

Pirates, Privateers and Buccaneers through the Ages

Frederick E. Hasecke

October 3, 2008

Ahoy mates! Come aboard! In the words of Blackbeard, “I come from hell and I’ll carry you there presently” as we sail the seas of Pirates, Privateers and Buccaneers from antiquity to today. So all hands on deck, weigh the anchor, and hoist the sails, or bones is what you’ll be.

Ever since persons set sail and carried cargo and passengers upon the seas and waterways of the world, piracy has existed. The International Maritime Bureau defines piracy as “an act of boarding or attempting to board any ship with the intent to commit theft or any other crime and with the intent or capability to use force in the furtherance of that act.” It is a rogue’s adventure that can shake your timbers and send you to Davy Jones locker (the bottom of the sea).

The earliest documented instances of piracy involve the Sea Peoples who threatened the Aegean and Mediterranean Sea in 13th century BCE (Before Common Era). The Tyrrhenians and Thracians were known as pirates. Homer recorded a case of piracy around 1000 BCE. Alexander the Great attempted to rid the seas of pirates in 330 BCE.

Julius Caesar was kidnapped by Cilician pirates and held prisoner in the Dodecanese islet of Pharmacusa. He was insulted by the mere demand of twenty talents for his ransom, insisting that he was worth at least fifty. He then dispatched those that were kidnapped with him to several places to raise the money. While they were gone he lived among the pirates not so much as a prisoner, but more like one that was being guarded by his servants. For thirty-eight days he wrote verses and speeches and joined in their exercises and games. As soon as his ransom came from Miletus, he was discharged. Then he proceeded to secure some ships and pursue the pirates that kidnapped him.

When he captured them, he took their money as prize and, according to Plutarch, had the pirates crucified in Pergamus.

Not all that have been captured by pirates have lived to tell about it and gotten such bloodthirsty revenge. Many were sold as slaves or kept as slaves on the pirates' ships. The wealthy were sold for ransom. The slaves on the galleys became brutally treated oarsman and many may have said, "Them that die'll be the lucky ones."

At first, those that took to the seas were afraid of the open waters and, thus, they sailed along the shore. This, however, made them more vulnerable to the pirates that used inlets and islands, especially around Greece, for hideouts. Everything from human beings to grain and olive oil was a welcomed prize to the ancient Mediterranean pirates that attacked vessels sailing between Egypt and Rome.

The ships of these ancient pirates were sleek and fast galleys that were powered by wind and two or three sets of oarsman. They had a battering ram, made of wood and strengthened with brass, protruding from the front of the ship to rip into the heavy and slow moving cargo vessels that were powered only by wind.

Tales were told and navies were created to discourage the pirates, but they still swarmed the waters. In ancient times, the Greek god of wine, Dionysus, is said to have been captured by pirates and then become a lion, frightening the pirates into the sea and turning them into a school of dolphins.

The galleys that were used by pirates were actually invented by the Greeks and the Greeks used them to fight the pirates. But the Greek navies were largely unsuccessful, because their city-states were often at war with each other and they enticed the pirates to attack their enemies; thereby, setting the stage for what would later become

known as privateering, which is often described as a form of “legal” piracy, in that private warships are authorized by countries with letters of marque to attack foreign shipping.

In 67 BCE, the Roman Senate granted Pompey powers to combat piracy and after three months of attacks from land and sea, suppressed them. However, it was not until 68 BCE that he was able to end the threat of the Illyrians, who lived on the western Balkan Peninsula and were among the most famous ancient pirates.

Early Polynesian warriors or pirates also attacked seaside and riverside villages, using the sea for their assault and safe retreat.

Of course, no pirate worth his or her bottle of rum and night on the town would allow the International Maritime Bureau to define who and what pirates can raid and so throughout history, pirates have not just raided ships, but also coastal settlements for their prize.

