

Hofstra University

Model United Nations Conference 2021



Yoh ho,

Yoh ho,

A Pirate's life for me.

Historical Crisis Committee

based on *The Rise and Fall of Libertatia* by Mike Roller

Hunter Pelskey, Chair
Charles Timm, Crisis Director

Introduction to the Committee

Welcome to the Hofstra University Model United Nations' Historical Crisis Committee; The Rise and Fall of Libertatia. This committee will follow the historical account of a reported pirate utopia known as Libertatia that was founded by Captain James Mission. Although there are few records of this fabled nation, historical evidence of both democratic and semi-socialist agendas within pirate crews provides a comprehensive idea of how Libertatia would have been governed. Many believe the revolutionary ideas professed by pirate crews in the 17th and 18th centuries were a monumental leap forward for conceptual governance and leadership. There is notable documentation of Libertatia's founding, yet there are very few accounts describing how Libertatia functioned. Therefore, it can be presumed that the pirate utopia quickly became a failed state. This committee will attempt to fill in the details of the story of Libertatia and its untimely demise during the Golden Age of Piracy.

As opposed to a typical General Assembly committee, each delegate will be debating on behalf of an infamous pirate that sailed around the time of Captain Mission. In taking on the role of these individuals, you will have direct command over several tools through crisis notes. For instance, a delegate may decide to move their ship to a specific area; they may also choose to send their crew on an objective. You may request to do any of these actions, and, more by sending a letter to the Crisis Director, Charles Timm. He, alongside our crisis staff, will approve or deny any of your requested actions and help guide you throughout the committee. As a conniving pirate, you're welcome to try to steal more ships, claim booty, or steal from your fellow pirates. Good luck to each of you on your journey to create Libertatia, the legendary pirate utopia.

Introduction to the Topic

Pirates have existed throughout history, from the Bronze Age to the modern era.¹ Most often, pirate ships welcomed those from all different backgrounds, regardless of their background, race,² or even gender.³ Despite the world leaving little room for women to excel professionally during the 1600s and 1700s, the pirate community was slightly more forgiving. One may characterize historical pirate culture as an egalitarian society striving for equality and justice. The individuals involved in piracy were considered criminals and came from all sects of life., creating a diverse community with stark differences in worldviews and values.

Although the crew lacked uniformity and had many differences, fighting among crewmates was rarer than one might anticipate. The common goal of claiming riches often overshadowed the disagreements between pirate crewmates. Working alongside one another to seize ships, goods, and gold was a unifying motivation in pirate life. Working together, pirate seafarers created a melting-pot of ideas that was unseen in history up to that point. The unique blending of cultures among the crew often led to revolutionary ideas regarding governance and liberty. By the time of the Golden Age of Piracy, many pirate ships used a democratic system to elect their leaders, create constitutions, and distribute their wealth.⁴

The 17th and 18th centuries were the Golden Age of Piracy, where more than 5,000 pirates sailed the seas. Although piracy has always existed, more than ever, seamen and women hoisted their sails to claim a life of oceanic crime in this period. Most often, poor farmers driven from their land, as well as small business owners displaced from urban areas, took up piracy.⁵ Additionally, hundreds of unemployed sailors from their nation's Navy used piracy to create a livelihood from their skills.⁶ This occupation was tempting because of its promise of independence and wealth beyond their imagination.

Many pirate recruits were often rudimentary seamen. Those hired by the British Navy were more ordinary men of the sea, held with strict discipline and low wages. Alternatively, those belonging to a pirate crew enjoyed greater freedom, high wages, and the democratic process. Another common way to be enlisted into a pirate crew was via kidnapping. Often, when pirates seized a ship, they would offer a position to the sailors they had defeated. Once again, offering more money, better food, and plenty of alcohol made pirate life an attractive proposition to these sailors.⁷

Before joining a pirate crew, many ships would have every member sign a constitution. All potential crewmates could propose amendments, so that each individual could be more comfortable with the ship's lifestyle. All crewmates would vote on these amendments before adding them to the constitution. In most cases, if a sailor disagreed with the document, they had the option to walk away without repercussions. Similarly, an individual who signed on to the pirate ship wanted to leave; they could do so at any time without issue.⁸

After signing the constitution, pirates could partake in another vital democratic process, voting for their leaders. The Captain and the Quartermaster were two fundamental positions on most pirate ships. The crew popularly elected both roles, and they held the right to impeach or contest their leaders whenever they pleased.⁹ With this system, pirate crews could prevent tyrannical leaders or oppressive individuals from seizing the helm. Crewmates enjoyed a fair democratic process to form a constitution, elect their leaders, and run for office.

