

## **Charles Wesley Francis - "Old Sea Dog"**

Wes was born in Oswego, no one knows exactly when, not even himself. He did know that at about the age of twelve, he shipped out to England on a brig in the year 1881.

His sea-going career was capped 58 years later with another voyage to that country. The "old salt" was an active 70 and had seen mutiny, war, earthquakes, typhoons, and death as well as the wonders of a hundred ports passed in his wake.

Sailor was 93 when telling this story to Grant N. Linsley in the 1970"s. A landlubber, but certainly not by choice. He had been living with his granddaughter, Mrs. Marion Hatcher of Syracuse.

Sailor Francis has a sharp memory and recalled his world-wide adventures with gusto. An 1880 APPRENTICE SEAMAN learned the ropes of seamanship in those romantic days of the windjammers. He spent three or four years with the Merchant Marines, then enlisted in the U.S. Navy. He spent two years of his first hitch on a gunboat battling cutlasses, swinging Chinese Pirates on the Yangtze River.

In Syracuse, when the Spanish-American scuffle (War) broke out, he decided to get into the thick of the fray and joined the Cavalry with his younger brother, Chauncey. He was at San Juan Hill when the Rough Riders made their immortal charge. A ricocheting Spanish bullet caught him in the leg during this engagement. Three days before San Juan Battle, he saw Spanish artillery and the infantry ambush of Teddy Roosevelt and his men at bloody El Caney.

His outfit, the 9th Cavalry, was ordered into action again when the Philippine Insurrection erupted. For many months the sudden crack of rifle shots echoed across the lush Philippine Hills as S"E" Troop - 9th Cavalry engaged fierce bolo-knife wielding Moro Tribesman.

Shipping with the Merchant Marine again, his slick clipper ship plying the Java Sea with a cargo of salt, was dashed against a razor sharp coral reef in a tropical storm forcing all hands to abandon the battered floundering vessel. The weary 36-man crew spent six months wondering in the dense steaming Japanese Jungles before they broke out into an isolated mission clearing and reached safety. One man did not make it.

In 1924, Francis retired from the Navy after serving a few more hitches. Because of his broken chain of service time, it took him 39 years to become eligible for his thirty year pension of \$109.14 a month. In his cabin days he received \$9.00 a month pay.

The Old Sea Dog tried again to enlist in 1942, but a hard-boiled recruiter told him he was too old! "Too old," he roared, "I'm only 72!"

During his lifetime at sea, Wes has seen the American Navy germinate from a 74 gunman-of-war that fired decks broadside to the missile firing atomic submarines and ships of today.

Though it seems that he never found time to settle in a spot, he did manage to marry twice and had four children. His first wife, Vivian, who died after fourteen years of marriage. He said his second wife was a mistake. Sailor took to the land around 1939, living on Co. Rt. 6 on top of a hill overlooking Catfish Creek, where he enjoyed fishing.

Losing his place, he moved about a mile away almost directly across from the first place to an 88 acre site on the Kibbe Rd. He bought this place to provide a home for his kin as he put it. He sold the farm in 1955 and moved to Rome where he lived on and off for six years until moving to Ft. Devans, MA with his granddaughter and husband.

At 93, sailor was amazingly alert, only slowing gait and hearing difficulties. Although his formal education spans but a couple of years, his wealth of experiences has given him a rich, yarn-spinning vocabulary. He turns out intricately patterned book and needle point. He learned the technique in an Army hospital where recuperating from his San Juan Hill leg wound. Because of his hearing difficulties, TV doesn't appeal to him. He misses the fights. Still pretty salty, he smokes an occasional cigarette, puffs on a pipe and even chews his cud now and then.

Sources: Material was obtained from American Legion Book - 1976 and article that appeared in Herald Journal 1963.

Written by Nancy Searles January, 1997.