

Chapter 11.1

Harry Takes A Wife, part II



As mentioned earlier, Harry Morgan was unlikely to have been part of Admiral Edward Mansfield's buccaneer campaign against Spanish America—the *Viceroyalty of New Spain*—in April 1666. The newly-married Morgan had recently returned from an arduous 22-month campaign of his own, he was newly married, and he had other family commitments that obligated him to stay at home in Jamaica. Nevertheless, we will cover Mansfield's engagements in some detail because it informs our understanding of the environment in which Harry lived. Military campaigns launched by England against Spanish territories were commonplace in the mid-seventeenth century. And the overwhelming majority of the significant ones originated in Jamaica and were fought mainly by adopted Jamaicans. Harry was at first a minor participant, then a major player in some. Others he missed entirely, though many chroniclers would have him at the centre of most if not all buccaneer battles.

After Admiral Edward Mansfield accepted his buccaneers' refusal to attack the Dutch at Curaçao, he seemed willing enough to accede to their demands to use their Portuguese letters-of-marque against Spain. Accordingly, he led his fleet to the coast of Costa Rica. Arriving on 8 Apr 1666, the buccaneers marched 90 miles inland in the hope of taking the city of *Cartago* by surprise. In those days, *Cartago* was the capital of both *Cartago* province and Costa Rica, then a part of the *Captaincy General of Guatemala*, nominally part of the *Viceroyalty of New Spain*. In

practice, the captaincy general was a largely autonomous entity within the Spanish Empire.

As Mansfield led his men inland, his army of about 600 men of several nationalities plundered plantations and settlements but secured little in the way of provisions. Moral suffered as the men argued among themselves over the sharing of their limited food supply. Tensions ran high between the English and the French buccaneers. The next target was the mountain stronghold of *Turrialba*, which lay east of *Cartago*. But, by the time Mansfield's force reached *Turrialba*, the Spaniards had been forewarned and had prepared for the attack.



1 - FORT OF FREEDOM AT OLD PROVIDENCE | DRAWN BY LOUIS PÉROU DE LACROIX

The buccaneers entered the town and plundered it, but soon a large force of Spanish militiamen launched an effective counter-attack, forcing the invaders to retreat. At a council of war, the buccaneer leaders agreed it was more prudent to cut their losses and retreat to the coast and the

safety of their ships. Mansfield reasoned that the people of *Cartago* were by now forewarned and had probably hidden their valuables and assembled a strong enough force to resist further attacks.

On 23 Apr 1666, the exhausted buccaneers boarded their ships with little to show for their efforts. Four ships then deserted, two of which returned to the Point at Port Royal, and two sailed for Tortuga. Unprepared to return to Jamaica empty-handed, Mansfield decided to capture the strategically located Old Providence (*Isla de Providencia*). The tiny island lay off the eastern coast of Nicaragua, almost equidistant from *Cartagena*, *Puerto Bello*, and Jamaica, and close to the usual route Spanish ships sailed between their ports on the Main, Havana, and *Vera Cruz*. The fertile island, well supplied by freshwater springs, had been an English Puritan colony during Cromwell's time, and in its last days had become a base for English privateers. However, after a little over ten years of English occupation, the Spaniards expelled the settlers, killing some and cruelly mistreating others.

Mansfield still commanded four English and two French privateers, totalling about two hundred men. This reduced force sailed along the rocky coast and, after an early morning landing, marched nearly 14 miles to surprise the governor, *Don Estaban del Campo*. The buccaneers took the governor prisoner along with 170 other captives. And, following a promise to be set free on the mainland, the defenders surrendered.

On 26 May 1666, the English and French buccaneers captured the fort along with twenty-six pieces of ordnance—many with Queen Elizabeth of England’s coat of arms engraved on them—100 barrels of powder and some shot. Mansfield claimed very little other plunder was found, though, he did admit to capturing 150 slaves. This is likely a case of the privateers sharing most of the loot and declaring a much smaller amount to Port Royal officials. Of course, the Spanish inhabitants’ estimate was much higher, as many hoped for compensation from Spain.

