

“FOUR MONTHS ON A WINDJAMMER.”

INTRODUCTION

The following article was written by Harry Morgan Stoe Man for the January 1931 issue of ‘Curry and Rice’, the Chartered Bank’s in-house magazine. This internet version was created in March 2004 and is a preliminary version with further revisions and explanatory notes to be added. (DGM – New York City). It describes his experience on the ship Sierra Colonna sailing from Burma to England. (Revised October 18, 2010)

PART ONE



Away back at the beginning of 1894, found me in Rangoon just completing a year's visit to my parents there. I had had a very good time and was naturally not keen to return home to find work. To keep me out of mischief, however, my father had got me a temporary job in Rangoon with Gillanders, Arbuthnot & Co., as a kind of "punkah wallah," at Rs. 50 per month, but I seemed to spend a good deal of my time out of the office, making trips on the steamers of the Asiatic Steam Navigation Co., for which G. A. & Co. were the agents. I remember I made several trips up the coast to Calcutta, stopping at the various ports *en route*, viz. : Sandoway, Akyab and Chittagong. When in Calcutta, I stayed with Mr. Cruickshank, Manager of the then Bank of Bengal. He was very nice to a youngster like me, and I can still remember the broad, cut glass mug from which he drank his whiskey "peg." It was always filled up to the brim with ice, so that I used to wonder how he enjoyed his "peg," because there was hardly any room in the glass for the whiskey and soda.

I also made a trip to Colombo, stopping at the Mount Lavinia Hotel for two weeks. The Manager in those days was a great, big, fat man, and he used to make himself very useful when his guests went bathing in the sea. He went into the sea and acted as a kind of breakwater, so that we had a certain amount of calm water to bathe in.

The most interesting trip I made was on board the Royal Indian Marine Vessel "DALHOUSIE." The commander, Barwick, was a great friend of my father's, and he asked me to go away with him on his next trip, taking reliefs and provisions to the various lighthouses and lightships on the Burma Coast. I was on board nearly three weeks, and the first lighthouse we visited was the "Alguada" Reef lighthouse, off the mouth of the Irawaddy.

The first lighthouse was destroyed by a cyclone about 70 to 80 years ago, and nothing more was seen of the building or the staff. The present lighthouse is built on a reef some few miles from the coast, and at high tide it seems as if it rises sheer out of the water. It

stands 80 feet high, built of massive concrete blocks, and looks very much like the " Eddystone " lighthouse. The " DALHOUSIE " hove to, lowered a boat into which I scrambled along with two white lighthouse keepers and three natives; provisions and water for the next three months were also lowered into the boat. We then rowed to the lighthouse. Owing, however, to it being high tide, we could not land at their small jetty, but were hauled up out of the boat in a " bosun's chair " some twenty-five feet up to the entrance. It was wonderfully cool inside owing to the thickness of the walls, and we inspected the various rooms -- sleeping quarters, kitchen, store rooms and lamp rooms, about six in all. One had a wonderful view from the little gallery at the top outside the lamp. In those days, the machinery was run by oil. We took back to the ship the two white men and three natives who had been relieved; the total complement of the lighthouse being four white men and six natives on duty for three months.



We then steamed away to the Coco Island lighthouse which lies just north of the Andaman Islands. This lighthouse is considered the plum of the lighthouses, as it is built on an island not quite as big as the Isle of Wight, and the head keeper had his family with him. He had a nice house for himself, also a small farm yard, a couple of cows and lots of ducks and chickens, so he didn't mind being there for three months.

From there we went on to Port Blair, the capital of the Andaman Islands, and the penal settlement for Indian convicts. Port Blair is a beautiful little landlocked harbour surrounded by hills covered with tropical vegetation. Round the harbour were the various buildings for the convicts and the Governor and staff. For protection against an uprising, there was stationed there a company of white troops from the British regiment in Rangoon, also two companies from a native regiment. We were there for three days, and I went ashore and stayed with the deputy Governor who was a relation of mine¹. He had a large, comfortable bungalow and was waited on by good conduct prisoners. I felt rather nervous at first, seeing these Indian prisoners standing round the table. Each one had an iron ring round his neck, with a small block of wood hanging from it, on which was written his number and the chapter of the Indian penal code under which he was sentenced.



Harry in Burma with his sister Mary.

