

PIRATES of the **Virgin Islands**



by Fritz Seyfarth

PIRATES

of the Virgin Islands

THE GOLDEN AGE OF PIRACY

1690 to 1720

Who were these men – adventurers, entrepreneurs, maritime gangsters, or terrorists . . . ? The booties taken were immense, their exploits legendary and devastating. The Caribbean – and especially the Virgin Islands – became a pirate paradise.

by Fritz Seyfarth

Art by Barney Horntimber

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The Golden Age Of Piracy

Some 275 years ago, the Virgin Islands were the center of a vast piratical activity that extended over the Caribbean Sea and the entire sea lanes of the New World.

It was the Golden Age of Piracy, from about 1690 to 1720, a unique era that lasted only thirty years or so. Shipping was plundered to the point where the normal commerce of most major countries was seriously threatened and their treasuries came close to bankruptcy. Spanish, French, British, Dutch -- it made no difference what flag a vessel sailed under. The pirates turned their energies and vengeance against all men and countries, and every vessel was fair game. The booties taken were immense, their exploits legendary and devastating. They performed astounding feats of navigation, seamanship and warfare, ferocious deeds of violence and cruelties . . . and incredible personal gluttonies.

These were men who chose romantic danger over safe boredom, men who were capable of being cruel, but seldom cowardly, who possessed a temperament much more comfortable with pirating than with legal commerce, with poaching than with ordinary hunting. Socially condoned practices lacked spice.

The Caribbean . . . and especially the Virgin Islands . . . became a pirate paradise. Who were these men, why did they suddenly devour the sea lanes, how did they survive the organized world navies?

It was a particular and peculiar time in history that allowed and motivated their energies to be siphoned off in piracy and lust rather than more proper endeavors. In these disturbed years, a series of political and economic circumstances developed to lure thousands of desperate men into lives of piracy. Most were English and American seamen, with a scattering of French, Scandinavian, and other nationalities. By themselves, on board their vessels and in their island hideaways, the society of the pirates was governed only by a few rules which they chose for themselves. It was a basic, simple democracy that demanded justice and rights of the individual, with no allowance for tyranny or abuse of power. Although often crude and violent to enemies, they were abundantly generous to trusted friends and amorous ladies. Fellow crew members who had been disabled in combat were allowed to live on board for as long as they chose, or were given large bonuses of plunder to live comfortably ashore. Many a pirate with one eye gone, or missing an arm, or clomping around on a wooden pegleg became respectable businessmen -- merchants, tavernkeepers, even farmers.

Their lives and deeds are often cloaked in bloodcurdling tales and legends as no pirate ever kept a log or diary of his exploits. Just the truth about the pirates was incredible enough. One of the best accounts of the pirates and their crimes was published in 1724 and entitled *A General History of the Most Notorious Pyrates*. Its author, Daniel Defoe, did not approve of the pirates he wrote about, saying, "They are like Mad Men that cast Fire-Brands, Poisoned Arrows, Wickedness and Death, and then say 'Are we not Sports?' and often

die in Agonies equal to their Villainies." Yet Defoe tried to understand the pirates, and at times indicated admiration for these bold seafarers. "They were usually Brave Men," he wrote, "and Wise Warriors, and Civilization is often led by Men no better. Under different Circumstances, they were capable of Decency, Dignity and Honourable Power."

The names of the pirate leaders of the Golden Age are legendary: Kidd, Blackbeard, Every, Bonnet, Tew, Roberts, Wilmerding, Rackam, Stocken. One great difficulty which confronts the pirate historian is the lack of interest shown by his subjects in recording their own deeds. The pirates carried no scribes aboard their vessels. The successful pirate, unlike the successful man in almost any other profession, did not crave notoriety, for obvious reasons. The pirate who escaped the cutlass or gallows preferred retirement into obscurity with his fortune and very few were ever induced, either by the need for money or the craving for fame, to write an autobiography. What is known of them comes from those who in one way or another escaped their clutches, from recollections of pardoned pirates and naval officers, from trial minutes to gallows confessions. The principal account -- in some cases the only record -- of the pirates was the work of a talented journalist of the day, who set himself the task of chronicling the Golden Age of Piracy just as it ended.



The Sweet Trade

History tells us that piracy, known as "the sweet trade," is humanity's third oldest profession, senioreed only by prostitution and medicine. It has flourished wherever and whenever the rewards of the crimes have been worth the dangers of battle and the risk of the ultimate punishment. From time to time pirates found it advantageous to offer their services to warring nations so that they operated as legal naval auxiliaries under the name "privateers." They were privately owned vessels with special government commissions authorizing them to attack, loot and destroy enemy shipping. Most nations looked upon privateering as a most effective and inexpensive method of waging war at sea. In the 16th and 17th Centuries, Britain and France were usually at war with Spain in the New World and their privateers constantly harrassed Spanish trade, even including raids on her rich Caribbean ports. The greatest success was Henry Morgan's looting of Panama in 1671 in which he carried away staggering fortunes in gold, silver and gems valued at over \$100-million.

But even the most legal privateers "strayed" from time to time and, depending on how the hunting was, would attack ships of any nationality if a good booty was at stake. And issuing commissions was a lucrative business for powerful government officials who essentially became partners with the sea raiders. Privateering was just like having a pirate franchise and noblemen investor syndicates were common.

By the time England finally made peace with Spain in 1689, many veteran privateers had already turned to outright piracy and their ranks were soon swollen by all kinds of seafarers anxious to taste the fruits of the sweet trade. Using the Caribbean as a base, they ranged out into the oceans of the world. But the Virgin Islands was where they called home and most surviving expeditions returned sooner or later to Charlotte Amalie to market their plunder, make repairs, reprovision, and -- most important of all -- enjoy her shoreside rest and relaxation facilities. At sea, these swashbuckling rogues were capable of frightful deeds, defying all the forces of law and order, even death itself. But St. Thomas provided an explosive release of tension after the discipline and hazards of the high seas and they turned to the basic pleasures of liquor and flesh. The treasures for which they had risked their lives were squandered and debauched in Charlotte Amalie's rum shops and brothels; there was continuous dancing and singing and fighting and love-making. Most of them set out on a new voyage as poor as they had begun the voyage before.

It was a period of robust maritime expansion with valuable trade routes being established throughout the seven seas. Merchant fleets loaded with rich cargo were ripe prizes: Spanish treasure galleons from Central America; Portuguese merchantmen stuffed with Brazilian riches; East Indiamen with holds full of silks, jewels, spices, ivory; an endless stream of cargo vessels bringing in staples and slaves to the New World and returning with export commodities of sugar, cotton, tobacco, rum. Such a variety of prizes found a

ready market in the North American colonies and St. Thomas was a favored trans-shipment port. The pirates operated with the active support and cooperation of the governor, merchants and populace. Even in American ports, they were given protection and hospitality. St. Thomas made a huge profit out of piracy. The merchants bought cheaply and sold dearly. The pirates were not businessmen and were heartily exploited, just as surely as their plunder had been unjustly obtained. It was a vicious circle of piracy . . . For the pirates themselves, their riches were short-lived and Charlotte Amalie soon became a hazy memory to motivate them on their next tour of sea duty.



Pirates burying a Treasure Chest

Pirate Justice

Seafaring visitors to St. Thomas were often cheated vilely at every turn and drunken men could be robbed boldly in the shadows of an alley-way outside a rum shop, or their trousers rifled as they took their pleasures upstairs. But it usually did not happen to excess. The pirates knew their own madness and gloried in it. But they could exact a terrible revenge if they thought the price of the fun-and-games had been too high; bare-faced robbery was for pirates only. Let greedy landmen beware!

One such incident of violent revenge occurred at the Red Fox Inn, a St. Thomas den of sin on the edge of Frenchtown where slinky Creole girls marketed their wares. For some time it had been operating on dangerous ground. Not content with the normal booming trade enjoyed by every tavern in town, the Red Fox had developed its own breed of vultures: in addition to their normal bountiful profit, they added short measures of watered rum, drugged food to twist a man's gut, cutthroat robbery on their own doorsteps, and gambling as crooked as a bolt of lightning. When a victim protested, he might find himself knocked on the head and thrown in the alley-way. One young pirate, Bob Qualls from the brig LYNX, well-liked and popular with his shipmates, had ended his life in a gutter near the Red Fox with his throat slit because he had dared to question his evening's bill. The foul wench who had brought him his fate was heard to boast she had earned a guinea for the task without even lifting her skirt.

