

OLD AFRICA

STORIES *from* EAST AFRICA'S PAST

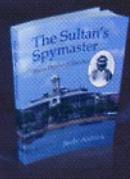
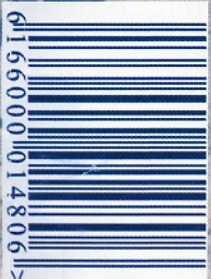
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ZANZIBAR - HAREM BOMBARDED - 1896

Chief Kareithi Semliki Sam

Kisii Boma 1975 Cricket World Cup

Makupa Causeway Airship Mooring Mast



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WIN!
2 Nights for
SAT...

BRITISH SAILOR PHOTOGRAPHS AFTERMATH OF WORLD'S SHORTEST WAR

by Jerry Haigh

This photo shows the three masts of the Sultan's ship the SS Glasgow, sunk in the battle in Zanzibar in 1896.

1896 My grandfather Francis Evans Percy Haigh (known as Percy) sailed into Zanzibar aboard HMS *Cossack* on Thursday 27 August 1896. With his camera he recorded the aftermath of a violent but short-lived conflict.

Lieutenant Haigh joined the Royal Navy as an engineer subaltern on 29 June 1894. He soon found himself aboard HMS *Bonaventure* on his way to the Indies. He carried with him a Shoviell Dry Plate camera that had probably been given to him as a parting gift by his father, Edward Makinson Haigh, who was a well-known professional photographer.

The ship travelled across the Mediterranean and stopped at Cairo where Percy took the first photos that he would later put in his photo album. The sphinx and the pyramids captivated him, as they have seduced many tourists before and since. Percy would have had to preserve his films with great care and have carried the collection with him until he returned to Britain where he could get them developed. Even the slightest trace of water would have wiped the

images. He placed his dry plates in the standard tin trunk that every sailor carried for his kit.

The vessel sailed through the Suez Canal and southwards through the Red Sea. The next stop was at Aden. Again Percy's camera came into use. Photographs of the tanks and the water reservoir for the town went into his trusty tin trunk. Granddad later wrote captions of these photos and most of his other works in his copperplate hand. Alongside a group portrait in the town of Aden he wrote: "The Native Element."

The *Bonaventure* turned southeast. Her next port of call was Mahé in the Seychelles. Again the camera came out of its bulky case. Then they sailed on to Sober Island east of Ceylon, as it was called in those days. Here, on 13 July 1896 Percy transferred to HMS *Cossack* and sailed back westwards. Somewhere off the coast of East Africa the *Cossack* touched long enough for Percy to capture his photo of two Somali men on camel back.

A few days later the *Cossack* joined the Royal Navy fleet

under the command of Rear Admiral H H Rawson at Zanzibar. By a single day granddad and his shipmates missed the 45 minutes of the shortest war in history, more prosaically called the Anglo-Zanzibar war.

The war had started because of the ill-advised decision by Seyyid Khalid bin Barghash to declare himself Sultan after the death of his cousin His Highness Seyyid Hamed bin Thwain at 11.30 am on Tuesday 25 August 1896. Within half an hour Khalid had seized the Palace. The British Consul General, Mr A Hardinge, Her Majesty Queen Victoria's representative on the island, disapproved of Khalid and sent him a letter requesting him to "retire quietly." Khalid refused, foolishly failing to realise Mr Hardinge had the backing of five of Her Majesty's Royal navy ships at anchor in the harbour. They were the *Philomel*, the *Racoon*, the *Thrush*, the *Sparrow* and the *St George*. Khalid said he would not open fire, but he would fight for his throne. The British sent Khalid an ultimatum to pull down his flag by 9 am on 27 August or the British ships would open fire.



The sphinx and the pyramids in Egypt captivated Percy Haigh and he captured them on his dry plate film.

At 8:30 am one of Khalid's supporters visited the British Consulate and declared: "We have no intention of hauling down our flag and we do not believe you would fire on us."

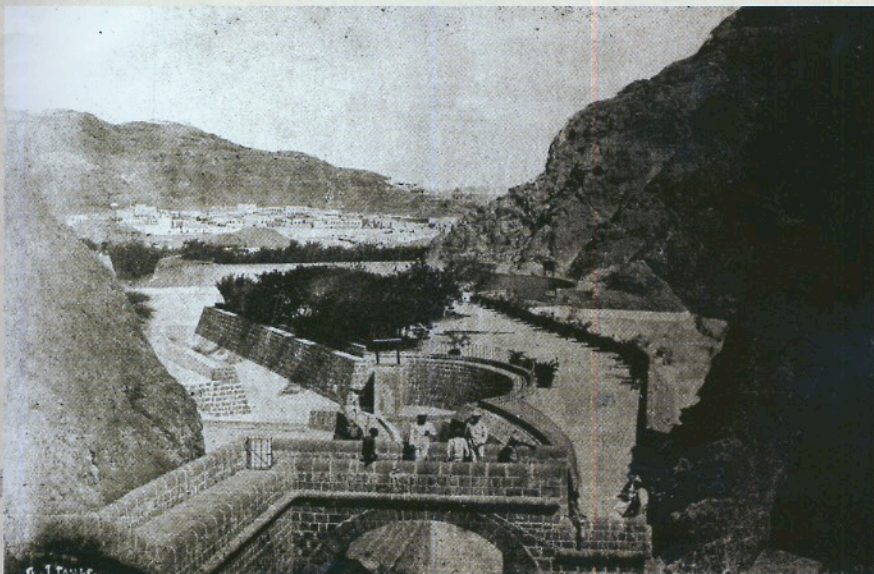
The Consul answered, "We do not want to open fire, but unless you do as you are told we shall certainly do so."