More likely than not, there would have been some coin in the island’s treasury. Besides, since the island was surprised and the Spaniards had little time to hide their valuables, the inhabitants almost certainly would have had some coin and other valuables worth stealing. One estimate puts the total, excluding the value of the slaves, at about 55,000 pieces of eight, or about £13,750. This the privateers probably divided among themselves, with no share going to the King or the Lord High Admiral. Not much by today’s standards, perhaps, but it is likely that each of Mansfield’s men took away with them the equivalent of from one to five years’ pay of a seaman of the mid-1600s.

It took nearly two weeks to loot and secure the island. Once that had run its course, Mansfield left Captain Charles Hatsell^[1] as “keeper of the magazine” and appointed a French privateer captain from Tortuga, *Le Sieur Simon*,^[2] as commander of Old Province’s small garrison.

The Frenchman was to serve until Mansfield returned with reinforcements from Jamaica. Some accounts claim it was Hatsell who was left in charge. I question this, however, for as we will see later, it was Simon who the Spaniards sent to greet an English ship that visited Province after the Spaniards had once again conquered the island.

[1] Other spelling: Hadsell, Hattsell; formerly master of the ship *Prosperous*, which was captured by a Spanish royal man-of-war and taken to San Domingo. After being kept in prison there for fourteen months, he was sent to Havana, and from there he had made his escape with five other English prisoners.

[2] James Burney, *History of the Buccaneers of America*, (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1891).

Regardless of who Mansfield left in command, most accounts agree that he left a garrison of only thirty-five men and fifty negro slaves to defend the island until he reported back to Jamaica and could arrange for Modyford to send reinforcements.

Mansfield arrived at Port Royal on 12 Jun 1666 to proclaim his success and invite the governor to furnish a garrison of soldiers to retain his conquest as a dependency of Jamaica. On his way there, Mansfield had stopped in Panamá and disembarked the former governor of Providence Island, *Don Estaban del Campo*, and his fellow captives under their terms of surrender. This honouring of the surrender terms contrasted with the practice of the “haughty Spanish dons” who too often ignored surrender terms and

shackled English prisoners before setting them to work as slaves—or simply executed them.

We believe that Morgan had become one of Modyford's confidants and knew the governor considered Mansfield's seizure of Old Providence technically illegal. We also believe he concurred with Modyford's belief that Mansfield had corrected an injustice when he recaptured the former English colony. After all, both men would have known England was the rightful owner of Old Providence, for it had been the English who were the first Europeans to settle there. Therefore, it made sense that it was the Spanish who occupied it illegally. Besides, both understood only too well how bitterly the Spaniards complained of being harassed by English *corsarios* during times of peace. The same Spaniards that seized English ships and committed other acts of war, seemingly without a second thought.

The Providence Island Company established Providence (*Isla de Providencia*) as an English Puritan colony in 1629. It was founded by a group of "friends," including several of England's richest peers and leading commoners. In its last days, the colony had become a favourite base for English privateers, who preyed on the Spaniards of the region. In 1641, the Spaniards captured the island, killing some of its inhabitants and cruelly mistreating others. The Spaniards' actions were the subject of a complaint by Oliver Cromwell. In his letter to Major General Fortescue, he said it was a place he "*could heartily wish were in our hands again, believing it lies so advantageously in reference, and especially for the hindrance of the Peru trade and Cartagena, that you might not only have great advantage thereby*

| of intelligence and surprise, but even block up the same.” [Carlyle, Cromwell, Letter 141, to Fortescue, 30th October, 1655; Newton, Puritan Colony.]

Men were living in Jamaica who had been expelled from Old Providence when the Spaniards captured that island. Not surprisingly then, news of its recovery was widely applauded. So, reasoning that he had little choice in a matter that was by then a *fait accompli*, Modyford officially “reproved” Mansfield “for doing it without order,” but retroactively approved the taking of Old Providence and set about reinforcing its garrison.

