

Log of the *HILDE M²*



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CONTINUED The story of Major Adventure #1. As indicated earlier, this was written "on the spot" and typed in Puerto Rico. Part 3 will be along in the next issue.

"PASSAGE 1, DAY 7 (TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 43. Now that I was headed E again the wind obligingly came about to the E, pushing me more to the S. I spent most of the day working on the engine, trying to get a spark of life with no success. The weather was beautiful: sunny, warm, with a pleasant breeze. The Gulf Stream water that had been so wicked during the blow was an incredible electric blue.

"Shortly before noon I heard an airplane. Jumping up the companionway I saw a twin engine Coast Guard plane circling to pass us for a look-over. I waved, then ducked back below to see if I could raise them on the marine VHF. Sure enough, they responded on channel 16 and we switched to 22 so I could tell them my plan to continue without power, and ask them to report my position to B and tell her I was OK but would be delayed. They agreed after asking for some information about the HM² and continued out of sight toward the west. (Editor's note: Sorry to report, I never heard from them.)

"Before I switched off I got a call from the yacht EMILY who had overheard my call to the CG. They were to the N of me, just on the horizon and headed west, I suppose from Bermuda. I could just make out their spinnaker. They offered assistance and I accepted if they had a diesel expert but they had none, so they wished me a good trip and pressed on.

"In the afternoon I continued trying to dry out practically everything on the boat -- an impossibility because of the salt -- but conditions became a little more comfortable. Late in the afternoon I discovered that one of the tiller lines on the Aries had worn nearly through from constant flexing during the storm, so I had to stop the boat for the replacement. As I hung over the stern working a large sailboat filled with what looked at a glance like a dozen people motor-sailed by, sightseeing and snapping pictures of us wallowing along. Someone hollered to ask where I was headed and if I needed help. I hollered back something from my inverted position and they proceeded to the southwest at tremendous speed and I was alone again. It was a strange encounter in the middle of nowhere.

"PASSAGE 1, DAY 8 (WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 5). About 2 AM I got disgusted with our course which was-now SSW, so we came about to about 60 degrees: almost as bad, but at least we got some easting. As always, HM² doesn't like being pinched. In this case we tacked through about 130 degrees before she would sail well in the moderate seas. At noon the loran showed us at 31,43N; 75,14W, a pretty poor showing for a week at sea. That afternoon I had the second hot meal of the trip: vegetable soup, crackers, and tea. We made better time to the SE with gradually increasing wind and waves. It was bouncy, but we were moving in a reasonably desirable direction even as I reefed down for the umpteenth time.

"PASSAGE 1, DAY 9 (THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 6). We continued to make progress generally SE and I spent time tightening things up to stand another blow if one should come. Clouds were building up and I was nervous. I figured that preparation would be the best way to insure nothing would happen -- and apparently I was right because the night brought calm winds though the waves continued to make us jump about. The gourmet dinner aboard the HM² featured fried cabbage and creamed corn. They were ambrosial, but the only powdered drink flavor I could find to mask the tank water taste was a horrible bright florescent orange and tasted sort of like turpentine. Since then I have developed quite a taste for straight tank water.

"A shower of sorts and a change to a clean and only slightly damp new set of clothes improved morale. As I mentioned, the stormy skies that evening came to nothing. The sails I had reefed for the expected blow had to come down altogether because they were flailing away as we rocked with no wind. It was disgusting, but better than a storm by far.

"PASSAGE 1, DAY 10 (FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 7). So far almost all of the wind on this passage had come from the ESE, pushing me always to the SSE. This morning in desperation I tacked to the NE again, just to work a little to the E, but again, I found myself dissatisfied with the idea of moving N more toward Bermuda. It took constant trimming of sails to keep us as close to E as possible. My hands were sore from constant hauling on the salty sheets, both wet and dry. The dry lines work on skin like sandpaper.

"As we moved along I pulled everything out of the V-berth area to dry out the mattress and the clothing bags a bit. By 3 PM I had gotten fed up with the day's northerly trend and tacked back to the SSE. Tonight's menu: chicken chow mein on a bed of Gibble's old fashioned thin salt free pretzels, with peaches for desert. Then sack time in a bunk with a clean bottom sheet.

"What luxury! I was able to rest without too much worry because I lashed the Tilley pressure kerosene lamp to the backstay. I figured any reasonably observant steersman would avoid running over an unknown object with a bright white light. Unfortunately, the lamp blew out and I couldn't keep it lit, so we continued unlit. About midnight we had 2 ships in view at the same time: surprising because I had seen almost none so far.

