

**THE HISTORY OF  
TRINCOMALEE**

BY

LIEUT.-COLONEL G.P.THOMAS, R.A.

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## PREFACE

After being stationed for a few months in Trincomalee I set out to learn something of the history of the place, in order to give lectures to the officers and troops. Information on the subject was so difficult to collect, and so much additional data was obtained after writing the original paper, that I felt it would be a pity not to record the results of the labour.

I am indebted to my wife for the re-writing of and additions to the original text, and I wish to thank the large number of people in Ceylon for the help which they gave me, particularly Mr. J. Paulusz, the Government Archivist, without whose help I would have been put to far greater trouble.

Any profits from the sale of this book will be used for the benefit of the troops at Trincomalee.

*Trincomalee,*

*August, 1940.*

## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Trincomalee is a strategically situated natural harbour on the east coast of Sri Lanka. During its long and varied history, which dates back to 1529 BC the harbour fortress has been continually invaded, occupied and re-occupied by various foreign powers, including the Portuguese, Dutch, French and British.

In 1940 a serving member of the British Army Lieutenant Colonel C.P.Thomas R.A. wrote and published a book entitled "The history of Trincomalee". This book traces the origins of Trincomalee and documents 3000 years of its history. For information regarding the early history of the town, Lieutenant Colonel Thomas had to rely on legend and literature. Poems, such as Kailasapuravam, Konesar Kalvettu and Thirukonamalaipuranam which in turn are based upon even older legend such as Kulakotan Kampasaththiram and Periyavalamaipaththi, were very important in this respect. In later years military documents and government archives were consulted.

Copies of the original edition of "The History of Trincomalee" are now very rare and since I consider this work to be an important historical document, I have decided to republish the book. I want to be sure that it is available to future generations and in particular to students of history and archaeology.

I am particularly indebted to the following persons who were of great assistance to me when I was researching and preparing the republication of "The History of Trincomalee".

- Mr. C.A. Roswell of the British Ministry of Defence whose letter concerning copyright is included in this edition.
- Mr. N.T.S.A. Senedeera, B.A., - Ceylon, Dipl. Lib. - London.
- Mr. Ernest Saunders
- Mr. S.Ganesalingan

Any profit resulting from the sale of this book will be for the benefit of the Anpu Illam children's home in Trincomalee.

**Kanagasabapathy Saravanapavan  
Trincomalee**

December 1994

# CONTENTS

Page

<b>I. Early Days, Based on Legend</b>		
Derivation of the name Trincomalee	...	1
The Legend of the Temple...	...	2
Historical Remains in Fort Frederick	...	4
The Story of Francina Van Rhede...	...	5
<b>II. European Invasions, A.D. 1500</b>		
The Portuguese Covet the Wealth of "Zeilun"...	...	7
The Dutch Plan to Attack ...	...	7
Capture of Trincomalee by the Dutch	...	8
The Portuguese Expelled from Ceylon	...	12
The French Expedition Against the Dutch	...	12
The French Fleet Departs ...	...	13
The British Fleet Arrives ...	...	13
Capture of Fort Frederick and Ostenburg	...	14
Boyd's Adventure ...	...	14
French and British Sea-fights	...	15
First Naval Battle, Sadras ...	...	15
Second Naval Battle, Provedien	...	16
Third Naval Battle, Negapatam	...	16
The British Surrender Trincomalee	...	16
Fourth Naval Battle, Trincomalee...	...	17
Fifth Naval Battle, Cuddalore	...	18
Memoirs of William Hickey	...	19
Trincomalee Restored to the Dutch	...	20
Second Capture by the British from the Dutch	...	20
The British Force, Military and Naval	...	22
The Landing and the Siege...	...	22
The Breach is Made...	...	24
<b>III. British Rule Established, A.D. 1800</b>		
The Duke of Wellington	...	26
Conditions in the Garrison...	...	27
The Name Fort Frederick	...	28
The Life of Alexander Alexander	...	28
Conclusion	...	30



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Date  
 23 June 1994

*Dear Mr. Kanagasabapathy*

REPRODUCTION OF THE HISTORY OF TRINCOMALEE

Thank you very much for your letter dated 2 June 1994, which has been passed to me for action.

It seems the book was published in Ceylon in 1940 as per the title page. Any Crown copyright would have expired now, but we would have made no objection to the reprint in any case.

I cannot answer your questions about Lt.Col. G P Thomas R.A., but have forwarded the query on to the Army for them to investigate.

I have no legal standing to opine about British Law, but as far as the Ministry of Defence is concerned there is no problem.

When published, can you please send me two gratis copies of the book for the MOD Library?

*For Smith*  
*John Smith*

# THE HISTORY OF TRINCOMALEE

## I. EARLY DAYS

THE story of Trincomalee begins so far back in the dim ages, that much of it is lost, and what remains is in the form of poetry and legends. It is not surprising therefore that some of these are hard to believe, but like all great stories the world over, they are founded on fact.

### Derivation of the name Trincomalee

Many different names have been given to this ancient place, as races and nations came and stayed for a while, only to pass on.

The oldest names are :—

Tirikona Malai.

Tiru Kona Malai.

In Tamil Tiru means Sacred, Kona the land of Kona, and Malai a mountain. So we get the meaning, "The Sacred Mountain of the land of Kona."

Tirukkonatamalai.—The native name of Trincomalee, derived from Konata, the tutelary deity of the place.

Konesar Malai.—Konesar means the god Isvera (or land of) Kona. In Tamil usage the god installed in a place is called after that place.

Later names are :—

Trincona

Trequimale

Trinkenmall

Trincoenmale

Trinkili-Male

Trinquamalle

Triquilimale

To try and picture this place as it was in the days before history was thought of, we must forget the busy, pleasant scenes of to-day. Shops, cinema, hotel, dockyard, station, fort and maidan must all be wiped away, and in their place we must imagine the dense virgin jungle, pierced by primitive tracks, one of which must have led up to the Swami Rock which then, as now, stood in remote, unique grandeur.

Here, on the Hill of the Three-Storied Pagoda, there stood the Temple of a Thousand Columns, which presents us with very tangible links with those early days, for the carved stones of that same temple, ruthlessly destroyed by the Portuguese in 1623, can be seen to-day in the ramparts of Fort Frederick.