Earlier Admiral Rawson

had invited Mrs Hardinge and some other European ladies to breakfast aboard the *St George* to watch the proceedings from the safety of the deck. After a magnificent breakfast, they waited for the last minutes to tick away. Signals were sent to the other ships to prepare for action. When the clock hit 9 am the

Racoon, Sparrow and *Thrush* opened fire on the Sultan's Palace and Harem.

The Sultan's steamship the *SS Glasgow*, built in Dumbarton, Scotland, had been a disappointment to Sultan Barghash after he purchased it in 1878 on the recommendation of William Mackinnon. The *Glasgow* had sat in the Zanzibar harbour getting little use during Barghash's reign, or the reign of the Sultans that followed him. But now, five minutes after the bombardment of the Sultan's Palace and Harem, the *SS Glasgow* retaliated. However, her outdated muzzle-loading guns were no match for the more modern breech loaders of the *Philomel* and *St George*. The *SS Glasgow* was holed along the water line and began to sink. By 10:45 am the *Glasgow* had sunk, leaving



Percy Haigh photographed these water tanks and reservoir above Aden town.



In his photo album Percy Haigh wrote the following next to this group portrait taken in the town of Aden: "The Native Element."

only her masts and funnel visible above the surface.

Accurate shooting at point blank range destroyed the front of the Sultan's Palace exposing the inner rooms. The Sultan's Harem next door was set alight and the women quickly evacuated. The House of Wonders beside the Harem was left intact.

Khalid and about forty of his followers escaped out the back doors and ran through the narrow streets to the German Consulate where Baron von Richburg gave him political asylum. At 9:45 am Khalid's flag was shot down and the order was given to cease-fire. The war was over, 45 minutes after it started. About 500 of Khalid's supporters had been killed or wounded in the battle.

An hour later the rightful heir, Seyyid Hamoud bin Mohammed, was proclaimed Sultan. Khalid later moved

to Dar es Salaam in German East Africa.

A great deal of looting took place in the Indian quarter of



When Percy Haigh's ship the HMS Cossack stopped somewhere on the East African coast Percy photographed these two Somali men on camel back.

Zanzibar after the battle and about 20 people were killed until British marines were landed to patrol the streets.

My granddad, Lieutenant Haigh, missed the war by a day. But on his arrival, he took photos of the aftermath of that encounter. One photo shows three masts of the sunken SS *Glasgow*, evidence of its sinking after the bombardment. The other photo of the ruined Harem, shown on the front cover of this issue of *Old Africa*, must have been taken ashore. Three men, identified by Percy as slaves, are being marched, chained neck to neck, across the rubble-strewn square in front of what had been the morning before the building that housed the Sultan's wives. Other citizens, showing no

interest in the chained men, walk by carrying a variety of goods. A large crowd in the background stand gawping at the wreckage.

These men may have been prisoners rather than slaves. Slavery was officially abolished in Britain by the Slavery Abolition Act 1833. But it wasn't fully enforced until the British pressured Sultan Barghash to close down the slave market in Zanzibar in June 1873. So why the men in this picture were chained may have meant they were actually prisoners and not slaves.

Granddad ended his career at Greenock, only ten kilometres across the water from Dumbarton where the Sultan's SS *Glasgow* had been built. Granddad served as captain engineer in charge of

torpedo development until he retired in 1922.

He had his films developed in Great Britain and created a photo album with captions, which he kept in his old tin trunk.

A century later Percy's granddaughter, my cousin Sue Langford, found his photo album in the tin trunk he had carried with him on his travels. Percy's widow Mabel had kept the trunk, unopened, for years. When our Grandmother Mabel passed away, Sue sorted through her belongings in the attic of her house. Sue found the tin trunk and opened it and was amazed to find the old photos of his travels as a sailor, including the rare photos of Zanzibar taken the day after the world's shortest war.



Percy Haigh's photo of the ruined Harem, taken when he went ashore. Three men, identified by Percy in his album as slaves, are being marched in chains across the rubble-strewn square in front of the remains of the Sultan's Harem. These men were probably prisoners rather than slaves.