup>[11]</sup>

After six months, Surcouf enlisted as a lieutenant on the slave ship *Navigateur*,<sup>[3]</sup> under Captain Lejoliff.<sup>[11][N.1]</sup> She departed on 27 August 1792 for Mozambique before sailing to Isle de France, where Surcouf was informed on his arrival of the outbreak of the [French Revolutionary Wars](#).<sup>[11]</sup>

Rising to the rank of captain, Surcouf took command of the brig *Créole*,<sup>[11]</sup> a four-gun slave ship.<sup>[3][9]</sup> He departed Isle de France on 3 June 1794<sup>[9]</sup> for a journey off Africa and Madagascar,<sup>[11]</sup> and engaged again in [slave trading](#), even though it had been prohibited by the [National Convention](#) and the Assembly of [Île Bourbon](#).<sup>[12]</sup> Upon his return to Isle de France, agents of the [Committee of Public Safety](#) inspected *Créole* for evidence of slave trading, but left empty-handed as Surcouf had already sold his enslaved cargo.<sup>[12]</sup> When British naval forces arrived to [blockade](#) the Isle de France, he served as an auxiliary ensign on the 40-gun frigate *Cybèle* and participated in the inconclusive [Action of 22 October 1794](#).<sup>[8]</sup>

### **Cruise of *Émilie* and capture of *Triton***



Cruise of [Émilie](#): from Port-Louis (Mauritius) to the Seychelles via La Réunion, on to Sumatra, the Gulf of Bengal, and return to Port-Louis.

In the spring in 1795,<sup>[9]</sup> Surcouf took command of the 180-ton,<sup>[11]</sup> privateer schooner [Modeste](#),<sup>[9]</sup> renamed *Émilie*, with a 32-man crew and four 6-pounder guns,<sup>[11]</sup> armed

by Malroux and Levaillant.<sup>[13]</sup> Governor [Malartic](#) refused to provide a [lettre de marque](#) and ordered *Émilie* to go to the [Seychelles](#) to purchase [tortoises](#) as food for Isle de France.<sup>[9][12][13]</sup>

*Émilie* departed on 3 September 1795 with a *congé de navigation* authorising her to defend herself, but not to take prizes as a privateer. The next day, she made a port call at [Saint-Denis](#) before cruising to [Mahé](#).<sup>[13]</sup> At [Sainte Anne Island](#), two large British ships chased him, but he was able to evade them by sailing through the reefs,<sup>[9]</sup> at night.<sup>[13]</sup>

Surcouf then decided to sail to the [Mergui Archipelago](#) to load a rice cargo.<sup>[14]</sup> On 8 December 1795,<sup>[12]</sup> while in transit, cruising off the [Ganges Delta](#),<sup>[15]</sup> Surcouf captured his first prize, the ship *Penguin*, loaded with lumber, on which he detached a prize crew under Lieutenant Péru before sending her to Isle de France.<sup>[14]</sup>

On 19 January 1796,<sup>[14]</sup> Surcouf met the [pilot ship](#)<sup>[15]</sup> [Cartier](#)<sup>[9][14]</sup> leading two merchantmen, the *Russel* and *Sambolasse*, through the Ganges delta.<sup>[14][N 2]</sup> He attacked and captured them, finding the merchantmen to be carrying rice.<sup>[14]</sup> After detaching prize crews, Surcouf transferred his command, along with his remaining 22 crew members and *Émilie*'s four guns, to *Cartier*, which (according to [Ambroise Louis Garneray](#)) he renamed *Hasard*.<sup>[15]</sup> Surcouf then sent *Émilie*, under Lieutenant Croizet, together with his prizes, to Isle de France.<sup>[17]</sup>

On the night of 28 January, Surcouf captured the 12-gun *Diana*,<sup>[17]</sup> loaded with 6000 bags of rice.<sup>[18]</sup> The next day, *Cartier* met a 26-gun Indiaman,<sup>[18]</sup> [Triton](#),<sup>[9]</sup> armed with [12-pounders](#) and a 150-man crew,<sup>[9]</sup> having decided to attack, and recognising only too late the overwhelming superiority of his opponent,<sup>[9]</sup> Surcouf, feeling threatened and unable to flee, decided to board her with his 26 men.<sup>[18][N 3]</sup> After haranguing his men, he approached under a British flag,<sup>[20]</sup> before hoisting French colours at the very last moment and launching a violent assault.<sup>[19]</sup> In the ensuing 45-minute battle,<sup>[9]</sup> *Triton* suffered 5 wounded and 10 killed,<sup>[21]</sup> including her captain, Captain Burnycat, and the first officer, Picket;<sup>[19]</sup> The prisoners were transferred to *Diana*, which Surcouf released against a 30,000 rupee ransom.<sup>[22]</sup>