The role of pirate Captain in a modern context often invokes imagery of a dictatorial leader. In most cases, this representation of a pirate Captain and their ship is a manufactured and propagated concept. In reality, these Captains held little authority regarding the day-to-day

business aboard the vessel. Their job was not to manage the ship during its voyage; instead, they set strategy and enjoyed absolute command during battle.¹⁰

The pirate Captain, like a General at war, was in charge of commanding forces and planning attacks to seize of other boats.¹¹ For those they opposed, a violent, absolute leader in combat was intimidating. Often, Captains would not only use remarkably gruesome techniques while in battle, but also against their prisoners in the wake of the assault. In one particular case, a group of pirates would chain their victims to a sinking ship after removing all four limbs of the opposing Captain.¹² Eventually, the systematic violence created a reputation for brutality and destruction. With this perception, most pirate raids would result in surrender before the bloodshed took place.¹³ Understandably, most merchant ships or naval vessels could not afford to lose the lives of their crews in exchange for the goods they carried. The legend of infamy created by pirate Captains was an essential tool to make their job easier.¹⁴

As opposed to the ship's Captain, the Quartermaster held most of the real power. Generally, their job involved taking care of crewmate disputes and distributing the booty.¹⁵ Unlike the Captain, Quartermasters had significant responsibilities outside of fighting. Their role aboard the vessel included allocating places to sleep for each crewmate, which often included the Captain, within the same communal area. Quartermasters also rationed food and ensured everyone ate the same amount.¹⁶ Their job included punishing disobedient sailors, or those likely to start a mutiny. Finally, Quartermasters would decide what to take and what to leave behind on pillaged vessels. After dividing the money between the men, the Captain and the Quartermaster would often each take a double share.

The Founding of Libertatia

The life of Captain James Mission is not a well-documented one. His experiences before piracy elude many historians, and few records detail his actions as a pirate. The most illuminating document written about Captain Mission was composed in the 1720s by Captain Charles Johnson. Johnson wrote multiple books describing the life of several famous pirates in that era, including Thomas Tew, Blackbeard, Henry Avery, and Calico Jack. Many of these stories are verifiable through historical records. However, Johnson's account of Captain Mission and his legendary pirate colony remain widely unconfirmed. The following is a summary of Mission's life and the founding of Libertatia as described by Captain Johnson.¹⁷

James Mission was born in Provence, in southeastern France, in the late 1600s and raised by his wealthy father. Mission proved to be of remarkable intelligence. When his father tried to push Mission into life as a Musketeer, Mission decided to rebel, dreaming of sailing the world. Conceding to his son's desires, Mission's father sent a letter of recommendation, allowing Mission to volunteer on the *Victorie* a French privateering ship captained by one of his relatives. Mission soon became dedicated to learning all aspects of sailing, observing and learning about the various operations aboard such a large vessel. Additionally, because of his family status, Mission formed a friendly yet respectful relationship with his crewmates.¹⁸

Out of happenstance, the crew members aboard vessels such as the *Victorie* were remarkably diverse. Their travels from around the world made it desirable to have crew members who spoke different languages or were comfortable with different societies. Mission's experience aboard the *Victorie* was no different—he encountered many individuals of various backgrounds, races, religions, and ideologies.¹⁹ Many would deem this aspect of pirate life responsible for the unprecedented progressive views often found within pirate communities.

Nonetheless, James Mission would find himself particularly fond of Signor Caraccioli, a Dominican priest and fellow crewmate on the *Victorie*. Despite his efforts to earn a position in the priesthood, Caraccioli grew disenchanted with organized religion, and instead saw it as an institution used to exploit the weak. Additionally, he adamantly rejected the concept of slavery and its role in society in that era. Due to his exposure to these ideas and values, Mission eventually subscribed to those ideologies. Similarly, much of the *Victorie* crew began to accept these culturally unconventional beliefs.²⁰

Eventually, the *Victorie's* captain, Monsieur Fourbin, died in a battle trying to protect his crew. As a result, Mission was proclaimed captain of the *Victorie* by the sailors. Following his nomination as captain, Mission convinced the crewmates to set aside their duties to the French government and become pirates devoted to a higher cause, liberty. From then on, Mission became a virtuous pirate captain, seeking to free those who are enslaved and rid the world of corruption.²¹