Among the more notorious of these pirates were the Vikings of Scandinavia, who mercilessly raided cities and towns in Western Europe, North Africa, and as far as the Black Sea and Persia. The Vikings roamed the seas and rivers from the 700s to the 1000s CE (Common Era). They used longboats, which had a shallow depth, making them easy to land on shore and either sail or row up a river. They prized precious metal, of which they stole large quantities from churches and then melted down to make jewelry and metal bars, or just cut up to use as money. They also sought people, taking them for ransom and selling them as slaves.

Before the Vikings and with the crumbling of the Roman Empire in the 400s, Slavs invaded the Balkan Peninsula, settled Nerotiva (Pagania, modern day Croatia), and

revived the old Illyrian piratical habits and often raided the Adriatic Sea. Known as the “Narentines,” the prize was split—one half going to the owner of the ship and leader of the attacks and the other half to the crew. Especially notorious for their slave-trade, they roamed the waters into the 11th century.

Not to be outdone by the laity, former priest Eustace the Monk (1170-1217) became a pirate. Protected by King John of England, he raided the French ships in the English Channel, but then he switched sides and was paid by the French to attack England. When he was captured by the English, the English as much as said, “I’ll fly your bloody head as my banner,” and beheaded him on his own ship.

Irish pirates sided with the Scots, Vikings, Picts and Welsh to raid England in 937. The Novgorodian pirates looted cities on the Volga and Kama Rivers in the 14th century. Both Indian and European bands of pirates flourished along the Indian coast from the 14th century. From the 13th century, pirates have used junks with their bamboo matted sails in South East and East Asia. And the Cossacks of Eastern Europe, which were comprised of run away slaves, criminals, bankrupt upper-class and slaves from Turkish galleys, razed townships from the 16th through the 18th centuries.

From the time of the Crusades and through the 1800s, Muslim and Christian pirates and privateers viewed their attacks on each other as a holy war. Called Barbary pirates by their Christian enemies, the Muslim pirates or corsairs (which in Mediterranean languages means privateer, but in English is a synonym for pirate) raided ships and coastal villages and towns in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic as far north as Iceland. Their strongholds were the three Turkish North African regencies of Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli and the port of Sallee on the Atlantic coast of Morocco. Their prize

was kidnapped Christians that they would either sell in the slave markets or keep for their rowing galleys.

Using galleys with lateens (triangular sails) and a canon at their bow to allow a head-on attack, the corsair soldiers, called Janissaries, were so effective that it is estimated that in a 200 year period, between 1 million and 1.25 million Europeans were captured by the corsairs and sold as slaves in North Africa and the Ottoman Empire. In fact, it is said that at one time there were so many Christian slaves in Algiers that you could buy one for the cost of an onion.

The most famous corsairs were the Barbarossa brothers, who became extremely wealthy with their own palaces and powerful galley fleets. But not all the corsairs were Arabs. Some were Christian sailors, such as John Ward, that turned Turk and then there were also the Christian corsairs, who attacked ships with Muslim passengers and goods off the coasts of North Africa and the eastern Mediterranean. They sold their Muslim captives into slavery or kept them for oarsman on their ships.

Pope Urban II had launched the First Crusade in November 1095 and Christian corsairs were commissioned by many of the Christian potentates of the Mediterranean such as the King of Spain, Grand Duke of Tuscany and especially the Knights of St. John on Malta. From 1530 to the end of the Crusades in 1798, Malta was the center of Christian piracy and “the Maltese corsairs” were just as feared in the east as the Barbary corsairs in the west.

In 1798, the Maltese corsairs were brought down by Napoleon in Malta. There he freed the Muslim slaves and terminated the corsairs’ commissions. The Barbary corsairs, however, continued into the 19th century, largely because the maritime nations were leery

of each other and they saw the Barbary regencies as valuable allies in the European wars. In the 19th century, though, the maritime nations deployed naval convoys, occasionally fought the corsairs and, thus, eventually contained them. The United States took part in this by sending a squadron of 15 ships in 1801 under the command of Commodore Edward Preble (the first overseas deployment by the United States) to attack the corsair stronghold Tripoli. From that comes the line in the *Marine Corps Hymn*, “from the Halls of Montezuma to the Shores of Tripoli.”

