



THE
PIRATE
KING

*THE INCREDIBLE STORY OF
CAPTAIN HENRY MORGAN*

GRAHAM A. THOMAS

The Pirate King

This book is dedicated to the all the heroes and adventurers in the world and to those people who strive for the impossible and achieve it.

The Pirate King

**The Incredible Story of the
Real Captain Morgan**

Graham A. Thomas



Skyhorse Publishing

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Preface

When I was researching a book about Blackbeard, the pirate, another name kept cropping up that I could not account for. That name was Sir Henry Morgan. Now, these two men didn't live at the same time (Blackbeard came several decades after Morgan) but scholars and researchers tended to either compare them, or when they named Blackbeard as the most famous pirate who ever lived they would add that Morgan was probably the most famous buccaneer who ever lived.

Intrigued, I had to discover for myself just who this Morgan was. Once I started digging I have to admit I was greatly surprised. The achievements of Morgan—sacking Panama, for example—far outweighed those of Blackbeard, or even Bartholomew Roberts, who took more than 400 ships during his brief career as king of the pirates.

Morgan was a cut above these two men—far above, in my opinion. Unlike the pirates, Morgan was driven by more than just the lure of gold. He was a patriot, loyal to the King and his country; in particular, Jamaica. He realized that pillage and plunder was the way to not only make his own fortune but to build the wealth and prosperity of the island. He never attacked without a commission or letter of marque from the Jamaican government, and all his exploits were against the Spanish, England's enemy at the time. He helped to expand England's influence within the West Indies.

There are many myths that surround Morgan, which some scholars and historians have attempted to dispel. Supposedly, he or his men committed torture and other brutal acts on their Spanish prisoners . . . or did they? As we look into the life of Henry Morgan, we shall see.

There was an eyewitness to many of Morgan's campaigns—Alexander O. Esquemeling, who sailed with the buccaneers as a surgeon. Most of the sources of research used for this book call him John Esquemeling, and it is this name that we will use. Knowledge of this man is incomplete although there are many who 'believe that John Esquemeling was a pseudonym for Hendrik Barentzoon Smeeks, a surgeon who left his hometown of Zwolle in central Holland to serve aboard a merchant ship with the Dutch East India Company.'¹ He wrote an account of his voyages in the West Indies and some of the campaigns led by Morgan in which he was involved. It is on his account that scholars have since based their work.

But is it accurate? Esquemeling is the one who tells us that torture was used on prisoners in order for the buccaneers to find out where treasure was hidden. However, if, as Dudley Pope tells us in his book about Morgan, *Harry Morgan's Way*, Esquemeling's account is exaggerated, then what do we believe?

It is highly likely that the truth lies somewhere in the middle. Every writer embellishes his or her own work in order to excite the reader and sell as many books as

possible. The accusation that Esquemeling exaggerated his accounts for this purpose is probably justified to some degree, but the authors who claim he was exaggerating are very likely themselves doing this in order to make their arguments more convincing.

While this book touches upon the allegations that Morgan and/or his men tortured prisoners for profit, it is more concerned with the man himself and the times in which he lived. The times were hard; they were rough and brutal.

Wherever possible we will be using official letters and documents to establish the facts but first and foremost this is a story of daring and courage, of an extraordinary man whose actions were akin to empire building. Like all of us, he was flawed, but England has not seen the likes of him for a long, long time and probably never will again. That's what makes this tale so compelling.

Graham A. Thomas
Warminster, April 2013

Introduction

Marching with Morgan

The commander marched ahead of his men, their colours flying in the hot breeze. Ahead lay the prize and spoils for those who had the courage to take them. He did and so did the 750 men marching with him.

Already the Spanish had tried to outwit him by felling trees along the road. But he had seen this ruse before and so ordered his men to march through the jungle. It was hard going for the heat was stifling, the undergrowth was thick and the men had to hack their way through it. But he knew the town wasn't far and in the town there were riches, wine, food and women.

