

Chapter 12

Harry Goes to War



MAP OF THE CARIBBEAN

In late 1667, Governor Modyford became increasingly alarmed by persistent reports of preparations being made in Cuba for an invasion of the island. Consequently, he obtained the Council's consent to issue a special commission to Harry Morgan, appointing him admiral and commander-in-chief of Jamaican forces.^[1] The commission^[2] directed Morgan to take Spanish prisoners and gather intelligence regarding Spain's intentions towards Jamaica. This amounted to an open-ended letter-of-marque against Spain's American interests and seemed to be a complete reversal of recent policy.

[1] He is also referred to in Beeston's contemporary account as "general Morgan." See also, *Calendar of State Papers, America and West Indies*, No. 1838, Information of Admiral Henry Morgan and his officers, Port Royal, 7th September, 1668.

[2] His commission has not been found but it is said to have restricted such hostilities to *Spanish ships at sea*, but allowed the capture of prisoners wherever they could be found.

The Treaty of Breda had been signed on 31 Jul 1667 and brought an end to the Second Anglo-Dutch War. The ensuing peace between England and both the Dutch and the French, conveniently for Morgan and Modyford, left the English in the West Indies with a free hand to attack the Spaniards.

Following Edward Mansfield's death, Harry Morgan became generally accepted as the old buccaneer leader's successor and unofficial admiral of the Brethren of the Coast. Interpreting his commission as admiral and commander-in-chief of Jamaican forces broadly, Morgan made it known from the start that he intended to make an attempt on a Spanish settlement. With all the booty that promised, recruits flocked to the Point. From this pool of eager battle-hardened men, Morgan assembled ten vessels and about 500 men. Six of his captains were Edward Collier, John Morris, Sr., Thomas Salter, John Ansell, Thomas Clarke, and John Morris, Jr. Their crews consisted of former soldiers, veteran privateersmen, buccaneers from Jamaica and Hispaniola, and French *flibustiers* whose country was at war with Spain.

In January 1668, Admiral Morgan sailed to Isle of Pines, the largest of the small islands south of Cuba and a favourite rendezvous. There, two ships carrying a total of two hundred men joined his flotilla. Those who sailed with Morgan included Captain Charles Hatsell—who we met on Old Providence—and a few others who had escaped from prisons in Cuba and were familiar with the countryside. They and many others were driven as much by a desire for revenge as by the prospect of plunder. Though many had been reluctant to go against Dutch targets, none hesitated when the objective was a Spanish settlement, for Spain was the common enemy and was despised by those who sailed with Morgan.



Originally, Morgan's privateers had planned to attack Havana by landing in the Gulf of Batabanó. From there, they planned to march overland, being careful to avoid the guns of the three castles that guarded the harbour and, thereby, taking Cuba's capital by surprise. However,

Morgan abandoned that plan when information reached him that Havana's already formidable defences had been reinforced recently and were fully prepared for such an attack.

Indecision reigned until the Admiral chose as his target the Cuban town of *Santa Maria de Puerto Principe* (present-day *Camagüey*). Despite its name, *Puerto Principe* lay fifty miles inland from the coast. The town was said to be "the wealthiest place in Cuba," next to Havana. It had become famous for the profitable trade in cattle and hides, and its prosperous inhabitants had gained a false sense of security being as they were set back and not easily reached from the coast.

On 28 Mar 1668, Admiral Morgan arrived at the Gulf of Santa María. Within the gulf lay the *Archipiélago de los Jardines de la Reina* (Queen's Gardens)—a cluster of small islands and cays off the southern coast of Cuba known to Jamaican seamen as the "South Cays." This had long been a favourite haunt of privateers, for the area offered safety and the opportunity to obtain provisions from among large populations of turtle and wildfowl. Among these cays, Morgan hid his ships, with a few of his followers left to guard them. At daybreak two days later, he landed a large party on the shore and led the march overland as he had done before on other raids. As usual, the invaders needed guides and coerced local peasants to lead the way. Astonishingly, Morgan's men made the overland journey of more than 30 miles in just over 24 hours, arriving in the hills overlooking the fertile plain around *Puerto*

Principe early in the forenoon of the following day. The men were hungry and weary from their hard journey but had no time to waste, for surprise was vital.



