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# Wrecked on Midway Islands in 1888

By MRS. F. D. WALKER as told to CALLA J. HARRISON

ONE day, June 5, 1895, when the shadows of the vine leaves played over the table on Mrs. Walker's lanai, and we were drinking our tea from the battered old silver tea-set referred to below, I heard from her own lips the following story and of her victory through faith. Storm and stress seemed very far away and the peace that had fallen upon her life is the peace that this world knows not of.

\* \* \*

Midway Islands is a group of two islands—one is Sand Island, the other Green Island. Sand Island is a rocky, sandy, barren knoll; Green Island is a tangle of creepers. Both are so small they can be gone over in a very short time.

That autumn a terrible typhon raged through the southern Pacific. Ships of many nations took refuge in the harbors of Samoa and other islands; many were wrecked because they were ground to pieces on the reefs and rocks. A few escaped by getting out to sea.

As the *Wandering Minstrel* came near the Midway Group, she was swept on by the besom of the storm. Being dashed upon the reefs of Midway she began to break to pieces. The only resource was to take to the boats. It was bitter cold. Mrs. Walker prepared for her struggle with the sea by putting on a pair of her husband's trousers, six heavy sea jackets, and an old felt hat tied down with a handkerchief.

She was not allowed to take any of her possessions, but when all was ready she slipped down a rope, and at a given signal was to let go of the rope and fall into the boat. The signal was given too soon and she came near going into the sea. Her pet dog ran wildly around the deck begging to go with his beloved mistress. Finally a sailor, in answer to her entreaties, threw the dog impatiently down. Fortunately he landed safe in his mistress' arms.

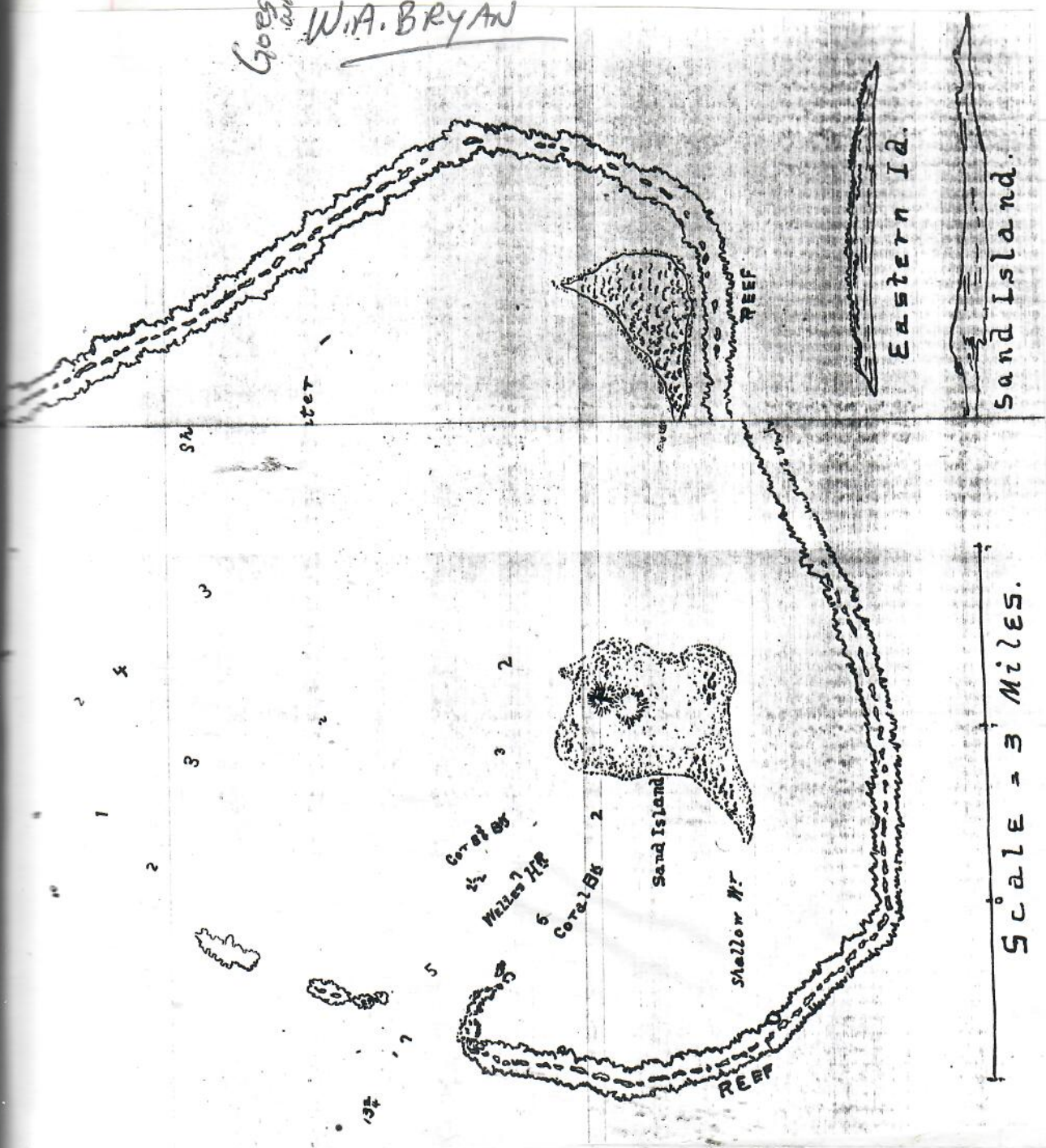
The sailors nearly swamped the boats by throwing into them great bags containing their possessions. This was finally stopped by the captain's orders. In the excitement a bag of biscuits, their only food supply, was thrown out. All managed to get into two boats safely and they started for land.

