



**Captain Henry Morgan (1635-1688)**

What must first be made clear is that Henry Morgan was not a pirate. A rogue maybe, but not a pirate. He was a privateer. This meant he held a paper issued by a representative of the English government, the governor of Jamaica, empowering him to fight the Spaniards on England's behalf. His pay was in effect what he managed to steal from Spain.

Today this might seem a dastardly way for any government to conduct itself, but in the world of the 17th century these were accepted means of conducting naval war among European powers. Hence Henry Morgan was not an outlaw pirate but a sea-raider authorised by an English Letter of Marque.

Much about the legendary Sir Henry Morgan has become blurred by myth. Not even upon his birthplace can the historians decide. He was either born in 1635 in either Penkarne in Monmouth, England or Llanrhymny in Glamorgan, Wales. Though it is believed he spent his childhood in Wales and he and his family were indeed Welsh. As such his family appeared well versed in the art of warfare. Two of his uncles, Edward Morgan and Thomas Morgan were officers of some success although opposing camps. During the English civil war Thomas was a Colonel for the Royalist cause and his brother Edward even rose to the rank of Major-General in Cromwell's army.

Most, if not all of Henry Morgan's youth is unknown. Also how the later infamous buccaneer ever reached the Caribbean appears to be disputed. I have come across two versions. One is that he was "Barbadosed". - Many a hapless visitor of Bristol was beaten over the head and found himself on a ship the next day, on the way to America where he would sold as an

indentured labourer. –



Oliver Cromwell, Lord Protector  
of England and her Commonwealth.

Later, as England's Puritan Ruler Oliver Cromwell sent forward an army to the Caribbean under the command of General Venables to attack the Spaniards, Henry in early 1655 joined this army to escape his indenture on the island. The other version says Morgan joined General Venables' troops in 1654 as a volunteer at Plymouth. Either way, Henry Morgan joined up with Venables' forces.

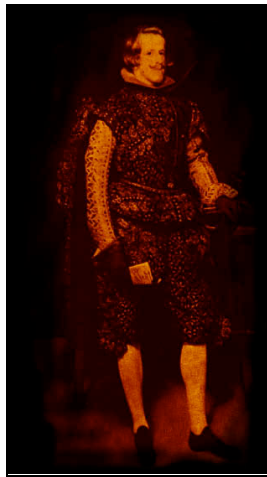
But, as so often in history, great careers arise as a consequence of complete disasters. General Venables' attack on the City of Santo Domingo was defeated. Exhausted and bruised the beaten army dragged itself back to its ships and limped on downwind to the then almost worthless island of Jamaica. There the remaining seven to eight thousand troops stormed the weakly defended shore against the efforts of 200 Spanish soldiers and conquered the island's only town, Santiago de la Vega.

But this apparent victory was in fact a complete catastrophe. Cromwell had sent an army, backed up by a huge fleet. Venables had recruited in both England and the Caribbean around eight to nine thousand men. He had been expected to achieve a significant victory, capturing a Spanish stronghold, the likes of San Juan, Santo Domingo, Havana, Santiago de Cuba, Vera Cruz or even Cartagena. Instead the English had taken a totally undeveloped island. Both General Venables and Admiral Penn, the commander of the fleet, were immediately thrown in the infamous Tower of London on their return to England.

Meanwhile on Jamaica the dying continued. The troops were being decimated by tropical diseases they knew little or nothing about. Yellow fever, dysentery and malaria killed droves of men. A Spanish resistance, fighting the English in the forests and savannas as well as runaway slaves, called Maroons, were reducing their numbers one by one. Throughout all this Henry Morgan survived.

What followed in the next few years were the courageous naval escapades and raids on Spanish ports, first by Vice-Admiral Goodson, then by Commodore Mings. And with the latter Henry Morgan had finally a part to play. During Ming's 1662 raid on Santiago de Cuba Henry Morgan appears as a captain of one of the ships involved. The attack was a thundering success, with the infamous Castillo del Morro guarding the entrance to the Bay of Santiago being totally destroyed.

Then in 1663, once again a captain of a privateer ship, Morgan joined Mings on his daring attack on San Francisco de Campeche. And once more the ramshackle fleet of English navy vessels and privateers returned with rich plunder.



Philip IV, proud King of Spain,  
who truly must have wished  
never to have heard the name  
Henry Morgan.

But Henry Morgan and his privateering friends were not the kind to wait around. Before the end of the year 1663 they were already underway again. Villa Hermosa, Trujillo and Granada fell victim to their attacks in a campaign which surpassed anything seen so far. By the time the privateers reached Port Royal, the main harbour of Jamaica, he was indeed a wealthy

man.