Surcouf returned to Ile de France with his prizes,<sup>[15]</sup> where he arrived on 10 March 1796,<sup>[19]</sup> although *Hasard* was captured by [HMS Victorious](#) on the journey back.<sup>[23]</sup> As *Émilie* had been armed as a merchant rather than a privateer, the [Prize court](#) seized her prizes and sold them for the benefit of the State,<sup>[15]</sup> although their capture was declared to be legal.<sup>[21]</sup> Surcouf returned to France to claim his prize money, and on 3 September 1797,<sup>[21]</sup> the government finally granted him 660,000 francs,<sup>[9]</sup> of which he only received 80,000.<sup>[21][N 4]</sup>



Boarding of *Triton* by the French corsair *Hasard*. Engraving by [Ambroise-Louis Garneray](#)



Boarding of *Triton* by the French corsair *Hasard* under Robert Surcouf. Painting by [Léon Trémisot](#).

### Cruise of *Clarisse*



First cruise with *Clarisse* and battle of Susoh.

In early 1798,<sup>[24]</sup> after 14 months in Paris,<sup>[9]</sup> Surcouf took command of *Clarisse*, a 14-gun privateer brig<sup>[9]</sup> armed with four 12-pounders, ten [8-pounders](#), and manned by a 120-strong complement.<sup>[24]</sup> He departed from [Paimboeuf](#),<sup>[9]</sup> [Nantes](#), in February 1798,<sup>[25]</sup> this time with a proper lettre de marque.<sup>[22]</sup> During the journey to Isle de France, *Clarisse* chased a British slave ship,<sup>[25]</sup> which escaped after one of her shots cut off *Clarisse's* foremast tops.<sup>[24][26]</sup> Surcouf captured a British brig<sup>[22]</sup> South of [Cape of Good Hope](#), which surrendered after a [warning shot](#) was fired,<sup>[22]</sup> on which he sent a prize crew under Captain Dujardin,<sup>[25]</sup> and arrived [La Réunion](#) on 5 December.<sup>[24]</sup>

In early 1799, Surcouf sailed to the city of Susoh<sup>[24][27][28]</sup> in [Aceh](#), on Sumatra, where he found two 20-gun merchantmen anchored in the harbour, in the process of loading pepper; *Clarisse* dropped anchor close by and opened fire, after which Surcouf sent his older brother [Nicolas](#) to head a 20-man board party on *Clarisse's* boats and board the largest of the ships, while he boarded her with *Clarisse* from the opposite side; assaulted from two sides, she surrendered after a 30-minute battle.<sup>[29]</sup> The other ship cut her anchor and attempted to flee, but the boats of *Clarisse* overhauled and captured her without resistance, most of her crew being ashore.<sup>[29]</sup> Surcouf returned to Île de France with his prizes in June.<sup>[24]</sup>



Second cruise with *Clarisse*

On 16 August, *Clarisse* departed Isle de France for another cruise; she sailed to La Réunion carrying despatches of Malartic to the governor. She then cruised to [Java](#) to procure water,<sup>[30]</sup> where she arrived on 27 September.<sup>[31]</sup> On 1 October, Surcouf captured a Danish<sup>[26]</sup> merchantman, which he sent away under Lieutenant Fonroc;<sup>[31]</sup> on 4 November,<sup>[32]</sup> the Portuguese<sup>[26]</sup> merchantman *Nostra Signora de la Conception* carrying 116 000 piastres;<sup>[30][32]</sup> on 6, a British ship laden with a salt;<sup>[32]</sup> and on 11 November, the 20-gun *Auspicious*, with a cargo worth 1,032,580 francs.<sup>[30][32]</sup>

Surcouf sailed to [Mergui](#)<sup>[30]</sup> to purchase food and free his prisoners, and put to sail on 10 December.<sup>[30]</sup> En route, he met the fellow French privateer *Malartic*, under [Jean Dutertre](#);<sup>[30]</sup> soon after, the privateers met a British frigate,<sup>[30]</sup> 38-gun frigate [HMS Sybille](#), which gave chase and which Surcouf managed to outsail by throwing eight guns overboard, along with various other implements.<sup>[30]</sup>