When the “Maltese corsairs” started to harass the seas in the 1500s, the European nations also were conquering new lands in the west and bringing back profitable cargoes. Chief among these nations was Roman Catholic Spain with its colonies in the Caribbean and in Central and South America, known as the Spanish Main. In the 1520s and 1530s, the conquistadores, overthrew the Aztec and Inca nations, stealing their wealth and using local and West Africa slaves to mine treasures of gold and silver, which they then minted into pieces of eight and doubloons.

Sickened by Spain’s success, its Protestant enemies hired private sea captains to attack the Spanish ships. These captains and their crews were called privateers and they were given letters of marque—formal contracts from a monarch, authorizing piracy and ensuring that a share of any seized cargo went to the monarch. It was a shrewd way to wage war and return a profit at the same time. Though it was intended to only be used in war, it was often encouraged by opposing powers while at peace and on neutral ships in times of war.

As you might imagine, privateers were considered heroes by their country, but ruthless criminals by their enemies. Their ships were sleeker and faster than the Spanish

treasure ships, or galleons, which were sturdy and well-defended, but slow and difficult to sail. Among the more famous privateers are Sir John Hawkins (1532-1595) and Sir Francis Drake (1540-1595) of England and Rene Duguay-Trouin (1673-1736) of France.

John Hawkins and Francis Drake were second cousins. Both were vice admirals in the British navy and knighted for their gallantry. They are especially remembered for contributing to the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, but both had established notable reputations before that.

Hawkins was a shipbuilder, naval administrator and commander, who rebuilt and helped design faster ships. In 1577, Queen Elizabeth I (1533-1603) sent Drake to attack Spanish ports and towns along the Pacific coast of South America. When war broke out between Spain and England in 1585, Drake plundered the ports of Santo Domingo, Cartagena and San Augustin. His exploits were legendary and he was known as “El Draque,” meaning “the Dragon.” But Drake and Hawkins also were slave traders and in June 2006, Andrew Hawkins publicly apologized for his ancestor's actions in the slave trade. Both Hawkins and Drake died of dysentery in 1595 after they unsuccessfully attacked San Juan during a treasure-hunting voyage that they were on together.

French privateers and pirates were called corsairs. In 1694, Louis XIV handed Rene Duguay-Trouin a sword of honor and made him a nobleman in 1709 with the motto “Bravery awarded these honors.” At the time, he had captured 16 warships and over 300 merchant ships from the English and the Dutch.

When nations were not at war, many privateers continued attacking ships of other nations and became pirates with letters of marque. Queen Elizabeth I called them “sea

dogs,” but turned a blind eye to them and privately supported them, because of the bounty they brought to England.

Now, mates, it is during this time of sea dogs and of going back and forth between pirates and privateers that the buccaneers came into being and movies like *Pirates of the Caribbean*, novels like *Treasure Island*, days like “Talk Like a Pirate Day” (which is September 19), and a slew of children’s books on pirates are based.

Originally, the buccaneers were a group of former French soldiers that settled on the island of Hispaniola in the early 1600s. Their name comes from the Arawak word *buccan*, meaning wooden frames for smoking meat, and the French words *boucan* and *boucanier*, referring to the French hunters that prepared their wild cattle and pigs in this way. About 1630, the Spanish drove these *boucaniers* from Hispaniola to nearby Tortuga. When the Spaniards tried to drive them from Tortuga, the buccaneers were joined by many other French, Dutch and English and they all became pirates against Spanish shipping. Calling all of the pirates or privateers in the West Indies buccaneers as we do today would have insulted many of those sea dogs, since they saw themselves as being above the French hunters that first bore that name.