This is its story—

### The Legend of the Temple

“The dominions of a certain King in India were supposed to be in peril, and the danger could only be averted by the sacrifice of his baby daughter. She was consequently put in an ark of sandalwood, floated to Ceylon, and landed south of Trincomalee at a place still known by the name of Pannoa or the ‘Smiling Infant.’ There she was adopted by a King and became his heiress.

“Meanwhile, a Prince came along and, hearing that the Rock of Trincomalee was a holy fragment of the Golden Mountain of Meru hurled there during a conflict of the gods, erected on it a temple to Siva. The Princess sent an army to war him out, but ended by marrying him, and endowed the Temple with the vast rice fields of Tamblegam.

“When she died, the Prince shut himself up in the Temple and was found turned into a golden lotus on the altar of Siva.”

Look on the archway of the gate leading into Fort Frederick and at the inscription on the right, which is supposed to be a prophecy.

*The Inscription as it now stands*

ன னே கு ள  
கா ட மு ட டி  
ரு ப் ப ணி யை  
ன் னே ப ற ன் கி  
க க வே ம ன ன  
ன டொ ண் ண  
னை ய ய ற ற  
தே வை த  
ண  
க ள்

*It can be Reconstructed as follows :—*

(மு) ன னே கு ள (க்)  
(டி) கா ட (ன்) மு ட டி (ந்)  
(தி) ரு ப் ப ணி யை (ப்)  
(பி) ன னே ப ற ன் கி (பி)  
(ரி) க க வே ம ன ன (ய)  
(பி) ன டொ ண் ண (த)  
(த) னை யி ய ற் ற (வழி)  
(க்) தே வை த (ன)  
(எண்) ண (ரேபின்)  
ன ர சர்) க ள்

*Which forms the following Poem in Venba Meire :—*

முன்னே குளக்கோடன் மூட்டித் திருப்பணியைப்  
பின்னே பறங்கி பிரிக்கவே—மன்னவபின்  
பொண்ணுதத னையிற்றவழித்தேவைத்து  
எண்ணுரே பின்னரசர்கள்

*Translation*

“The temple built by Kulakkodan of ancient times will be destroyed by the Parangi (Portuguese) and thereafter it will not be rebuilt and future Kings will not (even) think of the means of restoring it.” [See Appendix 1].

This Kulakkottan was an Indian Prince who, in the 5th century A.D., rebuilt and enlarged the Konesvaram (the temple) to the god Isvera of Kona, in the reign of Pandu, who held Anuradhapura from 434-439 A.D.

The date of the building of the original temple is recorded in a Tamil poem by Kavi Raja Varotayan as 1589 B.C.

The poem tells of a King named Manu Niti Kanda Cholan who ruled over the country of Cholamandalam (Coromandel).

Learning from the "Kailasa Puranam" of the wonders of Tirukkonatamalai and the magnificent state of its inhabitants, he came over to the place.

His son, who followed him thither, afterwards raised the Temple, the Spire, the Pavilion, and the Sacred Cistern in the year 512 of Kali Yuga (1589 B.C.). [See Appendix 2].

There is a legend hereabouts that a European soldier defiled by his presence the Temple on the Rock. It is said that this soldier can be seen by the faithful who still hold their ceremonies on the Swami Rock. He can be seen in the ruins of the old temple down under the sea when the Priest, sacrificing, holds his torch over the edge of the precipice at dusk.\*

#### Historical Remains in Fort Frederick

It is recorded that a race called the Pandyas (about 1200 B.C.) were among the first invaders of Trincomalee. They carved their Crest, the Double Pandyan Fish at "Konamalai" as it was then called, and this carving can still be seen on either side of the Fort Gate.

Cholas are also known to have settled here, and archaeologists have found a similarity between the remains of the Temple and the architecture of the Pallavas who are known to have settled in Anuradhapura in the 7th century. They were a Southern Indian race and carried on trade as far afield as Java and Sumatra and with the Chinese and Malays.

\*A colourful procession of Hindu devotees still gathers twice weekly on the summit and takes part in what is said to be a primitive form of Sun Worship. Flowers, incense, fire and ashes, and the sacrifice of coconuts form an interesting spectacle.

Whatever its actual date, however, the fact of the Temple's existence is incontrovertible, and it is impossible not to feel the awe-inspiring romance of these aged stones over which Time and War have flowed unavailing.

A walk round the ramparts of Fort Frederick to-day will reward the interested searcher with many treasures in the shape of granite blocks and carvings. These are the undoubted remains of the old Temple.

There are some fine columns on the Gateway to Amsterdam Bastion, and a curious plaque near one of the gun emplacements. All along the West Curtain between the two Bastions there are traces of carving, round the Citadel, on some old steps above the Tennis Courts, and lying at the foot of the cliff on Dutch Pier. The Sundial in the centre of the Fort is supported by a fine column. Other remains can be found on the top of the rock just below the Flagstaff, and this is probably the site of the Temple.

#### The Story of Francina Van Rhede

On the summit of the Swami Rock is a landmark of popular interest, and in the old Dutch records there occurs the following passage :—

"The name Van Rhee de or Rhede is also associated with a very romantic, though melancholy story, based upon an inscription on a stone pillar standing on a rocky promontory at Trincomalee. This monument, it is stated, was erected to the memory of one Francina Van Rhede, Lady of Mydrecht." This is all we learn from the inscription, but the following is the story:

"Francina Van Rhede was the daughter of a Dutch gentleman in the Government service; and had formed an attachment to an officer in the Army, which was sanctioned by her father, and the day was fixed for the celebration of the nuptials. Misunderstandings arose as to the amount of the bride's dowry, and other matters being disputed, the intending bridegroom broke off the match, and shortly after obtained leave to return

to Europe. The unfortunate and misguided girl rendered desperate by the desertion of her lover, resolved that he should not leave the Island during her lifetime; and having obtained information as to the time of the ship's sailing, watched from her chamber window the sails spread that were to waft him from the Cinnamon Isle. Before clearing the coast the vessel was compelled to tack and pass close to the precipices that bound the southern part of the Fort. For this moment she had watched; she rushed from her dwelling, darted along the edge of the cliffs under which the swift sailing vessel was gliding, for an instant balanced on an overhanging crag, then, with a wild exclamation of revengeful despair, leaped from the giddy height, and was dashed against the rock below. With some difficulty her mangled remains were collected, by order of her broken-hearted father, to receive Christian burial, and, although we can only hope the act of self-murder was perpetrated during temporary insanity, as that alone can extenuate the commission of so fearful a crime we often felt surprise that the family should have commemorated so awful an occurrence by the pillar on this conspicuous situation."