It was decided that the Red Fox had gone beyond the mark of enterprising business practices and a society of revenge was swiftly formed -- The Buccaneer Benevolent Fire Company. On a night agreed, twenty men each from five pirate ships in St. Thomas harbor went into action. They emptied the Red Fox Inn of all customers, leaving only the two owners, their treacherous employees, lady "troopers", and villainous hangers-on. Then the doors were locked and barred, each window guarded by sentries with muskets, and the inn was put to the torch. Around this merry blaze a hundred pirates danced and sang, with background music of hideous screams and frenzied banging on doors and walls. Wenches leaping from their upper room windows and roof were shot in mid-air or cut down with sword and cutlass as they ran. The pirates' final message: "We are not bad men. We are simply just. *Remember this!*"

Governor Reginold Modyford's answer to this outrageous pirate justice, as had been feared, was stern and swift. The following day he issued an official proclamation: "Henceforth, each tavern shall keep two fire-buckets, filled with water, in all its public rooms. The penalty for non-compliance will be *Five Shillings!*"

"By God!" moaned the pirates. "This man will *kill* us with his harshness!

Another incident of pirate justice concerned a traitorous and cowardly

merchant, Robert Allen Hardin. Hardin was a greedy, scheming manipulator. He had married a wealthy widow who brought him an extensive dowry of ships and land. When she soon died under mysterious circumstances, he found another wife just like her. He parlayed his holdings into a vast shipping and merchant business, and of course the riches from pirates proved irresistible. But his greedy double-dealing, outlandish cheating, and fraudulent schemes set records in human corruption, even by pirate standards. But pirate justice prevailed in the end. He was taken prisoner aboard one of his merchantmen, although he tried to hide his identity by disguising himself as a pregnant woman. His trial at sea aboard the SEA HAWK was quick, with a guilty verdict rendered on all counts, and walking the plank adjudged the proper punishment. Hardin cried, whimpered, and begged for mercy.

Pirate justice was cruel, and within their own ranks sentences for wrong-doing carried swift retribution, but very seldom brutal. Brutality was saved for wretched enemies. And walking the plank was considered the most ignoble, debased death. Pirate historian Daniel Defoe records that on September 13, 1720, Hardin's sentence was carried out: "The sea was strewn with bloody scraps of a freshly killed calf to bait and whet the appetites of a large school of Sharks. With hands tightly bound behind his back, the naked, screaming Hardin was prodded out the Plank with Sharp Spears that inflicted blood-streaming Wounds. Almost immediately on hitting the water, he was Vigorously and Violently attacked by the Ravenous Razor-Toothed Sharks, and within moments was Furiously Dismembered and Devoured amid the Cheering of the Pyrates he had so thoroughly cheated for the Last Time."

Most of the citizens of Charlotte Amalie had strong affection for their pirates. The merchants grew fat by buying pirate plunder at discount prices, and then easily and promptly recovered their investment by pandering to their vices. The common people adored them as heroes and for the protection that such a powerful fleet gave to the island, and at no increase to their own taxes. Shipwrights, riggers and sailmakers were in full employ, tavern-keepers enjoyed a booming business, and harlots, when they slept at all, dreamed that their aching rumps had turned, by lustful chemistry, to gold -- and often awoke to find it was true.

There was profit in it for all. And Governor Reginold Modyford took his generous share. As privateering multiplied and pirates swarmed the Caribbean like locusts, the Governor, in sage wisdom, decided that what was best for so many must be best for all. So he granted licenses for the buccaneers to legally plunder the sea lanes of the New World, reserving a healthy percentage for his private treasury. Disregard of power, corruption, greed, violence, and contempt for all except the strong turned the port into a shameless stew of blood, lust, and guzzling madness.

Their Background

Who were these men, where did they come from, what motivated them into the violent life of piracy? A great many came from Wales and the west coast of England -- not surprisingly, since these regions then provided the majority of British seafarers. But the turnover on pirate ships was high, and though the majority came from England and the American colonies, there was a good mixture of French, Danes, Dutchmen and Swedes.

The one thing they had in common was a love of the sea and the ability to fulfill the duties of sailing a ship. Landlubbers, with the exception of surgeons, carpenters and musicians, were not popular recruits on pirate vessels. Some pirates were deserters from Royal Navy warships. Other navy men drifted into piracy through unemployment caused by the laying up of fighting ships at the end of foreign wars. But most pirates were drawn from the crews of ordinary merchant ships, either as volunteers or forced men. Often they were mutineers who had taken over their own ships and turned pirate after killing or setting adrift their captain and any shipmates who did not wish to join them. Pirate vessels increased their manpower or replaced losses due to sickness, desertion, and death in action with new crew from captured merchantmen. Pirate crews were seldom crack teams of battle-hardened men welded together by years of service on the same ship. They were constantly changing, never the same size or composition from one month to the next, owing allegiance to nothing and no one, neither ship, nor captain, nor cause.

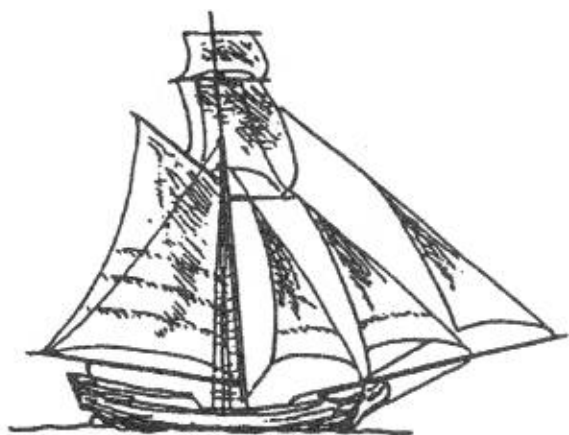
Many turned to the free life of piracy because of the harsh discipline on board merchant and Navy ships. They were subjected to brutal punishments of sadistic and power-hungry officers: flogging, keel-hauling, running the gauntlet, towed from the stern, hanged from the yardarms. Minor offenses or less brought the cutting flick of a bosun's rawhide whip or the crushing whack of an officer's heavy cane. Hatred of authority was an essential characteristic of every pirate. Brutality at sea was not a unique fact of life. All of life was brutal in those days. It was an age of legal torture and barbarity, with prisoners accused of minor crimes subjected to the pain and mutilation of such crude instruments as the press, screw, branding iron, nail and stone, or tied to a cart and whipped through the streets. Hanging was the most popular and a public execution was an occasion for drinking, feasting and revelry.

It was a time of gross social and economic injustice for the lower classes, be they sailors or landsmen. Those who survived a childhood of starvation, fatigue, cold, and sadistic beatings were chained to a life of crushing labor and marginal subsistence, without any medical care and facing years in a debtor's prison if they fell behind only a farthing in repaying a usurious loan.

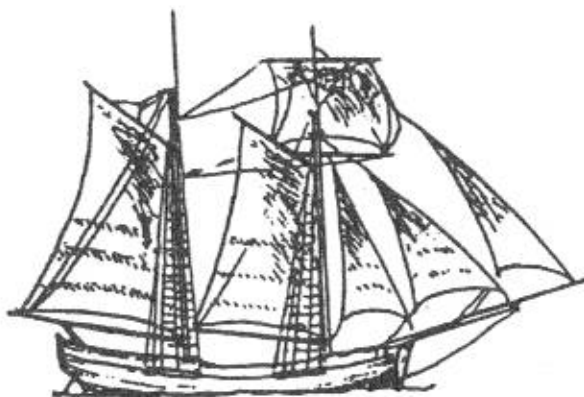
Such injustices and harshness of life would surely motivate a sailor into some kind of change, but it was the lure of money that gave the strongest drive. A seaman normally was paid about one pound a month and land workers received no better and often even less. During the Golden Years it was possible

for just a single successful voyage of a pirate ship to divide up a booty yielding 2,000 to 4,000 pounds per man. This sort of money was almost beyond belief in those days and represented over twice the annual income of the elite noblemen and rich landlords. The prospect of sharing in such treasures was irresistible. The rewards far outweighed the risks, since a man could be hanged for stealing a shilling, why not go for a fortune?

