**The Batavia Mutiny**

The 1629 mutiny of the VOC vessel Batavia has been overshadowed by numerous other extraordinary events of the Age of Sail: while it lacks to familiarity of the 1789 mutiny of HMS Bounty, it lacks none of the drama and intrigue and in fact dwarfs it in many terms of historical significance, and in bloodiness.

Batavia was built in the Dutch Republic, in 1628. A retourschip, she was designed and built to make multiple return trips to the far side of the world hauling cargoes of gold, precious metals, and building materials, and returning with spices. She was the pinnacle of Dutch maritime technology, and the pride of the VOC so much so that she was given the honour of being named after the capital city of the Dutch trading empire in the Dutch East Indies.

The senior officers appointed for Batavia's maiden voyage included the Overmerchant Francois Pelsaert, the Company's overseer and lead bureaucrat for the voyage, and the man with ultimate authority onboard surpassing that of even the Captain. The Captain, Ariaen Jacobsz, was a rough, no-nonsense career sailor who had previously worked with Pelsaert on a trading mission to India. These two men, the fastidious bureaucrat and the salt-of-the-earth sailor, were miles apart in ideology and personality, and had already developed a disliking for each other based on their previous collaboration.

The last-minute addition to the senior officers was Jeronimus Cornelisz. Cornelisz, an apothecary from Flanders, was escaping controversy and looked to the VOC navy in order to lie low. Having never set foot on a ship previously, but nevertheless valuable for his level of education, Jeronimus’s natural charm and gift of speech won him a commission for Undermerchant, technically third in command after the Overmerchant and Captain.

Collectively, these three were responsible for around 300 crew and passengers for the duration of the trip, which could be expected to last anywhere from between one to two years.

As could be expected, tensions rose repeatedly between the Overmerchant and the Captain during the journey. After a public humiliation at the Cape of Good Hope, the Captain, encouraged by the silver-tongued and opportunistic Jeronimus, began to plot a mutiny to take control of the ship, throw the Overmerchant and loyal crew overboard, and to begin a career pirating other merchant ships in the Indian Ocean.

Jeronimus Cornelisz was more than a simple apothecary. Born into a Flemish Anapabtist family, his religious views were heretical to the conservative Calvinistic Dutch mainstream. He was well-educated, highly-intelligent, and a gifted speaker. His philosophical musings came to conclude that no thought or deed could be truly sinful to a creation made in the image of the Divine. A psychopath with a messiah complex, he was extremely dangerous.

Weeks were spent plotting, planning and recruiting sailors and soldiers to the team of mutineers. However, mere days before the mutiny was to be put into effect, Batavia ran aground on the Houtman Abrolhos. A coral archipelago, the Houtman Abrolhos is 80 kilometres off the coast of Geraldton and was, at that time, known but completely unexplored. The Batavia survivors were stranded in one what is still today one of the most isolated parts of the world.

After unsuccessfully searching the archipelago for food and water, Pelsaert together with Captain Jacobsz and a small crew set out for Batavia, 3000 kilometres away across open sea, in an uncovered single-masted longboat. Their story alone deserves to be remembered as one of the most incredible feats of survival in maritime history.

But this story is not concerned with those who left, but rather with those who remained.

Back in the Abrolhos, Jeronimus Cornelisz had inherited total dominion over a flock of around 200 survivors. Determined to continue with the mutiny, he quickly assembled a council of his lead mutineers together with a new plan: to murder over a hundred men, women, and children, until there could be no resistance to seizing the rescue ship when it arrived.