After further inquiry about this mysterious lady, it appears that there is definite proof of her having married twice after the date on the monument, viz. 1687! Her first husband died in 1693, she married again in 1694, and had a number of children. The names are on record.

It is possible that her father erected the memorial to commemorate her sailing away as a bride, and that the date is not that of her death.

## II. EUROPEAN INVASIONS

1505—Portuguese.

1639—Dutch.

1782—British.

1782—French.

### The Portuguese Covet the Wealth of Zeilun

IT was more by accident than design that the first Europeans 1505 came to Ceylon, for the Portuguese Lorenzo D'Almeida and his three ships were making for the Maldivé Islands, when currents carried him northwards and he landed in Ceylon. Soon the lucrative glamour of cinnamon, pepper and musk, elephants, ivory, gems and pearls lured his fellow-countrymen to the Island, numerous bloody wars took place with the Sinhalese, and a trade monopoly was formed.

Meanwhile, the Dutchman, Joris van Spilbergh, sailed from 1601- Holland to open up trade relations with Ceylon, and eleven 1612 years later Marcellus de Boschhouder arrived at Kandy and made a treaty with the King by which the Dutch were permitted to build a fort at Kottiar, near Trincomalee. No sooner was it completed than the Portuguese destroyed it.

The growth of Dutch power in the East considerably alarmed the Portuguese and they built a number of strong forts on the eastern coast line of Zeilun, as it was then called. The beautiful temple at Konesar Malai (Trincomalee) was 1623 demolished by Constantine de Sa, and its delicately sculptured stones and pillars formed into the ramparts of Fort Frederick.

From this time on, until the dawn of the 19th century, Trincomalee was a battleground, over which greed and the lust for power warred without cease.

### The Dutch Plan to Attack

That the Dutch wanted to possess this stronghold is shown 1638 by a letter.



*The Fort of Baticalo,  
31st December, 1638.*

To the Hon. Governor General Anthonio van Diemen.

The Portuguese have now for their general one Don Anthonio Mascarenhas, also ten to twelve frigates with a thousand men, as is said here, but I hope if God the Lord so wills it, to attack them with such good effect that no place will withstand us.

Trincomalie is a fort built rather strongly of hard stone from an old pagoda round a hillock. On each side there is a sandy and rocky bay and it is like a peninsular. Generally it is garrisoned by thirty to forty soldiers with some blacks, but now they have brought there from Nagapatnam the soldiers taken from Baticalo. The married people have mostly gone to Jaffnapatnam.

If this place is only properly attacked it will, with God's help, not hold out long. There are not more than ten to twelve guns. There is little anchorage here on each side save very close to shore.

W. J. COSTER.

### 1639 Capture of Trincomalee by the Dutch

The fort at that time had three bastions :—

St. Jago (now Zeeburg) with six guns.

St. Cruz (now Amsterdam) with six guns.

Portuguese (by the present Officers' Mess) with two guns.

The guns were all six-pounders taken from a wrecked Danish ship. General Mascarenhas commanded only forty European and a hundred Ceylonese soldiers.

The Dutch fleet, under Admiral Westerwold, consisted of twelve ships of sorts, including two yachts.

The army was commanded by Commander Antonio Caen who was provided by the Governor with five hundred soldiers from Batticaloa and four hundred soldiers and workmen from

Kottiar, but "these did not do much more than help by producing ladders and baskets."

Caen obtained the assistance of the Governor of Samantura hailing from Batticaloa, and through him got information from "the Prince of the place" whom he describes as being "unwell, having had sore eyes for the last five years."

And so the Dutch landed in what is now called Dutch Bay, in the spring of 1639, and the Commander carried out a reconnaissance. The jungle grew close up against the bastions on the peninsular, and the party was able to get so close to the walls that they heard the defenders talking, and could have recognised a man on the ramparts.

Caen gave fair warning to the Portuguese by ordering his trumpeter to play a tune, which was rudely rewarded by a few shots from the fort. Round one was short and Round two was unobserved, but the bangs were so poor that the Dutch thought the enemy must be short of powder.

Next day the Dutch prepared to attack. They made paths for their cannon and mortars, built their batteries and armed them with twenty-four pounders and eighteen-pounders, which they called Brass Halve-Cartouwen.

Their preparations took them a week to complete, during which time the Portuguese shot stones from their guns and fired lead bullets which had been "chewed contrary to all the rules of war."

By May 1st all was ready. Three companies, each seventy strong, were drawn up within range but hidden in the scrub. The plan was to make a breach between the two bastions. After an hour and a half, the Portuguese guns were silenced, and three hours later the breach was made.

A lieutenant and a drummer were sent to the garrison carrying a Flag of Truce, and called upon the enemy to surrender, adding that if they delayed they would all be handed over to the Sinhalese and massacred. The Portuguese committed a further act of frightfulness by firing on the White Flag party, which so enraged Caen, who had been observing from some

rocks in Dutch Bay, that he proceeded with the bombardment relentlessly and resolved to attack at dawn in the following order :—

- 20 Musketeers
- 10 Sailors (armed each with four grenades, lance and sabre)
- 54 Sailors (similarly armed, and to be employed to carry wounded)
- 70 Major's Company
- 100 Sailors (armed with lance and sabre)
- 140 Reserve—Two Companies
- 120 Gunners, including protecting Musketeers

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514

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The attack did not come off. Two Portuguese captains appeared and apologised for their ignorant soldiers firing on the Flag of Truce, and later a padre handed over the keys.

Casualties were,

Dutch— killed and 2 wounded.

Portuguese — 14 killed and 9 wounded.

