

H.M.S. *Bounty*

THE MISSION

Needless to say, it was never supposed to be this much trouble.



William Bligh, in a picture from his memoir of the mutiny.

Along the way, however, Bligh proved that he was much better at ship management than he was at people management.

First in the long line for Bligh's torrential verbal abuse was the man he had promoted to be his first lieutenant, Fletcher Christian. Christian finally exchanged this dubious leadership position for another one, as the de facto leader of the sailors who seized the ship in the early hours of April 28, 1789.

The mutineers tossed Bligh and 18 loyalists into the ship's boat to take their chances.

Royal Navy Lt. William Bligh was commissioned to take the newly outfitted *Bounty* to the island of Tahiti to pick up some breadfruit trees. These were then to be carefully transported to the West Indies, where it was hoped that their starchy, melon-like fruit would make cheap food for slaves.



Fletcher Christian's career didn't last long enough for anyone to paint a picture of him.

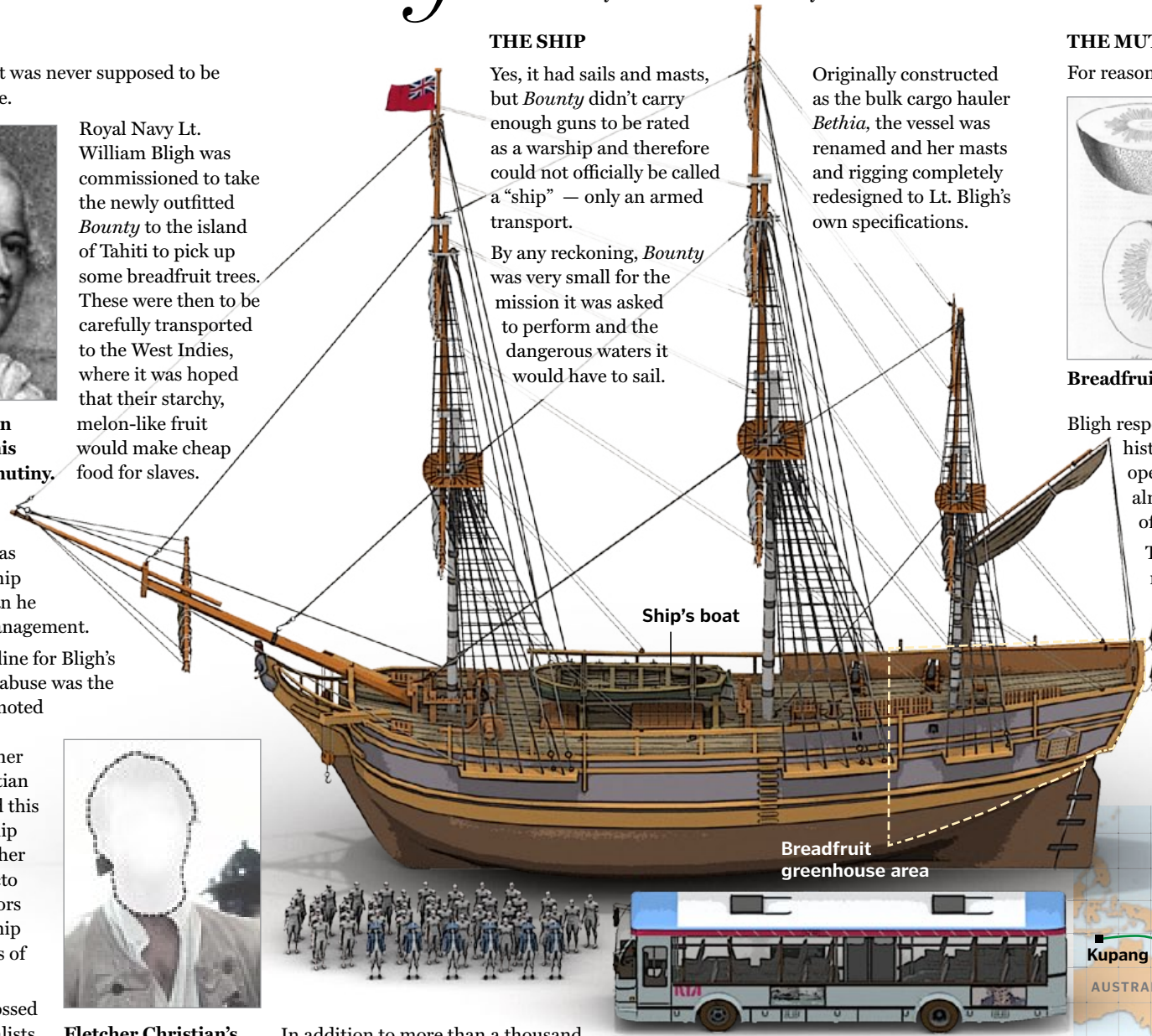
In addition to more than a thousand breadfruit trees, 46 officers and men called the 120-foot *Bounty* home during its 16-month voyage.

