



DIVER "JOHNNNO" JOHNSTONE emerging from the bell after his 528-foot world record dive

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Samarai early in 1944, but they recovered her very valuable cargo of war stores. It was here that Captain Williams sustained a badly-fractured skull by a blow from a swinging boat davit. A member of the salvage crew was killed in the same accident.

In January, 1944, with James Herd in charge, the biggest salvage job ever undertaken in Australian waters was successfully accomplished. The Rufus King with a £3,000,000 cargo of hospital equipment—enough for nine hospitals—and 10 bombers aboard, had broken her back on the rocks off Moreton Bay. While salvage was proceeding, the two halves broke away, so the salvage men sealed off the forward half and floated her into Brisbane. Here she was eventually turned into a floating workshop by the American Navy and taken to Finch-haven, New Guinea, where she may still be seen, bearing the name "The Half Rufus." The recovery of this immensely valuable cargo, practically intact, won the personal thanks of General MacArthur.

Stuck in the Mud

In November, 1944, Johnstone went with Captain Williams on loan to the Indian Government, to try to raise the 6,500 ton troopship Santhia in the Hooghly River at Calcutta. A year and a-half before she had caught fire on the night of her departure, laden with West and East African troops. Under the weight of water poured into her to quench the flames she turned over at her berth, badly blocking the port. It took 14 months to raise her. The method employed was ingenious, if simple enough in principle, but the local conditions under which they had to work would have daunted less determined men. The Hooghly mud is of such consistency that by the time work was started on her, the silt that partly covered the Santhia had consolidated into clay, and the rate of deposit of this silt was such that every full tide deposited a two-inch layer of mud on the upper side of the hull. This layer had to be removed each time before work could proceed. A very unusual feature of this undertaking was the employment of 150 Italian Naval prisoners of war. These men, all highly skilled tradesmen, did a very creditable job under Johnstone's supervision, not, however, without some forms of encouragement, peculiarly "Johnno's" own. He reminded them that it was an Italian salvage crew who performed the greatest feat in salvage history to that date, the recovery of the Egypt's gold, and

this appeal to their national pride was most effective. The canteen that he promised them, financed by extra earnings which they could not receive in cash, was even more effective. An army of Indian women also worked on this operation, mainly employed in carrying silt and debris in baskets on their heads—

Through New Zealand (IX)

NORTHERN LIGHTS

I HAVE confessed before in these notes to a weakness for men who can do things with their hands — mechanical things that are half craftsmanship and half the general competence that goes

HANDY MEN

with commonsense. I think New Zealand is well supplied with men of that type, and that we owe more to them than to our legislators and teachers for the safe and smooth way in which life for most of us generally runs. I find them everywhere; on farms, I think, most of all, but in country stores and country schools, on our railways and highways, in the bush, and to a surprising extent also in the places where one would not expect to find them, barbers' shops, hotel lounges, and even ice-cream parlours. If the light fails or the power goes off, a tyre burst or a car engine stops, there is almost invariably someone at hand who knows how to set things right, however remote the problem may appear to be from his ordinary work. As long as we retain such men I don't think much can go wrong with us, but I was told by a launchman on Whangaroa Harbour that we are losing the older specialised skills.

"Whangaroa boatbuilders," he said, "were once famous throughout the Pacific. Our materials were good and we took a pride in our skill. Now there is hardly one man left."

"Have they died or gone away?"

"Gone away. They were individualists, and could not fit into the bigger concerns that now do the building."

"Where have they gone to? Where else could they retain their independence?"

"Well, some have secured land. Some have bought launches and gone fishing. Some I suppose have had to work for wages."

for the daily equivalent of about 1/6 (Australian money).

While working on the Santhia, Johnstone contracted amoebic dysentery and had to be brought back to Australia, where he then took a well-earned rest of four months, following which he went on a round trip of the Islands, surveying wrecks. He visited Rabaul, which he describes as the biggest graveyard of ships in the world: 217 Japanese ships are known to lie here, including a large carrier and a cruiser, both of them losses which the Japs kept very quiet. Actually there are scores more hulls than the official figure discloses, strewn over the bed of this magnificent harbour, which fortunately, is of excellent depth, so that danger from fouling the wrecks is minimised to some extent. There will be many months of work here, however, blasting superstructures off those too near the surface for safety, and clearing hulls lying on their sides in the shallower waters.

In Cairns, "Johnno" is working on the seaplane moorings, as he did at Kurumba, on the Gulf. With him is his brother's son Peter, who is learning the diving game under "Johnno's" expert

tuition. "He'll make a rattling good diver—if he behaves himself," is his uncle's verdict.

His Last Job?

After this—what? Johnstone will be free from Commonwealth service by the end of the year—he hopes. He's scared to tell Mrs. Johnstone, but his heart is set on that last job which will provide the crown to a life crammed with interest and danger; he's going back to tackle the remainder of the Niagara's gold. The Johnstone Brothers (Bill is in the Royal Australian Navy, at present in Sydney) have the right of recovery of the rest of the bullion—a mere £145,000 worth. But when "Johnno" says quietly "It's not the money," you feel like believing him. He has to prove to himself, and the world, that his patent deep-sea diving bell, with its new important improvements, is as revolutionary as he thinks it is.

He's hoping, of course, that he can give Mrs. Johnstone a holiday in New Zealand while he goes to work; he has glowing memories himself of the hospitality of the North Auckland people, and he is keen to show his wife some of the beauty-spots. But he's a bit sceptical. Mrs. Johnstone isn't keen to leave her beloved Melbourne.

By "SUNDOWNER"

"In all those cases the skill has been lost?"

"Yes, but it is always the same. The qualities that make a man a craftsman make him independent of control. He knows his worth, and he hates being pulled about."

"But the average competence of New Zealanders is high. I think they are among the ablest people in the world in a general way."

"So do I. But craftsmen are more than competent. They are experts, and proud, and won't be interfered with."

"Is it your belief, then, that they will disappear altogether?"

"Many of them will. Here they are gone already."

His remarks interested me to begin with because he was a quarter-or-eight-

caste Maori and I could not help wondering whether it was the Maori craftsman talking or the Pakeha business man. But they were a reminder, in the second place, that there is a kind of Gresham's law operating on labour as well as on money, and that here too the second-best can be the enemy of the best.

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I DON'T know how other people react to an hour in a railway station, but it is a depressing experience as often as it happens to me. And I don't think it ought to be so dreary. Tens of thousands of people use these places every day, and it ought to be within our capacity to make a wait in any of them comfortable if not always amusing or exhilarating. Smoke is of course one of the problems, smoke and the dust that goes with it, and we shall have to endure those until we travel on water-power and not on coal. But I don't think we should have other discomforts added to the burden of inactivity. It is true that it is possible, in our two biggest stations, to have a bath and a haircut and a shave; that there are good rest-rooms for women; and that no one need travel very far without food and drink. But men travel as well as women; shaved men as well as unshaved; men and women with satisfied appetites as well as those who are hungry. It should not be necessary to be miserable if we don't want to eat or drink or bath or shave or escape for an hour from the baby.

RAILWAY STATION

If any reader thinks this comment harsh I invite him to spend an hour on Taihape station waiting for the Auckland express, two hours at Otahuhu waiting for a passenger from the suburbs,

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"Our materials were good and we took a pride in our skill"