

It's 1685-90. The Kingdom of England. Not super sure about the dates, sources aren't the best for the late 17th century.

Let's talk about two people. We are going to call them mom and dad. Dad was a sailor. Mom and dad had a baby boy. Then, Dad went out sailing for milk and cigarettes and never came back. Mom decided to have an affair with someone else since her husband was probably never coming back, and she ended up having a baby named Mary Read.

Mom attempted to hide the pregnancy by going to live with friends in the country, since it wasn't a legitimate pregnancy.

Shortly thereafter, her son died, and she gave birth to Mary. In financial distress, her mother decided to disguise Mary as her dead son, in order to receive monetary support from her late husband's mother.

The grandmother was apparently fooled, and mother and daughter lived on the inheritance into Mary's teen years. Some sources say that grandma caught on to their trick, and stopped giving them money. So, Mary's mom decided to basically make her work for money, dressed as a boy. Mary apparently enjoyed this work though, so good for her.

She later joined the British military, which was allied with Dutch forces against the French (this could have been during the Nine Years War or during the War of the Spanish Succession). Read, in male disguise, proved herself through battle, but fell in love with a Flemish soldier. When they married, she used their military commission and gifts from intrigued brethren in arms to acquire an inn named "The Three Horseshoes" near Breda Castle in The Netherlands.

Upon her husband's early death, Read resumed male dress and military service in the Netherlands. With peace, there was no room for advancement, so she quit and boarded a ship bound for the West Indies.

Mary resumed her life as a man and sailed for the West Indies on a Dutch ship, which was soon captured by English pirates. The crew, believing Mary to be a fellow Englishman, encouraged her to join them. Calico Jack Rackam served as the quartermaster of her new crew, and he, along with his shipmates, never suspected Mary's true gender. She was aggressive and ruthless, always ready for a raid, and swore, well, like a drunken sailor. She was "very profligate," recalled one of her victims, "cursing and swearing much." Loose clothing hid her breasts, and no one thought twice about her lack of facial hair; her mates, most of them in their

teens or early twenties, were also smooth-faced. It's also likely that Mary suffered from stress and poor diet while serving in the army, factors that could have interrupted or paused her menstrual cycle.

Now we're going to take a pause in Mary's life to talk about someone else for a quick second.

Back to 1698-ish. An Irish lawyer William Cormac and his maid had an illegitimate child. This child's name was Anne. Cormac separated from his wife following the discovery of his infidelity and later assumed custody of Anne. Following his cohabitation with her mother, he lost much of his clientele, and the trio emigrated to Charles Towne (now Charleston, South Carolina). Anne's mother died of typhoid fever when Anne was 13 years old.

Her father betrothed her to a local man, but Anne resisted. Instead, in 1718 she married sailor John Bonny, with whom she traveled to the island of New Providence in the Bahamas. There her husband became an informant for the governor of the Bahamas, privateer Woodes Rogers. Disenchanted by her marriage, she became involved with pirate John ("Calico Jack") Rackham. He offered to pay her

husband to divorce her—a common practice at the time—but John Bonny refused.

In August 1720 Anne Bonny abandoned her husband and assisted Rackham in commandeering the sloop William from Nassau Harbour on New Providence. Along with a dozen others, the pair began pirating merchant vessels along the coast of Jamaica. Rackham's decision to have Bonny accompany him was highly unusual, as women were considered bad luck aboard the ship. He may have been swayed by her fierce disposition: apocryphal stories claimed that she had, in her youth, beaten an attempted rapist so badly that he was hospitalized. Bonny did not conceal her gender from her shipmates, though when pillaging she disguised herself as a man and participated in armed conflict.

This is where the history gets a little fishy but we're just gonna go with it -

Unfortunately, much of their early existence is a mystery, with virtually no information about their lives before they entered piracy in August 1720. The only account comes from Captain Charles Johnson's book *A General History of the Robberies and Murders of the Most Notorious Pyrates* –a collection of pirate biographies published in 1724. However,

the book is seen as largely fiction, with very little fact. But we're doing it anyway because lesbian pirates.

Accounts vary as to how Anne met Mary Read. According to one source, Rackam's ship conquered Mary's somewhere in the West Indies, and Mary was among those taken prisoner. After the engagement, Anne, dressed in female attire, tried to seduce the handsome new recruit. Mary, perhaps fearing repercussions from Rackam, informed Anne she was actually a woman—and bared her breasts to prove it. Anne vowed to keep Mary's secret and the women became friends, confidantes and, depending on the source, lovers.

Initially, Rackam was jealous of Anne's relationship with Mary, and one day burst into her cabin intending to slit her throat. Mary sat up and opened her blouse. Rackam agreed to keep Mary's secret from the rest of the crew and continued to treat her as an equal. (He was also somewhat mollified when she took up with a male crewmate.)

During battles Anne and Mary fought side by side, wearing billowing jackets and long trousers and handkerchiefs wrapped around their heads, wielding a

machete and pistol in either hand. “They were very active on board,” another victim later testified, “and willing to do any Thing.” The summer and early fall of 1720 proved especially lucrative for Rackam’s crew. In September they took seven fishing boats and two sloops near Harbor Island. A few weeks later, Anne and Mary led a raid against a schooner, shooting at the crew as they climbed aboard, cursing as they gathered their plunder: tackle, fifty rolls of tobacco and nine bags of pimento. They held their captives for two days before releasing them.

Near midnight on October 22, Anne and Mary were on deck when they noticed a mysterious sloop gliding up alongside them. They realized it was one of the governor’s vessels, and they shouted for their crewmates to stand with them. A few obliged, Rackam included, but several had passed out from the night’s drinking. The sloop’s captain, Jonathan Barnett, ordered the pirates to surrender, but Rackam began firing his swivel gun. Barnett ordered a counterattack, and the barrage of fire disabled Rackam’s ship and sent the few men on deck to cowering in the hold. Outnumbered, Rackam signaled surrender and called for quarter.

But Anne and Mary refused to surrender. They remained on deck and faced the governor's men alone, firing their pistols and swinging their cutlasses. Mary, the legend goes, was so disgusted she stopped fighting long enough to peer over the entrance of the hold and yell, "If there's a man among ye, ye'll come up and fight like the man ye are to be!" When not a single comrade responded, she fired a shot down into the hold, killing one of them. Anne, Mary and the rest of Rackam's crew were finally overpowered and taken prisoner.

Calico Jack Rackam was scheduled to be executed by hanging on November 18, and his final request was to see Anne. She had but one thing to say to him: "If you had fought like a man, you need not have been hang'd like a dog." Ten days later, she and Mary stood trial at the Admiralty Court in St. Jago de la Vega, Jamaica, both of them pleading not guilty to all charges. The most convincing witness was one Dorothy Thomas, whose canoe had been robbed of during one of the pirates' sprees. She stated that Anne and Mary threatened to kill her for testifying against them, and that "the Reason of her knowing and believing them to be women then was by the largeness of their Breasts."

Anne and Mary were found guilty and sentenced to be hanged, but their executions were stayed—because, as lady luck would have it, they were both “quick with child.”

As custom dictated, they were given a stay of execution until after the birth of their children.

Tragically, Mary died in prison in April 1721 of ‘gaol fever’, today known as typhus, and possibly complications during childbirth. Anne’s end is more mysterious. It has long been thought that she managed to leave prison and go back home to the Carolinas, where she lived until the age of 82. On the other hand, more recent research has located records in St Catherine’s Parish, Jamaica, listing the death of a woman named Anne Bonny in 1731, suggesting that she may have spent the rest of her life on the island.