

# Wreck of the Admiral Day

**S**OUTH SEA islands history is tragically annotated with accounts of vessels wrecked on treacherous reefs and shoals. Pan American Airways' new island base on Canton Island — intermediate stop on the new South Seas route to New Zealand — knew two shipwrecks in its earlier history, says an article in a recent issue of *New Horizons*. The whaler Canton went aground there in 1785. The guano vessel De Troupe met a similar fate in 1884.

Recently a third shipwreck broke the serenity of South Seas existence at Canton. At 0730 GCT, on September 19, the island people observed a vessel off the northeast shoreline. As the beacon light was on, the radio station operating (affording the ship an opportunity to take radio bearings if they were equipped to do so), airport manager Harold Graves and other island personnel paid scant attention to the visitor in the vicinity, because they were preparing to receive the American Clipper en route to Canton from Noumea. But an hour and 45 minutes later in the early evening darkness when the airport manager was patrolling the lagoon in the airport launch, he received an urgent message from shore telling him that the visiting vessel was aground and asking for assistance.

By this time the American Clipper was approaching for its landing. The airport manager completed his role of assisting in the landing operation and in docking the clipper, then hurried out to sea to render assistance to the stricken vessel, which by that time had identified herself as the freighter Admiral Day, Captain E. H. Humphreys commanding, with a crew consisting of nine officers, 32 seamen, the latter Malays and Chinese. A 6,000-ton vessel of the Carpenter Line, the Admiral Day was of Australian registry, bound for Sydney with lumber and other cargo.

The first request made of Airport Manager Graves was that he give the Admiral Day a tow. The idea of towing the 6,000-ton steamer with an eight-ton launch is not quite as futile as it might seem — the point was to use the Admiral Day's own power with the launch exerting an extra tug in the right direction at the right moment. The effort, however, was unavailing and the launch went ashore to await high tide.

In the meantime Canton's radio station had been busy attempting to raise other vessels in the vicinity. Two were close enough to be eligible as rescuers and the closer one, the S.S. Camara, immediately changed her course, headed toward Canton. In the meantime, Canton kept in touch with the Admiral Day by radio and the launch made other journeys to the vessel, which for the moment was sound and seaworthy, but unable to move from the reef on which she was grounded.

Thirty-six hours from the time the Admiral Day struck the reef the Camara arrived alongside and the launch again journeyed the eight miles to the reef to assist in passing lines. A heavy manila line was made

fast and a tow attempted, but the line parted. Other attempts were similarly unsuccessful even when a five-inch cable was run between the ships. Finally when a steel hawser parted, the Camara's captain reluctantly concluded that his ship could not be of practicable assistance and departed for Japan, since the safety of the officers and crew aboard the grounded ship could be safeguarded by Canton personnel.

The next step by the Admiral Day commander was to jettison cargo, starting with lumber which had been stowed on the deck. Much of this was salvaged by airport personnel, using the launch and the station barges, and stowed away on the island.

On September 27, Captain Humphreys found that his vessel had been damaged so much by the swells grinding her on the reef that it was going to be necessary to abandon ship. Baggage was taken ashore by the Canton launch in preparation therefor, but the crew and the captain stayed aboard three more days in the last-stand hope that developments would give rise to some means of saving their ship. By September 30 even that faint hope had faded, and the men came ashore to be welcomed by the little colony on Canton whose population was practically doubled by the ship's crew.

As accommodations on the island are not flexible enough to take care of a 100 per cent increase in population on a moment's notice, the housing problem was solved by turning over to the crew the recreation hall, which they converted into a barracks, using their own bedding which had been brought in from the ship. They had their meals at the Canton Island station mess. This was their home for a week until there came an opportunity for them to depart for the United States aboard the supply ship Thor.

They had to leave the Admiral Day grounded on the reef from which her valuable cargo was being brought ashore piece by piece in the Canton island lighterage barge. It included a quantity of lumber, two Ford trucks, some mining machinery, which is suitable for moving earth, a large shipment of fertilizer, some of which will be useful on Canton, a quantity of canned beef which probably will plague the Canton island residents for months to come, and much ship's gear, such as lifting tackle, bollards, cable, rope, pumps and valves, navigating instruments and cabin equipment — at any rate, these items of value will not suffer the fate of being broken up in the surf as was the case when the Canton and De Troupe went ashore.

The question of disposition and ownership of the abandoned cargo which has been salvaged by the Canton island station crew is under study by marine lawyers.

Once upon a time John Burroughs said of Hawaii: "I had gone to Honolulu reluctantly, but I tarried there joyfully."