Captain Bartholomew Roberts summed up the pirates' outlook with these words: "In so-called honest service there are meagre rations, penurious wages, backbreaking labor, and harsh injustices. In piracy, there can be plenty and satiety, pleasure and ease, excitement and glory, liberty and power. Who would not find heavy balance on this side, when the worst hazard is only the noose's choking. No, a merry life and a short one shall be my motto!"



- SLOOP -
A SMALLER, SINGLE
MASTED SISTER TO THE
SWIFT SCHOONER.



- SCHOONER -
A FAST, MANEUVERABLE
ALL-AMERICAN RIG.
CARRIED TWO OR
THREE MASTS WITH
FORE-AND-AFT SAILS.

Their Ships

The pirates had no shipyards to provide them with specialized craft to ply their trade. Instead, they usually went about their predatory business in a succession of captured merchantmen which they altered to suit their purposes. They especially wanted speed and power to bear down on their prey that were heavily laden with cargo, poorly armed, and a crew usually kept to an absolute minimum by penny-pinching shipowners. They were no match for the pirates' screaming hordes in swift, maneuverable vessels.

But the pirates didn't have free reign of the sea. The roving fleets of the Royal Navy were not burdensome great ships of the line, but were light, efficient fighting craft -- sloops, frigates and snows with well-trained crews who could display great fighting spirit. Few pirates were foolhardy enough to slug it out with such worthy adversaries. No, they carefully picked their juicy plums and stayed clear of the Royal Navy vessels.

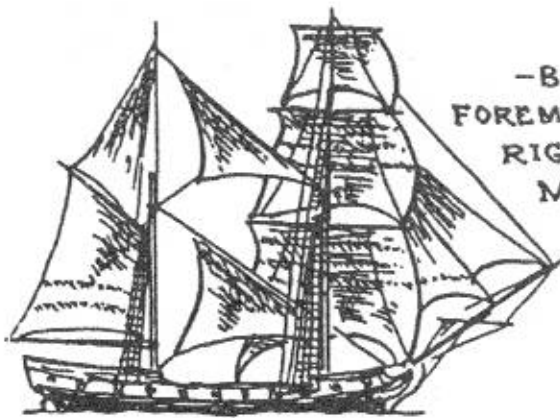
The schooner was a favorite vessel used by Caribbean pirates. Rigged primarily with fore-and-aft sails, a narrow hull, she was fast and easy to handle, capable of speeds of up to twelve knots in a fresh breeze. With a length of about 80 feet and weighing 90 to 100 tons, she was also big enough to carry a crew of 75 to adequately man her ten cannon, six swivel guns, and provide for powerful boarding parties. With a modest draft about six feet, such vessels were able to navigate shoal waters and hide in remote coves and lagoons. Sloops were also greatly favored. With a bowsprit almost as long as the hull, she could spread a parade of canvas that made her even more nimble than the schooner. In favorable winds, a square topsail gave her an extra measure of speed, sometimes exceeding fourteen knots.

The brigantine was the workhorse of the day and was used by some pirates as their combat craft. She was usually a two-masted vessel that carried both square and fore-and-aft sails for good versatility. The square sails drove her well in following winds, while the fore-and-aft sails were reasonably effective when sailing to windward. A brig was well-suited for carrying heavy and numerous armaments and a large fighting crew, but was not as fast or maneuverable as the sloop and schooner.

The East Indiaman was the biggest merchant vessel of her time. They were built to carry the wealth of the Orient and New World and were the supreme prize a pirate could hope to capture. A 700-tonner measured 160 feet on deck with 35 feet of beam. She packed enormous potential power: up to 60 cannon and a crew of 400, but she rarely carried even half that number of guns or crew since they took up valuable cargo space -- which made her delightfully vulnerable to pirates. The Dutch flute was also a popular cargo vessel in the 17th and 18th Centuries. They were inexpensive to build and cheap to operate (only 12 men were needed to man a 300-tonner) and offered large cargo capacity. They were round-sterned, broad-beamed, and flat-bottomed -- making them slow and sluggish. They were easy, lucrative prey for pirates.

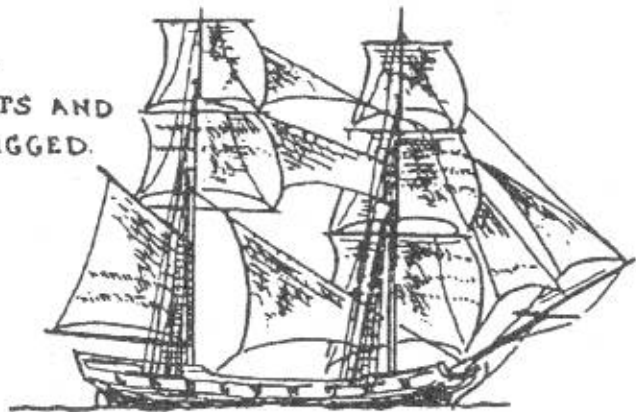
Designed for combat, a Royal Navy sloop was fast and heavily-armed. At 110-tons, a 65-footer carried 70 men to work the sails, fire cannon, or pull the seven pairs of oars to pursue pirates in a calm or swing the sloop into firing position. A well-trained crew could load and fire twelve nine-pound cannon at a rate of two rounds every three minutes. Few pirates were foolhardy enough to engage such a formidable foe. They looked for Dutch flutes and the like, and did their best to stay clear of Navy sloops. Pirates were great risk-takers, but most were not fools.

The frigate was the backbone of the Royal Navy West Indies Squadron that convoyed merchant vessels and fought pirates. Usually about 110 feet, carrying thirty guns and a crew of 200, the presence of a sturdy, high performance man-of-war frigate would usually keep pirates at a far distance.



-BRIGANTINE -
FOREMAST WAS SQUARE
RIGGED. THE MAIN-
MAST WAS FORE-
AND-AFT RIGGED.

-BRIG-
TWO MASTS AND
SQUARE RIGGED.



Their Life

But for all the glory, adventure and wealth that lured a man into piracy, life at sea in the 17th and 18th Centuries could be brutally severe. Their ships were damp, dark, cheerless places infested with vermin and rodents, reeking with the vile stench of filthy bilge water, rotting food, and dirty men. Whatever the weather, a wooden ship leaked -- decks, topsides, underwater hull. Fair weather or foul, the insides were always sopping wet.

Overcrowding was standard. There were sometimes as many as 200 men crammed into a vessel less than 100 feet long. Pestilence and feculence were rampant. The accumulation of filth and infestation of vermin during a long voyage provided breeding grounds for beetles, cockroaches and rats by the scurrying hordes. Disease often killed off half a crew during a voyage. Typhus, typhoid, scurvy, dysentery, malaria and yellow fever easily took a big toll. Venereal disease was such a curse that pirates boarding captured vessels were often more interested in ransacking the medicine chest for mercurial compounds to treat their severely advanced syphilis than in searching for loot.

The food was usually atrocious. The water was foul, the meat was putrid, the biscuits were liberally infested with large, blackheaded weevil maggots. The men could bring themselves to eat only in the dark. Thirst, starvation and sickness were constant companions.

Their shipboard community provided a total absence of those features of ordinary society that the pirates had rejected -- overbearing authority, class distinction, lack of a say in important matters. At its best, it was a utopian anarchy with complete individual freedom under no government control. At its worst, it was complete lawlessness and disorder with little self-discipline. The pirates shared their ship and worked for nobody. They elected their captain and they could easily depose him. Except in the heat of battle, major decisions were generally taken by show of hands. A large disagreeing minority often left the ship and struck out on their own to form a new band of marauders. Any special privilege or individual power was regarded as the first step toward autocracy and was treated accordingly. The pirate captain therefore had no constitutional authority and was entitled to no privileges except a double share of the booty. Only in battle did the pirate captain come into his own; during an engagement he exercised absolute control. The pirates most fortunately usually chose their most competent member as captain, the one superior in knowledge and boldness. They called it "pistol-proof". While some captains kept their appointments for years, others were quickly removed. The pirates were well aware of the trouble a bad or unlucky captain could get them into.