The Dutch entered the fort and found eight guns in the two bastions buried under debris. Caen appeared delighted with his victory and celebrated the occasion by building a "little tower" on the flagpole and playing another tune.

Two extracts from old manuscripts throw rather amusing sidelights on the events of this time :—

*From "A Voyage to Ceylon: On Board a Dutch Indiaman in the year 1747" by a Dutch Gentleman.*

"The Portuguese, to secure themselves the Advantages of such a rich Discovery (Ceylon) built a great many strong Forts (earlier he mentions Trinkenemalle), but the Dutch having bravely shaken off the Spanish Yoke, and then at war with the Portuguese, as Dependents of Spain, entered into an offensive Alliance with the King of Candy, Emperor of the

Island; and thus the Portuguese being vigorously attacked by Sea and Land were obliged to evacuate their favourite possession.

"Ever since, the Dutch cultivate the Friendship of that Monarch by every Mark of Esteem and Veneration, and the intent of their complaisance is entirely answered. The Company (The Dutch East India Company) every year send an Ambassador with presents to His Majesty who in return sends the Company a Casket of Jewels of such Value as to be esteemed above half the Cargo of the Fleet."

It certainly sounds a profitable exchange.

A year later the Dutch, feeling secure in their occupation of the Island, made a further bargain with the powerful warrior-King Raja Singhe, described in this letter :—

*From the Council at Batavia to the Directors of the Dutch East India Company.*

"After the departure of the 'Bos' we landed at Caymela, although we doubted the appearance of His Singhalese Majesty as the fleet had quite come to the end of its fresh water.

"The Portuguese, hearing that we had set foot on land . . . attacked us. The Emperor resolved to join forces with ours. The Fort of Negombo was taken by us with little or no loss. The Portuguese who took to flight were massacred by the Singhalese.

"Heer Lucasz having quarrelled with His Majesty, the Commander Coster as President and the Major Adriaan Anthonisz were appointed to take charge of affairs. Soon after, Coster entered into negotiations with His Majesty under the following conditions, that they should surrender the Fortress of Trincomalee and share equally in the ammunition if ten elephants (five with tusks and five without) be brought to the Fort of Baticalo, which surrender took place on the 20th of April, and the Fort was dismantled."

**The Portuguese Expelled from Ceylon**

1658 Meanwhile, rumours of French and British expansion in the East reached the Dutch, who hurriedly took possession of Fort Frederick once more, expanded it and called it Pagoda Hill. This fortress and the one at Kottiar were then re-fortified, and by 1658 the Portuguese were finally expelled from Ceylon.

We now come to an abortive effort from another quarter.

**1671 The French Expedition Against the Dutch**

As Admiral de la Haye with about thirteen vessels passed by the Dutch fort at Kottiar, the latter greeted them amiably with seven guns in salute. The French replied with five guns in earnest! The terrified Dutch destroyed and abandoned the fort, and fled to Trincomalee.

The French then fortified the two Sober Islands and what they called the Cape (Elephant Point).

The Islands were named after a British officer, Lieutenant Sober. The Dutch used to call the large Island "Dwars-in-de-weg" meaning "right in the way" and the French re-named it more romantically "Isle du Soleil."

The crew of the "Breton" worked at the Cape, which soon became known as Point Breton. Twenty men from each ship worked on the fortifications. They lacked a Chief Engineer, but the padre from one of the ships took charge and turned out to be an expert.

The French had sent Ambassadors to the King of Kandy, and obtained an army of seven thousand Sinhalese and the promise of provisions. The army cut down trees, but the provisions did not arrive.

Then the Dutch fleet appeared and anchored near Fort Frederick. De la Haye called on the Dutch Admiral and dropped cards. Van Goens returned the call and dropped hints.

Two ships sent to collect provisions were intercepted and captured by the Dutch, and de la Haye decided that having many sick and no food, the fleet must sail to look for provisions.

Count de Lanarolle was sent as Ambassador to the King of Kandy to explain that the fleet would return to Trincomalee after replenishing the Commissariat, but he grossly offended His Majesty by riding past the palace gates on a horse—an unparalleled insult, and finally, after being kept waiting a mere matter of two hours for an audience, he lost his temper and returned to his house. For which he was beaten and given six months' detention in chains.

**The French Fleet Departs, Leaving the Dutch Still in Possession**

So de la Haye sailed away, leaving only one ship and fifty men to guard the fortifications. The Dutch set on them at once, and in spite of a bad defeat at the hands of the King of Kandy's army under Kotiar, General of Tambergame, they soon captured the French Forts.

**The British Fleet Arrives**

Apart from improvements to Fort Frederick and the provision for five bastions, the Dutch raised a new battery on Oostenburg, or Osnaburg, to command the inner anchorage. And not without cause for Great Britain who was then at war with Holland and France, were making plans to capture Trincomalee with two objects in view:—

1. Extension of the British East India Company's territory.
2. Command of the sea—part of a plan to ensure that the French Squadron under Admiral Suffren then operating in these waters should have no base within 2,000 miles.

A fleet under command of Admiral Edward Hughes and a landing force with Sir Hector Munro at its head were dispatched to attack the storm-centre of European rivalry in the East. Having captured Negapatam on the east coast of India from the Dutch in 1781, Hughes sailed from there for 1781.

Trincomalee on 2nd January, 1782. Besides his seamen and marines he had some artillery, five hundred volunteer sepoy and a detachment of pioneers.

#### 1782 Capture of Forts Frederick and Ostenburg

On the 4th of January they anchored in Back Bay, landed the following day and captured the fort by surprise. Most of the garrison bolted to Fort Ostenburg. Three days later, the Admiral called on this fort to surrender and being a wily man, he sent the summons by his Chief Engineer, Major Gells, who carried out an excellent reconnaissance, and later suggested that another summons to surrender might be sent so that he could have another "look-see."

The British then attacked Ostenburg, managed to capture a hill three hundred yards from the fort, but could not get the heavy guns up it. The next day at gunfire, however, they entered through the lower fort, losing one officer and twenty men, while two officers and forty men were wounded. The Dutch lost thirteen dead, but nine officers, three hundred and fifty Europeans (including ten artificers) and sixty Chinese and Malays were captured. Sixty-two guns and six mortars were also captured from the two Forts.