Mission, Caraccioli, and their crew began to terrorize slave ships off the coast of Spain and later eastern Africa. Their efforts would often help build a larger company aboard their vessel as they took in some of the slaves they saved. The damage caused by Mission and the *Victorie* crew eventually made them outlaws evading British and French prosecution. Despite their efforts to avoid capture, Caraccioli and Mission often fought against bounty hunters and other forces. While seizing a Portuguese ship, a weary battle ensued which claimed the right leg of Signor Caraccioli. This event made Mission realize the need for a place where he and his men could be free. Mission envisioned a land founded on behalf of liberty.

Mission sailed to Madagascar to find unoccupied land to begin his new country, Libertatia. Reportedly, he settled on a location on the Northern side of the island. Any treasures Mission and his crew acquired would be pooled together and divided evenly between the captain and his men. This new nation would begin with a fair distribution of wealth to ensure an equal and unique nation of pirates.

Captain Thomas Tew ultimately found his way to Libertatia and joined the *Victorie* crew as a “Liberi”, or citizen of the pirate utopia.²² Free from danger, oppression, chains, and servitude, the pirate land of liberty was founded. Libertatia began with merely twenty-five men, including Mission himself.²³ By the time Tew had arrived at Libertatia, a government was being established and many of the natives in the area were deemed Liberi, as well.

After the arrival of Tew, very little information about the country is known. It will be up to this committee to continue the story from this point.



Character List



Captain James Mission

James Mission, along with his crew, founded Libertatia. After becoming Captain of the French privateering ship, the *Victorie*, Mission and his crew began a life committed to liberty. With his crew, Mission often freed slaves aboard merchant vessels in his pursuit of freedom.²⁴ Eventually, Mission's journey would reach its apex with the founding of Libertatia, a self-governing state free of prosecution and malice. Mission's progressive values for self-determination and democracy placed him far beyond other leaders of his time.²⁵

Captain Thomas Tew

Thomas Tew was an English privateer who went rogue with his crew in 1692, not long after the Governor of Bermuda gave Tew a letter giving him permission to act as a privateer and seize any enemy ship. After receiving a donated ship, the *Amity*, Tew sailed to the Red Sea where he and his crew captured a large cargo ship with relative ease. The goods seized from this ship would eventually earn Tew an immense amount of wealth, making him the third-richest pirate in history and allowing him to repay the donors of his ship.²⁶ Eventually, Tew would join forces with Henry Avery to lead a large fleet of pirate ships. Avery and Tew's fleet ultimately faced a dangerous encounter with the fleet of the Mughal empire.





Captain Henry Avery

Henry Avery, sometimes referred to as “John,” or “Every,” was the captain of a pirate ship named the *Fancy*. Avery began his career at sea with the Royal Navy before sailing for many years on buccaneer and slave ships, before assisting in a mutiny on a Spanish ship.

Renaming the ship the *Fancy*, he was elected the Captain in 1694.

That same year, Avery joined Thomas Tew in creating a fleet of pirate ships to amass greater wealth. The pair eventually made

enemies of the Mughal empire, which sought after Avery and his crew.²⁷

Anne Bonny

Anne Bonny was the illegitimate child of an Irish lawyer and his servant. Bonny’s father, who had moved to South Carolina to raise Anne, sought to make her a respectful woman in society, despite her often-rebellious behavior. At sixteen years old, she fell in love and married a small-time pirate, James Bonny. After their marriage, her husband’s career failures led him to become a pirate-informer for the Governor of the



Bahamas. Feeling conflicted with her husband’s decisions, Anne left him to run away with “Calico” Jack Rackham. After discovering that Bonny was pregnant, Rackham left her in Cuba to deliver the baby. After giving birth and leaving the child in Cuba, Anne rejoined Rackham’s ship, alongside fellow-pirate and close friend, Mary Read.²⁸



Captain Edward Teach

Captain Teach, often spelled “Thache”, is more commonly known as the infamous “Blackbeard.” Teach is known for his tyranny in the Americas, starting in 1716, particularly off the coast of the Carolinas, Virginia and the Caribbean Sea. Teach notoriously sailed a converted forty-gun French Naval ship called the *Queen Anne’s Revenge*. Teach reportedly collected tolls from ships in the Pamlico Sound, off the coast of North Carolina. One of the most famous legends surrounding Blackbeard’s ill-famed career is his great buried treasure, which has yet to be found. Many believe the treasure never truly existed.²⁹

