



PHOTO 6

On the last swerves, Peter (Photo 6), recovered faster and slipped across the finish line, the winner by the narrow margin of one young Tongan.

Later, both crews were paid off in candy while Rob groused, "I could have won — if I only could have kept the damn thing going straight." . . .

Two weeks later, we landed in a Fijian anchorage suggested by a cruising acquaintance with whom we shared the anchorage at Suva, where we spent early October. It was called Nadrunga Harbor and was located in a small bay behind Yanuca Island, 65 miles down the coast of Viti Levu from Suva. Here, the weather was warm, the bay was calm and the lush hotel on the small island of Yanuca was hospitable to yachts. In short, it was ideal.

We spent several days enjoying ourselves and, for the first time after several rainy weeks in Samoa and Tonga, felt like the old South Pacific hands we were in French Polynesia. We did a lot of diving and fishing to supplement our larder of canned foods. Everything seemed pretty good until it was time to sail back to Suva to get ready for the long passage to New Zealand, where we would wait out the hurricane season which usually begins in late November and lasts until April.

When we made the decision to return upwind to Suva, we found that the tradewinds were blowing almost gale force — something we had not noticed in the protected bay. We didn't want to try to go to windward against the strong trades since we knew how big the tradewind generated seas can be.

Along with a Dutch yacht, with whom we had become friendly, we decided to wait out the strong trades. They blew hard for a week and we began to despair of ever getting back to Suva. We began to take the tack that, if the trades did not slacken, we were going to take departure for New Zealand directly from our little bay. We felt like we had to be out of Fiji before hurricane season . . . we didn't make it.

On a Sunday morning, we saw our Dutch friend, Claes Hoenig, set out in his dinghy for *SKYLARK*. When he came alongside, he looked tense.

"Well, I guess you've heard the good news."

"No," I said, with a sudden premonition of danger. "What's the matter?"

"There's a hurricane coming," he replied. My heart sank.

We went below to hear more and study the pilot chart of the South Pacific to see what paths hurricanes had taken in this area. Our investigation showed that the hurricane, which Claes said was named "Bebe," was more than a month early, but coming nonetheless. The position which was initially given indicated on the pilot chart that there was a very good possibility that the tropical storm would hit the Fijian island of Viti Levu. None of the local people were too concerned, however, since it had been 20 years since there had been a severe hurricane in the area.

Once aware of the storm, we began to monitor all radio reports. The small bay in which we were anchored was only marginal protection against a severe hurricane but, unfortunately, was the

best protection in the area. We knew we would have to fight the storm at that anchorage if it came. The radio reports bore out our first and worst fears: it was heading directly for Viti Levu.

Sunday afternoon brought freshening winds and high cirrus clouds, usually the first indication of an approaching hurricane. As the dismal night approached, late weather reports indicated that the storm was building and not varying on her course to Fiji.

In the morning, after a worrisome night of little rest, the Fiji Radio weather report was that Hurricane Bebe had slammed into small Rotuma Island, 300 miles North of Viti Levu, with 80 knot winds and gusts to 130 knots! The projected course was SSW, meaning that the forecasters expected the storm to pass to the west of Fiji. We hoped they were right, but prepared for the worst.

We re-anchored *SKYLARK* in the middle of the small bay, giving up some protection from the small reef, but gaining swinging room and a better holding ground of hard packed sand. We set four anchors, one with an all-chain rode, and the other three with chain and nylon. The largest anchor was a 100 pound old-fashioned, or yachtsman's anchor; the other three were small to medium weight Danforth anchors.

After shifting and re-anchoring, we received the next report on Bebe. The hurricane was still moving directly for Viti levu. Winds near the center were reported to be in excess of 150 mph. How could any vessel survive winds of that force? I made the decision to take off the crew and all our valuables in preparation for the worst possible case — the loss of the *SKYLARK*. It was, in fact, my original intention to leave the boat completely unmanned but, in what was almost a disastrous decision, I went back out to the boat with Jim Elliot leaving Kristi, Peter, and Robby at the hotel.

Throughout the second night the winds continued to increase as Bebe continued inexorably toward our small anchorage. In the morning we established radio communication with a charter boat company called Yanuca Base which was on the shore of our small bay. We were also able to talk with some of the fishing boats holed up in small anchorages in the big lagoon area, Nadi Waters, to the west and north of us. One of the boats belonged to Yanuca Base and her name was *FLEET LADY*.

At 4 p.m., the wind was a steady 80 knots in our anchorage, gusting to 100. The day was dark and the approaching