

# Henry Thomas Thompson Sandes

## Biography by Adrian Sandes

Henry (Harry) Thomas Thompson (0301) was born on 17 October 1841 in The Citadel, Corfu; there is a painting of the house, now demolished. Henry must have lived there until he was about five, when his father was posted to Alderney

Due to the influence of a senior military officer, possibly Major General Henry Gordon of Corfu days, he had a better start in life than his brothers and sisters, being admitted to the Carshalton Military School near London, from which he gained entry to the Royal Military Academy (The Shop) at Woolwich in December 1857. He was a hard worker, a very neat draughtsman and probably quite good at military subjects, but did not shine at mathematics and was not above average at languages. He passed out of The Shop in twenty-second place out of thirty-three in his batch, but none of them reached a higher rank.

On 22 December 1859 he was commissioned by Queen Victoria as a Second Lieutenant in the Royal Artillery, and was soon posted to the 7th Battery of the 1st Brigade at Woolwich.

From spring 1861 to May 1866 he served in Gibraltar, and from 1866 to 1870 in Jamaica, where a horse kick on his left knee led to him being invalided home, and as he was still unfit for service by the autumn of 1871 he was placed on half-pay. With no influence, little money, from which he helped to support his parents, and almost out of his twenties with no training for civilian life, his future was highly uncertain, but fate was soon to shine upon him.

He was sent for further medical treatment to a hydropathic establishment at Matlock in Derbyshire, where he happened to meet Grace Henrietta, daughter of the late Rev Edward Warren Caulfeild and Millicent Hellicar. Grace was with her mother, who was also having treatment, and she and Henry must have been strongly attracted. Not only was she well connected through her father, but she was also pretty, a good pianist, a fair artist, and had a private income of some £500 a year. By comparison with her rather secluded life as daughter of a retired vicar in rural Wiltshire, taught by governesses and much younger than her two half-sisters, she must have found Henry exciting. He was six years older than herself, good looking and full of life, neat and methodical, fond of music and with quite a good tenor voice, a keen cricketer despite his moderate height of 5 feet 7 inches, and always ready for fun. He had a hasty temper, but seems to have been popular with his fellow subalterns, to whom he was known as 'Johnny Sandes', after the popular song of the time (see Ch3 AnxA Appx 1). Grace called him Harry. Soon after they had met, in early November 1871, he proposed and was accepted.

Her family objected but this was overcome, and the engagement was announced, subject to him being able to resume his Army career, in time for them to visit Ireland in the spring of 1872. Grace is said to have had rather a shock when she first met her prospective in-laws in London, as they were so very 'Irish', indeed her Sandes relations were always rather a trial to her, but she decided to continue the engagement provided that Henry's Army career could continue.

Fortunately he was passed fit for service in early 1873, and they were married on 6 May at Holy Trinity, Weston-super-Mare. On 4 October they sailed for Malta in a small military transport, the Himalaya, arriving nine days later after a stormy voyage.

Living close to the Grand Harbour opposite Valetta, they found Malta exhausting; the summer was hot, the stagnant harbour smelt abominable, the church bells rang constantly, and the damp scirocco wind drained everyone's energy. In addition, their first baby, Norah, arrived in March 1874, and a second was soon on its way. But in November Henry was promoted Captain and posted to Alderney, which he must have remembered well, and after the birth of their second daughter Millicent in April 1875 the family lived in Jersey until January 1876.

Their next move was to Bradford, Yorkshire, where Henry had been appointed Adjutant of the Artillery Volunteers. This offered better pay and a settled job, and oddly a new commission in the Volunteer Forces, which named him Henry T T Sandes Esq. The family lived in Bradford until mid-1882, finding it comfortable but dull and often depressing with winter fogs, and there a third daughter Eva, and a son, Edward Warren Caulfeild, were born.

On 1 July 1881 Henry was promoted Brevet-Major, a distinction in rank but not in pay, followed in December by the grant of substantive rank, and posting to Burma. They sailed in June 1882, leaving Norah and Milly with their grandparents as they were considered too old to be taken to the East, and the parting was bitter as such postings were usually for five years. The passage by troopship to Madras and on to Rangoon took nearly two months; from there they travelled up-country to Pegu, probably by road, and on up the Sittang River to Toungoo by boat, arriving in late August. Toungoo was then a British outpost on the border with Northern Burma which was ruled by King Thibaw at Mandalay. Henry took command at Toungoo of 9/1st Elephant Detachment RA, a battery of four 7-pounder guns carried on elephants. Including those carrying ammunition, stores and medical supplies, there were about twelve of the animals, and we still have a molar tooth of one that had to be put down.

The Burmese climate was trying, and in less than a year Henry's weight had fallen half a stone to eight stone ten pounds; Grace suffered often from toothache, for which the only remedy was extraction, without anaesthetic of course. The family lived in a thatch roofed bungalow of wood built on stilts to keep it dry in the huge rainfall, and the climate was hot and steamy. I have some watercolours of Toungoo by Grace.

In January 1884, the unit began a long journey to India, on relief by another, but did not sail from Rangoon for nearly two months. However, once arrived at Calcutta the journey by train to Delhi took only four days.

In Delhi the unit was quartered in the famous Red Fort, built by the Moguls, and there the family lived over the Lahore Gate, of which we have a miniature. Six months leave in the hill station of Landour, north of Delhi, helped to restore them to better health, and on return in October they moved into a small bungalow at Dehraganj which may have been the home of Mahatma Gandhi in about 1930. In early 1885 a fourth daughter, Elsie, was born, but soon life in India became too much for Grace and in December she sailed for England with the children, leaving Henry with the unit. He was with it in Calcutta until the spring of 1886, when they moved to Ferozepore, north-west of Delhi, in an extremely hot region. Here Henry suffered recurrent attacks of malaria, but in spring of 1887 his posting home came through and he was able to rejoin his family in London, looking very well.

From October 1887 to the end of the next year, Henry commanded the North Irish Artillery Depot at Londonderry. His promotion in December 1888 to Lieutenant Colonel was a mixed blessing as no appointments were vacant and he faced the prospect of again going on half-pay, but luckily he was posted to Malta in January 1889 and sailed with the family on the SS Kedar, 1783 tons. In this tiny ship they made a terrifying crossing of the Bay of Biscay in a huge storm, vividly recorded by Grace, and after further very rough weather in the Mediterranean reached Malta on 1st February. Here, Henry commanded the fortress artillery in the western part of the island. All the guns were still muzzle loaders, but some were very large, with calibres of 17.7 inches firing shells of 2000 pounds weight, and the armament was considered quite up to date.

After a militarily uneventful time in Malta, Henry applied in late 1894 to retire next January, as his promotion prospects were negligible without staff or operational experience. He has said to have been promoted Colonel in January 1894, this does not accord with his description as Lt Col in witnessing his mother-in-law's will. The family left Malta in May 1895 and later that year settled at No 7 Westerhall Gardens, Weymouth, Dorset. Here, Henry developed a passion for bicycling, which probably led to his premature death from an aortic aneurism, on 2 December 1906. He is buried in the churchyard of St Anne's, Radipole, Weymouth.

As my father remembers him, Henry was a fine man, the very soul of unselfishness, extremely generous so far as his means allowed, and one who made friends wherever he went. Like most Irishmen he was quick tempered, but the storm soon blew over and the sun shone through. He was a devoted husband and father.