Jamaica no longer had a standing army to draw from, so Governor Modyford called for volunteers to reinforce Old Providence. He chose Major Samuel Smith to be the commander. Accompanying him were Captain Stanley, “an honest old soldier” already in his sixties, and 32 men [Beeston’s Journal]. The adventurous Sir Thomas Whetstone, now a successful and experienced privateer and speaker of the Jamaica House of Assembly, volunteered to go along and offered his ship as transport.

Mansfield’s recapture of Old Providence came at a time of renewed optimism at the Point. Colonel Harry Morgan had organized the reinforcement of the port’s defences and had helped rebuild the ranks of the local militia, which now totalled a respectable 400 fighting men. Besides, David Martien, who Modyford referred to as “the best man of Tortuga,” had committed to using Port Royal

as his base and had promised to move his two ships there. Moreover, the vessels of the Curaçao expedition had returned to be refitted. These, along with several others, provided much-needed employment for many of the Point's labourers and tradesmen. In short, Port Royal was back in business.

Major Smith and Thomas Whetstone set sail from Port Royal and arrived at Providence Island with their small party at the end of July. There he found England's newest colony thinly defended with only 51 men to defend both Providence and the nearby smaller island of *Santa Catalina*. In August, another small party left Jamaica to join Major Smith. When Whetstone did not return to the Point as expected, Jamaicans became concerned about the new colony's plight. Finally, on 5 Oct 1666, disappointing news arrived to say that Providence had once again been lost to the Spaniards.

The news reached the Point when Richard Rawlinson, Isaac Webber, and Richard Cree, "emaciated and wretched men," made their escape from captivity at *Puerto Bello* and told their pitiful tale. The escapees had surrendered on condition of being supplied with a ship to take them to Jamaica. In their depositions, the three men declared:

But when they laid down their arms, the Spaniards refused them the barque and carried them as slaves to Porto Bello, where they were chained to the ground in a dungeon ten feet by twelve, in

which were thirty-three prisoners. They were forced to work in the water from five in the morning till seven at night, and at such a rate that the Spaniards confessed they made one of them do more work than three negroes, yet when weak with want of victuals and sleep, they were knocked down and beaten with cudgels, and four or five died. Having no clothes, their backs were blistered in the sun, their necks, shoulders, and hands raw with carrying stones and mortar, their feet chopped, and their legs bruised and battered with the irons, and their corpses noisome to one another. The daily abuse of their religion and King, and the continual trouble they had with friars would be tedious to mention.

[Source: Calendar of State Papers, America and West Indies, No. 1851, Depositions of Richard Rawlinson, Isaac Webber, and Richard Cree, 5th October, 1666.]

Once the story became public, Jamaicans were enraged. At the best of times, most locals needed little justification for their hatred towards their Spanish neighbours. If no quarter was offered to them, Jamaicans, in turn, would give none. Full details of the Spanish attack on Providence Island were not known for several more months, however. Nor were Jamaicans aware of the fate of Major Smith or Sir Thomas Whetstone.

During the next year, news of Edward Mansfield's death reached the Point. Soon after his return to Port Royal in the summer of 1666, the old buccaneer had sailed on another cruise. During that cruise, his ship was captured by a Spanish man-of-war and taken to Havana, Cuba. Later, he and many of his crew were put to death by order of

Cuba's governor, who was said to have executed more than 300 pirates within two years. (Another account has the buccaneer chief returning the Tortuga and dying there in early 1667.) This news was received with sadness at the Point, for Mansfield had served that community well for many years. Harry Morgan must also have felt some sadness at the demise of his old mentor.

Shortly after Christmas of 1666, Morgan received more upsetting news. After nearly a year of hostilities between England and France, the latter had declared war against England. This meant Jamaica could expect attacks from the Tortuga-based French. English shipping and seaside plantations on the north side of the island would be especially vulnerable.

Bertrand d'Ogeron, the French governor of Tortuga, had warded off any plan by Modyford to occupy Tortuga. In doing so, he made his tiny island a haven for both a powerful privateer fleet and for other adventurers who might more accurately be described as pirates. He attracted many of these men from other popular ports and hideaways throughout the Caribbean by a promise to forego his claim to the share of their booty to which his office entitled him. And, as mentioned earlier, he was able to obtain for them Portuguese letters-of-marque against Spain, since France was nominally at peace with that country. Moreover, d'Ogeron had begun the unusual practice of advancing interest-free loans to those

buccaneers who continued hunting feral cows and hogs and wished to build permanent houses.