The Andamans are ideally situated for a penal settlement. They lie some two hundred miles from the nearest mainland (Burma), and woe betide any convict who escapes into the interior of the islands. The natives are very primitive and antagonistic and would make short work of any man who fell into their hands. They resemble more a Central African tribe, are coal black, short, with thick lips and stubby curly hair. They are very uncivilised, wear no clothes and live principally by fishing. I remember feeling very bashful when, just after the " DALHOUSIE " had dropped anchor in the harbour of Port Blair, a native woman scrambled up on to the deck from her canoe and asked me for some tobacco, as they are great smokers. Her only attirement was a bead necklace.



From Port Blair, we left for the Oyster Island lighthouse lying off the Burma coast slightly to the north of Akyab. This island is not quite so large as the Coco Island and has not such comfortable quarters for the staff. We landed there with reliefs and provisions, but stayed only one day, after which we left for Calcutta.

We had on board from the Andamans about sixty time- expired convicts, and it was interesting to watch them, as we steamed up the Hooghly, pointing out to each other the various places, landmarks and villages which they hadn't seen for fifteen to twenty years. I understand, the Government of India are now giving up the Andaman Islands as a penal settlement and are now sending all convicts to the various prisons in India.

From Calcutta, I returned to Rangoon by one of the steamers of the Asiatic Steam Navigation Company.

I am afraid I have rather digressed from my original subject and must now get back to it.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this article, I had to return to England to find a job. Naturally, I wanted to take as long as possible over the journey, and, being very fond of the sea, I asked my parents if I might return home by sailing ship. They didn't like the idea at first, but when the family doctor said it would be the best thing for me and probably cure me of dysentery which I had had from time to time during my stay in Rangoon, they reluctantly gave in. So my father and I went down to the river to find out when a vessel was leaving for England in the next two or three weeks. At that time (March 1894), there were lying in the Rangoon river some fifteen sailing ships loading rice for all parts of the world. I don't suppose there has been one seen there during the past fifteen years.

We heard from W. Q. Rowatt & Co., that they were loading a vessel for U.K. for orders which would leave in a fortnight, and they knew there was a spare cabin on board, but we first had to ask the Captain if he would take me, and at what cost. We then took a sampan off to the ship, and dangerous work it was getting alongside, as the Rangoon river has a very swift current. We boarded the "SIERRA COLONNA," (below left) a vessel of 1489 tons registered, owned by Thompson, Anderson & Co., of Liverpool, who in those days possessed about a dozen sailing vessels, all named after the "Sierra" mountains, and trading to all parts of the world. They were three masted full-rigged ships, painted white outside, and with their white sails set they looked a fine sight.

We met the Captain of the ship, David Bowles by name, from Dundee, a fine old seaman, who had worked his way up from before the mast and in his younger days had been for some years on whaling ships in the Southern Seas-a hard training.

He showed us the cabin I could have, a nice, plain but roomy one, right aft on the port side, next to the rudder. It contained a good, broad bunk with a sofa, washstand and chest of drawers. He told us it was a spare cabin, generally used as a hospital, and on the passage out a seaman, who had fallen from aloft, had died in it. Cheerful news for me I On the starboard side, opposite to me, was the Captain's cabin and a small chartroom, in front being the two mates' cabins and a small saloon where the Captain and mates had their meals. From the chartroom was a ladder to the deck, which brought you out just in front of the wheel.

The Captain mentioned that, as he was not registered as licensed to carry passengers, he would have to put me down on the ship's crew list, and it was arranged that I should be entered as an assistant steward. He also arranged to take me home for £30, which included the passage and meals with himself and the two officers. He stated further that he would take no responsibility and that I ran the risks of the journey like any other member of the crew. My father agreed to this, and I was told to be on board by midday

on 23rd March. The Captain mentioned that the passage out had taken only ninety days, and he hoped to do the passage home in about the same time. As a matter of fact, we took 125 days, owing to calms and head winds.

On 23rd March, I went on board with my kit, four live sheep, with fodder, two dozen each of live fowls and ducks, a case of six dozen bottle beer, and four bottles of brandy.

As we were towed down the river, the crews of the other sailing vessels assembled on the fo'castles and cheered us as we went past. It was a funny sensation to me to be on board and feel no motion from a screw underneath. We seemed to slide along without any movement. No Bails were as yet set, but everything was being got ready to loose them as Boon as the pilot left us and the tug had cast off.



A sister ship of the Sierra Colonna's

Perhaps I have written enough for this issue of *Curry and Rice*, and had better continue my journey home in the next number. H.M.S.M.

