

## MUTINY ON THE BOUNTY TIMELINE

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**1754**.....William Bligh is born in Plymouth, England

**1764**.....Fletcher Christian is born in Cumberland, England   **1767**.....Philip Carteret discovers (and mis-charts) Pitcairn island

**1776-79**.....Bligh serves as Master of the *Resolution* on Captain Cook's 3rd voyage. He witnesses Cook's death in Hawaii.

**1784**.....19-yr-old Fletcher Christian is promoted to Master's Mate on board *HMS Eurydice* sailing to India. Christian subsequently sails as Second Mate under Bligh on the merchant vessel *Britannia*, and the two get on well.

**Feb 1787**.....The Royal Society under the direction of Joseph Banks commissions *HMAV (His Majesty's Armed Vessel) Bounty* to sail to Tahiti to bring breadfruit to the West Indies as a staple food for the slave population. 33-year-old Bligh is appointed Captain, with strong support from Banks. 23-yr-old Fletcher Christian, well-known to Bligh professionally and socially as a friend, is commissioned on board at Bligh's request, serving as Master's Mate. Bligh had wanted Christian to serve as Sailing Master, but the Navy Board gave that post to John Fryer due to seniority.

**Dec 23 1787**.....The *Bounty* leaves England bound for Tahiti with 46 men. Storms early on force a landing on the Isle of Wight and a month-long delay, in an inauspicious start to the expedition.

**April 1788**.....Bligh's attempt to sail westward to Tahiti via Cape Horn is thwarted by violent storms. The *Bounty* changes course and sails eastward around Africa's Cape of Good Hope. During the voyage, Bligh replaces the Sailing Master John Fryer with Christian, creating strong resentment of Christian on Fryer's part.

**Oct 26 1788**.....**The *Bounty* arrives in Tahiti** after a 10-month, 27,000 mi/43,000 km sea journey. Arriving too late in the year to make the return voyage against the wind, and needing time to firmly root breadfruit saplings (breadfruit cannot be grown from seed), the men revel for 5½ months in the pleasures of Tahiti and enjoy freedom from the rigors and privations of life at sea. Bligh allows them to live onshore, ostensibly to care for the newly planted breadfruit saplings. The ruling chief, Pomare I in his early ascendancy (confusingly called by multiple names in various accounts, including Tu, Hitihi, and Tynah) encourages interaction, including sexual liaisons. Iron is precious to the Tahitians & iron nails are traded for goods & services, including sexual services.

**Jan 1789**.....3 crewmen desert on Tahiti in order to stay with their Tahitian lovers and forever leave the rigors of life at sea for the sweet life of Tahiti. Bligh has them rounded up and flogged, a punishment that some scholars consider surprisingly lenient.

**Apr 5 1789**.....**The *Bounty* leaves Tahiti** after 5½ months, bound for the West Indies with 1,015 breadfruit saplings on board. 44 of the original 46 men are on board (the ship's doctor had died of alcoholism & 1 crewman had died of a respiratory illness).

**April 21 1789**....Bligh and Christian exchange harsh words. Bligh reportedly tells Christian, "I have been in hell for weeks with you."

**April 27 1789**....Morale on board further deteriorates as Bligh accuses Christian of stealing coconuts from the ship's stores and humiliates him publicly. Bligh reportedly tells Christian and other officers, "I'll sweat it for you rascals. I'll make half of you jump overboard before we get through the Endeavour Strait." [at the northern tip of Australia]

**Apr 28 1789**.....**The mutiny occurs** just before dawn, 1300 mi/2100 km west of Tahiti, off the island of Tofua in the Tonga islands, 3 weeks and 2 days after leaving Tahiti, 19 mutineers including Christian seize Bligh in his sleeping quarters. 22 crew declare loyalty to Bligh, whilst 2 crew members fail to choose sides. Bligh and 18 of the loyalists are set adrift in a 23-ft open launch with 5 days' rations, a compass, a quadrant, and a broken sextant, but no map. 4 of the loyalists are unable to go with Bligh as the launch is already overloaded. They remain on board with the mutineers.

