

# Public Health Reports

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## UNITED STATES.

[Reports to the Supervising Surgeon-General United States Marine-Hospital Service.]

### *Yellow fever on the American schooner Talofa.*

TORTUGAS, KEY WEST, FLA., *July 7, 1897.*

SIR: I have the honor to confirm my telegram of this date reporting a case of yellow fever on the American schooner *Talofa*. This vessel arrived June 25, and had left Colon eight days previously, bound for Port Tampa. A colored seaman, John Sturgis, was taken ill with fever the day after leaving Colon. Three days later another case of fever occurred, and 2 more cases developed at quarantine. All these cases were at once isolated and the vessel carefully disinfected. Three of the cases were clearly malarial fever and have since recovered. The case of Sturgis, whose fever had subsided at the time of his transfer to hospital, was looked upon with suspicion. The presence of slight jaundice and albuminuria, the occurrence of hemorrhages the day before his death on the 3d instant, and the finding of typical lesions at the necropsy leave no doubt that the disease was yellow fever. No other cases have occurred, and the *Talofa* having been duly disinfected and detained, will be discharged to-day.

Respectfully, yours,

L. L. WILLIAMS,  
*Passed Assistant Surgeon, U. S. M. H. S.*

*Smallpox in Toledo, Ohio.*

*Yellow fever at Panama and Colon.*

CONSULATE-GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,  
*Panama, July 12, 1897.*

SIR: On the 28th ultimo there were received from you two letters of June 9 and 10. Consul-General Victor Vifquain will answer these in person, having left the Isthmus on the 5th instant to be in Washington about the 15th.

On the 7th instant I received the following cable:

“WASHINGTON, *July 6, 1897.*”

“UNITED STATES CONSUL-GENERAL,  
*Panama, Colombia.*”

“If medical assistance needed to enforce quarantine regulations nominate physician, \$100 per month, same at Colon. If necessary can send physicians, if none available wire reply, giving estimated number yellow fever cases.”

“WYMAN, *Surgeon-General.*”

After careful consideration and inquiry, knowing that the number of cases were apparently decreasing, that the Panama Railroad and Steamship Company and Pacific Mail Steamship Company forbid their crews going ashore, the former in Colon and the latter in Panama, and also that the former company requires all passengers intending to embark on their trimonthly steamers for New York, to obtain a health certificate from their physician, I decided to cable thus:

“PANAMA, *July 7, 1897.*—WYMAN, Surgeon-General, Washington: Yellow fever decreasing, 10 cases, writing.—VIFQUAIN.”

Thinking that a history of the situation might be of interest to you, please pardon me should the following report seem lengthy.

The first cases of yellow fever appeared in Panama in the first days of April, continually increasing throughout that month and through May. During the month of June the disease seemed at a standstill, and it is now considered to be decreasing.

The disease is not contagious to the native Panamanian. However,

deaths have occurred here of persons coming from the mountains, not one hundred miles distant. With new arrivals from abroad the disease is generally fatal. A few foreigners of five and six years residence here have had mild cases, but these without exception recover. The natives too are subject to an unusually large amount of fever this year, but these cases are generally malarial, bilious, and pernicious fevers. I am advised confidentially (it being the custom of the country to cover up the cases as much as possible) by members of the medical board, that if 100 Americans, or other foreigners were brought to Panama and remained in the city for two weeks, that at least two-thirds would be subject to the disease.

Heavy rains have been looked for for the last two months, but the season remains unusually dry. Rains, with the consequent flushing of the streets and sewers of the city, which are of rude structure and date back to the Spaniards, and are often blocked up, causing bad odors throughout the streets, when they appear in genuine tropical style may be expected to mark the temporary disappearance of yellow fever in Panama.

About two months ago a contract was signed with a Belgian company for constructing waterworks in this city. Work on the pipes and sewers is expected to begin next year. It may be expected that yellow fever will appear then in this city as never before known, surpassing even the canal days.

La Boca (the Pacific mouth of the Panama Canal), 2 miles from here, where 2,000 laborers are now working on the canal, and where an immense pier is almost completed, which is expected will receive all the 20 ships visiting Panama monthly, commencing about the first of next July, is considered the most sickly place on this isthmus. The ships now anchor 3 miles from this city, but when these ships come into this pier there will certainly appear much sickness among the ship's crews.

Your cable reads, "If medical assistance needed, nominate physician," etc. Yellow fever being considered contagious in this city, and the regulations requiring that vessels leaving for the United States be inspected and disinfected, to secure a strict compliance with the law, it is certainly required that a medical officer be appointed to perform this service, and furnished with the necessary apparatus for the various processes of disinfecting. Should, however, the matter not be considered of sufficient importance, there being but few actual cases at the present time, this consulate-general can continue to issue bills of health as heretofore without this inspection. As you are aware, steamers leave here trimonthly for San Francisco, fifteen and twenty days en route, thus giving ample time for the development of cases before the ships arrive at a port of the United States.

As regards Colon, but few cases have occurred in that town, most of them originating here; but as steamers leave that port trimonthly for New York, direct, arriving within seven days, it is possibly of more importance to your Service than Panama. Cases might develop after disembarking in New York. However, the railroad company are taking precautions, and will not permit any suspicious cases boarding their ships. Should your Service decide to attach medical officers to this consulate-general and the Colon consulate, I might say that it would be well to have one at each place, as steamers might be leaving each port on the same day. There is excellent material both in this city and in Colon from which a selection could be made at the salary you state.

As fever is likely to be stamped out completely on this isthmus within

two or three months, but very likely to appear again next year, I would hardly suggest at the present time the appointment of physicians, unless the very strict compliance with the Quarantine Laws and Regulations is required. Should it be stamped out as anticipated, but to appear next year again, it might be well to be ready for it at the beginning of the season. \* \* \*

Trusting that the information given may be ample and satisfactory, I am, sir,

Your obedient servant,

C. J. VIFQUAIN,  
*Vice Consul-General.*

Hon. WALTER WYMAN,  
*Surgeon-General, U. S. M. H. S., Washington, D. C.*

NOTE.—United States sanitary inspectors have been appointed at both Panama and Colon to assist the consul-general in enforcing the quarantine regulations.