Hughes decided to make Trincomalee his base for the rest of the monsoon. The garrison which he put in charge of Captain Bonneveaux, consisted of:—

98th Regiment (North Staffordshires) ...	55
Artillery ... ..	42
Volunteer Battalion ... ..	495

These were the only troops available at the time, but later they were reinforced by two hundred men of the 78th (2nd Seaforths) and 42nd (1st Black Watch) Regiments under Captain MacDowal who took over command from Bonneveaux.

#### 782 Boyd's Adventure

After capturing Trincomalee, the British wanted to follow it up with an attack on Colombo. To do this, an alliance with the King of Kandy was desired.

Hugh Boyd, Secretary to the Governor of Madras, was sent as Ambassador. He left Trincomalee the day after Hughes' landing, January 5th, but failed to secure his object. He returned to Trincomalee to find the frigate detailed for him had gone, so hired a boat and sailed for Madras on the 15th April, 1782.

Next day, a French man-of-war seized the boat. They noticed a packet being thrown overboard and retrieved it. It turned out to be Boyd's papers.

Boyd was taken prisoner. The papers eventually got to Holland, and can now be seen in the archives at Colombo, slightly damaged by salt water.

#### French and British Sea-fights

While the British were busy seizing Trincomalee, the French were operating against them on the Coromandel Coast.

Admiral Suffren, an energetic and bold sailor, when he learnt of the departure of the British fleet, resolved to take the opportunity to out-manoeuvre his opponent. The five battles he had with Hughes were all remarkable for the fact that while all were hard-fought, neither side could claim a decisive victory.

#### First Naval Battle—Sadras

The first encounter, on the 17th February, should have been a great victory for the French, who had three more ships of the line and two more frigates.

Three factors prevented this:—

Firstly, Suffren got separated from the transports he was convoying. Some were captured, and the rest scuttled by Hughes.

Secondly, in spite of a favourable wind, Suffren failed to take advantage of his superiority.

Thirdly, after breaking off the engagement at dusk, he did not keep in touch with Hughes, who got away.

After this battle French troops captured Cuddalore, south of Madras, and gave Suffren a good base.

**1782 Second Naval Battle—Provedien (Between Trincomalee and Batticaloa)**

This occurred on the 12th April when Hughes was trying to take reinforcements and sick to Trincomalee. Although he had only one ship less than Suffren, two newly joined ships were full of sick so he tried to sail round the enemy and slip into Trincomalee. He was handicapped by the sudden failure of the wind, but owing to lack of spirit in some of his captains, Suffren failed to take advantage. Hughes had one ship crippled, but the French Admiral's fleet had not the necessary endurance to remain at sea, he was short of men, spares and ammunition, and burdened with many sick. He did not continue the action next day, and the battle was drawn.

**1782 Third Naval Battle—Negapatam**

On the 6th July, Suffren made an attempt to capture Negapatam. His fleet was caught in a squall and one ship was disabled. This made the two fleets equally numbered, but Hughes had a slight superiority in gun-power.

Hughes was robbed of a decisive victory by a sudden change of wind. He tried to reform, but the wind dropped and he was unable to get to grips again. The French losses were much heavier than the British, but once more the result was a draw.

**1782 The British Surrender Trincomalee**

Knowing that Suffren was after Trincomalee to get a harbour to shelter in during the North-East Monsoon (October-January), Hughes sent repeated letters to the Madras Government and to the General, Sir Eyre Coote, complaining of the inadequacy of the troops in the garrison. He pointed out that with the French in possession of this important harbour, his own fleet would have nowhere to shelter in nearer than Bombay and that owing to lack of troops it was impossible to man an important battery on Elizabeth Point which could interfere with a French landing.

He complained that the original draft of five hundred for both forts were "composed of all the outcasts of all the corps at Negapatam, including two hundred coolie prisoners" and that "not one cartridge of any kind was sent with the detachment."

With this inadequate force, MacDowal had barely a month to get his defences ready. Both forts had been well provided with guns, ammunition and six months' rations, but it is said that the administration was so bad that the powder was found in one fort and the shot in the other!

The French fleet anchored in Back Bay on the 25th August. The whole force, two thousand four hundred and ten men, with three days' rations, landed next morning between 2 a.m. and dawn, south of Elizabeth Point, and were drawn up across the isthmus between Orr's Hill and the sea. Three batteries were put up, one near the present fish market, and two on what is now the Maidan, 400-600 yards from the walls of the fort.

Next day, after a bombardment of the French lines, the garrison made an unsuccessful sortie. Two days later the French batteries opened, and after twenty-four hours they had damaged the S.W. Bastion so badly that, although there was no breach, it was said to be at the mercy of the French.

MacDowal thought that Hughes had been defeated by Suffren's fleet, and he surrendered. The terms of capitulation applied also to Ostenburg, which was surrendered with scarcely a shot being fired.

Later a Court Martial was held. MacDowal, Bonneveaux and Banks, the Chief Engineer, were all acquitted, but Captain-Lieutenant Saxon of the Artillery was found guilty on the grounds that "he did not avail himself of guns, shots, etc." He was suspended for six months.

**Fourth Naval Battle—Trincomalee**

Three days after the capitulation, on the afternoon of September 2nd while Suffren was giving dinner to his English

officer-prisoners, Hughes' fleet was sighted. He was dumb-founded next day at seeing the French flag flying on Fort Frederick, and would have attacked Suffren's fleet, which was still in disorder in the harbour, had the wind been favourable.

Suffren had dismissed several of his captains for inefficiency and slackness, and their reliefs did not turn out to be much more reliable. They tried to persuade him not to attack, but finding that Hughes had only twelve ships to his fifteen, he went out to meet him.

Although he had the whole day before him, Suffren was unable to get his ships into the correct order of battle. Eventually he got impatient and went into the attack in disorder. The result was that in the van he had five ships fighting two Britishers, and in the centre three ships engaging five of the enemy. The remainder were either shooting at very long range or not taking part at all.

But for a sudden change of wind and the fact that some of his ships were almost becalmed, Hughes might have crushed the French centre. As it was, darkness fell. The French crept back into Trincomalee Harbour, one ship piling up on the rocks as she went in.

