

ROYAL NAVY

NAVAL

CAMPAIGNS

GERALD J. ELLOTT MNZM, RDP, FRPSNZ.

POSTAL HISTORIAN

2010

Second Burmese War 1852 -1853

HMS Fox

HMS *Fox*, *Leda* Class 1794, Built to the lines of the French *Hebe* (taken 1782). The largest class of sailing frigates ever built (even larger if one counts the other French frigates built to the lines of the *Hebe*.) 42 guns, 284 men. Built at Portsmouth Dockyard, keel laid down June 1821, launched 17 August 1829; 1856 converted to a screw frigate (transport), 1882 broken up.

Fox was the favourite name for cutters in the period 1783 – 1815, the current *Fox* was the 28th so named, battle honours included Burma 1852-53

According to the 1852 Navy List, HMS *Fox* was on the East Indies Station.

Commodore George R. Lambert (17 July 1850)

Commander John W. Tarleton (23 July 1850)

Lieutenant Charles B.D. Kennedy (3 October 1851)

William B. Mason (6 May 1852)

Additional Robert C. Copland (*act*) (8 September 1851)

The 3 February 1852 letter was countersigned for the concession rate of 1d by **Lieutenant George H. Clarke**, who was appointed to HMS *Fox* on 25 July 1850

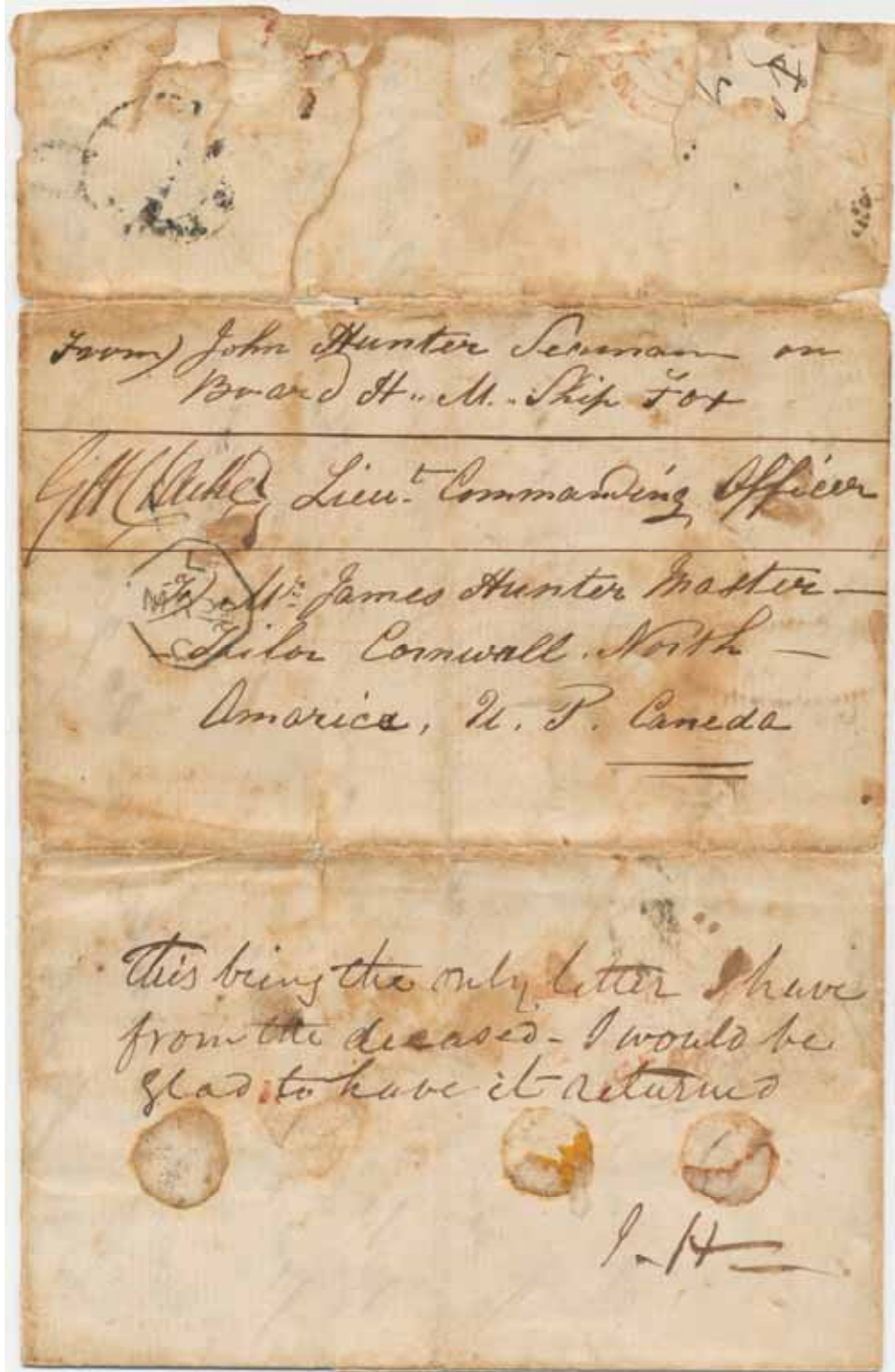
On 1 April 1870, retired as Captain (Retired). “War” service included Mate of HMS *Hydra* at the storming of Sidon and the bombardment of Beyrout and Tyre, 1840 (Medal); Senior Lieutenant of HMS *Fox*, in action with stockade batteries on the Irrawaddy, and at blockade of the river, 1852; in HMS *Blenheim* at the bombardment of Bomarsund, 1854 (Baltic Medal)

