

Aldabra

Being a voyage to Aldabra by the 36 foot Gaff Cutter Yacht "LUA LUA," crewed by the owner Mr. Bindshedler, by Mr. Gus Browning W4BPD, and by Mr. Harvey Brain VQ9HB.

On the 22nd of April, 1962, the peace of a meaningless Mahe day was abruptly shattered, for Ben and myself, by the arrival of Mr. Gus Browning, a well known American radio ham. He was going to make a DXpedition with us to the Aldabras. 'With us' needs qualifying. Ben, the owner of the yacht, is no radio ham. In fact, I am fairly certain that he now regards all hams as being certifiable!

Gus did not loiter. In fact everything Gus does is 'at the double'. So that the time it took him from the Customs to the Short Pier wasn't worth considering. "Hey: is that the little yacht down there?" "Looks OK to me." "Hey: Let's get aboard." "Hey: just hand me down that transmitter there this cabin table, right here; why that will take all the gear." "Guess we can all eat our food on the floor—or somewhere." Ben cast me a somewhat agitated glance. It did just cross my mind that this trip might not be quite so restful after all.

We left by the Cerf Channel late on Wednesday afternoon, the 25th of April. We ghosted down the East coast of Mahe to a light North Westerly breeze, weathering the Southern end of the Island just after dark. From there we set a course for Alphonse Island 210 miles away, and to the South of the Amirante Islands. The breeze became fickle. The sea was calm. So Gus was happy. Not only was Gus happy, but Gus was getting organized.

At Mahe Gus bolted down on the "Lua

Lua's" small stern deck, a 115 volt ac generator. There it was best calculated to snarl up the mainsheet. Climbing the shrouds, all the world like some convolulus from the tropical forest, was Gus's 'smack up to date' ground plane antenna. There it was best calculated to interfere with the sails; our main means of propulsion. Hi. Still this was a DXpedition! Something had to be sacrificed before the shrine of Radio.

The generator was now spouting flames and the noise was quite infernal. Ben's watch below, but Ben was not to sleep. Gus himself despises sleep. Gus thinks that time so wasted is quite lost to ham radio, and irrecoverable of course. Gus down in the cabin was seated before his rig, the meters and the dial lights yellow in the darkness before him. "VQ4GT this is VQ9A Maritime Mobile. Good evening Leny. Glad to meet you Leny. All OK here and we're about 12 miles West of the South of Mahe. Old Man Leny; you and George get us a weather report every evening at this time, please. Tell us when there's one of them hurricanes about. Hi. Be looking for you every day this time—1700 GMT. Good night Leny and 73's. VQ4GT from VQ9A Maritime Mobile on the Indian Ocean. Goodbye Leny. Now all you boys calling there; come in now, please, but not all at once."

That diabolical invention nesting on our stern—the 115 volt ac generator—continues to shatter the peace of the night. But from my place at the tiller I can just hear disembodied voices from the loudspeaker in the cabin below. Fantastic that some chap in London can follow our wanderings; can actually speak to us day by day. Likely he is wistfully wishing himself here with us on the Indian Ocean. On the Indian Ocean ploughing across blue sunlit seas. Away from it all: away from the fog and the grime of London's City.

Eager voices. "Hallo Gus old Man. Very glad to meet you Gus. Please Old Man Gus; don't forget to be looking for me from Aldabra. Cheerio Gus and 73. Sure was good to meet you Gus"



At 2200 hours ship's time Gus pulls the big switch. The generator peters out into silence. It has been decided that the enemy must be 'throttled' at this hour each night. Somebody has to sleep some of the time. Silence now and the stars steady above me. Silence and the dark mysterious sea around me. Silence but for the swish-swish and the gurgle of water as the 'Lua' swings along at three knots or so. I do not dwell on these things for long but only on my bunk below, where later the black cat—now asleep on the bench by my side—will follow me no doubt, when my watch on deck is over.

