

Adventures on the American Frontier

PIRATES AND PRIVATEERS

Part One

Peter Francis, Buccaneer



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There were pirates sailing the seas around Europe long before the first ships sailed to America. But the buccaneer, whose very name made people tremble with fear, was an American kind of pirate.

By the mid-1600s, when 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 said, “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.

“We will sail to another island,” the French settlers said. “There are plenty more.”

So, loading all they could take with them in canoes, they paddled to another island. There were some Spanish settlements there, but there was still plenty of room 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 faster way to get food and something to trade for the other things we need.”



They found the answer in the wild cattle and pigs. The native people on the first island where they had lived had shown them how to smoke strips of meat over low fires so the meat wouldn't spoil. 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.