Most of the buccaneers called themselves privateers and many sailed under the protection of a letter of marque by British and French authorities, but on the whole they were rough men who had little concern for the law and many of their letters were either legally invalid or fake. Having said this, though, they established a democratic organization by which they managed their ships and divided their prizes. Captains were chosen by vote and Articles of Agreement were accepted by both captains and crew.

These articles were at first called the Charter Party, Custom of the Coast and Jamaica Discipline.

The articles of agreement varied between ships and they included harsh punishments such as Moses Law, which was forty lashes minus one, and marooning sailors on deserted islands. Black Bart's (Bartholomew Roberts, 1682-1722) articles included:

1. Every man has a vote in affairs of the moment; has equal title to fresh provisions, or strong liquors, at any time seized.
2. If any man is found seducing any of the female sex, and carrying her to sea disguised, he is to suffer death.
3. The musicians to have rest on the Sabbath day, only by night. (1)

The Buccaneers raided coastal towns by coming ashore out of sight and attacking them from the landward side. They were excellent marksmen and good seaman. One of their favorite weapons was the cutlass. Short and easy to carry it harks back to their days of butchering animals on Hispaniola. They were able to convert merchant ships to pirate ships and their crews consisted of carpenters, coopers, sail makers, sailors, slavers and fishermen.

Scorned for their cruelty, Buccaneers tortured prisoners with the thumbscrew and knotted cord. They used mutilation and strung men up by their wrists, necks and private parts. Phrases like "I'll have your eye out," "I'll peel your skin like a mango," and "I'll see you skewered on the end of a pike" may not have just been words, but also deeds.

Buccaneers despised the Spaniards and lusted after loot. French buccaneer Daniel Montbars (1645-1707?) was called "the Exterminator," because he destroyed so many Spanish ships and killed so many Spaniards. Welsh privateer and buccaneer Henry Morgan (1635-1688) was commissioned by Modyford to capture some Spanish prisoners.

In the course of his privateering, he sacked Portobello, ravaged the coast of Cuba, and became exceedingly rich by withholding some of the prize he owed to the crown. Nevertheless, he was knighted by King Charles II and made governor of Jamaica, but eventually fell out of the king's favor and replaced.

In the 1690s, the buccaneers began to lose the support of the Caribbean officials, because they were hard to control and they could engage colonies in unwanted wars. Therefore, the buccaneers turned to law-abiding work or joined regular pirate crews, who set their sights not just on the Caribbean, but also on the Indian Ocean, the east coast of North America, and West Africa. Some became known as the Red Sea Men who pirated for Arabian gold in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean. Still others sailed the "pirate round," which was a route from the Caribbean and North America to the slave ships off of West Africa, into the Indian Ocean and then back again.

Though it stands to reason, it is still somewhat ironic that a clamp down on the privateers would usher in the golden age of piracy which was only from 1690 to 1730. During this time there were some 2,000 pirates at sea in some 30 vessels. The Jolly Roger was first spotted and the likes of Blackbeard took center stage.

Most historians agree that Captain John Cranby's July 18, 1700, account of chasing French pirate, Emmanuel Wynne into a cove at Brava Island is the first mention of a Jolly Roger. Wynn's was a black flag with cross bones, a skull and an hour glass (signifying time running out). The name Jolly Roger is believed to have come from the French *jolie rouge*, meaning pretty red one, since pirates flew many flags, including a red one, which was flown by many seaman to mean that the ship would "give no quarter," or take no prisoners.

Blackbeard's Jolly Roger had an image of the devil holding an hourglass and a spear pointing at a bleeding heart. It served his desire to be known for his brutality. Born Edward Teach, or Edward Drummond in Bristol, or London, or Philadelphia, Jamaica, or Accomac County, Virginia, Teach went to sea at an early age as an English privateer in the Spanish West Indies during the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714). When Britain bowed out of the war, Teach turned to piracy.