Puerto del Príncipe being sacked in 1668, by John Masefield

However, despite their cautious approach, one of the peasant guides had slipped away in the darkness and sounded the alarm.

The inhabitants of *Puerto Principe* and the surrounding area lost no time and began to send their families and valuables into hiding.

Meanwhile, the *alcalde ordinario* (municipal magistrate), a military man, hurriedly assembled 700 men on foot with 100 more mounted on mules and horses. With his force armed with an assortment of weapons, the *alcalde* led them to meet Morgan's advancing privateers.

The Spaniards showed courage but lacked the military discipline essential in such engagements. Their cavalry charge was met by several volleys of deadly musket fire, for buccaneers were renowned for their marksmanship. The Spanish defenders retreated, leaving the *alcalde* and several others mortally wounded or dead in the fields. However, they did not withdraw without a fight, resisting courageously in the streets and from their houses' flat

roofs. More than 100 Spaniards fell that day, with many others taken prisoner.

According to historian Jacob de la Pezuela, damage to the town's buildings was minimal. [D. Jacob Pezuela, *Historia de la Isla de Cuba* (Madrid, 1868).] This is confirmed in Morgan's report to Modyford, in which he says that the town was not put to the flame. We can be sure, however, that *Puerto Principe* was thoroughly searched for coins and plate and any other article of value that could be carried away to Morgan's waiting ships.

Two weeks after Morgan's initial assault and while still holding the town, one of his men intercepted a letter from the governor of Havana to the citizens of *Puerto Principe* that "he was fitting out some soldiers to relieve them." At that, Morgan made one last demand for ransom and gave orders to make preparations to withdraw from the town. He demanded the ransoms be paid the next day. An impossibility because of the short notice, as he came to realize, so he settled for 500 more "beeves," and enough salt to preserve their meat. He insisted that these should be ready by the next morning on a beach near his anchored ships.

Morgan lost little time marching his men back to the coast, where they set about slaughtering and salting the cattle in the buccaneer way. He put prisoners to work alongside his privateers, for all had to be completed before the ships from Havana arrived. The privateers left the bloody hides on the sands, there not being time to dry them. Almost to a man, the *flibustiers* and buccaneers

were well-practiced and skilful at this. Most could kill, skin, and cut up a steer in a few minutes. It must have been a grisly scene at that beach, with so many bones, skins, and quantities of curing meat about and done to a concert of seagull cries and the sight of turkey buzzards fighting over the discarded offal. Morgan's enemy that day was not the Spanish ships he expected to appear on the horizon at any moment, but the heat of the tropical sun. If there was a delay in applying enough salt to all exposed surfaces, the meat would putrefy.

During this furious activity, the French contingent had a quarrel with the Jamaican buccaneers.

The *flibustiers* had always tended to keep apart from the English and Dutch buccaneers who were mainly protestants and spoke only a little French. The *flibustiers*, however, shared with the buccaneers a mutual hatred of the Spaniards and often cooperated in actions against them. These coalitions were tenuous in nature and would dissolve as quickly as formed. The following incident is an example of how quickly such alliances could end.

A French privateer had set aside several marrow bones as a bonne bouche for later enjoyment. Seeing the tasty treats unattended, an Englishman snatched one up and began sucking at the toute chaude, the marrow so favoured by buccaneers. The flibustier became incensed at what he considered an insult and challenged the offending buccaneer to single combat—swords to be the weapon. As calmer heads discussed the preliminaries for the duel and while the Frenchman's back was turned, the Englishman suddenly struck, stabbing the flibustier from behind and killing him

instantly. A riot ensued with the flibustiers accusing their former English comrade-in-arms of treachery.

*The Frenchmen demanded—as was their practice—Morgan order the attacker put to death. Friction between the flibustiers and buccaners was commonplace and neither side needed much to provoke a falling-out. As the quarrel raged, Morgan separated them, demanding they put down their swords. Next, he ordered the murderer clapped in irons and sent aboard one of the Jamaican ships. Morgan assured the flibustiers that the murderer would be hanged immediately, as soon as the ships returned to Port Royal. The English contingent agreed the man deserved such punishment, “for although it was permitted him to challenge his adversary, yet it was not lawful to kill him treacherously, as he did.” [John Esquemeling, *The Buccaneers of America*.]*

The Frenchmen reluctantly accepted Admiral Morgan’s decision, though, some did continue to mutter among themselves. The mutiny, such as it was, ended then, and they returned to their ships, carrying the last of the salted beef.

