

Timeline of Events

- 2000 BCE:** The Phoenicians begin maritime trading in regions of the Mediterranean; as trade expands, piracy emerges.
- 1220–1186 BCE:** The Sea People, a band of sea raiders, dominate the Mediterranean Sea, attacking merchant ships and coastal towns.
- c. 750 BCE:** Greek poet Homer writes the *Odyssey*; the epic poem is the first known written description of piracy.
- 421–339 BCE:** Greek city-states engage pirates to attack their enemies in the Peloponnesian Wars in a system similar to what will later become known as privateering.
- 74 or 75 BCE:** Roman statesman Julius Caesar is captured by Cilician pirates and held for ransom. The event is later recounted in *Lives of Noble Grecians and Romans* by Plutarch.
- June 8, 793:** Vikings attack the religious center at Lindisfarne, England.
- 1100s:** A group of Germanic towns form the Hanseatic League to secure trade routes in the Baltic Sea and fight piracy.
- 1200s:** The Wokou, a group of pirates that originated in Japan, attack the coasts of Korea and China.
- 1243:** England's Cinque Ports, a league of sea towns, begins to license private merchant ships to raid enemy ships and ports. This is considered the origin of the privateer system that Europe would use for centuries to come.
- 1392:** A powerful band of pirates known as the Victual Brothers attacks Norway's major city, Bergen, and sets up headquarters in Visby, Sweden.

- 1492:** Spain captures Granada from the Moors and begins to expel the Moors from Spain. Tens of thousands of Spanish Muslims migrate to the Barbary Coast in northern Africa.
- 1492:** Explorer Christopher Columbus, serving Spain, arrives on a Caribbean island, beginning an era of Spanish exploration and colonization in the Americas.
- 1494:** The Catholic pope issues the Treaty of Tordesillas. Under the treaty, Portugal receives authority to control the non-Christian lands in the designated eastern half of the world, and Spain is awarded the lands in the west.
- 1516:** Barbary corsair Aruj leads a large force of corsairs in an attack on the city-state of Algiers. The corsairs gain control of the city and the surrounding region.
- 1523:** French privateer Jean Fleury captures two Spanish ships returning to Spain from Mexico. They are loaded with Aztec treasure that conquistador Hernán Cortéz was sending to the Spanish king.
- 1530:** The Spanish king leases the island of Malta to the Knights of Malta under the condition that they fight “enemies of the Holy Faith.” The Knights begin raiding Muslim ships and enslaving Muslim captives.
- 1550s:** Wealthy Chinese businessman Wang Zhi commands a large force of Wokou pirate fleets, comprised of hundreds of junks and, by some estimates, about twenty thousand pirates.
- 1562:** To protect its ships from piracy, Spain requires all ships carrying goods from the Spanish Main to Spain to join one of the two treasure fleets formed annually.
- 1567:** In the Battle of San Juan de Ulúa, John Hawkins and his fleet of illegal traders are badly defeated by Spanish naval forces in Mexico. The battle is recounted in *The Third Troublesome Voyage Made with the Jesus of Lübeck, the Minion and Four Other Ships to the Parts of Guinea and the West Indies, in the Years 1567 and 1568*
- 1577–60:** English privateer Francis Drake circumnavigates (sails around) the globe, raiding Spanish ships in the Pacific and bringing home an enormous booty.
- 1628:** Dutch privateer Pieter Pieterszoon Heyn, commanding an enormous fleet, captures a Spanish treasure fleet.

