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45

THERE'S STILL GOLD WHERE HE FOUND IT . . .

"Johnno" Johnstone and the Niagara's Bullion

THERE is gold still in the Niagara's bullion-room, and the world-famous diver, "Johnno" Johnstone, intends to recover it. With the experience gained during the war on some of the greatest salvage jobs in history, and with his improved diving-bell, he is confident of success. This interview with him was written for "The Listener" by PETER MIDDLETON.

NEW ZEALANDERS will recall without difficulty the keen interest aroused throughout the country by the story of the recovery of the bulk of the three million pounds in gold bars from the Niagara in 1941. And those who read James Taylor's excellent book *Gold From the Sea*—and learned the true nature of the stupendous undertaking—will be specially interested by the news that "Johnno" Johnstone, who played such a vital and prominent part in the original enterprise, plans to return to the wreck next year to bring up the remainder of the gold.

I met Johnstone in the lounge of the Strand Hotel at Cairns, North Queensland's tropical port—the crossroads and meeting-place of scores of interesting personalities from all over the world—a few nights ago, on his return from Kurumba, on the Gulf of Carpentaria, where he had been at work on the sea-plane moorings. He was sitting quietly in a corner, smoking, alone. No one unaware of his profession and his history would have given him more than a casual glance. Yet his story is a most fascinating and adventurous one for all that he tells it modestly, almost reluctantly.

Not Much Home Life

He has enjoyed his life—he is now 54, and good, in his own words, "for another ten years" of active employment. Mrs. Johnstone could testify, with feeling, to her husband's keenness for his work. He has been away from his Melbourne home so much in the past 20 years that he is looked upon as a sort of man who comes around. Having been engaged on big salvage jobs almost without a break from 1940 to 1944—on the Niagara, at Darwin during the first Jap attack, on the Normandie in New York Harbour, on innumerable jobs around the Australian coast and in the Pacific Islands—he arrived home unexpectedly one afternoon in November, 1944, and greeted his wife with the news that he was on his way to India. And for India he left a few days later—in a Liberator—from Perth, W.A., arriving in Calcutta after a trip of 36 hours.

Those who followed the progress of the Niagara gold recovery will be familiar with the story of that mighty feat of deep-sea salvage, in which men with international names—Captain John Williams, James Herd, the Johnstone Brothers—performed what was generally considered to be an impossible task.

Ninety-six per cent. of the three million pounds' worth of gold was raised from the record depth of 460ft.

Since then, other records have been broken and other impossible tasks successfully performed by men like "Johnno," who take it as being all in the day's work. Seeking to refresh my memory with the name of the man who saved the whole Niagara enterprise, by carrying a line beneath the Claymore's hull to free a live mine which was literally touching the side, I had to ask the question at three different points in the conversation before Johnstone admitted it was himself. Had that job been done in any of the three Services it would have earned him the V.C.

At Work on the Normandie

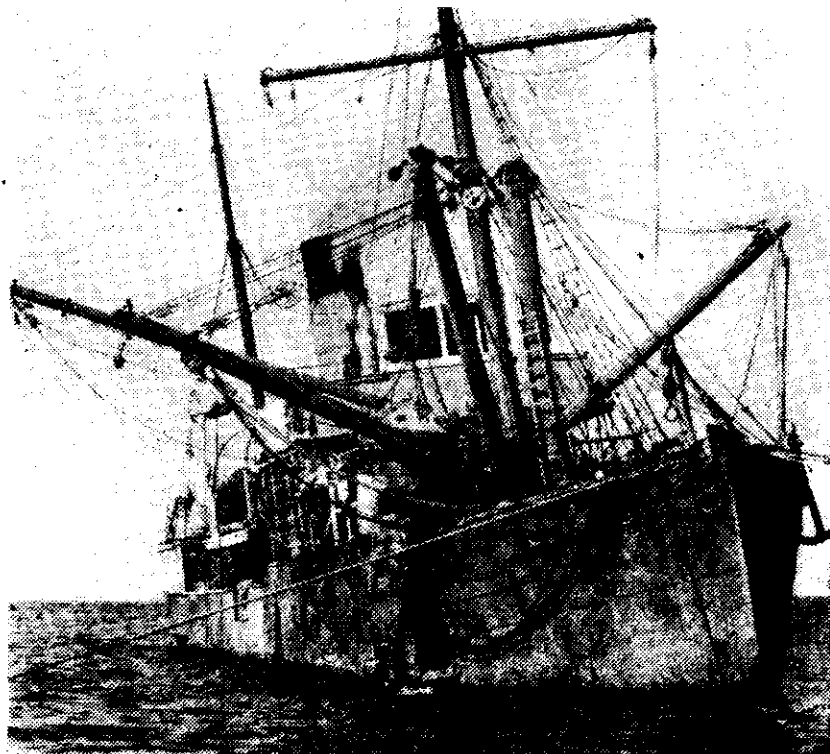
It was as Shipwright Surveyor to the Commonwealth Salvage Board that Johnstone went to Darwin and found himself an assignment with the small but valiant band of men who worked like heroes to minimise the effect of the Japanese aerial onslaught of February 19, 1942. And in this capacity he has served the Federal Government ever since. In

March, 1942, he was sent to the U.S. to attend the Deep-sea Diving School at Washington on submarine rescue work, where he qualified as an Operator, and while there he worked on the huge hull of the Normandie which lay on her side at her berth in New York for a year and nine months before being raised—in July, 1943. The record number of 110 American divers worked at this gigantic task, under the direction of Captain W. A. Sullivan, Chief Salvage Officer of the U.S. Navy.

Johnstone left the Normandie job in November, 1942, and in January of the next year was at work on the 8,000 ton Greek freighter Georges M. Emberecos, sunk by collision in Port Phillip Bay, carrying a cargo of iron ore. September, 1943, saw him in New Guinea, where he worked on a number of important salvage jobs, including the Anschun, sunk by enemy action in Milne Bay. "Johnno" is proud of the fact that eight 3.7 a/a guns, urgently needed at the time, were recovered intact from the Anschun and were in use against the enemy planes shortly afterwards. About this time, the R.A.A.F. supply ship Wanaka went aground on Eden Reef in a cyclone which put six others on the reef at various places. The Wanaka was proclaimed a total loss. Nine lives had been lost when she struck. But, using the experience gained on the Normandie, the salvage men brought her into Cairns within 27 days.

The U.S. troopship President Grant was a total loss on a reef south of

(continued on next page)



The Claymore anchored over the Niagara's wreck listed as the three-ton diving bell was raised from the sea