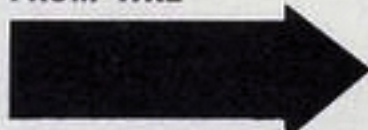
1000 hours ship's time the next day; April 26th. The sea is not so calm. Not so calm at all. Ahead, over the undulating swells, drab green tops of palms seem to float on the misty horizon. I, for one, am happy to see this island. I wonder if Gus would be happy too? "Hi Gus—how about all that washing up you haven't done?" "I guess I can't do that now at all; I'm just looking for my seasick pills." "Come on Gus, they say there's no better cure for sea sickness than to be occupied." "I sure am occupied; I'm still looking for them seasick pills."

Saturday, April 28th. 1700 hours GMT. Weather fine and clear. South Easterly breeze and a calm sea. Peace and quietness should be with us, but that generator is running again. "VQ9A Maritime Mobile from VQ4AQ in Nairobi. Good evening Gus. Evening Ben. Evening Harvey. George speaking. Gus: I have weather report. 300 miles South of Mahe, squally Southerly winds; 20 to 25 knots. Sea moderate. Best I can do. That's all for to-night so over to you Gus, and let's hear your voice Harvey; haven't heard it for a long time." "... VQ4AQ, Nairobi from VQ9A Maritime Mobile. All OK George. Your signal is 5 and 9: fine business. Weather still OK here. Hey: we've just been to an island and I've seen all about how they make copra. When we was goin' away George, why they gave us a loaf of bread an' two roast chickens. That black cat, he spent all last night, George, just sitting under that roast chicken locker. He never even moved. We're just looking around on the chart now to see if there's any more of them islands about here. Hi."

Early the next morning the two amateur navigators had found yet another island. "Gus: come up and see Alphonse." "How do you guys know that's Alphonse. "Might be some other island." "All look the same to me." "Well Gus: we usually call in and ask the Administrator."

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Gus W4BPD and friends.

A rising Southerly wind accompanied by a considerable swell made the usual anchorage untenable and so we had no option but to enter the lagoon. This necessitates following the breakers round to the South, and then by way of 'Le Canal de la Mort,' (The Death Channel)—blood chilling appellation—one comes to the pass. There, with the Red Ensign at the masthead, we awaited a pilot. No boat, however, was seen coming our way, and the sky was looking black and squally to wind'ard. Ben, therefore, decided to do his own pilotage. And so we hove up the centerboard—thereby reducing the vessels draught to something less than three feet—started the engine and entered the pass.

The passage through the reef can be dangerous, especially during bad weather when the sea breaks all around the narrow entrance. To-day, however, the pass was on its best behaviour. The sea broke sporadically as we entered. Suddenly the water beneath our keel became as clear as crystal and one could see every little detail of the bottom. The corals were splashed with marvelous colors: mauves; olive green; chromes; rust red. Here and there a stain of brown—the occasional niggerhead—but these were easily avoided. It all looked horribly shallow, though I do not suppose that anywhere in the channel was there less than 12 feet of water. Clear of the shallow rim of the reef the water deepened and became the turbid green of decaying vegetable matter held in suspense in still water.

Before us now, the island with its fringing golden beach; its crown of lustrous palms. Then came the administrator, approaching in a white gig. We were given a very cordial welcome.

Monday, 30th. April. The generator is at it again, for it is 1700 hours GMT. "VQ9A Maritime Mobile this VQ4GT. Good evening Gus. I have your weather report. 'Unsettled weather

450 miles South of Mahe. Wind 20 to 25 knots; squally; backing to SE or ESE. Sea moderate. "VQ4GT is VQ9A Maritime Mobile. All OK Leny. You're 5 and 8 here out in the Indian Ocean with Alphonse Island 6 miles astern. No wind at all here Leny and we're under engine. Tell George we've just been to another island. That black cat, he's sitting underneath the roast chicken locker again. Guess we must look around: see if there's any more of these islands about here. Hi. Good night Leny. Tell the boys now only 360 miles to Aldabra. 73's."

"All you boys calling me right now. I'm pulling the big switch. VQ9A Maritime Mobile don't count as no new country. Saving all the gas for when we arrive at Aldabra."

Tuesday evening, the first of May. VQ4GT . . . 450 miles South of Mahe . . . 25 knots. . . squally. . . ! ! ! A force 5 wind now blows, (16 knots). Ben has pulled down the first reef in the mainsail. He has set No. 1 foresail. Our sizzling wake speaks of six knots.