- 1600–40:** A group of French hunters, called buccaneers, establish a rough lifestyle in the Caribbean, living part-time on the island of Tortuga and hunting feral animals on the northwest coast of Hispaniola.
- 1606–8:** English pirate Jack Ward and Dutch pirate Simon de Danser join the Barbary corsairs. They are among the first in a long line of “renegades,” or Europeans who converted from Christianity to Islam and raided Christian ships and ports with the Barbary corsairs.
- Late 1620s:** Hoping to expel the buccaneers, Spanish colonial officials exterminate feral animals in the northwestern region of Hispaniola. The buccaneers, no longer able to hunt, become full-time sea raiders.
- 1642:** Robert Adams writes a **Letter from a Captive of the Corsairs**, pleading for his family to pay his ransom so he will be released from captivity among the Barbary corsairs.
- 1655:** English ruler Oliver Cromwell sends naval forces to attack Santo Domingo, Hispaniola. The English forces fail to take over Santo Domingo, but take control of Jamaica. Under the English, Port Royal, Jamaica, becomes a pirate haven.
- 1661:** Chinese pirate commander Kho Hsing Yeh attacks the Dutch colony at Formosa (present-day Taiwan) with a fleet of nine hundred junks and twenty-five thousand troops, pushing the Dutch military off the island. Under Kho Hsing Yeh and his sons, Formosa will remain a pirate kingdom for twenty years.
- 1668:** Privateer Henry Morgan, chief of the buccaneers in Port Royal, leads a raid on the well-defended port city of Portobelo, Panama, where treasure from Peru is held for shipping to Spain on the annual treasure fleets.
- 1678:** Alexander O. Exquemelin’s *The Buccaneers of America* is first published in Dutch.
- 1690:** The golden age of piracy begins.
- 1690s:** The African island of Madagascar in the Indian Ocean becomes a pirate base in the Pirate Round, a course in which pirates raid African slave traders and merchant ships transporting valuable Asian goods from the shores of India and the Middle East back to Europe.
- June 7, 1692:** A major earthquake strikes Port Royal, Jamaica, killing thousands, toppling part of the city into the sea, and forcing pirates to look for another base of operations.

- August 1695:** Pirate captain Henry Every raids the well-armed *Ganj-i-sawii*, the Indian emperor's richly laden treasure ship, making every man in his crew wealthy. The raid inspires many heroic legends in England.
- 1701:** After a lengthy trial in England, William Kidd is hung for piracy, though he claims to have been fulfilling his obligations as a privateer. His body is hung over the Thames River as a warning to all pirates.
- 1710:** In India, Maratha navy commander Kanhoji Angria captures the British East India Company's island headquarters off Bombay and sets up a well-fortified pirate base there.
- 1714:** Pirates of the Caribbean, led by Benjamin Hornigold, Blackbeard, and Charles Vane, establish a base in Nassau, a port in the Bahamas; other pirates soon join them there.
- February 1717:** Samuel Bellamy and his crew seize an English slave ship, the *Whydah*, near Cuba, and refit it for piracy.
- May 1718:** With a fleet of heavily armed pirate vessels, Blackbeard blockades the harbor of Charleston, North Carolina.
- September 5, 1718:** By this date, Bahamas governor Woodes Rogers has granted pardons to more than six hundred pirates on the condition that they stop raiding.
- November 1718:** English troops commanded by Lieutenant Robert Maynard battle with Blackbeard's fleet; Blackbeard is killed in hand-to-hand combat.
- 1720: The Trial of Anne Bonny and Mary Read** is held in Jamaica. The story of these two female pirates causes a sensation in Europe and the Americas.
- 1721:** England passes the Piracy Act, which punishes people who trade with or aid pirates.
- March 1722:** In the largest pirate trial of the golden age, 268 pirates who had sailed under the command of Bartholomew Roberts are tried at Cape Coast Castle, a slave-trading center in West Africa.
- 1724:** *A General History of the Robberies and Murders of the Most Notorious Pirates* is published by Captain Charles Johnson. The book describes the adventures of several pirates, including “**The Life of Captain Roberts**” and “**The Life of Captain Evans**”
- 1730:** The golden age of piracy ends.

