

# The Bully and His Booty

## Secret Disposal of His Stolen Riches

It's been over 150 years since pirates plied their twisted trade across the vast Pacific, but on the Micronesian island of Kosrae, the legend of the infamous Bully Hayes lives on.

By Tom Bentley

**T**he whole notion of buried treasure has a keen romantic allure, but combine it with an exotic tropical island, wicked pirates and unsolved mystery, and you have a compelling combination. It's been over 150 years since pirates plied their twisted trade across the vast Pacific, but on the Micronesian island of Kosrae, the legend of the infamous Bully Hayes lives on.

Hayes provided the best insurance that his name and legacy would still have currency today: the violent disposal of his famous brig the *Leonora* in a Kosrae harbor, and the secret disposal—or so it's said—of his stolen riches somewhere on the Kosraean mainland. The *Leonora's* location, though clouded by shifting silt, has been fixed in its watery grave for more than a century, but the location of Mr. Hayes's treasure is still a matter of sharp speculation.

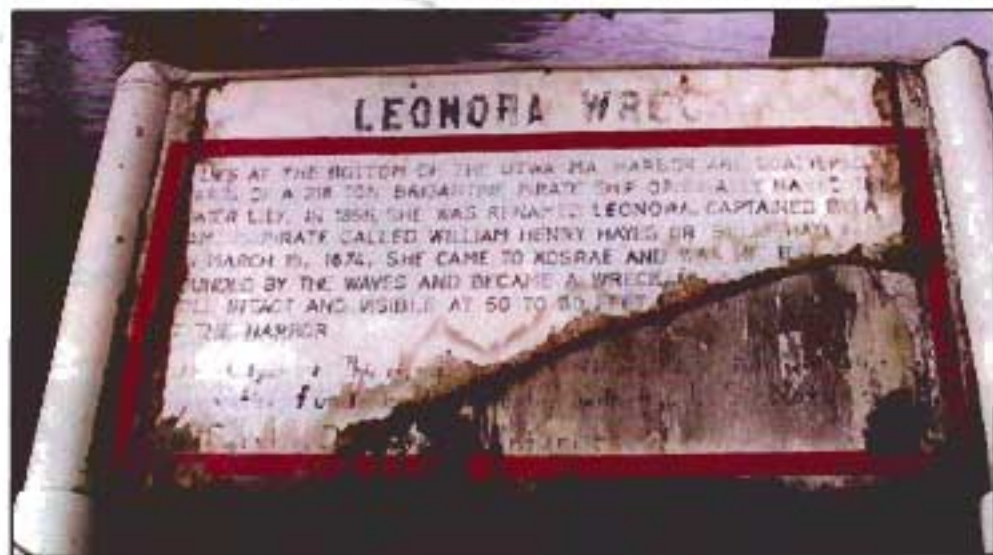
A bit of geography first, to fix Kosrae's place in the broad Pacific: the island is one of the states of the Federated States of Micronesia, just a tick north of the equator, part of the broader Caroline islands chain. It is 2,500 miles southwest of Hawaii, 1,800 miles

north of Australia, and scads of miles from any significant stretch of landfall. But its isolation didn't deter 19<sup>th</sup> century whalers, traders, and missionaries from seeking commerce in its rich waters (and for the missionaries, spiritual commerce among its pagan peoples). The island's three natural harbors—Utwe, Okat and Lelu—added to its presence as a stop on the whaling circuit. Whalers could spend more than a year out at sea working their tough trade, but the rewards could be significant: the head of the 90-ton sperm whale could yield 5,000 gallons of sperm oil, and at the 1845 prices of \$1.77

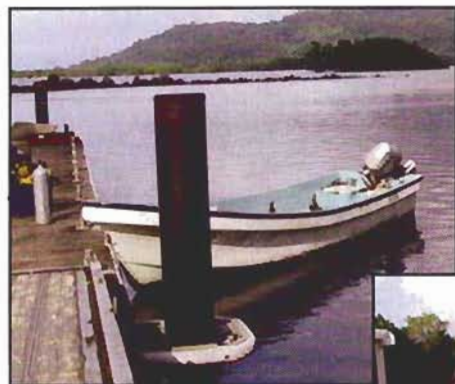
a gallon, that wasn't just grease.