Next to the captain, the most important man on a pirate ship was the quartermaster (sometimes known as the "coordinator"). He was the strong man of the ship and was empowered to punish minor offenses like quarreling or not properly taking care of weapons. Serious offenses could only be tried by jury. He was the only man allowed to administer flogging, but so detested was this

form of punishment that it was allowed only when approved by a majority vote of the crew. The quartermaster was also the first man to board a prize, and he was responsible for the selection and division of the plunder, including female passengers. But he also was subject to the will of the pirate band; he was chosen by a majority vote and he could be removed by it.

Besides the captain and the quartermaster, the pirates had most of the other officers usually found on a man-of-war -- if they could get them. These officers were sometimes elected, but more often were appointed by the captain and quartermaster. There was always a sailing master who was in charge of navigation and the setting of the sails. The bosun was responsible for maintenance, ship's tackle and stores, and the day-to-day work of the ship. The gunner was in charge of the gun crews and their gear. Other valuable specialist officers included the carpenter, the sailmaker, and the surgeon. The surgeon on board a pirate ship spent much of his time treating venereal diseases. Against the main causes of sickness and death in the tropics -- yellow fever, malaria, dysentery, infection -- he was virtually helpless. During battle he dressed wounds and performed amputations. If there was no surgeon, the carpenter took his place; the tools and skills were much the same.

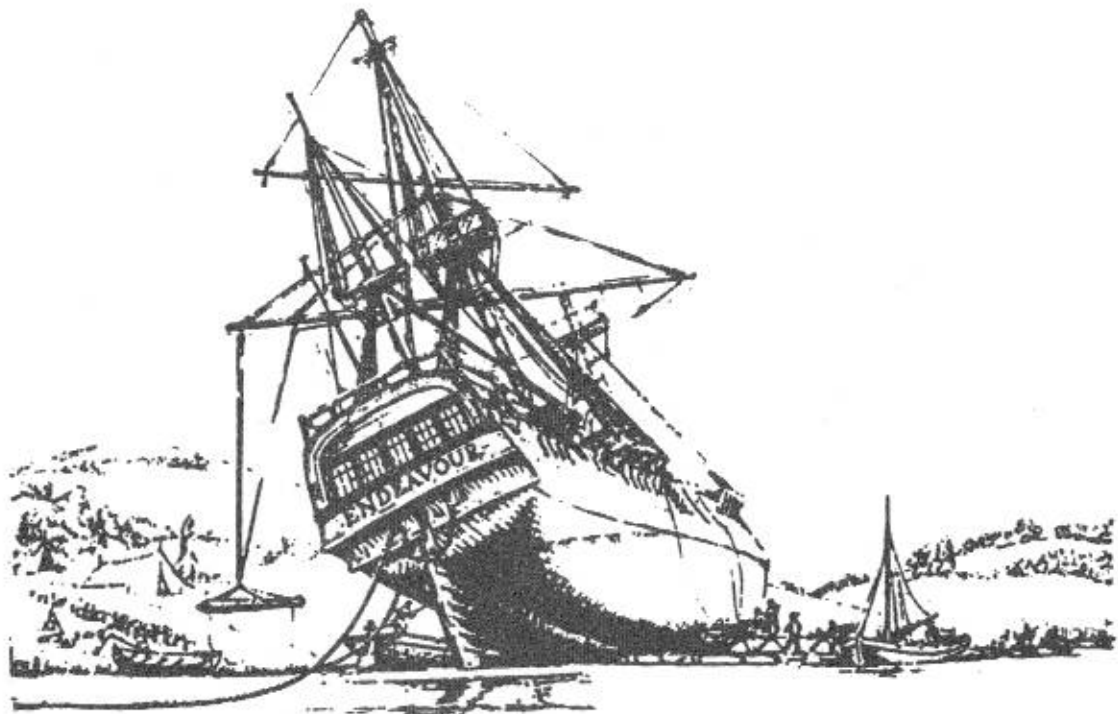
The most popular ship's specialists were the members of the pirate orchestra. These were seamen who were often pressed -- forced into service -- from captured ships because of their ability as musicians. A pirate ship with a good band was doubly blessed and were usually the happiest vessels. The bandsmen were constantly on call to play a jig or a hornpipe at a pirate dance, or to serenade the pirates with dinner music as they took their evening meal. But their most important function was during battle when they played nautical tunes, sea chanteys, aggressive war marches and fight songs on drums and trumpets and bugles to encourage their own men and to demoralize the enemy.

On occasion in Charlotte Amalie, a pirate vessel with an especially fine band would have a formal party, called a "social", with everyone dressed in appropriate attire. The female guests were usually not the gentry and society maidens of the island, but rather were ladies-of-the-night on a trooper's holiday. These parties started off in decent fashion with drinking and feasting and singing and dancing, but soon degenerated into drunken revelry, and by midnight the socials had deteriorated into uncontrolled orgiastic mayhem.

By some strange twist in their complex makeup, the pirates felt that their St. Thomas "resort" was incomplete without their own church. So they built themselves a house of worship, erecting it with the gold won by rapine and murder, fitting it with the candlesticks and altar pieces, the holy vessels and chalices, the tapestries and paintings looted from other houses of God; bloody vestments heavy with gold and silver thread torn from the bleeding bodies of butchered priests. And, as they never believed in doing anything by halves, the pirate chiefs decreed that now they had a church all buccaneers must attend services therein. Indeed, it is said that the notorious Blackbeard more than once shot down some scoffing pirate who had the audacity to interrupt the sermon. But there are no records as to what these "sermons" consisted of. The church, however, was shortlived. In 1709 it was destroyed by a fire of unknown origin

and never replaced.

Besides St. Thomas, other major Virgin Island pirate bases were located at Coral Bay on St. John, Sopers Hole on Tortola, the Bight at Norman Island, and Gorda Sound on Virgin Gorda. Each location had its own particular strategic value relative to protection from the weather and enemies, high elevation points for visual contact of potential prey, shoreside supplies of food and water. Low-lying Anegada with its reef-filled waters was also a favorite pirate hangout -- Gallows Bay, Carenage Bay, Galleon Cove, Hawkins Point, Pieces-of-Eight Lagoon, Cutlass Reef. Here the pirates gathered and laughed at their foes. Knowing the treacherous reef and familiar with its narrow passages, the pursued could sail in to a safe anchorage while their disgruntled enemies, confronted by the deadly ring of foaming coral and usually in vessels far too large and cumbersome to pass through even had they known the way, turned back thoroughly baffled and frustrated.