Short resume of the involvement of HMS Fox during 1851 – 1853

25 November 1851	Anchored off Rangoon
19 January 1852	Fired upon by stockade
31 January 1852	Fired upon again by stockade
5 April 1852	Attacked Rangoon
10 April 1852	Landed Royal Marines & 18 th Regt.
17 May 1852	ditto
3 June 1852	Left Rangoon for the attack on Pegu with 230 troops

The ships involved included HMS *Fox*, *Rattler*, *Serpent*, *Sphinx*, *Salamander*, *Hermes*, *Winchester* and a gunboat, together with 22 ships from H.E.I. Naval force, which included *Ferooz*. Seamen and marines, who took part, received the India General Service Medal 1854.

3 February 1852, Entire Letter, written by Seaman John Hunter at Rangoon, addressed to his Father, Master Tailor at Cornwall, Upper Canada.



Provenance Trevor Davis, February 2004.

The note on the reverse reads

“This being the only letter I have from the deceased –
I would be glad to have it returned. JH”

The question now to be answered is when and where did John Hunter die?

Seaman John Hunter's Letter

Rangoon 3 February 1852

Page One

Rangoon Feb 3 1852

Dear father & mother

I take this favourable opportunity of writing
to you to let know how I have been since
you have from me last we got Calcutta
I came here to Receive some money owing to
the East India government since the last year
we got an answer from the governor of Rangoon
that they would not pay any then we took
the only ship they had as a prize she had
a few small guns on board of her but the men
all ran away then she so we were determined to
take her we got under way and left the town
to go on and blockade the harbour when we got
abrest of the battery or the stockade as they call it the
opened fire on us we returned the ball very quick & kept
on for 3 hours steady firing so we killed 200 men and
wounded 300 of the men and not one man on board of us

The second Burmese War commenced officially on 5 April 1852, when Martaban was occupied. Rangoon was attacked on 12 April 1852, with fighting continuing for three days before Rangoon was captured. In the three days of fighting, British Strength, 6,000; Burmese 20,000 with 90 guns, the British losses were 17 killed and 132 wounded.¹

¹ Brigadier Peter Young DSO, MC, MA – *A Dictionary of Battles (1816-1976)* Volume I, Section two, page 97/98 Rangoon Mayflower Books New York, 1977. ISBN 0-8317-2260-6.

Transcript of letter written by Seaman John Hunter

HMS Fox at Rangoon, addressed to North America.