By early 1665 Henry Morgan had married his cousin Mary Elizabeth, the exact date of the marriage being unknown. The Morgan family had arrived in force by now on Jamaica. His uncle Colonel Edward Morgan had also arrived since, though had sadly soon died during an attack upon the Dutch island of Statia, Holland and England being once again at war with each other.

In 1666 Morgan was made Colonel of the Port Royal Militia, a defence force in which he had long served as captain and which he now commanded. And with the Dutch leader of the Brethren of the Coast, Edward Mansvelt (called Mansfield by the English), having died on Tortuga, the buccaneers promoted Henry Morgan to take his place and be their "Admiral".

The so undisputed king of the buccaneers, Henry Morgan went on to attack Puerto del Principe on Cuba which brought in another 50,000 pieces of eight. His men being disappointed by the recent booty from Puerto del Principe, Morgan was not to rest. And at the end of June he was already off the great harbour of Puerto Bello on the northern coast of the Isthmus of Panama. In a daring attack he took the town, held its citizens to ransom and beat off 3,000 strong troops coming to the aid of the town from the city of Panama. Morgan and his men arrived back at Port Royal with 250,000 pieces of eight along other booty in the hulls of their ships. This amounted to an absolute fortune!

Then in October 1668 Morgan set sail yet again. Governor Modyford and Morgan had agreed that it was likely the Spaniards were preparing an attack upon Jamaica. To prevent this it had been agreed Morgan should attack them instead. The best target it was thought would be Cartagena, Spain's chiefest harbour along the Main. But on Cow Island where Morgan established his base for the operation, his prime ship, *the Oxford*, exploded, killing 300 of his 900 men.

Reduced by a third of his strength, Morgan no longer thought himself strong enough to tackle Cartagena and, following an idea by one of his French captains who'd earlier sailed under the infamous L'Ollonais, he decided to instead attempt the harbour town of Maracaibo. The raid on Maracaibo was of little success, all the people having fled the city before the buccaneers had landed. Morgan sent out search parties to track down some of the citizens

hiding in the forests. They found at least some people, but still not much money was to be had. So Morgan instead decided to take his fleet further into the Lagoon of Maracaibo towards the town of Gibraltar at its southern end. But once again, the people were already gone.

After eight unsuccessful weeks in the Lagoon of Maracaibo he sailed back for Maracaibo itself. There he was to famously meet at sea with Vice-Admiral Alonso del Campo y Espinosa, who commanded three powerful men-o-war. On 1 May 1669 the battle took place whereby Morgan's buccaneers sailed a fireship (a ship purposely set alight) into the Vice-Admiral's 48-gun ship *Magdalen*. The *Magdalen* burnt and sank, the *Santa Louisa* fled and the *Marquesa*, the third Spanish ship, was captured by the buccaneers.



*The battle between Henry Morgan and Don Alonso at Maracaibo*

Vice-Admiral Alonso though managed to save himself into the fort of San Carlos island, the guns of which ranged across the narrow entrance of the Lagoon of Maracaibo. Thus emerged a stalemate between these most classic of enemies.



Carlos II, the ailing King of Spain  
to succeed Philip IV in 1665.

Morgan controlled both the city of Maracaibo, and all the ships. Meanwhile Don Alonso was marooned in his little fort but controlled the only exit the buccaneers had. The Spanish citizens now agreed to pay a ransom of 20,000 pesos (pieces of eight) to save their city from being torched by the buccaneers. But Don Alonso refused to agree with his compatriots and let the pirates get away. Morgan's men meanwhile busied themselves raising the gold which had sunk with the stubborn Spaniard's great warship, bringing in yet another 15,000 pieces of eight and more in plate gold.

Then in a strike of genius Morgan began to fake landing his troops close to Don Alonso's fort for a night attack. (the pirates sat upright when being rowed landward and lay flat and out of sight, when the "empty" boats were rowed back to pick up "some more" pirates.) Thus convinced he was about to be attacked with canoes from landward, Don Alonso moved all his guns to the landward side of the fort and Morgan cheekily set sail and with the ebbtide slipped out of the now unguarded channel of the Lagoon. Leaving his seething enemy behind him, the cunning rogue sailed back for Port Royal where he arrived in triumph on 17th May 1669. *(Poor Don Alonso was at first arrested and deported to Spain for questioning. But there he was cleared and deservedly commended for his bravery.)*

For the following year Morgan concentrated his efforts more on expanding his plantations than raiding hapless Spaniards. He'd since grown rich and was making the most of it, investing into sugar and becoming a man of

status rather than mere infamy.