Beached for Repairs

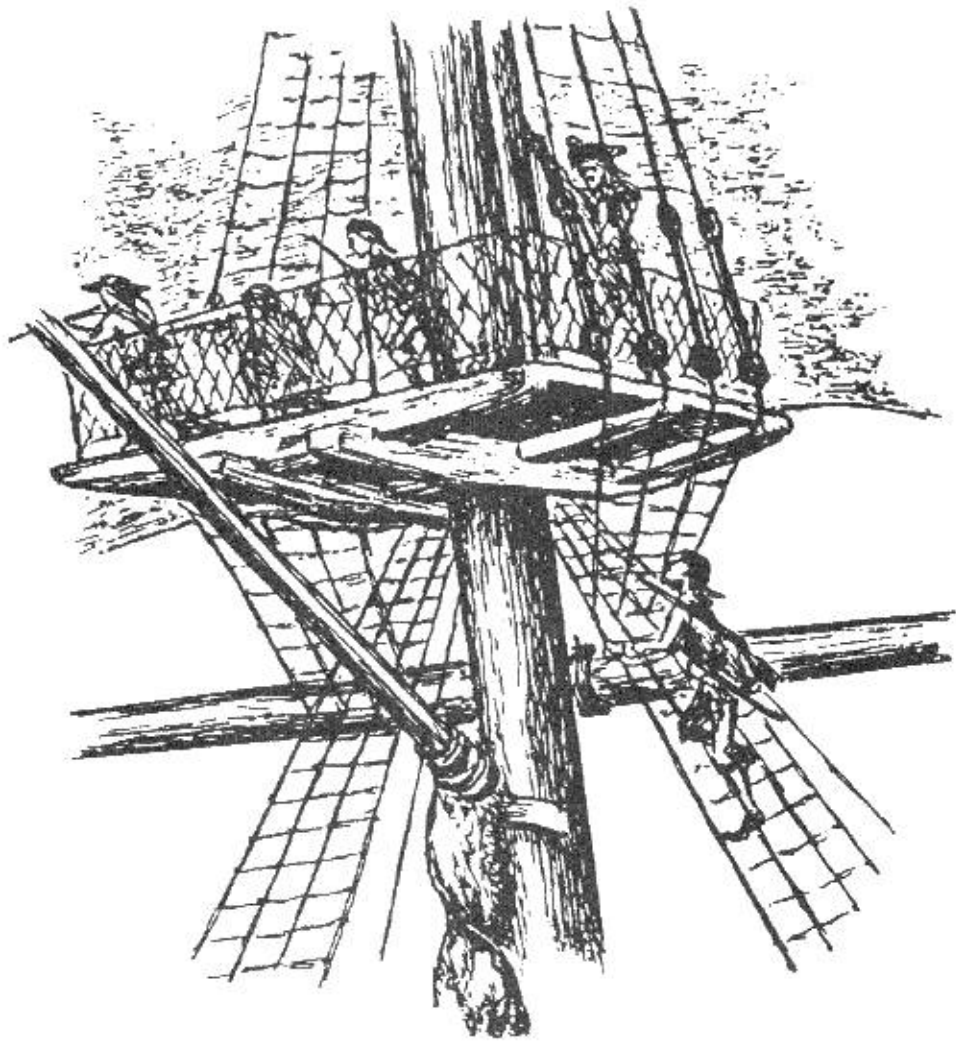
Rules of Conduct

There were seldom any stipulations governing shoreside conduct, but shipboard life required a few basic rules to preserve the efficiency, unity, safety and welfare of a pirate company. Whenever a man joined a pirate crew he had to sign their articles, swearing allegiance over a cutlass or brace of pistols to obey them. Although each ship varied, following is a standard set of pirate rules for order and conduct:

- I. Every man shall have an equal vote in affairs of the moment.
He shall have an equal title to the fresh provisions and strong liquor at any time seized, and shall use them at pleasure unless a scarcity may make it necessary for the common good that a retrenchment may be voted.
- II. Every man shall be called fairly in turn by the list on board for distribution of prizes. Over and above their proper share, they are allowed a shift of clothes and incidentals. But if they defraud their mates to the value of even one shilling in plate, jewels, gold or money, they shall be unmercifully marooned. If any man rob another in his company, he shall have his nose slit and ears severed, and put ashore under conditions of severe hardship.
- III. Aboard the ship, none shall game for money, either with dice or cards.
- IV. Each man shall keep his piece, cutlass and pistols at all times clean and ready for action.
- V. No boy or woman to be allowed on board except on special occasion such as socials. If any man shall be found carrying any of the latter sex to sea in disguise for purpose of selfish lust and seduction, he shall suffer severance of his organ.
- VI. He that shall desert the ship or his quarters or exhibit cowardice in time of battle shall be punished by death.
- VII. None shall strike another on board the ship, but every man's quarrel shall be settled on shore by sword or pistol in the proper manner of a gentlemen's duel.
- VIII. Any man who shall become a cripple or lose a limb in this service shall receive 800 pieces-of-eight from the common treasury, and proportionate amounts for lesser hurts.
- IX. The captain and the quartermaster shall each receive two shares of a prize, the master gunner and bosun one and one-half shares, all other officers one and one-quarter shares, and private of gentlemen of fortune and adventurers one share each.
- X. The musicians shall have the right to rest on the Sabbath Day if they so wish, except in the circumstances where an engagement is in progress or a social.

Two forms of pirate punishment have achieved great notoriety and publicity: walking the plank and marooning. Walking the long plank has long been considered synonymous with piracy. The inventor of this cruel method of sending men to their watery grave is said to have been Major Stede Bonnet, a Barbados planter-turned-pirate. But seldom was a pirate sentenced to walking the plank; such a barbaric end was reserved for only the worst of enemy swine. The devilish punishment of marooning, however, was all too real a possibility. An offending pirate was simply put ashore on a tiny cay or rock far from land and left there to slowly die. Few survived such an ordeal.

ACTION IN THE MAIN-TOP



The Battle

By building a reputation for great cruelty and barbaric acts, the pirates were often able to frighten their victims so not to resist their attack. They were hit-and-run raiders and they designed their tactics accordingly. Speed and surprise were essential -- and terror or the threat of terror was a basic weapon. Physical combat was not necessarily their favored way to gain an objective; a mental victory was much preferred. They were well aware of what can happen to a man in a naval battle -- the effects of falling spars, heavy showers of dagger-like splinters, shrapnel chain fired from cannon, crude grenades, and slicing cutlasses. They had seen the butchery of the ship's surgeon or carpenter, the horror and pain of gangrene in the tropics. They were not in any regular armed service; they were not fighting for a King or Country or because they had to. It was a selfish allegiance and they were careful about foolishly risking their lives for something they could not enjoy if they were dead.

Their ships were almost always fast sailors, and they were maintained to keep this quality. They were regularly careened to repair the ravages of the teredo worm and to coat the bottom with pitch to keep weed and barnacles from growing. Lurking among the cays and hidden coves of the Caribbean, the pirates were able to spot their prey before they themselves were discovered. At sea they always kept a lookout who could scan a 20-mile horizon from the top of a 100-foot mast. Once a ship had been spotted, it was thoroughly examined through a spyglass to determine what kind of vessel it was, its nationality, where it was likely to be coming from and where it was likely to be going, what cargo it might carrying, how much resistance it might offer, and how it sailed. Based on this careful scrutiny, the captain -- or often the crew by popular vote -- decided whether to attack it or not. Since some merchantmen disguised their fighting ability, such as marking false gunports on their sides, pirates would often shadow their prey for hours or even several days before striking.

At this stage of the chase, the pirates never fired a cannon salvo at their prize for fear of sinking her with all her booty. They simply put a shot across her bow and waited for her to strike her colors. Usually that was the end of it. The pirates were masters of psychology, and captured ship after ship without so much as striking a blow, simply by frightening their prey into submission. Every sailor had his stock of savage pirate stories. The lurid tales of what happened to those who resisted needed no embellishment.

The most obvious symbol of pirate terror was the skull and crossbones flag, the well known "Jolly Roger". But different captains exhibited their own originality in using personal flags and emblems to strike mortal fear in the minds of intended victims. They usually featured skeletons, daggers, cutlasses, or bloody bleeding hearts on white, red or black fields. Blackbeard's personal flag was quite simple and usually effective: it was only a one-color pennant uncluttered with any illustrations. While stalking a vessel, he flew his long, bright red masthead streamer signifying courage, valor and fearlessness, and let

them know their hunter was Blackbeard. If this didn't bring about surrender and an actual attack was required, then he replaced the red with a long black streamer pennant that indicated violence, brutality and death were forthcoming.

But the pirates had many other devices to remind their prey who they were and what sort of fate might be on the way. While the band produced horrendous noises, the pirates "vaped", as they called it, on the poop and after deck. They danced wildly, whooping and screaming war cries, waving their weapons and clanging their cutlasses -- all producing a chilling and frightening sight.

Yet there were times when all threats and psychological tricks failed, and a pitched battle rocked the skies and bloodied the waters. Once fighting had broken out, merchantmen often fought to the bitter end, for they knew they could expect no quarter or live long as prisoners. To hinder the pirates boarding a ship, a merchant commander might smear his decks with grease and butter, and scatter it with dried peas and wooden boards with tenpenny nails sticking up through them. Both vessels would sweep each other with maiming cannonshot mixtures of partridge and double chain, large and small arms blasted away in close quarters, fire bombs and crude grenades made of bottles full of powder, small shot and scrap iron exploded mercilessly, then hand-to-hand combat completed the devastation. They were gory, violent engagements and casualties to men and ships were always heavy. Such battles often resulted in no real victors, only a few bloody, crippled survivors. Yet to the pirates, the dreams of the rich rewards to be reaped from such actions were worth every risk.

