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Subject Matter

"Discovery of the Value of Lemon Juice
in the Treatment of Sailors Suffering from Scurvy"

by Dr. James Lind

Type of Presentation

Historical Drama

Approximate Length

Fourteen Minutes

Source

"LISTEN AMERICA"

(Women's National Emergency Committee and NBC)

1880
1881

DISCOVERY OF THE VALUE OF LEMON JUICE
IN THE TREATMENT OF SAILORS SUFFERING FROM SCURVY

by Dr. James Lind

ANNOUNCER: In order to build ourselves into stronger and healthier Americans, we want to understand exactly how what we eat affects our daily lives. Nothing can help us understand this better than the thrilling story of man's fight against hidden hunger the drama of those bold pioneers of science who hacked their way to modern knowledge through the jungle of the unknown. And so tonight, we recreate the story of one of these immortal hunger fighters, Dr. James Lind, patron saint of British sailormen, who vanquished scurvy,

(MUSIC IN . . .)

the fearful plague of the sea.

Dr. James Lind stands on the white cliffs of Dover in 1794 watching a

(LITTLE WIND SNEAKS IN)

stately warship in the harbor unfurling her sails and making ready to cast off --

LIND: (OLD) Mark you well that ship in Dover Harbor?
 Tis the Suffolk, and with all its gunpowder, its marines and its great cannon, the most important armor on it is a small cask of juice. Yes - and to put that cask aboard the Suffolk took me fifty years, aye, from way back in 1739 when I was a young ship's doctor in the Royal Navy aboard

(SHIPS NOISES - WIND WAVES - SAILS FLAPPING ETC.)

STARTS TO FAD IN)

the Salisbury ...

(SHIP SOUNDS ON STAGE)

(WAVES AND WIND FLAPPING, SAILS CREAKING,

PULLEYS CHAINS AND ROPES COMING IN UNDER ABOVE)

CAPTAIN: Men, you have been turned aft to see the punishment of
Seaman Brown

(MURMURS FROM MEN)

The stupid fool dozed at his post - and lost us a valuable
jib sail.

QUARTERMASTER: (OFF) The prisoner is tied fast, Sir,

BROWN: (OFF) (VERY YOUNG) Please sir, I didn't mean --

CAPTAIN: Three dozen strokes of the cat o'nine tails for him.
Lay on, Boatswains mate !

MATE: Aye, sir ! One --

(WHISTLE OF WHIP, INHALATION FROM CREW)

(GROAN FROM BROWN)

Two --

(WHISTLE AND INHALATION AGAIN)

BROWN: No, aiiiiii, please no --

MATE: Three ---

LIND: (YOUNG) Stop it ! Stop it ! I say

(ENTERING)

Boatswain, put down that whip.

(OFFSTAGE GROANS FROM BROWN)

CAPTAIN: How dare you interfere with my orders, Dr. Lind?

Get back to your sick bay !

LIND: Begging your pardon, Captain, but Brown here could not
help fumbling. He is a sick man, sir. I told him this
morning he was coming down with scurvy --

CAPTAIN: Scurvy --

(MEN REACT)

Then why did he not --

BROWN: (HALF SOBBING) I thought mayhap 'twould disappear if
I told no one --

CAPTAIN: (DISGUSTED) Loose his bonds and leave him be. He
will be dead within the week (EXITING) Crew dismissed --
(AD LIB MEN LEAVING)

LIND: Take him over with the others, poor devil.

MATE: Aye sir. Up with him -- you --
(AD LIB RESPONSE)

BROWN: (SLOW FADEIN) Oh please, Dr. Lind, I would rather have
my beating --

LIND: Nonsense.

(GROANS OF MEN FADING IN)

Brown, get hold of yourself....

(ASIDE) Put him down right here.

(AD LIB RESPONSE UNDER:)

BROWN: But must I die, like these men -- with the terrible pains
and the unhealing wounds --?

LIND: (WEARILY) I have tried every remedy in the Naval Almanac.
There is only one other infinitesimal choice, and if it
went wrong, I should lose my commission.....

BROWN: Anything, Dr. Lind, anything!

LIND: (WITH A SIGH) Very well... (DECISIVELY, RAISING HIS VOICE)
Look, men -- Science knows no way to halt your scurvy. But I
have found three untested drugs the Arabs write about. Are you
willing I experiment with them on you?

T) 1ST SAILOR: Go ahead.
O)
G) 2ND SAILOR: Anything.
E)
T) 3RD SAILOR: It could not be worse than this -
H)
E)
R)

LIND: Then you shall each have your choice. The drugs are tartar, elixir of vitriol, and lemon juice --

1ST SAILOR: Lemon juice is no medicine, give me tartar.

2ND SAILOR: The elixir for me --

3RD SAILOR: You would put us off and save the cost of decent medicine

(AD LIB AGREEMENT)

BROWN: Please, sir, I never did taste the yellow fruit.
Tis too expensive and monstrous sour I am told. But if you would make the test, I gladly choose the lemon juice.

LIND: So be it, men, and may your free choices bring you life....

