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Should we...

by Derek Richardson

...celebrate the discovery of Western Australia on 25 October 1616 by Dirk Hartog?. Or should we give credence to Willem de Vlamingh who in 29 December 1696 landed on Rottnest and sailed up the Swan giving it its name on account of the black swans he encountered.

These dates are very significant since they preceded James Cook by more than a century. We celebrate Australia Day on the 26 January the creation of which is the Story of Australia - the story of an extraordinary nation. The Story begins 60,000 years ago. New chapters are written every day.

We are lucky to be an only country on earth that can boast to have an ancient race on our doorstep. No matter what has gone on in the past we have come to respect the Aboriginal as an equal citizen.

There is no reason why we should not stand for our state instead of being directed by the East. Our history is without question and started in October 1616. The facts do not lie

Encounters

From 1616 onwards various crew members of European ships had to stay behind in the Southland as a result of shipwrecks. The first and well known names, Walter Loos (24) and Jan Pelgrom de Bye (18) were abandoned in 1629 by Cmdr Pelsaert for their

participation in the mutiny of the Batavia. In June 1656. There were sixty eight survivors, among whom was the captain Pieter Albertz. The 68 survivors disappeared and were never heard of again. What could have happened to them? And so we carry on.

The Gilt Dragon Incident

by Harry Turner

The late Harry Turner, a farmer who spent a lifetime searching for the evidence of the "Vergulde Draeck" (Gilt Dragon) survivors on his and surrounding properties.



He contributed greatly to the actual knowledge and geography of the area. He found and named the "Pinnacle". Now an international tourist attraction.

Harry Turner was considered an accurate, honest and reliable observer. He always reported on his exploration and wrote many articles and letters for newspapers and magazines.

The original "Gilt Dragon Incident" came out shortly after the controversial relocation of the shipwreck itself off Ledge Point.

Although listed as fiction in the State Library, Turner's book is an imaginative exploration of all the

facts (better called fiction) he gathered in his lifetime of research.

But he could never find the survivors, alleged campsites, reported by others now lost in the moving sand dunes along the coast.

In 1829, within weeks of British settlement in New Holland, the Governor was told that natives claimed white ancestry from old shipwrecks.

Then in 1846, the first Benedictine missionary monks in the area, led by Bishop Salvado, reported on the European characteristics of some of the Aborigines.

So the mystery still remains about what happened to the 68 survivors that landed in 1656 on this barren coast. Neither has the treasure ever been found - or has it?

Harry Turner was indeed an accurate researcher and his book gave evidence and the plausibility of his account. He spent some time searching for the survivors and the considerable treasure.

If the Captain Alberts managed to repair the boat left in pieces on the beach and sailed to Batavia and sank on the way, it would be impossible to find traces. However if he did not sail, the artefacts and treasure would be on land. But where?

A recent phone call gave me some clues that seemed quite credible. I checked Google Earth and found the location. I have decided to keep it secret. Perhaps the person giving me the data would like to call me for he should be the finder - not I.

Vergulde Draeck

On 4 October 1655 the VOC (Dutch East Indies Company) ship Vergulde Draeck, under the command of Pieter Albertszoon, of the Amsterdam Chamber sailed from Texel in the Netherlands, on her second voyage, bound for the East Indies (now Indonesia). She



was carrying, apart from passengers and crew, a cargo of trade goods and silver coins with 78,600 guilders.

She reached the Cape of Good Hope on 9 March 1656 and four days later set sail for Batavia.

She never reached her destination.

Tragedy happened on 28 April 1656, on a reef some 5 km off the mainland of Western Australia, about midway between what are now the towns of Seabird and Ledge Point, and 100 kilometres north of Perth.

Of the 193 crew and passengers, 75 of them were reported to have made it to the shore - in two of the ship's boats. The remaining 118 were assumed to have perished on the reef.

On striking the reef the Vergulde Draeck had burst open and only a few provisions were saved.

Captain Albertszoon decided to send a party of seven sailors to Batavia, in one of the two schuyts (a flat bottomed sailboat, broad in the beam, with square stern; usually equipped with lee boards to serve for a keel. Source: Wiktionary.) which had been beached from the wreck, to report the tragedy and ask for a rescue vessel to be sent. Albertszoon had decided to stay with the survivors and to appoint his under steersman (second mate) to lead the party of seven. The other schuyt had been damaged in the surf and remained on the beach.

(He was influenced in his decision by the events following the wrecking of the Batavia on the Abrolhos Islands some 27 years earlier. On that occasion Pelsaert left the survivors behind to sail to Batavia, of whom 125 survivors were ultimately massacred by mutineers.)