After much difficulty they reached Sand Island and landed safely. The only inhabitant of the island was a sea convict, named Jorgensen. He had murdered the mate of his vessel and was put off there and left to die by his ship. He lived in



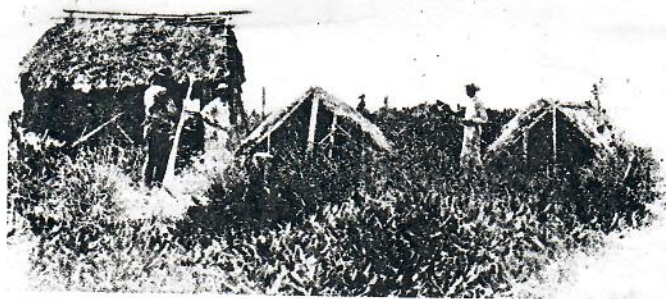
Capt. Walker's Midway Island Home, 1888—"Log of Kaalokai"

Goes with W.A. BRYAN



Scale = 3 Miles.

divided however, and Mrs. Walker p...



Deserted Village, Sand Island, Midway, 1891—"Log of Kaalokai"

a small hut and had dug a well of brackish water. No food was washed up from the wreck for many months. Nothing green was growing on the island but at this time of the year it was the haunt of sea birds, the southern albatross or *gooney-bird*, as the sailors called it.

These birds and their eggs were all they had to eat. The eggs often weigh one pound and are quite rich. Three in a day was as much as a hearty man could eat. They broke the eggs and beat them up with hot water and made a kind of a custard. During the laying season the eggs were plentiful, but later the birds suddenly left the islands and they were much distressed for food.

There remained only a small bird with plumage, soft as velvet, that burrowed in the sand like a rabbit. It had a note like a puppy's bark. They called it "the puppy bird." Little Jessie, Mrs. Walker's pet dog that had been saved from the wreck, was of great service in tracing out the burrows of these birds. If there was no bird in the hole, Jessie would sniff and go on to the next. By her aid enough of these birds were caught to save them from starvation. There were scarcely any fish and but little fresh water. They dug two more wells and made salt by evaporation of sea-water.

After a while the wreck began to break to pieces and most of the parts floated out to sea. There came ashore three mattresses, some blankets, five plates and five knives and forks—just the number of the Walker family. One day, Mrs. Walker, walking along the beach, found a soup tureen sticking endwise out of the sand.

They were cast on the island February 3, 1888. Twenty-three sailors were wrecked with them. After three weeks on the island, six men rigged up one of the boats and set sail, determined to find land. \* \* \*

Later, three men, the mate of the *Minstrel*, a Chinese boy, and the ship's convict, went to the other island and there fitted up a boat. Captain Walker gave them a compass and some water casks. The three left the islands and arrived safely at Jalute. Although they had promised, they failed to tell of those left behind.

