

# John Herbert Seccombe And the Lion



John Seccombe served as a Lieutenant aboard HMS Trincomalee during her first commission on the North America and West Indies Station, 1847 to 1850.

John entered the Royal Navy as a Naval Cadet in 1829, becoming a Lieutenant in 1842, a Commander in 1855, and then a Captain in 1859. He was promoted to Rear Admiral on the retired list in 1876, and then attained the rank of Retired Vice Admiral in November 1881. He died on Monday 14 September 1894 at Fairham, Paignton, Devon at the age of 78 years.

It was whilst he was a Commander that he had an unusual encounter with a lion, as reported in the Isle of Wight Observer of Saturday 12 February 1859:

“Her Majesty’s steam transport Himalaya, Commander John Seccombe, arrived at Spithead on Saturday morning, from Malta, Gibraltar, and Tangier. She would have arrived at Spithead on Friday evening, but in coming up the West Channel she touched the ground on Peel-bank, it being nearly low water at the time; she came off again in about two hours, without sustaining the slightest injury. The weather was exceedingly thick at the time, raining heavily, and blowing hard from the S.W. On coming off the ground, Captain Seccombe anchored his vessel at the Motherbank for the night, getting under way again the next morning for Spithead.

The Himalaya’s dates are, - sailed from Malta at 2 pm on the 24<sup>th</sup> of January, at Gibraltar in the 28<sup>th</sup>, at 8 am.; sailed from Gibraltar for Tangier at 2 pm on the 29<sup>th</sup>, and arrived there at 5 pm the same day.

The next morning embarked the presents of horses and wild beasts from the Emperor of Morocco to Her Majesty, consisting of one lion, one leopard, six ostriches, one gazelle, six horses, two mares, and an animal called by the Moorish attendants ‘irwy’, but which in appearance much resembles the mountain sheep of California, known by the trapper name of ‘bighorn’. The horses and animals have come to England in charge of four Moors, who form so slight attraction, dressed in their Moorish costume.

The somewhat unusual spectacle of a ‘lion hunt’ took place on board on the 2<sup>nd</sup> inst.. One of the Moors was engaged in feeding the lion through a door which opened for that purpose in a part of his cage or den, when, with a sudden spring, the animal dashed through the opening on to the steamer’s main deck, which, as may be imagined, was soon ‘cleared.’

The hatchways were at once closed, and measures promptly taken by Commander Seccombe to secure the animal as speedily as possible. For this purpose the commander, with the senior lieutenant, boatswain, sergeant of Marines, and two men, descended to the main deck, taking with them the end of a stout line; this was riven through a ringbolt in the deck, and a running noose formed with the end.

After some considerable manoeuvring the noose was thrown over the lion's head, the word was given to the hands on deck, who ran away with the other end of the line, and the lion was pinned down to the ringbolt in the deck. His legs were immediately secured, and he was dragged back to his den in safety.

The Himalaya steamed into Portsmouth harbour on Saturday at high water and made fast alongside the Dockyard jetty."

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