There was a huge demand for the goods that the pirates brought home from their voyages. With royal governors, merchants and the general populace sympathetic to their vocation, the rare pirate brought to trial in the islands or American colonies could count on a "not guilty" verdict from the jury.

Of course there is many a tale of treasure hidden in the islands, of vast stores of pirate loot secreted in subterranean caverns and hewn underground recesses, chests filled with gold, silver and precious gems. But few caches of treasure have actually ever been found; they must have hid it well. Actually, the pirates seldom stashed away their loot in the islands. Indeed, from what we know of the lives and character of these rascals, it is pretty safe to assume that they never hid their treasures, but no sooner put foot on dry land than they spent their gold on liquor and flesh. A few of the leaders put away tidy sums for a rainy day, for, as we have seen, several of them retired from the wild life and settled down in the islands or their native land well provided with the wherewithal to live as gentlemen to the end of their days. But it is far more likely that these canny pirate chiefs placed their loot in the keeping of some trusted merchant ashore rather than that they buried it on wave-washed bits of land.

"A BLACK FLAG," THEY MERRILY SAID,
"WOULD BE AS GOOD AS FIFTY MEN."

Sopers Hole, Tortola

Sopers Hole on the west end of Tortola became a virtual pirate kingdom. It was an ideal base from just about every point of view. The harbor was excellent and well-protected from the prevailing winds and seas so that the pirates could periodically lay up, repair, and careen their ships. It was superbly defensible; an enemy had to sail to windward to enter its confines and on such a point of sail could be easily fired upon by shore batteries. The waters were a proper depth for their larger vessels. But better still, there was a shallow inner mangrove-fringed lagoon that was just deep enough for the more nimble shallow-draft attack craft favored by the pirates. The high hills and ridges that ringed the harbor afforded a hawk's view of an approaching enemy or a potential prize. The nearby reefs abounded with conch, lobster, fish and turtles. The fertile interior of the island contained bubbling fresh water springs, excellent ship's timber, and a surplus of wild pigs, goats, pigeons and fruit.

There were a number of large sugar cane and cotton plantations on Tortola. Their managers and the pirates formed a most friendly and valuable liaison. The pirates offered goods and staples sorely needed by the landsmen, and they in turn had large gardens and pastures to supply fresh vegetables and beef. There were only rare instances of any misunderstandings between the pirates of Sopers Hole and the Tortola plantation gentry. Surprisingly, this brigand community controlled itself quite well. Sopers Hole was a working land base; their debauchery was reserved for St. Thomas. The wicked and wild port of Charlotte Amalie was less than twenty miles away and small "liberty" sloops regularly transported pirate crews for change-of-pace relaxation and revelry.

*Here come the pirates to St. Thomas Town,
With pockets of gold and nary a frown.
It's up and away for Charlotte's Bay,
Where the liquor is good and the lasses are gay!*

The uncrowned pirate emperor of Sopers Hole was Gustav Wilmerding. When only a lad of twelve, Wilmerding took to the sea as a cabin boy on a merchantman bound for the Caribbean. On this first voyage, his vessel was captured by pirates and he soon willingly joined them as a young apprentice. He adapted well to the life and had his first command before reaching twenty. In the years that followed, he became one of the most feared and successful pirates in the Caribbean. Like any good pirate ship, Wilmerding always carried a band, but his musicians performed in a unique way during an enemy engagement. Rather than just the usual beating of drums and blasting of bugles, he had all his bandsmen ring bells in a wild and raucous manner, and he soon became known as "Ding-Dong" Wilmerding. Any adversary would long remember an engagement with this Danish pirate.

The test of a true criminal is how he behaves himself after a successful crime. The master criminal will keep a low profile at all times and modify his life style with great discretion. Many retired pirates proved that they were far from master criminals. Upon returning to their home soils, they quickly drew attention to themselves by their conspicuous spending and drunken philandering. While they might have been heroes in the islands, they were maritime gangsters in London and many were convicted as such and hanged at Newgate Prison.

Some were more discreet, but, even so, still succumbed to the pitfalls of civilization. John Every returned to England with a fortune and dropped out of sight. According to pirate historian, Daniel Defoe, he settled quietly in the village of Bideford in Devon and negotiated with some merchants for the sale of his swag of diamonds and gold coins. The merchants put down a small deposit, took the loot, then refused to pay the balance. From time to time they sent Every a pittance to live on, but when he asked for the money they owed him, they threatened to expose him. He was reduced to the life of a pauper and even a beggar, and died according to Defoe "not being worth as much as would buy him a Pine Coffin," cursing the merchants as being "as good a Pyrates on Land as he was at Sea."

But Gustav Wilmerding had no desire to return to Europe and retired in the Virgins to live to a quite ripe old age in health and happiness. He settled on Little Thatch, a small island just to the west of Sopers Hole and established a modest utopian kingdom. It was essentially a pirates' retirement home and he gathered about him a few of his favorite comrades and together they fully enjoyed the fruits from their more active years. Although relatively small, Little Thatch was endowed with most of the attributes necessary for self-sustenance. These men went from the Golden Age of piracy into their own Golden Years of living. Although a strict disciplinarian, Wilmerding's one personal excess was girls. Accommodations on Little Thatch included quarters for a bevy of local maidens, to whom he gave English names such as Molly, Kate, Peg, Sue and Nell. He dressed his harem in silken gowns and adorned them with diamond and gold necklaces. He had them trained in exotic performances, and there was nightly belly dancing entertainment.

The present natives of Tortola tell strange tales of sights and sounds seen and heard at dead of night upon Little Thatch. With fear-widened eyes, they whisper of ghostly sentinels pacing the beaches and hillside paths, of phantom ships anchored off the cay, of blood-curdling shouts, songs and curses coming from no mortal throat but echoing across the bay from this ancient stronghold. Also, they tell of piercing screams, as of lost souls, heard by fishermen plying their trade at night upon the bay, and of mysterious lights, like the flare of torches, that dance and move and flit among the trees. Even today, some of the remains of the Wilmerding era are still intact on Little Thatch. And some of his descendants are still living in the islands, active in various pursuits and endeavors.



Captain William Kidd

Captain William Kidd was another well-known Caribbean pirate of the Golden Years with legendary exploits as a swashbuckling cutthroat. But in truth no pirate of that era spilled less blood or captured fewer prizes. The real story of Captain Kidd is more of political intrigue and double-cross than actual crime. In 1695 he received a privateer's commission from England's Lord Bellmont authorizing him to attack pirates. While purported to be a praiseworthy act of international policing to end the Caribbean piracy, it was instead a grandiose scheme for making a financial killing of astronomical proportions. The real target was not so much the pirates, but the prodigious plunder in their ships. Kidd was an ideal choice to lead this venture. He had a reputation as an honest, reliable merchant sea captain. Also, for five years he had been a former privateer in the King's service, so he was a fighting sailor who knew the ways of pirates. Lord Bellmont provided the money for outfitting the venture -- 7,000 pounds -- most of it coming from four other anonymous noblemen backers. The ultimate plan called for a large fleet of vessels that would plunder the plunderers.

As was customary in privateer commissions, the first 10-percent of any booty would go to the Crown. The remaining 90-percent would be split two ways: 75-percent for Bellmont and his investor group, 15-percent for Kidd and the crew. The usual privateering arrangement gave 75-percent of the spoils to the captain and crew, so the cruise started off with a major negative feature that was bound to cause trouble. The commission from the King, issued under the Great Seal of the Crown of England, empowered Kidd to seize pirates, their ships, and "Merchandizes, Money, Goods, and Wares." Kidd was well aware of the fine distinction between privateering and piracy. He also knew that it was not unusual for privateer crews to mutiny and turn pirate if the situation suited them.