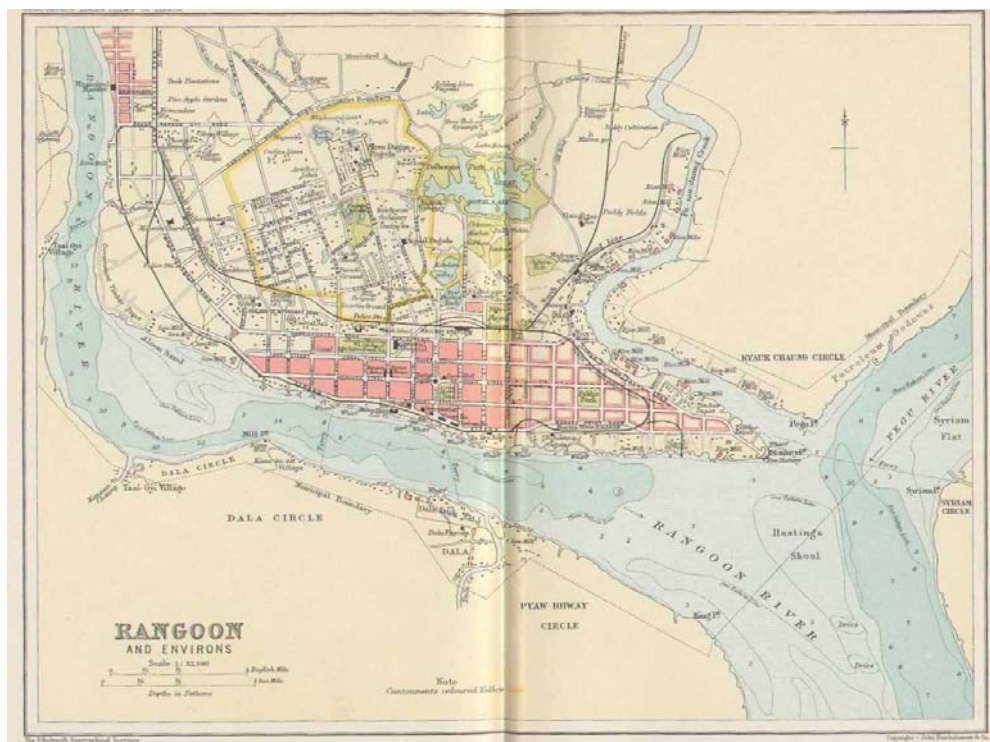
PART TWO:

“FOUR MONTHS ON A WINDJAMMER.”

(Continued)

In my previous article I mentioned that I left Rangoon on 23rd March, 1894, on board the three-masted full rigged ship "SIERRA COLONNA," bound to Channel for orders. That means the ship makes either for Queenstown or Falmouth, whichever port is the most favourable according to the wind.

At first we had dead calms with the ship hardly moving through the water. In one day we only made 12 knots, and the Captain was very annoyed as we took 23 days to reach the



Equator. I took the opportunity of the fine weather to get settled down and find my way about the ship and up aloft.

Besides the Captain there were two mates, five apprentices, young boys, mostly of about 15 years of age, 14 seamen before the mast, with a cook (a West Indian negro), bo'sun, sailmaker, carpenter and steward. Including myself, we were 28 all told on board. Of this number only half were British subjects, the rest being a mixture of other nationalities. The food was simple and a good deal of it uneatable, On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays the mid-day meal consisted of pea soup and salt pork. On Sundays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays we had fresh soup and tinned meat, and twice a week the steward made bread (fresh tack). The salt pork was ghastly stuff, it was kept in barrels,

and when the lid was taken off, you could smell it for miles. On the top was a layer of brine, and when this was removed one saw huge chunks of fat, at times half bad of a greenish colour, and underneath a layer of meat about as wide as a boot lace. The tinned meat was supposed to be beef or mutton, but it was mostly horses' sinews through which you couldn't get your teeth. I lived most of the time on biscuits, marmalade and butter. The biscuits were kept in air tight tins and were not bad, although you had to break them open and shake the weevils out before eating them. The marmalade was also kept in large tins, as well as the butter which came from Denmark. I messed with the Captain and two mates. We got the same food as the men, except that on Sundays the Company allowed the Captain a bottle of cheap red wine which was divided amongst us four. Ten days after leaving port, the Board of Trade insist on lime juice being doled out to everyone on board, to keep away scurvy. This is a great ceremony. The steward, who was a cripple with a huge hump and a big " Buffalo Bill " hat on his head (he was also stone deaf), would sit on the after hatch at mid-day with an empty butter tin full of lime juice and water properly mixed. The men would then come up with their cups or mugs, and the steward would dip the cup into the lime juice and give it to the man who would drink it in the presence of the steward and then go back forrard. Most of the men would not drink their cup full, but would spit it out into the scuppers as they went back.

