

# Eight days in the doldrums

ON September 23 the declination of the sun was nought, which means roughly that on that day the sun, on its journey south to provide New Zealand with its Royal Tour summer, was directly over the equator.

By a coincidence Leda, on her journey north from the Marquesas Islands to Hawaii, crossed the equator on that very day. Deciding which direction we should face to take the noon sight provided us with the day's subject for discussion.

Progress had been good up to that time, Leda's daily average being more than 150 miles despite a lawn-like growth of weed on her bottom and the fact that the wind was too far aft for really fast sailing. Optimists as always, we began to predict a record 12 or 13 day passage to Hilo, Hawaii.

We had stocked up at the island of Nuku Hiva, where we were farewelled rather forlornly by two Lotus-eating world voyagers. The Marquesas had certainly caught up with them.

## Eiao

Two Americans on the Alden-designed schooner Venturer had been there six months. A Dutchman, on the steel sloop Anna Elizabeth, still hoped to be the first of his race to sail round the world. He had been three years in the Marquesas and had aboard with him his lovely French-Marquesan fiancée.

A day's sailing took us to the uninhabited island of Eiao, alive with wild sheep, pigs, goats, its waters teeming with fish. I wouldn't recommend it as a Shangri-la, however.

The sheep have eaten the vegetation right down to the bare, volcanic rock, leaving the island indescribably desolate. Having no rifle we chased these sheep for a whole day in the vain hope of filling up the frig.

Giant tuna broke all our trolling lines until we finally pulled them aboard with stout manila rope. We left on September 19 with a frlg full of fish and a brisk trade wind astern. Hilo was 1800 miles away.

## Doldrums

And when, by the 25th, we had covered more than 1000 miles, as I say optimism ran high. But on that day the stately Trade Wind clouds slowly trundled to a stop and disappeared. High, high up appeared little puffy white clouds, and we knew we were in the doldrums. Eight days later we were still in the doldrums!

It wasn't an experience I would willingly repeat but, on the other hand, it wasn't too

from W. A. Wilson  
aboard the yacht Leda  
at Honolulu, Hawaii

bad. We read all our books, then worked out crossword puzzles until our brains reeled, and finally we fell back on marathon bridge games, starting at nine in the morning and finishing some time before midnight.

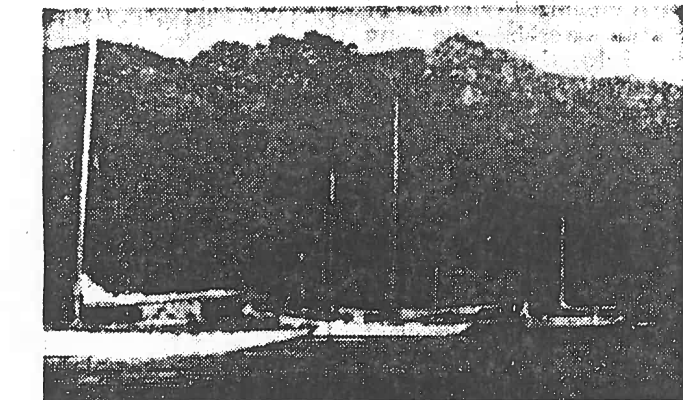
For 36 hours we sailed, in 12-hour bursts of pelting rain and squalls from the south-west. Once we dropped sail in a specially heavy squall, had a shower, filled up the water tanks then blocked the self-bailing cockpit outlets and collected enough water to wash and rinse all our clothes.

But most of the time we lay idle on the rolling deep under the Leda patent anti-rolling device, which consisted of the spitfire jib hoisted up the permanent backstay to the very top of the mast. And even though there were insect creatures scuttling over the glassy surface of the ocean, as far as I know we all forebore mention of the Ancient Mariner.

## Man overboard!

It was during one interval of very heavy rolling between dropping the mainsail and hoisting Dooley's patent anti-roller that we lost Dave overboard.

He was standing on top of the upturned dinghy on the coach-roof, holding the main halyard in one hand high above his head and reaching for the jib, which I was passing to him. A particularly violent lurch caught him off



At Nuku Hiva, Marquesas Islands. From left: Leda, Venturer (U.S.), Anna Elizabeth (Holland).

balance, he gathered momentum as he fell to port and then, with a tremendous thump, somersaulted over the lifelines into the sea.

It was pitch dark and as we peered into the bubbles over-side we heard the released halyard trundle through the sheave as it ran up to the mast-head. During the moments we waited for Dave to reappear we must all three have been wondering if he had been knocked out during his fall or had dislocated his shoulder in grabbing at the lifeline as he went over backwards.

He broke surface, however, nonchalant as ever, and we pulled him aboard.

"You were a long time coming up," I remarked.

Yes, he agreed, he had forgotten how to swim without flippers on his feet.

Finally, when we had worked our way more than 600 miles

north of the Equator and although we had spent the previous two days drifting slowly backwards to the south, a gentle breeze came in from the north-east. It freshened slowly during the afternoon of October 3, and stately galleons of Trade Wind clouds set sail once more and began to move across the sky. We were off again.

Hawaii is the same size as Fiji and higher than Mt Cook, so it would have been hard to miss. On the morning of October 8 it loomed up dead ahead, but the vagaries of strong currents and fitful land and sea breezes prevented us getting into Hilo until the following afternoon.

It quickly became obvious that this was no mere tropical island we had come to. Civilization and the great American Way of Life were way ahead of us.

In a few moments we were sitting in a corner drug-store having our first coke and ice cream on United States soil.