Captain Kidd's new vessel, the ADVENTURE, was launched at Deptford on the Thames in December, 1695, and was well adapted for his mission. A 125-foot schooner of 285 tons mounting 34 guns, she carried a large spread of sail and in addition was equipped with thirty pairs of oars for maneuvering when becalmed. Under full canvas of 3,200 square yards, she was capable of a 14-knot speed.

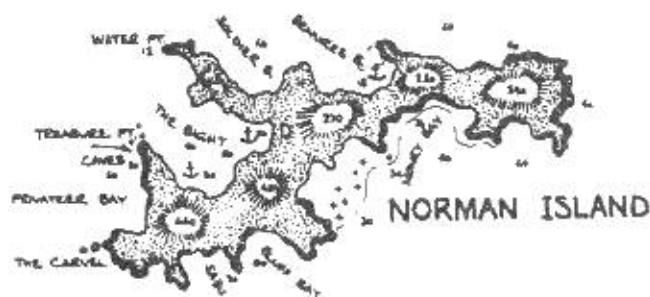
Kidd carefully selected 150 men for his crew. Many had previous experience as pirates or at least strong inclinations in that direction. Soon after departing England for the West Indies, the crew had a man-to-man talk with their captain -- just as he had expected -- and it was decided to raise their share of spoils to the usual 75-percent figure, leaving 10-percent for the Crown and 15-percent for the noblemen investors. In mid-Atlantic, they sighted a large Spanish galleon homeward bound and heavily laden with New World riches. Ignoring that they were commissioned to attack only pirates, the ADVENTURE easily took the Spanish vessel and she was a rich prize indeed. Then and there it was decided to again change the booty division arrangement: both the Crown and the noblemen syndicate were eliminated completely by a democratic

shipboard vote. The die was cast and ADVENTURE joined the pirate ranks. When word of this vile and dishonorable deception reached England, the syndicate gentlemen were outraged and a 1,000-pound bounty placed on the head of Captain Kidd, ordering his apprehension so that "he may be prosecuted with utmost Rigour of the Law." Even a bonus was offered in the form of a free pardon to any and all pirates instrumental in bringing Kidd to justice. William Kidd became an archcriminal guilty of the most heinous of crimes: cheating the King and his consorts.

He tried to make the most of it, using the Virgin Islands as his base of operations. But Kidd just wasn't cut out to be a pirate and longed for his family and the respectability of his former life. He attempted to bribe his way back into good grace, distributing over 100,000-pounds of booty to government officials in order to buy forgiveness from the betrayed noblemen. It was not to be. In 1701, William Kidd dangled from the noose on Execution Dock at Wapping on the Thames.

Many Royal Navy ships in the Caribbean had little interest in suppressing piracy since they themselves had learned to profit handsomely from it. By Admiralty Law, Navy commanders were allowed to charge 15-percent of the value of the cargo they were escorting on convoy duty. When a merchant complained about such high freight charges, the Navy commanders offered a secret deal: they would transport the goods in their own ships and charge less than the cargo vessels. This was illegal, of course, but profitable to those involved: the merchants got their goods and the commanders enriched their retirement funds. The pirates did not attack the Navy-escorted convoys, and the Navy did not attack the pirates, who were thus free to concentrate on unprotected shipping, which was in plentiful supply.

There were also some losers in this game. Cargo ships lost business to the Navy -- and then were plundered by the unhampered pirates. Uncooperative merchants paid high rates, received no protection, and often lost their goods. And some of the governors of island colonies not frequented by the pirates were very unhappy. The pirates were bringing neither bribes for them nor trade goods for their islands; instead they were robbing the vessels on which the economy of the islands depended. The ships and merchants and governors complained bitterly to London. The Admiralty responded with more Royal Navy warships . . . whose commanders were soon at the same lucrative game.



Blackbeard

The most notorious of Golden Age pirates that rendezvoused from time to time in the Virgin Islands was Edward Teach, better known as Blackbeard. Everything about Blackbeard was extraordinary in bulk, quantity or degree -- his fiendish appearance, drinking, courage, violence, cruelty, amorous exploits. A huge black beard covered his ugly face to his eyes, inky hair fell to his shoulders. Unlike many of his competitors, Blackbeard was no dandy. His favorite costume was a long-skirted, deep-cuffed coat, much the worse for wear, well-stained with dribbled food, drink and blood; a rough shirt open to the waist and exposing a chest as hairy as a gorilla's; short, wide breeches and low seaman's shoes. A battered felt hat crowned his tangled mane and to complete his get-up, a pair of cutlasses and a knife or two hung at his belt and a half dozen pistols were tucked through his sash. He was a walking arsenal with an appearance designed to make any adversary immediately beg for mercy.

His character was as ferocious as his looks, and his soul as black as his whiskers. There was not a single redeeming feature about him, unless it was sheer courage, and altogether he was a despicable scoundrel. On a number of occasions he robbed and murdered his own men, and he cared not a whit what flag the prizes he took were flying. For him, torture and butchery were mere pastimes. But he was a marvelous entertainer and he devoted considerable time to inventing new schemes to relieve the monotony between fights. One of his favorite games was to create a version of hell by battening down the hatches of his vessel, igniting several pots filled with sulfur, and seeing who among his crew could take it the longest. Blackbeard always won and was quite pleased that he was better able than anyone else to live in hell. But there was one game he could never get any of his shipmates to join: "Let's play gallows," he pleaded, "and see who can swing longest in the noose without being throttled."

Strangely enough, Blackbeard, despite his unattractive face and personality, appears to have been quite attractive to the ladies, for he managed to win the hearts and hands of at least fourteen maidens whom he married. His last wife reportedly was a "most charming young creature of twelve." History fails to record their subsequent fate or whether Teach devised some speedy form of divorce to suit himself.

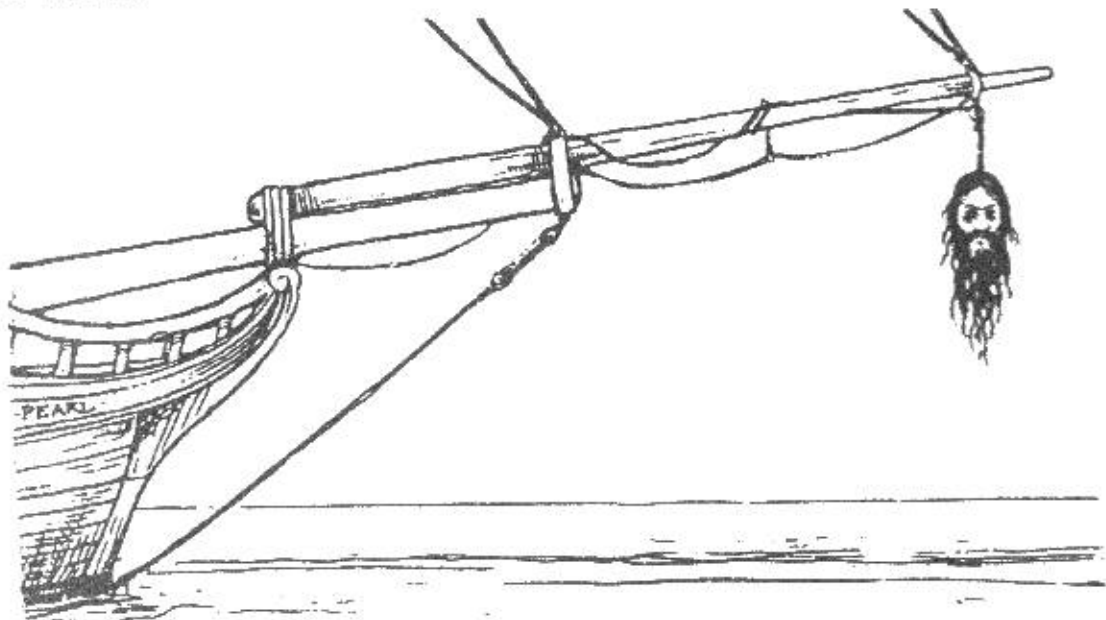
Teach was a cunning devil, and one of his filibustering tactics was to show false colors and move in on his prey in complete surprise. He often went to great lengths to disguise the identity of his vessel, sometimes even to the point of having the crew wear women's dresses and prance around deck with sunbonnets and parasols. On several occasions, when no proper enemy ship had been encountered for several weeks, Teach attacked and plundered another pirate vessel just to stay in shape and make something of the voyage. Such an act was considered morally despicable in the buccaneer code of ethics; it was raw piracy and depravity at its worst. But for Blackbeard, it was just some more



challenging fun-and-games. His unpredictable violence kept his crew in wary sub-jection. One night, while drinking in his cabin with his quartermaster, Ben Lawwill, Blackbeard suddenly drew his pistol and shot him between the eyeballs. When asked why, Blackbeard replied that he needed to kill one of his men every now and then to remind them who he was.