To give you an idea of the wages paid in those days to a crew on a sailing ship, the Captain received £15 per month - all found, the first mate £12 per month, the second mate £10, the cook-steward, sailmaker, bo'sun and carpenter each £6, able seamen £3 10s. per month, and ordinary seamen £2 10s. The apprentices got nothing, in fact, they paid a premium to serve their time before going up for their certificates to become third mates.

There was no ceremony crossing the Line, as this was the ship's homeward journey and I had already paid "my footing " by giving each man a bottle of beer before I was allowed to go up the foremast.



Sierra Colonna

On a fine, calm day, with the sea like glass, the ship would be surrounded by sharks. From aloft they were horrible looking beasts with one fin out of the water and their eyes looking up at you. The Captain asked me if I had ever caught a shark, and when I said no, he gave orders for the shark hook to be brought up and baited. The hook, an iron one, was about two feet long, at the end of a chain of about two yards, and then a stout rope. About ten pounds of bad pork were fixed on to the hook which was then gently lowered over the stern of the ship. About twenty feet under water it was made fast, and as one could see quite clearly down much further than that, the sport became interesting. Soon we saw the pilot fish come up from the depths and swim round the bait. A shark is always accompanied by about half a dozen small fish about the size of a herring who act as his scouts and lead him to any food they think he will like. Presently we saw a dark shadow coming up, a big shark which swam leisurely to the bait, smelt it, turned over on his back and swallowed it. We saw his white belly and the huge jaws which do so much damage. Then he swam off with it, but couldn't get far as the line was made fast. Then he began to pull like anything, and we let him do so for a few minutes to get the hook properly fixed in his jaws. The watch was then called, and it took eight men to haul him amidships and pull him up until his nose was level with the top of the bulwarks. He hung there for about half an hour so as to tire him out, his huge tail banging against the side, making the whole ship tremble. A slipknot was then put over his tail, and a cry of "look out" was raised, and then the brute was pulled on to the deck. The thump, with which he came down, woke him up a bit, and he commenced to lash out with his tail again. One of the sailors got a capstan bar and rammed it down his throat to keep his jaws open, whilst another sailor with a big knife cut his head off. Then you should have seen the blood flow. Sharks are full blooded fish, and the deck swam with it, over the ankles of the men.

His body was then ripped open, and it was found that the bait had been nearly masticated and only a small piece was left, about the size of one's fist. His heart was taken out and jumped about the deck for quite a while, showing the vitality of the beast. His fins and tail were also cut off, and then the carcass was thrown over-board and was devoured by the other sharks before it was out of sight. The hook had come out of his right eye and had broken off the teeth of the right upper jaw. A shark has five rows of teeth in each jaw, one row lying behind the other, and they are triangled with edges like a saw. When any food gets into the mouth, all the rows stand out, making it difficult for anything to come out of his mouth. The fins were eaten by the men, as they are looked upon as a great delicacy, but I couldn't stand the dish as the flavour was too strong. This shark was twelve feet long, and I still have the jaws and the skull mounted at home. The skin of a shark is like a nutmeg grater, and you can file your finger nails on it with ease.

By the time we got to the Cape (middle of May), I had become quite an efficient sailor, could give a hand at the ropes, furl a sail, and even steer the ship in fine weather.



I used to work with the apprentices on the mizzen mast, as well as help the carpenter overhaul the blocks and wire rigging and see that everything was shipshape and in order. It was very cold rounding the Cape of Good Hope on 22nd May, exactly two months out from Rangoon, and that night we had a heavy gale, the lee bulwarks under water, and the ship under a storm try -

sail only. A young sailor was lost overboard luring the evening, he fell from aloft direct into the sea. No one heard him go, and it was only when his watch went below at 8 p.m. that he was missed. All hands were called out to look for him, but only a few buttons from his oil skins were found. His disappearance caused a great gloom over the rest of us, and for weeks after there would be two men always on the look-out forward and two men at the wheel, in case his ghost should come aboard. Sailors are very superstitious.

After rounding the Cape, with her nose pointing home-wards, the ship is painted and cleaned up from top to bottom, and woe betide any sailor who lets a drop of paint fall from aloft on the deck. One nasty job was " holy-stoning " the leeks. That is, on one's knees with large sand-bricks scrubbing up and down.