With the hostages freed, Morgan ordered one of his ship’s guns to be fired, signalling the fleet to weigh anchor and set sail for *Île-à-Vache* (Cow Island or *Isla de las Vacas*) off the extreme southwestern coast of Hispaniola. *Île-à-Vache* was another favourite buccaneer rendezvous for it offered a relatively safe harbour to assemble a large number of ships. Also, fresh meat and supplies could be obtained on the island itself or from nearby Hispaniola.

There the plunder was heaped into piles. Whereupon the captains and other trusted veterans, who knew by experience what such goods would fetch in Jamaica, valued the various articles and divided the plunder according to the terms of the articles of association under which they sailed.



This might be a good time to explain a bit about how 17th-century privateers divided prize money and other plunder they acquired.

Most privateer ventures were carried out on the condition of *no purchase, no pay*. Although each specific venture was governed by its own articles of association, *chasse-*

partie, spelled out the shares everyone received. The following should give an idea of the process:

First, a fifteenth went to the king, and a tenth went to the Lord High Admiral. Next was a share to the official who issued the letter-of-marque—for example, this might be the governor of Jamaica. Also, many privateer vessels were owned, outfitted and/or provisioned by an individual or syndicate who expected a return on investment. Such an amount could be one-quarter or one-third of everything seized. In other cases, expeditions were outfitted, provisioned and/or supplied by investors other than the ships' owners in exchange for a share of the profits. The remainder would normally be divided among the men ("man to man" as it was said) who engaged in the action or stayed behind to guard ships.

An individual could receive more or less than one man's share. For example, boys might get half a share, while specialists such as surgeons and shipwrights might get more than one share. Captains got two or more shares, and officers received proportionately more than the ordinary soldier or sailor. A captain who owned his own ship might receive an additional four to ten shares, depending on the vessel's size, while the injured usually received additional compensation. Other incentives and bonuses were offered to encourage bravery or activity under fire, such as being part of a "forlorn hope," or throwing a grenade into an enemy fortification, or capturing an enemy flag.





So the Treasure was Divided | Illustrated by Howard Pyle

As Admiral, Harry Morgan got additional shares of the official and unofficial booty from the raid on *Puerto Principe*. He may also have received more as an investor and/or owner of one or more of the ships used in the venture. However, a key point was the difference between plunder actually taken and that which was officially reported and subject to sharing with anyone other than those directly engaged in an action.

Edward Long, in his 1774, *The History of Jamaica*, estimates Admiral Morgan's raid on *Puerto Principe* officially yielded about 50,000 pieces of eight (£12,500). However, he added that his estimates of the plunder from Morgan's raids were "*besides an immense quantity of silks, linens, gold and silver lace, plate, jewels, and other valuable commodities; which probably amounted to near as much more.*" This is an important point, for the estimates of the plunder won on Morgan's raids as referred to in most serious accounts are

taken as the total of all the plunder when, in fact, Long states these amounts do not include “immense quantity of silks, linens, gold and silver plate, jewels, and other valuable commodities.” Besides, the value of captured slaves was often not included.

Morgan oversaw the division of the *Puerto Principe* plunder among his entire force. Many were disappointed because they considered their share too small a reward for their effort. Moreover, the *flibustiers* still smarted from his refusal to summarily execute the privateer who had stabbed their comrade to death. As a result, many set off for Tortuga, while Morgan and his remaining ships sailed for Jamaica.

Readers should note that, although the spoils of the *Puerto Principe* raid were shared out at *Île-à-Vache*, we should not assume Morgan would cheat his monarch and his friend and mentor Governor Modyford by not reserving their fair shares. For, had he not done so, how likely is it Modyford would have remained so supportive of his future expeditions or remain so personally loyal to him? And, for that matter, would the king ever have rewarded Morgan with a knighthood?