On 1 January 1800, *Clarisse* captured a large rice-laden merchantman,<sup>[30]</sup> the British *James*.<sup>[32]</sup> On 3 January, she detected two American 16-carronade ships forming a [line of battle](#); although *Clarisse* lacked the eight guns sacrificed to escape *Sybille* and 60 of her men detached on her various prizes, Surcouf engaged.<sup>[33]</sup> *Clarisse* [raked](#) the rear-most ship, the *Louisa*,<sup>[26]</sup> and boarded her, while simultaneously firing a broadside on the other ship, *Mercury*,<sup>[31]</sup> which attempted to rescue her mate. Nicolas Surcouf led a 30-man boarding party to seize *Louisa*, while *Mercury* escaped.<sup>[33]</sup> *Clarisse* could not give chase, her [bowsprit](#) having been destroyed in the collision with *Louisa*.<sup>[34]</sup> Nicolas Surcouf took a prize crew and sailed *Louisa* back to Port Louis.<sup>[31][33][35]</sup>

*Clarisse* continued her patrol, capturing the ships *Catherine*, *Haderbux*, *Anna Maria*, *Nostra Signora de la Cruz*, *Louis*, *Janna*, *Notre Dame de Bon Succès* and *Albion*,<sup>[32]</sup> before sailing back to Isle de France with her prizes.<sup>[33]</sup> She arrived in early February 1800.<sup>[31]</sup>

### Depictions of *Clarisse*



Surcouf returning to Port-Louis with his prizes (probably on *Clarisse*).





Drawing by [Morel-Fatio](#) depicting the battle between *Clarisse* and the American *Liouisia* and *Mercury* (Morel-Fatio depicts *Clarisse* as a three-masted ship).

### Cruise of *Confiance* and capture of *Kent*



Cruise of *Confiance*

In May 1800, Surcouf took command of *Confiance*, a fast 18-gun brig<sup>[26]</sup> from [Bordeaux](#), with a 150-man complement; the competition with Dutertre for the captainship of *Confiance* almost degenerated into a duel, and Governor Malartic had to intervene to prevent it, stating that such a confrontation would be "an English victory".<sup>[36]</sup> The sailor and painter Ambroise Louis Garneray, future biographer of Surcouf, enlisted at this time.<sup>[36]</sup>

In late April 1800, *Confiance* cruised off [Sunda Strait](#), where she captured an American ship; she then left the strait to avoid the frigate [USS Essex](#),<sup>[37]</sup> which was known to cruise in these waters, and sailed to the Seychelles. There, he escaped a British ship of the line and a frigate, and sailed on to cruise the [Bay of Bengal](#).<sup>[38]</sup>

On 19 September, *Confiance* captured *Prize*, from Calcutta, which had stored eight of her ten guns in her hold to improve her stability. *Prize* was sent off to Mauritius on the next day with an 85-man prize crew.<sup>[39]</sup> Surcouf then steered for Ganjam, where he captured three smaller ships.<sup>[40]</sup>

On 7 October 1800, off Sand Heads, near Calcutta, *Confiance* met the 40-gun [East Indiaman Kent](#), of 824 [tons burthen](#),<sup>[41][42][N 5]</sup> under Captain Robert Rivington. *Kent* had rescued the crew of another ship, *Queen*,<sup>[43][45][N 6]</sup> destroyed by fire,<sup>[41]</sup> and therefore had an exceptionally large complement<sup>[44]</sup> of 437 men, including her passengers; 300 of them were soldiers and sailors;<sup>[38][N 7]</sup> Surcouf managed to [board](#) his larger opponent and, after over an hour and a half<sup>[47]</sup> of battle across the decks of the ship,<sup>[48]</sup> seize control of the *Kent*.<sup>[49]</sup>

The British had suffered fourteen killed, including the captain,<sup>[44]</sup> and forty-four wounded, while the French suffered five killed and ten wounded.<sup>[44]</sup> The privateers were then granted

one hour of free pillaging on *Kent* before Surcouf restored order;<sup>[43][49][50]</sup> however, the female passengers were strictly protected and sentries were placed in front of their apartments.<sup>[51]</sup> Amongst the prisoners were General [Frederick St. John](#) and his wife,<sup>[44]</sup> Arabella Craven.<sup>[52]</sup>

### Battle between *Confiance* and *Kent*



*Confiance* raking *Kent*, which just missed her maneuver, and preparing to come alongside.  
Engraving by [Léon Morel-Fatio](#).



Capture of *Kent* by *Confiance*. Painting by [Ambroise Louis Garneray](#).



Account of the capture of *Kent* in [The Gentleman's Magazine](#), October 1800.