His best known vessel was the *Queen Anne's Revenge*. (Pirates often renamed their ships *Revenge* to declare their intention.) Though there is no confirmation that Blackbeard killed anyone in his marauding, it is said that he would shoot one or two of his crew now and then to show them who was captain and that he had some 14 wives and he would force them to prostitute themselves with some of his crew before his face.

The classic image of the seafaring pirate, Blackbeard wore a big feathered tricorne and carried multiple swords, knives, and pistols. Hemp and lit matches were woven into his braided black beard to intimidate his enemies during battle. After but two years of pirating, he was killed in battle in 1718 aboard Lieutenant Robert Maynard's ship, the *HMS Ranger*, after having been shot five times and stabbed more than twenty times. He then was decapitated and his head was placed as a trophy on the bowsprit of Maynard's ship.

Other pirates of this time included Benjamin Hornigold, under whom Blackbeard was an apprentice and Howell Davis. Both were considered to be generous and less violent men. But then there were also Edward "Ned" Low (1690-1724), who was known for violently torturing his enemies and is said to have once cut off a man's lips and

cooked them, and Thomas Cocklyn, who was reportedly elected captain in 1717 because of his viciousness and ignorance.

Women pirates included Mary Read (1690-1720) and Anne Bonny 1700-?). Both wore men's clothing and sailed the Caribbean with Calico Jack Rackham (1682-1720). Bonny was Rackham's lover after leaving her husband and Read joined Rackham's crew after they captured the British naval ship on which she was. Both fought alongside of the crew and both were sentenced to hang with the crew when captured. However, because of pregnancy, their executions were delayed. Read soon died of sickness in a Jamaican prison, but Bonny had her child, was pardoned, released, and not heard of again.

Pirates used every form of skullduggery, intimidation and force to secure their prize. Their life at sea was harsh and they threw grappling irons into the rigging of the merchant ships to draw them closer and enable them to jump on board with their cutlasses, pistols, muskets, axes and daggers. Defeated merchant crews could either join the pirates or die. On land, the pirates were known for their excessive drinking, carousing and gambling. But not all was as adventurous as it might first appear. There was boredom between raids and tiring chores such as mending sails and careening (cleaning barnacles off of the ship's hulls). Food on board was terrible and often infested with weevils. Sores from scurvy and death from illness and surgery was common. Only the captain and senior officers had cabins. The rest slept on hammocks wherever they could.

In 1714, with the return of peace to Europe, the nations tried to rid the seas of pirates, because of the harm they brought to trade and by 1730 (the end of the golden age), many of the most notorious pirates were dead or behind bars. Of the fifty-five

pirate captains of this time whose fate is known, thirteen surrendered to live in comfort or poverty, six were killed in action, four drowned in shipwrecks, four were shot and one was set out to sea by their crews. One committed suicide. The remaining twenty-six died dancing the hempen jig, which was a nickname for hanging, because the victims seemed to be dancing at the end of the rope.

William “Captain” Kidd (1645-1701) was one who danced the hempen jig. Under the auspices of being a privateer and hunting down pirates, he engaged in piracy and for that was hung twice because the first time around the rope broke. After that his body was caged and hung over the River Thames for some twenty years as a warning to future pirates.

Piracy, though, has never been completely stamped out and privateers were an accepted part of naval warfare from the 16th through much of the 19th centuries. Chinese pirate fleets thrived in the China seas from the 1600s through 1800s. Unlike most Caribbean pirates, who for the most part worked on their own, the Chinese pirates had huge fleets and crews that could number over 100 ships and 30,000 sailors. It was a family affair—captains sailing with their wives and families, employing family members and passing down the fleets to relatives after a captain’s death.

The Chinese pirates sailed three mast junks with bamboo sails, canons and swivel guns. They fought with large two-handed swords. And they came to an end in 1849 when British and Chinese forces united to protect the opium trade between China and Europe.