He smiled at the Spanish attempts to stop him. They had thrown up ambushes and mounted cannon facing the road to destroy his forces. They hadn't thought that he would go through the dense woods. His men had spotted the Spanish troops waiting with their cannon and musketry at the ambushes and reported back to him.

But time was short. The blocked roads meant that the Spanish knew they were coming and so would be feverishly hiding their wealth in the surrounding countryside. Once they were past the blockades he spurred his men on.

Finally, they emerged from the woods onto the savannah and could see the town in the distance. The commander urged his men forward, drawing closer and closer to the town. As they came within sight of the entrance he could see the proud Spanish governor on his fine horse behind his foot soldiers and in the middle of his cavalry waiting for them. They were facing the wrong way.

The commander ordered his men to spread out from the rank and file formation into a semi-circle. He ordered the drums to beat, the men to quicken their step, muskets at the ready and the colours to fly.

Alarmed, the Spanish governor turned to face them, leading his mounted troops towards the buccaneers now marching towards the town. The Spanish horses charged but the commander expected this and had put his best shots at the front of his semi-circle formation. As the Spanish rode in, they were cut down from three sides by accurate musket fire. Regrouping, the Spanish charged again and again each time they met a hail of musket balls. Horses reared, men fell, their flesh torn by hot iron balls ripping into them.

The commander fired at approaching targets, waiting until the enemy were almost on top of him before pulling the trigger. More Spanish fell from their horses, shot through with musket balls. A musket ball ripped into the Spanish governor, throwing him from his horse, his blood flowing freely. Seeing the death of their leader those remaining Spanish still mounted headed for the woods for protection but even they were cut down by a rearguard the commander had placed behind his main formation.

As the Spanish mounted troops fled, the commander raised his sword and called for his men to surge forward. Shouting and screaming the men charged towards the town and met the Spanish foot soldiers. They quickly cut through them with swords and musket fire. The Spanish, seeing that their governor was dead and that the marauders held the upper hand, retreated, some heading back into the town while others headed across the open savannah towards the woods but were cut down long before they reached safety.

Those that retreated back into the town immediately shut themselves into houses with the inhabitants to continue the fight. They hid in windows and behind doors, waiting for the chance to fire on the invaders.

They didn't wait long.

The commander ordered the men to enter the town and take it. As they came rushing in the Spanish soldiers fired on them from their hiding places. Some of his men were killed and injured. Musket balls smashed into the walls and cobblestoned streets. His men took cover, returning the fire. But this kind of fighting could go on for days [and] time was not on the commander's side. He ordered runners to take messages to the Spanish saying that he would burn the town to the ground and kill everyone in it, including women and children, if the Spanish continued to resist.

The firing stopped. After a while a white flag appeared and the last elements of resistance surrendered. Immediately, the commander ordered his men to spread throughout the town, taking any prisoners and locking

them into the churches. As they spread out the men grabbed what loot was still left and corralled the prisoners.

With the town secure, the commander sent expedition parties into the surrounding countryside to search for wealth that had been hidden.

Over the time of the occupation more and more prisoners would be brought into the town to be tortured and punished until they told the marauders where their wealth was hidden as ransom for their lives. Indeed, four prisoners had been freed by the occupiers to go out into the country and raise the ransom they wanted. These four prisoners returned with nothing, saying they needed more time.

But the Spanish stalling tactics would work against them and many died of starvation.

So the account goes.

Who were they and who was their commander? He was Captain Henry Morgan and he was to become ‘the greatest and most renowned of all the buccaneers’.¹

The year was 1668 and the town that Morgan attacked and occupied was Puerto del Príncipe. The men who followed him were hard men, pirates and privateers out for loot and glory. They were largely English and French and they hated the Spanish. When these men heard of the expedition against Spanish-held Cuba and that it was to be commanded by Morgan, they flocked to join him for they were sure of victory. His reputation and his deeds were already known far and wide.

