

*Adventures on the American Frontier*

# PIRATES AND PRIVATEERS

Revised Edition



Edith McCall

Royal Fireworks Press  
Unionville, New York

## Contents

Peter Francis, Buccaneer .....	1
First Mate Henry King and the Privateer .....	13
Captain Kidd, Pirate .....	30
Blackbeard's Greatest Battle.....	47
Stede Bonnet, Landlubber Pirate .....	64
Silas Talbot, Heroic Privateersman .....	76

# Peter Francis, Buccaneer

---

There were pirates sailing the seas long before ships from Europe sailed to America. Columbus probably saw a pirate ship when he first became a sailor and traveled from one part of the Mediterranean Sea to another. But the buccaneer, whose very name made people tremble with fear, was an American kind of pirate.

By the time the English colonies in America were sending shiploads of goods from their harbor cities to other ports, the buccaneers were the terror of every honest sea captain. “Bloodthirsty,” the sailors whispered, “that’s what they are!”

This story begins in the West Indies in the days when the Spanish, the English, and the French were all trying to take the New World lands to be their own. The Spanish



had a strong hold on Mexico and most of the land south of it, as well as most of the islands between North and South America.

About the time settlers were setting up English colonies in Virginia and New England, a little colony of French settlers tried to live on an island in the West Indies. A Spanish warship came and drove them away.

“Come, *mes amis!*” the bravest of the French settlers said. “We will sail to another island. There are plenty more.”

So, loading all they could take with them in dugout canoes, they paddled their way to a large island just southeast of Cuba, which now is shared by the countries of Haiti and the Dominican Republic. There were some Spanish settlements there, but there was still plenty of room, especially in the northern part where wild cattle and pigs roamed.

“How will we live?” the French asked one another. “If we till the land, the Spanish might find our farms and chase us away before we can harvest our crops. We must find a quicker way to get food and something to trade for the other things we need.”

They found the answer in the wild cattle and pigs. They had learned, from the native people on the Carib island where they had first lived, a new way to fix meat so that it would keep without spoiling. The Caribs smoked strips of it over slow-burning fires. The smoked meat was called *buccan*.

Soon the French were busy smoking meat, making *buccan*. They came to be known as the *boucaniers*, which in time became *buccaneers*. But as soon as they began a good trade in *buccan*, the Spanish again chased them away.

This time they moved to the island of Tortuga, just off the northern coast of Haiti. They took along some cattle and hogs to smoke, and it wasn't long before they were back in business. But six months later, along came the Spanish. They chased away the French, but when things were quiet again, the French came back. This time they built a fort.

“Now no one will chase us away,” their leader said. “Each man among you must swear that he will give his life before he will give up this island.”

The group formed a brotherhood of buccaneers. A newcomer to the camp had to swear on a skull, placed in the center of the black cloth in which it was kept wrapped between times, that he would stand by his brothers at all times. He pricked his arm with his knife and signed a pledge with his own blood.



“The Spanish are our enemies,” they swore. “Any time we see them drawing near, we will band together to fight them off.”

The Spanish attacked the fort, but the buccaneers were good marksmen from shooting wild animals, and they shot down all who came near their walls.

The next step was to go out to sea and attack the Spanish ships that came near. In those days, many of the battles between nations at war were fought at sea.

Since they only had dugout canoes, the buccaneers had to plan how they would attack a big sailing ship. When they sighted a ship, they took their long muskets and sharp butcher knives and paddled out to sea under the cover of darkness. When dawn brought light, and the crew began the day's work on board the big ship, each waiting buccaneer chose one man to be his target.

Then, at a signal from their leader, they swarmed up the side of the Spanish ship, carrying their knives in their teeth and with muskets ready to shoot. Those who had pistols had them loaded and ready in their belts. The Spaniards, taken by surprise, were prisoners or dead in a few minutes' time.

Now the buccaneers had a sailing ship. Soon they took another, and then another. Some of the ships they took were Spanish ships loaded with gold and jewels that had been taken from the native people of Mexico and South America, and they kept the treasure they had won.

News of the buccaneers spread, and rough men came from many places to join them. They had become not just protectors of their island but pirates.

One day, soon after the buccaneers had begun roving the seas in pirate gangs, a big Spanish man-of-war, a smaller ship called a sloop, and a dozen little oyster fishing boats were

moving slowly up the coast of Central America. The captain of the man-of-war stood on the highest deck of his ship and searched the blue waters of the Caribbean Sea for signs of other ships. Satisfied, he put down his long spyglass and turned to his ship's mate. "Signal the fleet to drop anchor," he said. "We'll fill our water casks and get supplies in that little village on the shore there."

"Aye, aye, sir," said the mate. He started to walk away but turned back to his captain. Pointing to the shore, he said, "You noticed that small ship moving along the shore, didn't you, Captain?"

The captain turned away from the open sea and looked toward the shore. The fishing boats were pulling in close to the land. Out a little way from the fishing boats was the sloop that the man-of-war was guarding. The sloop was important, for it was carrying all the pearls taken from the oysters that the fishermen had netted that season. There were chests of pearls worth huge sums of money on board the sloop, ready to be taken to Spain.

Moving up the shore, toward the fleet, was the dark shape of a small ship, its sails bound close to its single mast.

"That little shallop? Nothing to fear from that," the captain said. "It's just a trading boat, moving from village to village along the coast."

"Aye, aye, sir," said the mate again, and he went about his work.

The captain was right. Even if that little ship was a buccaneer boat, the big man-of-war, with its cannons poking out of a long row of portholes in its sides and a big company

of armed and trained fighting men on board, would have nothing to fear from it. What kind of pirates would use a poor little boat like that one?