After the end of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars in 1815, there was a resurgence of piracy and Cuba was its hub. Though made up of former privateers,

sailors, fishermen, and escaped slaves from all over, they were known for having a Cuban air about them and for being the most vicious of all pirates. It is at this time that walking the plank came into being. After being captured by a pirate schooner on July 18, 1822, Captain Smith of the *Blessing* was forced to walk the plank and become shark bait.

The wars of the 18th and 19th centuries saw the return of privateers. Many of them had been pirates and so, one could ask which came first at this time, the pirate or the privateer, since many privateers and pirates were one in the same, depending on whether or not there was a war.

For example, privateers were hired to attack British merchant vessels by the colonies during the American Revolutionary War (1775-1783). They operated from ports like Boston and Baltimore and they devastated British trade by seizing almost 3,000 ships. At one time there was up to 500 privateers employed by the colonies, whereas in 1775, the Continental Navy barely had 30 vessels. It has been said that without the privateers, the American colonies would have lost the Revolutionary War.

More aggressive than the Continental Army, the privateers carried the war to Britain. Many were plain bandits and some were genuine patriots. Benjamin Franklin sent aid to imprisoned American privateers and arranged for many to escape. John Adams was a staunch supporter of privateers. Through cannon production and private warships, John Brown supported the patriot cause and fattened his wallet. On March 23, 1776, the American Congress deemed that British vessels and cargo “of what kind so ever shall be liable to seizure.”

John Paul Jones, however, opposed privateering, seeing it as a strictly profit motivated venture by both the owners of the vessels and the crews. He believed that they

robbed the Continental Navy of needed sailors by being more profitable and less regimented. Sir Andrew Snape Hamond, a British Naval officer, despised the privateers' use of abandoned ships that they rigged to explode after British sailors took possession of them. And because of its unholy mix of patriotism and profit, the American Congress and businessmen were more reserved about their support of the privateers and applause for their prizes.

In 1856, all the major European powers declared through the Declaration of Paris that "privateering is and remains abolished." The United States did not sign the declaration, because a stronger amendment preventing all private property from capture at sea was not approved. However, it agreed to the declaration during the American Civil War (1861-1865) when the confederates commissioned privateers from around the world. Prussia was the last major power to use privateering and that was in the 1870 Franco-Prussian War.

Though piracy has always been a threat (it is after all called the second oldest profession), it began to resurface in earnest in the late 1970s and early 1980s as a serious threat to maritime security. From the early 1990s to the early 2000s, The International Maritime Bureau (IMB) reports that there were more than 2,500 hostages taken, of whom 378 were injured and over 300 killed. The year 2000 saw the highest number of piracy attacks since the IMB started recording them in 1991—469. The seizing of a Greek chemical tanker on September 27, 2008, brought the number of attacks on ships off of the coast of Somalia to 63 this year. Of those attacks, 27 ships were hijacked with 16 remaining in the hands of pirates along with some 319 crew members. Most analysts agree that these figures are underreported by as much as thirty percent.

Recently reported incidents in the IMB's September 16-22, 2008, Weekly Piracy

Report, include:

- September 19, 2008: Venezuela. Five robbers boarded a general cargo ship at anchor. They broke into the forecastle store and stole ship's stores and property.... Robbers escaped with stolen items.
- September 21, 2008: Somalia. Four pirates in three speedboats boarded a bulk carrier underway. They took hostage 19 crewmembers and hijacked the ship. Owners are unable to contact the ship.
- September 20, 2008: Tanzania. Sixteen pirates, in a fifteen-meter long boat, armed with knives boarded a container ship awaiting pilot.... The crew noticed the pirates and informed D/O who raised the alarm.... Pirates jumped overboard and escaped with crew's personal belongings, ship's stores and property.
- September 18, 2008: Somalia. Five armed pirates in a speedboat attacked a bulk carrier underway. They took hostage twenty-five crewmembers and hijacked the ship. (2)

In that same weekly report, mariners are warned to be extra cautious around Bangladesh, Indonesia, India, Malacca Straits, Philippines, Singapore Straits, Nigeria, Tanzania, Gulf of Aden/Red Sea, Somalia, Brazil, Peru and the Arabian Sea. Alerts are listed for the Gulf of Aden, Nigeria and Bangladesh. Currently, the Gulf of Aden is the most treacherous area, but just a few years ago it was the Indonesian waters of the Straits of Malacca. For the most part, pirates operate in countries that lack the resources and/or will to secure their shorelines.