He was, in his way, a military genius, a truly remarkable leader of irregular troops whose skill in planning attacks, implementing them with secrecy and dash, and in maintaining throughout amazing discipline over his men commands admiration.²

Henry Morgan is best known as the man who sacked Panama City. His reign as a privateer lasted only four years but his career in Jamaica lasted much longer. Prior to him and his crew setting sail in 1670 for the Panama expedition the mood in the English colony of Jamaica had changed. Peace with Spain was being negotiated and became a reality with the signing of the Treaty of Madrid the same year. But before official news of the treaty arrived in Jamaica, Sir Thomas Modyford, the governor of the island, gave the go-ahead for the expedition. As this story unfolds the justifying circumstances of the mounting of this operation will be revealed.

After the Panama affair, Morgan and Modyford were sent to London to be punished for ignoring the treaty. Morgan was the toast of the town and was knighted. However, Modyford was imprisoned in the Tower of London. Morgan returned to Jamaica as Lieutenant Governor, with instructions to suppress the buccaneers, many of whom were his old shipmates. He died a rich man in 1688.

History has seen no other commander like Morgan, certainly no British commander. He would lead most of the attacks himself, often at the head of hundreds or, in the case of Panama, more than a thousand men. He was a product of his time. Perhaps Nelson is the closest to rival the deeds of Morgan than any other British commander. Although he had the title of captain or admiral he was a military man—a brilliant tactician and strategist in land warfare. One big difference between Morgan and other privateers/pirates of history is that he always made sure he had commissions from the governor for his expeditions.

The truth about allegations of the use of torture against prisoners taken by Morgan’s men, and whether he ordered or condoned this, is shrouded in the mists of time. For us to understand the man we need to take a detailed look at his battles, the actions that

made him famous, and for this there are letters, some eyewitness reports, Spanish reports of the events and the work of John Esquemeling, who published his experiences on Morgan's expeditions in a book entitled *The Buccaneers of America*. As with any eyewitness account the accuracy and reliability of the detail must be not be taken for granted; we need also to use a wide variety of other sources.

This is the story of Sir Henry Morgan, buccaneer, family man, politician and a great leader.

Part I

The Buccaneer

Chapter 1

First Moves

Captain Henry Morgan was different to his contemporaries as well as to the pirates and buccaneers that came after him. For a start, he was successful. He was married to the same woman for twenty years. Despite the atrocities he is alleged to have committed or that were committed in his name upon the Spanish he was never punished for them; instead he was made a hero and knighted by the English. He was appointed as Lieutenant Governor of Jamaica and then was relieved of his position by a vindictive and rather paranoid governor who believed that Morgan was at the heart of everything wrong in Jamaica. Nothing was further from the truth and we will look into this in detail later in this book.

Perhaps one of the chief differences between Morgan and pirates like Roberts, Vane, Blackbeard and many others is that he did his fighting on land and did not take ship after ship. He rarely got involved in great sea battles. While he was elected as admiral by the men who served with him, he was more of a general than an admiral.

Of course there is a lot of other material that has been written about Morgan. This book attempts to look at the different sides of the man. How do we marry the ruthless man capable of bringing so much misery and misfortune to his enemies with the man who was devoted to his wife and family and who was given one of the highest offices in the thriving colony of Jamaica? To the civilized twenty-first-century mind this can be hard to reconcile. Was he just a butcher, a monster, a man driven by greed and power, or was he driven by patriotism? Was he truly responsible for the torture and murder of Spanish prisoners? Some scholars say yes, others disagree.

