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Florida's Golden Galleons: The Search for the 1715 Spanish Treasure Fleet

Robert F. Burgess, Carl J. Clausen

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On July 24, 1715, a Spanish treasure fleet sailed from Havana, carrying a cargo of 14 million pesos in gold, silver and jewels. In the Florida Straits, near present-day Cape Canaveral, the fleet ran into a hurricane, with the disastrous loss of ten ships and 700 lives. Little was salvaged at the time. For more than two centuries, sand and sea held their secrets well. Occasionally, however, tides and storms tossed blackened silver coins up on the beaches, tempting would-be treasure hunters. Among the most successful was the Real Eight Company, contracted by the state of Florida to recover the valuable treasure and historical artifacts under the supervision of state underwater archaeologist Carl J. Clausen. Spurred by the unique finds on the ocean floor and curious about the full story behind the tragic event that had scattered this fabulous treasure along Florida's east coast, he and Robert F. Burgess determined to record the history of the ill-fated fleet. In writing their book, the authors needed the answers to hundreds of questions. What was it like to cross the Atlantic in the eighteenth century? What precautions were taken against pirates? What caused the delays that led to sailing at a particularly treacherous time of the year? What really happened the night of the hurricane? How much treasure was lost? How many people survived? The authors discovered that pieces of the historical jigsaw puzzle lay scattered all over the world. They examined hundreds of documents recovered from dusty archives: official statements, depositions, royal court orders, private and public letters, and ships' manifests. After ten years of research, the authors finally had all the facts, which enabled them to reconstruct the story. Florida's Golden Galleons is that stunning story, meticulously detailed and excitingly told, of the sinking of the great fleet and of the successful modern-day efforts to bring its treasure once more to the light of day.

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