At one time a heavy tempest swept over the islands; they were submerged and Mrs. Walker stood in water up to her waist for twenty-four hours.

On another occasion food gave out and Mrs. Walker failed rapidly. They determined to get some fish. Captain Walker and the oldest boy went out to a small patch of coral. Their anchor was a crooked piece of iron that had but little grappling power. At the first they found no fish but they went on until at last fish were plentiful. A storm of wind and rain came up and they were unable to return. They were in great fear lest their anchor should break and they be washed out to sea. Unfortunately they had also lost an oar.

Mrs. Walker waited in vain for their return. Late in the afternoon she could see them. As night came on she and the two younger boys gathered wood and made a bonfire. The rain beat upon their fire, but all night long she and the boys patiently fed it with *gooney* oil. With great difficulty they kept this "home fire" burning. It was a beacon of hope to the father and older boy who were clinging to the coral ledge to keep from being swept away by the surf.

On the next night they filled a large red lamp with *gooney* oil. All this second night she watched and tended this light. This gave courage to the castaways and on the morning of the third day, they made an agonized effort and swung around so that the two younger boys could swim out to them carrying oars. Mrs. Walker tried to get the other men to go to their help but they would make no effort. Of all the twenty-three men that were taken off the ship, one was drowned, six were lost in the boat that left the Islands, two went to another island, three died of scurvy, one died on the way to Honolulu, after being rescued, and one is at present in the lunatic asylum at Honolulu.

Those that left the Walker's and those that died were physically the strongest, but they were also the most violent and greedy. One of the first to die was especially greedy. He would kill as many as fifty birds at a time—more than he could possibly eat—but would share with none.

Another strong man lost all hope. He had a barrel or cask into which he was wont to crawl head first to sleep. One night, while talking to Mrs. Walker, he seemed very much depressed. She spoke to him of her faith in God, her feeling that help would surely come. The next morning he did not leave his cask. Captain Walker called and finally pulled him out; but he was dead.

A short time after they left the wreck a hen-coop of potatoes washed ashore. Rice had been packed in wine casks. All but one washed out to sea. After many months that one cask was found but the rice had fermented. It was carefully divided however, and Mrs. Walker pounded it and made a mush out of their part; fried in *gooney* oil it was delicious.

After these hard experiences they learned to provide themselves with eggs and stores of *gooney* breasts dried in the sun. The only flesh is on the breasts of the birds and that is rank with oil.

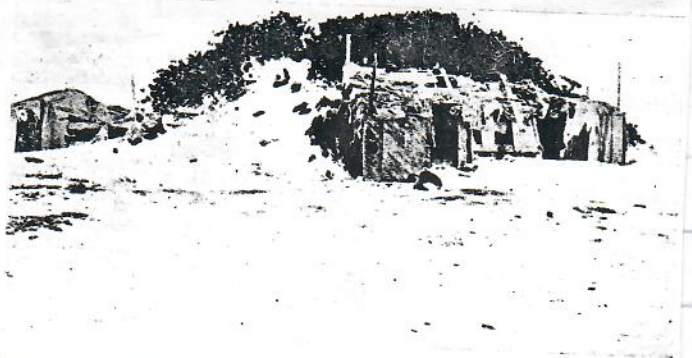
The men caught a man-eating shark and dried its flesh, but Mrs. Walker could not eat this and was three days without taking food. Once or twice the boys dived and found specimens of *beche de mer*, a sea animal-vegetable, tough as rubber; but when boiled properly it became soft and palatable.

One of Mrs. Walker's sons became sick of scurvy and was about to die for want of proper food. He begged piteously for rice but there was none to give him. His

mother was in despair, for he was in the last stages of that dreadful disease. His legs were patches of purple, green and red. The press of a finger left a dent in the flesh. The younger boys roamed the island looking for eggs. They could only find a small bird about the size of a pigeon. Finally they took to wading about in the water and one of them saw something below in the sand that looked like a bottle. They dived and brought up a bottle of lime juice. It had lain there thirteen months but was still fresh and good. This lasted the sick boy until the schooner came to take them away.

Among Mrs. Walker's most cherished possessions was a tin box containing some relics of her girlhood home—especially a silver tea set. She often longed for this and desired above all that it might have been brought away from the ship. One day a portion of the wreck was washed on shore. Jammed between the timbers was the much prized tin box.