Page One

Rangoon Febr. 3 1852

Dear father and mother

I take this opportunity of Writing / to you to let know how I hive (sic) been since / you hear from me last we left Calcutta / & came here to Receive some money owing to/the East Indea (sic) government since the last war. / We got an answer from the governor of Rangoon / that He would not pay any then we took / the only ship he has as a prise (sic) she had a few small guns on bord (sic) of her but the men / all ran away When the(y) see we ware (sic) determined to / take her we got underway and left the town to gow (sic) and blockade the harbour when wee (sic) got / abrest (sic) of the battery or the stockade as the(y) call it, the(y) / opened fire on us we returned the pills* very quick & kept / on for three hours stedy (sic) firing (sic) to we killed 400 men and round / 400 of the men and not one man on bord (sic) or us / hurt.

* pills – Sea-Jargon for cannon balls

End of page One

Notes

HMS *Fox*, Commodore George Robert Lambert left Calcutta in November 1851, for Rangoon, arriving on 25 November 1851, in order to inquire in the situation which had arisen. (*Several Ships' Masters had complained on the treatment which they had received from the Burmese authorities at Rangoon*)

According to reports no progress was being made, with and further acts of oppression taking place and when the Commander of the HEI Co. *Phlegethon* who had gone ashore with a letter was insulted, orders were given for all the British subjects to embark with all the British merchantman in the river towed to safety from Rangoon, and the King's ship the *Yathunah-gee-mhon* was captured.

On 10 January 1852, HMS *Fox* was towed into position abreast of the Dunnoo stockade just below Rangoon, and being fired from the stockade, returned the fire². The same situation again happened on 31 January 1852, when HMS *Fox* was being towed up the river to Rangoon, although HMS *Fox* returned the fire, *she did not stop*.

This is confirmed on page two of the letter.

² Wm. Laird Clowes – The Royal Navy History, Volume VI page 372/373. Sampson Low, etc. London 1901

Seaman John Hunter's Letter

Rangoon 3 February 1852

Page Two

I we should have destroyed 10 kinds as many if the had
not Run away then on Saturday January the 3rd we
went to the beach with a letter the governor of Rangoon
up again and the press again we stayed a few
minutes and gave them a few more pills
during the time ^{the day} that was happening & the lot
which gave them the guts ache and the pain
again we receive an answer that they would not
come on terms with the letter so we up
& went down again to the mouth of the
river we expect to give some place to the river
Season is over if we we shall get the hope
to not main that close to where we are at
Present but god knows when we shall go Home
to England for I do not expect we shall go
before this is settled but if you shot or
if I am dead you can always find out
by writing to the Somerset House
-- London & giving the directions where to
write back to you

Continuation of Transcript of Letter written by
Seaman John Hunter HMS *Fox*
at Rangoon, addressed to North America,

Page Two

& we should have destroyed 10 times as many if the(y) had / not Run away then on **saturday January the 30**** we went / to see if the(y) would comply with a letter the governor of indea (sic) / sent / up again am the fired again we stoped (sic) a few / minets (sic) and gave them a few more pills* / (during the time the boy that was keeping one of the bots (sic) / ad (sic) his leg shot of & hes (sic) dead) / which gave them the guts ache and the ? / again we receive an answer that the(y) would not / come on terms with the letter so we up / (Anchor) *John Hunter has drawn an anchor.* And went down again to the mouth of the / river (*Irrawaddy River*) we expect to gow (sic) some place to the rainy / season is over (*Monsoon period up to October*)

If not we shall get the troops / to molmaine (sic) (*Maulmain, Gulf of Martaban*) that's close to where we are at / Present but god knows when we shall gou (sic) Home / to England for I do not expect we shall gou (sic) / before this is settled but if I am shot or / if I am dead you can always find out / by writing to the Somerset House / London & giving the directions where to / write back to you.

* pills – Sea-Jargon for cannon balls

End of page Two

Notes

** Clowes gives the date as **31 January 1852**, which is the correct date for the Saturday. Dates are very important, as there is still great controversy over who initiated the second Burmese War.

Richard Cobden in his publication "*How Wars are Got Up In India*" is quite convinced that it was the actions of Commodore George Robert Lambert of HMS *Fox* which caused the war, and states that the dispute was miss-represented to Parliament and the true facts were suppressed to the British public.

For the record, for his services during this campaign, on 5 December 1853, Commodore George Robert Lambert of HMS *Fox* was honoured with the KCB, Knight Commander of the Bath.