Next morning Hughes decided he was not strong enough to continue the fight, and he returned to Madras, and later to Bombay to re-fit.

### 1783 Fifth Naval Battle—Cuddalore

One final battle was fought between these two fleets, on 20th June of the following year, off Cuddalore, south of Madras. In all the previous fights the British, although having fewer ships, held superior gun-power, so the balance was about equal. In this last battle the British had two ships more than the French, but they were very undermanned; and so the honours of victory were divided.

It is a curious coincidence that at Christmas, 1939, the French cruiser "Suffren" lay in Trincomalee Harbour at the

same time as the aircraft-carrier "Glorious" commanded by Captain Hughes, a descendant of the Admiral Hughes who fought these five battles with Suffren.

### The Memoirs of William Hickey

In the third volume of his interesting memoirs, William Hickey, an attorney, relates his adventures in Trincomalee while it was in the hands of the French.

He was on his way back to Calcutta with his so-called wife, when the ship was blown off its course in the N.E. monsoon and just managed to find Trincomalee. Hickey was retained as a prisoner, and had rather a bad time, as the Acting Governor, le Chevalier des Roys, left in charge while Suffren was away on an outing, was "universally disliked on account of his unaccommodating temper and unsociable manners." When Suffren returned, he and Hickey became great friends. They had long talks in which Suffren told of his constant difficulties with some of his Captains whom he called "poltroons," of his esteem for Admiral Hughes, and his poor opinion of Lord Macartney, Governor of Madras.

He describes the Admiral's extraordinary dress and figure—"in appearance he looked much more like a little fat vulgar English butcher than a Frenchman of consequence, five-feet-five and very corpulent." Hickey was astonished to find him in the mornings in shirt-sleeves "as though interrupted in his toilette." But in spite of his appearance he was extremely affable, and undoubtedly a great sailor and leader.

After being kept in the ship for some time, the French Captain-in-charge lent them his house, "if such a title could be applied to the wretched hovel," Hickey says, "it had been the residence of a Dutch pilot . . . the walls were quite bare, not even plastered, neither roof nor sides being water-tight, certainly my poultry in Calcutta were far better lodged."

To crown all, mosquitoes viciously attacked them and they procured two large English flags, sewed them together, and

fixed them over the bed. Hickey found this erection "dreadfully hot," and one can well believe him.

In spite of the fact that Trincomalee had been taken by the British and then the French, the Dutch Governor and his wife were still living in Fort Frederick on good terms with everybody.

There seem to have been a number of outings, "water-parties," musical evenings and card parties with the French officers, and Hickey seems to have enjoyed his accidental visit which terminated in his returning to India in one of the Admiral's own ships.

#### 1783 Trincomalee Restored to the Dutch

Trincomalee remained a French possession for less than a year; when peace was declared it was ceded by France to Great Britain, and then by Britain to Holland.

#### 1795 Second Capture of Trincomalee by the British from the Dutch

A very detailed account of this is available, mainly due to the efforts of a Major of the Green Howards, the old 19th Foot, who was writing their regimental history.\* He managed to find an eye-witness account written by George Turnour, who was in the 73rd Foot (2nd Black Watch) at the capture of Trincomalee, and later for five years in the 19th Foot.

The expedition to capture Trincomalee was sent by the Madras Government at the request of the British Government, in response to a suggestion of the Stadtholder, who had fled to England when the Batavian Republic was set up by the French. Its success was the beginning of the British occupation of the Maritime Provinces of Ceylon.

The Dutch administration of Ceylon at this time was in a most hopeless state, their fighting forces were divided into parties, and the troops appear to have been thoroughly

\*Fifty-one officers of this Regiment are buried in Ceylon.

debauched and mutinous. The British took full advantage of this, and Ceylon fell easily into their hands without much fighting. Colombo was captured in 1796, and its fall was mainly due to the astuteness of a Scotsman called Cleghorn.

He arranged with the British Government to purchase the services of Colonel de Meuron's Swiss Regiment, then forming an important part of the Dutch garrison at Colombo. After a rapid but ghastly journey from England to Madras, he visited the British army besieging Colombo, and passed the order from Colonel de Meuron for the transfer of the Regiment, to the Officer Commanding the Regiment in Colombo. The story goes that this order was concealed in a Dutch Cheese! The Regiment obeyed the order, the transfer took place, and Colombo fell at once.

The orders from the Prince Stadtholder to the Dutch Government in Ceylon were:—

"We have deemed it necessary to require you to admit into Trincomalee and elsewhere in the Colony . . . troops of H.M. the King of Great Britain . . . and you are also to consider them as troops and ships belonging to a power that is in friendship and alliance with Their Mightinesses, and who come to prevent the Colony from being invaded by the French.

(Sgd.) W. Pr. V. ORANGE."

The order was so indefinite that the Dutch in Ceylon did not know what to do, but eventually Major Fornbauer, Commandant of Trincomalee, was ordered to take in three hundred British troops to be stationed in Fort Ostenburg. Fornbauer, having heard rumours of British evil intentions towards Ceylon, queried the order on various grounds, and after some interchange of letters the Governor decided to break off all relations with the British, annul the decision to take in the three hundred British troops, and to defend the forts to the last. The letter containing this decision was dated August 15th, but a British force had already landed in Back Bay on August 3rd, while

the argument was in progress, and was preparing to besiege Fort Frederick.

### The British Force, Military and Naval

The landing party, commanded by Colonel Stuart of the 72nd Regiment, consisted of:—

72nd Regiment (1st Seaforth's) ... ..	750
Flank Companies of 71st (H.L.I.) and 73rd (2nd Black Watch) Regiments ... ..	350
R.A. Detachment ... ..	40
Detachment Madras Artillery with gun- lascars ... ..	350
1st Sepoy Battalion ... ..	650
23rd Sepoy Battalion ... ..	650
Pioneers ... ..	220

Total of 3,150

The Navy were under Admiral Rainier with the "Suffolk," "Centurion" and "Diomedé."

#### Battering train—

- 2-10" Mortars
- 4-8" Howitzers
- 8 iron 18-pounders
- 4 iron 12-pounders

#### Field train—

- 6 Brass 6-pounders

### The Landing and the Siege

The "Diomedé" was wrecked in Back Bay after striking a hidden rock, but all were saved.