During the time of their exile several ships showed above their horizon. In spite of all signals and their every effort, these ships passed on and their hopes faded into bitter disappointment. A miserable death seemed staring them in the face. One day they caught sight of a far-off sail. They hastened to put up a flag and build a bon-fire. In the morning the schooner was much nearer. They heard the welcome sound of a gun! The ship came nearer and a boat put off. At last relief had come! The schooner was the *Norma* of Japan.



Deserted Village, Green Island, Midway, 1891—"Log of Kaalokai"

Mrs. Walker's brother had married a Japanese wife who was very fond of her white sister-in-law. She became ill and later died. Before her death she consulted a Japanese soothsayer who told her that Mrs. Walker was still living, but in great distress, and longed to get away from the place they were in. The dying woman begged her husband to make every effort to find them. The brother asked the captain of the *Norma* to make particular examination of all the islands in his rounds.

With great joy they left Midway, March 26, 1889; arriving in Honolulu, April 7, 1889. All her family recovered from their hardships.

QUOTATIONS FROM AUTHORITIES

*Daily Bulletin of Honolulu, April 8, 1889*

"The British schooner *Norma* arrived off port Saturday (April 6, 1889) evening, having on board the captain and shipwrecked crew of the bark *Wandering Minstrel*, who had been on Midway Island some fourteen months. The

names of those rescued are Captain Walker, wife and four children, George Hanker, E. Biles, F. Noysette, S. Clarelles, L. Sacramento, A. Santos, B. Nico, T. Lucas, P. Militana, G. Gracia, and L. A. Chang."

*Daily Pacific Commercial Advertiser, April 8, 1889*

"Captain Walker, wife, and four children all show evidence of their severe privations on the desert island whereon they were cast. During the fourteen months on Midway Island they had to subsist upon the abounding sea-birds and their eggs, and the fish that they were able to catch. \* \* \*"

"Captain Walker, on being informed of the report that Cameron, his mate (who was master of the I. I. S. N. Company's *Planter* when wrecked) was reported to be keeping a saloon at Tacoma, Washington, said he well believed it. Cameron took up with the desperate Jorgensen, who was left on Midway Island when the *General Seigels'* crew was rescued and both of them made a great deal of trouble. \* \* \* So dangerous a character was Jorgensen proving himself to be, Captain Walker several times decided to shoot him for self-protection. Each time his wife restrained him. Jorgensen \* \* \* was left on the island a menace to any persons unfortunate enough to be cast away there." [The Walkers found him such].

*Report of Master of Schooner Norma*

C. Johnson, Master of the British schooner *Norma*, as quoted in the *Daily Bulletin* and also the *Daily Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, of April 8, 1889, reported: "Made sail for Midway Island on the 16th [of March, 1889]. Weather fine. At Midway Island found Captain F. D. Walker of the wrecked bark *Wandering Minstrel* with crew, in a very bad condition from want of food. \* \* \* remained there to get wood and water until the 26th of March, when the sick were fit to embark. \* \* \* On the 26th sailed for Honolulu being chartered by Captain F. D.

Walker. \* \* \* Arrived at Honolulu April 6th at 2:00 p.m."

*Report of Captain Walker*

"Left Honolulu December 10, 1887. \* \* \* Arrived at Midway Island and anchored in Welle's Harbor January 9, 1888. \* \* \* Found a man named Jorgensen on the island having been wrecked in the Schooner *General Seigel*. \* \* \* At 1:30 p.m. [February 3, 1888] abandoned the vessel \* \* \* all-hands saved.

"October 13th, the mate John Cameron, a Chinese lad, and Jorgensen, left for Honolulu in a boat fitted up with sails. \* \* \* My family suffers, one severely from the same malady [scurvy].

