

A NOTABLE SHIPWRECK OF TORRES STRAIT

[By CAPT. R. G. LEDLEY]

(Read by Mr. A. A. JORDAN at a meeting of the Society on August 25, 1955.)

Probably no part of Torres Strait has been responsible for so many wrecks, as what is known as Raine Island Entrance. So many wrecks occurred during the 1830's and 1840's, that the Government eventually erected a beacon, circular in shape, and seventy-five feet high above low water, visible about fifteen miles, this tower being erected by Captain Blackwood of H.M.S. survey ship "Fly". It was painted red and white stripes, and convicts were carried from Sydney to help in the construction of the beacon.

During the early days of Torres Strait traffic, there were no ports north of Brisbane, so when ships were wrecked at the Northern part of the Strait, the prevailing winds being from the South and South-East, the survivors usually up helm and stood with a fair wind towards Timor—Captain Bligh being a case in point. The Government also established on Booby Island, seventy miles West of Thursday Island, a cache of stores, for the benefit of shipwrecked mariners; these were placed in a cave on the Island, then known as the Post Office; ships bound for India or China left their mail there, other ships bound South for Sydney collected this mail, and delivered it on arrival.

In August 1859, a ship called the "Sapphire", loaded at Gladstone, some horses for Calcutta; after leaving there, she was wrecked on the Sir James Hardy Islands, inside of Raine Island⁽¹⁾, on September 23, 1859; the crew took to the boats and as they had no time to save stores from the wreck, with a fair wind, they made their way to Booby Island, to replenish their depleted stock.

After leaving Booby Island, the "Sapphire's" boats called at Friday Island, but the wind had changed to North and both boats were then bound South; while at Friday Island, the crew of the Captain's boat were attacked by the natives and all killed; the mate's boat

1. See also "*Pageant of the Pacific*", Capt. F. Rhodes, Vol. II, p. 49.

got clear and arrived back at Sir James Hardy Islands, on their way to Gladstone, at which point we will leave the "Sapphire's" crew for the present.

On October 30, 1859, a ship called the "Marina" was wrecked at Raine Island. Captain Jamieson was fortunate enough to be able to stock his boat with stores, before he abandoned the "Marina", after which he kept away for Gladstone, with a fair wind; shortly after leaving Raine Island he called at the Sir James Hardy Islands, and there found papers and documents showing that the "Sapphire" had been wrecked there, a month previous to the wreck of the "Marina."

At Sir James Hardy Islands, the crew of the "Marina's" boat took on board two guns found on the Islands, one brass and one cast iron, these being taken as ballast, as it was found that the "Marina's" boat was inclined to be cranky, after which the boat was kept away for Gladstone, this port being reached safely in November 1859. We will now return to the chief officer of the "Sapphire", who as previously stated had arrived back at Sir James Hardy Islands where they were astonished to find the "Marina" afloat, although damaged and leaking, and the "Sapphire's" crew boarded her, and after grounding three times, duly arrived at Gladstone on February 17, 1860; they were rewarded £600 by the Underwriters for their five months arduous toil and hardship, which they had certainly earned.

Amongst the crew of the "Marina", was a seaman called Jensen who decided to live at Gladstone and he later became Captain Jensen and was appointed pilot at that port.

The late Captain Mackay, Portmaster of Brisbane, related that he saw the "Marina" at Gladstone, the "Sapphire's" crew having tarred the deck house of the "Marina", and in large letters notified any ships they might meet on their journey South, that the crew of the "Sapphire" were on board, this to relieve any anxiety that would probably be felt for their safety. Years after, someone with a romantic turn of mind, stated that the brass gun, stamped with the name "Santa Barbara", landed at Gladstone by Captain Jamieson of the "Marina", the gun which he had taken

from Sir James Hardy Islands as ballast for his boat, must have been brought there by De Quiros, and had belonged to an old Spanish Galleon, wrecked on Facing Island opposite Gladstone.

The matter might have ended there, but in 1899, Cardinal Moran paid a visit to Gladstone, and he had heard about the "Santa Barbara" gun, and in the course of a speech, declared that, "There is the spot where De Quiros landed and where the first mass was celebrated by a Franciscan friar on Australian soil nearly 300 years ago."

This started a controversy regarding the authenticity of this statement, but all the keenest historical workers at that time exploded the statement that any Spanish galleon had ever been wrecked on Facing Island, opposite Gladstone; among those questioned was the seaman Jensen, who, as previously stated, had been a member of the crew of the "Marina", his version of the cannon branded "Santa Barbara" being that it was one of the two cannons they had picked up at Sir James Hardy Islands and loaded into their lifeboat that was cranky, the same cannon branded "Santa Barbara" being unloaded at Gladstone. All ships large and small carried guns, and were compelled to do so at that period by the authorities for signalling and firing distress rockets; later, a more efficient rocket was carried, and this rocket is still in use to-day.

The "Marina" was later patched up and sailed for Sydney. She was not in a very satisfactory state, so a schooner was sent with her as a precautionary measure, but off Cape Moreton she opened up her seams; the accompanying vessel took her crew off, set the "Marina" on fire, and remained with her until she sank.