In August, pirates stole cash and valuables valued at more than 100,000 pounds from the passengers and crew of the 160 foot super-yacht *Tiara* off the coast of Corsica. Some companies have been paying up to one million U.S. dollars in ransoms to free crew members. When one considers that in 2003, the international fleet of more than 46,000 merchant vessels carried more than ninety percent of global trade, that the tankers and cargo ships can become weapons of mass destruction in the hands of radicals, and that

passenger ships can be targets like the World Trade Centers were on September 11, 2001, the threat of piracy is serious.

Today's pirates have backgrounds as varied as ever. Among them are rich and poor, adventurers and fugitives, bilge-sucking cutthroats and thieves, as well as innocent and misguided souls. Some are politically and religiously motivated and some are just out for money and a better or more carefree life. Some are part of organized crime syndicates, while others are part of small poverty-stricken gangs. Some are modern-day Robin Hoods, seeking justice amid injustice. For the most part smaller boats are used today and some use a mother ship with them. Pirates can be highly trained with very sophisticated weapons and equipment for high jacking ships and then repainting and renaming them. Or they can be more like the common thief who takes the cash from the ship's safe and runs.

On September 25, 2008, pirates hijacked the Ukrainian freighter *Faina* about 200 miles off the Somali coast. It is loaded with tanks, artillery, grenade launchers and ammunition. Speaking on behalf of the pirates, Mr. Sugule Ali said, "We don't consider ourselves sea bandits. We consider sea bandits those who illegally fish in our seas and dump waste in our seas and carry weapons in our seas. We are simply patrolling our seas. Think of us like a coast guard."(3)

It is true that about ten to fifteen years ago, piracy began along the coasts of Somalia because of commercial fleets from around the world plundering these tuna-rich waters. However, now any and all vessels are attacked for millions of dollars of ransom and perhaps some for more worthy reasons than others, for as Mr. Sugule also said,

“Killing is not in our plans. We only want money, so we can protect ourselves from hunger.”(4)

It is rather remarkable how the pirates can scale and board the tankers and cargo ships with their grappling hooks and bamboo poles, because these merchant ships can be longer than three football fields and over seven times bigger than the *Titanic*. But the decks of fully loaded merchant ships can be fairly close to the water and compared to the pirates’ speedboats, just lumber along in the crowded sea lanes. It is estimated that pirates successfully board their targets seventy-five percent of the time. Once on board, they generally have free reign, because the merchant ship crews are few in number (maybe eighteen to twenty-four persons) and when they are in port, there can be just a few watching the ship.

Agreements and Codes such as the International Ship and Port Facility Security Code (ISPS Code) of 2003 and this summer’s United Nations Security Council Resolution that allows naval forces cooperating with Somalia’s transitional government to enter Somalia’s territorial waters to use “all necessary means” to repress acts of piracy have been positive steps, but as can be seen from Somalia, more needs to be done if piracy is to be seriously challenged.

Nautilus UK (a union for maritime professionals) contends that there is a lack of political will to deal with piracy and has recommended for safer seas such things as:

- Tighter control over the operation of ship registries to strip away the veils of corporate secrecy that can be used to cover up criminal activities
- Improvement of standards of reporting and investigation of attacks by flag and port states on their ships in their waters
- Consideration of the application of effective sanctions against flag and port states that fail to deal with piracy
- Technical and practical assistance to developing nations to help improve security

- Development by port states and authorities of such things as seaborne patrols, protected shipping lanes and restricted zone fencing around ports and berths
- Installation by ship-owners of more effective security equipment onboard their ships. (5)

I would add to the above recommendations, the need to address the disparity between the rich and the poor. It is thought that pirates can earn up to \$40,000 a year with the ransoms they collect and for those in impoverished countries that is a fortune. Though there are those that become pirates because of greed and other ruthless and demonic reasons and though many live on far less than \$40,000 a year, the gulf between the rich and poor contributes not only to persons becoming pirates, but also to coastal communities sheltering them.