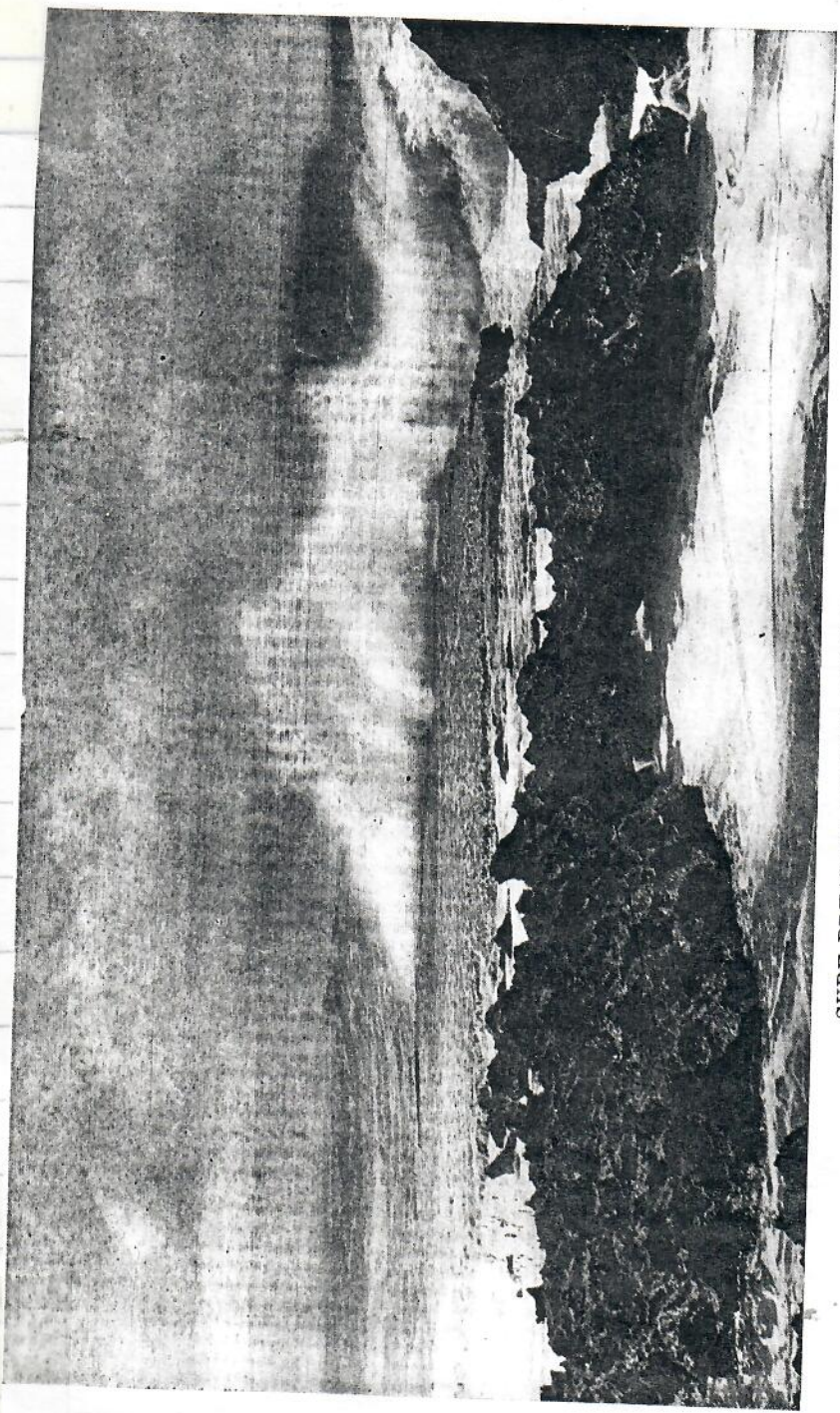
"March 17, 1889, the schooner *Norma* arrived at Midway Island, shark fishing and under agreement conveyed the balance of crew, self and family to this port."

*Log of the "Kaalokai" by Captain Walker*

"In 1888 my ship the *Wandering Minstrel* was wrecked, while anchored in Welle's Harbor, February 3d. \* \* \* The *Wandering Minstrel* was purchased in Hong Kong by The Shark Fishing Company, Limited, of that port for the purpose of shark fishing." Sailed October 13, 1887. "When we sighted Midway we spent three days waiting for the sea and wind to moderate. We entered Welle's Harbor, never to get out again. \* \* \* In about two months time part of the stern was washed up on the beach opposite the *Hut*, from which we secured some cloth, and a chest containing some valuables.

"On arrival at Midway we found a man named Jorgensen on the island. \* \* \* This Jorgensen became a very objectionable character, and we were not sorry at his departure, in company with the mate and a Chinese boy, in October. \* \* \* They also reached Jalnit."

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SURF BREAKING ON THE RUGGED LAVA COAST