**May 24 1789**.....After a month at sea in the *Bounty*, the mutineers land on Tubuai in the Austral group (which would later become part of French Polynesia). They are 360 mi/600 km south of Tahiti. The intent is to found a 'utopian' colony, but discord and violence - both with the islanders & amongst themselves - ensues. They leave Tubuai and return to Tahiti for supplies, intentionally covering up their mutiny and not disclosing the truth to Chief Hitihi who would surely object. They return to Tubuai with fresh supplies and 30 Tahitians, but hostilities with the Tubuaian natives and their own internal divisions continue to thwart plans for a settlement.

**June 14 1789**....Meanwhile: Bligh and the 18 loyalists miraculously reach Coupang in Portuguese Timor – having battled hostile cannibals in attempted island landings, endured fierce storms, and journeyed 6500 km/4038 miles in 47 days in their small launch - a stunning maritime feat for which Bligh is renowned to this day for both his leadership and his seamanship.

**Aug 20 1789**..... A bloody skirmish over women and property leaves 66 Tubuaians dead. After a 3-month stay in Tubuai, Christian and company abandon the effort to settle on the island.

**Aug 21 1789**.....Bligh and crew leave Coupang for Batavia (Jakarta) and then sail home to England on a Dutch schooner.

**Sept 21 1789**.....**The *Bounty* returns one last time to Tahiti**. 16 men choose to stay on the island: 10 mutineers, the 4 Bligh loyalists, and the 2 men that had not taken sides. Christian (probably) marries his Tahitian paramour, Maimiti (aka Mauatua, aka Isabella), daughter of Chief Pomare. The ship departs after less than a week, with 9 mutineers including Christian, and 18 Tahitians (11 women – some wives of mutineers and some 'single women to be shared', 6 men, and a baby). Several accounts say Christian tricked some of the Tahitians by inviting them onboard for a party & sailing away surreptitiously. Total on board was now 27.

**Jan 15 1790**.....**The *Bounty* arrives on uninhabited Pitcairn Island**, 1400 mi/2300 km southeast of Tahiti (and 1200 mi/2000 km west of Easter Island). The remote island had been mis-charted by Philip Carteret, making it perfect for a hideout settlement.

**Jan 23 1790**.....The *Bounty* is set afire in what today is known as Bounty Bay, most likely by order of Christian to both prevent discovery and prevent any desertions or alternatives to the planned 'island utopia'.

(continued)

**Mar 13 1790**.....Bligh returns to England. He is court-martialed and honorably acquitted of all charges related to loss of the *Bounty*. He publishes his own account entitled A Narrative of the Mutiny on Board Her Majesty's Bounty and goes back to sea, with several command appointments over the next 12 years. On one of his sailings he returns to Tahiti and successfully transports breadfruit saplings to Jamaica, dutifully completing the original mission..

**Nov 1790**.....*HMS Pandora* is commissioned under the hard-nosed Capt. Edward Edwards to search for & capture the mutineers.

**Mar 23 1791**.....*Pandora* arrives Matavai Bay and begins to quickly round up all the *Bounty* crew who had stayed on Tahiti.

**Apr 3 1791**.....14 men are captured (2 of the mutineers had led dissolute lives and had died violent deaths). Edwards treats all 14 captives equally harshly whether they were alleged mutineers, loyalists, or undeclareds. It is now almost 2 years since the mutiny.

**May 8 1791**.....*Pandora* departs Tahiti with the 14 captives in irons and imprisoned in the infamous 'Pandora's Box'. Edwards sails the vast South Pacific in vain for 3 months looking for Christian and the remaining mutineers, finding traces in Tubuai and Palmerston Island in the Cook Islands group (administered by New Zealand today). He sails by Pitcairn - but doesn't land.

**Aug 29 1791**.....*Pandora* hits the outer Great Barrier Reef near the northern tip of Cape York, Australia, and sinks. The survivors sail in lifeboats toward Coupang in Portuguese Timor. They arrive in Coupang 19 days later, barely alive, having resorted to drinking the blood of birds and their own urine. 4 prisoners had drowned in the wreck, leaving 10 alive to eventually face trial.

