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A SAILOR TURNS TO WELFARE WORK

Survivor of a Famous Wreck

HAT looks like a good oldtimer," we remarked the other day to Captain Charles West, of Wellington, as he replaced, carefully, in his vest pocket, a gold repeater watch.

"Not a bad old ticker, that. I've had it since 1923," he said. "Take a look at the writing on the inside of the

We found that the watch had been presented to him by the Commonwealth Government of Australia for the part he played in an adventure famous among sailors in Pacific waters-the wreck of the barquentine Amy Turner. We were consulting him about welfare work just then, but the watch was too big a temptation. Would he not tell us the story?

"Oh, I don't know. It's a long time ago and old history." However, we persisted, and with the ship's official log to back him up, finally extracted from Captain West the story of 23 days in an open boat and of more adventures than come the way of 99 men out of 100.

Captain West was on the Amy Turner when she left Newcastle 22 years ago with a crew of 15 and 1,400 tons of coal for Manila. When she was 300 miles off Guam the wind began to chop about in fierce squalls and, reaching hurricane force, did a lot of damage to the ship. One sea which broke on board carried away the rails and the gasoline engine for the pumps, smashed the cabin skylights, and flooded out the cabin and messroom.

When morning came there were signs of a typhoon, so the master, Niel Nielsen, decided to try and make Guam. But the ship was in a wretched condition. No warm food was available. Tinned meat, biscuit, and an occasional glass of rum, kept the crew going. The vessel could just stagger along under a lower topsail, shuddering and groaning at every blow of the sea.

No Reply to Signals

"Approaching Guam we found that it was the northern end and, as we passed the wireless station on the summit of Point Ritidan, we signalled that we were in trouble. I have never been able to discover whether the signals were seen, but they certainly were not replied to," said Captain West.

"The old packet received an awful buffeting. One boat was smashed away, leaving only the lifeboat and a 20ft. dory-built boat on the chocks. There was a depth of 16ft. of water in the hold and the ship was very much down by the head.

"At midnight that night Captain Nielsen, whose young wife was on board with him, called us all on the poop. He said that we had done all that could be done by human beings. The ship suddenly gave a plunge and I found myself in mid-Pacific hanging on the gunwale of a boat with my mates struggling in the water all round round me. The ship had taken her final dive to the bottom. The captain and his wife were seen clinging to some wreckage.



CAPT, CHARLES WEST A watch produced a story

Then came a deluge of rain, blotting everything out.

"Through a long day and far into the night we baled and kept one of the boats afloat. There were four of us. Clifton Cornish, a very brave and fine sailor, who was boatswain, asked me to take charge, and we set a course for Saipan. Luckily I had had a lot of experience vachting and in small boats. There was a chance of picking up the McKenzie Islands, but the distance to be covered was about 1,800 miles. Thirst and the strong sun were torturing us. We kept ourselves saturated with sea water, chewed pieces of rag and the ends of rowlock lanyards and at noon each day a tiny portion of water was served out."

Land at Last

There was only one occasion when there was any outward evidence of fear, Captain West said. That was when a large shark rubbed himself against the planking of the boat.

"Eventually," he went on, "we sighted some islands. It had been our intention to land near Suragao, where we knew we would be well received, rather than run the risk of meeting the hostile Moro tribe. On the 23rd day out, land was right ahead, and, too tired to row any more, we waited for a breeze which took us to the shore. In the afternoon a native canoe arrived, attracted by the smoke of our fire. In it were a man, a boy and three women. To our surprise the boy spoke perfect English, having been educated at an American mission

"Plenty of sleep and good food worked their own cures and in time we made our way to Mindanao and then Cebu. At Manila there was a court of inquiry," added Captain West.

Government Congratulations

Part of a letter of congratulation from the Minister of Trade and Customs of the Commonwealth Government of Australia, Mr. Austin J. Capman, sent to

(continued on next page)