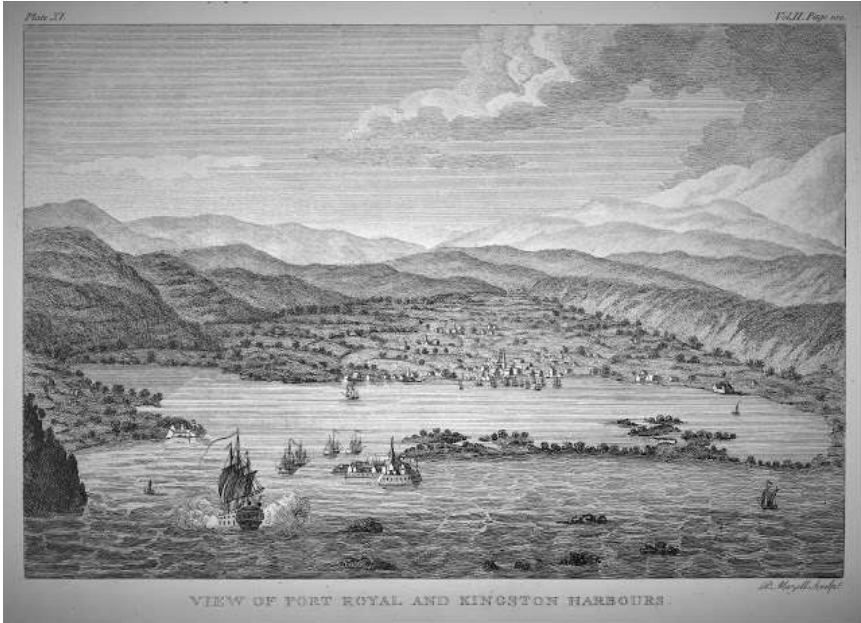


Chapter 10

Morgan's Entente Cordiale



From Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica, etc.* (Lownudes, 1774)

Harry Morgan returned to the Point in late-August 1665. He had been on a 22-month privateering cruise following the sacking of *San Francisco de Campeche*. He soon found many changes had occurred during his absence. Besides Lord Windsor's return to England and Sir Thomas Modyford having replaced him, England had reversed its official policy as regards privateering, at least, so far as Spanish shipping and colonies were concerned.

Arriving ahead of Morgan was his fellow privateer Captain Fackman,^[1] who landed at the Point on 20 Aug 1665. Shortly afterwards, Captain David Martien arrived but left as soon as he heard England and Holland were at war. With them came the news that they had taken the towns of *Tabasco* and *Villahermosa* in the Gulf of Mexico. There was a mixed reaction to this for, according to Jamaican officials, there had been peace with the Spaniards during the time the privateers were making war. In other words, they had acted without valid commissions. The town anxiously awaited the arrival of the leaders in this questionable series of raids.

^[1]Colonel William Beeston's Journal, 20 Aug 1665 entry. Elsewhere reported as Captain Freeman, but my copy of Beeston's journal uses the name Frackman.

Until this point in our story, Harry Morgan's life has been told more by inference than from direct reference to documentation, so little evidence of his earlier years having survived. However, from mid-August 1665, his exploits can more easily be traced directly from—English and Spanish—state papers, letters penned by the man himself, his enemies, and his friends. I have also seen reference to his personal journal that others are said to have read, but they do not seem to have survived to the present day.

Within days of Captain Fackman's arrival with news about the buccaneers' raids on the Gulf of Mexico and Central America, Captains Henry Morgan, Jacob

Jackman and John Morris dropped anchor at the Point and were informed they must meet with the new governor.



1 - YOUNG HENRY MORGAN

Accordingly, Morgan and his fellow privateers presented themselves to Sir Thomas Modyford for the first time.

As far as we are aware, only two likenesses of Sir Henry Morgan have survived that might be his true likeness. A portrait of him as a young man hangs in Tredegar House, a Morgan-family mansion in Wales. The other is of a rather stout, middle-aged Henry Morgan, which is a copy of an illustration published in 1684 in a book by Alexandre Esquemeling. Other illustrations that abound are likely post mortem artists' impressions, some of which we offer throughout this account for your entertainment.

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2 - ESQUEMELING'S HENRY MORGAN

Esquemeling, Alexandre (1684). *The Buccaneers of America: A True Account of the Most Remarkable Assaults Committed ... by the Buccaneers of Jamaica and Tortuga*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.

Using these as a guide and with research into the practices and fashions of those times, I have drawn a mental image of the man. And it is with this image in mind that I write this story.