The last lines of John Hunter's page two of his letter are interesting

"if I am shot or / if I am dead you can always find out / by writing to the Somerset House / London & giving the directions where to / write back to you."

I felt that this was quite enlightening, informative and knowledgeable for an 1852 seaman.

Seaman John Hunter's Letter

Rangoon 3 February 1852

Page Three

I have told you before in the letter
I wrote from Calcutta in an answer to yours
that I receive the thing I was on board of her
Majesty ship Fox write to me now as oft
as you can like to, let me know how
every thing is, how all my friends &
acquaintances is doing, as for me I get plenty
to eat, and a half a pint of rum per day and
when we are any place that is quite and
peaceable we have liberty for us to do
every month or so give my best respects
to all brothers and sisters
no more at present
but remain yours son
to Dotts
The sun is made the wood to be

Continuation of Transcript of letter written by
John Hunter seaman HMS *Fox* at Rangoon,
addressed to North America.

Page Three

I have told you before in the letter / I wrote from Calcutta in an answer to yours /
tha(t) I receive ther(e) tha(t) I was on bord (sic) of her / Majesty Ship Fox write to
me now as oft(en) / as you like & let me know how / everything is and how all my
friends & / acquaintances is doing as for me I get plenty / to eate (sic) and a half a
pint of rum per day and / when were are any place that's quite and / peaceable we
have liberty for 48 hours every / month or so give my best respects / to all brothers
an sisters / No more at present (sic) / but Remain your son / to Deth (sic) / the
pen is made of wood by ?

End of Page 3 and the Letter

POSTAL HISTORY

There are no visible Paid markings.

Transit Marking applied at Liverpool

LIVERPOOL Lozenge shaped datestamp **22 March 1852**

(Robertson Type M28)³ mainly used on Naval Mail to North America 1847 – 1860.

Receiving Markings applied in Canada

MONTREAL and **CORNWALL** circular datestamps applied in red on reverse

3 May 1852

Mail Route (To the United Kingdom)

P&O *Achilles* left Bombay 17 February 1852, at Aden 25 February 1852, at Suez 4
March 1852.

Mail transferred to P&O *Ripon* at Alexandria 7 March 1852, at Gibraltar 18 March
1852, arrived at Southampton on 21 March 1852.

Arrived at Liverpool 22 March 1852 (Confirmed by the datestamp).

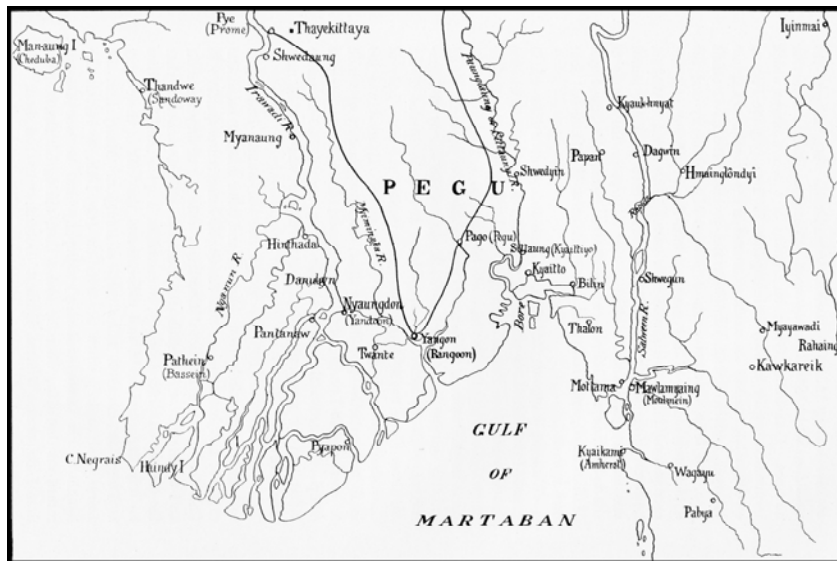
Mail Route (To the United States – either shipping Line)

The Collins Line "*Baltic*" left Liverpool on 24 March 1852 arriving at New York on 5
April 1852.

