



PHOTO 7



PHOTO 8

nightfall, with the prospect of Bebe slamming into us at midnight, was terrifying. The base called, "FLEET LADY, FLEET LADY, this is Yanuca Base," but the call went unanswered. The only sounds were the crackling and snapping of electricity in the stormy skies.

"FLEET LADY, FLEET LADY, this is Yanuca Base. Do you read me?" After a pause, another boat in that same anchorage came on the radio.

"We are sorry to report that FLEET LADY just went aground." Jim and I looked at each other in fear.

"Is that yacht still anchored in front of you, Yanuca Base?" came our new radio contact.

"Yes she is," was their reply.

"If they have a way off the boat, they had better go now. We are having winds of 140 knots and there is no way anything can survive," said the skipper. Ten minutes later, he — like FLEET LADY — was dragged ashore.

My brother took over the radio at Yanuca Base.

"Bob, Robby and I will come and get you in the big dinghy with the outboard if you want." Our decision was this: Should we go ashore, dangerous now in 100 knot winds, or risk our lives to try and save SKYLARK? Already we had found that the wind force was too strong to be resisted by running the engine, the only possible thing we could do.

"Okay, Pete," I decided, "Come and get us." Jim and I crawled on deck and watched for them.

We could not see through the driving rain and sea spray. We looked upwind, trying to protect our eyes from the bullets of water. Soon we saw them come out of the rain, a hurricane at their backs, seas almost breaking over the stern, and bright orange life jackets against a grey-green turmoil that was Nadrunga Harbor.

"How are they ever going to turn that thing?" Jim shouted against the wind. Unable to answer, I just shrugged. Somehow, they maneuvered astern and, with SKYLARK pitching and bucking, Jim and I leaped into the dinghy.

To get back to the base, we had to go directly upwind into the teeth of the hurricane. It was only 100 yards, but it might as well have been 100 miles. We couldn't make it. Half way there, the waves almost overpowered us. One came over the stern and almost flooded out our little 9½ hp Evinrude outboard, but somehow, the valiant little engine refused to die. It ran at about half-power, still not enough to keep the bow of the dinghy into the wind, so we fell off and tried to make it to the beach on the lee shore. The motor sputtered and coughed but kept us driving.

Soon, as we approached the surf and the shore, the wind and seas took over. We were being lifted by the surf and sent on a wild ride completely out of control. The beach loomed closer.

"We're going to make it!" yelled Robby from the bow. Just then, the bow nosed under and the wind caught the stern, throwing the boat end-over-end and spilling us into the sea. Jim was first to his senses.

"Everyone hold hands!" he commanded, fearing that someone would be lost. As we struggled, we found that we could stand up. The water had shoaled. We waited for the overturned boat to float into us and then rescued it. We carried it, fighting the grasping wind, up the beach and tied it, by its painter,

to a tree. Then, after a long struggle, we made our way back to the hotel where Kristi waited anxiously.

As night darkened the fearsome skies, the eye of the storm passed, just seven miles to the east, and the winds peaked at 150 mph. The anemometer at the international airport at Nadi, some 20 miles from Yanuca Island, hit 180 mph before the tower blew down! Throughout our vigil we were thankful to see, through the rain and rack, SKYLARK'S lone white masthead light jerking a tight arc through the stormy skies as she fought her lonely battle. We prayed that our anchors were placed correctly and that they would hold.

In the first light of dawn, with the wind down to only 50 knots, we could see that our boat (Photo 7) had weathered the hurricane and we immediately went out to her. The damage was minimal considering the force of the storm. Sail covers hung in shreds, paint was peeled off by the wind, and two anchors were lost. We set to work to clean up the boat and repair the dinghy which was slightly battered. The outboard motor was torn down, cleaned up and was found none the worse for its experience.

Once we had everything together, we, along with the Dutch yacht which had also ridden out the storm at anchor, took advantage of the stalled tradewinds to get back to Suva.

We spent several days in Suva getting the boat ready to depart for New Zealand. We took one day to haul the boat out of the water at the government slipway in Suva to see if she suffered any underwater damage during the hurricane (Photo 8). We found that the rudder had been strained, but could wait until New Zealand to be repaired. We put a quick coat of bottom paint on before putting SKYLARK back into the water and two days later, we were underway for Auckland.

After a smooth 115-mile sail from Suva to Auckland, we arrived in New Zealand in the southern hemisphere springtime and would stay all summer — five months to be exact. Our main reason for being so far south was to be out of the tropical hurricane area until the end of the season. As one can imagine, at this point, we wanted nothing to do with any more of the cyclonic madness. While