The first officer of *Confiance*, [Joachim Drieux](#), was sent on *Kent* with a 60-man prize crew, while her passengers were released on a merchantman that Surcouf stopped a few days later.<sup>[53]</sup> *Confiance* and *Kent* arrived at the Rade des Pavillons in Port-Louis in November.<sup>[43]</sup> The capture of *Kent* became a sensation, and the British Admiralty issued a reward for the capture of Surcouf.<sup>[53]</sup>

After her return to Ile de France, *Confiance* was armed as a merchantman *en aventurier*<sup>[N 8]</sup> with an 89-man crew<sup>[43]</sup> and loaded with colonial goods for her return to France. On the journey, Surcouf still managed to capture a number of ships, notably the Portuguese *Ebre*,<sup>[43]</sup> with eighteen 12-pounder carronades and a 60-man crew; he released her



against a ransom of 10,000 piastres and after exchanging her greatmast with that of *Confiance*.<sup>[53]</sup>

Upon her return, *Confiance* ran into the British blockade and was chased by a frigate; Surcouf managed to evade her by throwing overboard all but one of her guns, his boats, anchors, chains and even components of his masts. He eventually arrived at [La Rochelle](#)<sup>[26][54][55][N 9]</sup> on 13 April 1801.<sup>[53][54]</sup>

In France, Navy Minister [Truguet](#) attempted to enrol Surcouf in the Navy as an auxiliary officer, which he declined.<sup>[53]</sup> Hennequin states that Bonaparte himself offered him the rank of Captain and the command of two frigates, which Surcouf declined for fear of losing his freedom of action, and awarded him a [Sabre of honour](#).<sup>[55]</sup> Surcouf was awarded the [Legion of Honour](#) at the founding of the Order, on 19 May 1802.<sup>[26]</sup>

- **Documents on Surcouf's Legion of Honour**



Document forwarding Surcouf's request to be admitted in the Legion of Honour



Document on the background verification process



Official letter to Surcouf: "The Emperor, during a Great Council, has made you a member of the Legion of Honour"

On 28 May, in Saint-Malo, he married Marie Blaize, who had been his fiancée for two years;<sup>[54]</sup> over the course of their marriage, they had five children together.<sup>[3]</sup> Around 1805, Surcouf started to arm privateers in Saint-Malo in partnership with his father-in-law [Louis Blaize de Maisonneuve](#),<sup>[56]</sup> notably [Caroline](#) which captured four ships in the Indian Ocean under Nicolas Surcouf,<sup>[57]</sup> *Marsouin*; and *Confiance*, which took two prizes under Joseph Potier.<sup>[58]</sup>

### Cruise of *Revenant*



Cruise of *Revenant*.

After a five-year retirement,<sup>[26]</sup> in early 1807, Surcouf ordered the 18-gun<sup>[54]</sup> [Revenant](#), a privateer which he had built on his own specifications.<sup>[26]</sup> On 2 March, he departed Saint-Malo with a 192-man crew<sup>[54]</sup> to cruise off Bengal. On 9 March 1807,<sup>[59]</sup> while en route, off [Madeira](#), *Revenant* captured the British slave ship *Aun*,<sup>[59]</sup> of sixteen 12-pounders, recently departed from Liverpool,<sup>[60]</sup> which Surcouf let go for a ransom, after throwing her guns overboard, wetting her gunpowder and destroying some of her sails.<sup>[54]</sup>

Surcouf arrived at Île de France in June, slipping past the British blockade and capturing several ships on the journey. During the subsequent campaign, which was to be his last, Surcouf captured 16 British merchantmen, partly because they tended to [strike their colours](#) as soon as they realised their opponent was Surcouf.<sup>[60][61]</sup>

The arrival of Surcouf at Isle de France did not go unnoticed: the authorities and the population reacted with enthusiasm, while British insurance companies on Calcutta doubled

the reward for his capture,<sup>[54]</sup> which amounted to one [lakh](#) of rupees, or 250,000 francs.<sup>[62]</sup> On 3 September 1807, *Revenant* departed to cruise off Bengal. On 25 September, she captured the British 12-gun *Trafalgar* carrying 10,000 bags of rice,<sup>[59]</sup> and the 14-gun *Mangles*, carrying 11,000;<sup>[59]</sup> on the 27th, the 12-gun *Admiral Applin*, with 9,500 bags of rice;<sup>[59]</sup> on 1 October, the 1-gun *Suzannah*, with 5,500 bags of rice; on the 19th, the wood-laden *Success*, which was burnt;<sup>[59]</sup> on the 30th, the 12-gun *Fortune*, which carried no cargo and was sunk;<sup>[59]</sup> on 15 November, the Indian *Macaulay*;<sup>[59]</sup> on 18 December, the British 10-gun *Sir William Burroughs*;<sup>[59]</sup> on the 30th, the Portuguese *Oriente*;<sup>[59]</sup> and on 6 January 1808, the Arab *Jem lab Dim*.<sup>[59]</sup> Surcouf sent these with prize crews to Isle de France, and then returned himself on 31 January 1808.<sup>[54]</sup>