The crew of seven successfully sailed the schuyt to Batavia to report the mishap and to get help to rescue the survivors.

They arrived in Batavia, on 7 June 1656, where the under-steersman reported to the Council of the Indies the events relating to the demise of the Vergulde Draeck at Lat. 30deg.40mins.S. He told how only 75 had survived the ordeal and when asked about the remaining crew, he stated that the other 118 had perished on the reef. (At that time, many sailors could not swim.)

(Ed.: The understeersman could not have been sure about those remaining alive on the shipwreck but he had no choice for the VOC Board did not allow half answers.)

The VOC Board in Batavia subsequently sent a letter to 'Patria' - or 'homeland' that contained details of the loss of Vergulde Draeck and its location at 30deg.40 mins.S - as well as the loss of life.

This is ambiguous for the given location is near the mouth of Hill River, some 70 km to the north from where the wreck was actually found.

Immediate action was taken upon receiving the

circumstances and location of the wreck. The chances of rescuing the captain, Pieter Albertsz and the other survivors were best upon taking prompt action. Of course the treasure that was on board also held some persuasion an equivalent of approx. A\$1 million in today's terms.

It was not realised that there was an anomaly with the location of 30deg.40mins.S. Why was that coordinate given instead of the actual location of 31deg.16mins.S where the wreck was found in 1963?

Needless to say that the first rescue attempt with the ships Goede Hoop and Witte Valk were futile if indeed the wreck was at 31deg.16mins.S.

Abram Leeman

Now, two years after the drama of the Vergulde Draeck, Abram Leeman, upper-steersman of the Waeckende Boeij, was on the shore of the Southland, searching for any sign of survival of the crew and passengers from the Vergulde Draeck.

Having been ashore many times and having found wreckage Leeman set out once again with thirteen other men only to return to the Waeckende Boeij when he noticed the weather turning bad. On returning to the ship Volkerson disputed Leeman's concerns and send him back. By nightfall the storm had broken and the sea risen so high that Leeman and his men were unable to land and were forced to ride out the storm in the darkness of night. The storm worsened the next day and the boat lost its rudder and steering had to be managed by using the oars. Eventually Leeman sighted a small inlet between two rocks and with little control over the boat made for the beach with the boat considerably damaged.

Meanwhile, the Waeckende Boeij had headed out to sea to ride out the storm. After 4 days Volkerson returned to the site where the boat was last seen. He fired cannons but there was no response. He concluded that Leeman and crew were lost, presumably drowned. He then decided to sail back to Batavia.

That evening, March 28, they saw a fire on the land. He discharged a cannon again and immediately another fire was seen close to the first. Not having another boat on board and convinced that Leeman and his crew had perished, he couldn't go ashore to investigate.

He decided to stay in the vicinity and wait for daybreak. By then the ship had drifted further north and although Volkerson recorded that he sailed past the shore and that he got close in to the coast, nothing further happened that prevented him from sailing north to Batavia, which he reached on 10 April 1658.

During the 4 days the Waeckende Boeij was riding out the storm, Leeman and his crew were doing all they could to repair their damaged boat. Keeping a lookout for the Waeckende Boeij they survived by killing seals and gulls and drinking brackish water found in

the rocks. They returned to the mainland near where wreckage of the Vergulde Draeck littered the beach fearing that they would be stranded there. Then, on the 28 March, in the evening, sails were sighted and Leeman ordered a fire to be lit. Shortly afterwards, the Waeckende Boeij reduced sail and fired a gun to which Leeman responded with a second fire. They could have sailed their boat to the ship but the sea was rough, it was getting dark and the surrounding reefs were of concern. Instead they decided to wait until morning.

When dawn broke (29 March 1658) the Waeckende Boeij was nowhere to be seen. They sailed their boat out to sea trying to find her, but to no avail. They were now marooned

With their spirits low, Leeman had to work hard to convince his men that there was only one solution for their plight and that was to sail to Batavia. For a week they worked to outfit the boat for the long voyage on the open sea.

On the morning of the April 8, 1658 began one of the more heroic sea voyages of all time. In a remarkable feat of courage, seamanship and endurance, Leeman sailed a leaky craft with fourteen men on board, for 21 days along the barren Western Australian coast and across the Timor Sea to Java.

When Leeman finally reached Batavia and reported his experience to the Governor-General and his councillors, they decided not to mount anymore expeditions to search for the survivors of the Vergulde Draeck.



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