(MUSIC...SHIPS SOUNDS OUT)

(MUSIC OUT UNDER MURMUR VOICES)

LIND: (EXCITED, VOLUBLE) That is why I hastened to you, milords of the Admiralty, as soon as the Salisbury docked. I have definitely proved how to prevent scurvy !

1ST OLD LORD: Humph, there has always been scurvy --

2ND OLD LORD: Tis the Lord's judgment --

LIND: My experiments prove differently, gentlemen. I fed thirty sailors elixir and tartar. They died. But Brown here and one other boy got all the lemon juice on board --

BROWN: (HEALTHY) And we recovered at once, sir.

LIND: (TRIUMPHANT) Scurvy, milords, kills more men than the French and Spanish fleets together. But feed our sailors lemon juice, and they can all live !

3RD OLD LORD: Mayhap, mayhap ←

1ST OLD LORD: In due course, Dr. Lind, we shall acquaint you with our decisions.

LIND: Acquaint me with your decisions ! Godsblud, sirs, destiny has already made the decisions ! -- It rests with you to carry out her orders ! --

1ST OLD LORD: Hold your tongue and return to your ship before you find yourself in chains. Lemon juice and seamen, folderol !

(CHORDS INTO LIND THEME AND DOWN UNDER)

LIND: I held my tongue five years and proved my lemon juice cure over and over. The admiralty would do nothing. Then I resigned from the Navy and published my findings... No one would listen and the long, long years went by -- England fought a war with Spain, conquered India and lost her American colonies,

(MUSIC OUT.....)

and all the while I kept on trying to make them listen --

(MONTAGE MUSIC.....)

(FAST PACED VOICES JEER AT LIND)

EARL: (FILTER) A plague on this crack-pot ! I will not see him --

LIND: (MIDDLE AGED) (PLEADING ALWAYS) Just lemon juice, my Lord Earl, nothing else, and they will live --

DUCHESS: (FILTER) What ideas ! I can scarce afford lemons for my fete to the King, yet Dr. Lind would waste them on sailors --

LIND: If Your Grace would but lift your voice in Parliament, the loved ones of hundreds of sailors would bless you --

NORTH: (FILTER) Sailors are cheap, Lind. We can seize them in any slums. Lemons are expensive and your claims are fantastic.

LIND: Milords, they are human beings, dying pitifully --

ADMIRAL: (FILTER) He is old, and addled in the head these forty years.
Tell him to go and die --

ALL: Go and die, go and die !

(MUSIC WASHES VOICES OUT AND FADES QUICKLY OUT AS DOOR OPENS.....)

HOWE: (KINDLY, BUT BRISK) Sit down, Dr. Lind. Tis not meet an old man should wait upon a younger one -- They tell me you have been coming to the Admiralty for fifty years !

LIND: (VERY OLD) WITH PRIDE) Fifty-three years and eight months, my Lord Admiral Howe. And this is the first time I have ever seen my reports on the Commander of the Fleet's desk.

HOWE: Lind, last year we lost four thousand sailors and an entire Channel campaign because of scurvy. And so -- your claims shall have their chance. I have given orders that the Suffolk, sailing from Dover on Tuesday next, shall have on board a cask of lemon juice sufficient for all her crew. If your claims be true, sir, history and your country shall reward you.

(MUSIC UP AND UNDER...AS WIND REGISTERS QUIETLY)

LIND: (VERY OLD) So, you see, these so patient white cliffs of Dover could have told me .. anything can be accomplished

(MUSIC OUT.....)

if we but take patience.

Look down to the
Suffolk there, raising
her anchor, ready to sail
away to sea. This time,
her crew shall stay
strong, thanks to one
small cask of plain

CAPT: (OFF STAGE) Haul
in the main top
gallant --

ANSWERING VOICE:
Haul in the main
top gallant --

SAILOR: Aye, aye, sir --

MORE

MORE

LIND:
(CONT.)

lemon juice. And
over across the mists
of the channel,
Napoleon, whose armies
are legion, threatens
our little isle.

SOUND: (SAILS FLAPPING
OFF MIKE)

BOATSWAIN: Anchors clear --

SOUND: (RATTLING OF CHAINS)

SAILOR: (WAY OFF) She's
away...

CAPTAIN: (WAY WAY OFF)

(MUSIC SNEAKS IN)

Let go your mainsheet.

But, God willing, he shall
rant and fume in vain.
For we shall bind him
with a chain of ships
manned by men fearless
in their freedom and
strong in their health.

(MUSIC CURTAIN.....)

ANNOUNCER:

Thank you, for your vivid portrayal of a great soul.
Today, scurvy is only a memory in His Majesty's Fleet, and
here in America, what with the quantities of grape fruit
and lemons, oranges, and the tomato juice we consume, we
certainly get enough vitamin C to prevent scurvy. But we
now know that this does not mean enough vitamin C for
bounding, vigorous health. And the same principle applies
to all the vitamins. A fact we must know, if we are to build
a buoyant health for America, is that you can be half starved
for vitamins and as a result be only half healthy.