The troops landed on August 3rd at sunrise at the Rocks, about four miles to the northward of Flagstaff Point, that is, at Elizabeth Point, and near where the British and French landed in 1782.

The time between the 3rd and the 17th August was spent by the British in reconnaissance and siege preparations, as neither side quite knew whether they were at war or not.

On the 18th August, the British "broke ground." This day and the next were employed in completing the "First Parallel" 900 yards from the fort (on rough line Trinco Stores—Nelson Theatre, but further away).

*20th August.* They started to make the Breaching Battery for eight 18-pounders, 600 yards from the fort. This must have been near the fish market. That night two 8-inch Howitzers came into action in a small trench near the site of Commissioners House, firing from their "howitz-carriages." They fired for two hours, did some damage and drew the enemy's fire from the working parties.

*21st August.* Three 12-pounders were put in as Enfilading Battery between what is now Nelson Theatre and Commissioners House to enfilade the Curtain between the N.W. Bastion and the Lower Cavalier.

*22nd August.* Spent in getting the guns into the Breaching Battery.

*23rd August.* They fired on the enemy in the Ravelin and N.W. Bastion and forced them to abandon their guns. The Breaching Battery then opened on the Curtain where the breach was to be made.

The enemy later returned to their guns and did some counter-battery work on the Breaching Battery.

*24th August.* Two 10-inch Mortars opened fire from a position to the right of the Breaching Battery (near the market) and annoyed the Dutch in the Upper Cavalier or Redoubt.

That night two Malays from the garrison crept out and noticed how slack was the covering party for the Breaching Battery.

*25th August.* Twenty-five of the Malays armed with Kriss (Malay knives) came out of the fort at 4 a.m., got into the trenches between the Enfilading Battery and the Breaching Battery, turned to their right and entered the Breaching Battery.

They spiked four of the guns before the alarm was given. They then killed thirteen men, and wounded the Gunner



Officer and twenty-three others, most of whom were asleep, before the covering party turned out. The latter managed to recapture the battery after their Captain and four others had been wounded.

The Malays then got away, mixing with the gun lascars, as their dress was very similar. They lost only five or six killed.

This incident very much impressed Turnour, who wrote—

“Thus did twenty-five undisciplined enthusiasts, during the short space of ten minutes, execute what no men, judging by common rules and precedents, could have expected from a respectable sortie of the best troops in the world, besides killing and wounding a greater number than were killed or wounded otherwise during the siege.”

He then makes excuses for the gunners—

“I should not do justice to the Corps of Artillery on this occasion, if I did not account for their having been found asleep. The numbers of this Corps were so unequal to the duties required from them, that the men were permitted to sleep during the night, that they might be fresh during the day, when their services produced a more certain effect.”

### The Breach is Made

*26th August.* At last the Breach was declared practicable by the Engineers, and the enemy's fire was almost silenced. The fort was summoned to surrender.

The Dutch Governor said he would defend the Breach if only a hundred Europeans would stand by him, but they refused, and only the Malays remained loyal and keen.

The Europeans then marched up to the Swami Rock and hauled down the flag. The British marched in by the South Gate, and the garrison went out by the Breach in the North Curtain, and laid down their arms on the Esplanade. The place where the Breach was made in the Curtain can still be seen.

The killed and wounded in the garrison amounted to a hundred and twenty or a hundred and thirty which, as Turnour says, “with the sick and drunk, will account for the number that marched out.”

The British losses were seventy-two killed and wounded.

Turnour criticises all the Dutch forts of this period in that they were allowed too little Esplanade. He states that this was of the greatest advantage at Trincomalee, presumably because it enabled the batteries to be erected under cover.

The terms of the capitulation are recorded in the Ceylon Archives. One of the clauses shows the respect which the British felt for the Malays after their daring sortie:—

“The Kriss of the Malays will be packed in a box and returned to them when they are sent back to their fatherland, as they are their weapons which they will never abandon.”

### III. BRITISH RULE ESTABLISHED

#### The Duke of Wellington

THE Duke of Wellington was once in Trincomalee. If his family had not pulled so many strings he would have been at the capture of Trincomalee in 1795, for he started his career as Ensign in the 73rd Foot (now the 2nd Black Watch), one of the regiments at the siege. But he never joined them, as he was made A.D.C. to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland.

He spent several of his early years in this A.D.C. capacity, and did no regimental soldiering till he was promoted Captain.

As Ensign he was in the 76th (2nd Duke of Wellington's), 41st (1st Welch), and 12th Dragoons.

As Captain in the 58th (Northhamptons), and 18th Light Dragoons.

As Major and Lieutenant-Colonel, 33rd Foot (1st Duke of Wellington's).

He was Major after only six years' service, and saw active service in Belgium with the 33rd.

He took the 33rd to India in 1796, as Lieutenant-Colonel Wesley. While in India he assumed the fuller family name of Wellesley, which his elder brother had always used.

In 1800 he was in Trincomalée, as a Colonel, collecting a force which was at first under orders to seize Mauritius from the French. As our fleet failed to appear to transport the force, the expedition was cancelled, and fresh orders to attack the Dutch in Java were received. These orders were also cancelled. The force was sent against the French in Egypt, but while on the way Colonel Wellesley had fever in Bombay, followed by "Malabar Itch" (which he only got rid of after a course of nitrous baths) and the expedition sailed without him.

He arrived in Trincomalee with six cases of claret, six of madeira and six of Port, and spent Christmas in the fort. He seems to have occupied most of his time struggling to collect for his force vinegar, tea, sugar, beef, rum, and staff officers.

#### Conditions in the Garrison

In 1800 it is said that the first requirement of Trincomalee was then, as now, accommodation for the troops. As the Dutch barracks were badly situated and in poor repair, temporary barracks had been erected in 1799.

The garrison of the two forts consisted of:—

80th Foot Regiment (South Staffordshires).

One Company Madras Artillery.

260 Gun Lascars.

One Battalion of Sepoys.

Fort Frederick had seventy-two guns and Ostenburg had fifty.

Officers were billeted in the "lower town" at this time.

In 1801 permanent barracks were started in the fort to include quarters for the officers.