When a British captive officer taunted Surcouf with the words "You French fight for money while we fight for honour", Surcouf replied "Each of us fights for what he lacks most".<sup>[63][64]</sup>

Surcouf then gave command of *Revenant* to his first officer, Joseph Potier. After a short cruise, Potier returned with a 34-gun<sup>[N 10]</sup> prize of the [Portuguese East India Company](#),<sup>[67]</sup> the *Conceção de Santo Antonio*,<sup>[67]</sup> captured after a one-hour fight.<sup>[68]</sup>

On 4 July 1808, General [Charles Decaen](#), governor of Isle de France, requisitioned *Revenant*.<sup>[69]</sup> She was renamed *Iéna*, and commissioned under Lieutenant [Morice](#), with *Lieutenant de vaisseau* [Albin Roussin](#) as second officer. Surcouf had an altercation with Decaen but had to renounce his ship. He eventually purchased *Sémillante*, which he renamed *Charles*. Returning with this vessel to Saint-Malo, he arrived on 4 February 1809.<sup>[26][68]</sup>

## Later life



Portrait of Surcouf by [Antoine Maurin](#)

From 1809, Surcouf went into business as ship-owner,<sup>[26]</sup> and over the years, he equipped a number of privateers:<sup>[68]</sup> *Auguste*, under Pelletier;<sup>[68][70]</sup> *Dorade*;<sup>[68]</sup> *Biscayenne*;<sup>[68]</sup> *Édouard*;<sup>[68]</sup> *Espadon*;<sup>[68]</sup> *Ville-de-Caen*;<sup>[68]</sup> *Adolphe*<sup>[68]</sup> and his last, *Renard*,<sup>[57][68]</sup> under Leroux.<sup>[70]</sup> The British captured all the privateers sent into the Channel, with the exception of *Renard*.<sup>[3]</sup> Surcouf also built the brig *Fantôme* at [St. Malo](#) in 1809. Surcouf dispatched *Fantôme* to Isle de France ([Mauritius](#)) in the Indian Ocean on her first voyage where the brig took three prizes but was captured by the British in 1810 and commissioned into British service as *HMS Fantome*.<sup>[71]</sup>

In January 1814, Surcouf was made a colonel in the [National Guard](#) of Saint-Malo.<sup>[26]</sup> During the [Hundred Days](#), he served as a chief of Legion and maintained order.<sup>[26]</sup> He resigned after the [Battle of Waterloo](#) and became a merchant,<sup>[26]</sup> arming 19 merchantmen<sup>[72]</sup> and establishing business with Newfoundland.

Between 1814 and 1827, Surcouf organised over 116 commercial expeditions.<sup>[73]</sup> In 1815, Surcouf engaged in the slave trade, commissioning the ship *Africain* to transport enslaved Africans from Gabon.<sup>[1]</sup> *Africain* conducted another slave trading journey in 1819.<sup>[74]</sup> Four other expeditions are also suspected of having been slaving runs: that of *Marie-Anne* in 1819, *Adolphe* in 1820, and in 1821 *Victor* and *Adolphe*,<sup>[74]</sup> under René Decaen and with Désiré Surcouf as first officer, which sailed under the pretence of sailing to Isle Bourbon (now Réunion), but actually to ferry slaves to Cuba and Philadelphia.<sup>[75][73]</sup>

Surcouf died on 8 July 1827, and was buried in Saint-Malo graveyard with military honours.<sup>[76]</sup> His tomb features a globe showing the Indian Ocean and an anchor,<sup>[77]</sup> with the epitaph:

A famous sailor has finished his career

He is in the tomb forever asleep

Seamen are deprived of their father

The unfortunates have lost a friend<sup>[77][N 11]</sup>

## Legacy

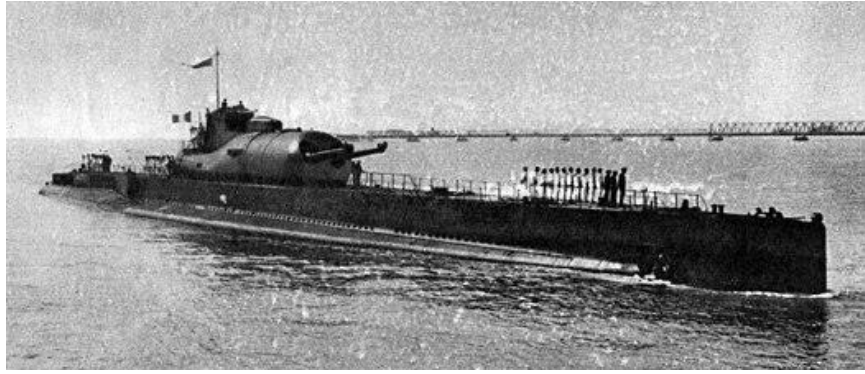
Five ships of the [French Navy](#) were named after [Surcouf](#), the first three being a steam [aviso](#) (sloop), an armoured cruiser, and a [submarine cruiser](#), which at the time of her launch was the largest [submarine](#) in the world. The submarine joined the [Free French Naval Forces](#) during the Second World War and disappeared mysteriously after liberating Saint-Pierre and Miquelon. The fourth *Surcouf* was a large fleet escort destroyer, which was severely damaged in a collision with a Soviet ship, and the fifth is a modern stealth frigate, one of the first stealth combat ships.<sup>[78]</sup>