The Cunard Line "*Africa*" left Liverpool on 27 March 1852, arriving at New York on 7
April 1852

The mail from New York to Montreal would have travelled by River Boat and overland.
Mail from England to Montreal during the summer months would normally arrive
within four weeks.

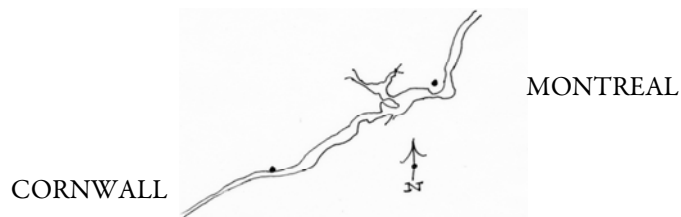
³ See Colin Tabcart - Robertson Revisited Page 166, note 52



Map of Lower Burma
 (Wm. Laird Clowes – *The Royal Navy History*, Volume VI)



Mail Routes up to August 1852
 J.C. Arnell - *Atlantic Mails* – A History of the mail service between UK & Canada to 1882



St. Lawrence River

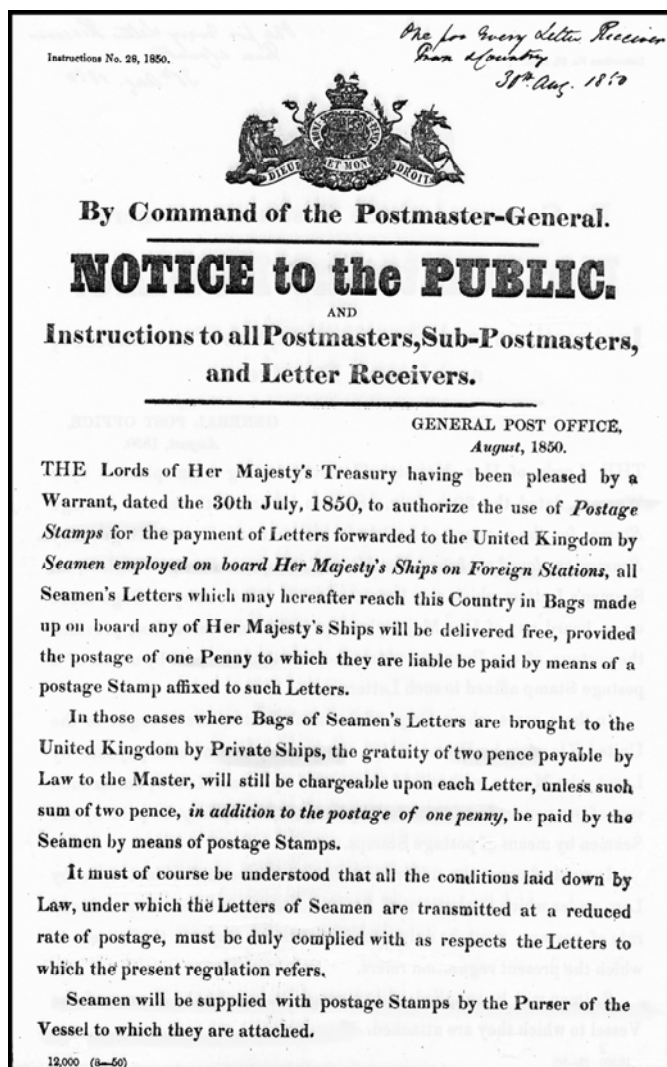
Locality Map

Soldiers and Seamen Concession Rates

The Concession Postage Rates for mail posted or received by Seamen serving in His Majesty's Ships was first introduced on 5 May 1795, at which time Single sheet letters could be sent for One Penny, and received on payment of One Penny.

From 25 March 1803, Letters addressed to Seaman could be prepaid the Penny Postage.

From 10 January 1840, the single sheet, was changed to a maximum weight of half an ounce.



Instruction No. 28 1850

From 31 August 1850, the use of British Postage Stamps was authorized, and generally these were made available through the Ship's Purser. These letters were posted on board ship, in the Navy Mail Bag.

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E&OE

7 October 2010

Gerald J. Elliott MNZM, RDP, FRPSNZ.