Darkness and a drab horizon. Patches of clear sky brilliant with trembling stars playing hide-and-seek amongst the drifting trade wind clouds. But I cannot abandon myself entirely to the wonders of the night sky for I have a course to steer. Three parallel phosphorescent lines shimmer from the compass dial before me. It is my business to keep them parallel. I am conscious that the wind is cool on my shoulder and on my neck. I sense, though unseen in the darkness, the black cat is close by my side. Those faint phosphorescent shimmering lines. I must keep them parallel. They mesmerise with their dancing ghostly light. One hour: two hours: three hours: more than half of my watch has passed. I will certainly fall asleep. I bestir myself; disturb the black cat; lash the helm; get up; study the horizon all around. Nothing but the dim forms of the silently working sails. Nothing but the swssh—swssh—sss as the cloven water laps astern, frothing and foaming into our luminous wake.

Thursday May 3rd. 1700 hours GMT. The generator almost drowns the voice of the wind. "VQ4GT from VQ9A Maritime Mobile. OK Leny; say let me give you our weather report. Wind ESE force 7 to 8, (30 to 37 knots). Sea high and steep. with breaking crests. Harvey says we are now running under twin foresails on a WNW course, and 24 fathoms of warp streaming astern to slow us down and to keep us steady. He says Cosmoledo is about 36 miles on a bearing 274 true—as far as he knows. He says he hopes to miss it! This black cat, Leny, down here right by my side, he don't see no

fun in all this; he sees no fun at all in all this rollin' and rockin' around."

0200 hours the next day—Friday, May 4th. Ben and I are both on deck. The sea is very confused, pyramiding and with breaking crests. The wind blows in great gusts from a clear sky. Almost one would say that we were in shoal water. The cries of seabirds are heard all around. But the moon is up and 7 x 50 binoculars reveal—nothing.

345 hours. Ben sets trisail and storm jib, and hands the twin foresails. We change course to 240 degrees magnetic to close the land. Strong currents run here. Our position is anybody's guess.

0800 hours. In spite of the high sea, the appalling motion, and the hazy horizon, Ben managed to get a sight. Worked out it gave a position line 30 miles farther to the West than our deduced reckoning. So we might be quite close to Aldabra! But Ben, unused to this area of fierce currents, was unconvinced and inclined to doubt his sight. 0930 hours; I obtained another sight and this put us even nearer to Aldabra than the previous one. In fact, if it could be relied upon we should soon be seeing land.

Time went by and nothing solid was visible across the waste of confused rough water; the squalls of rain; the lowering clouds. "Ben, there's no chance, I suppose, that we might have mistaken the date and so looked up in the wrong table?" Ben was sure of the day and date—Friday, May 4th. Then he wasn't so sure. "Could it be...?" "Do you think, Ben...?" Well; could it be Saturday, May 5th. for instance?"

"Gus; start up the stinkpot." "Ask some fellow what day it is." "They'll think we're all crazy guys." "CQ: CQ: CQ. . . .CQ. 20 meter phone—from VQ9A Maritime Mobile. Will somebody come in, please?OK Old Man, this VQ9A Maritime Mobile from somewhere in the Indian Ocean." "Ben; there's a guy here



Harvey VQ9HB

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VQ9HB

in Durban. He says its May 4th all day in South Africa. Wants to know if he can send two more guys with two brand new sextants? Hi."

By 1700 hours ship's time we were under the lee of the North Eastern corner of Aldabra, and only too thankful for the certainty of a quiet night at last, away from the swell. The settlement was still some 18 miles to the Westward but we knew that it would imprudent to approach this indifferent anchorage after dark. We therefore eventually hove-to to the Eastward of the Main Pass and awaited the break of day.

On our arrival at the settlement the next Administrator arrived with the big pirogue and Gus, in command of all his baggage, was ferried ashore like some Eastern Potentate—even though he lacked the Royal Umbrella. Then Prince Charming and his shining modern equipment was installed in the Guest House ashore, while we, with the 20 years old converted ex. military transmitter, slunk off in the 'Lua Lua' into the lagoon, where we hid ourselves, like Cinderella, in the remotest corner that we could find.