## Statue in Tribute

Ships of the French Navy named Surcouf



The aviso [Surcouf](#) (1858)



The [submarine cruiser \*Surcouf\*](#) (N N 3, 1929–1942)



The fleet escort destroyer [Surcouf](#) (1953–1972)



The stealth frigate [Surcouf](#) (1997–present day)

A number of legends have grown around Surcouf, he is often stated to have been made a Baron of the Empire, which is untrue.<sup>[3][N 12]</sup> Another legend states that Surcouf had thrown overboard gold seized on *Kent* but *Kent* did not carry gold.<sup>[3][N 13]</sup>

There is a tale that in 1816, Surcouf challenged twelve Prussian officers to a duel and defeated all of them except for the last, which he let go "to tell in his country how a former soldier of Napoleon fights"; this story is a fabrication.<sup>[81][N 14]</sup>

## Notes

Wikimedia Commons has media related to [\*Robert Surcouf\*](#).

1. <sup>^</sup> [Granier](#) gives the captain's name as "captain de Joliff" instead of "Lejoliff".<sup>[8]</sup>
2. <sup>^</sup> [Russell](#) was a pilot boat of 111 tons (bm), launched in 1770.<sup>[16]</sup>
3. <sup>^</sup> [Levot](#) gives a figure of 17 men; [Cunat](#), of 19.<sup>[9][19]</sup>
4. <sup>^</sup> Some sources state that the allowance was of 1,700,000 francs, of which [Surcouf](#) left two thirds to the Treasury.<sup>[22]</sup>
5. <sup>^</sup> A number of French accounts of [Surcouf's](#) victory exaggerate *Kent's* size and guns by 60%. [Rouvier](#) states 38 guns and 1200 [tons](#); [Cunat](#) specifies that *Kent* carried twenty-six 18-pounder on her battery and 12 9-pounder on her castles; [Hennequin](#) gives an approximate 40 guns, but confirms the figure of 1200 tons.<sup>[38][43][44]</sup>
6. <sup>^</sup> [Cunat](#) actually names her as *Reine*, translating her name into French.<sup>[43]</sup>
7. <sup>^</sup> The *Gazette de France* reported that *Kent* carried 150 soldiers of line infantry.<sup>[46]</sup>
8. <sup>^</sup> [Cunat](#) says that *Confiance* was armed "*à l'aventure*", entailing that she was nominally a merchantman, but was capable of attacking targets of opportunity.<sup>[43]</sup>
9. <sup>^</sup> [Rouvier](#) says Rochefort instead of La Rochelle.<sup>[53]</sup>
10. <sup>^</sup> [Cunat](#) gives a figure of 64 guns for *Conceção* and implies she was a naval ship; while she had indeed been built as a 64-gun ship of the line and still belonged to the government, she sailed for private ship-owners and was armed with 36 guns, of which only 28 were usable (report of Captain Potier, quoted in [Lepellety](#) pp. 143–144).<sup>[65][66]</sup>
11. <sup>^</sup> *Un célèbre marin a fini sa carrière  
Il est dans le tombeau à jamais endormi  
Les matelots sont privés de leur père  
Les malheureux ont perdu un ami*
12. <sup>^</sup> [Granier](#), for instance, states that [Surcouf](#) was made Baron.<sup>[79]</sup>
13. <sup>^</sup> For instance the tale is told without reservation by [Granier](#).<sup>[80]</sup>
14. <sup>^</sup> For instance the tale is told without reservation by [Granier](#).<sup>[82]</sup>

## References

1. <sup>^</sup> [Jump up to:](#) <sup>a</sup> <sup>b</sup> [Roman \(2001\)](#), p. 272.
2. <sup>^</sup> [Roman \(2018\)](#), p. 130.
3. <sup>^</sup> [Jump up to:](#) <sup>a</sup> <sup>b</sup> <sup>c</sup> <sup>d</sup> <sup>e</sup> <sup>f</sup> <sup>g</sup> <sup>h</sup> <sup>i</sup> [Alain Roman](#); summary on [Robert Surcouf Archived](#) 23 April 2003 at the [Wayback Machine](#), www.netmarine.net
4. <sup>^</sup> [Jump up to:](#) <sup>a</sup> <sup>b</sup> [Levot](#), p. 493