**June 19 1792**....Edwards and his surviving crew and 10 prisoners finally arrive in England after transport to Batavia on a Dutch merchant ship, and then home to England on the British man-o'-war *HMS Gorgon*

**Sept 1792**.....A contentious court-martial trial is held for the 10 imprisoned defendants. Fletcher Christian's and Peter Heywood's families launch an intense & well-coordinated smear campaign against Bligh. The trial results in 6 convictions. Peter Heywood & James Morrison, who were from prominent families and who both steadfastly avowed their innocence, were soon fully pardoned by King George III. One of the convicted mutineers (the only one besides Heywood & Morrison who could afford legal counsel) was freed on a technicality. The 4 who had declared loyalty to Bligh were acquitted, based on Bligh's written testimony. Contrary to cinematic depictions, Bligh was not at the trial - he was off at sea delivering breadfruit plants to Jamaica.

**Oct 29 1792**.....**3 of the convicted mutineers are hanged** from the yardarm on board *HMS Brunswick*

**Sept 1793**.....Fletcher Christian is (reportedly) brutally murdered by disgruntled Tahitians after almost 4 years on Pitcairn, which had been overtaken by extreme discord and violence among the mixed group of settlers, much of it stemming from mistreatment of the Tahitians despite 'utopian' ideas of 'living in freedom'. Nevertheless, unsubstantiated rumors surface of Christian having been sighted in England. He had fathered 3 children with Maimiti on Pitcairn.

**1805**.....Bligh is appointed Governor of the colony of New South Wales in Australia.

**1808**.....**American sealer *Topaz* lands on (still-mischarted) Pitcairn Island** after the settlers had gone undetected for 18 years. The mariners are greeted by English-speaking children. A small community of women & children plus one older man are found alive on the island. The older man is the sole surviving mutineer, John Adams (aka Alexander Smith, a pseudonym).

**1808**.....Bligh is arrested in 'the Rum Rebellion' in Sydney and deposed from his post. (Another mutiny!) The action is later declared illegal but he is replaced as Governor and returns to England.

**1817**.....Bligh dies of cancer in London, age 63                      **1829**.....Mutineer John Adams dies on Pitcairn Island, age 66

**1831**.....Pardoned mutineer's James Morrison's memoir entitled The Eventful History and Piratical Seizure of the Bounty comes to light and paints a subjective picture of a villainous, tyrannical Bligh. This memoir will influence later literature & cinema.

**1841**.....Maimiti, Fletcher Christian's Tahitian wife, dies of influenza on Pitcairn Island

**1916**.....Famed Australian silent film director Raymond Longford releases a film *The Mutiny of the Bounty* which was well-reviewed and highly successful at the box office. The film is sadly lost. Bligh was not demonized as in subsequent films.

**1931**.....Australian director Charles Chauvel releases *In the Wake of the Bounty*. A young Errol Flynn debuts as Christian. The hodge-podge film is unintentionally comedic today, but Bligh as played by Mayne Linton is more petulant than villainous.

**1932**.....Charles Nordhoff and James Norman Hall release The Mutiny on The Bounty, the first book in their Bounty Trilogy. It is a romantic novel with a villainous, caricatured Bligh- and it would be the basis for the screenplays of two blockbuster Hollywood films.

**1935**.....Oscar winner for Best Picture, Frank Lloyd's *Mutiny on the Bounty* with Clark Gable and Charles Laughton is a stirring (if historically inaccurate) cinema classic. Laughton plays a caricature sadistic Bligh and Gable is a heroic and charming Christian.

**1957**.....The remains of the *Bounty* are discovered by famed National Geographic explorer Luis Marden.

**1962**.....More Hollywood versus history in the Marlon Brando/Trevor Howard remake, again based on Nordhoff & Hall's novel. A rousing tale filmed on location in Panavision and Technicolor. Brando was widely panned for playing an effete Christian while Howard (age 49) fashioned a memorably nasty Bligh. Mediocre box office and just one Oscar (for sound editing) - but still a classic.

**1972**.....A controversial revisionist book, Captain Bligh and Mr. Christian by Richard Hough, offers nuanced (albeit speculative) psychological analysis, including the possibility of a Bligh smoldering with suppressed jealousy & homosexual passion for Christian.

**1984**.... *The Bounty*, directed by Roger Donaldson, starring Mel Gibson and Anthony Hopkins, paints a more nuanced and sympathetic picture of Bligh. It subtly incorporates some of the ideas from Richard Hough's book. Snubbed at the Oscars.

**2004**.....Historian Caroline Alexander publishes her excellent and comprehensive The True Story of the Mutiny on the Bounty, providing a scholarly alternative to entertaining Hollywood myths.