The lagoon is very shallow and dries out over a large area at low water. Ben beached the 'Lua' on hard, clean sand, and legged her up, so that during the period of the spring tides he could clean and paint the bottom. Then when the receding tide left the vessel high and dry we humped all the radio equipment ashore and installed a bell tent on a nearby spit of land. This situation was not ideal for it was surrounded by mosquito-ridden mangrove swamps and moreover there was scanty protection from the prevailing wind. However, this area contained a number of casuarina trees of a suitable height for the installation of the antennas.

By 1400 hours on May 5th the work ashore was completed. The tent was up; two anten-

nas installed; the wind motor erected; a table, supported on a number of 4 gallon petrol tins, had been improvised for the gear. So VQ9HBA was now ready to go on the air.

VQ9HBA was a very modest affair. The transmitter, a wartime Collins TCS-12, drawing power from two dynamotors which, in turn, depended upon 12 volt heavy duty storage batteries. It is unlikely that the transmitter output exceeded 16 watts or so. The receiver, an old Eddystone 750, was efficient but made heavy demands on battery current. For charging the batteries we used Ben's 300 watt, 12 volt, petrol generator, for which we had brought 16 gallons of fuel, (we used just 7 gallons for about 45 hours of operating). But as a standby we had the portable wind motor, so that a major breakdown of the petrol generator would not have put me off the air. We were about a mile from Gus and at that distance there was no mutual interference.

At 1400 hours GMT. I started operations, using a vertical end fed half wave antenna. "CQ: CQ: CQ. .from. VQ9HBA on Aldabra. CQ: CQ: CQ." No response. Nevertheless plenty of stations could be heard between 14 megacycles and 14,100 megacycles. I confined my attention to 14.085 megacycles. No contact. I checked the output with the neon lamp and that seemed all OK. So I changed over from the half wave vertical antenna to the full wave horizontal. The latter had been installed in a SE/NW direction which was not ideal for working the United States, however, the trees were orientated in that direction and so it was 'Hobsons Choice'. "CQ: CQ: CQ. .from. VQ9HBA on Aldabra." Then at 1415 hours GMT ZS5KU in Durban replied, giving me RST 599. He had the distinction,—if you like—of being my first contact at Aldabra. He was elated. He had a rare new country. I was elated. He was my first contact from Aldabra. After this the stations started to roll in but I was delighted that No. 3 was VQ4GT, my old friend, my very first ever radio contact—Lenny. But the W Boys, where were they? I heard not one.

Gus, in the meanwhile was in trouble. He had forced and broken an aluminium needle valve of the ac plant carburettor, and the broken point had jammed in the main jet. Can't think why aluminium was used for the valve. It surely should have been in brass. Anyhow, we had the good fortune to extract the broken piece by heating the end of the main jet and then plunging it into cold water. But now Gus has more trouble. A crushed plastic carburettor float valve. Why must they make this in plastic? Usual modern stuff. Pretty, but

not durable. So now we'll have to fiddle this up somehow or Gus is off the air for keeps. Prefer my old solid transmitter and batteries; plus windmotor; plus charger. Ancient and despised but infinitely reliable!

Aldabra is a raised atoll consisting of four principle islands. Their structure is of coral, or coral rock, the seaward face of which forms abrupt overhanging cliffs from 12 to 15 feet high. The islands are largely covered by almost impenetrable pemphis jungle and the shores of the lagoon are fringed by extensive mangrove forests. All along the foot of the dead coral seaface one finds little white sandy bays. And each afternoon, in the warm pale green laughing waters of one of these, I used to bathe. On a jagged pinnacle of rock nearby, a pure white egret, a bird without fear of man, would cock one beady eye on me—in curiosity. He would think, no doubt, as I sported in the playful swells, "this seems a new and interesting specimen; wonder what he thinks he's up to?" Each day he was there awaiting me. I like to think it was always the same bird.

The walk back along the dunes twists and turns amidst the pemphis shrub. And every clearing offers glimpses of the lagoon and pass, of beauty almost beyond belief. The swift waters of the pass, steely blue and sparkling in the sunlight. The lagoon, a patchwork of color where deeps and shallows give rise to blues and greens and turquoise, and all aglitter under the deep blue sky. While here and there, small barren islets; jagged fragments of this dying atoll; litter the lagoon and make one think of worlds long cold and dead. All this can bring great contentment to anyone whose mind can be in harmony with these values.