5. [^](#) Cunat, p.145
6. [^](#) [Jump up to:](#)[<sup>a</sup>](#) [<sup>b</sup>](#) [<sup>c</sup>](#) [<sup>d</sup>](#) [<sup>e</sup>](#) Cunat, p. 390
7. [^](#) Hennequin, p. 378
8. [^](#) [Jump up to:](#)[<sup>a</sup>](#) [<sup>b</sup>](#) [<sup>c</sup>](#) [<sup>d</sup>](#) [<sup>e</sup>](#) [<sup>f</sup>](#) Granier, p. 216
9. [^](#) [Jump up to:](#)[<sup>a</sup>](#) [<sup>b</sup>](#) [<sup>c</sup>](#) [<sup>d</sup>](#) [<sup>e</sup>](#) [<sup>f</sup>](#) [<sup>g</sup>](#) [<sup>h</sup>](#) [<sup>i</sup>](#) [<sup>j</sup>](#) [<sup>k</sup>](#) [<sup>l</sup>](#) [<sup>m</sup>](#) [<sup>n</sup>](#) [<sup>o</sup>](#) [<sup>p</sup>](#) [<sup>q</sup>](#) [<sup>r</sup>](#) Levot, p. 494
10. [^](#) Roche, p. 74
11. [^](#) [Jump up to:](#)[<sup>a</sup>](#) [<sup>b</sup>](#) [<sup>c</sup>](#) [<sup>d</sup>](#) [<sup>e</sup>](#) [<sup>f</sup>](#) [<sup>g</sup>](#) [<sup>h</sup>](#) Cunat, p. 391
12. [^](#) [Jump up to:](#)[<sup>a</sup>](#) [<sup>b</sup>](#) [<sup>c</sup>](#) [<sup>d</sup>](#) Granier, p. 217.
13. [^](#) [Jump up to:](#)[<sup>a</sup>](#) [<sup>b</sup>](#) [<sup>c</sup>](#) [<sup>d</sup>](#) Cunat, p. 392
14. [^](#) [Jump up to:](#)[<sup>a</sup>](#) [<sup>b</sup>](#) [<sup>c</sup>](#) [<sup>d</sup>](#) [<sup>e</sup>](#) [<sup>f</sup>](#) Cunat, p. 393
15. [^](#) [Jump up to:](#)[<sup>a</sup>](#) [<sup>b</sup>](#) [<sup>c</sup>](#) [<sup>d</sup>](#) [<sup>e</sup>](#) Rouvier, p. 254
16. [^](#) Phipps (1840), p. 131.
17. [^](#) [Jump up to:](#)[<sup>a</sup>](#) [<sup>b</sup>](#) Cunat, p. 394
18. [^](#) [Jump up to:](#)[<sup>a</sup>](#) [<sup>b</sup>](#) [<sup>c</sup>](#) Rouvier, p. 252
19. [^](#) [Jump up to:](#)[<sup>a</sup>](#) [<sup>b</sup>](#) [<sup>c</sup>](#) [<sup>d</sup>](#) Cunat, p. 395
20. [^](#) Rouvier, p. 253
21. [^](#) [Jump up to:](#)[<sup>a</sup>](#) [<sup>b</sup>](#) [<sup>c</sup>](#) [<sup>d</sup>](#) Hennequin, p. 380
22. [^](#) [Jump up to:](#)[<sup>a</sup>](#) [<sup>b</sup>](#) [<sup>c</sup>](#) [<sup>d</sup>](#) [<sup>e</sup>](#) Granier, p. 218
23. [^](#) Demerliac, p. 309, no 2915
24. [^](#) [Jump up to:](#)[<sup>a</sup>](#) [<sup>b</sup>](#) [<sup>c</sup>](#) [<sup>d</sup>](#) [<sup>e</sup>](#) [<sup>f</sup>](#) Rouvier, p. 447
25. [^](#) [Jump up to:](#)[<sup>a</sup>](#) [<sup>b</sup>](#) [<sup>c</sup>](#) Cunat, p. 396
26. [^](#) [Jump up to:](#)[<sup>a</sup>](#) [<sup>b</sup>](#) [<sup>c</sup>](#) [<sup>d</sup>](#) [<sup>e</sup>](#) [<sup>f</sup>](#) [<sup>g</sup>](#) [<sup>h</sup>](#) [<sup>i</sup>](#) [<sup>j</sup>](#) [<sup>k</sup>](#) [<sup>l</sup>](#) [<sup>m</sup>](#) [<sup>n</sup>](#) Levot, p. 495
27. [^](#) Granier, p. 223
28. [^](#) Hennequin, p. 381
29. [^](#) [Jump up to:](#)[<sup>a</sup>](#) [<sup>b</sup>](#) Hennequin, p. 382
30. [^](#) [Jump up to:](#)[<sup>a</sup>](#) [<sup>b</sup>](#) [<sup>c</sup>](#) [<sup>d</sup>](#) [<sup>e</sup>](#) [<sup>f</sup>](#) [<sup>g</sup>](#) [<sup>h</sup>](#) [<sup>i</sup>](#) Rouvier, p. 448
31. [^](#) [Jump up to:](#)[<sup>a</sup>](#) [<sup>b</sup>](#) [<sup>c</sup>](#) [<sup>d</sup>](#) [<sup>e</sup>](#) Cunat, p. 397
32. [^](#) [Jump up to:](#)[<sup>a</sup>](#) [<sup>b</sup>](#) [<sup>c</sup>](#) [<sup>d</sup>](#) [<sup>e</sup>](#) [<sup>f</sup>](#) Granier, p. 224
33. [^](#) [Jump up to:](#)[<sup>a</sup>](#) [<sup>b</sup>](#) [<sup>c</sup>](#) [<sup>d</sup>](#) Rouvier, p. 449
34. [^](#) Hennequin, p. 383

