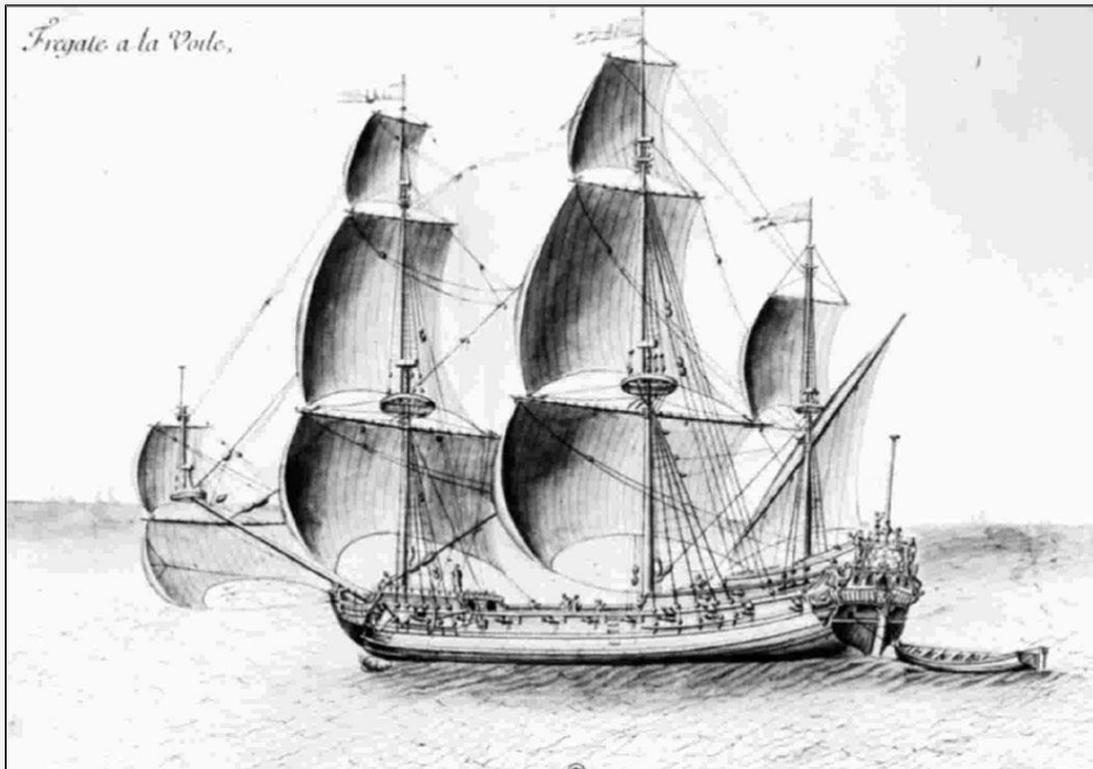


# BLACKBEARD AND BEQUIA



*Early 18<sup>th</sup> century French merchant ship similar to La Concorde*

During the early 18th century, the so-called Golden Years of Piracy, British seaman turned pirate Capt. Edward Teach, commonly known as “Blackbeard”, was one of the most notorious pirates to plague the shipping routes between West Indies and the American colonies. Even the tiny island of Bequia, with its deep, safe anchorage in what is today called Admiralty Bay and then likely populated only by a handful of Caribs mainly on the windward side, was not spared a visit by this legendary villain.

On March 24<sup>th</sup> 1717, the 200-ton French merchant ship *La Concorde* left the port of Nantes, ultimately bound for Martinique and armed with 16 cannon and a crew of 75 men. Stopping in Benin in early July 1717, *La Concorde* took on board 516 captive Africans, with *La Concorde*'s captain and officers receiving 20 pounds of gold dust from the African traders. By the time the vessel had neared the end of its voyage, 61 slaves and 16 crew had perished, with another 36 crew seriously ill from scurvy and dysentery.

*La Concorde* finally set sail from Africa for Martinique on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1717. By November 28<sup>th</sup> she was just off the coast of St. Vincent and less than 100 miles from their final destination of Martinique. It was here that she encountered two heavily armed sloops manned with a total of “two hundred and fifty men” and 20 cannon and commanded by “Englishman Edward Titcher”. The sick and voyage-weary French were powerless to resist and surrendered after just one volley from the attackers.

Blackbeard immediately sailed the seized *Concorde* and his two sloops to Bequia where he set the French crew and slaves ashore, and plundered the 20 pounds of gold held onboard. After recruiting four of the French crew, taking ten more crew by force, (including a pilot, three surgeons, two seamen, two carpenters and a cook), seizing 157 Africans and removing the onboard armaments, Blackbeard left the smaller of his two sloops to the abandoned French crew.

The French lost no time in sailing this vessel - newly and aptly named the *Mauvaise Rencontre* - away from Bequia and up to Martinique, though still returning twice to Bequia to collect the remaining Africans.

At the time, Bequia - and indeed all of the Grenadine islands - was under French control from Grenada. Deemed "too small" for a French garrison, and as yet still not settled or cultivated, Bequia was nevertheless a well-established watering hole and source of lumber for visiting vessels, including buccaneers, privateers and pirates. Since it is documented that it was to Bequia that *La Concorde* was originally taken, it seems likely that it was on the accommodating shores and in the shallows of Admiralty Bay (once known as Privateers Bay), that Blackbeard began converting *La Concorde* to suit his own nefarious activities. She was ultimately fitted with no less than 40 guns assembled from a variety of captured ships, and renaming her the *Queen Anne's Revenge* -the most powerful warship in the Americas at the time.

After her conversion, the *Queen Anne's Revenge* became Blackbeard's flagship and by the end of 1717 he sailed north, plundering ships near St Vincent, St Lucia, Nevis, Antigua, Cayman Islands, Honduras, Cuba, Bahamas and up towards the North American coast. Blackbeard now had four ships in his flotilla and 350 pirates under his command. In May 1718 his ships blockaded the port of Charleston, North Carolina for almost a week. Blackbeard ran *Queen Anne's Revenge* aground while attempting to enter Beaufort Inlet, North Carolina. Blackbeard disbanded his flotilla and escaped by transferring supplies onto the smaller ship *Adventure*.

In November 1996 a wreck was discovered in Beaufort Inlet. After several years of intense research and examination, the wreck has been identified with considerable confidence as that of *Queen Anne's Revenge*, still with its 40 guns still onboard.

Nicola Redway

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