2230 hours local time. The mosquitos from the swamps are biting my legs in the tent. "CQ: CQ: CQ. . . W: W: W. . . CQ: CQ. . . ." But the W Boys do not reply. Outside is black night and a rising gale. Inside the tent on the camp bed the black cat sleeps on. He knows how to jump off the boat and on to the sand at low tide. And he has discovered my retreat. "CQ: CQ: CQ. . . W: W: W. . . ." But the W Boys are mute. At 2217 hours—"VQ9HBA this is UA3CT. Good evening Old Man. My name is Kon and my QTH is Moscow. Your signal is 589. Fine business. I am very glad to meet you. Please do not fail to QSL. Many thanks Harvey for the vy fb QSO and I sure hope to meet you again. Vy 73's. VQ9HBA from UA3CT in Moscow." The gale is increasing in strength and the tent is rocking and flapping. Two German stations come in—DL1QT and DL5DU,—and then, at 2306 hours

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one side of the tent blows in and the light goes out. I struggle in the darkness under flogging canvas and manage to find my flashlight and extract the black cat.

Friday May 19th, and two days before leaving the lagoon. We set up a 136 foot long wire antenna orientated in an approximately ESE/WNW direction. The average height of this antenna was about 36 feet.

Quite by chance, I had discovered that the 14 megacycle band opened up for a very brief spell at 0340 GMT—almost precisely. The heavy blanket of static which hindered us during most of our stay at Aldabra, fell away then like a curtain drawn aside. So at 0130 hours GMT the next morning I was already waiting expectantly at my post. I was soon to experience several shocks—of a non electrical nature.

Soon the first light of day filtered through the clouds. I was tuning the band but was unable to find any W's. Only an occasional Russian or Pole broke through the abnormally thick static 'fog'. I did not contact these. I was saving my batteries. Suddenly—Wallop—bang—twang. The transmitter almost leaped off the table. Followed other disturbances of a similar nature at close intervals. One might have supposed that the long wire antenna was being subjected to a peculiarly accurate bombardment. So it was. Outside I soon discovered the explanation. A flight of boobies had hit the wire. Now they were all out of formation and milling around at various levels in complete disorder. One giant fowl seemed considerably annoyed. Having shot up into the air after the initial impact he then dive-bombed his invisible enemy. Don't tell me that the booby is a stupid bird. That evening the same flight, returned from their fishing at the same height. As they approached the wire, in line ahead, each bird 'ducked' (if I may use the pun), and passed safely underneath.

Anyhow, when I had finished cursing the B's, I returned to the set in search of some W's. And at 0313 hours GMT Ben placed a very fine breakfast before me. . . . an omelette and a steaming cup of coffee. I picked up my fork at that moment the W's struck. The veil of static had been dramatically rent asunder.—"VQ9HBA. VQ9HBA. . . from. . . W8FCX—VQ9FCX from W9RK—VQ9HBA this is W1FH—VQ9HBA his is. . . ." "W's this is VQ9HBA on Aldabra. W's move up 10 kc on the band please. Sorry Ws. can't talk to everyone at once." VQ9HBA. . . VQ9HBA. . . VQ9HBA from W5PSB—please." "W5PSB from VQ9HBA. . . Good morning Old Man. Ur RST 589 in Aldabra. Fine business. Name

is Harvey. . . ." "VQ9HBA from W5PSB. . . Many thanks Harvey. Psd. to meet you. Name here is Pat and QTH in Texas. UR putting in a fine signal here Harvey—5 7 & 9. Will not hold U. Many stations calling U. 73s. . . ."

At 0432 GMT the static closed in solid again, shutting out all the W's completely. But by then I had a long list of W's worked before me. My untouched breakfast lay stone cold on the table.

After this I took a walk to the settlement. I thought I would boast of my achievement to Gus. But on arrival at the Guest House I found its inmate stretched out on his bunk asleep. His mouth sagging open. Too tired to snore. Exhausted. No doubt, all night, he had been over chasing W's. Three small Aldabra kid goats romped around the polished floor. But Gus slept on. Over there the table with the sets—now abandoned. Its white cloth powered grey with the ash of countless cigarettes. A litter of wind blown paper on the floor.