It would be expected that a man of Edward Teach's character and accomplishments would die with his boots on, fighting to the last, and he was not one to disappoint the lover of lurid adventure. In November, 1718, Blackbeard died as violently as he had lived and in the end he completely fulfilled everything expected of him. In a three-day bloody engagement off the Carolina coast against a squadron of seven men-of-war led by the H.M.S. PEARL, under the command of Lieutenant Robert Maynard, the grand finale came as the pirates boarded the Navy sloop and the two crews met head on, amid the screams and oaths of the men, the clang of cutlasses, the roar of pistol shots. Maynard and Blackbeard dueled face to face and each fired at point-blank range. Blackbeard's shot missed, but Maynard's went straight into the pirate's body just above the heart. Incredibly, the heavy ball seemed to have no effect. The howling, raging Blackbeard swung his cutlass, breaking Maynard's in two and leaving him defenseless. As the pirate drew back his cutlass to finish off the helpless lieutenant, one of Maynard's seamen slashed Blackbeard's throat. Still the giant pirate fought on, spouting torrents of blood from his half-severed neck and roaring vile curses as six other Navy men shot and whacked at him. Then slowly, like a bull in a ring, he crumpled and fell to the deck with more than thirty pistol and sword wounds.

Maynard ordered Blackbeard's head to be cut from his body and the grisly trophy was lashed to the tip of the bowsprit of the victorious PEARL. The mutilated body of the pirate was thrown overboard and Defoe reports that "the Headless Corpse swam around the sloop Three Times in Defiance before it sank into the Sea."



A Lady Pirate

Anne Bonny was just about the prettiest Irish colleen who ever grew up to slit a man's gullet or skid her dainty feet on the blood-spattered deck of a pirate ship. She was born in Cork, Ireland, the illegitimate child of a prominent attorney and his wife's maid. The scandal attending Anne's birth caused her father to relocate with his new family to South Carolina, where he prospered as a merchant. Anne grew to be a handsome woman, with much vitality and courage, but also a fierce temper. When only twelve, in a fit of temper, she stabbed to death a servant girl with a table knife.

Rather than one of the wealthy young gentlemen her father approved of, Anne married a penniless ne'er-do-well sailor by the name of James Bonny. After a fervent honeymoon, he slipped away to sea and never came back. Anne tracked him down to the Virgin Islands and at the age of sixteen she committed her second murder by slitting the throat of her runaway husband in a St. Thomas brothel. She soon transferred her affections to Captain Jack Rackam, better known as "Calico Jack" because of the colorful shirts he wore. Although a handsome devil, Jack had been just another run-of-the-mill pirate. But Anne apparently inspired him to greatness, and soon this pair became the scourge of the Caribbean, cutting a bloody swath as they plundered everything that crossed their paths, from rich merchantmen to small fishing vessels. According to Defoe, Anne was a lioness in battle and was "as active as any of her male shipmates with cutlass and marlinspike, always one of the leaders in boarding a prize." In late October, 1720, Rackam dropped anchor off the coast of Jamaica and the pirates were getting gloriously drunk when a British Navy sloop surprised them. Rackam and most of his men decided not to fight and hid in the hold in a cowardly manner. But Anne fought the Navy men furiously and boldly, firing her pistol and flailing away with cutlass and axe. When she realized all was lost, she turned on her hiding mates, killing two pirates and wounding eight others. At the trial in Jamaica, Anne, Calico Jack and the surviving pirates were sentenced to be executed. When the judge asked if Anne had anything to say, she replied, "Milord, I plead with my belly." She was pregnant. The judge immediately stayed the order for her execution -- no English court had the power to kill an unborn child, no matter how guilty the mother.

As Calico Jack went to his death, the unrepenting Anne told him, "Had you Fought like a Man, you need not have been Hanged like a Dog."

After the birth of her child, Anne's wealthy father bought her release, and she returned to Charlotte Amalie where she opened a gaming house and further acquired a sporting reputation.



A New Era

The Golden Age of piracy lasted barely thirty years, yet this period of villainy on the high seas left an indelible mark on society. Although often cruel and brutal scoundrels, the pirates appealed to something deep in the oppressed soul of common man: the lure of adventure over the horizon, the promise of a different tomorrow, the dream of breaking out of the trap of human miseries, a life of freedom unshackled by laws and rules . . . and becoming rich in the bargain.

Piracy could never be eradicated completely. Cargoes were better guarded than ever before. As trade increased during the 18th and 19th Centuries, the Western nations could support more efficient navies. Colonial administrations were tougher and more honest. Merchant ships were better armed and manned. There was a greater sense of international responsibility toward maintaining civilized standards by the leading seafaring nations. In the face of this, piracy diminished, but with isolated incidents reported from time to time. There were no more great seafaring rascals plundering the Spanish Main with imagination and courage and charisma. The new cutthroats were no more than scavenging sharks.

Today, Charlotte Amalie entertains a new breed of swashbucklers, and she lives for and on the ever-increasing throng of tourists -- late, carefree, sparkling nights; blurry, hungover mornings. At six-thirty a cruise ship quietly slips into the harbor. A single car moves slowly along the strand. The only real noises so far are crowing roosters, barking dogs, a fisherman's outboard motor, children's laughter. At seven-thirty a jet airliner roars overhead, skimming the hilltops, apparently a signal for the waterfront bars to unshutter their doors and provide sedation for shaking hands and aching heads. At seven-forty another three-thousand-passenger floating city anchors in the outer harbor. Swarms of cars and taxis and trucks suddenly appear out of the crevices; a raucous roaring and honking and screeching echoes off the hillsides. Four more cruise ships arrive. It will be a big day for St. Thomas. The narrow streets and waterfront alleys will soon be jammed with thousands of bargain-hunting visitors elbowing their way into the little free-port shops: pink faces, funny hats, screaming shirts, bulging shorts -- and fat wallets. So Charlotte Amalie grimaces, throws down a double shot of rum, then prepares herself for another onslaught. And she looked so pretty last night.

The old buccaneers are gone, but a new generation of pirates is doing its best to plunder these island gems. Instead of sporting fiery beards and wielding pistols and cutlasses, these modern freebooters carry briefcases, wave blueprints and flash credit cards.

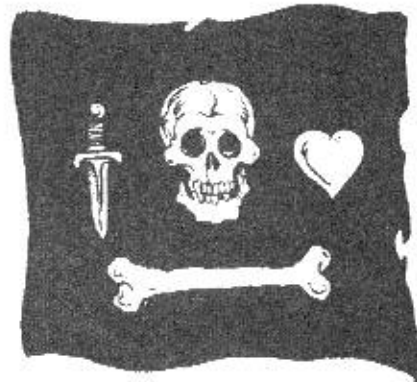
Every year thousands of visitors flock southward to the Virgin Islands, but few are aware of the intimate associations with the old buccaneers that these places still hold. Yet they may dine or sleep in the very inn where pirates reveled and spent their ill-gotten gold; stroll through little towns that have echoed to the

ribald songs and shouts of roisterous pirate crews; sail in fancy yachts and palatial cruise ships above the long-forgotten hulks of burned and scuttled galleons; haggle with shopkeepers in whose veins may flow the blood of Morgan, Hawkins, Blackbeard and Wilmerding.





Long BEN AVERY



Major BONNET



Cap? ENGLAND



Calico JACK RACKAM



Cap? TEW



French · FILIBUSTER