The only way for us to find answers to these questions is to put the man into context, look at his actions, at the times in which he lived, at his letters and the people who influenced him the most. One key point is that Morgan always thought of himself as a privateer. He never embarked on an expedition without a commission from the government of Jamaica, no matter how tenuous that commission might be. History labels him a buccaneer, or a pirate in some cases, but he was, technically, a privateer. ‘The one label we can give him is that of buccaneer, that romantic-sounding word that applied to several generations of fortune hunters who roamed the Caribbean looking for plunder.’¹

What do we know of Morgan? Certainly we don’t know what he looked like as there is no physical description of him, save for the one given by the physician attending him in the last months of life. By then, the power and might of the man had gone out of him and he was reduced to a sallow, lean and gaunt figure with a swollen belly. But to lead hundreds of men—who were not military men but largely buccaneers, privateers

and fortune hunters—on expeditions against the Spanish, and be able to instil enough discipline in them to successfully carry out his military plans, takes a man of considerable power, discipline, strength and self-confidence. As we have seen in the introduction, Morgan was able to improvise in the middle of an operation by skirting blocked roads and marching his men through thick, humid rain forest. For this to work the improvisation had to go all the way down the line from Morgan's commanders at the top to the men at the bottom.

Many writers suggest that Morgan was born around 1635 to a good Welsh family from the county of Monmouth. His father was Robert Morgan, a farmer living in Llanrhymni. This branch of the family was related to the Tredegar House Morgans, who lived just a few miles away to the east. Robert had a brother, William, of Llanrhymni Hall, in the same area. Inside the Church of St Mellons, not far from Llanrhymni, there are many memorials to the Morgans. Indeed, during this time in the counties of Monmouthshire and Glamorgan there were a handful of other 'great families', such as Herbert, Stradling and Matthews.

Henry had two distinguished uncles, both brothers of his father: Edward, who was a colonel in the Cavaliers during the Civil War fighting for the Royalist cause; and Thomas, who also fought in the Civil War but on the side of the Parliamentarians under Cromwell. Edward was later to become Lieutenant Governor of Jamaica, a post that Morgan himself would hold.

One thing is certain about Morgan—he was the product of his time. He could not have flourished as the greatest of the buccaneers had he been born twenty years earlier or twenty years later.²

Henry Morgan married the daughter of Edward Morgan in Jamaica. Deciding to follow in the footsteps of his uncles, Henry joined an expeditionary force that left Britain in 1654 under the command of General Venables and Admiral Penn, with the objective of taking the islands of Hispaniola and Cuba from the Spanish. The force arrived in Barbados on 29 January 1655, when Morgan was just twenty years old. Venables needed men, so from the islands of St Kitts and Nevis he recruited 1,200 men, and then once in Barbados took on another 3,500. It didn't matter that they were barely trained for the task in hand.

Arriving at Hispaniola they headed for the south side of the island, landing at Santo Domingo, where Penn and Venables sent 7,000 men ashore to capture the town and the rest of the island according to the original plan. But things went badly for the English force. The men were affected by tropical disease and this, combined with incompetent leadership, left the expedition in chaos and more than 2,000 men died, not from battle, but from sickness. The English were forced to withdraw.

Undaunted, Penn and Venables turned their attention to another Spanish settlement that was lightly defended—Jamaica. Had the defences been much stronger the poor leadership could have spelt disaster, but the English had the greater numbers and they overwhelmed the Spanish. However, this was not the end of the matter.

The last Spanish governor of the island, Don Cristoble Arnalso de Ysassi, fled to the hills, where he commanded an effective guerrilla war against the English. But two

expeditions from Cuba sent to reinforce the courageous Don were met off the north coast of the island and defeated while the Don and his forces were defeated in 1657 near Ocho Rios. By 1660 the Don's forces were few; the slave allies (known as the Maroons) he'd brought with him after fleeing the city deserted and before the year was over he and what was left of his guerrilla force escaped under the cover of darkness, rowing in canoes to the safety of Cuba.³

At that time, the war in Europe against Spain was officially over but in the West Indies the situation was much more fluid. The Spanish continued to capture English ships cruising off the Spanish Main⁴ and considered all English ships as pirate ships and treated them accordingly.

