

SYNOPSIS



Grand Turk is a UK-flagged wooden replica of a three masted, three decked, 18th Century square-rigged sailing vessel, originally designed in about 1791 as a British Frigate. Although capable of sailing as a fully rigged vessel, she is fitted with two auxiliary engines and is licensed as both a Class V and a Class III passenger vessel. On 20 August 2001, *Grand Turk* left Dover for Gosport, Hampshire, where she was to take part in the International Festival of the Sea (IFOS).

After arrival at Gosport on 20 August 2001, she carried out several practice firings to welcome other vessels; the gun crew comprising the mate, third mate, the acting bosun, and a senior topman. On Thursday 23 August, the third mate was asked to take over as gun captain during the demonstration to be given the next day in front of an invited audience, the vessel having been chartered for the day. After discussions with the master and mate he chose his own team: two experienced members and a young lad of 17, who was keen but relatively inexperienced. During the day, the new gun crew carried out various practice routines, culminating in both loading and firing.

The following day, Friday 24 August at 1145, *Grand Turk*, which was now tied up alongside the north wall of HM Dockyard, Portsmouth, had the noon day gun loaded but not primed. The demonstration gun team was in position and dressed in period costume, with the guests grouped on the forward starboard side of the main deck with the second mate. At about 1156, No 4 cannon was prepared for the customary noon day firing. The master was standing port side forward to warn off any boats approaching from forward, while the mate was aft, keeping a general eye on the gun team, at the same time warning off any boats which might approach too close from astern.

Immediately after the noon cannon was fired, the reloading demonstration started. After the recoil, the acting bosun concentrated on securing the cannon carriage and serving the vent. The young lad pushed the swabber down the muzzle, "bottomed" it and pulled it out. As he turned to get the rammer, another crew member used the wormer on the debris. Immediately the wormer had been withdrawn, a new charge was placed just inside the muzzle. The young lad then began to push it down the barrel with the rammer. As he tapped the charge down against the breech, there was a loud bang, together with the customary cloud of smoke. When the smoke cleared, the young lad shouted out for help and was seen standing in front of the muzzle clasping his hands, which were covered in powder burns and blood.