35. [^](#) Austen (1935), pp. 93–94.
36. [^](#) [Jump up to:](#)<sup>a</sup> <sup>b</sup> Granier, p. 219
37. [^](#) [Robert Surcouf](#), ageofsail.wordpress.com
38. [^](#) [Jump up to:](#)<sup>a</sup> <sup>b</sup> <sup>c</sup> Rouvier, p. 526
39. [^](#) Asiatic Annual Register, Volume 3, p. 39
40. [^](#) Asiatic Annual Register, Volume 3, p. 40
41. [^](#) [Jump up to:](#)<sup>a</sup> <sup>b</sup> Norman p. 353
42. [^](#) Biden p. 212
43. [^](#) [Jump up to:](#)<sup>a</sup> <sup>b</sup> <sup>c</sup> <sup>d</sup> <sup>e</sup> <sup>f</sup> <sup>g</sup> <sup>h</sup> Cunat, p. 398
44. [^](#) [Jump up to:](#)<sup>a</sup> <sup>b</sup> <sup>c</sup> <sup>d</sup> <sup>e</sup> Hennequin, p. 384
45. [^](#) Laughton, [p. 439 Archived](#) 10 August 2017 at the [Wayback Machine](#)
46. [^](#) Gallois, Napoléon (1847). [Les Corsaires français sous la République et l'Empire](#) (in French). Vol. 2. Julien, Lanier et compagnie. p. 374. [OCLC 6977453](#).
47. [^](#) Laughton, p. 438
48. [^](#) Laughton, p. 440
49. [^](#) [Jump up to:](#)<sup>a</sup> <sup>b</sup> Laughton, p. 441
50. [^](#) Hennequin (p. 385) states that the effects of the prisoners were returned to them when he had them transferred on *Confiance*.
51. [^](#) Laughton, p. 442
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54. [^](#) [Jump up to:](#)<sup>a</sup> <sup>b</sup> <sup>c</sup> <sup>d</sup> <sup>e</sup> <sup>f</sup> <sup>g</sup> <sup>h</sup> Cunat, p. 399
55. [^](#) [Jump up to:](#)<sup>a</sup> <sup>b</sup> Hennequin, p. 385
56. [^](#) Granier, p. 221
57. [^](#) [Jump up to:](#)<sup>a</sup> <sup>b</sup> Gallois, vol. 2, p. 302
58. [^](#) Gallois, vol.2, pp. 302–303
59. [^](#) [Jump up to:](#)<sup>a</sup> <sup>b</sup> <sup>c</sup> <sup>d</sup> <sup>e</sup> <sup>f</sup> <sup>g</sup> <sup>h</sup> <sup>i</sup> <sup>j</sup> <sup>k</sup> Granier, p. 225
60. [^](#) [Jump up to:](#)<sup>a</sup> <sup>b</sup> Hennequin, p. 386
61. [^](#) Fonds Marine, p. 362
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76. [^](#) [Cunat, p. 402](#)
77. [^](#) [Jump up to:](#)<sup>a</sup> <sup>b</sup> [Granier, p. 228](#)
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