Captain John “Calico Jack” Rackham

Calico Jack was a historically famed pirate because of his inclusion of two female crewmates on his ship, Anne Bonny and Mary Read. As a pirate, Rackham was notorious for his tyranny around the Bahamas and Cuba. Rackham earned the captaincy of a ship named the *Ranger* after defaming the former captain and having him voted him out of office. Calico Jack was successful at plundering smaller ships near the Caribbean shore. Most ambitiously, Rackham seized the large cargo ship named the *Kingston*. Unfortunately, this capture drew too much attention to his activities, leading to a significant bounty being placed on Rackham’s head and pursuit by pirate hunters for the rest of his career.³⁰





Captain Christopher Contend

Christopher Contend, sometimes referred to as “Billy One Hand,” spent much of his life as a pirate in the Caribbean, West Africa, the Indian Ocean, and the Arabian Sea. Contend’s real name is still unknown because he often went by several different first and last names. Captain Contend conducted joint raids of Madagascar with pirate captains such as Edward England and John Taylor.

Additionally, Contend’s pirate career was remarkably profitable, ending with each of his crew members receiving around \$800,000 (adjusted for inflation).³¹

Contend captained his ship, the *Fiery Dragon* and helped found Saint-Marie, his pirate base on a small island off of Madagascar, separate from Libertatia.

Captain Bartholomew Roberts

Captain Roberts, known as Black Barty, was older when he started his pirate career, around the age of thirty-seven. Nonetheless, he rose swiftly to the rank of captain, leading several successive ships including the *Royal Rover*, the *Fortune*, the *Royal Fortune*, and the *Good Fortune*. He operated in a wide area, robbing and destroying ships mostly in the waters around West Africa—but also as far away as Newfoundland (Canada), Brazil, and the Caribbean. By the end of his life, Roberts seized nearly 400 vessels, making him the second most successful pirate in history.³²





Captain Edward “England” Seegar

Captain Edward Seegar, commonly known as “Edward England,” was the captain of several pirate ships, including the *Royal James*. England spent a significant portion of his pirate career around the coast of Africa where he pillaged and plundered passing ships. One of his more successful periods was during his siege of Cape Corso in Africa. In this siege, England destroyed many ships and managed to capture some pirate ships to add to his fleet. England also spent a notable amount of time in the area around Madagascar, the rumored location of Libertatia.³³

Captain William Kidd

William Kidd was a Scotsman with significant experience in sailing and captaining. In the 1690s, during the Nine Years War between England and France, Kidd was a successful privateer defending English and American trade routes in the West Indies. Due to his success, he was commissioned by England to end piracy in the Indian Ocean. During this unsuccessful expedition, Captain Kidd was convinced by his restless crew to turn to piracy. On their first excursion, they captured a ship with cargo rumored to be worth £700,000. Kidd and his crew aimed to use the captured ship, renamed the *Adventure Prize*, to continue plundering in the West Indies. However, England had begun devoting more resources to hunting and prosecuting pirates, adding difficulties for the life of piracy chosen by Kidd and his crew.³⁴





Mary Read

Similar to Anne Bonny, Mary Read was one of the few female pirates of the Golden Age of Piracy. Read and Bonny were close friends when they served under Captain John “Calico Jack” Rackham.³⁵ Unlike Bonny, however, Read spent a significant portion of her life hiding her true sex. Early on, Mary was forced to pretend to be her recently deceased half-brother to receive monetary support from his paternal grandmother.³⁶ Even after receiving the money, Mary lived under the pseudonym “Mark”, pretending to be a man to acquire a job as a soldier, and later, a sailor. Read became a buccaneer after her ship was seized by a band of pirates. Eventually, she became a member of Calico Jack’s crew, where she maintained her disguise as a man. She was renowned for being both a rowdy shipmate and a ruthless enemy.

Captain Adam Baldrige

English pirate Adam Baldrige was well-known for his control over the pirate haven, Saint-Marie (also spelled “Saint Mary”), a small island outpost off the west coast of Madagascar. Captain Baldrige founded the settlement after fleeing Jamaica to avoid prosecution for murder. Controlling the surrounding waters of Saint-Marie, he created a safe environment for pirates to reside and restock for a high price. On the island, Baldrige lived a luxurious life, as he profited from the passing pirates and by taking advantage of the native tribes.³⁷



Endnotes

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