The Commandant, Colonel Champagne, had many of the coconut trees between the fort and the harbour cut down. This was, in the words of the historian, "a measure which, with the better housing of the troops, was expected to reduce the high mortality among the troops, rendering the name of Trincomalee so dreadful to the ears of military men."

There were many deaths among the Europeans in Trincomalee. Tropical diseases and the precautions to be taken to ward them off, were not understood. Pestilence also broke out among the cattle and caused anxiety.

Small-pox caused widespread ravages, and eventually Mr. North, the first Governor of Ceylon, established a hospital at Trincomalee, as well as at Colombo, Jaffna and Galle. Vaccination was then in its infancy, but it was at Trincomalee that on 11th August, 1802, a patient was innoculated for the first time in Ceylon, with a thread steeped in vaccine sent from Bombay.

### The Name Fort Frederick

The Dutch always referred to Fort Trincomalee, and the first occasion on which the name Fort Frederick was used dates from about 1803. Just at this time Frederick, Duke of York, was Commander-in-Chief of the British army. In the "Ceylon Gazettes" of that period, up to about 1814, notices appear signed "Frederick—C.-in-C."

His full name and title were Frederick Augustus, Duke of York and Albany, 1763-1827, second son of George III and Queen Charlotte.

1801 In 1801 Ceylon was formally ceded to Great Britain by  
1802 the Treaty of Amiens, and in 1802 by virtue of Article 5, became a Crown Colony.

1803 By 1803 Trincomalee was considered to be in a formidable state of defence.

An interesting book written by a Bombardier of the R.A. and published in 1830 describes vividly the adventures and hardships of these days. It is called—

### The Life of Alexander Alexander

He joined the R.A. in 1801 and found himself in Trincomalee in 1803. The Hon. Frederick North was Governor, and Major-General Macdowal, commander of the forces. The garrison of Trincomalee consisted of the 19th Regiment of Foot together with a Malay Regiment, commanded by Major Davie.

While he was there, a Corporal George Barnsley arrived dreadfully wounded at Fort Macdowal, a temporary fortress between Trincomalee and Kandy. He brought the unwelcome information that Major Davie's force had surrendered to the King of Kandy's army on the 25th June, that the Major and his officers had been separated from the men, when a general massacre had commenced. The executioners hit the victims on the back of the neck with their swords, severing the sinews. Corporal Barnsley got one cut on the back of his neck and it

is amazing to think that this man walked sixteen miles to Fort Macdowal, and swam a river, having to use his left hand all the time to prevent his head falling on his breast. Then he had his wound dressed, and marched back with the garrison of the fort the whole way to Trincomalee, supporting his head with his hands.

Trincomalee, so Alexander relates, was the worst station on the whole Island. "The climate and the great fatigue, but more especially the food, had begun to tell upon me and others in a fearful manner. The diseases most prevalent among us were the dysentery, liver complaint and the berry-berry, inflammations of the stomach and bowels, and fevers. The mortality was so great and our duties so severe at this time that we were often obliged to get assistance from the 19th Regiment in the melancholy office of burying the dead.

"Strange to tell, the longer the European troops remained in this wretched place, which I may call the gates of death and hell, the more immoral and depraved they became . . . There was a continual flogging . . . the officers appeared to take a pleasure in it . . . The natives took every opportunity to abuse and insult us . . . nothing appeared to give them greater pleasure than to get the European soldiers flogged."

Alexander gives an excellent account of the religious ceremony at the Swami Rock, showing that it differs little, if at all, from the rites performed to-day. The R.A. had at this time a barrack room very close to the Swami Rock.

He found the food in the barrack mess so badly cooked, and it made him so ill, that he decided to take a native wife—"or rather a nurse"—to cook for him and get better food from the Pettah. He obtained permission from the Commandant to build a hut for his family in the fort, a proceeding which was quite in accordance with the customs of those days.

Alexander left Trincomalee in October, 1810, as a Bombardier and soon after returned to England.

**Conclusion**

1815 About 1815 a small dockyard was started by Captain  
 Puget, R.N. This, and some sort of defences, remained at  
 1905 Trincomalee until about 1905. Then Admiral Fisher dis-  
 1923 mantled it all. Everything was left in ruins till 1923 when  
 the dockyard was re-opened, and work commenced on the  
 defences which we have to-day.

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## APPENDIX

1. The local tradition is that the Inscription contains the following prophecy :—

“The Portuguese shall take the holy edifice built by Kulakkoddan in ancient times. O King, hearken ! After the cat's-eyed one, the red-eyed one and the smoke-eyed one have gone, the figure will be that of the Northerner (*i.e.* Telugu).”

2. A more detailed account is found in Codex 51—viii—40 in the Ajuda Library of Lisbon.

Constantino de Sa de Menezes destroyed these pagodas, and with the stones thereof made a fortress to close that port to the Chingala, and, as it was not large enough for a battery, it also came to have a very small garrison. This event of the destruction of this pagoda was found engraved on a stone and, being authenticated by the Ouvidor of Ceylon, after it had been translated by those most learned in ancient letters of the Chingalas it was sent to His Majesty, and it said as follows :—

“Manica Raja Bau Emperor of this Lancaue erected this pagoda to the god Vidia-mal-manda in the year . . . (according to the reckoning it comes to be 1,300 years before the coming of Christ). There will come a nation of the Franks who will destroy it and there will be no King in this Island to rebuild it once more.”

This stone was placed in the gate of the fortress ; and there is no doubt that it is the Portuguese who are called Franks, because as the French in past ages were so well-known in Syria and thence their name resounded in all this Asia, they called therein every European with some corruption Franguis, as though they were all French, and it suffices to be white folk and not to wear a cabaya to be called Franguis by them.

Nor can I give any account who it was who foretold this truth so distant in futurity, to a heathen king ; for if the dedication of the pagoda implies idolatry, the prediction of its destruction so far back implies prophecy, the author of which cannot be manifest to us in the obscure state of the traditions of India. And though Constantine de Sa destroyed these pagodas, their worship continued until the time of the General Dom Nuno Pereira, when the last Ganes and Jedacas who carried it on were beheaded.

De Queyroz who has embodied the above, gives the Kings name as Manua Raja.