

When beetles invaded Guernsey!

The evening of July 13th, 1967, was peaceful –there was hardly any wind. The boats anchored near the jetty at Saint's in St. Martin's didn't move on the sea. A yacht was anchored among the little boats of the fishermen and the two people on board were fast asleep.

At that time, the ship *President Garcia* was passing close to the coast of Guernsey en route from Sierra Leone in Africa to Rotterdam in Holland with a cargo of copra. This copra is what is around coconuts before they are separated and the nuts are eaten whilst the copra is used to make matting and other things. The ship was travelling at twelve knots and there was no fog.

At twenty minutes before midnight this large ship found herself amongst the little boats anchored at Saint's and struck bow first into the cliffs which are two hundred and fifty feet high there. Two young people who were at the little harbour had a great shock when they saw the ship and they could see that she was not going to stop. They said later that they felt the shock when she struck and the noise was terrible. She passed between the yacht and some boats, but she sank some others.

Another man who saw the accident said later that he thought that the ship was going to towards the Pea Stacks but she turned towards Moulin Huet. She turned again and ended up by crashing into the cliffs. She had not reduced speed at all and when she struck, the noise was terrible. He fetched a friend and the two men went to the harbour to salvage engines and what was left of the boats.

The captain, when was interviewed by the authorities, said that no-one would be allowed ashore during the night. When he was shown the charts of where the ship was, he could not believe it. He believed that he was near Ushant –an island in Brittany, one hundred and twenty miles away! It was high tide and it was decided to try and remove the ship from her position against the cliffs. The engines were put in reverse, but the bow would not move. It was very damaged and water was entering the ship.

Two tugs arrived from Holland and tried for an hour and a half to tow her from there, but without success. It was hot during those days, and the crew opened the hatches to allow air into the hold. Two or three days later, hundreds of beetles flew from inside the hold towards St. Martin's. People had to close their windows –the insects were everywhere. All over the island people found them and they were a nuisance.

There were plans to unload part of the cargo to lighten the ship which would help, perhaps, the tugs to pull her from where she was. There was also a risk of pollution for oil was leaking into the sea. Three hundred tonnes of copra were taken on board two ships from Holland and that helped the tugs. A week after the *President Garcia* found herself at Saint's, the tugs *Willem Barrenz* and *Utrecht* managed to pull her from there. They began at five in the afternoon and for more than an hour the two large powerful tugs did their best. At six o'clock the ship began to move and suddenly, at eighteen minutes past six, she had slipped into deep water. All those who had been watching from the cliffs and from small boats cheered and clapped their hands. The ship sounded her siren as she was towed towards Town. There only remained some oil on the water to show that a ship had spent a week there.