Harry Morgan was now thirty years old. He'd be considered handsome in most quarters: steady, piercing eyes set well apart, straight nose, full-lipped mouth and a solid chin. His mustache was light in the centre and fluffed out and curled upwards at the ends. Just below his bottom lip was a small triangular tuft of hair that barely served as a beard. His hair was close-cropped, but on this occasion, he wore a dark shoulder-length wig, which was too hot to wear on less formal occasions in a tropical country like Jamaica. When not wearing a wig, he wore a red bandanna tied around his head and almost always carried his wide-brimmed hat in his left hand or tucked beneath that arm.

The Welsh-Jamaican's medium-height frame had filled out and become thick-set. Weighing perhaps 175 pounds, his neck was thick and short, descending onto wide shoulders. His face was tanned and showed signs of furrowing in the brow. Overall, though, he exuded an impression of good health and goodwill. He had, in fact, demonstrated remarkable health and seemed immune to the fevers and other tropical maladies that were so often suffered by his fellow Europeans who had tried to make a home on the island.

His everyday dress was fashionable but functional and set him apart as a man of some means: white linen shirt covered by a vest trimmed with silver, linen breeches, knee-high hose and square-toed shoes, except while on military duty. When on duty, he always wore bucket-topped calf-skin boots. He was seldom without a sword hanging from his belt, and sometimes he had a pistol stuck in it. His coat was made of heavy silk and brocade, but he seldom wore it because of the year-round tropical heat.

When he spoke, it was in a clear, commanding voice with a somewhat musical accent—a pronounced rhythmic inflection with strong and weak stress on alternating syllables. And he had a habit of rolling the letter “R,” though not nearly so much as do the Spaniards.

He was a veteran of more than two years of nearly continuous campaigning. In fact, he had lived his entire life in times of war, if you include the English Civil Wars during his childhood. Yet, he showed none of the signs of the wear and tear one might expect from such a life.

Morgan would certainly have understood that his arrival with Jackman and Morris would place Modyford in an embarrassing position, for Morgan almost certainly knew the governor had recalled all privateering commissions. But he would also know Modyford faced a dilemma.

The removal of all Royal Navy’s ships and the army's disbandment had left Jamaica’s defence in a precarious

position. Therefore, it was to privateers–buccaneers like Morgan that the governor would need if his colony was threatened. Besides, despite the peace, Spanish ships of war continued to take English vessels whenever they could and treated all English prisoners as pirates. And, at that time, there were English captives imprisoned in Europe and Spanish America who were still waiting to obtain their freedom. Moreover, Spain continued to demand that England restore Jamaica to its rule.

Morgan was right, of course. We know the governor felt powerless to act, for he had little desire to punish these men, and in particular, their leader. This haughty privateer was the nephew of his late deputy–governor Sir Edward and Sir Thomas Morgan, a close friend of the Duke of Albemarle. He knew as well that Morgan had well-liked and respected relatives on the island.

The meeting between Morgan and Modyford was momentous, for from it, there emerged a lasting political alliance, an *entente cordiale* and personal friendship.

Morgan spoke for his fellow captains. He told Modyford a straightforward story of how they had been gone for about 22 months and, consistent with the privateer commissions they held from Lord Windsor, they had made war on the Spaniards. He claimed not to have heard of the cessation of hostilities between England and Spain. They were 750 miles away in what they believed was enemy territory, he explained.

Was Harry telling the truth? We believe mostly but not entirely so. Did the governor believe them? We really will never know. However, what we do know is he didn't sanction them in any way. Rather, he had their statements taken down in narrative form and sent to the Duke of Albemarle in London. [Source: Calendar of State Papers, America and West Indies, No. 1142, i.] Modyford's cousin and patron was chairman of the *Committee of the Privy Council on the affairs of Jamaica*, and perhaps the governor believed he would be more sympathetic to the plight of the buccaneer leaders than would the pro-Spanish secretary of state, Lord Arlington, to whom he usually reported.



As Harry told Governor Modyford, immediately following Christopher Myngs's plundering of *San Francisco de Campeche*, John Morris and Dutch-born David Martien led about 200 Jamaicans on a raiding expedition. Morris and Martien were supported by Morgan in his sloop and captains Jacob Jackman and Thomas Freeman.

Their first stop was at the mouth of the Grijalva River on the southern coast of the Gulf of Mexico near the town of *Frontera*. They anchored there and, after disembarking 107 buccaneers, they sought out local Indians living in the town to act as guides. The Indians, of course, hated the Spaniards and were only too pleased to help.