The man-of-war dropped anchor much farther out from shore than the other ships did, for it could not float in the shallow waters. The treasure ship anchored a little nearer the shore, and the fishing boats went up to the beach.

On board the treasure ship, one of the sailors leaned on the deck rail, looking at the pleasant little village to which the rowboats were already heading with empty water casks. The dark shape of the oncoming trading boat caught his eye. Some of its crew were rowing it out from the shore, skirting around the fishing boats and drawing nearer to the sloop.

“Lucky fellows,” thought the sailor. “They’ll soon be sitting in their own kitchens at home, eating fresh meat and newly baked bread, while we eat wormy ship’s biscuit.”

He watched the shallop, wondering why it was skirting so far around the fishing boats and coming so near to the treasure ship. Suddenly, he stiffened. He could see the men on board the little ship clearly now. They did not look like traders. They wore dark, dirty clothes that had not had the attention of a wife on shore for many a sea journey. The men’s shirts were ragged, hanging over trousers that were cut off just below the knees. Their hair was long, and they had beards. But the truly startling thing about the men was that each wore a bright cloth sash around his waist and another over his shoulder, called a *bandolier*. The sashes and bandoliers were packed with knives and pistols. No trader went about armed like that.



“Man the guns! The buccaneers are coming!” the sailor shouted.

The treasure ship had four cannons along each of its sides and a crew of sixty men, many of whom were trained fighters. But it was too late for the cannons to hold off the men in the dark little ship. The shallop was too close to be hit by them. A few men on the treasure ship quickly grabbed muskets and fired down at the pirates, but onward the buccaneers came, swarming up the side of the treasure ship.

Holding on to the ship with one hand, the buccaneers slashed with knives at any man who reached down to try to block their way. Only two or three pirates were forced back. About two dozen of them scrambled onto the ship’s deck, firing pistols and darting at the sailors with their knives. The sailors fell back.

“Don’t let them take us!” one brave young man cried out, and he charged forward. Instantly, two pirates slashed at him, and he fell, bleeding, to the deck. The other men, staring at the awful sight of their friend dying before their eyes, pulled back farther.

“Hands high in surrender!” ordered the buccaneer leader, and the sailors lined up with their hands in the air.

“That’s Peter the Great,” one of the sailors whispered to the man next to him. “He’ll cut you in quarters and throw you into the sea, piece by piece, if you try to fight him.”

Peter the Great, whose real name was Peter Francis, took over the treasure ship quickly. He had his men take all of the sailors’ guns and knives, and then he left a few of the pirates

to guard the prisoners. The guards marched the sailors down into the hold in the lower part of the ship to lock them up.

“Weigh the anchor!” ordered Peter. “Stand by the halyards!” The men jumped into action. Sails filled with wind. Lines were made fast. The treasure ship got under way quickly.

The next step was to head for the man-of-war and try to take it by surprise.

On the man-of-war, someone noticed the sails opening on the treasure ship. He believed that the sailors on that ship had decided to steal the treasure and were about to sail away with it. “Mutiny on the sloop!” he cried out. “The crew is making off with the pearls!”

In a moment, the captain gave orders on the man-of-war, and its sails, too, began to open.

Peter the Great saw that his hope of taking the big ship by surprise was gone. Now the best thing he could do was to slip past the man-of-war before it could fire its cannons at him. The sloop was the faster of the two ships, and the pirates thought they could escape with the treasure.

“Head for the open sea!” Peter cried as every inch of canvas caught the wind and the sloop moved faster.

Skirting around to keep out of reach of the cannons, the sloop sailed ahead. The stretch of sea between the two ships widened every minute.

Peter looked back at the man-of-war, and his cruel face broke into a yellow-toothed grin. He had won his prize for sure. The clumsy man-of-war could never overtake the

fast sloop, which was skimming through the waves. Behind them, the little empty shallop they had used was washing in toward shore. They wouldn't need it now. They had a fine ship, armed with cannons, from which to attack the next merchant ship they sighted.

Peter decided that the first thing he needed to do was to drop off the prisoners. Any island would do for that, or if they found none, they could simply force the prisoners to walk a plank, hands tied behind them. No helpless sailor who had to walk off a plank could stay afloat for long.

Then Peter would take his treasure ship to a safe harbor that he knew of, off the shore of Carolina, not far from a settlement in the English colony there. He had a friend in that settlement who would help him get a good price for the load of pearls.

"A good day's work," he said as he cleaned and reloaded the pistols he carried in his red bandolier. His knives were already wiped clean and tucked into his sash.

Peter raised his eyes to look back at the man-of-war, which was still trying to gain on the escaping treasure ship. "Poor fools! Why don't they give up?" he laughed. The black-bearded pirate who held the ship's big wooden steering wheel laughed with him.

Both of the men had noticed the heavy black cloud that was moving in swiftly from the southeast. But neither of them dared to lower the sails. That would slow them down.

A moment later the wind hit them with tremendous force. There was a cracking sound.



“There goes the mast!” a pirate cried. Only the fast work of the men kept the mast, sails and all, from snapping off all the way and falling into the water. They drew in the sails and pulled the ropes tight to hold the cracked mast.

The storm raged around them. Then, almost as suddenly as it had come, the squall was over. But behind them was the man-of-war, moving toward their crippled treasure ship.

Peter knew that with the cracked mast, he could not hope to outride the big ship again. “Stand by to fight!” he ordered. The four cannons on the sloop faced the oncoming battleship.

“Fire!” ordered Peter when the ship was close enough, and the cannons boomed.

The big ship shuddered as the cannonballs hit, but on it came, swinging around to aim its biggest guns at the treasure ship. Its cannons boomed. Splinters flew from the side of