- April 19, 1775:** The Battles of Concord and Lexington begin the American Revolution.
- March 1776:** The Continental Congress passes legislation allowing American privateers to raid British warships and merchant ships.
- September 23, 1779:** Continental Navy commander John Paul Jones defeats a Royal Navy warship and utters his famous line, “I have not yet begun to fight.”
- 1788:** With the aid of Chinese pirates, the Vietnamese Tay Son rebels defeat Vietnam’s military and take control of the country.
- 1796:** The English government issues a **Letter of Marque against the French** to John Maciver, captain of *The Swallow*.
- 1804:** The United States sends its recently established naval forces to Tripoli in an attempt to force the Barbary corsairs to stop demanding tribute payments from U.S. merchant ships in the Mediterranean.
- 1807:** Chinese pirate chief Cheng I dies, having organized and led the largest pirate confederation ever known to history, comprised of an estimated 40,000 to 70,000 pirates. His wife Cheng I Sao takes command of the pirate empire.
- 1810:** Cheng I Sao surrenders to officials in “**The Pirate Surrender Document of 1810**”, accepting a general pardon for the pirates in her confederation, ending the huge and powerful Chinese pirate empire.
- 1812:** As the United States prepares for war with Britain in the War of 1812, it once again enlists the aid of American privateers.
- 1814:** Lord Byron publishes *The Corsair*, a long poem in which the pirate captain Conrad is portrayed as a brooding, romantic hero. The poem is an instant success.
- January 1815:** In the Battle of New Orleans, the last battle of the War of 1812, privateer Jean Lafitte aids U.S. forces in defeating the British invasion of the city.
- 1830s:** A combined force of British Royal Navy and English East India Company ships set up an antipiracy base in Singapore. After a long series of fierce battles with the pirates of the Strait of Malacca and surrounding areas over the next thirty years, the antipiracy forces destroy the pirates.
- 1856:** The leading powers of Europe sign the Declaration of Paris, which prohibits privateering. The United States does not sign.

- 1861:** In the first year of the American Civil War, Southern privateers raid scores of Union ships.
- 1883:** Robert Louis Stevenson publishes his children’s adventure story *Treasure Island*. His pirate character, Long John Silver, becomes the best-known pirate in popular culture.
- 1904:** J.M. Barrie’s play *Peter Pan, or The Boy Who Would Not Grow Up* is first produced. The play features a group of children, led by Peter Pan, who defeat a group of pirates.
- 1982:** The **United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea**, which authorizes official ships of all states to seize known pirate ships on the high seas, is signed by 158 nations.
- 1984:** Underwater explorer Barry Clifford discovers the pirate ship *Whydah* off Cape Cod. Relics recovered from the sunken ship and can be viewed today at the Whydah Museum in Provincetown, Massachusetts.
- 1992:** The International Maritime Bureau (IMB), a division of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), establishes the IMB Piracy Reporting Centre, based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, to track pirate attacks around the world.
- 1998:** Political unrest in Indonesia leads to a surge in pirate activity in the Strait of Malacca.
- 1998:** Chinese pirates posing as customs officials hijack a Hong Kong cargo ship, the *Cheung Son*, killing the entire twenty-three-member crew. China captures and prosecutes the pirates, executing thirteen of them.
- 2000:** Piracy peaks worldwide, with a reported 469 attacks during the year; 65 percent of the attacks occur in Southeast Asia.
- 2003:** *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl*, the first in a series of Disney pirate movies featuring Captain Jack Sparrow, is a huge box-office success.
- 2004:** Under the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP), Malaysian, Indonesian, and Singapore naval forces begin to work together to combat piracy.
- 2005:** Indonesian pirate John Ariffin participates in the hijacking of the tanker *Nepline Delima* in the Strait of Malacca. Ariffin recounts this event in “**Dark Passage**”, an interview with *National Geographic* reporter Peter Gwin.

- June 2, 2008:** The UN Security Council passes Resolution 1816, which authorizes foreign warships to enter Somali waters to stop piracy by any means necessary.
- April 8, 2009:** The world watches the aftermath of the botched hijacking of the U.S. cargo ship *Maersk Alabama*, after four Somali pirates take the ship's captain, Richard Phillips, hostage. Phillips recounts this event in an interview for *Yankee* titled "**Captain Richard Phillips and the Pirates: What's Ahead for the Vermont Captain**".
- April 16, 2009:** Reporter Jay Bahadur publishes "**I'm Not a Pirate, I'm the Saviour of the Sea**", his interview with a Somali pirate.
- 2009:** Two hundred seventy-one pirate attacks were attributed to Somali pirates—more than half of the worldwide total.
- May 2010:** The Anti-Piracy Caucus releases its *2010 International Piracy Watch List*, citing problems with intellectual property piracy in five nations.
- July 2010:** A new court near Mombasa, Kenya, built with international donations through the United Nations, is established as a place to try pirates from the region for their crimes.