By early 1660 Morgan was heavily involved in the skirmishing that continued as the former Spanish governor did his best to hang on. When Morgan was not involved in expeditions against the guerrillas he was a privateer operating under the command of Commodore Christopher Myngs. The main port was called Cagway, or Caguaya, and the English built a fort there to protect the natural harbour. Hearing of the regular expeditions of Myngs's fleet against the Spanish, privateers began to flock to the new settlement.

The young Morgan proved to be popular and soon made friends amongst the privateers. As a captain he distinguished himself by taking three ships on a single raid. 'Captain John Morris, a friend of Morgan's, bought one and renamed it the *Dolphin*.'⁵ Captain Robert Serle bought another, the largest of the three, which had eight cannon and weighed more than 80 tons. He named this ship the *Cagway*. Along with Captain John Lawrence, who renamed his ship the *Pearl*, these four men became fast friends and the most popular and daring of all the Cagway privateers.

News arrived from England in August 1660 when the *Convertine* sailed into the harbour. Charles II was back on the English throne having been restored to it by General Monck. Peace had been declared now between England, France and Spain, while Monck was made Earl of Albemarle for his help in getting Charles II back on the throne. However, Jamaica was not returned to the Spanish in the peace deal.

Colonel D'Oyley as the first governor of Jamaica was tasked with defending the new English settlement. He had a twelve-man council to assist him and one of its members included a close friend of Henry Morgan, Henry Archbald, who had arrived on the *Convertine*. Another friend, Thomas Ballard, was also elected to the council. The task of defending Jamaica was a daunting one as there were no resources other than the privateers and any help from England was months away. After less than a year in office, D'Oyley, who had proved to be an unpopular governor, decided he couldn't cope and asked to be relieved.

His replacement, Lord Windsor, immediately began to make changes upon his arrival in Jamaica. To honour the newly restored king, Port Royal became the new name for Cagway and the fort was given a new battery of cannon and renamed Fort Charles. Lord Windsor then created a militia that was made up of five regiments and Henry Morgan was given a commission in the Port Royal Regiment for his work in fighting the Spanish guerrillas under the hapless Don. But there was a thorn in the side

of the young colony. The Spanish rebels had been supplied by the Spaniards in Cuba from the closest settlement to Jamaica, Santiago de Cuba, on the island of Cuba, only 150 miles away from Jamaica. Lord Windsor believed this would be a perfect place for the Spanish to launch their invasion of Jamaica. Even though there was peace between England and Spain in Europe, the council in Jamaica voted to send an expedition to destroy Santiago de Cuba.

Myngs led the fleet towards Cuba and, once again, Morgan was commanding his own ship as captain, along with his friend Robert Serle in command of the *Cagway*. Myngs's flagship, the *Centurion*, was a forty-six-gun vessel and sailed at the head of the fleet.

On 5 October 1660 they sighted Santiago de Cuba and having obtained information from former prisoners of the Spanish who knew the town, they realized that a frontal assault would be a disaster because of the Spanish cannon protecting the narrow entrance to the huge harbour. Instead, they landed 2 miles down the coast, near the mouth of the San Juan River, and began landing men and supplies. They marched and hacked their way through the dense forest heading for the town in an assault from the rear.

The following morning, Myngs's forces reached the town, having cut through 9 miles of forest, and attacked. The Spanish were taken by surprise and fled, leaving riches behind them. The privateers began a systematic looting, which ended when they blew up the town and the fort with 700 casks of Spanish gunpowder they'd seized.

On 22 October, Myngs returned with the rest of the fleet and vast amounts of plunder taken from the town including 'six ships, cannon, wine, silver plate, church bells, hide and more. Just six buccaneers were killed and twenty went missing.'⁶

By 1662 Lord Windsor had stepped down as governor due to ill health and Sir Charles Lyttleton, who had been Windsor's lieutenant governor, was now temporarily in charge. But Lyttleton was a man of peace and refused to attack the Spanish. Since the end of the war in Europe, envoys had been sent from Jamaica to the Spanish Main to negotiate peaceful trade. However, the Spanish flatly refused to allow trade with the new English colony. Concessions and diplomacy weren't working. To make matters worse, when Windsor had been governor, he'd received instructions from King Charles II to force trade, if necessary.

