

# Narrative of the Mutiny of the *Bounty*

By Anonymous

About the year 1786, the merchants and planters interested in the West India Islands became anxious to introduce an exceedingly valuable plant, the bread-fruit tree, into these possessions, and as this could best be done by a government expedition, a request was preferred to the crown accordingly. The ministry at the time being favorable to the proposed undertaking, a vessel, named the *Bounty*, was selected to execute the desired object. To the command of this ship Captain W. Bligh was appointed, Aug. 16, 1787. The burden of the *Bounty* was nearly two hundred and fifteen tons. The establishment of men and officers for the ship was as follows:—1 lieutenant to command, 1 master, 1 boatswain, 1 gunner, 1 carpenter, 1 surgeon, 2 master's mates, 2 midshipmen, 2 quarter-masters, 1 quarter-master's mate, 1 boatswain's mate, 1 gunner's mate, 1 carpenter's mate, 1 carpenter's crew, 1 sailmaker, 1 armourer, 1 corporal, 1 clerk and steward, 23 able seamen—total, 44. The addition of two men appointed to take care of the plants, made the whole ship's crew amount to 46. The ship was stored and victualled for eighteen months.

Thus prepared, the *Bounty* set sail on the 23d of December, and what ensued will be best told in the language of Captain Bligh.

*Monday, 27th April 1789.*—The wind being northerly in the evening, we steered to the westward, to pass to the south of Tofoa. I gave directions for this course to be continued during the night. The master had the first watch, the gunner the middle watch, and Mr. Christian the morning watch.

*Tuesday, 25th.*—Just before sunrising, while I was yet asleep, Mr. Christian, with the master-at-arms, gunner's mate, and Thomas Burkitt, seaman, came into my cabin, and seizing me, tied my hands with a cord behind my back, threatening me with instant death if I spoke or made the least noise. I, however, called as loud as I could, in hopes of assistance; but they had already secured the officers who were not of their party, by placing sentinels at their doors. There were three men at my cabin door, besides the four within; Christian had only a cutlass in his hand, the others had muskets and bayonets. I was pulled out of bed, and forced on deck in my shirt, suffering great pain from the tightness with which they had tied my hands. I demanded the reason of such violence, but received no other answer than abuse for not holding my tongue. The master, the gunner, the surgeon, Mr. Elphinstone, master's mate, and Nelson, were kept confined below, and the fore-hatchway was guarded by sentinels. The boatswain and carpenter, and also the clerk, Mr. Samuel, were allowed to come upon deck. The boatswain was ordered to hoist the launch out, with a threat if he did not do it instantly to take care of himself.

When the boat was out, Mr. Hayward and Mr. Hallett, two of the midshipmen, and Mr. Samuel, were ordered into it. I demanded what their intention was in giving this order, and endeavored to persuade the people near me not to persist in such acts of violence; but it was to no effect. Christian changed the cutlass which he had in his hand for a bayonet that was brought to him, and holding me with a strong grip by the cord that tied my hands, he with many oaths threatened to kill me immediately if I would not be quiet; the villains round me had their pieces cocked and bayonets fixed. Particular people were called on to go into the boat, and were hurried over the side, whence I concluded that with these people I was to be set adrift. I therefore made another effort to bring about a change, but with no

other effect than to be threatened with having my brains blown out.

The boatswain and seamen who were to go in the boat were allowed to collect twine, canvas, lines, sails, cordage, an eight-and-twenty-gallon cask of water, and Mr. Samuel got a hundred and fifty pounds of bread, with a small quantity of rum and wine, also a quadrant and compass; but he was forbidden, on pain of death, to touch either map, ephemeris, book of astronomical observations, sextant, time-keeper, or any of my surveys or drawings.

The officers were next called upon deck, and forced over the side into the boat, while I was kept apart from every one abaft the mizzen-mast.

Isaac Martin, one of the guard over me, I saw had an inclination to assist me, and, as he fed me with shaddock (my lips being quite parched), we explained our wishes to each other by our looks; but this being observed, Martin was removed from me. He then attempted to leave the ship, for which purpose he got into the boat; but with many threats they obliged him to return. The armorer, Joseph Coleman, and two of the carpenters, M'Intosh and Norman, were also kept contrary to their inclination; and they begged of me, after I was astern in the boat, to remember that they declared that they had no hand in the transaction. Michael Byrne, I am told, likewise wanted to leave the ship.

It appeared to me that Christian was some time in doubt whether he should keep the carpenter or his mates; at length he determined on the latter, and the carpenter was ordered into the boat. He was permitted, but not without some opposition, to take his tool-chest. The officers and men being in the boat, they only waited for me, of which the master-at-arms informed Christian; who then said, "Come, Captain Bligh, your officers and men are now in the boat, and you must go with them; if you attempt to make the least resistance, you will instantly be put to death:" and without further ceremony, with a tribe of armed ruffians about me, I was forced over the side, where they untied my hands. Being in the boat, we were veered astern by a rope. A few pieces of pork were thrown to us, and some clothes, also four cutlasses; and it was then that the armorer and carpenters called out to me to remember that they had no hand in the transaction. After having undergone a great deal of ridicule, and having been kept some time to make sport for these unfeeling wretches, we were at length cast adrift in the open ocean.

I had eighteen persons with me in the boat. There remained on board the *Bounty* twenty-five hands, the most able men of the ship's company. Having little or no wind, we rowed pretty fast towards Tofoa, which bore northeast about ten leagues from us. While the ship was in sight, she steered to the west-north-west; but I considered this only as a feint; for when we were sent away, "Huzza for Otaheite!" was frequently heard among the mutineers.

It will very naturally be asked, What could be the reason for such a revolt? In answer to which, I can only conjecture that the mutineers had flattered themselves with the hopes of a more happy life among the Otaheitans than they could possibly enjoy in England; and this, joined to some female connections, most probably occasioned the whole transaction. The women at Otaheite are handsome, mild and cheerful in their manners and conversation, possessed of great sensibility, and have sufficient delicacy to make them admired and beloved. The chiefs were so much attached to our people, that they rather encouraged their stay among them than otherwise, and even made them promises of large possessions. Under these, and many other attendant circumstances equally desirable, it is now perhaps not so much to be wondered at, though scarcely possible to have been foreseen, that a set of sailors, most of them void of connections, should be led away: especially when, in addition to such powerful inducements, they imagined it in their power to fix themselves in the midst of plenty, on one of the finest islands in the world, where they need not labor, and where the allurements of dissipation are

beyond anything that can be conceived.

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