"PASSAGE 1, DAY 11 (SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 8). This morning I manufactured an onion omelette which was scrumptuous. The standard of living on the HM² was on an upswing (later to be thought of as the high point of the trip). Winds were picking up, as always from the ESE and the ride was definitely getting exciting "skipping over the ocean like a stone" as in the song. The action of the boat made it nearly impossible to do anything but lie in a bunk. My reaction to being shaken vigorously is to go into a kind of semiconscious never-never land.

"Things got wet again on the boat. Lots of spray found its way below through deck leaks, and the cockpit took an occasional dollop of green water. Constant changes in sail trim and the wind vane helped slow the boat down, but the ride was rough. No more interest in food for the time being. Too much wind and boat action - to keep a lantern going tonight, so the ship was dark again. The night was beautiful. A spectacular shooting star came down somewhere aft. There have been many meteors seen on this trip: several at least each night. In general the night skies have been most active and interesting.

"PASSAGE 1, DAY 13 (MONDAY, NOVEMBER 10). By this morning the wind had moderated enough to let me pull out the genny again. At 7 AM we passed an "M Lines" ship going the other way rather slowly about a half mile N. Most of the ships I've seen were moving more slowly than I would have thought -- not more than 10 knots. We spent the day pounding along at a little less than half that speed, and I spent a lot of time in the bunk. About all I could manage was an occasional trip to the cockpit for a look-around.

"For the third night it was too windy to have a lamp up. About 8:30 PM I heard a ship's horn and leapt to the cockpit to see a ship about to cross our bow. I put the tiller over to bring us around behind her. We wouldn't have hit, but we'd have been shaken up by her wake if I hadn't altered course. The ship continued on about a half mile, then circled back behind us and signaled with a light. I was too fuddled to read her morse code, but managed to blink out an "OK" in morse with a flashlight that seemed to satisfy her, for she turned back on course and steamed on her way. I was embarrassed but very thankful that the duty officer made an effort to check out the condition of a tiny unlit sailboat on a wild and windy night. I wish I could have seen her name.

"PASSAGE 1, DAY 14 (TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 11). Around 2:30 this morning the boat's motion changed and her sails began to bang about. I wasn't at my brightest and best, and it took a couple of minutes to figure out that the Aries vane wasn't working. Shining a flashlight over the stern I discovered that the pendulum rudder that provides the steering power was missing. The stainless retaining pin had apparently shorn off allowing the shaft to come adrift. It was puzzling but starkly obvious that the Aries would be of no more use on this passage.

"With the Tiller-master already dead (and no electricity to use it anyway) it was now a matter of steering by hand (ugh) or rigging the tiller and headsails to keep a rough course relative to the wind. Since we were beating close to the wind, this might not be too impractical. I worked out a lash-up that seemed to hold us close to 160 degrees. My noon sextant sight agreed pretty well with a loran fix of 25,59.39N; 69,14.41W -- 89 miles made good since Monday noon.



The sextant was vital with low electricity onboard.

"The wind softened a bit after 24 boisterous hours, making the motion of the boat easier. By 7 PM I was considering pulling the reef out of the main but delayed because it was so nice not having the boat sailing on her ear. Around 9 a squall hit and I had to pull in the genoa for about 10 minutes. I got completely drenched. Good thing I was naked. I decided to spend the night in the cockpit, maybe because survival would be easier there if we were struck by ship. Last night's encounter sobered me. Of course there were no ships to be seen.

"PASSAGE 1, DAY 15 (WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 12). Wednesday morning I got more genny out to bring our speed from 3 to 4.5 knots. The ride immediately got rougher. My noon sight effort was disastrous because of the boat's motion. I just got myself and the sextant soaked with spray for my trouble. We kept bouncing along into the evening with the wave action gradually subsiding. Every once in awhile a special one would thump us on the port bow just to keep us awake. I warmed up some supper but didn't finish it for lack of interest. The clean-up was left for morning light.

"Some slightly fuzzy calculation produced the estimate that next Sunday night or Monday morning might see us near St. Thomas. It was all speculative but still nice to think about being safely and calmly anchored in a snug harbor. Then thoughts of all the jobs to be done crowded in to spoil the picture. Spent the night in the cockpit again -- rather pleasant, but my bones were awfully stiff by morning.

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