Since the attack on Cuba the privateers had been idle and there was no pay for them while they sat and waited for Lyttleton to issue the necessary papers enabling them to go out and plunder the Spanish.

Myngs was impatient. He knew that the privateers could turn to piracy if they didn't have some direction. He also knew that on the coast of Mexico there were English log cutters who had great difficulty getting their wood from the coast to England via Jamaica because of the Spanish. It was these log cutters that Myngs wanted to protect and ensure their trade routes were secure. Day after day he approached Lyttleton, slowly wearing the man down until, finally, on Christmas Day 1662, Lyttleton relented and letters of marque were issued to the privateers to attack the Mexican coastline, specifically a prosperous town built on a Mayan site known as Campeche. Its full title

was San Francisco de Campeche and it was called Campeachy by the English.

It would not be an easy victory. To the north and south the town and its harbour were guarded by two fortresses, the Castillo San Jose, 2 miles north of the town, and the Castillo San Miguel, 2 miles south. Both these fortresses stood at the tops of hills overlooking the town. There were also ‘three batteries of cannon between the fortresses, protecting the town and the port.’⁷

In Jamaica preparations were under way for the expedition against the Spanish. Myngs chose his captains, giving each of them letters of marque. Those captains included 27-year-old Henry Morgan, his two friends, Captain John Morris and Captain Jackman, along with Captain Abraham Blauveldt and Captain Edward Mansveldt—the latter an experienced and famous Dutch buccaneer more usually known as Mansfield. The fleet Myngs assembled included fourteen ships from Port Royal, three French ships from Tortuga and three Dutch privateers, along with more than 1,100 men. Leading the fleet in the *Centurion*, Myngs raised his sails and hoisted his anchor, setting sail from Port Royal in January 1663.

Along the way, one ship was lost in a storm and three more were separated from the fleet. They sailed for days, crossing more than a thousand miles of ocean. By 9 February 1663 they anchored a mile down the coast from Campeche and began landing their men.

While they did this, Myngs sent a boat to the governor asking for his surrender. He waited for the response.

Realizing that the Spanish were stalling, he decided not to give them time to move or hide their valuables and prepare for a fight so he attacked the town, his men only armed with pikes, swords and pistols against the cannon. The fighting was intense.

For almost an entire day they fought. The buccaneers had to take the stone houses one by one while being shot at by Spanish snipers and soldiers. Shot whizzed around, bouncing off cobblestone, embedding into stone walls, tearing through clothing and ripping into flesh and bone. Men shouted as they attacked. Spanish soldiers were impaled by pikes. In close combat men were cut down by pistol shot and swords. Shards of wood, stone and metal flew in all directions from pistol and cannon shot.

Myngs was wounded three times but by the end of the day, the buccaneers were successful. In the harbour they captured fourteen vessels, and crews were chosen to take them back to Port Royal. ‘The Spanish counted their losses at 150,000 pieces of eight, and the damage done to the town and the fort costing another 500,000 to repair.’⁸

Myngs and the rest of the fleet left Campeche on 23 February but did not arrive in Port Royal, Jamaica, until 13 April. In his book *Admiral Sir Henry Morgan*, Terry Breverton suggests that the delay was down to the fleet spending some time sharing out the loot they had plundered from the Spanish ‘rather than bring it back to Jamaica for the English royal family and assorted ship owners to take their commission.’

But what of Henry Morgan? The captains and crews that sailed with Myngs and sacked Campeche had made a considerable amount from that action.

Morgan and three other captains—John Morris, William Jackman and David