Research Institute for European and American Studies Security analyst Ioannis Michaletos says, “There’s a humanitarian crisis. There’s a food crisis. You have people who are desperate, and this is an easy way to supplement their income.” Until more deliberate action is taken to work for everyone’s well-being, piracy will continue.

Well, me hearties, reef the sails. For the seas are rough, even when the waters are calm and the ports seem safe. Lower the Jolly Roger and give chase for the prize that brings justice, peace and good-will to all. For therein lie fair winds and a “splice of mainbrace” (a drink) for everyone.

Footnotes

- (1) Brennan, Steve, *The Gigantic Book of Pirate Stories*, page 561
- (2) “Weekly Piracy Report: 16-22 September 2008,” International Maritime Bureau
- (3) Gettleman, Jeffrey, “Somali Pirates Tell All: They’re in it for the Money”
NYTimes.com
- (4) Ibid.
- (5) “In the Firing Line,” Nautilus UK, 4 June 2004

Bibliography

Brennan, Steve, *The Gigantic Book of Pirate Stories*, Skyhorse Publishing, 555 Eighth Avenue, Suite 903, New York, NY, 2007

Burnett, John S., *Dangerous Waters, Modern Piracy and Terror on the High Seas*, Dutton (Penguin Group), 375 Hudson Street, New York, NY, 2002

Butterfield, Moira, *Pirates and Smugglers*, Kingfisher (Houghton Mifflin), 722 Berkeley Street, Boston, Massachusetts, 2005

Choundas, George, *The Pirate Primer, Mastering the Language of Swashbucklers and Rogues*, Writer’s Digest Books (F + W Publications), 4700 East Galbraith Road, Cincinnati, Ohio, 2007

Earle, Peter, *The Pirate Wars*, St. Martin Press, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY, 2003

Gettleman, Jeffrey, “Somali Pirates Tell All: They’re in It for the Money,” *The New York Times*, 30 September 2008, NYTimes.com

International Maritime Bureau of the International Chamber of Commerce, Cinnabar Wharf, 26 Wapping High Street, London UK, icc-css.org/prc/piracyreport.php
“Weekly Piracy Report: 16-22 September, 2008”

International Maritime Organization of the United Nations, 4 Albert Embankment, London UK, imo.org
“IMO Welcomes Security Council Moves on Somalia Piracy,”

Nautilus UK, Oceanair House, 750-760 High Road, Leytonstone UK,
nautilusuk.org/ngen_public

“In the Firing Line: NUMAST Report on Piracy,” 4 June 2004

“Shipping Industry in Piracy Crisis Call,” 18 September 2008

“Piracy: Union Urges Members to Seek Assurances,” 25 September 2008

Patton, Robert H., *Patriot Pirates, The Privateer War for Freedom and Fortune in the American Revolution*, Pantheon Books (Random House), New York, NY, 2008

Stevenson, Robert Louis, *Treasure Island*, Puffin Books (Penguin Group), 375 Hudson Street, New York, NY, 1994

Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia—

[wikipedia.org/wiki/Anne Bonny](http://wikipedia.org/wiki/Anne_Bonny)

Bartholomew_Roberts

Benjamin_Hornigold

Blackbeard

Buccaneer

Daniel_Montbars

Edward_Low

Emmanuel_Wynne

Francis_Drake

Howell_Davis

John_Hawkin

John Paul_Jones

John_Ward

Henry_Morgan

Mary_Read

Piracy

Privateer

Thomas Coclyn

William_Kidd