Though by the end of 1670 he was to be scheming again. Uniting the two pirate forces of the Caribbean, those from Port Royal with those from Tortuga, he now ventured fourth for Panama. Thirty six captains under his command and 1800 men he first conquered the little island of Old Providence before continuing southward. He overcame Fort San Lorenzo at Chagres and then, travelling up the Rio Chagres he headed for his main goal - Panama.

Governor Don Juan Perez de Guzman, viceroy of Panama, met him in battle outside Panama on 19 January, outnumbering Morgan's forces by about 500. Though superior in numbers, the Spaniards' resistance was a fiasco, many of Guzman's troops fleeing after the first shots were fired. It appears that Morgan's reputation had preceded him and that in their heart of hearts the Spanish ranks no longer believed they could overcome the mighty buccaneer.

Their city fell and, the origins of the fire are disputed, burnt to the ground. An estimated 400,000 pieces of eight were eventually stolen and/or extorted from the formerly great Spanish city, but most men are believed to have been disappointed by this amount. Panama was understood to be the capital city of Spanish America (one of the richest cities in the whole world!) and hence it had been expected that one would carry away unseen riches. But the silver gathered from the Peruvian mines and the merchants' fortunes had all been taken to safety before Morgan's army arrived.

Though as Morgan in March 1671 got back to Chagres on the north side of the Isthmus, things were to get worse. Message had arrived that a treaty had been signed between England and Spain. The buccaneers had in fact attacked Panama during times of peace between the two Kingdoms. Only shortly after Morgan had left Port Royal had the message arrived with Governor Modyford.

Morgan returned back to Port Royal in April. By June Governor Modyford was already under arrest and on his way back to England. But as more and more news reached Europe of the great raid and the Spanish court's protests at this breach of the peace got ever more outraged, the order to arrest Henry Morgan was eventually dispatched to Jamaica, reaching the island against the end of 1671.

At first the new governor, Sir Thomas Lynch, was reluctant to execute this order, fearing public disorder if the island's greatest hero was put in chains. But on 4 April 1672 Henry Morgan was arrested and taken back to England on the frigate *Welcome*. Though strangely he was never to see the insides of the infamous Tower of London, where his former governor Modyford was incarcerated, although Morgan too remained a prisoner of State.

England was at war with Holland again and governor Lynch on Jamaica was getting into some trouble trying to fight the Dutch off, for the buccaneers seemed little cooperative once their leader had been taken away in disgrace. In July 1673, considering West Indian affairs, the King eventually sought the advice of Henry Morgan, with the infamous buccaneer replying in writing what should be done to defend England's greatest colony (the sugar trade was very, very lucrative and brought in lots of tax for the Crown!).

It is believed that Morgan's memorandum made a good impression with his Majesty. And, wonder over wonders, it was soon decided that Morgan should return to his home Jamaica as deputy governor to Lord Vaughan who was to succeed luckless governor Lynch. And as though it would not have been enough to be sent back home to his beloved Jamaica for the 34-year old Welshman, just before Christmas 1675 he was knighted!



Charles II, King of England,  
who bestowed a knighthood  
on one of the world's most formidable rascals.



On 6 March Morgan was back in Port Royal. But never again was he to be the infamous pirate, far more the respectable man of power and status. He soon settled down to life in the island's council, overseeing the defences and of course expanding his fortunes as a rich sugar planter.



George Monck, Duke of Albermarle,  
ally of Henry Morgan.

He was made Governor to Jamaica in 1682  
and sought to have re-elected as Lieutenant Governor.

The attempt failed, though he gave him a seat on the island's Council.

During his further life as deputy governor he showed great ability when acting as governor (when the governor proper was in England), endured countless quarrels and political intrigues with political opponents and even sued for libel the publishers of Esquelemling's famous tales about him and the buccaneers of America. For a time his political enemies did get the better of him, though he was restored to the council shortly before his death on 25 August 1688 .

Sir Henry Morgan had been a heavy-drinking, fighting man of much charisma and equipped with an indomitable will to succeed. He had been ruthless and, in execution of his bloody trade, he had no doubt been brutal at times. But Henry Morgan had never been the sadistic, drunken lout of Esquemeling's stories.

His contribution to the building of Jamaica had been immense. But with unique irony history wiped away almost any trace of his doings from the surface of the earth. As though the gods were out to prove that buccaneers by their mere nature only could destroy and would leave nothing worthwhile in their wake, shortly after Morgan's death on 7 June 1696 a massive

earthquake wiped out the city he had done so much for to build - Port Royal.

***Bibliography:***

*Harry Morgan's Way*  
by Dudley Pope

*Buccaneer*  
by H.R.Allen