As you might expect, where there's legal commerce, there's always the less-than-legal kind, and that's where Mr. Hayes comes in. Hayes was truly a jack (or jackanapes) of all trades when it came to crime, an equal-opportunity criminal for the ages. His illustrious career encompassed every flavor of infamy available, from theft, to kidnapping, to rape and murder. Though the Pacific islands had seen a good deal of knavery in whaling times, Hayes upped the ante, and then some. As James Michener says in his book, "Rascals in Paradise" which

Aging Utwe Harbor sign attesting to the final resting place of the *Leonora*.



Dockside at Utwe. The *Leonora* lies in waters to the right of the background reef.



devotes an entire chapter to Hayes:

Native chiefs prayed to ancient gods that they might be spared visits from this terrible man. Police and warships of many nations tried to track him down, but he either eluded them or talked his way to freedom, and after thirty years of unparalleled depravity he died of natural causes—that is, he was murdered and thrown to the sharks by his cook, whom he had bullied once to often.

Michener's account and several others testifies to Hayes's uncanny ability to bilk unwary businessmen and put the hard swindle on any marriageable woman in sight—numerous are the accounts of him obtaining full cargo holds of goods on credit and leaving ports with only a promise and a wave, never to pay any merchant a dime, and often on a ship obtained without cash or good credit. Arrested numerous times, at one point even being charged with 97 criminal counts, either by force of personality or by skulking out into the night, Hayes always sidestepped justice. Before he'd arrived for a first visit on Kosrae, his reputation—and that of his partner, Ben Pease—for dirty dealing preceded him.

Among their exploits at that point, Pease and Hayes were servicing the growing copra market, by hook or by crook (mostly crook) off various Pacific islands, where they'd established many copra processing and harvesting stations.



Local Utwe divers getting ready to hit the water.

Hayes had also become a notorious "blackbirder," the practice of kidnapping island natives at gunpoint and selling them into slavery on other more developed islands, like Australia, Hawaii, and Fiji. Michener tells of islands whose entire male populations were forcibly removed for the slave trade. So vicious were the blackbirder's methods that one of them consisted of infecting some natives with measles and then returning them to the native population, who, ravaged by fever, could offer no resistance to the slaver's depredations.

Sometime around 1870, Hayes stole a ship named the *Neva* out of a Kosrae harbor, installing one of his men on it as captain, bringing the *Jamestown*, a USS warship in pursuit. But as was the case for many of Hayes's misdeeds, he fled to another island, and got away unpunished. For years, he'd made a habit of making the rounds in his vessels, committing crimes, and making off before capture. But his luck was beginning to run out.

On March 15, 1874, a southern storm came up when Hayes's *Leonora* (named after one of Hayes's daughters) was harbored in Kosrae at Utwe. (A. Grove

Barrel coral near Utwe Harbor.



An Utwe diver near a coral formation, the real treasure on Kosrae.

Day said the *Leonora* was "the most notorious ship in the 18<sup>th</sup> century Pacific." Hayes became the self-proclaimed captain after Ben Pease's mysterious disappearance.) The *Leonora*, with all its cargo and armaments, including four cannons, went down in tremendous seas after smashing into a coral reef. Hayes managed to get ashore, but a number of his sailors were drowned. Two other whaling ships escaped, avoiding the storm—and avoiding Hayes, whose reputation for stealing ships was well known.

Marooned at Utwe, Hayes built a house and set up copra collection there. Allegedly, he charged the Kosraean chief a bounty of 48,000 coconuts to make up for lost cargo he claimed the Kosraeans stole when the ship sank. It's said he married a Kosraean woman, but I wasn't able to verify that, though in Michener's book, he claims that Hayes had island wives on practically every habited isle in the South Pacific. During the time of this stay, Hayes was accused of raping a 9-year-old

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### The Treasure:

In excess of \$1 million in stashed gold coins.

### How to Find It:

Carefully research accounts of Bully Hanes activity, including places he frequented in the Micronesian island of Kosrae. Presumably, the treasure would be buried somewhere on the mainland.