One reason for pre-sharing the spoils of a venture resulted from the precarious nature of buccaneer enterprises. So close to the legal line did these resolute men sail, they sometimes crossed that line and for one reason or another had a price on their heads and could not safely return to the Point.

My belief is that though some cheating undoubtedly occurred and protocols ignored, a reasonable and believable share would have been allotted to the officials and presented to them later so as to ensure their future cooperation and support. Nevertheless, I acknowledge that many chroniclers do insist that the purpose of pre-sharing the booty before appearing in front of an admiralty court was to deny government officials and other stakeholders their fair share.

After anchoring at the Point, the admiral ensured the murderer was hanged just as he had promised. The poor fellow's corpse was left dangling from the gibbet at Gallows Point as a deterrent to others. [Gallows Point was in a part of Port Royal that disappeared under the sea in the earth-quake of 1692.]

Admiral Morgan's official report was brief. In it, he told Sir Thomas Modyford:

We were driven to the south keys of Cuba where, being like to starve, and finding French in like condition, we put our men ashore, and finding all the cattle driven up country and the inhabitants fled, we marched 20 leagues to Porto Principe on the north of the island, and with little resistance possessed ourselves of the same. There we found that 700 men had been pressed to go against Jamaica; that the like levy had been made in all the island, and considerable forces were expected from Vera Cruz and Campeachy to rendezvous at the Havannah and from Porto Bello and Cartagena to rendezvous at St. Jago of Cuba, of which I immediately gave notice to Governor Modyford. On the Spaniards' entreaty we forbore to fire the town, or bring away prisoners, but on delivery of 1,000 beeves, released them all.^[3]

As would be expected, Morgan's attack on a city so far inland as *Puerto Principe* caused a great deal of consternation in Havana and *Santiago de Cuba*, the provincial capital. We see this reflected in the provincial governor, Pedro de Bayona Villanueva's, report to the Queen Regent:^[4]

The appearance of English and French ships on this coast, constantly reconnoitering its harbours, watering-places, and hunting grounds leads me to believe that having sacked Puerto Principe, and the fact that some of the neighbouring inhabitants have been in the habit of paying this kind of ransom to the pirates, they intend other attacks. I have thought proper to summon the serjeant-major and the alcalde in ordinary before me, having already laid a charge against them for misconduct, to hear what excuse they can offer for the loss of that town having such a greatly increased population, when the advantages of its position and the rugged nature of the mountains in an extended march of fourteen leagues, should have enabled a body of native soldiers, acquainted with the country and trained in hill-fighting, although two-thirds less in number, to destroy the enemy. If the evidence in the case warrants a conviction, they ought to be punished as a warning to those other towns, whose inhabitants may be disposed to yield to any insignificant number of the enemy rather than risk their lives in so good a cause as the defence of their country and their Sovereign.^[5]

[3] *Calendar of State Papers, America and West Indies*, No. 1838, Information of Admiral Morgan and his officers, Port Royal, 7th September, 1668.

[4] Spain's king was Charles II (1661–1700) who was a physically and mentally disabled child at the time. His mother,

Mariana of Austria (1634–1696), ruled Spain as queen-regent.

^[5] Letter from Bayona Villanueva, quoted by Pezuela, *Historia de la Isla de Cuba*, II, pp. 165-6 as translated in E.A. Cruikshank, *The Life of Sir Henry Morgan* (MacMillan, 1935).

Harry Morgan's attack on *Puerto Principe* was the first in a series of increasingly fierce military actions against Spain, which would etch his name in history. He had gained the respect of the buccaneers and held the unofficial title of Admiral of the Brethren of the Coast.

Esquemeling wrote,

...Morgan, who always communicated vigour with his words, infused such spirits into his men as were able to put every one of them instantly upon new designs; the being all persuaded by his reasons, that the sole execution of his orders would be a certain means of gaining great riches. This persuasion had such influence upon their minds, that with inimitable courage they all resolved to join him.

Harry Morgan's mastery of military tactics and leadership skills so evident in Cuba would bedevil the Spanish dons and drain their treasuries—all to the credit of England and its Jamaica colony.