Monday 21st. of May. A light Southerly breeze. And at 0900 hours ship's time we shook hands with the Administrator. We set the full mainsail and the genoa. We proceeded Eastwards, and towards Mahe, along the northern shore of Aldabra.

Under the lee of the land the sea was calm and we made good progress until some distance the other side of the main pass. Here the wind headed us and forced us on an off shore course. But by mid-day the sea was still reasonable enough to allow us to take our lunch in comfort. It was the last time that Gus was to appear at lunch—or any other meal—for many days to come. In so far as Gus was concerned, the voyage from this point onwards was completely peaceful, for he went into almost total hibernation, being even incapable of pulling the cord of our little 'Frankenstein Monster'—115 volt ac generator.

1400 hours and change of watch. Log 22.5 miles. Wind SSE force 4. Weather fine but sky hazy. Course 075 degrees true which—allowing for current and leeway—should just have allowed us to fetch Alphonse Island, now 390 miles away.

My watch below. I decided to turn in and to snatch some sleep while the going was good. In the forecabin the motion was considerable. From my bunk, on the weather side, one could hear the resounding blows of the seas, just by one's ear, against the steel plates of the hull. As all the ports were closed the atmosphere soon became oppressive, and moreover, the air was charged with the nauseating fumes of benzine coming from, I believe, an imperfectly sealed tin stowed just below my bunk. So I

was soon in a similar state to Gus, and left that fore-castle hastily, never there to return for the rest of the voyage.

1900 hours. Log 47 miles. The breeze had freshened considerably so Ben double reefed the mainsail and shifted foresails, making all snug for the night. It was well that he did so for later during my watch it breezed up with heavy squalls from the SSE, and the vessel—even under that canvas—was just about as much as I could manage. And one is always reluctant to call out the watch below unless things seem to be getting out of hand. The crew of a small vessel on 'the great waters' need all the sleep that they can get, for they never know when wild weather may demand many hours of vigil.

We had already decided to work 4 hour watches during the hours of darkness, and 5 hour watches during daylight. So at 2300 hours I handed over to Ben. By then the wind had increased to about force 5 or 6 and was still from the SSE. The vessel was sailing very fast and the log read 69 miles.

My watch below, but as I was unable to sleep in the fore-castle, I had to improvise a bunk on the saloon floor. A lot of water was sloshing about there. And every now and then heavy spray would sweep the coachroof above and then, water dripping from the skylight, would find its way to Gus or to me. At about 0200 hours, Tuesday May 22nd., the vessel was thrown violently almost on to her beam ends. Torrents of water seemed to sweep over the cabin top. There was a series of crashes and thuds, as an avalanche of cushions and heavy objects sailed from the weather bunk and past my head. Switching on the light revealed a state of dreadful disorder. Amidst a litter of sodden books and wet cushions were seen Gus's Transmitter and Receiver, both upside down in the bilge water. As though this were not enough, Gus's brand new camera in its smart yellow leather case floated amidst the debris. It is hardly an exaggeration to say, that we passed a most miserable watch below and that we lost a lot of sleep.

0300 hours. Unfortunately my watch again on deck. The weather had obviously deteriorated and so Ben pulled down the third reef and took in the small jib. The vessel at once became easier on the helm but she was still sailing fast. A very big swell was rolling in from the SE. The wind was gusty and at times force 6 or more. Low scud raced across the sky, and shutting out the moon and the stars, cast grim shadows across the rough sea. To the South'ard, against a background of storm

cloud, stood a perfect lunar rainbow. And this was not a good sign.

0700 hours. Log 105 miles. Speed about 5 knots. A high sea and a strong wind still from the SSE. A typical, sullen, overcast, monsoon sky of the kind which makes all observations most difficult. I was very tired but held on while Ben prepared our breakfast. How does Ben manage to keep his pots and pans on that reeling stove below, and at the same time maintain his balance? All this would try even the most skillful juggler.

