



The Lost Fleet: The Discovery of a Sunken Armada from the Golden Age of Piracy

By Barry Clifford, Kenneth Kinkor

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On January 2, 1678, a fleet of French ships sank off the Venezuelan coast. This proved disastrous for French naval power in the region, and sparked the rise of a golden age of piracy.

Tracing the lives of fabled pirates like the Chevalier de Grammont, Nikolaas Van Hoorn, Thomas Paine, and Jean Comte d'Estrées, *The Lost Fleet* portrays a dark age, when the outcasts of European society formed a democracy of buccaneers, settling on a string of islands off the African coast. From there, the pirates haunted the world's oceans, wreaking havoc on the settlements along the Spanish mainland and -- often enlisted by French and English governments -- sacking ships, ports, and coastal towns.

More than three hundred years later, writer, explorer, and deep-sea diver Barry Clifford follows the pirates' destructive wake back to Venezuela. With the help of a lost map, drawn by the captain of the lost French fleet, Clifford locates the site of the disaster and wreckage of the once-mighty armada.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Diver and shipwreck explorer Clifford (Expedition Whydah) produces an entertaining account of his 1998 exploration of the Caribbean reef of Las Aves, off the coast of Venezuela, where more than 1,000 French seamen and accompanying "filibusters" (pirates) ran aground in 1678. Clifford shows why the Las Aves calamity "one of the most fatal naval catastrophes of its time" was not only "the spark that ignited the golden age of piracy" but also the event that "probably meant the end of any chance for French domination over the West Indies." The bulk of the book is a fascinating investigation of the life of 17th-century pirates. Clifford argues that, in the wake of their destruction of much of the French naval force in the Caribbean, "pirate crews carried on a unique social experiment, creating a sea-faring society that was fundamentally democratic, egalitarian, fraternal and libertarian." Clifford does not overlook the crime and squalor of "hell towns" occupied almost exclusively by pirates, such as the legendary Penzance in England or the island of Tortuga, off the coast of Hispaniola. But his profiles of renegade sailors Captain Thomas Paine, the Chevalier de Grammont and others make vivid the complexity of the pirate world. Unfortunately, Clifford's detailed recollections of his ultimately successful discovery of two pirate vessels at Las Aves simply can't compete with his descriptions of pirate life; this less-interesting secondary narrative is overshadowed by his own ability to bring that lost pirate world alive for the reader.

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From Library Journal

Clifford, the author of *Expedition Whydah: The Story of the World's First Pirate Ship and the Man Who Found Her* and subject of a PBS National Geographic Explorer special on his discovery of the Whydah, here attempts to weave together two stories: the almost-forgotten 1678 wreck of the French West Indies fleet, under the command of Jean Comte d'Estrees, on the treacherous reef of Las Aves off the coast of Venezuela and Clifford's 1997-98 expedition to explore the site of the catastrophe and document the remains of the lost fleet. The 18-ship French fleet was accompanied by a flotilla of about 15 ships manned by privateers. Clifford argues that by encouraging the "Brethren of the Coast" to form their own alliances, this attempted combined operation launched "the golden age of piracy" and thus profoundly affected the history of America. Unfortunately, Clifford's historical narrative, lavishly illustrated with 84 black-and-white photos and drawings, coexists uncomfortably with his narrative of the contemporary expedition. Presenting the lives and adventures of these 17th-century pirates often depends more on speculation than documentation, and Clifford's account of the confusions and double-dealings he encountered during the contemporary expedition is perhaps more than a reader needs to know about such problems. Readers familiar with *Expedition Whydah* may be interested in this recent Clifford expedition, but the truly fascinating thesis about the role of piracy in the history of America still remains to be explored. Recommended for larger public libraries with an interest in maritime history. Robert C. Jones, Warrensburg, MO

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From [Booklist](#)

Clifford, an underwater explorer who has done work for the BBC and the Discovery Channel, writes in his latest book about a project to map the site of a colossal shipwreck in 1678, which caused the French navy to suffer heavy losses and all but ended France's hopes of dominance in the colonial Americas. Much of the fleet, along with two hired pirate ships, crashed into the Las Aves reef (off the coast of Venezuela) while pursuing smaller Dutch vessels, whose crews were much more familiar with the waters and deliberately led their attackers into the trap. Clifford, whose primary field of research is piracy, recounts the lives and

exploits of a number of infamous pirates of the day and provides a glimpse of the underhanded politics employed by imperialist European nations to sabotage each other's efforts in the New World. His present-day descriptions of the wreck site will inspire the reader's imagination, and his contagious enthusiasm for underwater archaeology makes this a thoroughly enjoyable and aptly recommended read. *Gavin Quinn*
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