At St. Helena we slowed down, that is, put the main yard back, when a fisherman's boat came alongside and the Captain bought some fresh potatoes from him. The man took a

letter from me to post on shore, which cost me a bottle of brandy. He, however, proved quite honourable and posted it all right, as it arrived at its destination. We then went on with the S.E. trades helping us, until we struck the "Doldrums" near the Western Isles (Azores). There we lay for days "boxhauling" the yards, trying to catch every little breath of wind that came along. Some days we made no progress owing to dead calms, and a bottle we had trailing a stern of us to show the currents, used to race the ship and get ahead of us. In one week, I remember, we made only 100 miles progress. Several sailing vessels were lying around us, and we used to speak with them, asking where they had come from and how many days out they were. On one day, there were ten sailing ships lying becalmed.



Owing to our long and slow passage, the fresh water on board was getting low, and all hands were put on an allowance of one quart per man per day, which had to suffice for cooking, washing and drinking. Matches and also tobacco were beginning to get scarce. On 15th July, we were getting right into the track of the ocean liners going to New York. One night, we were nearly run down by an Atlantic liner. The weather was very foggy, and as we were unable to make Queenstown owing to head winds, the old man set his course for Falmouth. He had to go by "dead reckoning," as for days we had not seen the sun. I well remember him coming up to me one morning early and saying he hoped to pick up the Scilly Island lighthouse at noon. I went up to the main royal with him (150 feet above the deck), and through our glasses we saw right on the horizon a little white speck which was the lighthouse. There was great excitement when we shouted down to the crew below: "land in sight."

The old man bargained with a tug a few hours later for the amount he should pay to be towed up to Falmouth. After a long haggling, the price was fixed, and a hawser quickly thrown from the ship to the tug, and so we arrived in Falmouth on 24th July, after 125 days at sea without landing. The next morning, the old man took me to lunch ashore and afterwards saw me off to London by train. His last words were: "Thank God you arrived safely." The old ship was ordered to Bremen where her cargo was sold, and I have never

seen anything of the Captain or of the crew since. I enjoyed my trip immensely, I never read a book the whole voyage, and when I arrived in London, my people could hardly understand me, as I had such a strong Scotch accent acquired from long political arguments with the old skipper during the voyage.

H.M.S.M.
(Concluded.)

Notes: The Sierra Colonna was 'an iron sailing ship that was converted into a coal hulk by the Adelaide Steamship Company in 1915. She was one of over forty hulks which were used over the years to store coal for the company's fleet of steamships and for other clients. She was based at Albany from 1917 and survived until 1952 when she was sunk by the RAAF for target practice.' (Note supplied by Sally Horne, Curator, South Australian Maritime Museum – October 2010)

Two articles found in the Times of London that refer to the Sierra Colonna:

MISCELLANEOUS.
The Sierra Colonna, belonging to Liverpool, from Calcutta for Dundee, about which vessel some amount of anxiety has been expressed in consequence of her having been some time out, was reported yesterday to have been seen on Monday morning off Aberdeen with half the crew down with sickness. The vessel which spoke her was the steamer Phoenix, from Iceland, arrived at Leith, which also reported having on board the crews of the three French fishing smacks wrecked at Iceland—viz., the Ouvre, Alsace-Lorraine, and Auguste Clemence.

SIR GORDON ILLINGWORTH

Sir Gordon Illingworth, a former Commodore of the Cunard White Star Line, died at Boston, Massachusetts on Friday at the age of 75. He was born on April 28, 1884, the son of R. G. Illingworth, of Kendal, and first went to sea in 1901 in the Liverpool sailing vessel Sierra Colonna.

He joined the Cunard Line in 1910 as junior officer in the first Mauretania, served in the Royal Navy in the First World War, and was in H.M.S. Valiant at the Battle of Jutland. He rejoined the Cunard Line in 1919 and in 1937 became captain of the Ascania. At the outbreak of the Second World War he returned to naval service and in 1940-42 served as commodore of the Queen convoys; subsequently he was released from naval service to take command of the Queen Mary. During the war he also commanded the Aquitania, Mauretania, and the Queen Elizabeth. He became Master of the Queen Mary when he rejoined her in 1947. Later that year he was appointed Commodore of the fleet and in October, 1948, he retired. In the birthday Honours of 1949 he received a knighthood. He was a Freeman of the City of London and a Younger Brother of Trinity House.

¹ This relative was Reginald Fendall Lewis the brother of Cecil Champain Lewis who had married Harry's sister Sarah Josseyln Man in 1894. Among the private papers held by the Indian Office in London is the

following catalogue record: *Photocopies of articles on the Andaman Islands by Mrs E H M Lewis, wife of Reginald Fendall Lewis, Assistant Superintendent, Port Blair 1898 and Deputy Commissioner 1914-1922, and brief typescript memoir, dated 1969, by their daughter Mary Hope Wemyss Deane, wife of Lancelot Victor Deane, Assistant Commissioner, Port Blair 1930-34.*