THE SHIP

Yes, it had sails and masts, but *Bounty* didn't carry enough guns to be rated as a warship and therefore could not officially be called a "ship" — only an armed transport.

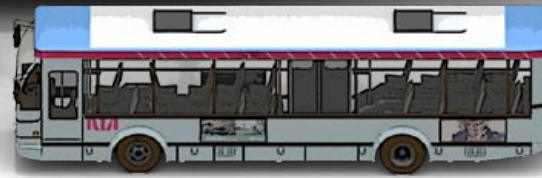
By any reckoning, *Bounty* was very small for the mission it was asked to perform and the dangerous waters it would have to sail.

Originally constructed as the bulk cargo hauler *Bethia*, the vessel was renamed and her masts and rigging completely redesigned to Lt. Bligh's own specifications.



Ship's boat

Breadfruit greenhouse area

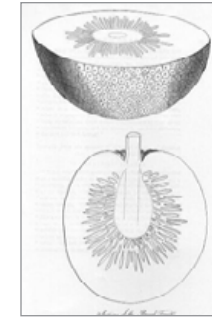


RTA BUS FOR SCALE

On April 27, 1789, she was an unrated, unassuming little ship halfway through a low-priority agricultural mission for the Royal Navy. A day later, she was launched into immortality as the site of history's most famous mutiny.

THE MUTINY

For reasons having to do with the weather and the life cycle of breadfruit trees, the *Bounty*'s stay in the tropical paradise of Tahiti stretched to five months. 24 days after weighing anchor to begin the arduous voyage home, Christian — brandishing a bayonet and screaming "I am in hell!" — led 18 mutineers into Bligh's cabin and packed him off the ship.

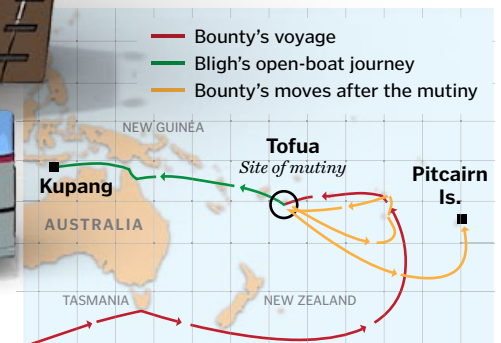


Breadfruit.

Bligh responded by cementing his place in naval history with a 4,000-mile journey, in an open boat with no maps or charts and almost no food, to the Dutch settlement of Kupang in West Timor (see map).

The mutineers fared worse. Those who returned to Tahiti were picked up by a vengeful Royal Navy and tried for mutiny; three were hanged. Christian, eight other crewmen and 17 Tahitians finally settled on tiny, uninhabited Pitcairn Island, where most died violent deaths.

Their descendants, however, live on Pitcairn to this day.



SOURCES: Royal Naval Museum; "Bligh" by Sam McKinney (International Marine Publishing, 1989); tallshipbounty.org

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