JOHN ESQUEMELING, A BUCCANEER who sailed with Harry Morgan on his later voyages, wrote that Morgan had accompanied Edward Mansfield on his expeditions to Cuba and Central America and was with the buccaneer admiral when he captured Old Providence. Esquemeling's account lacks accuracy in other areas, and, as expressed earlier, I doubt Morgan was directly involved in any of those raids. Morgan probably did have something to do with garrisoning Old Providence, however.

We see evidence of this when it is to Morgan—and not any of the other experienced “old guard”—that Modyford turns when next he fears an invasion. It must have taken months of personal contact with Modyford for Morgan to have acquired the reputation and local influence needed to justify the governor's confidence in him. Had Morgan been with Mansfield on the raids mentioned above, how likely is it that Modyford would have gotten to know him well enough to trust him so wholly with the command of the colony's defences?

According to Esquemeling's account, Morgan wanted to keep Old Providence as a pirate base, implying Morgan himself was a pirate. This seems fanciful to me for Providence was considered an official territory of England. In

fact, not knowing the Spaniards had retaken the islands, the Privy Council in London had gone so far as to appoint Thomas Modyford's brother, Sir James Modyford, to act as Providence's governor, thereby placing the island colony within England's jurisdiction and under its protection.

Besides, far from being a pirate, Harry Morgan was scrupulous about obtaining a genuine commission signed by Jamaica's governor to cover his raids. By any legal sense of the word, Morgan was not a pirate. Unfortunately, Morgan's history was first popularized by John Esquemeling, a malcontent who had served under Morgan's command, and by his Spanish enemies. Those first impressions have stuck and have been embellished over the centuries.

Esquemeling wrote primarily for the Dutch and Spanish markets, and Spain especially had been for centuries a bitter enemy of England. The English edition of his book, *The Buccaneers of America*, was made from a translation of the Spanish edition in which Morgan was demonized with no fear of penalty for libelling him. When the English edition appeared, Morgan did sue and won.



ALTHOUGH HARRY MORGAN HAD overseen the upgrading of Port Royal's defences, the island was sorely in need of a Royal Navy presence. Those in command believed two fifth-rate frigates would be sufficient and argued their

cause with London's Privy Council committee. Two Royal Navy men-of-war, the Jamaicans reasoned, would allow the governor to coerce the privateers into defending Jamaica and attacking their enemies' interests in the West Indies. It was generally accepted in Jamaica that, without naval power to keep them in line, the privateers would continue "*to prey upon the Spaniards whether countenanced at Jamaica or not,*" for these were not men who would give up their way of life and become farmers. In truth, their neighbours invited attack for the Spaniards "*have so inveterate a hatred against the English in those parts that they will not hear of any trade or reconciliation, but any of the islanders that they can cowardly surprise, they butcher inhumanly.*"

William Beeston's journal entry for 15 Jul 1667 stated that Sir James Modyford, the governor's brother, arrived in Jamaica on that day. As noted earlier, the Privy Council in London had appointed Sir James as governor of Providence. So, with that island colony once again in Spanish hands, his brother named Sir James lieutenant-general of Jamaica, captain of the fort and governor of Port Royal. And in the same entry, Beeston noted that "the private men-of-war went in and out and brought in prizes frequently," but it appears that buccaneers cruised independently and undertook no combined major operation.

The requested English warships were not soon forthcoming, however. Not until 14 Oct 1668 did the frigate HMS *Oxford* arrive at Port Royal, "*for the defence of his*

Majesty's plantation of Jamaica, and suppressing the Insolence of Privateers upon that Coast, the Governor and Planters of Jamaica." [Acts of the Privy Council, I, No. 762, 13 Mar 1668.]

Oxford was a 26-gun fifth-rate ship launched at Deptford in 1656. She had been assigned to Jamaica station several months earlier, but her refitting had been interrupted by frequent delays.