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first time, a little black bird with a white breast gliding around in the valleys between the wave crests. A storm petrel, though not the true storm petrel of the Atlantic. These birds like to follow ships and are believed by seamen to be the harbingers of bad weather. They are also known as 'Mother Carey's Chickens' though I know not why. I recalled then that a local 'sea cook' on seeing one of these used to work himself up into quite a frenzy. "Mauvais oiseau: tue-lee: shoot the B'. Petrel is a diminutive of 'Peter', (St. Peter), and this genus was given the name because of the habit of fluttering their feet almost on the surface of the water, and thus giving the impression of 'walking on water'. (Matthew XIV-29).

Dawn, Wednesday, May 23rd. The vessel was under storm jib and trisail. The sea was as high and dangerous as I have ever seen from the deck of such a small boat. The force of the wind I estimated at 8, (34 to 40 knots). An incredible confusion of monstrously steep seas with foaming, toppling, crests advancing upon us inexorably, and then, almost miraculously it seemed, passing harmlessly under the hull to reappear to leeward with a roar of riven water, just near my elbow where it rested on the cockpit combing. Brave little ship behaving magnificently! These seas were running from several directions. Occasionally two huge crests would charge each other from opposite points of the compass, and then crash down in a welter of broken water, making a noise like a ton of falling masonry. Now and again the top of a crest would smash down on the vessel's coachroof, drenching the helmsman in sheets of flying spindrift, and forcing its way even under the battened-down skylight. On these occasions muffled curses were audible from below as jets of water spouted from the skylight frame and on to Gus's bunk.

"Gus: any water down there?" "Hey: you don't have to tell me." "One of them lands right on my bunk about once every half hour." "Say: you could time your watch by 'em." "Hey: when I get on with them W Boys next time, I'll tell them W Boys if they want to make another DXpedition to the Aldabras they can have all them islands to themselves, so far as I'm concerned." "They won't be finding me there, No sir."

The violent motion: the stinging sheets of spray: the sopping cloths: lack of sleep: irregular meals: the menace of the breaking seas: even the dismal whine of the wind in the rigging—all this tends to exhaust a hard tried crew. Not a question of whether a small vessel will, or will not, survive but rather a matter of

whether the crew will, or will not, endure.

1530 hours. Still blowing very hard but from the South. Aldabra 210 weary miles astern. We had been set back 25 miles by current. Now brilliant sunshine had broken through the dull sky at last. The sea though still big was more regular. Great seas of deep sapphire blue with almost everywhere the intense white of breaking crests. We hoped that the worst of the storm was over. But the storm petrel was still with us.

The storm petrel did not lie. We had not yet finished with this wild weather. But although it blew hard again that night and early the next morning, we did not encounter again, during the remainder of the voyage, such dangerous seas as we had experienced on the morning of the 23rd of May.

Noon on Saturday 26th of May. Position—Boudeuse Cay in the Southern Amirantes now 65 miles, bearing 52 degrees true. We had been unable to fetch Alphonse; we had been set too far to the Westward by unfavorable currents. But there was now a marked change in the weather. Gone the blustering, bullying, Southerly gale. But instead, a bright sun smiled down on a blue and sparkling sea. "Hey Gus: how about some eats to-day?"

We're back on the good old corned beef again. Ben fries it up with onions and potatoes. Corned beef is the best canned meat of all—say what you like! They've never bettered it. Tinned chicken; tinned ham—you can keep 'em. They're expensive and they all lose their taste with canning. Whereas, as Gus now says, "Good old corned beef; why it tastes of good old corned beef!"

Dawn on Sunday, May 27th, we passed quite close to Etoile Cay and set a course for Poivre Island which we sighted around about 1000 hours. Here we trolled and caught a fine big bonita. Then Ben cut half of this into steaks and fried them. But the chipped potatoes—the last of our potatoes—evaded him. At the last moment they leapt clear of the stove and landed in the bilge. Never mind; land in sight and Gus is on the feed. So three men and a black cat finished 7 lbs of fish and a packet of Ryevita. Fingers were used for forks.

That evening we anchored in 2 fathoms of calm water under the lee of DesRoches Island. The vessel was unbelievably motionless. We found it hard to sleep. But the next morning we were awake early and set sail for Mahe, where we arrived after an uneventful voyage, 32 hours later.

In summing up the return voyage from Aldabra, Gus says, "This sure was no roast chicken trip."