Then began an arduous march inland through rough, wet tropical jungle to take the capital of *Tabasco* province, *Villahermosa*, completely by surprise. *Villahermosa* was only about 50 miles inland, but the buccaneers chose—with the Indians to guide them—a far more circuitous route of some 300 miles to bypass all towns and settlements and avoid the impassable swamps that guarded shorter approaches to the town. The buccaneers captured *Villahermosa*, plundered it in the manner of the times and took many prisoners—one report claims as many as 300. General practice on such raids was to capture as many prisoners as possible and ransom them back to friends and relatives.

Although Harry could not be expected to realize it at the time, this was a seminal event in his life, for it was probably the first time he had acted as the commanding officer of a joint force of buccaneers. Chroniclers seem to agree that, at the outset, the more-experienced Morris and Martien were the expedition's leaders. Many, though, believe that—given his experience as a veteran of land warfare in Hispaniola and especially the five-year guerrilla war in Jamaica—Morgan was the better choice to lead the trek through the jungle and the battle to take *Villahermosa*. This was a job more suited to a soldier than a sailor.

When Morgan and the buccaneers returned to *Frontera*, luck deserted them. Their ships had been taken by the Spaniards, who according to Modyford's letter to his cousin, "soon attacked them with ships and 300 men."

However, Morgan and his men fought off the Spaniards and did so without losing a single man.

The buccaneers were stranded and desperately needed transportation. After a brief search, they captured and fitted out two barques and four large canoes. These they loaded with plunder and supplies from *Villahermosa* and headed north toward the Caribbean, landing now and again to take on fresh water and to replenish food suppliers. They rounded the top of the Yucatán Peninsula and sailed and paddled along the coastline towards Honduras. Eventually, they reached Trujillo, where they landed a force and took the town and a ship at anchor there.



Next, as Morgan reported, he and his buccaneers travelled south some 450 miles along the Mosquito Coast (Nicaragua) before anchoring at Monkey Point, south of Bluefields. There they met up with nine Indians who were hostile to the Spaniards. The objective was a city the buccaneers knew as *Gran Granada*, which they believed held great wealth. *Gran Granada* lay on the western shore of a large inland lake, *Lago de Nicaragua* (aka *Lago Cocibolca*), over 150 miles as the crow flies west of Monkey Point. The freshwater lake lay so far inland that the inhabitants gave little thought to an attack by Caribbean buccaneers. They had not yet met the intrepid Harry Morgan, however.

After hiding their larger vessels in an inlet at Monkey Point, the buccaneers loaded nine piraguas with men, arms and some supplies. Next, they headed inland, using the San Juan river whenever they could. They took very little food with them, for they planned to live off the land. With the Indians as their guides, Morgan and the buccaneers travelled along the twisting, winding river past three waterfalls and into the southern tip of *Lago de Nicaragua* at a place called *San Carlos*. It was gruelling work requiring much skill and not something the Spaniards would expect.

From *San Carlos*, sheltering among small cays and low islands during the day and rowing at night, Morgan's party traversed nearly the lake's full length and width to reach *Gran Granada*. Once there, the buccaneers lost no

time and, as Modyford later transcribed from Harry Morgan's report:

... landed near the city of Gran Granada, marched undiscried into the centre of the city, fired a volley, overturned 18 great guns in the Parada Place, took the serjeant-major's [sic] house, wherein were all their arms and ammunition, secured in the Great Church 300 of the best men prisoners, abundance of which were churchmen, plundered for 16 hours, discharged the prisoners, sunk all the boats and so came away.

Gran Granada was said to be bigger than Portsmouth with seven churches, a cathedral, several schools, and monasteries, all built of stone, as were most of the town's houses. For defence, the Spaniards had six horse and foot companies and many Indians and slaves.

Believing the buccaneers intended to stay, more than 1,000 Indians "joined the privateers in plundering the city and would have killed the prisoners, especially the churchmen." However, on learning Morgan's army planned to leave, the Indians headed for the safety of some nearby mountains, though a few did join Captain Martien's crew. As we know, Captain Martien sailed back to Jamaica with the bulk of Morgan's flotilla, but he learned Holland was at war with England, and being a Dutchman, he feared imprisonment at Port Royal. So Martien had slipped out of the harbour unnoticed and sailed on to Tortuga.

Modyford took no action against the privateer captains. He cast his letter to the Duke of Albemarle in such a way as to imply their expedition was more of a reconnaissance of Spain's mainland defences. He completed his letter with his recommendations regarding England's future military ambitions in the region. And there, apparently, the matter rested.