### Sources:

Kosrae, *The Sleeping Lady Awakens*, Harvey Gordon Segal, Kosrae State Tourist Division, 1989.

*Rascals in Paradise*, James Michener, A. Grove Day, Fawcett Crest, 1957.

*Captain Bully Hayes, Blackbirder and Bigamist*, Frank Clune, Halsted Press, 1970.



island girl. A British warship came to investigate charges against him, but he escaped in one of the *Leonora's* small boats.

As for the *Leonora's* status now, since the advent of modern diving, the ship has gone through many phases of limited or greater visibility due to currents and seafloor changes, but recent storms had produced more favorable conditions. John Latchelt, the owner of the Channel Dive Center out of Juneau, Alaska took out a group of divers to view the *Leonora* in January 2005, and reported that visibility was about 80 feet, which is fairly murky for Kosrae, where on good days it can be 200 feet. (The Alaskan divers weren't complaining, since they often dive in water that's below 40 degrees, and Kosrae waters are always above 80.)

They located the wreck in about 45 feet of water. Here's Latchelt's account:

Much of the wreck was exposed: ballast stones, ribs and parts of the keel were quite evident. Some planking with square nails was seen as well. There is a coral structure on the island side of the wreck, but the area around the wreck is primarily sand and silt. This is a very easy dive due to depth and visibility. We also noted no significant currents on our dive.

Besides the *Leonora*, Kosrae's harbors are home to two whaling ships, the *Henrietta*, which foundered in 1843 and the *Waverly*, downed in 1893. There are also two WWII shipwrecks, the *Sansun Maru* and *Keikyu Maru*, plus sever-

al planes from the Japanese occupation. The Kosrae Museum has a small glass case devoted to documents and artifacts about Hayes and the sinking of the *Leonora*.

Before his hastened departure, Hayes allegedly buried his considerable treasure somewhere on the island. It has been supposed that the cache would be somewhere in the vicinity of one of Kosrae's harbors, though over time all of the diggings came up empty. Hayes returned after a few years in March of 1877 on a small schooner, the *Lotus*, but supposedly got into an argument with the ship's cook and was hit over the head and dumped overboard.

That's a fitting end for a man of violence, but one that left the mystery of his treasure's whereabouts unknown. One of the island stories of the treasure tells of the sighting of a big crab emerging from a hole carrying a large gold piece in his claw, but all excavations near the spot had empty yields. It was reported that prior to WWII that the employees of a Japanese-run sawmill hit a metal box while digging on a small island off Okat harbor, and that soon after the sawmill closed down, and everyone returned to Japan. It was later reported that the sawmill's owner had become a wealthy man, but there was no accounting either way for his prosperity. If the treasure was the source of his bounty, the new owner kept mum.

Tadao Waguk, the self-proclaimed "last storyteller" of Kosrae (and someone well versed in island history and lore) says that

Hayes reputedly had *three* treasure chests, and that only one was recovered through the Japanese sawmill crew, leaving two still at large. However, there's no record or story of any local treasure diggings for more than 50 years. The time is ripe for the technology of the modern treasure hunter to be applied to Hayes's ancient booty.

If Hayes's buried treasure is even half as rich as the tales told of him, its capture would keep a body in pleasures for many a day. Here's how Michener sums up his life:

The number of ships he stole cannot be accurately computed. The slaves he impressed must have run into the thousands. The money he got by fraud probably totaled well over a million dollars, and all of which he wasted. That he invaded peaceful ports and stole all the coconuts he could find, we know for sure. That he subdued and debauched whole islands we find reported by trustworthy witnesses. That he kidnapped and raped children is on record. He was a known bigamist three times over, and if one counted his island marriages, he was probably guilty one hundred times more.

Hayes was an unrepentant scoundrel, but it must be said his evil deeds provided a long-term publicity machine for his legacy. He will be remembered, and sour memories they might be, but they cross generations and cover thousands of miles. There's an old rusty sign in Utwe Harbor that attests to Hayes infamy and the final resting place of the *Leonora*, only a few hundred yards away. Unfortunately, the sign doesn't give the slightest hint as to where Bully secured his booty, but anytime I make my way around the island, I look for the glint of gold. **Tc**